



INTERNATIONAL FORUM

OSLO, NORWAY

February NEWSLETTER 02/2019

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Number 440



INTERNATIONAL FORUM

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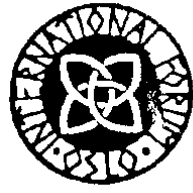
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Website www.iforum.no

Forum Diary

| DATE | EVENT | TIME | PAGE |
|----------|---|-------|------|
| March 4 | H. E. Anna Maria Sikó of Hungary | 18:45 | 6 |
| March 12 | The Maritime Museum | 10:45 | 6 |
| March 21 | The Swan Princess – Russian Art at the Munch Museum | 11:45 | 8 |

From the President



**HAPPY 40TH ANNIVERSARY
INTERNATIONAL FORUM!**



Best wishes to you all!

Sally Burgan

President

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

The working language of the International Forum is English. Not all members speak Norwegian. Please **remember to use English** in your communication with the Office, Committee leaders and at Forum Events.

Thank you for your kind cooperation,

The Board



FROM THE NOMINATION COMMITTEE

The Nomination Committee is now starting its work

We are looking for members, who would like to take an active part in the running of the International Forum over a period of time. Please feel free to suggest yourself or submit the name of another member whom you think would be able to contribute in some way.

It doesn't necessarily take a lot of time to be a member of a committee, and it can be very rewarding. It is also a good way to learn more about the International Forum and to become better acquainted with other members.

The Nomination Committee prepares a list of nominees, which is submitted to the Board. Six weeks before the AGM the list of all nominees will be published in the Newsletter. Members may then send the Board further proposals, which can be put on the final list for election at the AGM. There is no vote by proxy at the AGM. The candidate receiving the most votes will be elected.

Included in this Newsletter is a form for your proposals which we hope that you will fill out. Please return **as soon as possible (by email or post) and by March 1 at the latest** to the Leader of the Nomination Committee: Ellen Vollebæk,

Do remember that your suggestions will form the basis of the Committee's proposals when members are nominated for election at the Annual General Meeting in 2019.

We cannot emphasise how much we look forward to receiving the names of as many nominees as possible.

Thank you!

The Nomination Committee:

Ellen Vollebæk (Leader), Sigrid Langebrekke

Barbara Lee Ødegaard



Proposals for nomination:

I (name)

Tel:

propose *myself and/or*:

Tel.:

for the position of *:

and

propose:

Tel.:

for the position of *:

**President, Board Member, Committee leader, Committee member, etc.*

The form should be sent to:

Ellen Vollebæk,

COMING EVENTS

MONTHLY MEETING

H. E. Anna Maria Sikó

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Hungary



H. E. Anna Maria Sikó has studied extensively abroad, at Cambridge University, the University of Baghdad, and Eötvös Loránd University Budapest, focusing on the arts, literature and languages. She has a master's degree in English and French language and literature. She spent some of her youth in Baghdad.

Ms Sikó has extensive experience from international civic organisations and diplomacy. She will talk about Hungary, its history and today's socio-economic challenges.

DATE/TIME: Monday, **March 4** at 18:45 for (19:00)

For more information, please contact the IF Office.

SPECIAL EVENTS

The Norwegian Maritime Museum

The Special Events Committee has the pleasure of inviting you to a guided tour of the Norwegian Maritime Museum (NMM). This is a national museum, which is responsible for collecting, researching, and teaching about the Norwegian maritime cultural heritage. The museum has a wide range of interesting indoor and outdoor exhibits placed in a unique maritime environment.

The Norwegian Maritime Museum was founded in 1914 under the name Norsk Sjøfartsmuseum. The museum changed its name to NMM in 2010, and has since 2015 been a part of the Norsk Folkemuseum, a foundation that runs the Bogstad Manor, the Bygdøy Royal Manor, Eidsvoll 1814, the Ibsen Museum, and Norsk Folkemuseum.



