Vigeland's

PARK & MUSEUM

This guidebook describes the life and work of the Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland. Fifty-two pages with plenty of photos of the renowned Vigeland's Park and Museum.

On pages 44–51, find in numerical order all the sculptures of the Park with their exact location and description.

On page 51, find a map of the Park and useful information about the means of transport getting you there.

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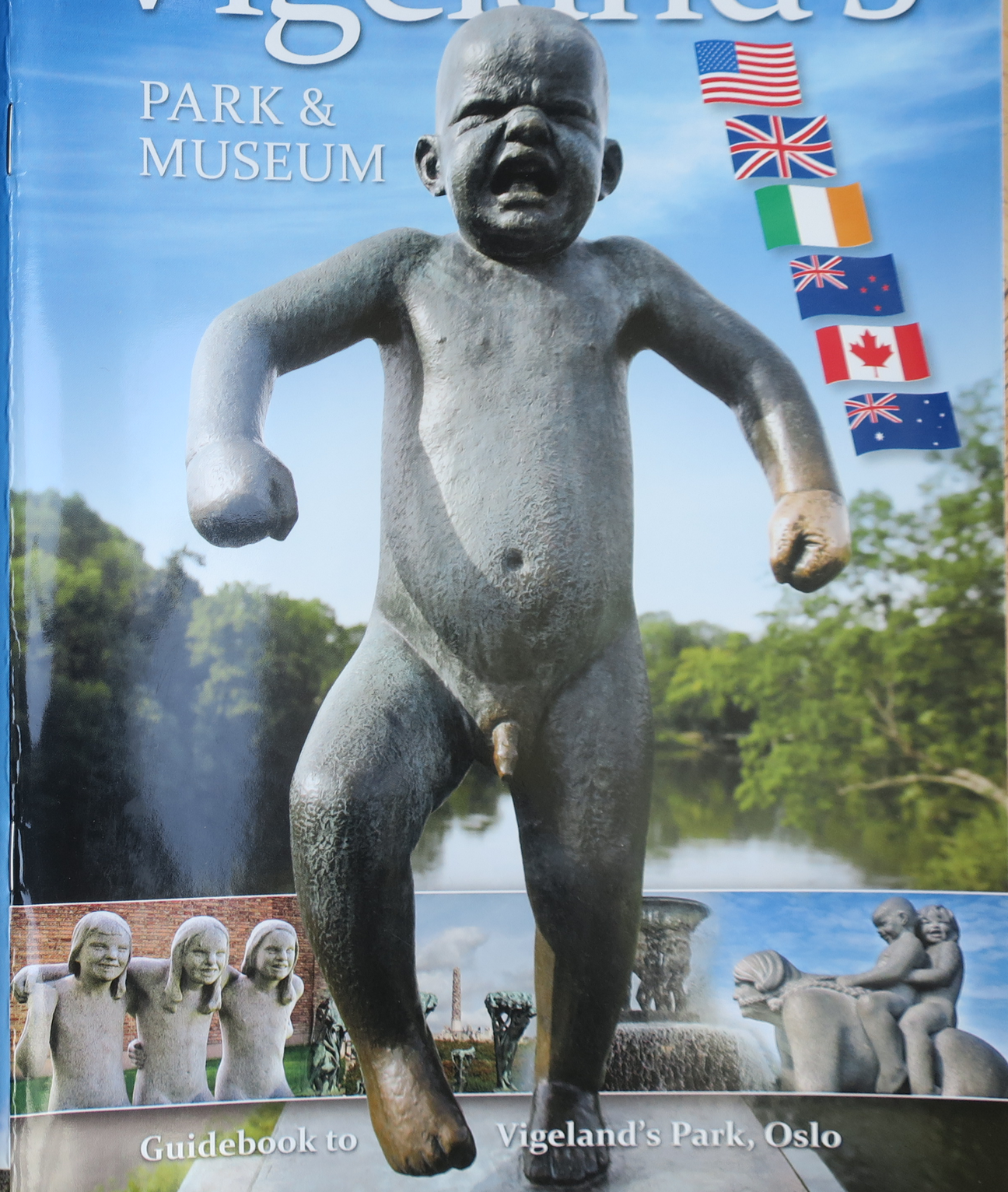

Guidebook to Vigeland's Park, Oslo

Alexandra Theophilakis

The Sculptures in Vigeland's Park and Museum – Oslo

English Guidebook

Thanks to Dionisia Theofilaki and Natassa Theofilaki.
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Vigeland's Park: A place for your own personal experience

The first visit

Many visitors pay the Park a second or even a third visit, because the first one had such a strong impact on them. Admission to Vigeland's Park is free to everybody, and at any time of the day or night you can go for walk or jogging and play with your children or even spend the night there, as this is not forbidden.

However, not only does it serve as a place for entertainment and physical activity, but it also provides the visitor with an opportunity for spiritual quest.
It is an open-air exhibition of sculptures, a work to which Vigeland devoted his entire life. The 214 bronze or granite sculptures are so figurative that the visitor gets the feeling of being part of the sculptures themselves.

The granite sculptures, though bulky, maintain their anatomical details. The artist selected hard material, the granite, taking into account that the sculptures would not be exhibited in a museum room, but outdoors, exposed to the extreme weather conditions of this northern country.

In addition, he decided not to 'dress' the sculptures rendering them timeless for the future.

How the Park started life and was created

In the early 20th century, when Norway, as a newly independent country, was looking for its national identity and the artists were in search for new ways of self-expression, Vigeland started working on the idea of the park in his mind. By creating this park, which stretches ahead of you, Vigeland gave life to his artistic expression.

Although the mid-war period with the economic collapse (unemployment and poverty) had led people to inertness and despair, Vigeland carried on his life's work with great enthusiasm and optimism.

Gustav Vigeland was an extremely prolific sculptor, which is proven by the plethora of his sculptures. The abundant flowing water, the beds with the colorful flowers, the trees, the soft and rich lawn – all arranged according to his designs – make a strong contrast with the hard material of his sculptures.

The benches offer rest and self-concentration encouraging the visitors to let their thoughts and imagination travel ...

The symbolic meaning of the sculptures

The Park, full of symbols and metaphors of feelings, depicts Man's life.

The Dragon is the symbol of Evil and Temptation, with which Man is often confronted. And there are times when Man gives in, because temptation has the power to lure him and make him lose his way.

Nevertheless, while Vigeland makes Man vulnerable to temptation, in the next composition he makes him powerful, already from childhood. He presents Man in his daily life, filled with emotions and expressions of joy, sadness, anger, violence, affection, and love.

