



***Art projects bringing a message of fellowship, tolerance and love in a world in which life-destructive forces are winning ground***

Life-boats is the latest and most spectacular project of its kind, with the broadest perspective. It is a flagship for the activities that Aarhus will be creating in connection with its role as European Capital of Culture in 2017.

**“Art arises when it encounters the spectator and we interpret it.”**

**Ludwig Wittgenstein.**

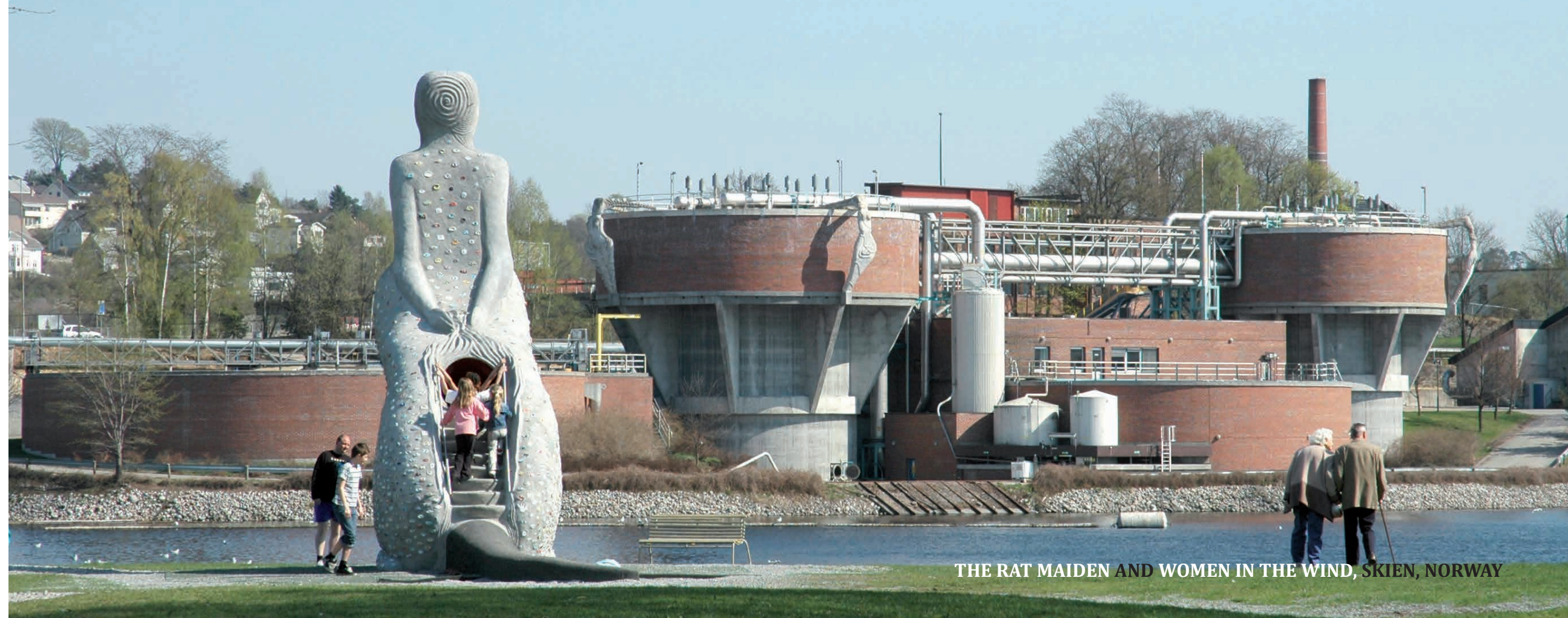
The artist and sculptor Marit Benthe Norheim is known as an innovative artist in Denmark, Norway, the rest of the Nordic countries and UK. Her works are represented at a broad range of museums and institutions. But she is known first and foremost for her series of significant and original projects in the public space. One has to tra-

vel to different parts of Denmark and abroad to get a sense of the breadth, diversity and artistic conviction of her powerful works.

***Art projects that provide anonymous places with a new profile and new significance***

Marit Benthe Norheim has always had a nuanced understanding of the role of art in creating new experiences or disseminating new orientations to people moving around or working in the public space. Numerous artists - e.g. those who dominated Greek Antiquity or the Renaissance - have always been interested in creating works in the public space which create new visual dialogues between art and people and visualize the basic values in society and religion.

