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Private taste and public space: the heated media debate about a privately initiated sculpture park in Oslo

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ABSTRACT

In 2003, billionaire and art collector Christian Ringnes launched an idea to fund a sculpture park in the Ekeberg area of Oslo, based around his private collection of female sculptures. The idea spurred heavy criticism for years leading up to the park's opening in 2013. Local residents, local politicians, artists, art professors, art critics and newspaper columnists were highly engaged in discussing the park, performing their critiques in newspaper articles, at the construction site, in City Hall, and through official complaints to Oslo Municipality and the County Governor. In seeking to understand why it became such a contested issue, I have followed the mediated public debate throughout the process from idea to realization. The analysis shows that the debate has been agonistic, influenced by deep stories and feeling rules. Nevertheless, the intense debate resulted in a number of unintended consequences leading up to the park's successful integration into the art world upon its opening.

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Introduction

There are long traditions for donorship and patronage in the arts (Becker 2008 [1982]; DeNora 1991; Ostrower 1995), some of which occurs in the form of privately initiated gifts to the public. As many associate arts with esteem, 'artists, private donors, companies, foundations and governmental bodies receive benefits from their gifts to the arts' (Abbing 2002, 41). The recipient, on the other hand, may feel unease from receiving external funding due to obligations attached to the gift (Mauss 1990 [1950]; Alexander 2014). The benefits from gift-giving will again often be symbolic, associated with prestige rather than financial gains (Dahl and Helseth 2006, 269). At the same time, such gifts will most likely be scrutinized, as

gifts are given in a context of public drama, with nothing secret about them. In being more directly cued to public esteem ... the gift economy is more visible than the market. Just by being visible, the resultant distribution of goods and services is more readily subject to public scrutiny and judgments of fairness than are the results of market exchange (Douglas 2002 [1990], Xviii).

The Sculpture Park at Ekeberg in Oslo, which opened to the public on 26 September 2013 has been subjected to such scrutiny. The park is the result of a public-private partnership between real estate billionaire and art collector Christian Ringnes and Oslo Municipality. It is located in a forest close to the city center, surrounded by a residential area. The park contains a number of sculptures and architectural installments by a range of artists, contemporary and historical.¹ There is also a small

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museum center located in a Swiss villa. The Feminine is the overarching theme for the curation of the park (Oslo Kommune Byrådet 2011, 4–5). The park was initiated by Ringnes and is financed by his C. Ludens Ringnes Foundation. He also owns a restaurant located by the park.

Ringnes' original idea was to establish a park dedicated to the Woman, based around his private collection of female sculptures. This idea became known as early as 2003 (Eide 2003), when Ringnes had bought the restaurant, a work of Functionalism constructed between 1927 and 1929. Prior to Ringnes' purchase, the building had not been maintained for many years. He spent 40 million NOK restoring the building, before the restaurant reopened to the public in 2005 (Kleppe 2005). During the ten-year-process of realizing the park, Ekeberg residents, politicians, newspaper commentators and art critics expressed their criticism of the park, and a popular protest action group was established. Despite this criticism, and a number of official complaints to the Municipality and County Governor, Ringnes managed to obtain, through his foundation, an agreement with Oslo Municipality to establish a public sculpture park based around his private collections of sculptures.

In this article, I will investigate how the idea of the sculpture park was received, discussed, and modified in the mediated public sphere. By studying the media coverage of the process leading up to the realization of the park, I will examine who was critical, what influence they had on the process (as seen through media representations) and how they may have influenced how the park turned out in the end. By a detailed analysis of newspaper articles, I get to study how the idea of private taste in public space has been represented and discussed in the mediated public sphere. Following the process from proposal to approval and investigating the several stages of protest also provides insights into how art donors, municipal managers and citizen-publics got to influence the transformation of a recreational area into a sculpture park. As such, it contributes empirical knowledge to such important cultural policy topics as urban park development, public-private partnership and art donorship.

