

# The Art Museum Propelling City Development

*Oslo as a Creative City*

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## Abstract

A new boost in art infrastructure in the Norwegian capital Oslo will have a great impact on contemporary city development, and the important question is how this impact can be used to help build a sound society where democracy, human rights and financial development can prosper, and where conflicts can be discussed and solved in a non violent order. The answer depends on the ability of the institutions to play a relevant part in contemporary core problems and ask: what are societies main challenges, and how can we help solve them? In the further development of art institutions, they will have to strengthen their role as an attractive, accessible and vibrant part of society by inspiring creative and constructive critique in addition to their traditional tasks. Art institutions will have to bring important contemporary issues such as human rights and dignity, migration, poverty and crime up for reflection and discussion. By investigating and act on the human condition, peoples lives and society development art institutions can and should make an important difference.

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## Introduction

Being the capital of Norway, Oslo just reached 680,000 inhabitants. The city, which is located between vast wonderful woods on three sides, and by the beautiful fjord to the south, grows relatively fast by 15,000 new inhabitants annually.

This is related to three factors; high birth rate, Norwegian centralisation and immigration. The migration in Europe is today the biggest since the huge movement of peoples around AD 600, and this is certainly felt in Oslo where people are coming from all over the world to start a new life in a country that experiences an unusual economic bloom.

The challenges facing the Oslo municipality connect to growth and migration, are supplemented by traditional challenges connected to human welfare and economic growth. Art and culture has always been an important part of the city's development, which was emphasized in 2008 with the opening of the new opera at the waterfront.



Figure 1. Central Oslo with its new Opera house and showing the location for the new Munch Museum.

The city profits from being the Norwegian capital in the sense of representing national as well as local interests. The new opera house clearly reflects this by being fully financed by the state budget.

The decision to locate the opera building in a part of the city historically occupied by industry, came after a long discussion on city development, and started a very interesting turn in opening up the sea to the city, whereas the woods had before been city landmark and identity number one. The new opera where you can walk up to the roof like a hill or a snow-clad mountain, quickly became popular and is now the most visited spot nationally.

Building the opera became part of a radical new city development plan, involving the development of a whole new part of the city facing the sea, opening up the seafront to the city inhabitants. Amongst the new buildings being planned in this area was a new city library and a new museum dedicated to our great painter Edvard Munch called Lambda, named after the 11th letter in the Greek alphabet.



Figure 2. *The Scream* by Edvard Munch, by many referred to as the world's most known and commented image.

The new library, which expects 2 million visitors annually, is designed by the Norwegian architect Lund Hagem, and is located just behind the opera. The architecture reflects the contemporary role and philosophy of a modern library fully equipped for the digital future and modern human behavior.



Figure 3. The library with the opera to the right.



Figure 4. Inside the library.

The new Munch museum - designed by the Spanish architect Joan Herreros - is also an example of a modern architecture that reflects contemporary museum philosophy, and fulfils everything an audience might expect from a visit to a museum.



Figure 5. The new Munch museum on the left of the Akerselva river outlet.

The museum is located in front of the opera building seen from the fjord, and is also placed where the river *Akerselva* runs into the fjord: a very beautiful location with plenty of space around and a fantastic view to the city and the sea.

All three buildings have a very central place in the city close to other cultural historic institutions and sites, and a stones throw from the central railway station, Norway's busiest traffic point serving 680,000 travellers on a daily basis.



To top this vibrant city development on the east side of the city, there will soon be two new museums for the visual arts on the west side of the fjord: The newly constructed *Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art*, designed by *Renzo Piano* and the new *National Museum of Visual Art* with the old city hall to the right



Figure 6. The new Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, designed by Renzo Piano.



Figure 7. The new National Museum of Visual Art left, with the old city hall right.

Developing three new museums for the visual arts at the approximate same time, means an enormous lift for the status of art, and shows clearly that the society including private institutions are willing to invest dramatically into new infrastructure for art and artists, and of course promote city development.

Even if the three museums have their specific and separate profiles, there will be a great deal of collaborations creating a new international focal point in the European art environment.

