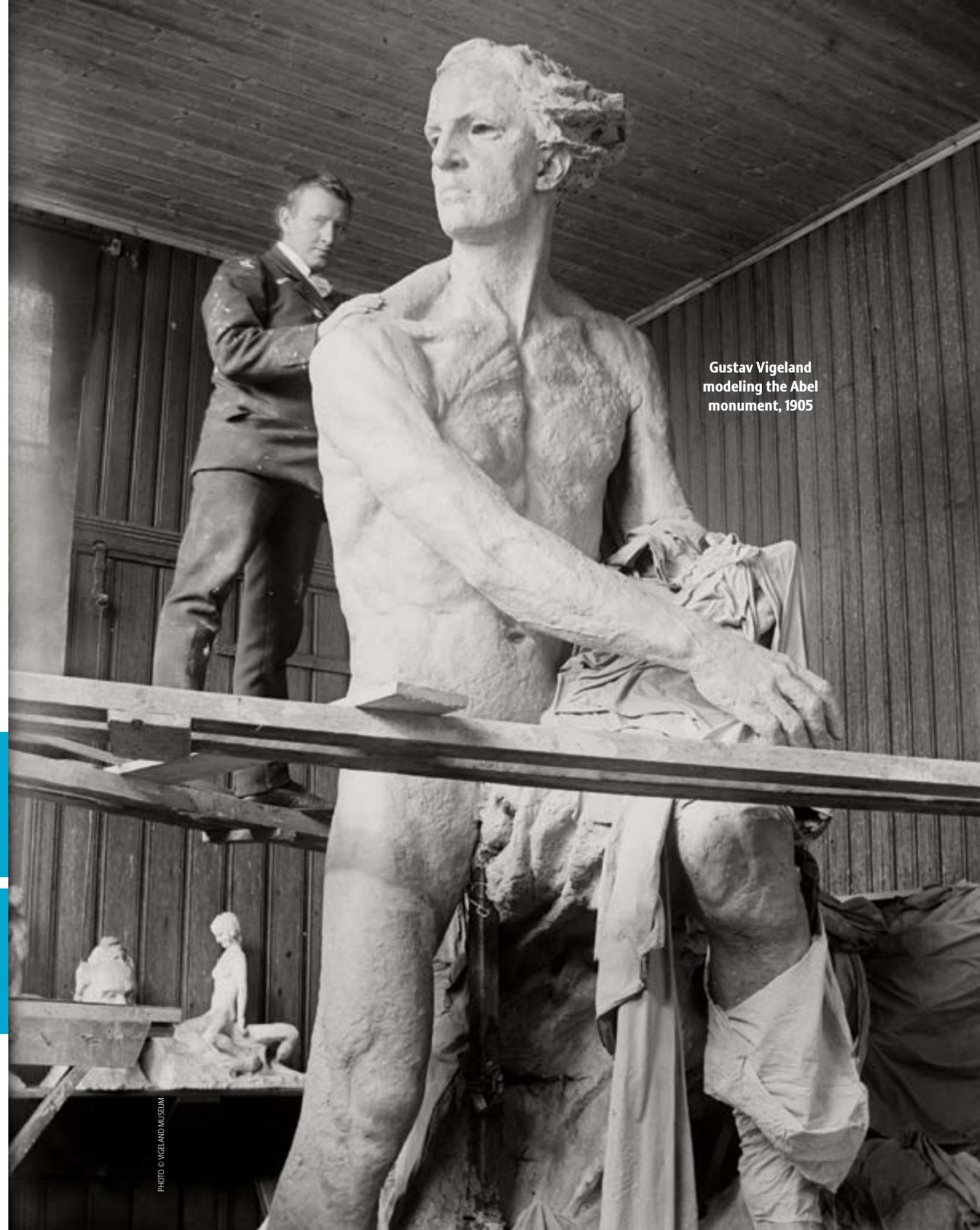


AS NORWAY GEARS UP FOR THE
150TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION
OF GUSTAV VIGELAND,
TAKE A LOOK AT HOW ONE OF
THE COUNTRY'S MOST FAMOUS
SCULPTORS CEMENTED
HIS LEGACY AND CONTINUES
TO MAKE AN IMPACT TODAY.

