



NATURAL BEAUTIES

OSLO

*On a hillside above town a remarkable collection of
sculptures is growing among the rocks and trees*

WORDS BY KRISTINE HOVDA PHOTOGRAPHS BY IVAR KVAAL

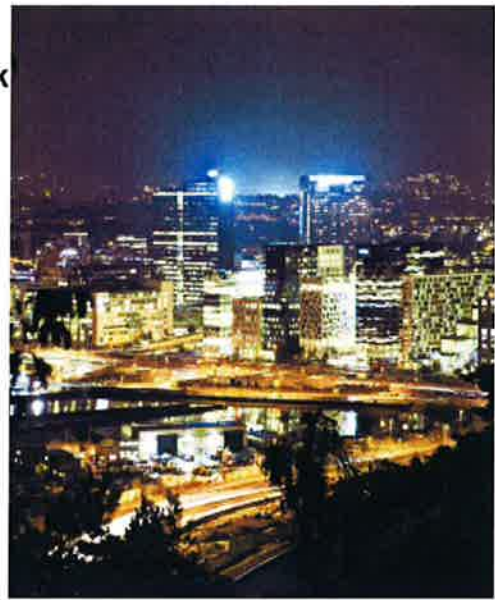
Opposite: Art lovers take
in the late Louise Bourgeois'
The Couple lying down

Below: Christian Ringnes got
the idea for the sculpture park
after restoring the similarly
neglected Ekeberg Restaurant
to its former glory



OSLO'S EKEBERG PARK

Feast for the senses: Fine dining in refined surroundings at Ekeberg Restaurant. Right: Ekeberg Park offers stunning views of Oslo



Art on a plate: The chev re sandwich with avocado, spring onion and dill at Karlsborg Spiseforretning



As we walk up the steep hill from the Old Town, the view gets ever more beautiful. We look down on the hyper-modern Barcode buildings and the gleaming white Opera House. In the distance, on the other side of the city, is Holmenkollen ski jump. Along the narrow green trail we come eye-to-eye with *Huldra*, an Amazonian bronze figure by the Norwegian sculptor Dyre Vaa (1903-80). A stunning woman both strong and feminine with the tail of an ox emerging from beneath her skirt, she stares past us and gazes down on the city. A few minutes later we reach Ekeberg Restaurant, a beautiful functionalist building designed by architect Lars Becker in 1927. This is the main entrance to the Ekeberg Sculpture Park. Let the feast of art begin.

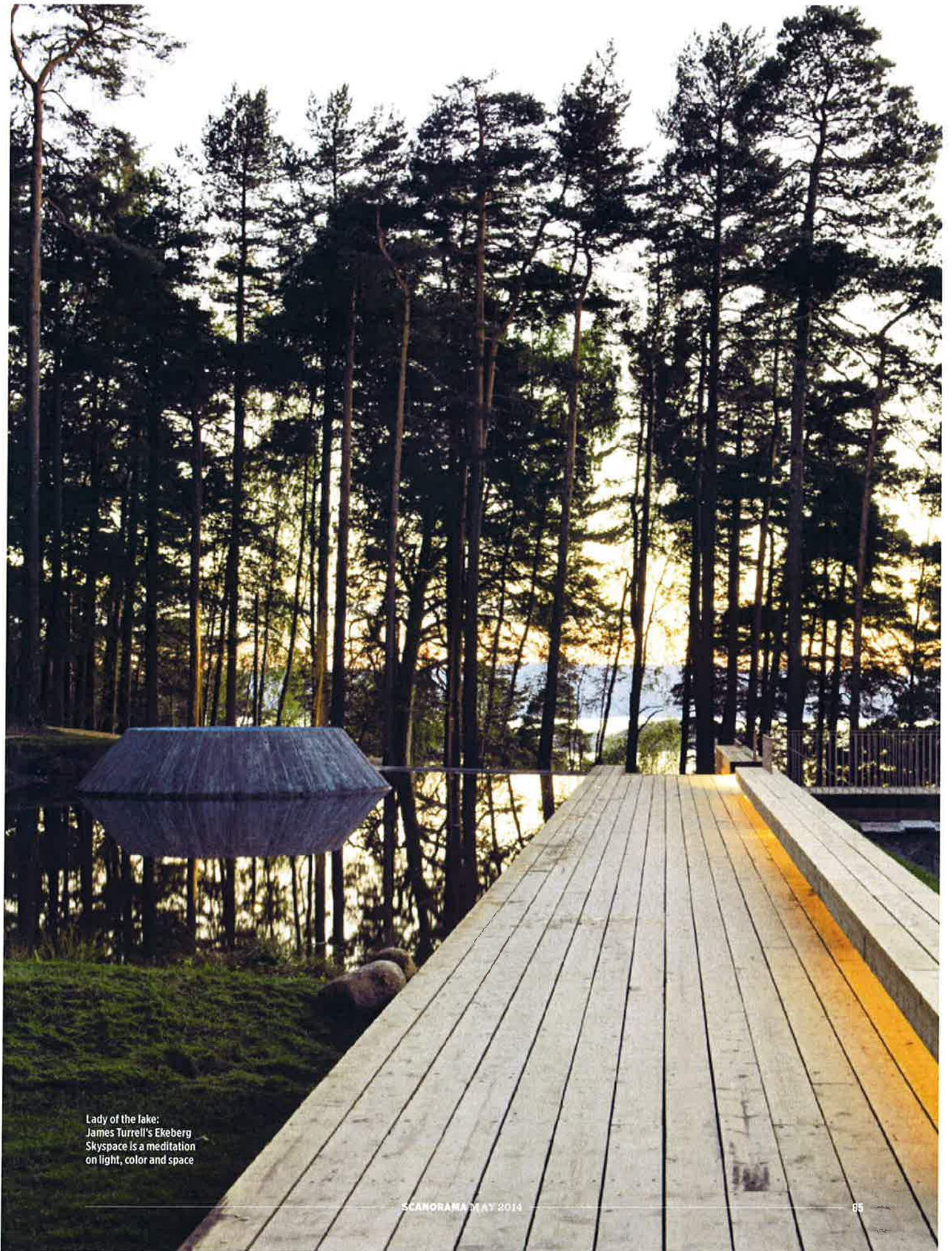
THIS 64-ACRE PUBLIC PARK opened last September. In its first four months more than 300,000 people came to see the 31 sculptures and art installations, both figurative and nonfigurative, linked by a 3km path that winds through the forest. The art ranges from classical pieces by masters including Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol to contemporary works by James Turrell, Jenny Holzer and Dan Graham. Two more pieces will be added every year, eventually turning the park into a collection of 80 artworks.