Data and methods

The data analyzed consists of newspaper articles collected through systematic searches in the Norwegian full-text newspaper database Atekst. The search was conducted on 9 November 2020 with the search string `ekeberg * AND ringnes AND sculpture *`.² The data set includes a number of national newspapers based in Oslo (Aftenposten, Dagbladet, Dagens Næringsliv, Dagsavisen, Klassekampen, Morgenbladet, VG),³ a weekly local newspaper for the district in question (Nordstrands Blad) and the websites of Norway's two public service broadcasters (NRK and TV2). In addition, I included the local sections from the national daily Aftenposten (Osloby and OsloPuls) and the local section of NRK (NRK Østlandssendingen). The time period for the qualitative content analysis was limited to 1 January 2003 to 31 December 2014. The subject for this investigation first appeared in 2003, and the public discussion about the park ended in 2014. Consequently, articles published in 2015 or later has not been included in the data set.⁴ The total number of newspaper articles from this search was 394.

Thematically, the debate has been about aesthetics, gender relations, cultural heritage, municipal case processing, municipal cultural policy, the development of the Ekeberg area and the Nordstrand district of Oslo, and art donor Christian Ringnes. The most important actors in the debate have been neighbors and others who organized a popular protest group, local politicians in Oslo municipality and the Nordstrand District, Christian Ringnes and others working with the Ekeberg project, artists/art critics and journalists/commentators in the newspapers.

The analysis has been conducted through a three-step process: First, I skimmed through all the articles in order to take out objects not related to the process under investigation. This narrowed down the data set to 241 articles. In the second step, I read through all the articles in a chronological order, in order to get familiar with key actors and events in the mediated debate. In the third step, I re-read articles in order to make fruitful connections between the data and analytical categories derived from a continuous reading of social theory. Through this abductive analysis (Timmermans

and Tavory 2012), agonism, deep stories, feeling rules, and unintended consequences emerged as analytical categories suited for a fruitful merger of data and theory.⁵ In the following section, I will present these key analytical concepts, before returning to them in the discussion-section of the article.

Analytical concepts

In order to understand the polarized debate about the Ekeberg Sculpture Park, Chantal Mouffe's (2005 [1993], 2005) notion of agonism has proved helpful. According to Mouffe, conflict, disagreement and emotional involvement are a healthy part of our democracies, as long as this is combined with a basic respect for the views of one's other, achieved through agonisms:

While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation in where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are 'adversaries' not enemies (Mouffe 2005, 20).

In addition to agonism, deep stories and feeling rules (Hochschild 1979, 2016) are fruitful concepts to employ when seeking to understand why many protesters upheld their critical stance towards the park, despite numerous attempts from Ringnes or representatives from the municipality to inform them that the actual plan for the park was somewhat different from what they perceived it to be. As developed by Arlie Hochschild, a deep story is a '*feels-as-if* story – it's the story feelings tell, in the language of symbols. It removes judgment. It removes fact. It tells us how things feel' (Hochschild 2016, 135). This concept is again inspired by Lakoff and Johnsons (1980) theory of how metaphors influence how we think and act. For Hochschild (2016, 295), metaphors are elaborated to stories that not only influence how we think and act, but also how we feel. These stories are based on feeling rules, 'what I should feel' (Hochschild 1979, 565). In her study of the American right, Hochschild (2016) delineates feeling rules of the left and feeling rules of the right. Even though Norwegian society by no standard is as polarized as American society, it nevertheless makes sense to employ these concepts when seeking to understand the polarized nature of the debate, as feeling rules seem to have intensified an agonistic debate. Whereas the concepts of agonism, deep stories and feeling rules help capture the emotional aspects of the conflicted debate, Merton's (1996 [1936]) notion of unintended consequences proved helpful for understanding how a polarized debate can influence the result of a process. Finally, the notion of art worlds (Becker 2008 [1982]), premised on an understanding of art as collective action (Becker 1974), has been useful for investigating the status of the park as an exhibition space for artistic works, and how symbolic boundaries are drawn between the art world and the outside world. In the following section I will present key issues from the debate in a chronological order, before engaging in a discussion of the results.

