

## THE PATIENT GARDENER OF CERAMICS

### (ONE MAN'S DEATH IS ANOTHER MAN'S BREAD)

TEXT BY PEDER VALLE

Trude Westby Nordmark (b. 1969) is a patient artist. I guess you have to be, when you construct works from hundreds—thousands—of extruded clay loops. For more than 20 years, Westby Nordmark has made this technique her signature, and it acts as a leitmotif for her artistic practice. From this basic unit she builds complex, impressive, and towering works of art.

“I have been a gardener with shears, pruning the wildness of spring,” writes Norwegian poet Herman Wildenvey in his poem *Den glemte have* (The Forgotten Garden). At times, Westby Nordmark's works may recall such a garden, where the ceramic has been allowed to grow, sprout, bud—and bloom. Like a gardener, the artist herself has cultivated the ceramic wilderness, shaped it, and deliberately pruned its vital ideas and possibilities. The result feels complete and balanced—yet still abundant.

As in the exhibition at Hå gamle prestegård. Westby Nordmark's works conquer floors and walls in the old barn, transforming the whitewashed space into a bright and open landscape where ceramics are allowed to proliferate. The title “One Man's Death Is Another Man's Bread” lends itself to multiple interpretations: On the one hand, it may point to dystopian narratives about nature's brutal logic of survival; on the other, it allows space for more encouraging reminders of mutual human dependence and the importance of community.

Not least, the title opens for the complex realization that “misfortune and opportunity can be inseparably linked,” as the artist herself expresses it. In nature this happens quite literally, when dead plants and animals become food for others. Yet we may also recognize this dynamic in the human world, when the misfortune of others leaves a space of opportunity that we may benefit from—directly or indirectly. In that sense, it need not concern the survival of species alone; even the world of art can sometimes appear as if governed by “the survival of the fittest,” a place where originality, refinement, and mastery may seem like vital tools—if not to say weapons—for asserting oneself.

“One Man's Death Is Another Man's Bread.” The title holds not only the brutal logic of nature, but also the promise of reciprocity, of a cycle. Perhaps it is fair to point out that all ceramic innovation grows in the fertile soil that has also nurtured earlier development, experimentation, and breakthroughs within the field of ceramics. In this way, one is tempted to see the “bread” of the title as the metaphor of a shared heritage—the knowledge and tradition from which all ceramic art grows, while simultaneously adding new content to it.

Thus, the role of the gardener becomes even more meaningful: one who cultivates and tends, who cuts away and refines, and who painstakingly shapes new shoots upon the old, vital trunk of ceramics. Between her hands, the clay blossoms, taking on forms not yet seen. From this, new traditions slowly but surely emerge.