



## The Other Homer

When Simon Reynolds wrote *Retromania. Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past* (2011), he likely did not imagine that our collective love affair with history could go all the way back to Greek Antiquity. Then again, he never met Berg. Most of us are happy to cite or to revive cultural trends from the late 20th century: music as well as fashion and design. Yet Berg – who produces ceramic sculptures, including life-size self-portraits – might find such passions downright neoteric. His addiction is not to, say, Echo & the Bunnymen, flare jeans and Jean Prouvé chairs, but rather to Homer's epic Greek poem *The Odyssey* (circa 8th century B.C.) about the Greek king of Ithaca who took ten years to return home after the Trojan War. While Berg views his sculptures as interpretations of Homer, the pieces seem to cite scenes from the epic poem allegorically or to revive them in a more literal manner. For example, *Untitled* (2015) remains an allegory of Odysseus: sitting down slumped in a chair, surrounded by the heads of mortals, who double as the Furies, as well as an ornamental shield. In this sculpture and others, the shields are not merely decorative but relate stories, much like Antique Greek vases. *Untitled* (2015) seems closer to a revival, if not a re-enactment: the double-portrait bust depicts Berg himself as the young Ulysses. In a way, this work seems to combine the pursuits of James Joyce's novel *Ulysses* (1922) and Cindy Sherman's *Untitled Film Stills* series (1977–80): giving us a contemporary, human Odysseus while mimicking this historical figure, as if he were a character in a Hollywood film. Yet ultimately Berg's pursuit is closer to the memory of a society without writing. Since nothing can be written down, the past must be continually repeated: in songs, sculptures or epic poems. While the artist grew up with literacy, his approach belongs to orality, as does Homer's epic. However antiquated his source, Berg's oeuvre suggests that today's retromania might hold the elements of a much older past. *Jennifer Allen*



*Calypso* 2015, stoneware, life-size.  
All images courtesy: the artist.

A zephyrean greeting whispered by the wind akin to a warm breath's intimate invitation. The horizon, the gentle hills already so distant in the morning mist, so intensely blue against the nascent sky. The night's pitch-black shroud, sparkling with countless stars, falls slowly behind us. The olive trees bob tenderly in the warm breeze; for a short while, it is absolutely quiet.

A distant sound of horses' hooves. Hollow echos of neighing and the thin rattle of gold-plated harnesses reaches us, the dump banging sounds of wagon wheels. We see embers on the horizon. Up he rises, Helios the magnificent, drawn in his quadriga by his feisty Pyrois, Aeos, Aethon and Phlegon. Yet again he rides out across the firmament, alone in his duty.

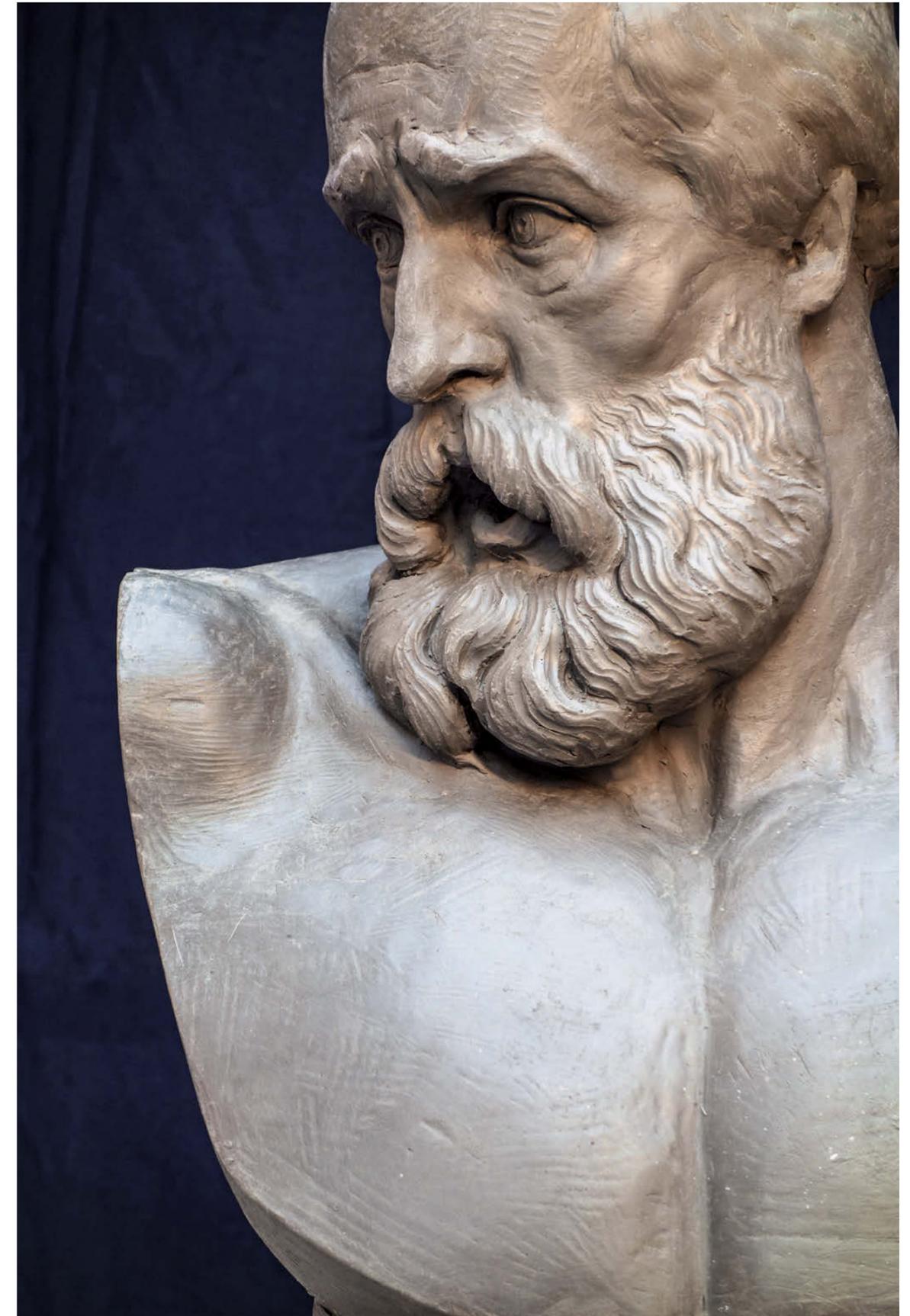
A ruin of faded marble harbours two twisted junipers. On a sun-warmed architrave among toppled columns, we find cover in a land of short shadows. Rest, water, romancing hearts alone in nature. The golden reeds wave softly under the azure sky, a dry wind silences the crickets. Above them traverses Helios the brilliant, perpetually industrious, austere in his office.

Immortal, eternal and perfect, Helios the titan rumbles down towards the garden of the Hesperides. There among the cypresses stands a tree bearing golden fruits, inaccessible, guarded by the dragon Ladon. No dance awaits with the nymphs of that twilight land, only his silent return down Okeanos, home to his palace of gold. A simple supper under a deep copper coloured sky, for them a joy in life.

*Christian Magnus Tømmeraaas Berg*

Christian Magnus Tømmeraaas Berg (1988, Oslo) is an Oslo-based figurative sculptor. After completing his BA in Visual Arts as a ceramicist at the National Academy of the Arts in Oslo in 2013, he studied classical art in the Athens School of Fine Arts in 2014 and then completed his MFA studies in Oslo in 2015.

## Christian Magnus Tømmeraaas Berg



*So Grossly Incandescent* 2015, stoneware, life-size.