

The Sculpture Project





MEET ARTIST OF THE YEAR, NILS GUNNAR ZANDER

For the fourth year, Byarums Bruk foundry has commissioned an artist to create a sculpture that will be cast in the foundry's recycled aluminium in a numbered series. Nils Gunnar Zander was a natural choice. He has worked with a variety of materials and has a unique ability to breathe life into these materials. In 2015 he had a magnificent painting exhibition at Prince Eugen's Waldemarsudde entitled "Tystnadens revir. 25 år från andra sidan" ("The Territory of Silence. 25 Years from the Other Side"), and in October 2006 he exhibited a beautiful and fascinating collection of primarily older works in clay and lead at Galleri L2 in Stockholm's Old Town.

The name of the new sculpture is Urania. In Greek mythology, Urania was the daughter of the god Zeus and the Titaness Mnemosyne. She was the muse of astronomy and is associated with universal love and spirituality. She was also called "the heavenly one". Urania has also been regarded as the mother of music. "That's the highest art form," comments Nils Gunnar, who listens to modern jazz, especially Miles Davis, while working. His Urania can be regarded as a torso, a thin bodily shell or a vest. The sculpture is reminiscent of a body floating in space. It creates an imaginary space around itself – a territory. This space gives

the viewer room for thought and reflection, and also reminds us of our own silent inner space. Art is like that.

The name "Urania" was inspired by a book that his grandfather, Nils Björsell, received as a Christmas present in 1910, by French 19th century astronomer Camille Flammarion. Nils Gunnar found the book among his late mother's belongings while working on an exhibition at Kristianstad Municipal Art Gallery in 2006. The book's title was perfectly suited for the suite of paintings that he exhibited a year later in Australia, and he called the exhibition Urania 1.

The first chapter of the book is entitled "The Youth's Dream". Let me quote part of the introduction: "I was seventeen years old. Her name was Urania. Was she a young, fair, blue-eyed maiden, a youthful dream, an innocent but curious daughter of Eve? No, she was, quite simply, like the nine ancient goddesses of song, the muse of astronomy whose heavenly gaze ignites and guides the harmony of the spheres; she was the angelic idea that soars above earthly matter; she had neither flesh to restrain her, a heart that is heard beating from afar or the tepid warmth of human life. She existed in a kind of higher and eternally pure ideal world, yet she was human in name and form, and she awakened a deep and quickening feeling in my soul, an elusive, indefinable sense of admiration which can almost be described as love."

Nils Gunnar Zander can look back over almost seventy years of life and fifty years as an artist. As a high school student, he was involved in the peace and anti-atomic weapons movements and

spent endless hours hiding in the school art department painting and working with clay. He was dyslexic so had to learn the content of his school books by heart. This resulted in an enormous respect for letters and words with their condensed and expressive content.

He developed an early interest in Dag Hammarskjöld's work. "Strangely enough, when Hammarskjöld died in the plane crash in Zambia in 1961, it brought him to life for me. I clearly remember the torchlight procession through Stockholm after his death. People had gathered from far and wide. We marched in solemn silence through Stockholm. What had happened would change history forever. It became more important than ever to promote peace and combat atomic weapons. I bought Hammarskjöld's book *Waymarks*, published in 1962, for my mother. His haikus have accompanied me through my life ever since." To mark the Dag Hammarskjöld celebratory year in 2005, Nils Gunnar created a suite of works using Hammarskjöld's poetry.



Urania **Nils Gunnar Zander**

In 1964, at age 20, Nils Gunnar began studying at the ceramics department at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm. Over the next few years there was a lot of turbulence at the college, like in other colleges and universities around the world. But while the other students discussed politics, he concentrated on ceramics. His views were already clear. Peace was the only possible answer. He graduated in 1968. He won a scholarship to study in Kilkenny, Ireland, a unique and fascinating art and craft centre that had many ties with Scandinavia. He learned to create turned plaster moulds for casting pottery. Some of his colleagues became lifelong friends, and he has returned there several times to hold exhibitions.

At the time, military service was obligatory in Sweden. As a pacifist, Nils Gunnar did service in a hospital and then enrolled a postgraduate course at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm. He wasn't interested in shiny glazes or perfectly turned shapes. What fascinated him

was burnt, unglazed clay with a crumbling, cracked look and a sensuous, tactile feel.

Petra, the legendary gallery owner had an uncommon knack for discovering new talent. She painstakingly selected the tiny handful of young artists who were offered their first exhibitions at her gallery. Nils-Gunnar was one of them. His debut was in 1971. His large, expressive masks and small bud-shaped heads appealed to both critics and the public. His attitude to materials and expressive use of burned, cracked, rough sanded surfaces was something new.

The materials offered a link to a deeper awareness. But rather than materials, I would describe it as a fascination with matter, its consistency, the various expressive possibilities of the surface, decomposition, abrasion, fading symbols, the feeling of something about to disappear. When I look at his works, I see a coherent interweaving of themes that revolve around a common hub, regardless of the techniques used.

