

Marit Benthe Norheim and her new project: "Life-boats"

The sculptor Marit Benthe Norheim is first and foremost an artist who has, in an exemplary and contemporary manner, created an array of sculptures in the public space. She has managed to create unique sculptures, which establish unexpected visual dialogues with their surroundings. They lend the locations where they are situated a new identity and establish new patterns of meaning. The dialogues with the surroundings which are created by her sculptures are so nuanced and intense that meaning, form and materials are always closely aligned in relation to their locations.

This is obvious in her large sculptural work "Figureheads/ Women in the wind" for Union/Norske Skog's biological purification plant in Skien, Norway. It shows in an artistically convincing manner how art – in this case, sculpture – can change a building's character and create a stimulating environment, which puts a poetic perspective in a one-dimensional and cold technological world. This monumental and original work was unveiled on 30 august 1996.

Marit Benthe Norheim's seven metre tall sculpture on the harbour in Sæby – The Lady of the Sea, which was created in 2001 – is another example of how a monumental sculpture can create a new town space, provide an area with an eye catching new profile and the town with a striking landmark. This colossal and monumental female figure is a double sided figure and is modelled in shining white cement, which has an intense light reflectiveness. Marit Benthe Norheim has always sought out new boundaries in the artistic world. This can be seen in the spectacular work "The Rat Maiden". It was erected in 2006 in Skien. It is a visualisation of the mysterious rat maiden in Ibsen's play "Little Eyolf."

In 2008 Marit Benthe Norheim completed a new large scale and convincing project, which is full of surprises and which really made people see new and unexpected perspectives. The project grew out of a wish to create sculptures that could establish unexpected dialogues with the maximum number of different people. It has been responsible for opening our eyes to the fact that art can express experiences that the verbal language cannot pass on in the same way and in many cases cannot grasp. Marit Benthe Norheim created nothing less than a rolling sculptural installation with the five "Campingwomen". These are five large female sculptures that are built up over five functioning caravans. Inside their internal spaces there are partly sculptures, partly photographs. The famous Norwegian composer, Geir Johnson, has created music for the caravans' internal spaces. The music enhances the uniqueness of each caravan. These are The Refugee, Maria the Protector, The Siren, Campingmamma and The Bride, who all perform as monumental "Campingwomen." They each contain, in their own way, a symbolic content, where tradition and innovation are connected together in many surprising ways. On their journey from Denmark to Norway and their continued journeys to Norway in connection with European Capital of Culture Stavanger 2008, they were met with great enthusiasm.

At the end of 2008, she started work on a proposal for a new, large-scale and original project, which in a qualified and wonderful way, will create new connections between the North and several European cities. She has called this project "Lifeboats/Livbåter". In this project, she has found new solutions between the relationship between sculpture, movement and music in order to appeal to the feelings and imaginations of the viewers and to draw them into the magic circle of the artwork. The project will consist of three boats, made of cement, and shaped like female figures. The plan is to sail the three Lifeboats from Sæby to Copenhagen and then to cross the European canals and create

a network of new contacts between the North and the South. They invite viewers to experience something new and unexpected, which they have not experienced in the arts world or in their daily lives. These "Lifeboats" can underline new directions of movement in the environment and create new directions for the gaze. And they will contain a special sensory experience, which shows us sides of your inner and outer realities which we often neglect and perhaps don't even know. The art creates meaning in the public space, but does so in a special way.

In a world, where there are often contrasts between ethnic groups and nationalities, the "Lifeboats" will create new life affirming relations between people and symbolise a desire for fellowship and respect for one another, which is always at the top of our agenda, but which has often been difficult to realise.

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