

the successful merging of city and land that make them exist in comfortable and attainable tandem. Oslo presents itself as a city busy enough to resemble the fast-paced character of a metropolis, yet stands in close enough proximity to nature as to not feel suffocating.

More importantly, nature is there for an escape, ready for us when we need a self-encounter, whenever we want it. It offers itself as a place which we can enjoy in solitude, or company, reflection or conversation, no matter what season.

In spite of my being an art historian, I had largely omitted the study of landscape from my repertoire. Like many, I felt it lacked substance, as though it wasn't 'about' anything. Lately my views on this have changed, not lastly because of my own Norway-induced sympathy for nature. What I hadn't been able to see, was that every landscape is an encounter with yourself, with your emotions, and feeling their existence in one space with those of the artist. Attached to this is a very special perception of time and space, which allows for you to project yourself into scenery that existed but for a moment and will never be attainable again in the real world.

This temporality is what makes both landscape and its overruling nature so special, because although it is temporal, it is also a cycle with no definite start or finish, which caused Hegel to omit it from his study of aesthetics. It may not be the encounter with nature itself that is aesthetic, but rather the creativity it induces; aesthetic is the act of viewing and representing a moment in time that will never be the same again. Each moment is both unique and fleeting within an endless versatility.

Living the moment thus receives a whole new meaning in Norway, a country in which the motto "Det er ikke noe slikt som dårlig vær, bare dårlig klær" is written on beer cans. Nature

should be enjoyed regardless of the weather and good clothing is obligatory in order to experience this. (This became painfully clear to me, when, on my very first fjelltur I spent half of the trip with wet feet, while my Norwegian counterparts were all Gore-Tex-ed up. )

Coming from a family that dislikes cold weather and anything wet that falls from the sky, I couldn't understand the concept of going out when it's raining. Why would you do that? With time you come to realize that this is again, a self encounter. When nature expresses itself as temperamental, it can be a reminder of life, which isn't linear, but rather a series of episodes of different emotions.

Norway will always remain my safe haven for reflection and thinking, because there is nothing else in the world that compares to a 'hyttetur', in which days are spent outside in the mountains hiking and fishing, and the evenings are spent by the fireplace with a book and maybe a pen. Once your lungs have been refilled with fresh mountain air, your legs can feel the day's steps and your mind has had time to reinvent itself, life and all its stresses and sorrows can be put into perspective.

This is what 'back to nature' means to me, and why my relationship with Norway has become more intimate over the years. My mind feels almost resuscitated after just a few days of a trip to the mountains. But this detoxification can only be possible when the mountain cabin is kept to its basic minimum. Though we'd all agree that an indoor toilet is definitely a modernization we embrace with open arms, television, computers and other technologies can and should be left behind in the city, to leave nature its pristine character of renewal.

(Bakgrunnsfoto: Inger Karin Riise Hansen)