Results

The launch of an idea

After officially launching the idea of 'a kind of eastern "pendant" to the Frogner Park'⁶ and 'a park à la the Boboli Gardens in Florence, but with a sculpture theme about the Woman' in 2004 (Aftenposten 2004), Ringnes withdrew 160 million NOK in revenues from his real estate companies to establish the sculpture park in 2007 (Johansen 2007). Nordstrands Blad expresses its support for Ringnes' project in the newspaper's editorial, where they refer to Ringnes as

... one of the few players who have other things than their own profits and new real estate investments in mind. Therefore, it is exciting what is now being established at the Ekeberg Restaurant. The actual renovation and restoration of the entire property of the restaurant has been a fantastic contribution to the local community. It is with excitement that we also follow the completion of his next major project: the sculpture park dedicated to the Woman (Nordstrands Blad 2007a).

Aesthetic and gender criticisms

In July 2007, the aesthetics of a sculpture park dedicated to the Woman emerged as a hot topic. Professor of Art History at the University of Oslo, Ina Blom, '... thinks it sounds awful with a park with only statues of women' and Professor of Sculpture at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Stein Rønning, '... describes the project as ridiculous and unimportant' (Aftenposten 2007a). Rønning advocated the establishment of a sculpture council, as did the leader of the Norwegian Sculptors' Association, Ståle Sørensen. The latter accused the City of Oslo of having no '... policy when it comes to art in public space' and that '... they let those who provide money decide everything' (Aftenposten 2007a). The idea of a sculpture council was supported in Dagbladet's editorial, where it was argued that Ringnes should not be a member of the council (Dagbladet 2007). City Councilor for Industry and Culture, Annette Wiig Bryn (Progress Party) then emphasized in Aftenposten that '[i]n meetings with the municipality, Ringnes has all along been clear that an art committee will be established that will contribute to the selection and placement of sculptures in collaboration with Oslo Municipality and Ringnes himself'. She also reminded the public that '[before] such a committee is appointed, it will be up to the Oslo City Council to decide whether the municipality should accept the gift from Christian Ringnes'. She was of the opinion that there was no basis for claiming that the process had been undemocratic, as some critics argued (Bryn 2007).

In August 2007, a majority for the park was attained in the Oslo City Council, after the Socialist Left Party decided to vote yes. The party's candidate for city council leader, Knut Even Lindsjörn, emphasized to Aftenposten that 'it is a prerequisite that an artistic committee must pick out the sculptures, but at the same time it is important that Ringnes is on the committee ...' (Aftenposten 2007b). Klassekampen (2007) supported the proposal for a sculpture park in its editorial and distanced itself from the art critics, exemplified by Ina Blom's claim that 'it sounds awful with a park with statues of only women'. We do not think so'. Nordstrands Blad (2007b) also gave its clear support to the sculpture park in its editorial. Following the criticism from Blom, Rønning, Sørensen and others, op-eds were written in defense of the sculpture park from an artistic point of view: Former chairman of the sculptors' association, Skule Waksvik, criticized the current leader, Ståle Sørensen, for not representing the membership of the association in that he clearly took sides with those interested in abstract art. If he had also been concerned with representing those who practiced figurative art, he should, according to Waksvik, 'have met the initiative of Christian Ringnes with flowers and fanfares' (Waksvik 2007).

This intense debate about aesthetics and gender occurred in 2007. In 2008, there were only a few articles about the park. The number of articles increased in 2009, until the debate once again got hot in 2010, this time related to preservation of nature and cultural heritage.

Cultural heritage and nature

On 8 January 2009 the City Council of Oslo Municipality approved an agreement between Ringnes and the municipality on a preliminary project to study the possibility of constructing a sculpture park (NRK Østlandssendingen 2009). The agreement Ringnes entered into with the municipality stated that there would be an artistic committee, of which Ringnes is a member, that selects sculptures for the park, and that a large part of the funds from the park's foundation will go to long-term operations and maintenance.

