



CAMPINGWOMEN

-a rolling sculptural installation in cement

by artist Marit Benthe Norheim

with incorporated music by the composer Geir Johnson

created in connection with
the European Capital of Culture Stavanger 2008

CAMPINGWOMEN

By Marit Benthe Norheim

The bearing concept as well as the inner armature of the construction of the Camping Women is functioning caravans from the 1960's and 70's. The torsos of the female figures grow out of the roof in such a way that the caravans function as the women's skirts.

The Campingwomen can be driven and have already been out on many different journeys – on their own wheels, at 30 km/h in Norway, Denmark and Iceland.

The caravan, camping life, the traveller, taking your house with you – memories of cramped spaces with the family close together – cosiness and the holiday, or the explosive nature of these elements – gives rise to many associations. These include stories associated with gypsies and circus folk, the travellers. The woman and the secrets she hides or reveals, also provides many associations.

The project also involves social participation and direct participation on many levels.

A brief description of the Campingwomen

1) Refugee woman is strong, on her way forward, but also vigilant and vulnerable. She has an experience space inside, which also becomes a kind of a shelter.

The interior is covered with a porcelain mosaic created by 400 children and refugee women from the Stavanger 2008 region in collaboration with the Figgjo Porcelain factory. They have



Maria the Protector inside



The Siren inside



First stop in Hjerring, on the first journey from Mygdal to Stavanger, May 2008

worked in dialogue with a theme that emphasised all the longing and loss of refugee women and children.

2) The Bride with her romantic and erotic appearance, points towards the real institution that marriage is, in all parts of the world, a publicly approved framework that makes the production of new generations possible. Wedding photographs, collected both locally as well as from many other parts of the world, create wallpaper inside the Camping Bride.

3) Maria the Protector has the authoritarian mother and protector role. She also carries the pain of losing a child. I have included the protector image from the Middle Ages into her story, where she offers her breast to Christ on the Day of Judgement and begs for mercy for the poor people who have hidden themselves in her robe. But also her pain and strength in the Pieta, where she holds her dead son. I have laid the dead Christ inside her, modelled into the floor, surrounded by 20 people and spirits.

4) The Siren is life affirming – she is extroverted, with a voluptuous and vigorous body. The Siren lures and tempts/seduces and enjoys her femininity. The power that both attracts and repulses. This is prohibited and frightening in different ways in different cultures – and has been so, throughout the ages. Inside the Siren, the roof, walls and floor are all covered by pink cement, with impressions of the hands of many people. In the centre of her inner chamber, there is a freestanding figure in a static position. A person/foetus/phallus?

5) The Campingmama is both powerful and nurturing, but so powerful that it is difficult to tell whether this is a good or a bad thing. Control fails – two figures are on their way down, head first, behind her back. She has been wallpapered internally with photographs from camping life.



The Campingwomen's first journey from Mygdal to Stavanger, May 2008



The Campingwomen are ready for the ferry from Denmark to Norway, May 2008

THE MUSIC

Geir Johnson on the music inside the Campingwomen

1) The Refugee Woman: I had been working for a long time trying to find an approach to the story of this sculpture when I happened upon Mahmoud Darwish's fantastic text "State of Siege". I was immediately gripped by the text – it set things into motion, intellectually, emotionally, it shook me in its simplicity with its descriptions of the daily things that people under siege have to do and which refugees also have to do.

I had just been in Ramallah and experienced the conditions that the Palestinians were living under, the daily repression and degradation, but at the same time their gratitude at having a westerner come to be an eye witness, and maybe that was why the impact was twice as powerful. In any event, I got hold of Darwish himself on the phone – it wasn't easy, but I managed to, and I told him of my task. I asked whether I could make modern, electronic music for his text, that is, not a traditional Arabic accompaniment. He was very positive and gave me permission to organise the text as well. Some weeks later he passed away and Palestine went into national mourning. The text in the sculptures is read by Tora Augestad.

2) The Bride: Are there any characteristics of wedding music? Instead of composing the ideal wedding music, I have collected music from weddings and wedding parties from diverse cultures, including African, Indian, Irish, American and Eastern European. And from Norway, Myllargutens bridal march.

