SIK ISEA
Schweizerisches Institut für Kunstwissenschaft
Institut suisse pour l'étude de l'art
Istituto svizzero di studi d'arte
Swiss Institute for Art Research

Vital, Not, *Tongue*, 1986, Bronze mit grüner Patina, Höhe: 39 cm (Objektmass), Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur, 7540.000.1996

Documentation level
■■■■□

Name
Vital, Not

Dates of birth and death
* 15.2.1948 Sent

Municipality of origin (CH)
Sent (GR)

Nationality
CH, USA

Brief biography
Bildhauer, Maler und Zeichner. Druckgrafik, Architektur und Kunst im öffentlichen Raum

Fields of activity
Plastik, Druckgrafik, Assemblage, Architektur, Zeichnung, Malerei, Multiple, Fotografie

Lexicon article
Not Vital grew up in the Lower Engadine in a Rhaeto-Romanic-speaking family. He first came into contact with art in 1962 thanks to the art historian Max Huggler. From 1968–1970, Vital was in Paris, where he studied art at the newly established Centre universitaire expérimental de Vincennes. From 1970, he travelled all over the world, moving in 1974 to New York, where he lived until 2012, apart from regular sojourns in Lucca (Italy), Agadez (Niger) and his home village, Sent. Vital made the acquaintance of Willem de Kooning and younger painters in the circle of Francesco Clemente and Jean-Michel Basquiat. 1980, first sculpture in plaster; 1983, first bronze sculptures; Vital first started to explore graphic techniques in 1985. Since 1998, he has

created constructions in a historic garden in Sent (Parkin Not dal Mot). 1999, trip to West Africa; having acquired land in Agadez, a city in the Touareg Desert, he built various clay edifices there until 2006. In 2003, he established the Fundaziun Not Vital in Ardez with the aim of extending his collection of historic, Romance-language books. 2007, first trip to China; 2009, occupation of his new studio with living space on several floors, built by Mitsunori Sano, in Beijing.

Solo exhibitions (selection): 1979 and 1991, Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur; 1988, Kunstmuseum Luzern; 1989, Centre Culturel Suisse, Paris; 1994, Kunsthalle Basel; 1997, Malmö Konsthall; 2002, Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen; 2005, Kunsthalle Bielefeld; 2007, Museo Cantonale d'Arte di Lugano; 2009, Kunsthalle Wien (Vienna); 2011, UCCA (Ullens Center of Contemporary Art), Beijing; 2012, Kunstraum Dornbirn. Vital attracted international attention at the Venice Biennale in 2001 with his installation of bronze camel heads, which were visible only at low tide.

After an initial phase in which he was still influenced by Abstract Expressionism, Not Vital turned towards objectivity. The archaic traditions and environment of his place of origin, which is close to nature, have influenced his art from both a formal and an iconographic perspective. Recurring motifs in Vital's work are the Alpine world, the symbolic and mythological significance of animals, and their relationship with man, either as prey or sacrificial beasts. Vital works associatively and executes his visual ideas across the boundaries of different genres. His work oscillates between poetic humour and noble symbolism, in a combination of «new Surrealism» and «individual mythology».

Since the 1980s, Not Vital has worked three-dimensionally, creating idiosyncratic objects from human, animal or vegetable components using a wide variety of materials, such as *Missing Deer Ear Replaced by a Fish Plate Looking at Rain* (1998) or *Radtier* (Wheel Animal, 1982), which shows an indefinable creature on a wheel with four spokes and symbolises the passage of time and the eternal cycle of life. Since the mid-1980s, the artist has also dedicated himself to interpreting the concept of objectuality in graphic prints. He has also printed the ox tongue that occupied him since his time Lucca and was executed in marble, steel and bronze (*Tongue*, 1986) as an aquatint on paper, as well as other, less printable things such as dead lambs, dung, snowballs or snails (*Snails, 1992*). In a simultaneous counter-reaction to his one-dimensional, graphic work, Vital has also produced increasing numbers of sculptures. The objects not only become larger and taller (*Bigger than you*, 1987, bronze sculpture, Credit Suisse counter area, St. Moritz), but also push their way out of doors, are transformed into pieces of

architecture, and compete with nature itself. This process is exemplified by the numerous constructions that Vital started building in 1998, and which now occupy a central position in his œuvre.

Not Vital has been fascinated by huts and hideaways since childhood. On the edge of the village of Sent he acquired an old garden, which he has been developing together with his brother Duri Vital since 1998. On the steep terrain there are sculptures, bridges, viewing platforms, raised perches and all sorts of dwellings. 2008 saw the creation of the hydraulically operated *Josüjo* house, which can be completely lowered into the ground. There is also a sculpture made from the planks of an old barn that resembles a house; a house above the water; and another made of Murano glass. Climbing on and entering these constructions offers not only a special perspective on their natural surroundings, but also elicits a highly antithetical sensation of both security and abandonment.