During the preparatory work for the establishment of the park, archaeologists discovered remains from the Stone Age. As a consequence, Oslo Municipality was from now on referring to the project as the Ekeberg Sculpture and Cultural Heritage Park. In April 2010, Ekeberg resident Marianne Sunde went hard against the park in Aftenposten: 'The city's largest number of remains from the Stone Age has recently been discovered in the Ekeberg Forest. This is a place where children pick flowers ... In this paradise, Christian Ringnes plans to bring in excavators, trucks, cranes and chainsaws to cut down trees and set up tons of female sculptures up to 20 meters'. Sunde later became the leader of the Protest

Action Group for the Preservation of the Ekeberg Forest (Protest Action Group), which would dominate much of the debate in the years to follow. After Sunde's op-ed, *Aftenposten* pointed out that they agreed that the park should be somewhat scaled down out of respect to cultural heritage and the people's use of the park for recreation. At the same time, they repeated that Ringnes would not only build a monument over himself in that most of the money in the park's foundation will go to long-term operation and maintenance (*Aftenposten* 2010). Several residents of Ekeberg were critical of what they perceived as a comprehensive encroachment on nature (Pedersen 2010; Winther-Larsen 2010).

In an interview with *Aftenposten* in October 2010, Ringnes stated that

it ... will be quite different from what I had in mind ... it has become more nature and less of a park than I imagined ... it is perhaps more correct to call it a sculptural landscape. It is less than 10 percent of the small forest that has to be cut down, and only 1 to 2 percent of the large trees (Slettholm 2010).

He referred to 'the importance of having dialogue. ... In sum, this process has been positive, although it is a bit frustrating that it takes such a long time' (Slettholm 2010). Eikabergtinget (an interest organization for the preservation of the Ekeberg area), which initially was positive to Ringnes' plans, had in its consultation statement on the proposal for The Ekeberg Park pointed out a number of aspects of which they were critical:

It has been stated on several occasions that the plan affects less than 10% of the area. Eikabergtinget cannot understand that this is correct. Installations and buildings, with several lookout pavilions, masts and lighting, etc. will affect up to 100% of the area ... (Trosvik 2010).

The municipality's Cultural Heritage Management Agency was also critical in its consultation statement and pointed out that '[t]he size of the sculptures and the number of sculptures must be adjusted downwards'. Part of the reason for their opinion was that the preparatory work for the park revealed 21 Stone Age sites in the Ekeberg Forest, which makes the area '... the largest collection of older Stone Age sites known in Oslo' (Njarga 2010).

Where the debate in 2010 was related to the scale of the park, with preservation of nature and cultural heritage as critical features, the most intense part of the debate occurred in 2011, when local residents, fronted by several celebrities, really made their voices heard. Now, the critique was directed at the municipality.

Critique of municipal case processing

Fitness instructor and TV celebrity Kari Jaquesson took a leading role in this critique, and musician Silje Nergaard and politician Abid Q. Raja (Liberal Party) voiced their public criticism and took part in public protests (Hustadnes 2011; Nordstrands Blad 2011a, 2011b; Raja 2011; Semmingsen 2011). Erling Folkvord from the Red Party was also critical of the municipality's case processing and the fact that Ringnes had paid for the investigations that formed the basis for the municipality's processing of the application for a park (Bergo 2011).

The Protest Action Group continued to criticize the park: 'The case processing has been a pseudo-democratic game. Reference groups have been set up and consultation rounds run, just as a play to the gallery' (Klungerhaug and Sunde 2011a). Ina Blom (2011) held on to her criticism of Ringnes' art view even after the agreement was finalized and the art committee that will curate the park was established: '100 years after Norwegian women got the right to vote in municipal elections, Oslo municipality's politicians are in favor of a large public facility which theme promotes a gender ideology from the time before women gained political rights'. Art historian Paul Grøtvedt (2011) answered Blom and believed it was pointless to make such a bombastic assessment without looking at a single sculpture that will actually be part of the park: 'Instead of presenting analysis and interpretations of concrete works, Ina Blom presents a theoretical construction that is based on an extensive and vague approach to art history and aesthetics. She does not present empirical material that we can put to test'.