Today, the NMM is both a cultural history museum as well as an archaeological administrative museum with important responsibilities for cultural heritage both above and under water in ten counties. The museum is actively involved in the preservation of historic vessels. It is possible to book trips with some of the museum vessels, including the schooner *Svanen*, built in 1916, and the renaissance boat *Vaaghals*, a reconstruction of an archaeological find from Bjørvika in Oslo.

The museum is located near the Fram Museum and the Kon-Tiki Museum at Bygdøyenes in Oslo.

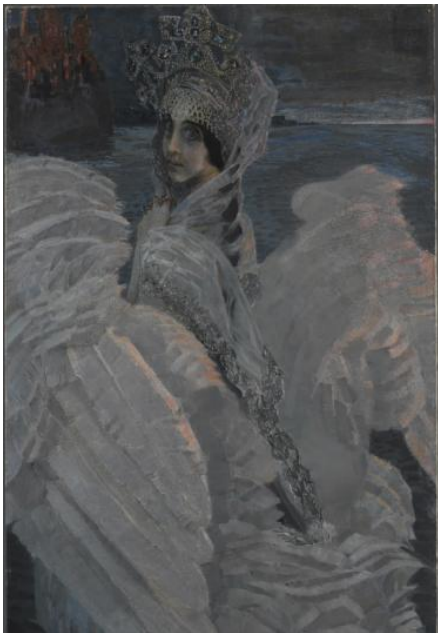
DATE/TIME: Tuesday, **March 12** at 10:45 (for 11:00)

For more information, please contact the IF Office.

ART COMMITTEE

The Swan Princess: Russian Art 1880-1910

The Munch Museum



Through a unique collaboration with the State Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, the Munch Museum has gained access to some truly iconic Russian works of art. The public will have a rare opportunity to view works by some of Russia's most renowned artists in the company of works by Edvard Munch and some other famous Nordic artists. This exhibition bears testimony to the powerful sense of national identity that prevailed in both Russia and Norway in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

The exhibition is particularly relevant in the current tense political climate, in that it makes possible an important cultural dialogue with Norway's most powerful neighbour. This

exhibition demonstrates how society stood at a new watershed between national mythologies and a new transnational modernity that challenged the traditional value systems of the time. This created fertile ground for the emergence of new, modern forms of art, both in Russia and in the Nordic countries.

DATE/TIME: Thursday, **March 21** at 11:45 for 12:00

For more information, please contact the IF Office.

ACTIVITIES

Norwegian Conversation Group



The Norwegian Conversation Group (norsk samtalegruppe) is a group of 20 ladies from countries such as India, Columbia, Indonesia, Russia, Peru, Germany, Canada, China, Taiwan, Hungary and Norway. We meet once a month in each other's homes. The intention of the group is to practice speaking Norwegian in an informal setting and to

share experiences and interests in our daily life. We have all levels of proficiency.

There is no homework, since the main point is to come together and have fun. The hostess decides if she wants to serve a light lunch or just coffee and biscuits (or cake) after the practice session.

We usually meet on Fridays at 11:00. You are very welcome to join us!

For more information, please contact the IF Office.

Monday Duplicate Bridge

We play at Ris Menighetshus Peisestue between 9:00 and approximately 13:15. Everyone can choose whether to pay a fee of NOK 50.- per session, or pay a 'term fee'. If you wish, you can bring your own lunch; coffee and cookies are provided.

If you are interested, please contact Gerd Ulriksen. Let us know as early in the week as possible if you want to play. It would be good to sign up with a partner; however, if you do not have one, we can try to find one for you.

For more information, please contact the IF Office.

Monthly Wednesday Bridge Group

We generally meet on the second or third Wednesday of the month, depending on the holidays. We are usually 8 or 12 players, on occasion 16. We play duplicate bridge and enjoy a light lunch afterwards. You are most welcome!

For more information, please contact the IF Office.

Cooking Group I



Outside it was wintery and bleak, so the menu for our first gathering in 2019 was chosen accordingly. It was highly appreciated by the ladies in the cooking group.

The next cooking morning is going to take place at Lillan's home.

DATE/TIME: Thursday, March 7 at 13:00

For more information, please contact the IF Office.

