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National Library of Norway

Nytt Nasjonalbibliotek
åpner 15. august 2005



Nasjonalbiblioteket

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A house of contrast

The character and contents of an institution manifests itself through its buildings. The National Library of Norway has many buildings of many rooms both in Oslo, in Rana and in cyberspace. When viewed at as a whole, the buildings and their rooms display a set of exciting contrasts. Both through its architecture and its contents the National Library represents a diversity which few other cultural or information organizations have the pleasure of opening their doors to.

The newly renovated building from 1913 at Drammensveien in Oslo has literally been held up by its load-bearing bookshelves. Now we are reopening the building after establishing a digital architecture which is of great importance in an information-historical perspective. In this way the historical basis has caught up with modern design, creating a unity which connects the history of information with the technological future.

In its contrasting buildings the modern National Library is also the manager of multimedia collections full of exciting contrasts. The extended concept of “text” includes both writing, sound and images. We find maps from the Great Nordic War, drawn by hand, that show king Carl XII’s military positions in Båhuslen and Østfold in 1717–1718, side by side with digital maps of today, with labels for canned foods from 1910 beautifully depicting eider ducks, next to film commercials for cigars, a children’s song book from 1905, “Hoist all flags today!”, and film and sound recordings of the 1973 Ragnarock concert. In this perspective describing the National Library as the keeper of the nation’s memory becomes more than just a way of speech.

The mission given us by society is to safeguard what is created today for a thousand years or more. However, the “texts” must not only be physically accessible in 1000 years, they must remain of intellectual interest then – and to us who live today. In order to achieve this, they must be available for constant use and discussion, by scientists and the generally interested public. This requires a focus on the transmission of knowledge. The half old, half new building and the digital national library will enable the transmission of knowledge and experience, in the reading rooms, musical collections and auditoriums, through exhibits and events — and on the net.

Vigdis Moe Skarstein
National Librarian Vigdis Moe Skarstein



The goal of Entra Eiendom

The goal of Entra Eiendom has been to transform the National Library, which is the cultural symbol of Norwegian intellectual history, into a more effective, dynamic and modern building, for the benefit of our customers and the users of the building.

We took over this monumental building on July 1, 2002. In agreement with the Ministry of Culture it was Entra's task to rehabilitate the existing building, build new underground vaults and to set up a new and flexible office building above the vaults.

We have had great ambitions with this construction project. This is in line with the importance of the National Library as an institution and of its building as architecture. In addition to a gentle rehabilitation of the main building it was our goal to provide a worthy addition to architect Holger Sinding-Larsen's venerable library building. We also thought it important to give the city of Oslo a high quality park, in compensation for using part of the open space for the new building.

The National Library is among the most complex development projects that Entra has been faced with.

In this year of celebrating Norway's century of independence, I am pleased to be able to deliver a new and modern National Library.



June 7, 2005

Erik Løfsnes
Chief Executive Officer
Entra Eiendom AS

Artistic decoration

The walls around the National Library's staircase were decorated by two artists: Axel Revold (1887–1962) and Per Krohg (1889–1965). Krohg and Revold were among the artists that were referred to as the “Fresco brothers”, and their art is highly visible in public spaces in Norway, as they were responsible for many large monumental decorations in public buildings. They took their theme from the *Voluspá*. On the left when you go up the stairs is Revold's *The Norns beneath Yggdrasil*. On the lower left is the *Volve's* description of the creation of the world. The centre is dominated by the three sister goddesses of fate, *Urd*, *Verdande* and *Skuld*, by the roots of the World Tree, spinning the thread of fate and engraving people's destinies on rune tablets. In the background are the carefree gods playing board games. But the Midgard Serpent is gnawing at the roots of *Yggdrasil*, auguring the end of the world.

Krohg's middle fresco is a depiction of *Ragnarok*. Some mythological creatures, such as the *Fenris Wolf* and the *Midgard Serpent*, have been left out, as are the great battle scenes. This is a vision of the future with the trappings of modern man: flying machines, robot-like beings and tanks. Mechanized creation has taken over from living, thinking Man. Mercilessly, inexorably, Per Krohg's “*New World*” is taking over, a world that he described as consisting of “motor cycle beings”, “centaurion tanks” and “conscientious but single-minded humans with no initiative of their own.”

The wall on the right is covered with Revold's *The new Earth*, the possibilities after the end of the world. In a green and vigorous landscape He and She recover the board game at *Idavolden*, the same game in which the gods were engrossed before *Ragnarok*.

The decoration was paid for by consul general Peter Krag.