CARVED IN STONE

BY TAYLOR HUGO



Gustav Vigeland
modeling the Abel
monument, 1905

PHOTO © VIGELAND MUSEUM

As 2019 approaches, the city of Oslo is preparing for the sesquicentenary birthday celebration of one of Norway's most famous native sons: Gustav Vigeland.

When the sculptor was born in the mid-1800s, the country was much different than it is today. The House of Bernadotte was still in power, with King Carl IV sitting on the throne; a devastating famine that swept Scandinavia had just ended, prompting the emigration of thousands to the United States; and the capital city was still known as Kristiania.

Yet, even though 150 years have passed since his birth—and nearly 76 since his death—Vigeland's legacy continues to reverberate throughout Norway, with a museum dedicated to his work and a park he designed attracting tourists from around the globe. So why does this sculptor from Mandal have such a lasting impact on the Norwegian art world and, more generally, the Scandinavian community? "It has much to do with the universal aspects of his art," says Jarle Strømmodden, the director for the Vigeland Museum in Oslo. "Gustav Vigeland's art is exploring what it means to be a human."

An Artist Is Born

Born Adolf Gustav Thorsen in 1869, Vigeland's childhood was not an easy one. His father, Eliseus Thorsen, poured the family fortune into the shipping industry, but they lost everything. To make ends meet, Eliseus later opened a bar on the ground level of their three-story home in Mandal, a tiny town

on the southern coast of Norway. But when he got a little too attached to his work and became an alcoholic, Vigeland's mother, Anna Aanensdatter, took her children to live with their grandparents on a farm in Vigeland, Norway—a town that later inspired the family name change.

Though life at home was not idyllic, Vigeland's parents may have set him on his path to becoming an artist. Eliseus was, first and foremost, a master carpenter, and by the time Vigeland was 15, he was apprenticed to Torsten Christensen Fladmoe in Oslo. There, under Fladmoe's tutelage, Vigeland learned the art of woodcarving. Even at his young age, he knew his true passion was sculpting.

Vigeland briefly returned to Mandal when his father died in 1886, but the allure of the capital city wouldn't keep him home for long.



Pictured at right: Gustav Vigeland in 1918 (top). Gustav and Ingerid Vigeland in their Maridalsveien apartment in 1922 (bottom).

Vigeland's Big Break

Vigeland returned to Oslo in the late 1880s. Learning from and working in the studio of sculptor Brynjulf Bergslien, 20-year-old Vigeland made his artistic debut in 1889, when he presented "Hagar and Ishmael"—a mother-and-son piece inspired by the Book of Genesis—at *Statens kunstutstilling*, the Norwegian State Art Exhibition.

Throughout the 1890s, he continued to hone his craft, traveling to cities in Denmark, France and Italy. Learning from artists such as Mathias Skeibrok, Vilhelm Bissen and Auguste Rodin, some of his prominent pieces of the time include the clay "Forbannet," which translates to "Accursed" in English, and "Hell," a bronze relief that depicts Satan surrounded by people in despair. According



PHOTO BY NANCY BUNDT / VISITNORWAY.COM / VIGELAND-MUSEET | BONO



PHOTOS (LEFT): © VIGELAND MUSEUM



PHOTO BY INGEBJØRG MOGSTAD

IF YOU GO

Nobels Gate 32,
N-0268, Oslo
+47 23 49 37 00
vigeland.museum.no

Hours

Museum
May 2–August 31,
Tuesday–Sunday,
10 a.m.–5 p.m.

September 1–April 30,
Tuesday–Sunday,
12 p.m.–4 p.m.

Park

Open 24 hours



WHAT TO SEE

Covering 80 acres, you could spend hours admiring the sculptures in Vigeland Park. To spot some particularly popular pieces, walk the "Bridge" and find the bronze "Angry Boy" statue before walking up the "Monolith Plateau," the highest point of the park, which boasts an impressive 57-foot sculpture carved from a single block of granite. Stop for a contemplative moment at the "Fountain," which has the longest history in the park. Inside the museum,

book in advance for a guided tour through Vigeland's apartment on the second floor. "The colors and the light, together with his artwork, make the Vigeland Museum an extraordinary, attractive location for visitors, tourists and photographers from all over the world," says museum director Jarle Strømmodden. "The Vigeland Museum is, in my humble opinion, one of Norway's most beautiful museums with a contemplative atmosphere that is quite unique."



to Strømmodden, death is a common theme in Vigeland's work.