Cooking Group II



This is a small cooking group. The cooking sessions take place in the homes of the participants, on a rotation basis. The hostess decides on the menu and buys the ingredients and beverages. At the gatherings, we all take part in preparing the meal. The cost of the ingredients is

shared between the participants.

We have room for two more participants, so if you are interested, just join us!

For more information, please contact the IF Office.

R E P O R T S

Monthly Meeting January

Sigrid Bratlie was our speaker at the January meeting. She is Senior Advisor at the Norwegian Biotechnology Advisory Board and holds a PhD in Molecular Biology. Her talk was an enlightening and fascinating presentation of a very complicated matter: biotechnology and in particular CRISPR – a simple but powerful tool for editing genomes. A genome is an organism's complete set of DNA, including all of its genes. CRISPR makes it possible to read, write and edit DNA, be it in plants, animals or humans, and was discovered by studying how bacteria in yoghurt become immune to invading viruses. The bacteria



activate a CRISPR system that allows them to ‘cut’ strands from the virus’ DNA and incorporate them into their own genome. This enables their defence system to detect attacking viruses and destroy them.

Researchers have now tweaked the CRISPR system so they are able to cut any DNA, not just virus DNA. They can use it to insert genes, cut out genes, change single base pairs, or turn on and off genes even without cutting the gene. The CRISPR technic came in 2012 and was a significant scientific advancement. It has many potential applications, such as correcting genetic defects, treating and

preventing diseases from spreading, and improving crop yields. In food production for example, the technique can increase crop yields (e.g. more rice grains per plant). It can also increase wheat resistant to fungi, lower the amount of unsaturated fat in plant oils, produce peanuts with fewer allergens, etc.

The possibility for modifying genes has existed for some decades. However, the methods have been crude and the result not always satisfactory. The CRISPR technology is precise, efficient and cheap. It allows researchers to cut strands of DNA and insert new strands exactly where they should be.

Ms Bratlie explained the difference between the old methods and CRISPR by using a metaphor. She compared the human genome to a library with 20 000 books and in one of the books, on one specific page, there is a misspelling of one of the words. With the old method, you could insert the corrected word, but it might end up in one of the other books. CRISPR allows researchers to find the exact place where the error has occurred and correct it.

The development and use of this technology does raise a series of ethical and economic questions. Experts disagree as to whether CRISPR – a phenomenon found in nature – is a GMO (genetically modified organism) technique or not. In the US, and until recently in Sweden and GB, the method is not considered a GMO technique and may be freely used in research and in production. After July 25, 2018, however, this changed in Sweden due to a ruling in the European Court of Justice. This court considers CRISPR a GMO procedure because it uses gene technology. Accordingly, projects using CRISPR have to pass exhaustive assessments for health and safety. It can take up to five years to get through the approval process and costs in the range of 10-13 million dollars. This regulation prevents small companies from using the technology. Medical treatment could become very expensive and – consequently – available only for the few and the wealthy.

Of course, a precautionary approach is needed to protect our health and the environment. At the same time, research in this field is also very important, as it can bring about beneficial discoveries, products and treatments. Until recently, the debate on whether CRISPR is a GMO technique or not, has been very polarised. Nevertheless, it is important to look at the different uses of the technology in a more nuanced way and to have different regulations for different purposes. Norwegian authorities emphasise that research in this field should be beneficial for society, sustainable and ethically defensible.

When it comes to modifying human genes, numerous ethical questions must be considered, such as ‘Is it ethical to modify someone’s genes without the person’s consent?’ ‘Is it ethical *not* to modify genes if you can prevent disease?’ Some kind of societal consent is probably needed before treatments such as CRISPR can be allowed.



Ms Bratlie, Ruth Klungsøyr, and Sally Bergan

The audience had many questions, for instance: Is it harmful to eat GMO products that exist today? The speaker’s answer was “no”. Thousands of studies show no harmful effects, she says. A few studies show that there might be such an effect, but their methodologies have generally been regarded as poor.

In connection with questions regarding ecology and food production, Ms Bratlie mentioned Charles C. Mann's book, *The Wizard and the Prophet*.

