

HOMMAGE À HERDIS.

By Ole Rikard Høisæther, MAG.ART.

Herdis Maria Siegert puts, in her project, unexpectedly the term homage into a new context. The apparent simplification in using only the word HOMMAGE seems to be her desire for a veiled word, as opposed to the more ordinary use of the word. The latter would in fact have included what or whom one wishes to give honour or favour *to*, thus explaining the word's carrying capacity. One comparison could be in saying: *congratulate with...* without mentioning what, and thus remaining, hanging in the air, as the small moment of rest which comes into existence between our breathing in and out. The challenge for the audience will indeed be to understand the project's title, among other aspects, through Siegert's work, as well as her approach to this. The title HOMMAGE becomes then a part of the artist's effectuation through this project, and the title becomes meaningful as regards the understanding of her ideas, working-method and artistic aim.

The term homage is not a new one concerning history of art, the origin of the term is however, far from art itself. Already during the early Middle Ages the term was in use, describing a festive occasion, a celebration of honour tied up to the relationship between the feudal lord owning the land, and his vassals who, through oral proceedings, were renting the land. Even during the feudal system's Europe, the vassals were regarded as free men compared to those who were to be found lower in society's ranking order. Some were knights as well. Therefore, the agreements made, were between free men, and done by shaking of hands instead of in writing. Through even or uneven intervals, those involved would meet to confirm the deals made as well as making new ones. Gradually, the men of the church participated in the homage-festivities, which meant that any eventual disputes could be solved by their testimony. Etymologically, the word signifies that *men only* agreed to these various arrangements; «*homme*» in French, hence homage. *Men* swore allegiance to each others through obedience and service on the one hand, and gratitude to the feudal lord for renting his land, on the other. At what time we get a more metaphorical use and meaning of the word 'hommage', we do not exactly know. We can however, observe the use of it, in different contexts, already in the eighteenth century as 'hommage à ...' and then always referring to persons.

Applied as part of an art-work, we can see the use of homage increasing during the last three centuries. It can be as an honour to soldiers being executed (Goya), a criticism of society and solidarity with people in the shadows of this society (Christian Krogh), or as the politically agitating paintings by well-known Norwegian painters such as Henrik Sørensen and Reidar Aulie.

Through other expressions of art, others would most likely regard Woody Allen's film *Manhattan* as an homage to New York, whereas the Beatles' album *Abbey Road* was an homage to their recording-studio.

Torun Lian's novel (1994) and later, the film with the same title (1998); *Only Clouds are moving the Stars*, an homage to the son she tragically lost, are further examples. There are numerous others.

It is important to distinguish between an homage and the slightly poorer form «dedication». In dedicating a book or a work of art to someone, does not bear the same honour as an homage. The term is not as often used in Norwegian contexts as it is in other countries, due most likely, to the French origin and meaning. In 1994 I wrote the foreword and was the editor of the book-as-homage to the gallery-owner Haaken A. Christensen's 70-th birthday, the title being *Hommage à Haaken*. In 1988, celebrating the 20-years jubilee of the Henie Onstad Art Centre in Oslo, a book and an exhibition were launched. The title was *Hommage à la France* as an homage and gratitude towards the French-Norwegian alliance in the arts. I can still remember the meeting where this illuminating idea was born, with the director at that time, Ole Henrik Moe, who assisted with the idea of the title. As I am giving this contribution to the project the title *Hommage à Herdis*, it is not only because it is the most appropriate for the task, but because she does in fact deserve it.

The fine art photographer Herdis Maria Siegert has, through her project *Hommage*, in many ways summed up a life's work, amidst her own life. Her *HOMMAGE* is not attributed art, artists or by any means, herself. On the contrary, Herdis' art is in this perspective, her tool for bringing about in the best and most precise way, an homage to God's creation: An 'hommage à Dieu, à l'Univers'. Through meeting God's nature she takes on a role as an instrument. This very role leaves the audience no room for remaining untouched. Her meeting makes the condition that contact with what is immortalized can take place. She does not continue her work until the dialogue is established. We are speaking of a real contact between the traditional object and the subject, which in the process ends up with becoming two subjects.

In nature, Herdis is seeing elements which others do not see. That is because she meets nature in a way few others do; hers being a genuine humility, a natural respect and a childlike wondering indeed. No wonder that she receives answers back from the nature through her attitude. A buddhist-monk with a strange garment on his head is the result of the dialogue with an orchid. The organic shapes of rock grinded by ice contrasted by tufts of grass and other plants, give an exchange of thoughts connected with human forms, skin and hair. Rocky slopes become backs and thighs and water-mirrors become infinities. Waves breaking against each others give three-dimensional effects which eradicate conceptions of time and space.

Always softspoken, always careful in her impact, the artist is approaching her purpose. It is as if we can hear her whispering to her chosen motive; ... is it o.k. that we cooperate in this?

The sand is answering by giving constantly new formations from each wave. The monk inside the orchid is nodding diligently.

Through the dialogue the metamorphosis is created, an element is changed from being what it is, towards becoming something more. The beauty is enforced through the artist's gaze before it becomes imprinted on the photographic paper. This is Herdis Maria Siegert's *HOMMAGE*; it extends from her towards creation, in respect, claiming however that this respect is to be shared by us all.

Translated from Norwegian by Hilde Raastad O'Hanlon.