

# THE GREAT ESCAPE

The art offerings of the Nordics are well established: from the capitals' gleaming national galleries to the scrappier artist-run spaces in less polished neighborhoods. But travel away from the established centers, and you will stumble upon some of the region's most visually arresting art sites. In each of the following three art spaces - the Steilneset Memorial in Norway, Artipelag in the Stockholm archipelago and Copenhagen's Cisternerne - a unique alchemy fuses the space with the unique landscape in which it sits. Together they yield something magical.

TEXT BY KAREN GARDINER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY FREDRIK FLOGSTAD / STATENS VEGVESEN AND BJARNE Riesto





## THE STEILNESET MEMORIAL

Norway

The Steilneset Memorial in Vardø, Norway attempts to atone for a centuries-old story of state violence that once occurred there. To arrive at the memorial, you need to journey the Norwegian Scenic Route Varanger, which takes you through some of Norway's starkest Arctic landscape. This 160-kilometre-long drive is a designated national tourist route and boasts more than 200 installations along its route, including viewpoints, rest areas and artworks. Each project connects to the surroundings and history of its site, but perhaps none more chillingly than The Steilneset Memorial.

The memorial commemorates the 91 people (77 women and 14 men) who were burned at the stake as a result of the 17th-century Finnmark witch trials — more people in the sparse Finnmark region were executed for witchcraft than anywhere else in Norway. French-American artist Louise Bourgeois and Swiss architect Peter Zumthor were invited by the Norwegian Public Road Administration to create a memorial close to the site where the executions took place, an event that Zumthor described to BLOUIN ARTINFO as "a forgotten history in a forgotten place." Svein Ronning, curator and director of the Norwegian Scenic Routes art project, says that this dark period in history was merely "sleeping." Now, by inviting tourists to the

island and the execution site, it has been reawakened. The project, says Ronning, "is about creating attractions so they want to visit special places related to the landscape."

The memorial is made up of three components: art, architecture and history. Visitors walk along Zumthor's slender 125-metre-long oak-floored hall, illuminated by light bulbs hanging in each of 91 steel-framed windows, one for every victim. Next to each bulb, texts printed on silk, written by historian Liv Helene Willumsen and based on original court records, detail facts about each of the accused, the charges brought against them and their final sentence. Bourgeois' sculpture, named "The Damned, The Possessed and The Beloved", sits inside a steel and smoked-glass box at the end of Zumthor's hall. It comprises a circle of mirrors surrounding and reflecting a burning steel chair. One of Bourgeois' final works, the memorial was unveiled in 2011, a year after her death. The three components "have melted together into a strong aesthetic expression," says Willumsen, to whom the memorial represents "dignity and shelter [for] the human beings who suffered [and] a reminder that the mechanisms of fanatic persecution carried out by men of power, that took place in the seventeenth century, have parallels today."





PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDERS FREDRIKSEN AND ARTIPELAG

## ARTIPELAG Sweden

Surrounded by dense pine trees on Värmdö, more of 20,000 islands that make up the Stockholm archipelago, Artipelag is inextricably stitched to its environment, a concept playfully reflected by its name: a fusion of "art" and "archipelago." The museum is perched on a cliff overlooking Baggen's Bay. Designed by the late Swedish architect Johan Nyrén to melt into the surrounding landscape, the sloping grey concrete of the building's façade - with a moss and sedum plant-covered roof - opens up to reveal an interior of beveled planks of pitch pine walls and plenty of natural light.

Artipelag's site was chosen with great care by the founders and owners Björn and Lillemor Jakobson, says curator Iselin Page. "Björn has spent numerous summers sailing in the archipelago, and Artipelag became the ultimate way of combining his love for nature with his wife's interest in art and culture. Together they searched for a location that was close to Stockholm, but still had everything that characterized the unique Swedish archipelago."

Whether you arrive by boat or drive the 20 kilometres from Stockholm, your path to Artipelag takes you along a wide wooden boardwalk, meandering through woods

and meadows and past moss-covered rocks by the water's edge. At 32,000 square feet, Artipelag is one of the area's largest art spaces. This combination of vastness and the clear air and water that surrounds it, ever present thanks to the building's tall picture windows, provides a place to slow down, breathe and deeply connect with the art on view.

Such reverence for nature translates into exhibition programming which highlights artists whose practices engage with issues of environment and nature. "Our shows encourage dialogue between contemporary, modern and historic art and craft," says Page, "and present a natural relationship between art and nature." 'Eye of the Storm', for example, a recent exhibition by Swedish duo Mats Bigert and Lars Bergström, who work with nature's impact on human life, tackled questions relating to how we (globally and individually) respond to climate change. The exhibition's large-scale installations included 'The Weather - a Synoptic Battlefield', a group of sculptures portraying the impact of the weather upon historical events, from the French invasion of Russia to World War II. It also included 'The Climate Chambers', five sculptural chambers, inside which visitors are subjected to extreme weather conditions such as high winds, humidity and freezing cold temperatures; each one testing their powers of endurance.



## CISTERNERNE

Denmark

Copenhagen's Cisternerne (The Cisterns) is in leafy Frederiksberg, across from the castle and deep beneath the lush green grass of Søndermarken Park. Here, only glimmers of daylight find their way into this gloomy and humid underground space, a former water reservoir.

In 1933, the three cisterns were no longer required to perform their near century-long function of providing the city's water supply. As such, they were drained and then largely forgotten about until 1996 when, as part of Copenhagen's tenure as European City of Culture, the reservoir was utilized as a temporary exhibition space. Now, Cisternerne is part of Frederiksberg Museums and a venue for contemporary art exhibitions.

"Cisternerne is in many ways a challenging - but also deeply interesting - space to curate, and to experience, an art show," said curator Silje Brethvad. "Traditional materials like paintings and drawings cannot be shown in the moist climate where temperatures vary throughout the year. Also the sheer size of the space (4320 square metres, 4,2 metres to the ceiling) can easily make things seem small when

placed here, which is why the art installations have to have a certain scale. Our curatorial focus is primarily on artists working with large-scale installations and in the field of site-specific art. It is absolutely essential that the artist or architect in question has a profound understanding of the character of space and is able to work to a certain scale—to be able to take on the vast underground halls with the very unique climate."

This was perhaps best demonstrated by the 2017-2018 exhibition 'The Water', which saw Japanese architect Hiroshi Sambuichi refill the space with water and entice visitors to cross it via a wooden walkway. Lit only by natural light, through a small skylight and mirrors, the dwindling daylight hours of the winter period over which the installation stretched meant that its character changed expression according to that of the park above. Opening hours were sometimes limited to a scarce few per day. These conditions may have seemed problematic to another architect, but Sambuichi harnessed them to create a captivating sensory journey through a sea of light and darkness where sound and smell were, said Brethvad, "just as important factors" as the visual.



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