

City view

New sculpture park Ekebergparken opens in Oslo



Among the featured art works is this sculpture by Richard Hudson, literally reflecting the surrounding nature with its polished mirrored surface.

A celebration, along with fireworks and a rock concert, was held in Oslo in honor of a newly opened sculpture park Ekebergparken. The park is a time capsule, enabling visitors to travel back in time to see works by August Rodin (his petroglyphs), James Turrell, Tony Oursler, Louis Bourgeois and Marina Abramovich. The park is 64 acres, costs about 300 million NOK and so far holds 31 contemporary art works out of 80 proposed. It also holds a broader perspective for potential cultural growth.

Mount Ekebergen, towering above the city and the fjord, has become a magical mountain. In its jungle hides a troll cave: Tony Oursler built a video installation inside the stone niche called Klang, made up of many TV screens emitting loud noises all at once. The work refers to the development of language and communication and was inspired by the place itself, according to the artist. Another work by Oursler is also connected to language: a talking lamp post, lecturing on various socio-psychological topics and the more passionate the narrator's speech becomes - the brighter the lamp glows. There is a good magician cave in the park too. In the grove underneath the lake is a hidden Ganzfeld, containing James Turrell's observatory, where visitors are first blinded by a strong pure light and then allowed to gaze at the stars with a freshly color-cleansed sight.

It seems other artists share Turrell's vision, creating works that harmonize with nature, reflect it with their mirrored surfaces, or invite viewers to observe the naturally occurring surrounding phenomena.

Like branches bent by strong winds, George Katz's kinetic spirals intertwine with each other in "Dance" while the wind is playing with Louis Bourgeois's "Couple", suspended off the pine branches and frozen in ecstasy; a giant vane is spinning Lynn Chadwick's "Ace of Diamonds" nearby and "Cast Glances" by Tony Crag has taken its full form.

Sometimes art works point out the best spots in the park, and other times - our inability to perceive: Dan Graham's transparent "Pavilion" reflects its surroundings, yet inside one is immediately confronted with his own reflection, referring to the narcissistic tendencies humans often possess and the ever present dividing wall between cultures and nature. Other artists touch upon park's cultural history: Jenny Holtz etched her aphorisms on the wall, similar to the petroglyphs, Marina Abramovich did a performance with the help of Oslo audience at the same spot, where Edvard Munch saw a vision for his future "Scream", the installation, which recorded the whole performance, is officially opening in a month. Some works were controversial: there is a bronze statue of a woman-fountain Ann-Sofie Siden, hidden in a bushes near James Turrell's pond with pants lowered to her ankles - an autobiographical work by the artist and her response to male chauvinism.

It is not that Oslo is lacking in sculptures - quite the opposite. To an unknowing eye, the capital of Norway has the highest number of sculptures in the world. Until now it's main attraction has been the Vigeland sculpture park, which is currently holding a Norwegian sculpture biennial. Overall, citizens of Oslo developed a certain taste for plastic, including the creator of Ekebergparken, largest Norwegian developer Christian Ringnes, whose been collecting sculptures for nearly 30 years.

The concept for the park was born about ten years ago, when Mr. Ringnes bought a construction site inside the city's public park, built in the late XIX century and abandoned in the second half of the XX century. As soon as the ruins were renovated into a trendy restaurant Mr. Ringnes came up with an idea to display his whole collection to the public, already having gifted several sculptures from his personal collection to the city since mid-80s: and since there is a Vigeland park in the west, why not balance it out with a museum of contemporary art in the East. The negotiations with city council lasted several years, finally resulting in 300 million NOK funding and city's ownership of the Ekebergparken for fifty years. An arts committee was assembled, consisting of government officials, artists and funds representatives.

Ekebergparken is not your ordinary sculpture park - it is an image of intelligent coexistence of nature and society: hectares of clean forest; kilometers of land covered with gravel, sand, ash or sawdust; thousands of street lamps, both tall and short; observation points with benches; guarded archaeological monuments from the Bronze, Iron And Neolithic Ages. Even the XIX century historical manor is carefully preserved: now holding a museum, educational center for kids and a cafe, as well as the most "classical" part of Ringnes's collection - a Rodin, Renoir, Mayol and a Dali. Nonetheless, angry neighbors are dissatisfied that the forest is turning into a tourist attraction: they blame the benefactor for nature exploitation, calling him developer-imperialist, a Nazi and a sexist with the help of local papers and in his face - having

been invited to various press-conferences were they could voice their opposition and state their case. But as the Ekebergparken envelops protests are winding down, Mr. Ringnes even had time to round up another collection - various press junk and caricatures, which now elegantly cover up cafe's bathroom walls.

With all due respect to the protestors, it seems like their efforts are worthless. "Developer-imperialist" has not only saved the abandoned wild park, but prevented other developers from using the park for new building units. The city has been trying to find access to water in the last several years - the shore is turning into an architectural exhibition, housing new opera Snohetta and Museum of Astrup-Fernly and planning to add Munch Museum and National Museum within next ten years. If it was not for the Ekebergparken, the area would turn into a prestigious wealthy neighborhood with pleasant city view. In any case, it is already understood that the name of Christian Ringnes will enter Oslo history not due to bad press.