"Entrepreneur, inspired by women, turns Oslo park into open-air gallery," wrote the *International Herald Tribune*. That entrepreneur is investor Christian Ringnes, who gifted the NOK300 million sculpture park honoring women to the city. His office in central Oslo is within walking distance of several sculptures

he has donated to the city over the years, including the Peacock Fountain near the National Theatre, the huge tiger in front of the Central Station, and *Hansken* (The Glove) by Akershus Fortress.

"I've seen how these sculptures transform the city space and how people enjoy having art in their surroundings," he says. "When I bought the Ekeberg Restaurant in 2003, I read the story of the park and saw how it had been neglected and forgotten. I wanted to freshen up the area for my new restaurant and use art to add an extra dimension."

However, not everyone wanted a new sculpture park. Some critics feared the area would be destroyed by thousands of visitors. Some wanted to let the drug addicts who reside in the woods in the summertime have their peace. Others didn't want to disturb nature, as though ▶

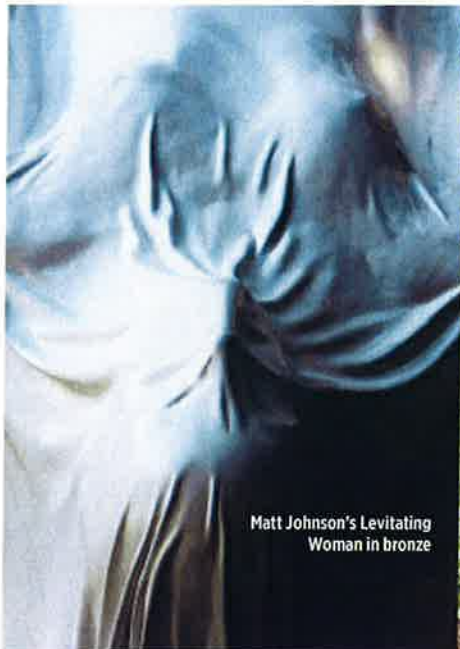


Lady of the Lake:
James Turrell's Ekeberg
Skyspace is a meditation
on light, color and space

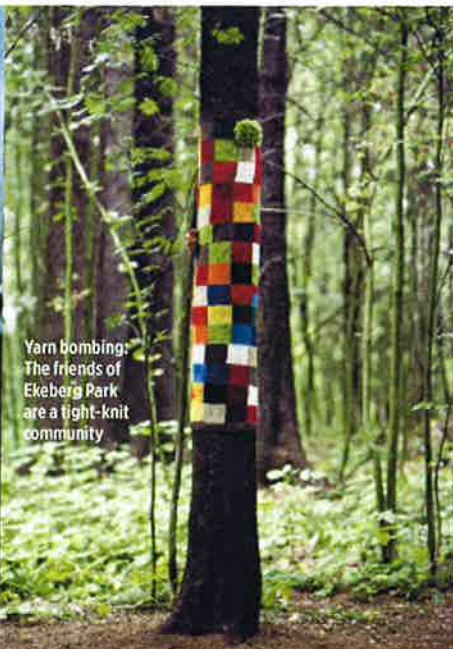
OSLO'S EKEBERG PARK



Sean Henry's *Walking Woman* in painted bronze



Matt Johnson's *Levitating Woman* in bronze



Yarn bombing: The friends of Ekeberg Park are a tight-knit community

Ekeberg was a pristine forest. But people have lived, loved, hunted and made sacrifices to their gods here ever since the Ice Age glaciers retreated. Evidence of these earlier inhabitants can still be seen in the park. The majestic oak trees that once covered the slopes are long gone, felled by the shipbuilders who needed materials in the Middle Ages. In place of the oaks a forest of pine and birch sprang up. It wasn't until 1881 that someone saw the value of grooming the Ekeberg slope.