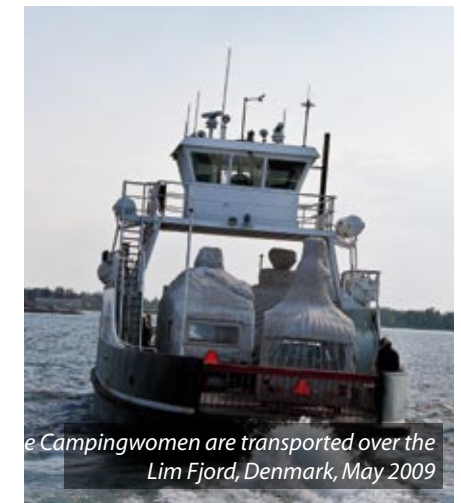
3) Maria the Protector: The music for Maria was based on a work that I grew up with, Gregorio Allegri's Miserere – a choral work for eight voices, which, for several centuries, could only be heard in the Sistine chapel in Rome. But Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had



The caravans overnight at Ølberg Campsite, Norway, May 2008



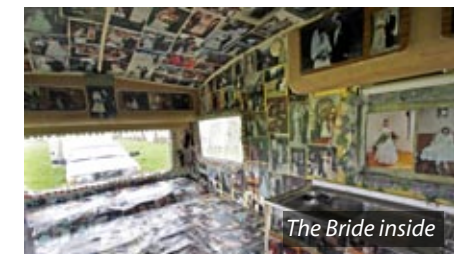
The Refugee Woman inside



The Campingwomen are transported over the Lim Fjord, Denmark, May 2009



Sæby, Denmark may 2009



The Bride inside

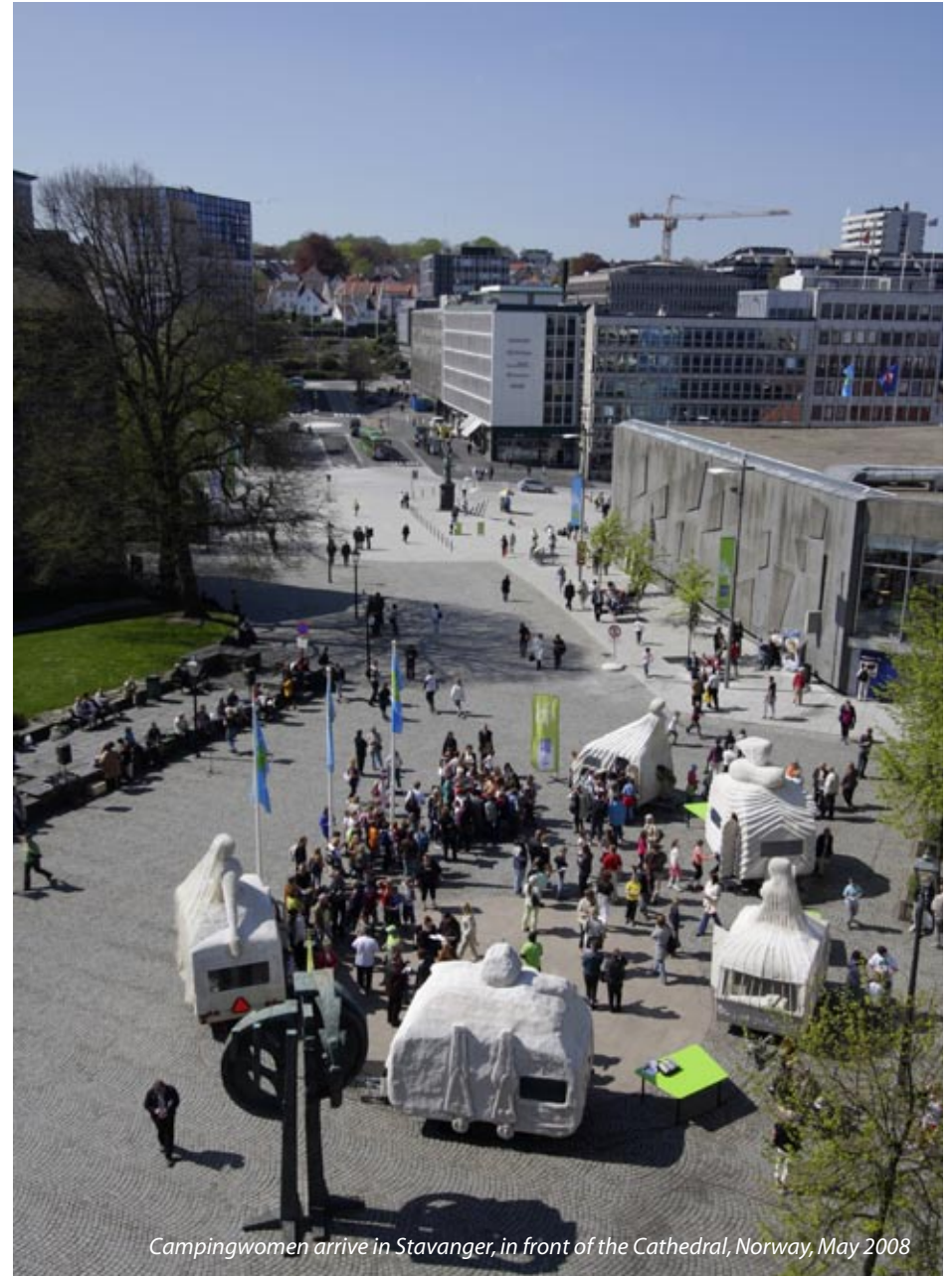
other ideas, he wrote it down from memory and it was subsequently released by the Pope. This work has been a part of my memory all my life, and here, I finally got a chance to write my own version of this work, forty years after I sang it as a child. Trio Mediaeval makes it possible to hear this version.