I quote the following from *Washington Independent Review of Books* regarding this book:

[...] *The Wizard and the Prophet*, which sprawls from history to engineering, from economics to ecology.

The 'Wizard' of the title is Norman Borlaug, a Nobel Prize-winning central figure of the Green Revolution and champion of the view that innovation and technology, when applied to environmental problems, 'can help us produce our way out of our predicament'.

The 'Prophet' is William Vogt, a founder of the modern environmental movement and proponent of 'the belief that unless humankind drastically reduces consumption its growing numbers and appetite will overwhelm the planet's ecosystems'.

<http://www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/index.php/bookreview/the-wizard-and-the-prophet-two-remarkable-scientists-and-their-dueling-visions-to-shape-tomorrows-world>

Gunnel Anita Solheim

Special Events

Visit to the Norwegian Red Cross

A group of 20 ladies from the International Forum visited the Norwegian Red Cross on January 24. We were warmly received with cakes and coffee. The presentation, which started at noon, was divided into two parts: the first on the organisation's work in Norway, the second on its international missions.

Karin Afeet, our host, first introduced the organisation's three emblems: a red cross, a red crescent and a red diamond. The red crescent on a white background is used mainly in Muslim countries where the cross symbol is not widely accepted by the inhabitants. The red diamond is mainly used in Israel, as the Israelis do not identify with either the cross or the crescent.

The Red Cross is a private humanitarian organisation – founded in Geneva, Switzerland – in 1863. It has around 17 million volunteer workers and 119 member organisations across the world. The two top principles guiding their aid works are *humanity* and *impartiality*, i.e. the organisation strives to meet the needs of all human beings, no matter which ethnic or religious background they have.

In Norway, the strong presence of the Norwegian welfare state is a central concept of debate. Whose responsibility is it to care for and meet the needs of Norwegian citizens? Should the citizens be covered and supported by the local

authorities or by the state? How and where to we set the limits for volunteer intervention? How should a sustainable safety net be organised and maintained in a society like Norway? Norway is experiencing many changes to its demography. There are many new challenges associated with the country's social welfare system. The Red Cross very often steps in to help people who have fallen outside the welfare system.



Karin Afset



Torben Henriksen

One important feature of the Norwegian Red Cross' national projects is that most programmes are run by volunteers. The sheer extent of the communal effort is a reflection of a strong sense of volunteerism. There are a total of 300 local Red Cross offices in 19 counties. Even in peripheral places with small populations, the Red Cross is present.

Volunteerism also offers a possibility of inclusion into Norwegian society. For example, many newly arrived young Syrian men have volunteered to work with the Red Cross. They have been of invaluable assistance to other Syrian refugees who need help with settling. In this way, the Red Cross lets refugees become active service providers instead of remaining aid recipients.

Thanks to government support and private donations, the Norwegian Red Cross is well funded. The main focus is on helping children and youth, migrants, the elderly, people struggling with substance abuse. The Red Cross also has programmes to prevent crime and delinquency, and some 80% of prisoners receive visits from the Norwegian Red Cross.

Volunteers also organise and conduct search and rescue missions all year round. In Norway, the avalanche and mountain rescue teams are all volunteers. Many have received special training and provide competent and professional help in sectors where the government resources are stretched in a certain area.

Torben Henriksen also outlined the Norwegian Red Cross' missions worldwide. There are many interrelated challenges: how to cope with climate change and population growth; and how to continue to fight poverty, improve sanitary conditions and promote better health. In fact, poverty *has* been reduced worldwide and the health sector *has* improved. However, there is still a lot to do.

Urbanisation, new diseases, antibiotic-resistant bacteria and non-communicable diseases – such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and so on – put a strain on the health system of many countries. Many densely populated and poor communities located in coastal areas are increasingly exposed to climate-related rising seas. The Red Cross mobilises in times of earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis. The organisation also tries to gain access to conflict areas – and areas in which the authorities struggle to contain high rates of murder and violent organised crime – with an aim to assist innocent civilians.