In Agadez and the nearby Aladab oasis, Vital has erected various buildings, tapped a spring and cultivated a garden. The steps of the pyramid-shaped *Makaranta*, a Koran school built by Vital in 2005, can accommodate up to 500 children. The *Mekafoni* (House with Horns, 2000) and the walls that surround it are decorated all over with cow horns – the only part of the animal that the Touareg people do not reuse. In the Aladab oasis there is a *Haus, um den Sonnenuntergang zu betrachten* (House to watch the sunset, 2005), a *Haus, um den Mond zu sehen* (House to see the moon, 2005) and a *Haus gegen Hitze und Sandstürme* (House against heat and sandstorms, 2006). These are archaic constructions of clay and sand, which Not Vital erected together with local workers within a very short time. Vital does not go in for protracted preparatory studies any more than he does for construction plans, and yet all these pieces of architecture are convincing in their harmonious proportions and formal clarity, which render them habitable sculptures. His most recently constructed building – also a *Haus, um den Sonnenuntergang zu betrachten* (House to watch the sunset) – is in the hollowed-out marble island of NotOna in Patagonia (Chile), and he has been working on another construction project on the Indonesian island of Flores since 2013.

Vital's buildings are shelters against the forces of nature, and at the same time serve as places from which to contemplate it. In all of his projects, an exchange with the local people and the interaction with their traditions play a central role. In Agadez, Vital employs silversmiths, who enclose the sun-dried remains of camels in silver spheres (*Camel*, 2005), for example. In China, a craft workshop has found a new livelihood through his commissions, for instance, by producing a hundred hand-beaten steel lotus blossoms (*Lasst hundert Blumen blühen*, Let a hundred flowers bloom, 2008). Although many of these more recent objects are characterised by a minimal, modernist aesthetic, they are always based on a poetically associative approach and reveal a biographically influenced subtext. One of the key levels of meaning that accounts for the intense symbolism of Vital's works is the fact that they are rooted in their location. In his quest for original stories and local realities, the Engadine native Not Vital engages unconditionally with human beings and the natural world across the globe: his works are the result of this encounter between the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Works: Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur; Chur, Alexanderplatz, *3 Lotus,* 2012; New York, The Museum of Modern Art; Salzburg, Museum der Moderne; Salzburg, forecourt, Museum der Moderne, *Schlafendes Haus*, 2009; Schauwerk Sindelfingen, The Schaufler Foundation; Zurich, Collection of Prints and Drawings, Swiss Federal Institute of Technology; Zurich, Mobimo Tower, *No Problem Sculpture*, 2011.

Katharina Ammann, 2013
Translation: Toby Alleyne-Gee

Selected bibliography
- *Not Vital. Paintings*. Helsinki, Ateneum Art Museum, 2018 -19. Essay: Susanna Petterson. [Helsinki:] Parvs Publishing Ltd, 2018
- *Not Vital. univers privat*. Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur, 2017. Herausgeber: Stephan Kunz, Lynn Kost. Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2017
- *Not Vital. Lasst hundert Blumen blühen*. Kunstraum Dornbirn, 2012. Texte: Edelbert Köb, Alma Zevi. Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2012 [Ausstelllung: Montagehalle, Jahngasse 9, Dornbirn]
- *Not Vital. Not Why. Selected Works 2008-2009*. Peking, Galerie Urs Meile, 2009-10. [Texte:] Christoph Doswald und Not Vital. Beijing-Lucerne, 2009
- Thomas Kellein: *Not Vital. Agadez*. Kunsthalle Bielefeld; London, Albion Gallery, 2005. Köln: Walther König, 2005
- *Not Vital. Fat es fat*. Schaffhausen, Museum zu Allerheiligen, 2002. [Text:] Markus Stegmann. Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2002
- *Not Vital. Skulptur / Sculpture*. Malmö Konsthall, 1997-98. [Texts:] Bera Nordal, Anthny Iannacci. Malmö, 1997
- Thomas Kellein: *Not Vital*. New York: Distributed Art Publishers D.A.P., 1996
- *Not Vital*. Kunsthalle Basel, 1994
- *Not Vital. Druckgrafik & Mulitples*. Chur, Bündner Kunstmuseum, 1991. [Text:] Beat Stutzer. Chur, 1991
- *Not Vital*. Kunstmuseum Luzern, 1988. [Texte:] Martin Kunz, Matthias Frehner. Luzern, 1988

Website
http://notvital.com/

Direct link
http://www.sikart.ch/ kuenstlerinnen.aspx? id=4004342&lng=en

Last modification
17.11.2020

gedruckten Publikationen ist ohne ausdrückliche
Zustimmung von SIK-ISEA nicht gestattet.

Empfohlene Zitierweise
AutorIn: Titel [Datum der Publikation], Quellenangabe,
<URL>, Datum des Zugriffs. Beispiel: Oskar Bätschmann:
Hodler, Ferdinand [2008, 2011], in: SIKART Lexikon zur
Kunst in der Schweiz,
http://www.sikart.ch/kuenstlerinnen.aspx?id=4000055,
Zugriff vom 13.9.2012.