Parallels to this view have shaped Marit Benthe Norheim’s artistic development. She has always had a keen eye for the importance of creating projects in a variety of scales in places that were formerly anonymous. Through her artworks, these places - either out in nature or in the city space - were given a new profile and provided in-



**THE RAT MAIDEN AND WOMEN IN THE WIND, SKIEN, NORWAY**

spiration in daily life. In the encounter with her works in the public space, the veil of conventionality, which often cloaks our daily lives, is torn away and we discover new openings and values in a world, which we thought we knew so well, but which actually contained endless undiscovered possibilities.

These qualities are clearly evident in her major project, with the title; ***Women in the Wind***. This was a commission for Norske Skog Union's biological purification tank in Skien in Norway (1995-1996). An industrial company was given a new poetic profile for their employees and their visitors through this work. The same qualities characterize two of her monumental sculptures, which both contain new artistic interpretations of Ibsen's dramas and which visualize the relationship between tradition and innovation in a new way. These works are ***Lady of the Sea*** (2001) in Sæby, Dk, inspired by Ibsen's play of the same name and ***The Rat Maiden*** (2006) in Skien, N. which was based on a character from Ibsen's play Little Eyolf.

Marit Benthe Norheim has also been very concerned with how new connections between art and the public can be formed. She wants to in-



volve both children and adults in this teaching process. She has achieved these goals in a qualified manner in the aforementioned sculptures. The viewer is drawn into a new experiential space and enriched by the new experiences. In *The Lady of the Sea*, children from different schools created small porcelain reliefs, as symbols of protection. Her sculptural projects relate - often intensely - not only to the intellect, but also to the imagination, emotions and all our senses.

Both these works and her later works show that she manages to reshape and transform concrete in a unique way, so that it quivers with life and is thus able to visualize the humanity, the shield against destructive forces, and the love, which she has been intent on interpreting in diverse ways. In most of her projects, the female figure occupies a prominent position. She has been particularly focused on interpreting the mysterious and contrasting nature of women. The women in her visions are often providers of the life-giving processes. Sculptures and particularly monuments in the public space can, at first glance, appear to be

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*Lady of the Sea*

static. They create an experiential space, which activates the viewer and inspires them to walk around and experience their uniqueness from countless angles. Marit Benthe Norheim has always worked energetically to find new artistic strategies, which can create a more intense relationship between art and people and specifically reach the environments, where art has not yet gained a foothold.



***“The Rolling Angels” draw the viewer into their magical circle***

In 2000 she created the ***Rolling Angels***. They were created on top of nothing less than the frame of a waste bin. By doing so, Marit Benthe Norheim emphasized that the things we turn our backs on, can be given a new function and significance in art. At the same time, this compositional form visualizes both the exalted and humble nature of angels. They bring light into a grey reality, which they are also a part of. And by using both concrete and a waste bin - rather than gold or bronze - the angels become a part of contemporary art and written into our own era. They are drawn out of a known religious framework and are thereby given a new expressive power and appeal powerfully to the viewer. Finally, it is the viewer themselves, who roll the angels and thereby get special contact to them and experience that the sculptures also appeal to the sense of touch.

This installation was also one of the first of Marit Benthe Norheim’s sculptural installations, in which the dialogue between the sculptural idiom and the music have a central place. The angels belong not only to Christianity or other religions, but also form symbols of important life values and en-



**THE ROLLING ANGELS, TRAFALGAR SQUARE, LONDON 2000**

ter into personal contexts. For the ***Rolling Angels***, who each have an individual character, the renowned Norwegian composer Geir Johnson created both electronic music and choir songs with poems about angels, which is placed physically in the hearts of the angels. The songs were written by Henning Kramer Dahl. This installation, in which sculpture and music are united in a very artistically convincing manner, has been presented in a variety of places - including Trafalgar Square and St. Martin in the Fields in London in 2000 and in the Jakob Culture Church in Oslo.

By involving so many artforms, the ***Rolling Angels*** become a Gesamtkunstwerk, because sculpture, poetry and music are combined in a way that creates two timelines. The first timeline is established via the movement of the sculptures in the church, on streets and squares, the second timeline is created through the music. In the years ahead, Marit Benthe Norheim will be expanding and refining this concept, which could be called a Gesamtkunstwerk moving in two time dimensions.

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*From Church of St. Martin to Trafalgar Square, 2000.  
Marit Benthe Norheim’s studio in Mygdal.  
Vendsyssel Museum of Art 2005.  
Salisbury Cathedral, 2001.*



***The Camping Women  
- create a new experiential space***

In 2008, she created an original project (in connection with the European Capital of Culture Stavanger 2008) - which made the world around her sit up and take notice. She took us out in a new and unexpected manner into her artistic universe, when she chose to transform five dilapidated caravans into mobile sculptures shaped like women. They represent different aspects of our history and our daily lives.

