

KURT HENNING TRAMPEDACH

HILLERØD 1943 – SARE, PYRÉNÉES-ATLANTIQUES, FRANCE 2013

The son of a typographer, the painter, sculptor, and graphic artist Kurt Trampedach was born and grew up in the northern Zealand town of Hillerød, well known in Denmark on account of the magnificent Frederiksborg Castle, which so often figured in paintings of the Danish Golden Age and today serves as the museum of national history.

However, it was not the national paintings of the 18th century that interested the young Trampedach. After finishing his apprenticeship as an artisan painter in 1963 he became a journeyman and was admitted to the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. Here he studied until 1969 under two influential painters and graphic artists in Danish art, Professors Dan Sterup-Hansen (1918–1995) and Søren Hjorth Nielsen (1901–1983).

Trampedach made his first appearance as early as 1962 in Kunstnernes Efterårsudstilling and very soon discovered his preferred circle of motifs, self-portraits and figure paintings—starting out with his own facial features, using at first such sublime models as Rembrandt (1606–1669) and Goya (1746–1828). But Trampedach was also fascinated by artists in the more recent Nordic tradition, such as the Danish painter Vilhelm Hammershøi and the Norwegian Edvard Munch (1853–1944). Gradually his attention was drawn to contemporary foreign artists such as the Swiss Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966)—of whose work there was a major retrospective exhibition in the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in 1965—as well as the English artist Francis Bacon (1909–1992) and the Americans George Segal (1924–2000) and Edvard Kienholz (b. 1927).

Kurt Trampedach was from the start a loner who might well have been inspired by the works of other artists but who used his artistic intuition to form a completely personal idiom. In the 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Trampedach's work was dominated by self-portraits influenced by the textuality and chiaroscuro technique of Rembrandt, painted in ashen-gray and earth-brown colors. These were at first in the form of insistent, almost invasive, studies of facial landscape and later of larger figure portraits in which the artist pictured himself in rapid motion, parallel with the plane of the picture, appearing to move away from the gaze of the viewer. Over the years Trampedach has returned to this latter motif in many different versions, including the watercolor of his son Jonas in the Loeb collection.

At the beginning of the 1970s Kurt Trampedach made a number of tableaux in barrier-breaking realism. They were painted plaster casts after living persons—including the artist himself—with human hair on their heads, naked or dressed in ordinary clothing, and placed in environments taken from the world of reality. By placing these figures in his own and his viewers' everyday environments, the artist was able to create a series of what could be called various kinds of participants in life emanating a disturbing presence, rather than artistic objects amenable to classification and judgment in the usual way.

In 1978 he moved to an outlying area near the town of Sare in the southern French Basque country, protected by mountains and impressive scenery. Before this he had an apartment and studio in New York, where it was possible for him to live in complete anonymity. It was here that Trampedach found the artistic freedom that enabled him to find his way to his next quite original idiom.

His later works are still based on the self-portrait, but their form and coloring have been radically changed. We are now confronted with strange, staring creatures who seem to have been drawn up into the light from the deepest and most secret layers of the human mind in the form of chubby children or dwarfs. Their silent appearance is at once violently repulsive and strangely moving; their behavior seems intended to symbolize various stages of life. The small, grotesque figures are backed like a relief with color to form a compact mass that sometimes belongs together with its background, and sometimes they have developed into free-standing, painted plaster figures of fascinating lifelikeness.

Trampedach's new painting glows with shades of red, orange, yellow, and deep blue. In recent years green has been added. Along with the original earth color scale and various engravings of mysterious signs and animal figurations referring to primitive and classical Greek mythology, these colors—reminiscent of church windows—contribute to the works' ambiguous emanations of forebodings and premonitions. The artist has applied the same coloring to a number of interesting portraits, of which one of the latest and most eagerly discussed is the double portrait of Prince Joachim and Princess Alexandra from 1997 (Schackenborg).

In addition to paintings and sculptures, Trampedach has produced a large number of drawings; special mention should be made of a series of illustrations for Bob Dylan's "Ballad of Frankie Lee and Judas Priest" published in 1970,¹ along with the series *Blade fra min dagbog* (Pages from My Diary), which includes the *Tegninger fra Baskerlandet* (Drawings from the Basque Country) referred to above, from 1979–1980.

Since 1970 Kurt Trampedach was a member of the association of artists known as *Decembris-terne*. He took part in many international group exhibitions, including the FIAC in the Grand Palais in Paris (see the Loeb collection poster from this), and he had solo exhibitions in Fyns Kunstmuseum (1971) and various galleries, of which mention can be made of the Galerie Asbæk in Copenhagen (first in 1978) and the Allan Stone Gallery, New York (first in 1987). Kurt Trampedach is represented in various Danish museums, the Sundsvall Kunstmuseum in Sweden, and the Antwerp Sculpture Park in Belgium. In 1969 he received the State Foundation for the Arts one-year grant in addition to the Queen Ingrid Roman Scholarship. In 1984, Kurt Trampedach was awarded the Eckersberg Medal. He died in southern France in 2013.

S.L.

LITERATURE: Klaus Rifbjerg, *Kurt Trampedach*, Copenhagen 1978; Mikael Wivel, *Kurt Trampedach, Tegninger fra Baskerlandet 1979–1980*, Copenhagen 1981; Rolf Læssøe, *Kurt Trampedach* (Dansk Nutidskunst 7), Copenhagen 1990; Peter Michael Hornung, *Dansk Billedkunst, De utilfredsstillede*, Copenhagen 1995, pp. 159–161; Mikael Wivel, *Kurt Trampedach*, Allan Stone Gallery, New York 1995; Mikael Wivel in *Weilbach*, vol. 8, 1998; Mikael Wivel, *Kurt Trampedach*, Copenhagen 2001.

¹Bob Dylan's "Ballad" was translated and made understandable for Danish music lovers by a well known contemporary and esteemed Danish poet, Poul Borum. The song was originally published in 1968 in the record *John Wesley Harding*. Mikael Wivel, *Kurt Trampedach*, Copenhagen 2001, p. 34.