

**Speech by Torben Venndt Chairman of the Independent institution Lifeboats
June 18, 2016 Launch of *Life-Boats***

I would also like to outline some perspectives on *Life-Boats* and the entire process behind this magnificent work of art.

Vision and Support

Great projects begin with dreams.

In this case, you, Marit Benthe Norheim, dreamt in 2009 of three sailing sculptures of women in three different stages of life. It was the dream of life and tolerance through the human encounter. When you told your husband Claus Ørntoft about this dream, he replied – loosely quoted: “*Then just do it!*”

Such a helper and such moral support are crucial in transforming dreams into magnificent completed projects.

But in order to realize great visions, much more is required.

A Front Figure

Above all, there must be one or more front figures who, with deep commitment and inspiration, share the vision with all the many links in the long chain such a comprehensive project consists of. As a front figure, Benthe, you have been perfect. You never gave up, even when everything seemed hopeless.

That is why the name *Concrete Benthe*, as you are also called in Vendsyssel, is so appropriate. With infectious enthusiasm, you explained and described the project hundreds of times. Gradually, more and more people became convinced of the sustainability of your vision.

Marketing – Volunteers – Economy

Then followed extensive marketing. With dedication and contagious excitement, you, Benthe, told about the project, exhibited preliminary works, and gave lectures. Countless brochures, newsletters, and special prints were produced. You gave talks and presentations on a large scale and welcomed a steady stream of visiting groups and media representatives.

The marketing department of a large company would be left breathless by such a program.

Along the way, more and more people were recruited – both paid and unpaid. The art project could never have been realized without this massive effort by unpaid volunteers. The *Life-Boats* Support Association has carried a huge and vital responsibility in organizing the casting parties.

Specialists with unique expertise were sought and found. Finally, the necessary capital had to be raised. To meet this task, the Independent Institution *Life-Boats* was established.

Preparations

The preparations were extensive. Countless sketches were made, models were built, and consultations were held with ship engineers, boat builders, and many other experts – so that the female-shaped sculptures, once completed, could also function as seaworthy ships.

To house *Life-Boats*, the barn at the farm in Mygdal had to be rebuilt extensively. In effect, a shipyard was established, where work could continue both summer and winter.

The Artistic Process

The artistic process behind the construction of these three ferrocement ships is truly impressive. A colossal amount of work lies behind this achievement. First, the skeletons were built with keel and ribs. Then they were covered with seven layers of chicken wire, bound together with 50,000 wire ties per ship.

To coat the hulls with concrete, hundreds of people were needed, working in well-coordinated teams to spread special concrete in thin layers across the wire mesh. This had to be completed over the course of a single extended weekend. Such a casting was in itself a tremendous accomplishment.

Afterward, the three giant sculptures had to be transformed into functional, seaworthy ships – an enormous task in its own right.

Like so many other projects, *Life-Boats* depended on a chain of many sub-processes – a chain that is never stronger than its weakest link. If one link fails, the entire chain breaks.

The story of *Life-Boats* resembles a folk tale.

Here is a nearly impossible task the hero must accomplish. There are helpers and obstacles. Terrible dangers appear along the way – but in the end, the true hero, despite all challenges, reaches the goal.

That is how it has been for you, Benthe, and the *Life-Boats* project. Many times it seemed hopeless – but in the end, everything succeeded. Congratulations!

Life-Boats has cost just under 10 million kroner. In reality, it should have cost many times more. Sponsorships and special-price contributions have significantly reduced expenses. It is also a project in which the artist herself has delivered an enormous amount of unpaid work over several years.

Thanks

To you, Benthe, who through vision, perseverance, and dedication have driven this process.

To you, Claus, and your family, who have provided moral, financial, and practical support throughout.

To all the friends and volunteers, in their hundreds, who have contributed to this project in practical, financial, and moral ways. Thanks to the *Life-Boats* Support Association, which coordinated much of this help.

Thanks also to the many public institutions that have supported this work.

Not least to the European Capital of Culture Foundation Aarhus 2017, with whom we have had an exemplary collaboration.

Likewise, warm thanks to Aalborg Municipality, the city, the harbor, and institutions including Stigsborg Brygge, who also helped bring this great work to completion. And recognition, too, of the regatta, which provides a beautiful and natural framework for the launch of *Life-Boats*.

A heartfelt thanks to the generous foundations and companies that contributed financially in such an outstanding way. They are all listed in the program distributed today. Together, the necessary funding has, happily, been secured.

The name *Life-Boats* is most fitting for this project. It carries within it the meanings: ships of life – life-giving ships – and lifeboats.

For Inger and Ole Davidsen, who were initiators of both the Independent Institution *Life-Boats* and the Support Association, there was sadly no lifeboat when they perished off the coast of Greenland almost two years ago. We miss them especially today.

But *Life-Boats* has already given life to the many who took part in its creation, and without doubt, *Life-Boats* will continue to be life-giving on its future journeys.

On this happy day, I will conclude with the refrain from Povl Dissing and Benny Andersen's *Svantes lykkelige dag*:

*Life is not the worst thing one has
And in a moment the coffee is ready*

You will not get coffee now, but there is surely more to eat and drink while you enjoy the beautiful music. Afterwards, the ships will be open for visitors, ready for closer inspection – as are the events of the Aalborg Regatta.

Enjoy – and thank you for listening.