

Contributing to Life

Fertile Forms is the title of the book on the art of Ulla and Gustav Kraitz. Fertile, as in fecund. It is, in every sense, about forms that have fertilized, touched and nourished each other. In order to give rise to new life, if you will. Well, why not? It is true. That it is a very beautiful book goes without saying. Anything else would be unimaginable, well nigh impossible to produce. It is a book not only for the eye, however, but also for mind and spirit. The designers, Walter Bernard and Milton Glaser, have overcome the two-dimensionality of the page and constructed a space for the sculptures of Ulla and Gustav Kraitz.

Göran Christenson writes in the book: "Few Swedish artists have treated public space as a visual experience as thoroughly as the Kraitzes - one in which man is part of the whole."

This is repeatedly confirmed when you read *Fertile Forms*. The photographs have an architectural, matter-of-fact weight. They do not indulge in needless poeticizing, but create rhythm and lines. And, most of all, the space that all good sculpture requires.

Many of Ulla and Gustav Kraitz' sculptures are immediately familiar. The blue spheres with their magical sheen have been rolling through the world since the 1980s. The same luster is found on all their sculptures: horses, female torsos, sea shells, apples, cubes, and beans.

Their home in Fogdarp in Skåne contains their Chinese kiln in which ashes and air currents produced the glaze according to a thousand-year old technique. No one in Sweden has mastered it like the Kraitzes. It has taken an entire lifetime, however. Or, rather, two.

Gustav and Ulla Kraitz have lived and worked together for 45 years. Neither their life-time achievement nor their idiom would have been what it is without the other. Gustav's matter-of-fact and rather strict geometry has been fertilized by Ulla's organic shapes. Ulla's realism by Gustav's abstraction. Neither of the two spurns the narrative, however. They both choose their narratives sparingly. Not a word too much.

The story of Gustav Kraitz is well-known. In 1956 he fled Hungary for Sweden.. Behind him lay five years in one of Stalin's labor camps. As an 18-year old art student he was sent to the Dombas district north of the Black Sea and the Soviet Union's largest coal mines. Of the 2,800 slave laborers most had held desk jobs and were unaccustomed to physical labor. Many might have survived the cold, the flooded tunnels, and the hard work, but most slowly succumbed to mistreatment, starvation, and disease. Gustav Kraitz was among the ten percent who decided to survive.

He and Ulla have carved out a new life in stone, formed it in clay.

This is why Gustav and Ulla Kraitz's monument to Raoul Wallenberg in New York, with its soaring diabase columns resting on 35 tons of paving stones from the Budapest ghetto, is not just another commission. It is the survivors' proof of life and payment of debt. It, too, is part of the large and dark European story.

Ulla Kraitz keeps coming back to the first cell. In the form of a bean, an embryo, a fetus. Every object is a first form, the potential for life, perhaps a salute to long-forgotten myths or meditations. They are born in the eye of the beholder. This is the task of the fertile form. To contribute to life.

Our lives.

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