

Playing with Fire

Edmund de Waal
and Axel Salto

CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art Denmark,
8th October 2023 – 11th August 2024

Artist and author Edmund de Waal will curate an exhibition of acclaimed Danish ceramicist Axel Salto (1889 – 1961), considered one of the greatest masters of 20th Century ceramic art.

The exhibition is the result of a collaboration between Edmund de Waal, CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art Denmark, and Kunstsilo, Norway. It opens in Denmark in October 2023, at the Kunstsilo in September 2024, and at The Hepworth Wakefield, West Yorkshire, in 2025.

Born in Copenhagen in 1889, Axel Salto was a radical polymathic figure who crossed boundaries from one discipline to another, producing an extraordinary body of ceramic work alongside paintings, wood-cuts, drawings, book illustration, and textiles. After studying at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts where he became intrigued by modernism and a progressive aesthetic, Salto travelled to Paris, where he met Picasso and Matisse. An accomplished poet and author, he founded the influential Danish art journal *Klingen (The Blade)*, an important forum for critical thinking in Denmark.

Salto is internationally renowned for his highly individual and expressive stoneware inspired by organic forms, characterised by budding, sprouting, and fluted surface textures that appear to ripple and burst with life.

This exhibition will bring together a significant number of Salto's ceramic works from the collection of CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art, Denmark, and The Tangen Collection at Kunstsilo, the world's largest collection of Nordic modernist art. Salto's ceramics will be shown alongside lesser-known and unseen works on paper, illustrations, writings and textiles, with a major new installation by de Waal reflecting on Salto's enduring influence.

Edmund de Waal said:

“Axel Salto is one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century. He created a unique body of ceramic work that continues to fascinate me. His sculptures seem to be on the point of change: glazes are caught in flux. Vases swell as if to burst. He cared about the ways that patterns change course, shift energies, how an animal becomes a person, a man metamorphoses into a stag. Ovid ran powerfully through his life. That moment of change, transformation, is the moment when poetry occurs.”

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated book, published by Forlaget PRESS exploring the dialogue between the two artists. The book will contain a wide range of excerpts from Salto’s extensive writings, an interview with de Waal, as well as a new essay in which de Waal investigates the concept of metamorphosis and the fusing of clay and words.

The project is made possible by a generous grant from the AKO Foundation, a London-based philanthropic foundation.

Exhibition design by Hutchison Kivotos Architects.



Edmund de Waal surrounded by Axel Salto's work at the Clay Museum of Ceramic Art Denmark. Photo by Peter Leth-Larsen
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For further press information:

Edmund de Waal
Erica Bolton or Daisy Taylor, Bolton & Quinn
erica@boltonquinn.com / daisy@boltonquinn.com
+44 (0) 207 221 5000

CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art Denmark
Henny Husum, Press Manager
henny@claymuseum.dk
+45 30301019

Kunstsilo, Norway
Eldbjørg Dahl, Commercial Director
eldbjorg.dahl@kunstsilo.no
+47 938 04 000

Hepworth Wakefield
marketing@hepworthwakefield.org
+44 (0)1924 247360

NOTES TO EDITORS

Edmund de Waal

b.1964 Nottingham. He lives and works in London.

Edmund de Waal is an internationally acclaimed artist and writer, best known for his large-scale installations of porcelain vessels, often created in response to collections and archives or the history of a particular place. His interventions have been made for diverse spaces and museums worldwide, including the Musée Nissim de Camondo, Paris; The British Museum, London; The Frick Collection, New York; Canton Scuola Synagogue, Venice; Schindler House, Los Angeles; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna and V&A Museum, London. De Waal is also renowned for his bestselling family memoir, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (2010), and *The White Road* (2015). His most recent book, *Letters to Camondo*, a series of haunting letters written during lockdown was published in April 2021. He was awarded the Windham-Campbell Prize for non-fiction by Yale University in 2015. In 2021 he was awarded a CBE for his services to art.

Axel Salto

b. 1889 in Copenhagen. d. 1961 in Copenhagen.