So what will these institutions give back to the society in order to defend such an extensive investment? All over Europe there is an ingrained belief in art and culture as tools for urban and social development. But hardware alone solves no problems. We also need people. We need the software. We need to know what will go on inside these institutions that lifts society. The answer depends on the ability of the institutions to play a relevant part in contemporary lives addressing core contemporary problems.

Let's see what the Munch Museum will represent as a modern art institution propelling city development.



Figure 8. The Opera house on the left with the Munch Museum on the right.

In addition to 3,500 works by Norwegian modern painters, the Munch Museum will house 26,000 works by Edvard Munch; 1,185 paintings, 4,500 drawings and 20,000 graphic works in plus 12,000 original texts, letters, library, lithographic stones and work tools: a waste collection – probably the biggest collection by one artist in one museum in the world.

The requirement laid out by Munch's testament to the city municipality when he donated all his works to the city, was to Preserve, Research and Present the collection in a separate museum. Even though in 1963, at the 100 anniversary of Munch's birth, a new museum was built it is now over 50 years old and is currently being substituted by the new museum.

When it comes to *Preservation*: our aim is to keep all Munch's works in mint condition for the future. Our aim concerning Research is to further develop knowledge and understanding for the art of Munch in order to maximize his relevance and strengthen his presence on the world's art stage. In addition to a new collaboration with the University of Oslo, the Munch Museum also plans to create a New centre for Munch research collaborating with universities and art institutions all over the world promoting advanced studies of Munch and his works. When it comes to presenting the works of Munch, our prime aim in the new museum is to create great art experiences and hopefully make an impact on the lives of visitors, which certainly happened in the old museum.



Figure 9. Today's Munch Museum.

To make ourselves relevant to a local population, we will in addition to our huge collection also present other important artists and participate actively in developing the contemporary art environment both nationally and internationally through all kinds of artistic activities. In short create connections between contemporary art, art history, and our common cultural heritage.

In competition with other activities in town we will in the future have to segregate and diversify communication. We will focus on children and young people, use extensively modern communication techniques, modern exhibition curation and planning that supports the design and development for a total art experience.

Our dreams is: To Create A Vibrant and Living Museum

- that takes care of - and builds on - heritage
- that defines contemporary life
- that forms the future

Our challenges in this respect are basically related to five possible problems: popular ignorance, possible marginalization, commercialisation, lack of resources due to financial regression and the possibility of being understood as a mausoleum (been there - done that) rather than a modern and vibrant museum.

How can we meet these challenges? We will have to make ourselves relevant to contemporary society

- by making an impact
- by being at the core of social development
- by being at the core of the future



Figure 10. Starry Night (Stjernenatt) by Edvard Munch.

In more practical terms this could mean that we have to participate in the whole social ecology. We will have to develop methods for making children from an early age understand and take an interest in the arts. This can be achieved by developing methods to help children understand that they can become artists themselves and that art is communication. We have to participate in talent development and professional training to bridge the gap between higher education and the professional artist. In other words, create possibilities and spaces for young artists supporting young voices and young expressions.

Furthermore we will have to participate in bringing up and help solve contemporary social challenges not only as artists, but as art institutions. How to increase physical space for a wide range of expressions, promoting human dignity, addressing poverty and social differences promoting care of the elderly and disabled along with human rights in all of its forms – and possibly a whole list of other aspects of the human condition.

As institutions we can bring these issues up to the surface; discuss, reflect, create movements for change. In addition to our traditional tasks, we will have to be an attractive, accessible and vibrant part of society. We can inspire creative and constructive critiques. We can set the agenda for the future.

In our new museum we have emphasized the importance of having spaces for cafés – restaurants – libraries – bookstore – concerts/art activities – lectures – workshops – activity rooms in order to be open to the public basically all day (and most of the night) in order to merge ourselves into contemporary society, and contemporary lives.



We will put great importance on collaboration with other parties and institutions locally, nationally and last but not least, internationally. We will collaborate with kindergartens and primarily schools, higher education, local art institutions, local culture institutions, international art institutions, and to a wide degree other formal and informal social institutions by investigating and acting on social developments in how to make a difference in peoples' lives.

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