He also explored the relationship between men and women in his sculptures, as seen in "Young Man and Woman" and "Man and Woman, Adoration," but that was a dynamic Vigeland struggled with in his personal life. He married his first wife, Laura Mathilde Andersen, in 1900, and together they had two children before separating in 1901 and divorcing in 1906. He would go on to have an affair with his muse, Inga Syvertsen, for nearly 20 years before marrying Ingerid Alise Vilberg in 1922.

Despite Vigeland's talent, his professional life had its ups and downs. With little money and few commissions in the late 1890s, he accepted a job working on the restoration of Trondheim's Nidaros Cathedral, which had just barely survived several fires. During his time there, he created 44 sculptures for the church, including a statue of St.

Olav, 16 gargoyles and an oak piece showing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

But as his notoriety continued to grow, Vigeland had an opportunity to create more public works of art. His monuments of feminist and writer Camilla Collett and mathematician Niels Henrik Abel are located in the park surrounding the Royal Palace in Oslo, and his portrayal of Norway's first prime minister, Christian Michelsen, is located in Bergen. "Vigeland's public monuments are characterized by his ability to grasp the individuality and inner life of the persons he portrayed," Strømmodden says.

A Lasting Legacy

Perhaps the defining moment of Vigeland's career came in 1921, when the city of Oslo planned to demolish the area where his studio was located. They offered him a new home just outside Frogner Park, complete with a studio and an apartment for him and his second wife, Ingerid, on one condition: All of Vigeland's artwork—past, present and future—would be donated to Oslo.

So, for the next 20 years of his life, the reclusive Vigeland quietly continued to fill Frogner Park with more than 200 bronze, granite and wrought iron sculptures. Vigeland Park is now the largest sculpture park in the world created by one artist. "The Vigeland Park is the most comprehensive collection of Gustav Vigeland's sculptures and art, and a strong symbol of what he could achieve when given space and artistic freedom," Strømmodden says.

After Vigeland's death in 1943, the building he called home was turned into a museum in 1947. With 1,600 sculptures, 420 woodcuts, 12,000 drawings and several thousand letters in the museum's collection, it offers an all-encompassing look at the artist's life. Though his impact on the European art world was on a smaller scale than some of his contemporaries, such as countryman Edvard Munch, Strømmodden says Vigeland remains significant because we can still relate to his themes of life, death and love. "These themes are still relevant today," he says, "and therefore the Vigeland Museum is presenting contemporary art within the three-dimensional field, and is established as an important part of the Norwegian art scene." ♡

Pictured above, top to bottom: The prophet Elias at Nidaros Cathedral, Hagar og Ismael, and famous Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel



PHOTOS BY BERIT ROALD / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

DID YOU KNOW?

Vigeland designed what is perhaps the most famous award in the world: the Nobel Peace Prize medal. Featuring Alfred Nobel on the front, the back side pictures three men forming a fraternal bond with the phrase "*Pro pace et fraternitate gentium,*" or "For the peace and brotherhood of men."

JOIN THE CELEBRATION

Institutions around Norway are anticipating Gustav Vigeland's 150th birthday with a lineup of installations and celebrations. At the Vigeland Museum, a special Anniversary Exhibition will open on Vigeland's birthday, April 11, featuring the sculptor and contemporary peers like Auguste Rodin and Aristide Maillol. A traveling exhibition with Norway's National Museum will

be displayed through 2020, and the Thielska Gallery in Stockholm is presenting a summer Vigeland showcase starting in June. "In the long run, we hope that the anniversary might contribute to more research among scholars on Vigeland," says Guri Skuggen, a Vigeland Museum curator and project leader for the anniversary celebrations. Norwegians will even have the opportunity to commemorate the occasion with a special edition 20-krone coin, released by Norges Bank.

Norges Bank invited five artists to a competition to design the sesquicentenary motif on the coin's reverse side. The winner was Håkon Anton Fagerås, with the motif "At Work."



PHOTO COURTESY NORGES BANK