Vigeland uses the Tree as a symbol of Man's life. Everyone takes hold of the Tree of Life and struggles to survive. The survival instinct dominates all stages of life, from birth to the very last moment of life.

Vigeland concludes with the Wheel of Life, which symbolizes Eternity through the generation succession.

This is Vigeland's world and his work is a service to Man.

Gustav Vigeland 1869 – 1943

A few words about the artist

Vigeland was born in Mandal, in southern Norway. His father was a carpenter and he had his own furniture workshop.

Vigeland was brought up in a strictly religious and oppressive environment. His father was psychologically unstable and went through periods of alcoholism, thus often treating his family with violence, which left deep scars both in Gustav's and his siblings' characters.

During his childhood, Gustav spent quite a lot of time in his father's workshop carving wood. His talent in sculpture was revealed from an early age and when he reached 15, his parents sent him to Kristiania (Oslo) to study the art.

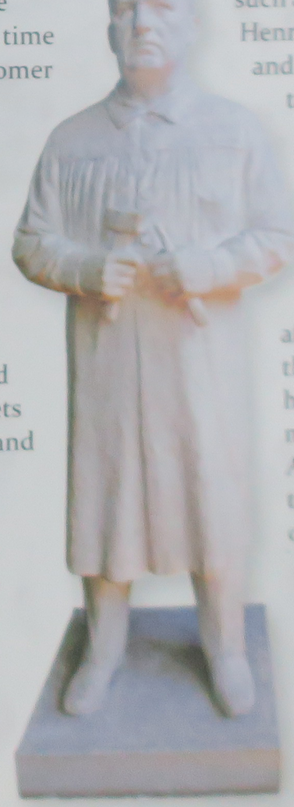
However, due to his father's death, he had to return to Mandal to help the family. He used to devote his spare time to reading and drawing. Besides Homer and Greek mythology, he also studied anatomy.

At the age of 19, he returns to Kristiania carrying with him his drawings, many of which were influenced by the Greek mythology and the Bible. After lots of wandering and indecisiveness, he decides to turn to the distinguished sculptor Brynjulf Bergslien, who gets impressed by Vigeland's drawings and accepts him to work in his studio. Vigeland attends the School of Drawing and in 1889 he takes part, with other artists, in an exhibition. Two years later, Bergslien ensures Vigeland a scholarship for traveling abroad.

Vigeland travels to Copenhagen, where he works with Vilhelm Bissen. Later he travels to France where he becomes a frequent visitor to French sculptor Auguste Rodin's studio. Then, he goes to Berlin, where he gets acquainted with the Symbolists and later he leaves for Italy. The archaic and medieval architecture in Florence, absolutely different from Rodin's modern style, fascinates him and he studies it with extraordinary zeal. Then he returns to Kristiania once again, where, in 1894, he presents his first personal art exhibition. In 1897, he takes over the restoration of the medieval Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim.

Between 1900 and 1910, he creates the busts of many distinguished Norwegians, such as Henrik Ibsen, Niels Henrik Abel, Henrik Wergeland and Camilla Collett, and establishes himself as the most talented Norwegian sculptor.

In 1921, he achieves an agreement with the municipality authorities in which they were to provide him with a building which not only will be his workshop, but also his residence. In exchange, after his death, he would bequeath the place to the Municipality. In 1924, he moves to his workshop, which he maintained until he died in 1943. According to his will, the urn containing his ashes is kept in the tower of this building. The workshop, which is a museum today, opened to the public in 1947. There can the visitor see his initial works, models and moulds of his works. In all, it contains about 1.600 sculptures, 12.000 drawings, and 420 wooden carvings.



Initial model of Vigeland's portrait (1942) made of plaster (Vigeland's Museum).

Vigeland's Park

At the heart of the Norwegian capital

Vigeland's Park is part of the Frognergaard. Frognergaard covers an area of 80 acres (0.32 km²) and is open to the public on a 24-hour free admission basis.

There are 214 sculptures in the park, amounting to 760 figures, some made of bronze and others of white granite. Most of the sculptures are life-size. The park was designed by the artist himself without anyone else's involvement.

Beautiful, high trees, such as birch, lime, chestnut and other trees, as well as colourful flowers, flowing waters and rich lawn adorn harmonically this unique park. It is also the life work of this significant sculptor, who was not so lucky as to see it as it is today. The park opened in 1947.

Every year more than 2 million people visit Vigeland's Park in Frogner. It constitutes a complement to the natural beauty of the city, which surrounds it, with Oslo's fjord, the dark blue sea, the hills and the evergreen forests.

The Bridge

Sculptures of the bridge.

Walking ahead from the Park entrance we get to the Bridge. On each of the four of its corners a column of white granite rises (1916–1917). A common characteristic is the giant dragon, symbol of Evil, but also a symbol we come across in the Scandinavian pre-Christian religion. In the three columns, the dragon is fought by a man, while in the right front one a maid is tempted and subdues to his arms. For the artist the man-dragon relationship implies not only the sexual but also the existential element.

The first composition is located on the Bridge, both to the left and right, and consists of 58 bronze sculptures (1926–1933). The Bridge is 100 metres in length and 15 metres in width. The sculptures, despite the dominant childlike element, portray individuals of all ages in moments of daily life, depict the relationship between man and woman, child and mother and especially between child and father, as well as grandchild and grandfather. There are scenes of calmness, affection, competition, but also scenes of violence and oppression.

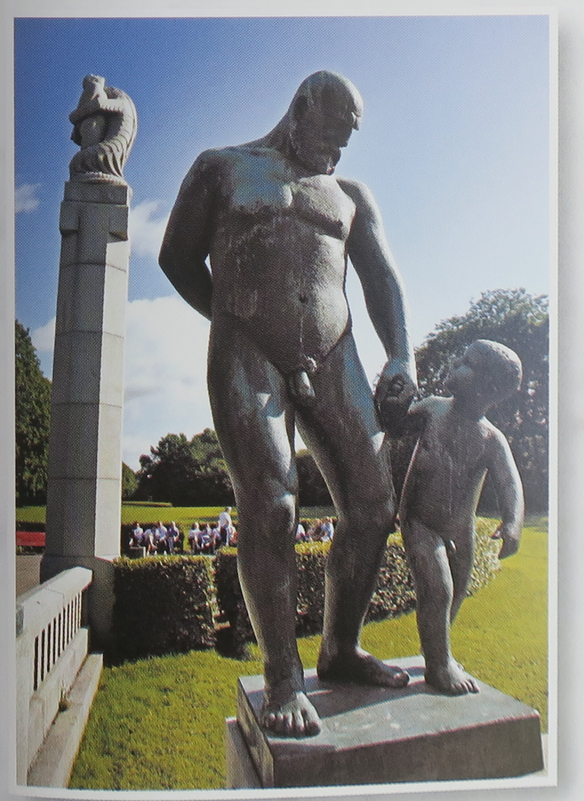
Our attention is drawn by the next two children's sculptures, the 'angry boy' (sinnataggen) and the 'sad girl'. These are characteristic expressions of anger, spite and sadness, common reactions through which Man has been endeavouring to impose on others since childhood.