On 23 August 2011 representatives of the Protest Action Group wrote:

Many of us have put an enormous amount of work into familiarizing ourselves with plans, laws and regulations, as well as writing consultation statements. We have referred to several laws that have been violated in the zoning plan. We have not been heard. When we argue in the press, we are met with silence. When we write letters, we get answers devoid of relevance. We have been tricked (Klungrehaug and Sunde 2011b).

After an extensive case processing, a decision to realize the sculpture park was made on 24 August 2011 at the last City Council meeting before the upcoming municipal and county council elections. The proposal was supported by a broad majority consisting of the Conservative Party, the Labor Party, the Progress Party and the Socialist Left Party. The Red Party, the Liberal Party and one representative from the Socialist Left Party voted against the proposal (Aftenposten 2011; Ramnefjell 2011). Protesters were present at the gallery during the City Council meeting, rolling out banners and making noise in attempts to stop the vote. Mayor Fabian Stang contacted the police to remove the protesters. They left voluntarily before the police arrived at City Hall (Christiansen and Nipen 2011; Dagbladet 2011). Following the decision in the City Council, the Red Party and the Protest Action Group complained to the County Governor. They requested that more documents be published, a request that was granted. These documents showed that the culture agency of Oslo municipality had been critical of Ringnes' view of art and women. Ina Blom comments:

This is a hair-raising example of overriding professional competence. If the objections from the Culture Agency had become known, we would have most likely had an interesting discussion. Then the City Council had been forced to defend why they go against the professional advice from their own agency (Brække 2011).

After a year with critiques of municipal case processing, and a return of the aesthetic criticism, 2012 became the year of official complaints to the municipality and county, in last attempts to terminate the construction of the park.

Trying to stop the construction

Following the City Council's decision, ten complaints were received by the municipality, several of which demanded that work on the park not be initiated until the complaint had been processed. In April 2012, Aftenposten wrote that work on the park would start even if complaints had not been processed, because '... The Planning and Building Agency has assessed it so that there is little doubt about the outcome, and they believe that the case processing rules have been followed and that the complaints are considered in the planning work' (Gran 2012). On the day the construction work was to begin, the Protest Action Group demonstrated to prevent the workers from doing their job (Svendsen 2012a). Forty protesters 'held each other's hands and formed a living chain around the trees they wanted to save' (Brække 2012a). The group also sent a complaint to the Ministry of Environment:

-If the decision has been made on an insufficient foundation, we can demand it be reversed. In this case, the municipality has failed to inform about something very significant, namely that the archaeological investigations will lead to irreversible intrusion on nature, Sunde claims (Brække 2012b).

The Red Party reported the C. Ludens Foundation to the police for violations of environmental laws, due to what they perceive to be illegal logging (Svendsen 2012b), and the Protest Action Group reported the municipality to the police for corruption (Johansen 2012).

On 12 June 2012 Aftenposten stated that the County Governor had rejected all complaints related to the sculpture park (Gran and Svarstad 2012). In October 2012, the police dropped the corruption complaint (Eikås 2012).

As the park opens, criticism dies out

The park was officially opened on 26 September 2013 (Trinh 2013). Several newspapers reported on popular enthusiasm from visitors at the park, and one of the opponents had written an op-ed where she acknowledged that the result was much better than feared (Nyeggen 2013). Also, the art donor '... feels that the opposition has turned around. – Some have even been so generous that they have gone out and said that they were wrong ..., says Ringnes' (Eriksen 2013). In 2013, Ringnes was named Oslo Citizen of the Year by *Aftenposten's* readers (Løken 2013).

The loud protests subsided after 2013, but the Protest Action Group announced on its blog in 2013 that it will continue its work to prevent future encroachments on nature at Ekeberg. The blog has not been updated since.⁷ When all channels to stop the project had been tried, the air went out of the Protest Action Group.