Later in the 1970s, he moved on to other materials, paper and lead. Some of these works were exhibited in 1979 at the Doktor Glas gallery in Kungsträdgården. He stamped words and symbols into the soft, matte, silk-like surface of the lead. He made the paper himself to achieve the expressive consistency and matte sheen he needed. Creating or choosing the actual material is a key part of the process. His sculptures were like shells, whether they portrayed bodies, doors, unopened envelopes or parcels. "The content should be imagined by the viewer," he comments. "As long as a letter is unopened, the mystery remains. The magic often disappears after the letter is read."

He met author and poet Staffan Stolpe on a Greek island. They began working together. Nils Gunnar transferred stanzas from his poems to lead or paper panels. "Staffan's poem line There is no secret had a shattering effect on me," he says. "There's nothing behind or inside." They exhibited their joint works at Doktor Glas

gallery in 1987. Nils Gunnar had stamped words on the grey lead panels with wooden stamps or lead types. The words sometimes stood out and sometimes merged in. They were fragments of something important that had once existed. "Clay requires you to work quickly. I could return to the lead panels again and again, working slowly and thoughtfully."

"I also started working with Dag Hammarskjöld's haikus. His lines "It will never return. A different man will find a different city" had a concrete impact on me. I had separated from my ex-wife. I changed direction as an artist. Even if you come back to an idea you've worked on in the past, the result is never the same. The same applies to everything really. You can never recreate or relive the same feeling." Nils Gunnar went travelling and ended up in Melbourne, Australia. He completely abandoned clay and began painting.

He started collaborating with Byarums Bruk foundry two years ago. An earlier Urania sculpture

exists, which Nils Gunnar cast in bronze thirty years earlier while visiting the glass artist Erik Höglund in a small town in southern Switzerland. Höglund, who became blind in later life, had been commissioned to produce a cast bronze sculpture, and asked Nils Gunnar to help him by checking the final result. Whilst there, Nils Gunnar made a cast of a small torso sculpture he had created, which resembled a vest.

But aluminium has different characteristics to bronze and lead, and requires different working methods. He made the whole shape out of a single sheet of wax 2 cm thick in his studio on Brännkyrkagatan. The craftsmen at Byarums Bruk coated the wax with a green shimmering surface to separate the sculpture from the mould. Nils Gunnar's work was pressed into the sand and then removed. The empty space was filled with recycled aluminium. The material – aluminium – has a clearer texture due to the sand, creating a coarser expression than the lead panels Nils Gunnar has worked with in







his own studio. But he sees this as an advantage. It gives life to the surface.

Australia, where he lives for six months of the year, has influenced his subject matter and view of the world. In this remarkable continent, nature is ever hostile, regarding its inhabitants as intruders and waging a constant battle on them with its endless red sand deserts, frequent wildfires, poisonous snakes and vast distances. The Aboriginal Australians learned to respect their unwelcoming surroundings, as is exemplified by their songlines or dreaming tracks. Nils Gunnar is inspired by their art and outlook.

In his paintings, he returns time and time again to the remarkable Australian nature. He looks deeply inside the red earth, the rough, cracked ground, the vast landscapes, the burnished light and the dried-out salt lakes, trying to grasp their essence. The paintings are not smooth and glossy. Their surface texture invites the touch and beckons the viewer inside. Urania has the same inviting effect.

Nils Gunnar's paintings recreate the universe's galaxies, stars, planets and moons suspended in an infinite sky. Gazing at a starry night sky or looking into a microscope can evoke a sense of infinity. We know today that the world consists of infinite macro- and microcosmoses. It is no coincidence that Nils Gunnar Zander has chosen them as subjects in his art. His works remind the viewer of the world's immensity and life's depth. These things are portrayed in the sculpture Urania.

Text: Kerstin Wickman, Professor Emeritus in Design and Craft History.









Urania

Limited edition of 60 sculptures
Sand cast recycled aluminum / Norwegian black slate

Sculpture	Base
Width 20 cm	Width 21 cm
Height 42 cm	Height 2 cm
Depth 11 cm	Depth 21 cm
Weight 4 kg	Weight 2,4 kg

SOLO EXHIBITIONS SELECTION

1971	Hos Petra, Stockholm, Sweden, 1972
1972	Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden
1973	Krognoshuset, Lund, Sweden
1974	Mors Mössa, Göteborg, Sweden, 1979, -81, -89
1975	Dr Glas, Stockholm, Sweden, 1979, -81, -83, -87
1977	Gallery Wallner, Malmö, Sweden, 1983
1979	Centre Culturell, Paris, France
1980	Kilkenny Arts Week, Ireland, 1985, -96
1986	Millesgården, Lidingö, Sweden
1986	Gallery Arbour Fine Art, Singapore
1987	Gallery Birgersson, Halmstad, Sweden, 1991, -93, -99, -03, -08
1990	Gallery Engström, Stockholm, Sweden, 1993, -97, -00, -03, -05
1991	Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne, Australia, 1995
1991	Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin, Australia
1994	Gallery Magnus Åklundh, Lund, Sweden
1995	Olle Ollsonhuset, Solna, Sweden
1997	Gallery Kamras, Borgholm, Sweden
1997	Embassy of Sweden, Tokyo, Japan, 2009, -12
2002	Tomarps Kungsgård, Kvidinge, Sweden

