

«A Continuation»

Proposal for the National Memorial after July 22

By Matias Faldbakken

01. Introduction

My proposal is to create a public square sculpture at the site intended to serve as a National Memorial after July 22. The sculpture will stand on the 'city floor' in the government quarter as a monument. It will both be a gathering point for visitors and serve as a visual backdrop for ceremonies. The artwork should be a dignified remembrance of the deceased while also embodying much of the conflicted national history following the 2011 terrorist attack.

I have two sketch proposals. Both are based on reconstructing the large steel rig used to move Pablo Picasso and Carl Nesjar's work 'The Fishermen' from the demolished Y-block to the new A-block in the government quarter. In one version, the rig is filled with a monumental mosaic. In the other, the rig is transformed into a stained glass window.



Picasso's 'Fiskerne' (The Fisher Men) i the rig.

02. The Rig

The Y-block had to be demolished as part of the process of rebuilding the government quarter after the terrorist attack. However, the artwork 'The Fishermen' on the end wall was to be preserved. A red steel rig measuring 12 x 15 meters was constructed to facilitate the removal of the artwork from the building. While preparing for the move, the artwork, mounted in the rig, was exhibited for a long time, facing Akersgata.



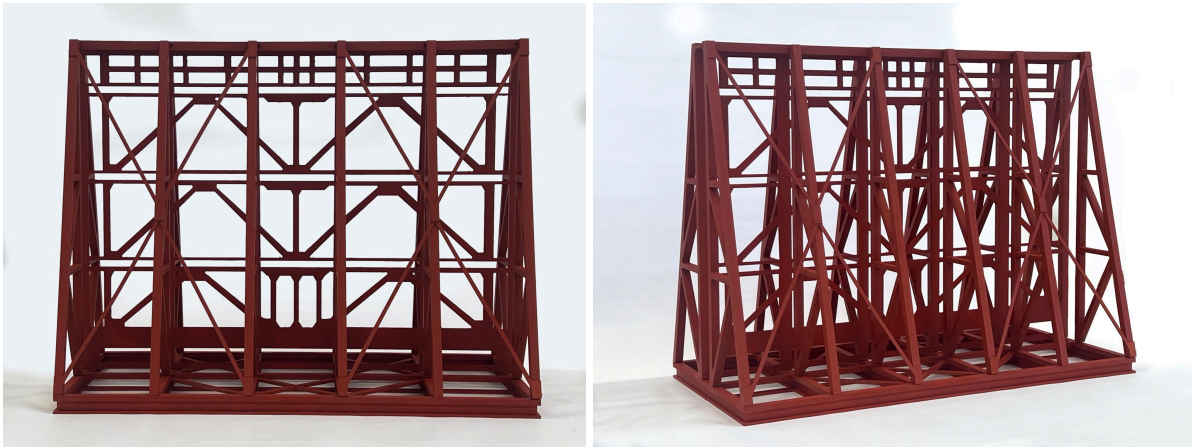
Picasso in the rig towards Akersgata

I often walk through Akersgata, and as long as Picasso's work stood in the rig, I would stop and look at it. The Picasso piece is a naive and feelgood line drawing of fishermen and fish in the sun, the rig was heavy, angled, and structural. The beams and braces crisscrossed the motif and partially covered it. The rig was a vast cage, or exoskeleton — a harsh addition to the sunny drawing.

To me, the rig increasingly appeared as a significant object from the transitional phase between the old and new government quarters. Here, we literally had a tool for rearranging our shared values. The rig had the terrorist act as its tragic *raison d'être* and it stood there as an involuntary monument to the shocks the community experienced on July 22 and the time that followed. It was a clear symbol of democracy as an eternal construction site. An unintended public square sculpture had already been a part of the cityscape in Oslo for a long time.

But in addition to being an image of the political conflicts that followed the terrorism, I began to see that the rig also expressed preservation, solicitude. For, in all its brutality, it was a large crutch. The rig was literally a support apparatus, speaking a clumsy language of care. I saw the form of a care mechanism. In the broadest sense, the rig could be seen as a kind of embrace.

The rig expressed upheaval on a monumental scale, but also preservation on a monumental scale. It was dual. It was disturbing, practically, like a blockage or an enclosure. But it was also solid. Stable and safe. Functional. Visually, it was a pragmatic abstraction, forced out by the processes after July 22. Figuratively speaking, one could say it displayed the structure of a collective trauma.



Scale model of empty rig

My initial idea for the memorial was therefore to reconstruct the rig and keep it as a historical object from these years of conflict, innovation, and reconstruction. (The rig must be rebuilt as Statsbygg had already sold the steel before the competition application. I have Statsbygg's drawings.) What had been a somewhat undignified resting place for 'The Fishermen' could be turned into something meaningful. The rig could also help write a historical narrative in the quarter, from Henrik Bull's old G-block, over Erling Viksjø's High block, via the shattered VG-display from the very moment of the blast, through the absent Y-block — and to the forward-looking new buildings.

Bulls gamle G-blokk, over Viksjøs høyblokk, via VG-monteret fra selve dagen, gjennom den fraværende Y-blokka – og til de fremtidsrettede nybyggene.

The rig is also an enormous picture frame. A frame is an object that does not belong to the artwork itself — what is called the *ergon* — but to the surrounding, the *parergonal*. And regarding the idea for a memorial, I paraphrased Stian Grøgaard for myself:

The rig is not what the place is about, but it can be what the place is for.

But how did the rig relate to the new government quarter's four key words: lasting, dignified, beautiful, and friendly? This had to be adjusted with new content.