Axel Salto graduated in 1914 from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts as a painter. Multitalented as he was, he also worked as designer, editor and writer. In 1917-20 he founded the avant-garde journal *Klingen* (The Blade). His career as a ceramicist began in the 1920s when he designed porcelain vases and bowls for the Danish manufacturer B&G (Bing & Grøndahl). From 1929 he was linked to the stoneware studio at The Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Manufactory.

Salto had numerous solo-exhibitions in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and France. He was awarded the "Grand Prix" at the World Expo in Paris in 1937 and at the Milan Triennale in 1951. In 1961 he received a gold medal at the international ceramics exhibition at Musée des Beaux-Arts in Ostend, Belgium. In the 50's his ceramics and textiles played an important role in promoting Danish design and crafts, known as Danish Modern, in North America.

CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art Denmark

CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art Denmark is the largest museum in the Nordic countries for ceramic art, crafts, and design. Beautifully situated close to the waterfront on the island Fünen. It started out on the initiative of a group of Danish ceramicists in 1994, in a stunning old villa from 1857 built by the owner of the nearby castle. Since then, the relatively young museum has evolved with rapid haste, not least because the museum received the enormous historical collection, The Royal Copenhagen Collection, which includes a large number of works by Axel Salto. This addition to the collection led to an extension of the building with large subterranean exhibition halls and a pavilion in the park. This year, only seven years later, yet another building is being added. This will be inaugurated in October with the exhibition - *Playing with Fire: Edmund de Waal and Axel Salto*.

www.claymuseum.dk

Kunstsilo, Kristiansand, Norway

Kunstsilo (Art Silo) is still under construction in an old grain silo, right on the waterfront in Kristiansand. The spectacular building will be unique both in terms of content and architecture, as it is being transformed from an abandoned industrial building to an art and experience center with international appeal.

At the very core of Kunstsilo is The Tangen Collection – a collection of more than 5,000 works created by more than 300 different artists from the Nordic countries. It is the largest collection of Nordic modernist art in the world – and it is still growing. Included in the collection is a large amount of Salto's ceramic work. This collection – in conjunction with the works of Salto in The Royal Copenhagen Collection at CLAY Museum of Ceramic Art – forms the backbone of the upcoming exhibition. When Kunstsilo opens in 2024 it will offer a wide range of temporary exhibitions as well as being a platform for international digital contemporary art, lectures, concerts, workshops and events.

www.kunstsilo.no

Hepworth Wakefield

The Hepworth Wakefield is an award-winning art gallery based in the heart of Yorkshire, UK. The building was designed by the acclaimed David Chipperfield Architects and sits alongside a beautiful free public garden designed by Tom Stuart-Smith and the River Calder.

Named after Barbara Hepworth, one of the most important British artists of the 20th century who was born and brought up in Wakefield, the gallery presents major exhibitions of the best international modern and contemporary art. It is also home to Wakefield's growing art collection – an inspiring resource comprising outstanding works of modern British and contemporary art in a broad range of medium including paintings, sculpture, ceramics, photographs and works on paper.

The Hepworth Wakefield runs engaging programmes for schools, families and local community groups to provide inspiring creative learning opportunities and a vibrant talks and events programme, including regular makers markets.

www.hepworthwakefield.org

AKO Foundation

The AKO Foundation, based in London, was established in 2013 by Nicolai Tangen, who had previously founded AKO Capital, an investment business. The Foundation makes charitable grants towards causes which improve education, promote the arts, and combat climate change.

The Foundation has been instrumental in the creation of the Kunstsilo, an abandoned, award-winning grain silo in Kristiansand, Norway, which is now being transformed into one of Northern Europe's most innovative art institutions and experience centres. Kunstsilo will house the Tangen Collection – the world's largest collection of Nordic modernist art – and Sørlandets Kunstmuseum's permanent collection; it will also present temporary exhibitions.

The AKO Foundation has a pro-active approach to giving grants and does not consider unsolicited applications.