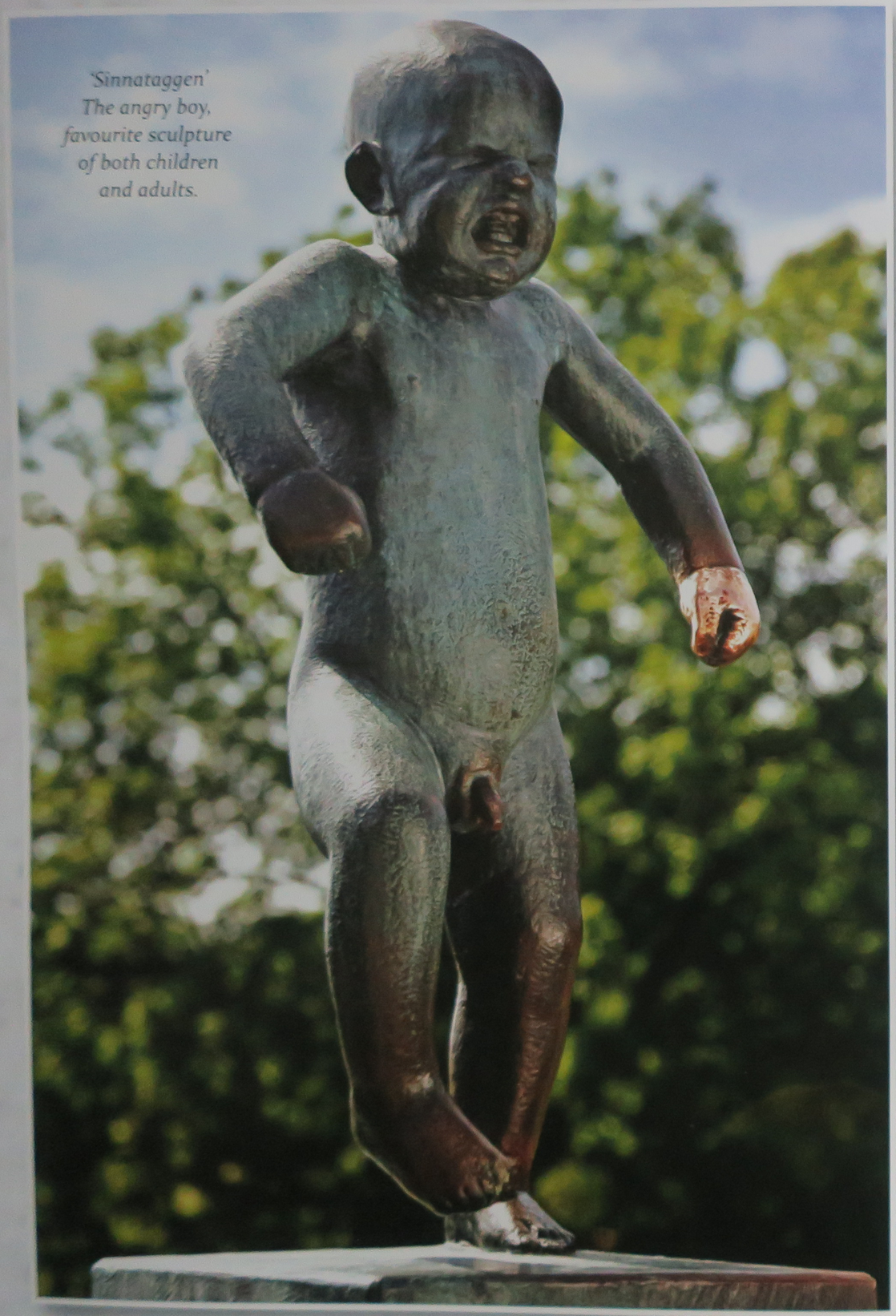
Most of the sculptures are so figurative that they are very easy for the visitor to interpret. However, they may have a symbolic meaning, just like the two circles, symbols of harmony, in the centre of the

Bridge. One of the circles presents the Man who does not compromise with the conventions of social life and struggles to break the bonds of restrictions. On the opposite side, the human couple rotates inevitably linked together by the continuous attraction of love and affection between the two sexes. Even stronger is the symbolism based on the eastern philosophy, the 'Yin-Yang', where the circle symbolizes the Whole, the Universe, which contains the Yang (light) and the Yin (dark).

Further down, on the southern side of the Bridge, there is a composition of sculptures in life-size, also of bronze. In the centre, on a base of granite, there stands the fetus (1923), ready to be delivered surrounded by eight sculptures (1940) depicting various development stages of infancy, such as the infant playing with its toes, raising its head, crawling, trying to stand up, etc.

Sculptures of the Bridge.

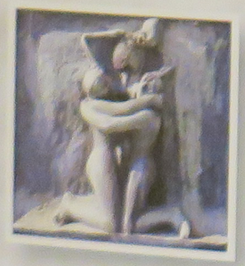


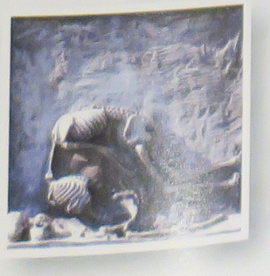


'Sinnataggen'
The angry boy,
favourite sculpture
of both children
and adults.

The Fountain

Infancy and childhood. Below: Carved in high relief figures around the Fountain.





Leaving behind the Bridge, the visitor comes through the fragrant, colourful roses to the Fountain, the oldest place of the Park. The Fountain was initially designed for positioning in front of the Parliament (Eidsvolls Plass).