2005	Dag Hammarskjöld's Backåkra, Sweden, 2008
2006	Kristianstad Center of Contemporary Art, Sweden
2007	Gallery Pizzi, Melbourne, Australia
2010	Studio L2, Stockholm, Sweden
2014	Gallery Aniara, Sollentuna, Sweden
2015	Prince Eugens Waldemarsudde, Stockholm, Sweden

Nils Gunnar Zander is also represented in Public Collections at for example Nationalmuseum, Röhsska Museet and Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin, Australia.

ABOUT

The Sculpture Project is an initiative founded on curiosity about the relationship between art and traditionally crafted products, as well as a love of new cultural trends. This project will lead to the casting of unique artworks by some of the most fascinating creative individuals in Scandinavia. The artwork will be manufactured in limited editions by experienced craftsmen at Byarums Bruk in Småland.

/ Joel & Kenneth, project founders

“Ever since 1947 we have stuck to the same principle: only to use recycled aluminium in our products and to make the moulds from a mix of natural sand from lake Vättern, clay, soot and water. This is a mix that is entirely free from chemical additives and forms a closed system so it can be used over and over again,” explains the manifesto of Byarums Bruk. Also worth mentioning: “And for the last decade we have worked closely with some of the top designers and artists in Sweden.”

Sand casting is the common factor in everything that Byarums Bruk produces. It is a technique that

requires the finest craftsmanship. The casting works is thus preserving an old craft tradition and using it to create objects for the present day and for our future. This is not the only benefit. Production is environmentally sound, since every stage builds on the principle of reuse and recycling. The raw material is, as mentioned, recycled aluminium. The casting sand is used over and over again for new moulds. Some of the grains of sand undoubtedly date back to 1947, when the sand depot was filled for the first time. The finished objects are highly durable and remain just as beautiful year after year, decade

after decade. Byarums Bruk is one of a few companies that live up to the concept of sustainable design.

The technique requires a sharp mind, extreme care and skillful hands. Just as an experienced baker tests the dough with finger-tips to check if it has risen fully, the casting workers rub the sand between their fingers to check whether the moisture content is right, depending on what they plan to cast and the prevailing weather. Production at Byarums Bruk is in other words reliant on a level of craftsmanship that is becoming increasingly prized today. Deep experience – developed through

years of practice and often passed from generation to generation – is essential to achieve quality in production based on craft skills.

“Making quality products with an environmentally friendly production makes me and my staff very happy and proud.” comments Joel Enhörning, owner of the casting works. “We are lucky to still be able to practice this wonderful craft and supply these unique products to our customers. It also feels right to keep on manufacturing in Byarum in Småland.”

THE SCULPTURE PROJECT 2013

Ann Wolff is one of our most brilliant international artists and uses glass as her primary medium. Despite her success around the world she has remained surprisingly unknown in Sweden in recent decades. As a young glass artist with the former Kosta Boda AB – when her surname was Wärf – the situation was quite different. Her art glass gained a lot of publicity then and she was frequently in the spotlight. In 2011 Ann was awarded the European Culture Prize in Strasbourg, for her art, for having worked in several European countries, and for her contributions to the international success of European culture.



Aluna, 2013 **Ann Wolff**



THE SCULPTURE PROJECT 2014

Britt-Ingrid Persson, usually known as BIP, has many years' experience of working in a number of materials, such as clay, concrete, latex foam and bronze, using at least as many techniques. But aluminium was something completely new. Her ability to communicate thoughts and clearly illustrate universal problems has been clearly demonstrated in 30 or more works of public art and a long series of exhibitions. BIP's artistic creations are always characterised by simplicity, abstraction and focus.



Plexus, 2014 **BIP**



THE SCULPTURE PROJECT 2015

Kjell Engman was the third artist, after Ann Wolff and Britt-Ingrid "BIP" Persson, to be commissioned to create a limited edition sculpture in aluminium for The Sculpture Project initiative. Or more correctly in collaboration between The Sculpture Project and Byarums Bruk, since the final casting process took place at the foundry. His many years of experience in creating public sculptures in a range of materials also proved an asset. He is commissioned regularly, both at home and abroad, and has exhibited all over the world.



DO-RE-MI, 2015 **Kjell Engman**



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INSTALLATION CONCEPT AND PHOTOGRAPHY **GRANDPUBLIC**

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PRINTED BY **GÖTEBORGSTRYCKERIET**

Byarums Bruk



HYBRID PRINT
TECHNOLOGY