Discussion

Feeling rules and agonism

In this debate, defenders and opponents of the proposed park have stood far apart. Even though the project has been adjusted to accommodate issues raised by protesters, and a few critics have publicly announced a change of opinion once the park opened, defenders and opponents of the park have for the most part held on to their views and presented their defense or critique of the park throughout the process. The defenders of the park have time and again presented the intended scale and purpose of the park, in attempts to correct misunderstandings on part of the critics. Most critics, on the other hand, have held on to their position as fierce critics of the park and presented their perception of the project as facts. This can be illustrated through the protest action group claiming that over 200 trees were cut down between 18 and 24 April 2012 (Brække 2012a), while Ringnes stated as a response that they cut down 10–20 trees (Grønning 2012). And further, that one of the protester stated that they would like to be able to see the fjord and the islands from the forest, and not 9 meter high statues (Nordstrands Blad 2011a), while Ringnes (2011) stated that none of the sculptures bought are higher than 4 meters, with most of them being 2.5 meters (as noted in the results section, Sunde (2010) also claimed the previous year that the park would contain sculptures up to 20 meters high).

Many critics have been influenced by deep stories (Hochschild 2016) and feeling rules (Hochschild 1979) of the political left, with disgust and anger directed at the vulgar aesthetics and conduct of the rich man. These feeling rules also got displayed in humorous pop culture protests, such as the hard rock band Black Debbath releasing the song 'No to Jerk Off Path at Ekeberg (the Sculpture Park Song)', comics artist Christopher Nielsen (2011, 2013a, 2103b) writing several op-eds about Ringnes's taste and views on gender, and comedian Bård Tuft Johansen (2013) doing a satirical critic of the park. As egalitarianism and modesty are important values in Norwegian public culture (Daloz 2007; Vassenden and Jonvik 2019), and the strong and liberal state is omnipresent in the culture sector (Engelstad, Larsen, and Rogstad 2017; Larsen 2018), the idea of a wealthy man donating art to the public might create stronger reactions here than elsewhere.

Some of the defenders, on the other hand, have related to deep stories and feeling rules of the political right, as a deep story 'permits those on both sides of the political spectrum to stand back and explore the subjective prism through which the party on the other side sees the world' (Hochschild 2016, 135). Defenders of the park pointed out the predictability of negative reactions to the presence of private capital in public space. Culture and opinion editor at *Aftenposten*, Knut Olav Åmås, was one of the most outspoken supporters of the park among the media commentators. As a supporter of private art donations, he feared the ridicule directed at Ringnes would prevent other wealthy individuals from donating art to the public (Åmås 2011). Åmås was later to become state secretary for Thorhild Widvey, Minister of culture (2013–2015) from the Conservative Party, whose policies promoted increased private capital in the culture sector.

Even though there are exceptions on both sides of the political spectrum regarding positions on the park (e.g. the newspaper *Klassekampen* [*The Class Struggle*], being in favor of the park, and the Liberal Party being opposed to the park), there is nevertheless an overall resistance against the rich man's display of personal taste in public space from a majority of actors with sympathy for the political left. And the relatively few defenders of the park (excluding representatives from the municipality and C. Ludens Foundation), have been people with sympathy with the political right (e.g. Åmås, and wealthy art collector Christen Sveaas 2011, a major financial donor for the Conservative Party, the Progress Party and the Liberal Party [Spence 2017]).

The discussions in the mediated public sphere have been characterized by agonistic disagreement (Mouffe 2005). Even though the fronts in the debate have been fierce, the parties have met in various public meetings whose purpose was to discuss plans for the park and seek to reach common understandings on what the park will actually look like. Even so, the various protesters have for the most part maintained their positions throughout the process, whether they have been critics of the aesthetics of the park, its gendered profile, the preservation of nature or cultural heritage, or the municipal case processing. At the same time, they have complied with democratic rules of the game and tried all possible channels to stop the project. Once every complaint to the Municipality and the County Governor had been rejected, critics quietly disappeared from the public stage.