"More than most countries our citizens need to stay indoors," the mayor of Christiania (as Oslo was then known) wrote to the city council. The city was growing rapidly as the industrial revolution drew poor farmers from the countryside to work in the new factories, but this also led to pollution and poor living conditions for the working class. The mayor argued that workers who spent long days in dirty factories would surely benefit from fresh air. This would "keep them away from temptations which a worrisome and oppressed life so easily could lead to. The sacrifices which have to be made for this purpose would surely bear fruit in greater work capacity, greater self-consciousness and greater satisfaction in the layers of society, among which the seeds of immoral and unhappiness under the modern cultural circumstances easily would find a welcoming soil."

The mayor won over the city council ▶

OTHER SCULPTURE PARKS

WANÅS, SWEDEN

A rural estate and arts foundation in Ostra Goinge, 100km north-east of Malmö. Wanås consists of more than 50 permanent outdoor artworks in a wooded park, plus large-scale installations and temporary exhibitions in former farm buildings.
www.wanas.se

STORMKING

ART CENTER, USA
This open-air museum in Mountainville, New York, contains the country's largest collection of contemporary sculpture.
www.stormking.org

MEMENTO PARK

BOUNDARY

"The biggest statues of the Cold War" – so runs the propaganda for this park on the outskirts of Budapest. See the giants of the country's communist era, from Lenin to Béla Kun.
www.mementopark.hu

CHATSWORTH, ENGLAND

Sotheby's *Beyond Limits* exhibition of monumental sculpture returns to the grounds of one of England's most handsome country houses. September 8–October 26.
www.chatsworth.org

and together with the workers' unions they bought the Ekeberg area.

WITH THE EKEBERG PURCHASE, Christiania now had its own public park like so many European cities during the 18th century. In 1779 the Danish-German philosopher Christian Cay Laurenz Hirschfeld wrote *Theorie der Gartenkunst* (Theory of Garden Art) on the importance of free space where crowded citizens could rest after a hard day's work. In 1980, during a visit to the Boboli Gardens in Florence, Ringnes got the idea of creating a new sculpture park in Oslo. Not like the existing Vigeland Park, where the majestic statues are the most visual part of the park, but a place where nature and art would play together.

When the Nazis occupied Oslo during World War II, they destroyed much of the Ekeberg forest and built an enormous cemetery with more than 3,000 German graves in two fields connected by concrete steps. After the war part of the area became a soccer field but the forest was neglected – until Ringnes came along.

"People want to give presents to the ones they love," he says. "I love my city and wanted to give something in return for all the wealth I earned investing in property here. After all, that's what made me able to donate this park."

It didn't all go exactly to plan. While

Patron of the arts:
Ringnes with Auguste Rodin's bronze *The Fallen Caryatid Carrying an Urn*



the city council was still considering the idea, Ringnes bought 27 sculptures of women, all in a classic figurative style, deciding that if the park didn't happen then he'd find somewhere else to put them. Later, when the art committee went through his collection, they decided only one third of it was of good enough quality.

"I have to admit they have better taste in art than I do but in one respect we had the same taste – the sculptures they wanted to keep were the most expensive ones."

He describes the process as very educational and hopes visitors will feel the same way.

"But more importantly what matters is who we walk with, what the weather's like, if the view is clear," he says. "The nature here is so stunning in itself, I hope the art will add an extra dimension to the beauty of the park."



Million kroner views: The park overlooks the Opera House, the Barcode Project and the Oslo Fjord

PLAN YOUR VISIT

GETTING THERE

Take trams 18 or 19 to Ljabru, getting off at Oslo Hospital if you want the steep walk or Sjømannskolen if you're feeling lazy. Or take bus 74 toward Mortensrud or the 34 toward Simensbråten and get off at Ekeberg camping. www.ekebergparken.com

FOOD AND DRINK

Both **Karlsborg Spiseforretning** (karlsborgspiseforretning.no) and **Ekeberg Restaurant** (ekebergrestauranten.no) are open every day from 11am. You can drop in for lunch but book for dinner.

BOOK A TRIP TO OSLO

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The easiest way to book flights is through Flysas.com. Choose from SAS Go or SAS Plus.

Get your points!