*Axel Revold: Nornene under Yggdrasil and Den nye jord, 1932—33
Per Krohg: Ragnarok, 1933
Emanuel Vigeland, 1913
Frescos in the National Library*

Monumental building

The monumental building at Drammensveien 42 was erected as a new University Library for the University of Oslo, because the Domus Biblioteca at Karl Johans gate had become too small.

The new building was finished in 1913. The university building inspector Holger Sinding-Larsen was the architect. The first stage was the front building and the stacks in the west wing. In 1933 the building was extended by an office wing along the west wall of the stacks building. Construction on the east wing with stacks and the great reading room was begun in 1939, but the war prevented it from getting ready for use until 1945. All extensions were done from drawings by Holger Sinding-Larsen. Since the latest stage in 1945 the building has seen little renewal or upgrading.

In 1998 the University Library was moved to the Blindern campus, leaving the newly established Oslo department of the National Library as the sole occupant of Drammensveien 42. At the same time Statsbygg (The Directorate of Public Construction and Property) began working on a total rehabilitation. The building was later sold to Entra Eiendom, that carried on this process.

Interplay between architecture and contents

It has been a challenge to reshape the existing outdated, outworn and rambling buildings into a modern National Library which is to preserve the cultural heritage as well as use modern technology for preservation and dissemination. The architectural layout of the building must both support this and mirror it.

The goal has been to search out an expression that will create a dialogue between the interiors, materials and history of the past, and the materials, forms and techniques of the present, allowing the old to present itself as old and the new to present itself as new, in an exciting and contrasty encounter. It has also been important to create a good, functional and representative work environment for the users of the building.

Challenges

The existing building has been declared a protected site, which necessitated working closely with the Directorate for Cultural Heritage. Large parts of the interior have been preserved and restored. Most of these are in the public areas, but there are also some special offices and meeting rooms of antiquarian interest. The large paintings around the great staircase have also been restored.

The greatest challenge has been to bring the building up to modern functional and technical standards without detracting from its antiquarian value. This entailed an extensive rehabilitation of all technical installations, and replacing many doors, windows and the large glass ceilings. Several intermediate floors have been removed, and new load-bearing constructions have been introduced to both the east and the west wing. New corridor lines and elevators have been established.



Other new elements are large constructions for a new auditorium, exhibition room and bridge. A visit to the building during the demolition process visualized the dramatic measures, with openings through 10 floors and concrete constructions propped up on a makeshift basis.

To rebuild this without lessening the antiquarian value of the building has demanded an enormous effort, precision and perseverance at all stages. Antiquarian interiors have been preserved in the building, which consists of some interiors and rooms clearly worthy of protection.

Contrasting interiors

Glass has been used consciously and as a recurrent theme. This creates transparency and reflections in the building. It has been used in harmony with existing wood in the protected areas, and it improves the standard in the modern areas. The glass reflects the indirect light into the interior. In order to emphasize old wood sorts and colours, all new elements such as columns, glass areas, doors and interiors have been turned to shades of grey.

The turquoise of the antiquated areas have been extracted and supplemented with nuances that provide the building with the required dignity and refreshing elements.

Sections with protected areas are scattered and areas overlap. To connect the building and act as a unifying element the library green floor covering has been selected. The desks and counters in the great reading room are brand new, but we have attempted to adapt colours and design to the existing interior.

New installations have been partly adapted to existing protected interiors where necessary, but also contrasted in a totally modern design.

Addition

The new addition to the National Library is a developed version of the winning entry in the autumn 2002 architecture competition. There has been a simultaneous rebuilding of the National Library's back premises into a glass covered yard of light, and a new park has been established. The project was jointly developed by Longva arkitekter AS and Østengen og Bergo Landskapsarkitekter AS.

The Hydro park, the Observatorie park and the new National Library park have been joined into a continuous green belt — for the enjoyment of both the public and the building's occupants. The addition and the yard were developed in consultation with the Directorate for Cultural Heritage.

The addition stands separate from the historical building and has been designed as a separate volume which has its entrance from Observatoriegaten. The transparent glass façade between the addition and the old building offers openness and a view towards the park on the opposite side. The 7-floor addition has been built on top of the underground stacks. Wood and copper have been employed in the façades, and large glass areas ensure the contact between the yard and the park.

The glass covered yard connects the addition to the historical and renovated building and is a unifying common area for the different parts of the project. Access to the yard is by stairs and elevator from the old building, and the yard also contains elevators and communication galleries for the transport of books to and from the stacks. A joint canteen is located on the ground level in the glass covered yard with direct access to outdoor space and the park. The floor in the yard was decorated by artist Terje Roalkvam.

Architects involved:

Lund & Slaatto Arkitekter AS, ØKAW AS Arkitekter, Longva Arkitekter AS and Østengen og Bergo Landskapsarkitekter AS.





National Library of Norway

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