The park's grounding in the art world

The park, as originally envisioned by Ringnes through media representations, was a donation of a private collection of female sculptures to the municipality, for it to be exhibited in the form of a public sculpture park. As we have seen in the analysis, the aesthetics and gender aspects of his idea got molded throughout the years it was debated by art critics, artists, and art professors. By expressing their views in the public debate, these experts got to intervene in the process of establishing the park. Through laying various aesthetic judgements onto the park, its theme, and its artistic qualities, the actual park is now well integrated into the art world. The artistic committee curating the park provides legitimacy to the park as an exhibition space for art, and through that define all the works displayed in the park as art (Becker 2008 [1982], chp. 5). The committee consists of two representatives from the municipality, two representatives from the Foundation, and up to three representatives with artistic expertise appointed by the Foundation and the Municipality in cooperation. The process with adding new works to the park proceeds as follows: The committee issues a statement on whether a particular work of art is to be made part of the park. The Foundation then decides whether it will recommend to the Municipality that the work be included in the park, and the Municipality makes the final decision (Oslo Kommune Byrådet 2011, 5).

One month prior to its opening, the park's status as a space well integrated in the art world got manifested through the world renowned performance artist Marina Abramovic using the park as a location for the performance *Scream*, as part of the 150-year-celebration of Munch's birth.⁸ Even though Norwegian art critics disapproved of Abramovic's collaboration with Ringnes (VG Nett 2013), Abramovic herself accused Norwegians of being provincial in engaging in such heated debate over this park: 'It seems so strange when you come from the outside and see that here you are arguing about some trees. This is a very provincial way of looking at things. You spend so much energy on something I think is completely ridiculous . . . ' (Gravklev 2013). She also stated that 'what Christian Ringnes has done is brilliant. Any rich man who spends his money on art instead of Ferrari's are worthy of praise' (VG Nett 2013).

Private taste and public space

The area behind the Ekeberg Restaurant has been transformed from being a municipal forest to becoming a municipal park. With that, billionaire Christian Ringnes has gained a permanent imprint on the city of Oslo. That a wealthy individual is able to realize such a project and

display his taste in public space can in many ways be seen as a refeudalization of the public sphere (Habermas 1989 [1962]). At the same time, this study has shown that the park exhibits Ringnes' personal taste to a lesser extent than what was originally imagined. Where he envisioned a park dedicated to the Woman based on his private collection of sculptures, the result is a park with a feminine theme curated by an art committee where Ringnes is one of several members.

The sculpture park has been created through Ringnes negotiating an agreement with Oslo Municipality, and it being passed in the City Council. The public critics on the one side, and the giver and receiver of the gift on the other, never reached an explicit compromise, or settled the discussions through the force of the better argument (Habermas 1989 [1962]). Even so, the opponents of the park got to influence how the park turned out, through their excessive promotion of critical viewpoints on plans and processes leading up its realization. When compromises through dialogue is an unattainable goal due to parties being too far apart, influenced by deep stories and feeling rules (Hochschild 1979, 2016), voicing ones' position in an agonistic public sphere (Mouffe 2005) might still have effects on the outcome of processes. As a result of the various actors' relentless performances of critiques in the public sphere, they managed to influence the park through three unintended consequences (Merton 1996 [1936]): First, the aesthetic criticism of the park helped integrate the park into the art world. Second, the criticism related to cultural heritage and preservation of nature did not stop the construction, but instead helped moderate the scale of the park. Third, the various modifications of Ringnes' original idea helped provide esteem to the art donor (Abbing 2002, 41; Dahl and Helseth 2006, 269), as the park evolved to become a major success (Fayard 2015).

Conclusion

Opponents of the sculpture park at Ekeberg presented their views in newspaper columns, through official complaints and public protests. By using available democratic means, they set out to terminate the construction of the park. They did not manage to achieve their goals, but through the agonistic (Mouffe 2005) debate they got to influence the process and the result through a number of unintended consequences. 'For though these results are unintended, they are not upon their occurrence always deemed axiologically negative. In short, undesired effects are not always undesirable effects' (Merton 1996 [1936], 173).