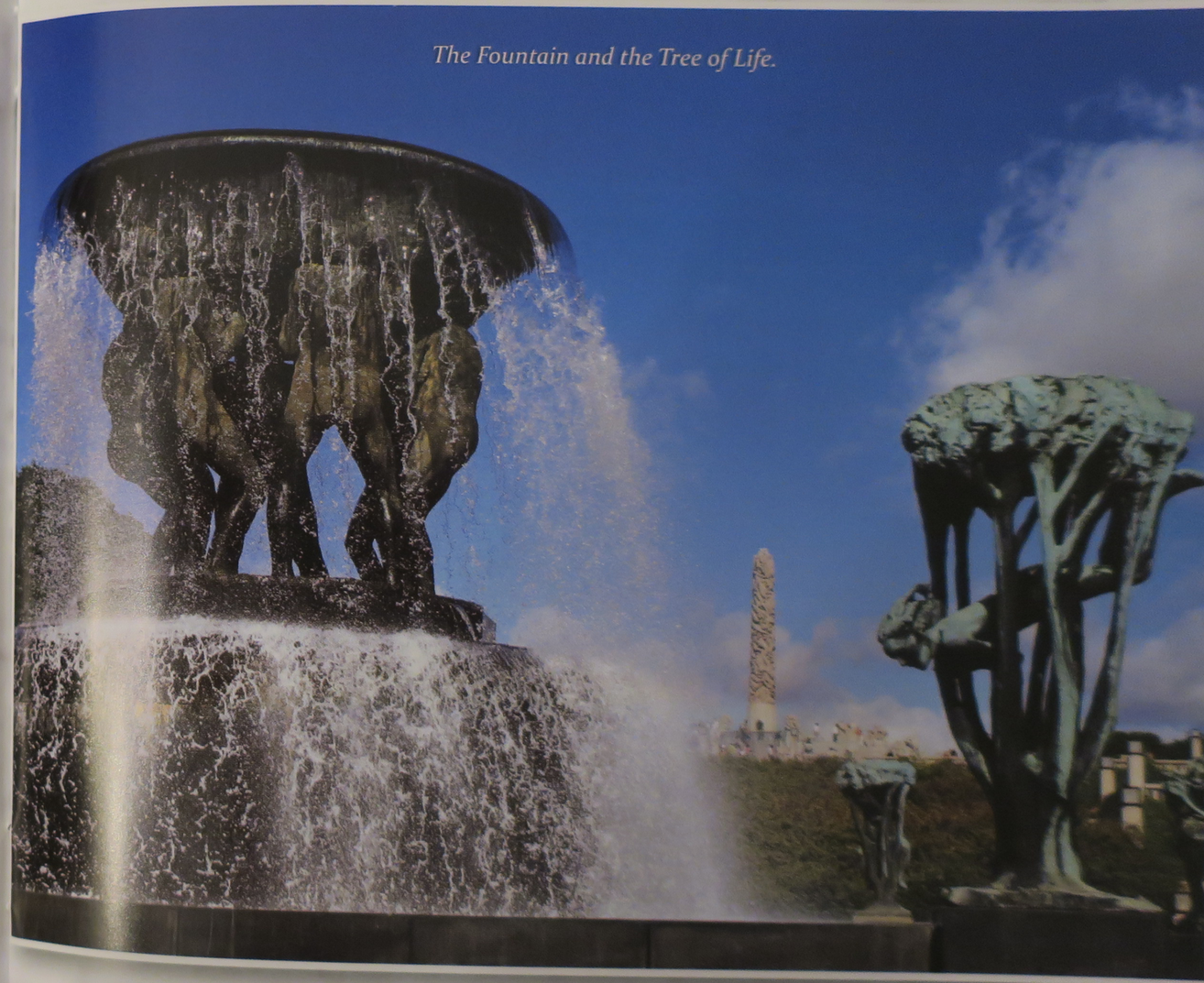
Six giant male bodies, of different ages, support the vessel, which symbolizes Man's personal struggle to endure the burdens of life. The Fountain is surrounded by a composition of 20 bronze sculptures which rise around it. Their main element is the Tree, each tree being 2 metres high, (p. 20) in combination with human figures.

Each corner refers to one of the four main

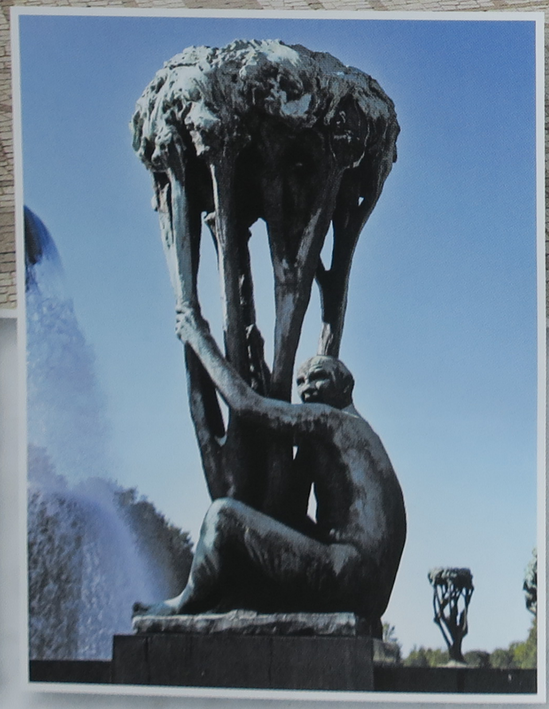
stages of Man's life, childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age, in this way completing the life cycle. The combination Tree – Man, even in the most surrealistic version, constitutes one of the most unique and authentic ideas of the creation.

On the outer wall surfaces, the total of sixty carved in high relief figures, symbolic scenes of Man's life and adventure, as well as of his relationship with the animals and the nature itself, completes the topic 'The Life Cycle'.

The Fountain and the Tree of Life.



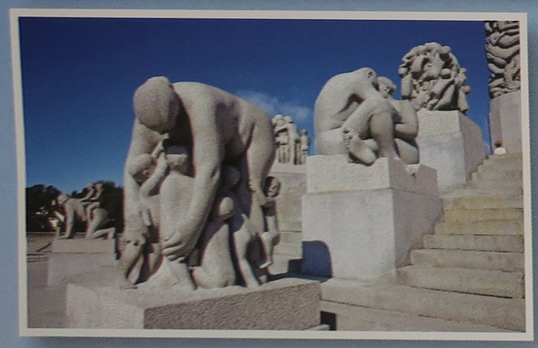
Showing around the Tree of Life.



The mosaic floor surrounding the Fountain represents a Labyrinth 'path' of a total length of 3.000 metres, created of white and black granite. It is a superb combination of four squares on each side, which are independent but, at the same time, interdependent.

Again Vigeland gives his own interpretation of the Labyrinth, making it with a separate entry to and exit from it. The Labyrinth is linked in a sense with the composition of the Tree of Life. Every person have their own inner labyrinth and wander through deadlocks, but with patience and perseverance they finally manage to find their way out and go on with their journey, that is, their destiny.

It took Vigeland only ten days to make the designs for the Labyrinth, which was inspired by the French cathedrals of Chartes and Amiens.



Monolith and Plateau with granite sculptures.

The Monolith

At the highest point of the Park you can see the Monolith.

