

This is an extract from Trygve Bång's book *Coffee for two, please!* published in Sweden 2004. Translation by Caj Lundgren.

It had become a pleasant habit to meet Monsieur and Elan in the bar at apéritif-time. We had no explicit agreement, it just happened. With every time we met, the talks deepened and with them the friendship. After about a week I had an unexpected invitation to the studio of Monsieur Boncoeur. I say "unexpected" since the French most often prefer to meet their friends outside their home. I had a walk of five minutes to the studio. It was in one of the grey houses at rue Wilson, which I had often passed during my evening walks. Before I got to know Monsieur Boncoeur I may have passed and got a telling-off by Elan. Now I was more than welcome. The gate to the street was high and inset in the wall. We stepped into a spacious hall with a beautiful stone floor. Towards the garden two transom windows opened. A rectangular lawn led down to the river. There was one other house on the premises, a post modernistic creation in glass and concrete.

- My studio, Monsieur Boncoeur said. Come in, please.

It was an unusual house that I entered into. The ceiling height was at least ten meters and the highest point formed a huge glass tetraeder. The walls were naked concrete. You could see the traces of the boards that once had been the mould.

- Some time every year I open my studio to visitors, Monsieur Boncoeur said. It may be big companies or institutions that want to buy monumental sculpture. The inexperienced may need some guidance. At exhibitions very small details are often pointed at, but what is not demonstrated may not be noticed. Life and art hold lots of details. People come to the studio to see not only my works, but also how I live. Where is his bed? Where does he cook? Where does he relieve himself? Where is his dirty underwear? The details matter very much to people. In time the details form the work of art, Monsieur. Am I boring you?

- Not at all, I truthfully said. The analysis you're making interests me highly.

He went on:

- What comes first when something new is created? Nobody knows, I'd say. The human organs I've created are details, interesting details. I take a position to make the works more alive, more interesting, more bizarre. To do the unexpected, to bring two irrelevant things together, is to create a new relation. In one sculpture, for instance, I pitted a human ear against a sausage. To reach strong effects I often use parts of the body. One day I passed a butcher's shop and there was a pig's tongue in the window. I bought it and brought it to the studio as a model. This muscle, this intimate organ that we use every day and for different purposes.

When we eat, speak, kiss, make faces and so forth. Here you see the largest tongue sculpture I've ever made, three and one half metres high. It may be bought by a telecom company and put in their lobby as a reminder of the fact that their products wouldn't exist without the human tongue. Isn't that a fascinating thought?

In his own house Monsieur Boncoeur was another person than the one I had met in the bar. He spoke louder and with more confidence. His cheeks reddened with self-assuredness. Didn't the eyebrows look like daggers? I was getting uncertain about whether he was a real celebrity or just an educated fool.

- And here. A plaster sculpture called "Testicles". What do you say? Completely true to nature, eh? Although somewhat bigger. The size is related to Michelangelo's statue "David", actually. If it was 32 metres high these testicles would fit. He looked at me. His cheeks glowed, he was in his element. Under his calm surface a passive volcano might be resting. Could an eruption be on the way?

He showed me yet another sculpture, forearms in natural size cut off at the elbow. The material was aluminium. They were standing on a white plate.

- This one I call "Arms for Holding my Head". To support my head which is slightly too big I made my right arm in aluminium. The hands and the fingers have different functions - as ear scratchers, nose pickers and hair scratchers. Moreover, there is a thinking, a coughing and a yawning arm.

I made an effort to look neutral. Looking around for the exit, I silently repeated some excuses for having to leave the room in a hurry. Elan too was changed. When Monsieur Boncoeur raised his voice, the dog raised his hair and bared his teeth. I tried to turn the conversation over to a calmer subject.

-Are you interested in the audience's reaction to your work or is that indifferent? I asked. He looked sharply at me.

- I'm glad you asked that. Of course, I do the sculptures for myself. I can only say what I have done. What you take in comes out. A work of art is complex, the more complex the larger audience it can win. I am glad if my works can make somebody react. Indifference is the worst thing.

He had calmed down and spoke in a lower voice. Elan had lain down on the floor and was licking his paw.

- I remember an exhibition in a Paris gallery. After the opening I visited it three times. Every time, the same man was there. I asked him what he thought of the show. The first time, he really had liked it. The second time, he wasn't sure and the third time he had made up his

mind: He didn't like it.

It was fantastic, I learned something about myself.

We shook hands and he followed me to the door.

- A damn, he said forcefully. Once more he was his old self.

- A damn, I answered.

My voice was considerably weaker.

This is an extract from the book *Coffee for two, please!* Click the link below to read the extract.