How the park turned out in the end is somewhat different from what Ringnes envisioned in the first place. The giver (Ringnes) and the recipient (Oslo municipality) of the art gift took an active part in the public drama (Douglas 2002 [1990], xviii), listened to the criticism and sought to adjust their plans in order to resolve issues raised in the public debate. As a result, the art world (Becker 2008 [1982]) gained an exhibition space, and the public a space to experience art (and nature).

Although not perceived as so by the parties during the 10-year process, this case illustrates how citizen-publics by way of protests can influence the outcome of public-private partnerships in urban park development. The empirical analysis indicates that the (implicit) influence of the citizen-publics on the process of realizing the park made the result more successful than what would have been the case if left out of the process altogether. As such, it stands as a contrast to cases where public protest had little influence and seemed incapable of taming the capitalist growth machine (Lang and Rothenburg 2017; Loughran 2014; Molotch 1976; Yarina 2017). For a public park project involving public-private partnerships and art donorship to be successful, competent art management on part of the recipient is not sufficient – an attentive attitude from the donor and recipient towards citizen-publics opinions are also crucial for successful results.

Notes

1. The park contains works by Matt Johnson, Salvador Dali, Auguste Rodin, Aristide Maillol, Guy Buseyne, Per Inge Bjorlo, Sarah Sze, Tony Oursler, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Gustav Vigeland, Sarah Lucas, Richard Hudson, Dan Graham, Huma Bhabha, Jenny Holzer, Elmgreen & Dragset, Roni Horn, Per Ung, Damien Hirst, Sean Henry, Diane Maclean, Hilde Mahlum, George Cutts, Tori Wrånes, Aase Texmon Rygh, Tony Cragg, Louise Bourgeois, Lynn Chadwick, Fernando Botero, Fujiko Nakaya, Ann-Sofi Siden, Jake and Dinos Chapman, James Turrell, Knut Steen, Jaume Plensa, Markus Lupertz, Marina Abramovic, Dyre Vaa og Paul MacCarthy. <https://ekebergparken.com/en/kunst> (last accessed 10 September 2021).
2. I included all three words in order to avoid hits on articles not relevant to the case at hand, e.g. articles about the Ekeberg area or Ringnes' sculptures at other Oslo locations.
3. *Aftenposten* is Norway's second largest daily, with a liberal-conservative profile. *Dagbladet* is Norway's third largest daily, a tabloid with a social-liberal profile. *Dagens Næringsliv* is Norway's largest financial daily. *Dagsavisen* is a daily with a social-democratic profile. *Klassekampen* is a daily for the political left. *Morgenbladet* is a weekly with a focus on culture-, politics- and science. *VG* is Norway's largest daily tabloid. These were chosen based on initial searches in a larger number of papers from the database, in combination with extensive knowledge of Norway's newspaper landscape.
4. The same search as for the period 2003–2014, was conducted for 2015–2018. The only articles of interest in this additional data set were discussions of new works added to the park's collection. As my interest lied in discussions of the park as such, I chose not to include these in the analysis.
5. 'Abductive analysis is aimed at generating creative and novel theoretical insights through a dialectic of cultivated theoretical sensitivity and methodological heuristics' (Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 180).
6. The Frogner Park in the western part of Oslo is the home of the Vigeland Sculpture Park, one of Oslo's top tourist attractions, created during the first half of the 20th century. This park was also heavily debated in the mediated public sphere prior to its establishment (Wikborg 2001, 432–437; Slagstad 2008).
7. <https://folkeaksjonen.wordpress.com/> (last accessed 9 March 2021).
8. '270 Oslo residents stood in front of the camera inside a frame the size as the actual painting and screamed. This was filmed by Abramovic's team and will be edited into an art film' (Gravklev 2013). The location for the performance was the sight where Munch supposedly got his inspiration for the iconic painting, a location close to the sculpture park. The film *Scream* is on view in the park's visitor centre.

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