



Fig. 1 Yngve Holen, Installation view, *HEINZERLING*, Kvam, 2019.

XWB

Many artists have worked with everyday objects, and this will perhaps continue even more so. But Yngve Holen's works don't end up being purely conceptual (eg. Marcel Duchamp) nor didactically sculptural (eg. Haegue Yang). They have a mythical dimension of sorts. "Extracting soul," giving rebirth, transforming into a different materiality...—One can find these activities in numerous ancient myths as well. Behind the calmness of Holen's objects lies some serious drama and comedy. The following interview was conducted by email in March 2020.

MIHYE AN What is most fascinating to me in relation to this book's theme—naturing affairs—is your "life-giving" technics to the things that are already forming the basis of our world. You gave an extended life cycle to the cows and chickens: "I live. I die. I live again!" (From *Mad Max: Fury Road*).

YNGVE HOLEN You could say so—without seriously following some kind of theory of animism, though. Maybe better call it a metamorphosis than a rebirth. I took chickens from the supermarket, ran them over with a car—individualising the generic supermarket chickens. Then I had them 3D-scanned and printed, and integrated in works from the *Sensitive to Detergent* series. I threw them into the washing machine. The chickens became

a different shape and in the context of an artwork they also got a different function and meaning.

The rib of the cow on the other hand came from the butcher, was then 3D-scanned, and the data was sent to Italy, where it was milled out of marble. The materiality of the red marble with its white lines running through the stone like a venous system strongly alludes to organic material, imitating flesh, 'marbled meat'.

These works definitely play with the concept and question of animation. But at the same time they address very different topics, such as our body flying, airport security, sanity, mass consumption, globalisation and body-object relations in general.



Fig. 2 Yngve Holen, Installation view, *HEINZERLING*, Kvam, 2019.

MA But their life, the cow's and chickens' I mean, somewhat paradoxically, seems to have more limits in your production than the car rims to which you repeatedly went back for different series of work? For example, your wheels are continuing to live different lives just like Virginia Woolf's Orlando, traveling to many places, changing appearances: *Leichtmetallräder*—*Snowflake*—*Rosetta (Decorazione)*—*Rose Painting*—HEINZERLING.

YH It's a very different material to start with and consequently also takes different turns. I wouldn't necessarily call it limitations or limits. The decision to work with meat was in the first place content driven. I was reflecting on the way we treat meat, on health issues, our fear of germs (think of the chlorinated chicken). The work was called *Sensitive to Detergent* which I used as a metaphor for keeping clean, for pushing nature away.

Regarding the rims, I was foremost interested in their ornamental quality. By gutting the rims, I isolated the ornament from the original function. And now the ornament does what ornaments usually do—they wander, shift, change context and meaning.

MA The choice of animals/meats tells us some things, too. It wouldn't work well with dogs and cats, because they are not our food and we have too much affection for them. But they are also highly domesticated, reproduced animals for human needs. Do you think affection, in general, can block us from accommodating a new life? What are you thinking when you're choosing an object?

YH As I was interested in a global mainstream, I chose mainstream meats,

industrialised chickens and cows to work with. For me that was the obvious choice in regards to the issues I was looking at at the time. The massive industry behind it, the masses of meat. In some way I was trying to visualise the scale of it, or our cognitive failure to grasp the scale of it. You're always confronted with your own portion of meat, but the sum of personal portions of meat all together is horror.

Choosing an object is always a different process. Sometimes I've already been looking at something for a while until I realise it's material for me to work with.

MA The cow is from a Berlin butcher. Where did you get the marble?

YH From Italy. The cow was bought in Berlin. There was a 3D scanner next to the butcher where it was scanned. The data was sent to Verona where it was milled. Then, the meat was brought back to the butcher, portioned and donated to *Die Tafeln*, a volunteer-based organisation in Germany which hands out food to people in need.

MA How and why did you decide to work with marble in the first place?

YH An older catalogue from the *Museo Archeologico Nazionale* in Naples fell into my hands again. You know, this stunning museum where they also keep a lot of the finds from Pompeii and Herculaneum. There was the photo of a sculpture, a marble bust. Flesh and eyes were articulated using different types of marble. And I thought of marbled meat. I've later come across the meat-shaped stone, a stone carved into the shape of a Dongpo pork; it's in Taiwan, you have to google it, it's an amazing piece.



Fig. 3 Yngve Holen, Installation view, *Sammlung Boros #3*, Boros Collection, Berlin, 2017.





Fig. 4 Yngve Holen, Detail, *Extended Operations XWB*, 2014.

MA When I first saw your works with the meat marble pieces, *Extended Operations XWB*, at Sammlung Boros, I almost just walked by, because I felt rather comfortable with the XWB (eXtra Wide Body) marble meat piece lying there. I thought (semi-consciously) they're perhaps waiting to be CT scanned, or resting on a special running track, things like that. But then the very professional company stickers on the stretcher caught my attention, and I started to examine the whole thing closer. Same for the 3D-printed chicken inside the washing machine drum on a honeycomb panel pedestal. You always seem to put things together, and by that, give a certain 'spiritual' order—which is actually a very architectural gesture. Any influence here from the fact that you once studied architecture?

YH That's very likely. I have always been interested in the relation of things to one another—context, interdependencies. To the same extent I also consider the scale of things in relation to the human body. Take the rims for example—I blew them up to a 2 m diameter. That's huge for a rim, but I wanted the rim to become architecture. For me 2 meters is taller than most humans, so maybe just enough to become architecture.

MA Do you find sculpture the most powerful form for your speculation? Have you also thought about writing a drama or making a film for example?

YH For me, sculpture works best as the medium and means to do what I'm interested in. But I've from time to time incorporated elements from other fields, graphical elements. I did a trailer

(film) for my *HEINZERLING* show. And I have this ongoing publication series called *ETOPS*, where I deal with different topics in the form of interviews. I'd like to do more film, and maybe also a cartoon, or better a manga. But I'm not sure how to approach that right now.

MA *ETOPS*, the title of your research magazines, is a term coming from aircraft operation, short for *Extended Operations*. What feels common in experiencing your sculptures and reading *ETOPS* is that things never look the same. Chickens never look the same. Pilots never look the same. The world never looks the same! In other words, you're so good at researching and activating some very strange parts of our world, which we tend to overlook and accept as something natural. On the other hand, one may go mad and get very stressed if everything in the world appears fuzzy and uncanny. What does the idea of 'nature' look like in your mind? There is a mixture of taking distance, being irrational, and at the same time steady grounding, isn't there?

YH Yes. There definitely is. Take the mentioned works from the *Sensitive to Detergent* series, for example: A washing machine drum which you think could constantly be turning, presented on a spotless, clean white plinth; inside is a white, completely artificial 3D-printed chicken carcass. Everything is sanitised, clinically sterile, paused nature. The arrangement of objects might seem irrational at first glance, though they are all leading to basic human topics like the fear of things to change.

MA Do you have any next object in mind?

YH I'm trying to make sense of a lot of different ideas at the moment, as I'm currently preparing a solo show which will take place in a new museum in Beijing, called X Museum.

MA Many architects around me work with big data and methods of AI. In a way, they also work with the most mundane materials, collecting plenty of data from the Internet, scanning books, scanning objects, and so on. What would you do when everything is so generic that the 'object-ness' depends heavily on your abstraction and articulation of it?

YH Haha. No idea. We'll know when and if we get there, I guess.



Fig. 3 Yngve Holen, *The Animal House Is Closed*, 2019, Bronze, 49 × 41.5 × 13 cm.