They are ***Maria the Protector, The Bride, The Refugee, Campingmamma*** and ***The Siren***. Inside the caravans there were sculptures, reliefs, photographs and highly expressive music created and edited by the composer Geir Johnson.

***The Refugee Woman*** leans forward and gazes out into an unknown world. She demonstrates strength, but is also anxious and vulnerable, because she does not know what fate awaits her. The interior of the caravan is covered in porcelain mosaics, created by 400 children from the Stavanger region in collaboration with refugee women in Sandnes. The mosaics express loss and longing. The famous Palestinian natio-



***Upper left, Maria the Protector***  
Slettnes lighthouse, North of Norway 2009

***Upper right, Campingmama***  
The Cultural Summit, Mors DK, 2012

***Lower left, The Bride***  
In front of Herning Museum of contemporary art DK, 2009

***Lower middle, The Refugee***  
Reykjavik Arts Festival Iceland 2009

***Lower right, The Siren***  
Church festival in Aalborg DK, May 2013



nal poet Mahmoud Darwish gave Geir Johnson permission to adapt sections of the work *State of Siege* (2002) and set it to music. Through this work, the painful fate of the refugees become present in a powerfully expressive way.

*The Siren* is a fertile female figure with an enormously erotic aura. She is seductive, but also dangerous. She attracts and repels. Geir Johnson composed the music sung by Siri Torjesen. It emphasises the contrasting nature of the siren. *Campingmama* appears to be a very dominant matron, who embraces everyone who comes close to her with great care - but she is maybe too caring, so that she almost suffocates them. Siri Torjesen also created the musical soundscape for this work. She sings popular songs, in which security may feel constraining.

*Maria the Protector* is a contemporary interpretation of Maria as the depictions of Maria as the merciful Madonna, who protects and prays for the damned. The dead Christ lies on the floor of the caravan, surrounded by many of the people that she has protected. Geir Johnson's adaptation of *Misere-re Mei* by Gregorio Allegri contains a musical interpretation of the sculptural depiction of the theme of mercy, sung by the Trio Medieval.

*The Bride* is both poetic and erotic. She beckons us to enter into the caravan and to listen to wedding music from all over the world, while looking at wedding pictures from countries close to home



and far away, which present known and foreign forms of marriage.

*Campingwomen* demonstrate how Marit Benthe Norheim uses the the female body - both on a large as well as a small scale - to express basic human attitudes, experiences, emotions and dreams. They teach us, in a very direct manner, that art contains a special sensory experience, which is in many respects parallel to those we encounter in Louise Bourgeois' expressive female figures, which also interpret basic human experiences and values.

When the *Campingwomen* are on the road, they engage viewers in a very active way. They drive through towns and out into the landscape, both in Denmark, Iceland and Norway and are met with surprise, enthusiastic exclamations, stares and countless other reactions. Through these women on wheels, new spaces for dissemination are created, in which different forms of movement occupy a central place. They inspire both absorption - which happens mostly in the interiors of the caravans - and new experiences of movement and transformation, which arise when they drive through the landscape or in the city. Finally, they perform as artworks, which create new portable experiential spaces, where new relationships can arise.



CAMPINGWOMEN AT A CAMPINGSITE IN NORWAY, ONE THE JOURNEY TO EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE STAVANGER 2008

*Life-boats - create new  
compassionate relationships  
and tolerance in a fragmented world.*

In 2008, Marit Benthe Norheim got an idea to create a new adventure in the art world. This new project is bigger and bolder and has more potential than the Campingwomen, but also builds on the artistic foundation that they were built upon. Marit Benthe Norheim started planning the completion of no fewer than three sculptures in ferrocement, which would become seaworthy boats; shaped like female figures. They would be twelve meters long and rise three meters above the surface of the water. The project was called *Life-boats* because it is aimed at promoting and protecting the life-giving processes and all the positive manifestations of life, as well as symbolizing basic values in Western European culture. But this goal also had a global aim. Marit Benthe

Norheim has formulated the overall aims of the project as follows:  
"The overall aims of the *Life-boats* project is to create new forms of dissemination of art and culture. We need to establish, coordinate and plan exchanges on many levels. The *Life-boats* project will be about meetings and exchanges. About daring to move in unknown territory and creating new connections." The project will become a flagship, when Aarhus becomes European Capital of Culture in 2017. It will be the second time that one of Marit Benthe Norheim's projects will be a part of the European Cultural Capital, because Campingwomen were created to celebrate Stavanger becoming European Capital of Culture in 2008. And by that time, a wide European network had already been established. This has been built upon during the creation of *Life-boats* and it has connections to both countries within and outside the European cultural sphere. Marit Benthe Norheim, Geir Johnsen and

I have, for example, introduced the project at an international seminar at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. After our lecture, there was an interesting discussion on how representatives from Thailand, Japan and Vietnam were interested in how Marit Benthe Norheim's *Life-boats* project had united the artistic, disseminative and technical requirements in a convincing way. The work was also highlighted as an artwork, which was capable of building bridges between the local and international, the national and international. The three "sailing women" have each their particular personality and individual fates. The titles, that they have been given, point to a central point in their fate.

