



### ***A Three-Dimensional Poem***

John Raustein has a clear and distinctive voice in the field of textiles and visual art. Since his debut in 1998, he has continuously explored the textile tradition and the possibilities of handicraft, not only materially and technically, but also conceptually. His associative objects reveal his insatiable need to explore the ever-new possibilities of textiles. His goal is to penetrate deeper into questions about how memories and experiences of ordinary events play a decisive role in forming personal identity.

Raustein crosses the boundary between craft and pictorial art. He stands firmly in the textile tradition, with an understanding of materials and handicraft that has been a hallmark of the field of craft-based art as a whole. At the same time, the three-dimensional and conceptual qualities of his textile sculptures make it challenging to read his production within the framework of handicraft alone. His works clearly situate him in the wider field of visual contemporary art. This kind of boundary-crossing practice is increasingly common in Norwegian art today, and it partly has to do with the great attention paid to material-based art in recent years. Qualities linked to craft and material choices are evaluated more highly now than just a few years ago. There is increased appreciation of works that require time, that involve tradition, techniques and material knowledge – all this characterises Raustein's artistic approach to the textile tradition.

Raustein combines a thorough knowledge of craft with a unique sensitivity to the state of world around him. He uses his own life history as a resource. A mundane event can be a watershed, and memories from childhood and youth can be the basis for saying something with universal relevance. With the starting point of his own biography, Raustein explores how we are formed as individuals.

To understand Raustein's symbolism in depth, it is necessary to know something about his history. This is a characteristic shared by many 'confessional' and biographically-oriented

artists, one example being the French artist Louise Bourgeois, another being her heir, the English artist Tracey Emin. Like Bourgeois, Raustein allows objects to be symbolic expressions for his own memories and experiences: of vulnerability, loneliness and the feeling of being an outsider. At the same time, he appeals to the viewer's own experiences by fully exploiting the associative potential of textiles.

### **When Everything Falls into Place**

The installation *When Everything Falls into Place* (2019) fills a whole room and appeals to several senses, not just to sight. The acoustics are hushed and the atmosphere is dense and warm. We move about as if in a greenhouse, in amongst mangrove vegetation or a primeval forest. The light is filtered in some places, but there are also bright clearings and deep shadows. The boundaries of the individual works intervene in each other and are tied together, as it were, by the matt fabric's light green monochrome colour. Over time we become increasingly aware of contrasts in size and volume and between details, gradual transitions and the installation as a whole. Our will to explore propels us to move throughout the installation.

The installation can be experienced as dystopian, as if civilization has been taken over by pale and deformed plants. Only traces of human beings remain, like fragments of arms and scaffolding. The place is invaded by organic yet incomprehensible growths. But this kind of interpretation overlooks the humour and creative energy that permeates the exhibition. Melancholy and joy are inextricably linked.

The installation is a journey of discovery without a map. Its abstract and expressive character and the poetic titles allow us to activate our own interpretations. We are free to place them on the works in an exhibition that, in itself, seems like a surreal poem. A poem that can be read in many ways. Not everything does fall into place – luckily.

John Raustein (born 1972, Stavanger, Norway) lives and works in Oslo. He studied at Bergen National Academy of the Arts, Norway (1995–2000), with one semester at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts / Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation (1997). Raustein has held several solo exhibitions at notable Norwegian institutions. He has also participated in numerous group exhibitions in Norway and internationally. His works have been bought for the collections of, among others, the National Museum in Oslo, Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum in Trondheim, and KODE, Art Museums and Composer Homes in Bergen.

Janeke Meyer Utne, art historian and curator