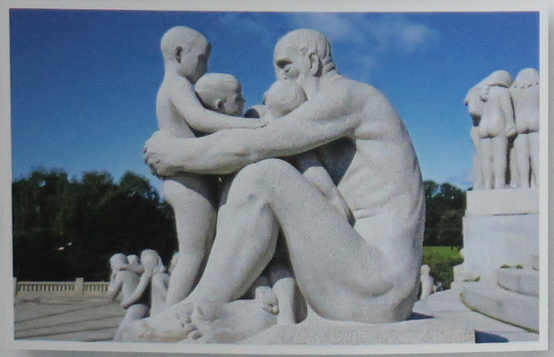
The column is seated on a base of about 3.20 square metres and its height reaches a total of 17.3 metres. Although Vigeland himself gave it the name 'Human Column', the name Monolith prevailed, as it consists of a one-piece white granite from Iddefjorden, nearby Halden, in the southeastern Norway. Vigeland prepared the original design during the period 1924–1925. The granite block was placed at the point where it stands today and for 14 years onwards three professional stone engravers worked on it. From that huge block, which initially weighed 180 tons, the Monolith was created. The sculpture was completed short before the artist's death. It is known that Vigeland, although a sculptor, worked mainly on the creation of the models of his artwork.

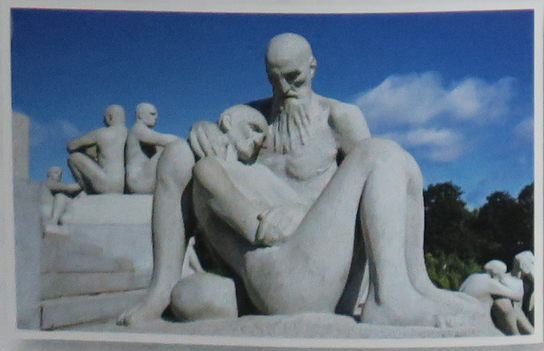
The Monolith includes 121 human figures individually or in groups, all of them carved in high relief. At the bottom of the composition the bodies lie totally inert and passive, while the bodies above them follow a spiral movement and struggle desperately to reach the top. There are many different interpretations with regard to the Monolith's symbolism, such as the Composition of Life, Man's Resurrection, the Phallic Symbol, the Struggle for Survival, etc. The obvious, however, is that Man is seen to struggle to climb up to the top, sometimes with passive indifference for his fellowmen, at other times showing solidarity, and sometimes striving desperately to continue the ascent towards hope and salvation. Here also, the artist is mindful of children and does not forget to place them on the top of the column, sending the message that children are the world's hope. Vigeland himself avoided giving interpretations regarding his work encouraging the visitors to explore their own imagination. However, he had said: 'The Monolith is my religion' (p. 26) and he lets us see

the metaphysical aspect of this subject. Perhaps this comment targets at two of his carved in high relief pieces 'Hell' and 'Resurrection', which he created during his youth.

The Plateau around the Monolith

The Monolith is surrounded by 36 white granite compositions (1915–1936) which refer to human home and social life. Each sculpture consists of at least two figures. Young children at joyful playing (nr. 11), small children enjoying riding on their mother's back (nr. 4), the young couple sitting face to face and protecting their offspring, the baby (nr. 2), the old man and the mischievous lads with the haughty contempt towards his disadvantageous state (nr. 14), the young couple in a moment of privacy (nr. 18), and in a tender moment, too (nr. 16), (p. 28), the old woman comforting the thoughtful and sad young man (nr. 28), the old couple in a tender

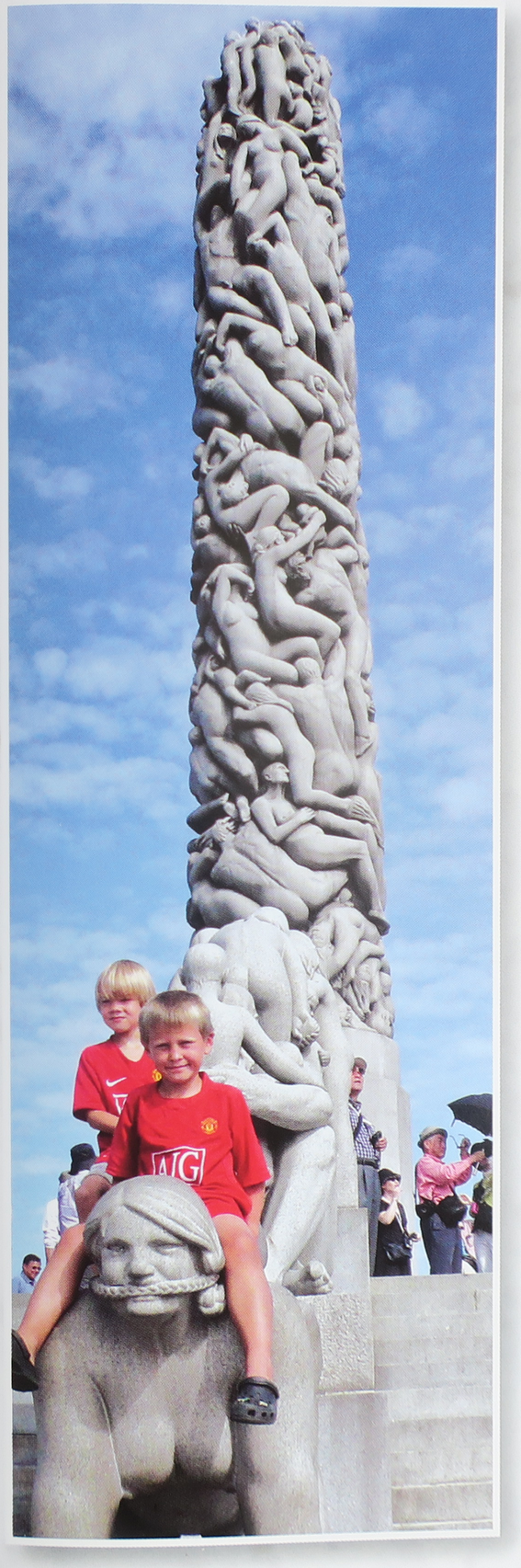




hug (nr. 32), the company of old women (nr. 31 and 35).

During the creation of this composition Vigeland is already quite old compared with his age on the creation of the Bridge composition, and this is the reason that many of his sculptures depict the third age. Elderly people either in the company of their peers or in couples or in groups of younger people and children stress this composition.