The Red Cross international operates through three branches. First, the head organisation, the ICRC, is based in Geneva, Switzerland. The Geneva Convention gives the Red Cross a special mandate in times of war and conflict, acting as an intermediary and ensuring humanitarian aid. Then there are the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRS), which organises missions locally. The IFRC functions as an umbrella organisation, coordinating and distributing tasks among the national offices. The last branch is an office that organises direct cooperation between Red Cross offices in neighbouring states.

Mr Henriksen also updated us on troubled areas such as Syria, Yemen, Congo, and North Korea. He explained that *stable* international funding is a constant worry, and that it is usually easier to raise funds for a major crisis, owing to the massive media coverage, than for more chronic situations that do not get the same media attention.

The presentation was indeed interesting and informative, and the members of the Forum engaged in lively discussions!

Irene Chang

Art Committee

Håkon Bleken's retrospective exhibition at Henie Onstad Art Centre

Do not go gentle

Håkon Bleken uses Dylan Thomas' poem as the title of this exhibition, and it can stand as an epitaph for his entire body of work:

*Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

Håkon Bleken has burned and raged all his life over the battles between ideologies, religious fanatics and political visions. Closer to home, he has raged over death and the poignancy of the human predicament.

He chose to study death with stark honesty as he painted his own mother and father going into that good night, and he documented his friend Arne Nordheim slipping into dementia with 'ever blinding sight'.



How does an artist find his or her signature form, style and medium that will be able to express so much? Bleken says himself that there is nothing worse than being faced with a blank canvas. There is so much to say in such a small space. Many artists can spend a lifetime looking for the answer, but already in the early 70's he solved part of the problem by using collage as a way to cover the canvas before he started painting. The triptych, *Nameless 1976*, takes on monumental subject matter of War, Ideology (see next page) and Eroticism.

The apparent harmony between the three works is broken as soon as the viewer goes forward and looks closely at the collage. Small squares of photographs,

articles from newspapers or clippings from magazines, create an infinite kaleidoscope of every aspect of war, differing ideologies and sexual appetite. It is hard to see what is painted, what is paper, and where chaos blends into more chaos. The Bleken-style is born. Part abstract, part figurative, sometimes cubist, he finds a form and rhythm that ultimately finds a balanced and harmonious whole through his careful placement of colour.



Another experiment that became integral in his style, is the use of collage with charcoal sketching on top. Bleken was very innovative and had no fear of changing and developing his style to find new ways of expressing himself. There is a lot going on in all his works, and he is reflecting that life is messy and entwined in a thousand different ways.

His brutally honest reflection over the death of his parents is rendered with angry brush strokes, heavy, suffocating layers of oil paint, and a lot of silence. Arne Nordheim is almost faceless, avoiding eye contact and surrounded by uncomfortable shades of colour as he goes blindly and silently into the night. Bleken is watching them all with great empathy and gentleness while he rages at Death.

Håkon Bleken has an acute sense of the power in the hands of an artist to communicate with and against the society around him. The terror of Utøya in 2011 triggered a series of works. Arnold Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead*, is hauntingly present in the shape of Utøya, and the first work has a traumatic collage of the Holocaust glued all over the island. Up close are all the horrors of fascism and Nazism, so lauded by Bering-Breivik. A monumental painted version is striking with the Bleken-blue fjord and searing red abstractions that bleed into the water. A sinister blackness on the island belies the tragedy.

Bleken is still productive, right into his 90th year, and has recently painted rather uncomplimentary portraits of the Mayoress of Trondheim because of her decision to put a large building project alongside the river. Forever raging against his local society!



The works from the last ten years explode into an unusual amount of colour. The canvases become bigger and bigger, red and yellow become prominent colours, and the battles are intense and discomfoting. Bleken is most certainly not going gently. He is going out in a blast!

Håkon Bleken is one of the great Norwegian artists of our time and this retrospective gives a clear overview of the enormity of his production and his important position as a critic of our society and era.

Our thanks to our favourite guide – Karen Reini – for taking us around this splendid exhibition.

Jane Steenbuch

Issued by the Board of the International Forum

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