

Marit Benthe Norheim - an artist who creates meaning

As the local promoter and project manager on the cultural project "Between Heaven and the Sea. Angels, Mermaids and other Travellers", I had the pleasure of working closely with the artist Marit Benthe Norheim for more than two years. This was partly in connection with her sculptural project "Rolling Angels" in Oslo, Wick and Sæby and partly in connection with work on a 6m tall, double-sided figurehead, Sæby's new landmark, "The Lady of the Sea". The sculptural project "The Lady of the Sea" inspired a twin sculpture in Norway with a different motif from Henrik Ibsen's plays, namely "The Rat Maiden" in Skien – a project which, with the help of Marit Benthe Norheim, led to a wonderful and fruitful cultural collaboration between the Ibsen towns of Skien and Sæby. Finally, in Sæby we had the pleasure of being visited by the rolling caravans of the "Campingwomen", which aroused a great deal of interest in the town.

The focal point of the cultural project in Sæby was Marit Benthe Norheim's idea of connecting four historic, strategically important harbour towns, based on the "spirit of place", because today we have a "periphery" in Denmark, Norway, Scotland and England respectively. "The spirit of place" or what is unique to the local identity, was to find its expression through each town's unique figureheads. And an inspiring, cultural exchange of experiences and stories was set in motion across national borders.

In Sæby, we chose to involve schools and kindergartens in the project and as something entirely new, Benthe went out to schools and kindergartens and told the children about the meaning of figureheads and guardian angels and kick-started the children's work in creating each of their "guardian angels" for inclusion in the figurehead "The Lady of the Sea". More than 1500 children took part in the project, of which 900 children made protective figures in ceramics and glass, whilst others created art and sculpture on the same theme which were exhibited at several locations in the municipality.

Throughout the project, Marit Benthe Norheim displayed a great deal of enthusiasm as a promoter of her art and also as an artist who masters the very large scale and simply grows in relation to the challenges. "The Lady of the Sea" has become a national treasure and is a landmark which attracts many visitors.

Marit Benthe Norheim has a singular ability to involve both children and adults in her huge projects. With great seriousness and commitment, she manages to both communicate her visions as well as being completely open and unbiased in her approach to the people that she includes in her work. She has, as an artist, a unique respect for the expressiveness that children contribute, and she succeeds in creating enthusiasm, ownership – and above all else, **meaning** in the artworks that she creates.

Head of Tourism, Inger Grund Petersen, Sæby