Despite the bulkiness of the sculptures and the difficulty in granite carving, the bodies do not lack in plasticity. Initially, the human figures were simple and almost attached to each other. But as time went on, the artist varied his composing style, providing not only more details, but also more room between them. Although Vigeland was a skilful sculptor, (p. 29) he persisted on making his drawings. And then he employed professional



carvers to convey the drawings onto the granite.

The Plateau and the Monolith are enclosed in eight iron gates, four of them being double and the rest four single, which present Man in all ages. The gates were designed between 1933 and 1937.

The Sun-Dial

Leaving the Monolith behind, the visitor goes down the few steps to the place where the Sun-Dial stands (1930). It is made of copper and bronze and was designed by the engineer Imset. The Sun-Dial was placed on a twelve-side white granite, and on each side we can see one of the signs of the zodiac cycle in high relief.

The Wheel of Life

The sculpture is made of bronze and stands on a granite column. It is the Wheel of Life (1933–1934). Seven bodies united, four adults and three children, move to circular orbit. It presents one generation succeeding the previous one, thus sending the message about the eternal renovation and the immortality of the human existence.

The Sun-Dial and its function. The shadow of the vertical axis shows 9:30 a.m.! The sun does its own circle ...

The Main Entrance

The main entrance is on the eastern side of the Park, on Kirkeveien (Church Street). It consists of the main iron-gate and two smaller ones on its left and right, all of them made of forged iron and decorated with lively motifs bound together harmonically. At the top of the gates, there are lanterns made during the 1930s when they replaced the original ones. The gates were made in 1926 and were installed in 1927. The main gate was destroyed in 1942 and was made again at the expense of the Bank of Norway.

Entering the Park through the main entrance you can see Vigeland's statue on the right. The artist is represented life-size in working clothes carrying the sculptor's tools. (Photo on page 35).

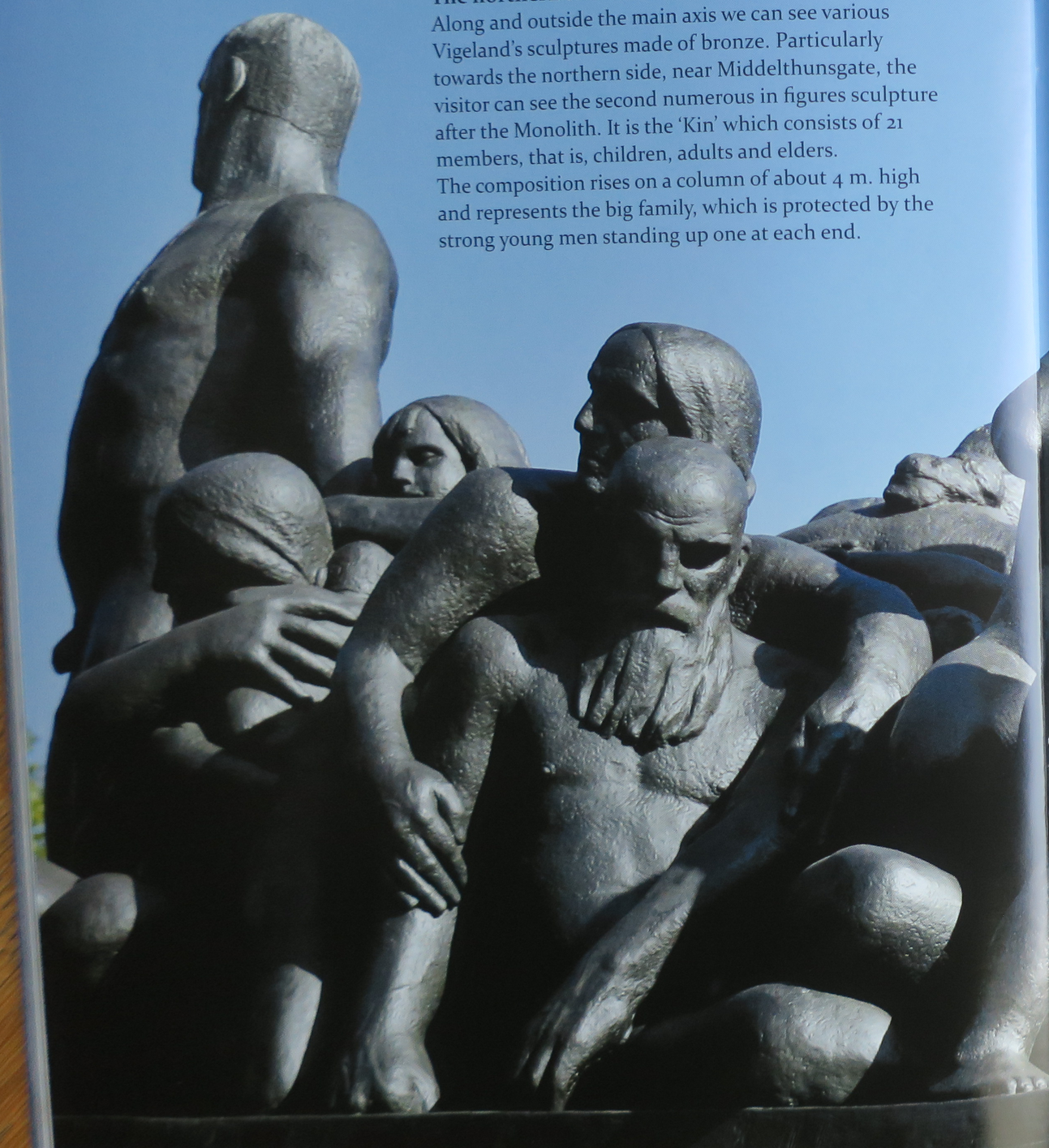
The forged iron gates with the various motifs together with the white granite compose an impressive picture of the Kirkeveien entrance.

Detail from gate with female figures.

Vigeland's statue at the main entrance of the Park

Sculptures outside the main axis

The northern side of the Park
Along and outside the main axis we can see various Vigeland's sculptures made of bronze. Particularly towards the northern side, near Middelthunsgate, the visitor can see the second numerous in figures sculpture after the Monolith. It is the 'Kin' which consists of 21 members, that is, children, adults and elders.
The composition rises on a column of about 4 m. high and represents the big family, which is protected by the strong young men standing up one at each end.



(p. 37) The rest of the family are sitting down with the mother protecting her children with both arms, the elder siblings taking care of the young ones, while the elders are huddled together. The artist's intention to convey the strong human instinct in protecting the mankind is very clear. The sculpture was designed by Vigeland between 1934 and 1936, but it remained in

The maid and the huge lizard coiled around her knees.

plaster until 1985 due to lack of funds. (p.39) In 1985, a fresh grant made possible the installation of the sculpture, as it is today, at the Park. The installation took place in 1988 according to the artist's original plan.

