

The last sheaf

Inger Sif Heeschen

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In the 1800s, during peasant societies' annual harvest celebrations, the sheaf – bundles of hay – held significant importance as a central tradition. The last sheaf of the harvest was intricately tied to resemble a human figure, marking a pivotal moment in the festivities. Various superstitions surrounded this ritual, such as the belief that whoever tied the final sheaf would be cursed forever. Over the century, agricultural practices evolved from emphasizing self-sufficiency and tradition to prioritizing modernization and commercialization.

In her exhibition *The Last Sheaf*, Inger Sif Heeschen explores whether contemporary identity formation still heavily relies on professions and societal roles, drawing parallels to the transformation of peasant society, which catalyzed Denmark's pork export industry, and other significantly altered traditional professions.

Through her ceramic series *Urner til Dansk Erhverv (Urns for Danish Professions)*, Inger Sif Heeschen reflects on how professions were once inherited and served as essential identity markers. Pig heads, straw hats, the iconic Danish Irma girl, hotdogs, and minks are employed to evoke a kitsch and symbolic iconography and depict a broader narrative of Denmark as both an industrious and idyllic nation.

Central to Inger Sif Heeschen's practice is the exploration of national self-perception and the images and motifs tied to identity. The work *Fiskerifontæne (Fishing Fountain)* investigates objects' narrative qualities through time and context. Here, the artist delves into her Bornholm roots. The ceramic fountain visualizes the island's fishing industry's history and its crisis in the late 1980s due to overfishing, fishing quotas, and seal protection measures.

With several historical references – from clay as a material to urns' ritualistic and representative functions, and the mythologies surrounding fountains – *The last sheaf* prompts a negotiating reflection on the collective narratives we construct and how they shape our identities.

The exhibition is supported by the Danish Arts Foundation.

Inger Sif Heeschen (1989, DK) studied at The Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam (BFA 2016), San Francisco Art Institute (2014), and the Royal College of Art, London (MA 2022). Her work has been exhibited at Charles Burnand Gallery, The Amber Room, and Wetherby Garden in London, Galleri Delfi in Malmo, Thorvaldsen Museum, and Den Frie in Copenhagen, as well as Bornholm's Center for Applied Arts, among others. In 2023, she was honored with the Carl Nielsen and Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen Talent Award.