They have been given the following "names": 1. *My ship is loaded with Longing*, 2. *My ship is loaded with Life*, 3. *My ship is loaded with Memories*. They visualize three crucial phases in the life of a woman.



photo montage of *Life-boats* models in the scale of 1:5



*My ship is loaded with Memories*

- Under construction, May 2015
- Casting party, with 150 voluntary participants, September 2015
- Seven of the figureheads

*My ship is loaded with Life and  
My ship is loaded with Longing,  
the courtyard in Mygdal*



In the beginning, most people thought the project was a dream that would never be realized. But they were sorely mistaken. The incredible happened. **Life-boats** maintained with great pride and intensity their entry into our world. First, **My ship is loaded with Longing** was realized. This was followed shortly afterwards by **My ship is loaded with Life**. And a little while ago **My ship is loaded with Memories** joined the two other "sailing women". Geir Johnson created music for this project too. This will enhance its uniqueness and help to lure viewers into the wondrous world of the sailing women, where new orientations will be revealed in our familiar world. The music is designed such that it emphasizes the sailing women's particular personalities and activities. **Life-boats** will be given a very clear profile in his highly expressive soundscapes.

In the artistic universe created by **Life-boats**, new platforms for new forms of cultural collaboration between the European countries will be created. A collaboration of this kind, which will be combined with an understanding of cultures in countries outside of Europe, are important in a world characterized by so many dark shadows. Both in Europe and outside its borders, art will be highlighted as a suitable medium of building

bridges between different cultures and population groups. There is a growing understanding of how art can communicate life values in an intense and present way, so that they can be experienced as an essential part of our daily lives. - And Marit Benthe Norheim has had an understanding of this very early on.

The artistic bridge-building that **Life-boats** creates, is very clearly visualized through the 19 female figures, which act as figureheads in full scale on the ship with the title **My ship is loaded with Memories**. Marit Benthe Norheim has chosen to combine the group of women in such a way that there is a great breadth of nationalities, social backgrounds and religion. They are all over 70 years old and have in common that they come from different cultures and have had to adjust to cultures other than their own. Their fates include both flight, different kinds of work, experiences and other forms of contact in several countries. They have all been interviewed and the conversations can be heard on the boat. Finally, they all have their individual fates, and symbolize the will for tolerance, the breakdown of fixed boundaries and a belief in the ability of love to triumph. As a group, they communicate a global perspective, because they come from Vietnam, Greenland, So-

malia, France, Bosnia, Japan, Denmark, Germany, USA, Syria, China, Croatia, South Africa, Greece, India/Israel, England Palestine, Norway. New figureheads will be created on the future journeys.

-And now all the three women are looking forward to be launched in Aalborg and then coming out to sail. And the rest of us are also looking forward to the event, which the European Capital of Culture Aarhus 2017, will form the framework for. All the ships will be loaded with art and culture. On the voyages, which are being planned, artistic and cultural events will be arranged in the towns where the boats will be docking and there are usually also events with the various artists and other cultural workers in the various towns.

**Life-boats** demonstrate very clearly that Marit Benthe Norheim has succeeded in creating an artwork on a very large scale, which includes a time dimension through the movement of the boats and the acoustic space of the music. But she has also managed to model the three sailing woman in a way, which infuses them with great intensity and presence. Finally, all the women, in their respective ways, all carry a message of love and tolerance, which they bear out into the world, building bridges where there previously were fixed border posts.



LIFE-BOATS, TEST SAILING OF "MY SHIP IS LOADED WITH LIFE", STRANDBY HARBOUR, OCTOBER 2015



Special edition of Else Marie Bukdahl's speech (illustrated) at a meeting of sponsors and contributors to the Life-boats project in Marit Benthe Norheim's studio on 3rd September 2015.

*Art projects bringing a message of fellowship, tolerance and love in a world, in which life-destructive forces are winning ground.*

**Else Marie Bukdahl**

Dr. phil., adjunct professor at the Art and Technology department at Aalborg University and former rector of the Danish Royal Academy of Art.

**Marit Benthe Norheim**

Visual Artist / Sculptor  
[www.norheim.dk](http://www.norheim.dk) / [www.life-boats.com](http://www.life-boats.com)