Near the second terrace, between the Fountain and the Monolith we can see the statue of a maid trapped by a cold huge lizard (1938).

The southern side of the Park
There is one more bronze sculpture between the Monolith and Vigeland Museum. The Triangle is composed of three bodies, where the two young girls fight with a young man. Further to the west a young girl struggles to hide her nakedness.

Oslo City Museum
Heading towards Vigeland Museum we walk past the Oslo City Museum, one of great historical interest. Walking along the south side of the museum and crossing Hvalvdan Svartes street, we reach Vigeland's Museum.

Vigeland's Museum

Vigeland's Museum (1924) is located in Frogner Park, outside the southwestern side of the Park, at 32 Nobels street. You can visit the Museum on week days, except on Mondays and on formal holidays. Admission is free only during the winter months (October-March), but the rest of the year you have to pay an admission fee.

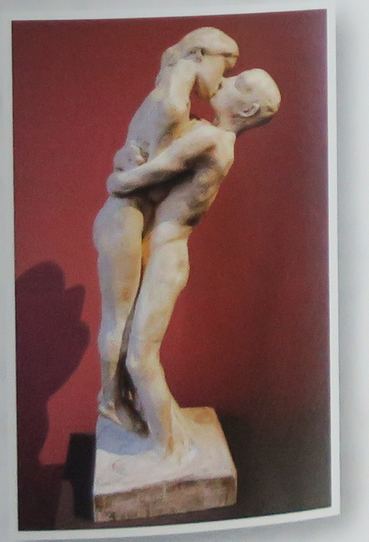
One of the most beautiful neo-classical buildings of Norwegian architecture hosts this unique sculpture museum. Here you can see some of the artist's first pieces of art. The museum's collection includes sculptures of bronze, marble and granite as well as statues and monuments of distinguished Norwegian people.

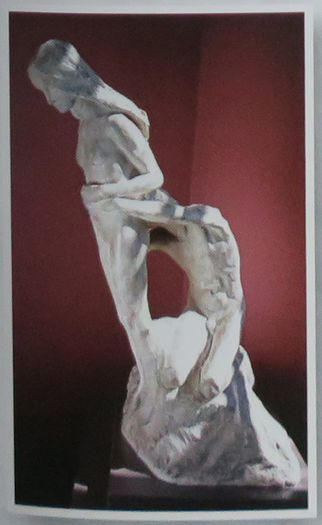
The visitor to the museum has the chance of seeing all the plaster models of the sculptures in the Park. Also you can have a look at photos of Vigeland's studio as well as at the tools he had been using to create his sculptures.

The urn containing the artist's ashes is kept in the tower of the museum.

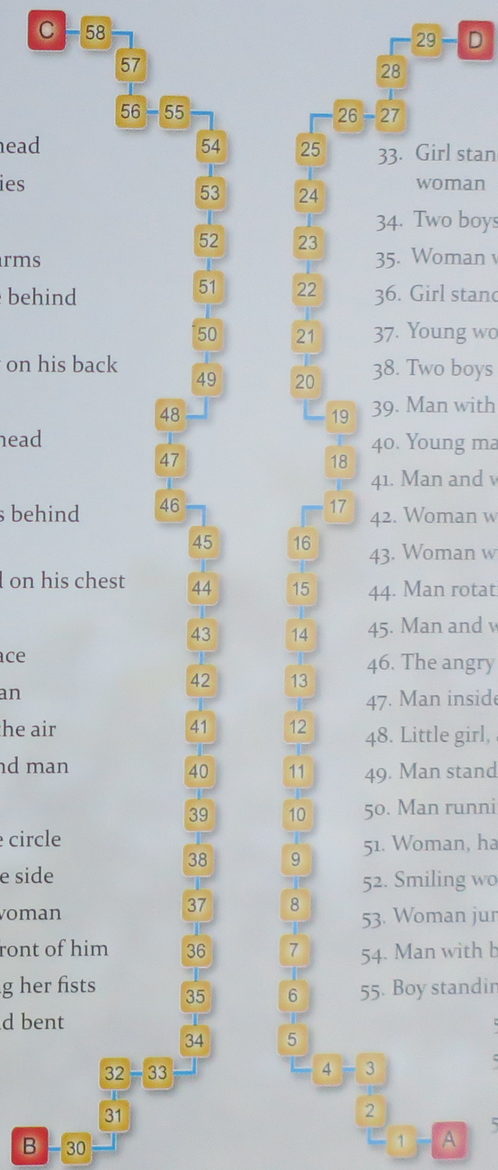
Left: Eros and Psyche, Right: The kiss p. 43, left below: Orpheus and Euridice, right: the model of the 'Sinnataggen'.

Many thanks to Vigeland's Museum for the kind permission to photograph the sculptures for this guidebook.





On the parapets of the bridge a total of 58 bronze sculptures, 1926–1933



1. Boy with baby on his head
2. Man carrying two babies
3. Man swinging boy
4. Woman with baby in arms
5. Two girls standing one behind the other
6. Man running with boy on his back
7. Girl facing woman
8. Girl with arms on her head
9. Man lifting woman
10. Young man with hands behind his back
11. Man with arms crossed on his chest
12. Old man hitting boy
13. Woman covering her face
14. Old man and young man
15. Man lifting woman in the air
16. Woman standing behind man
17. The smiling girl
18. Man and woman inside circle
19. Little boy looking to the side
20. Man standing behind woman
21. Man lifting woman in front of him
22. Young woman clenching her fists
23. Young woman with head bent to the left
24. Young woman dancing
25. Man with hands tied behind his neck
26. Man with baby around his neck
27. Man playing with four children (geniuses)
28. Elderly man walking with a child
29. Man with hands on his chest
30. Young woman with baby on her head
31. Woman with baby in her arms
32. Woman lifting baby
33. Girl standing back to back with woman
34. Two boys looking high up
35. Woman with sleeping baby in arms
36. Girl standing in front of woman
37. Young woman with hands behind
38. Two boys running
39. Man with hands on his hips
40. Young man with arms at his sides
41. Man and woman dancing
42. Woman with arms behind her back
43. Woman with arms at her sides
44. Man rotating woman above his head
45. Man and woman in confrontation
46. The angry boy
47. Man inside circle
48. Little girl, arms stretched out
49. Man standing behind woman
50. Man running
51. Woman, hands above her head
52. Smiling woman
53. Woman jumping onto a man
54. Man with baby in his arms
55. Boy standing in front of man
56. Man lifting older man
57. Elderly man with boy on his back
58. Man looking to the right