4) The Siren: Like many other men, I have lived close to strong women, and partly allowed myself to be dominated by women. Dominated, because they often make wise choices, but also because they have duality – they both lure as well as hold back. In the Siren, I have attempted to highlight this duality by getting the singer Siri Torjesen to sing a powerfully seductive three voice virtuoso composition, which is set against more trivial statements and verbal demands.

5) The Campingmama: Which songs does the big mother sing? For me, there was never any doubt. It was the childrens' songs from my own childhood that had to come through the radio into that caravan. The collection "Norway's Melodies" has been a source of inspiration for several generations of mothers and fathers when children had to be sung to sleep in Norwegian homes, and here it is Siri Torjesen singing and playing 20 of the greatest classics.



Campingwoman in front of the ArtCenter Silkeborg Bath, Denmark may 2009



Campingwomen arrive in Stavanger, in front of the Cathedral, Norway, May 2008

THE CAMPING TRIPS

The Campingwomen's first journey on their own wheels, from Mygdal in Vendsyssel in Denmark, to Stavanger, Cultural Capital 2008, was a four day journey, planned as a series of happenings, with stops many places along the route, where we opened the doors so that random passersby could enter the women. We stopped in towns, on the Danish beaches as well as at several campsites.

We had 5 voluntary drivers and the passengers were, in addition to the artist and the composer, cultural personalities from Denmark and Norway as well as craftspeople and supporters who had been a part of the process and the completion of the project. The camping trip was a taste of what the sculptures were capable of, by bringing art to places where people



Maria the Protector



The Siren



In queue for the ferry, may 2009

do not usually look at art. The people who came with on the trip were also some of the best cultural ambassadors in Denmark and Norway, including the former Danish Minister of Culture, Elsebeth Gerner Nielsen, who is now the leader of the Design School in Kolding, Else Marie Bukdahl, the "grand old lady" of the Danish art world, Dr. phil and former rector of the Danish Royal Academy of Art for 20 years and the author of a series of art books and articles as well as Norwegian Jorunn Veiteberg, also Dr. Phil and professor at Kunsthøjskolen in Bergen, living in Copenhagen.

Our camping trip and the stops on the journey provided viewers with the opportunity to come into the caravans, hear the music and come into dialogue with the "campers".

After the opening of Stavanger Cultural Capital 2008, they moved around Rogaland from 5 May to 8 December 2008, with more than 40 stops at schools, other institutions, town centres and parks.

In 2009, the installation was in Iceland in May, as a part of the Reykjavik Arts Festival. It was then on display at Silkeborg Bad Art Centre, in connection with the "Exile" exhibition. After that, three of the Campingwomen travelled to Slettnes lighthouse in Gamvik, Finnmark to be a part of Kulturdagnaden in August, whilst the last two remained at Silkeborg Bad.

In September 2009, the project visited the Music House and Aros Art Museum in Århus. The new art museum, Heart in Herning and the Music theatre in Holstebro in Denmark, where the Campingwomen were shown to 150 cultural leaders in connection with an international seminar arranged by Århus, which is working towards becoming a Cultural Capital in 2017.

In the summer of 2010, the Campingwomen drove to Skagen Odde Nature and Culture Centre and were there for the rest of the year, after the Bride came home from a stint at the Historic Museum in Vendsyssel.

In spring 2011, Maria the Protector travelled to a meeting of priests in Djursland, whilst the Siren and the Rolling Angels went to a performance in Holstebro together with the Odin theatre.

For the remainder of the summer 2011, all 5 Campingwomen were exhibited at Hirtshals Lighthouse.

New requests for exhibitions and journeys are still coming in and we have an open invitation to take over the roof of the Norwegian Opera House in Oslo for the summer weeks.



Campingwomen in front of the hot springs in Iceland, May 2009



Maria the Protector in front of Slettnes Fyr, Gamvik, Finnmark, Norway august 2009



Campingwomen on their way to Slettnes Fyr i Gamvik, Finnmark, Norway august 2009



Last leg of the journey to the European Capital of Culture, Stavanger 2008, Norway, May 2008



Campingwomen in front of the art museum Heart, Herning, Denmark, september 2009



Campingwomen in front of the Aros art museum, Århus, Denmark May 2009



Campingwomen on Blokhus beach Denmark, may 2008



Campingwomen on Iceland, may 2009



Campingwomen on their way to Århus, Denmark, May 2009



The Siren is transported over Randers Fjord, Denmark, May 2009



The Campingmama in front of Slettnes Fyr, Gamvik, Finnmark, Norway august 2009

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