Corners of the Bridge:
Columns with the granite Dragon

A 1918 Dragon embracing woman
B ca. 1930 Man fighting small dragon
C 1918 Man fighting the Dragon
D 1930 Dragon clutching naked man

The Fountain – Plan of sculptures

Bronze 1906–1914

1. Swarm of babies (geniuses)
2. Boy sitting in a tree
3. Two boys climbing up a tree
4. Three girls around tree
5. Girl emerging from among tree branches
6. Girl with head sticking out of tree
7. Standing young couple, foreheads touching
8. Young man standing behind girl
9. Young man hugging young woman
10. Young man supports tree with his head
11. Woman sitting on an animal-like tree
12. Baby in the middle of tree
13. Man and woman with heads downwards
14. Man tied on tree
15. Man lifting up the babies (geniuses)
16. Man clinging to tree
17. Old woman with baby
18. Old man with small child
19. Old man sitting and clinging to tree
20. Death sitting in tree

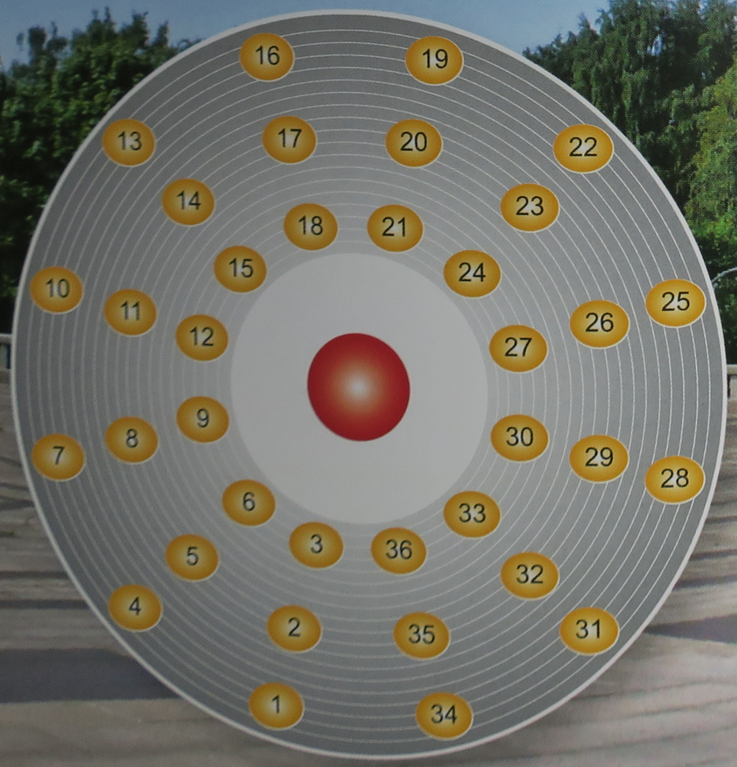
Bronze reliefs, 1906–1936

1. Small child on prehistoric animal's skull
2. Five small children carrying parts of a skeleton
3. Babies gliding in the air
4. Foal kicking small child
5. Two small children in the air above foal
6. Four small children playing with wolf
7. Five small children looking at bear-cub
8. Four boys walking hand in hand
9. Two girls tending a lamb
10. Boy looking at angry little boy
11. Two girls carrying a baby or babies (?)
12. Three boys fighting
13. Three standing boys turning their backs
14. Three girls dancing
15. Two girls with babies on their heads
16. Boy fighting an eagle
17. Two girls trying to calm down fighting children
18. Small girl standing on girl's knee
19. Boy touching girl's neck
20. Two girls lifting up a dwarf
21. Dwarf lifting up girl
22. Young man lying down
23. Young man holding young woman by shoulders
24. Boy and girl standing face to face
25. Woman lying on her back
26. Young man and young woman standing face to face
27. Young man and four gliding in the air babies
28. Old woman chasing young woman
29. Two girls making dance figures
30. Women (or woman?) sitting in horns of a reindeer
31. On sea bed, woman, babies and fish
32. Young woman riding a bear
33. Sleeping boy and woman gliding above him
34. Two young women gliding in the air
35. Elderly woman and young woman
36. Woman and unicorn

37. Recumbent baby
38. Woman between two men
39. Man between woman and young woman
40. Man and woman dancing
41. Woman kneeling behind seated man 'Consolation'
42. Kneeling man places baby on sitting woman's head
43. Woman between man and child
44. Man and woman with dead child
45. Man and woman gliding in the air
46. Old man kicking wolf
47. Obese man and frightened girl
48. Lying old man looking high up at two boys
49. Two seated men facing each other
50. Old man crawling on the ground, 'The hermit'
51. Old couple facing each other
52. Thin old man lying on his back
53. Old woman carrying two babies
54. Old woman blessing small boy
55. Emaciated old woman lying on her back
56. Death separating couple
57. Three men falling sideways
58. Five swinging human skeletons
59. Man's skeleton falling on woman's skeleton
60. Skeleton remains

Granite Sculpture compositions, 1915–1936

1. Bending woman embracing children
2. Man and woman with baby between them
3. Group of babies (geniuses)
4. Small boy and girl riding on woman's back
5. Elderly man with four children
6. Group of children
7. Five kneeling girls laughing (or four) (?)
8. Two smiling girls forming a bridge
9. Eight girls forming a ring
10. Boys fighting
11. Three girls lifting up a boy
12. Man putting his hand on boy's shoulder
13. Three kneeling boys looking up in the sky
14. Two boys teasing an imbecile man
15. Two young men sitting side by side
16. Young man bending down to seated woman
17. Kneeling young couple one behind the other
18. Young man and woman sitting back to back
19. Elderly woman dressing young woman's hair
20. Elderly woman blessing young woman
21. Young woman crouching behind man's back
22. Man lifting woman up violently
23. Young man and young woman sitting apart
24. Young couple sitting, foreheads touching
25. Kneeling young man embracing woman
26. Elderly man and smiling young woman
27. Two young women
28. Elderly woman touching compassionately young man's shoulder
29. Two men fighting
30. Two men sitting back to back
31. Two kneeling elderly women listening
32. Elderly woman in old man's arms
33. Two old men
34. Man lifting dead man
35. Three elderly women sitting in a row
36. Dead human corpses



On the northern side of the Park the composition 'the kin' from a different perspective.

Park Map

1. Main entrance
2. Tourist Information Office and Café
3. The Bridge
4. The Playground
5. The Fountain
6. The Kin
7. The Monolith
8. The Wheel of Life
9. Oslo City Museum
10. Vigeland's Museum
11. Parking Lot

How to get to Vigeland's Park

Main Entrance from Kirkeveien

Tram nr 12 to Vigeland's Park

Underground, all lines to Majorstuen