03. Mosaic

In 2022, I unveiled the monumental mosaic 'Skyldner' at a rest area along the National Tourist Route in Rondane, consisting of 26,000 stones in light and dark granite. The mosaic monumentalized an intimate, small charcoal drawing I had made of a bust.



'Skyldner' in Rondane

When I saw the site for the memorial in front of the High block, I immediately thought that a mosaic could be appropriate for this place. One could say that placing thousands of unique stone fragments side by side, so that they form a unified image — a stable, durable unit — could be meaningful in the government quarter, and in itself, an image of democracy: No whole without all the pieces playing in.

The stone mosaic is one of the oldest forms of imagery we have. Throughout history, the mosaic has been called "painting for eternity." It originated in the Middle East several thousand years ago and developed further around the Mediterranean. The mosaic survives volcanoes, fires, and earthquakes precisely because it is already fragmented. The ancient technique of mosaic is also acutely contemporary: The premise of arranging small monochrome elements in rows to form a readable whole is the same for a digital screen as for an antique stone mosaic.

An interesting thing that happens with drawing in mosaic, if you let the stones follow the lines in the traditional way, is that the inactive areas around the motif become activated. The dynamics between the lines, the spaces, and the individual stones become visually productive. The foreground/background hierarchies are blurred and this also makes sense, figuratively.



Example of organic pattern in antique mosaic. Notice how background and surrounding space follows the shapes and makes the whole image active.

I pictured a "high-resolution" stone mosaic of a line drawing standing vertically inside the steel rig. Not a floor, as in Rondane, but a wall. A simple, yet monumental image in a frame, 11 meters high and 15 meters wide. An organic mosaic against an angled rig. The "eternal" mosaic representing the opposite of the (construction site-like) temporariness of the rig. By the way, line drawing is already established as part of the visual identity of the government quarter with Picasso, Nesjar, and the other artists represented in the old buildings. A mosaic could also, on multiple levels, engage in dialogue with Jumanna Manna's stone collage to the left of Lindealleen (which also addresses democratic representation).



Antique mosaic in the rig as an example of organic pattern and industrial steel. Human figur for measurement

I thought of changing the color of the rig, both to tone down the industrial feel and to shift the impression to something new and constructive. I would also set the lines in red stone to enhance the

drawing's strength. I imagined using smaller stones than I used in Rondane (which were 10x10 cm). For full effect, the drawing requires a formidable effort of craftsmanship. Reducing the stone size to 3x3 cm results in about 180,000 stones. Reducing to 2x2 cm means almost half a million stones. One must envision myriads of stones, an extremely elaborate stone wall, a rippling image, based on an intimate hand drawing. The mosaic could become an attraction in itself.

As for the backside, the mosaic must be set in a steel frame. This can be painted in a different color so that, in addition to the drawing on one side, the impressive structural abstraction of the engineers on the backside is also highlighted — a visual homage to all those who handle the practical implementation of political decisions daily.



Examples of coloured rigs and 'abstraction' on the back side

Hammersborg is a relatively colorful area, with the red Trinity Church, the green Deichman, the greenish Margaret Church (copper spire), the blue Obos blocks behind and the red Supreme Cour on the other side. I believe the coloring of the mosaic, the rig, and the backside can draw on the colors from the historical architecture in the area. Overall, the work becomes a sculpture, an image, and a small piece of architecture at the same time.

Regarding placement, I am open to discussing the best location within the designated area and in which direction it should face to best function on the square and against the surroundings.

04. Motif

Since the rig deals with the realities in the city, I thought the mosaic's motif should point outwards, be a bridge to Utøya — the other crime scene — and function as a window towards Tyrifjorden. A portal between the political complexes centrally and the broader surroundings of our country. Possibly towards the smaller, more invisible elements; it could focus on the things that, with their everyday naturalness, represent what we have but could also easily lose. What is unassuming and indispensable at the same time.

The motif should be something a child would notice.

I initially focused on the natural elements in and around Tyrifjorden. The original idea was to draw a portrait of a specific tree that stood on Utøya, a pine, a symbol from Tyrifjorden, an archetypal Norwegian growth and one of the silent witnesses to the events that occurred there. This proved difficult; the image became generic and seemed trite. I drew birch and heather and sketched the blue anemone and wood anemone that bloomed when I was on the island in April. I continued to draw most of the fauna in the area. Life in the sea is a typical motif in classical mosaics, and the next idea was to align myself with that tradition. I drew everything from local crayfish, perch, and pike to whitefish, bream, crucian carp, smelt, and three-spined stickleback.

It wasn't easy. Most sea creatures become symbolically heavy in depiction, no matter how small or overlooked they are.

I shifted to birds. I saw a goldfinch while I was on the island, and it made an impression. Birds are a much used image of spirit, soul – a metaphysical lift. The bird has a body that somehow comes into contact with the beyond.

As an artistic motif, however, it quickly becomes generic. Then I found a nice bird that resides in Tyrifjorden: the Greenshank. It is a small wading bird typical for the inland area of Norway. But it is also a migratory bird and can just as well be a southern European, an Asian, or come from south of the Sahara. I sketched it and liked the expression. One can imagine a ten-meter-tall greenshank – light, wary, and unassuming – balancing on thin legs over the government square, supported by the rig. The smallest and most fragile, monumentalized in a hundred thousand stones. It has a direction and a gaze. And again, a silent, non-human witness, making a wordless assessment of what we represent with ourselves, right in the center of democracy and power.



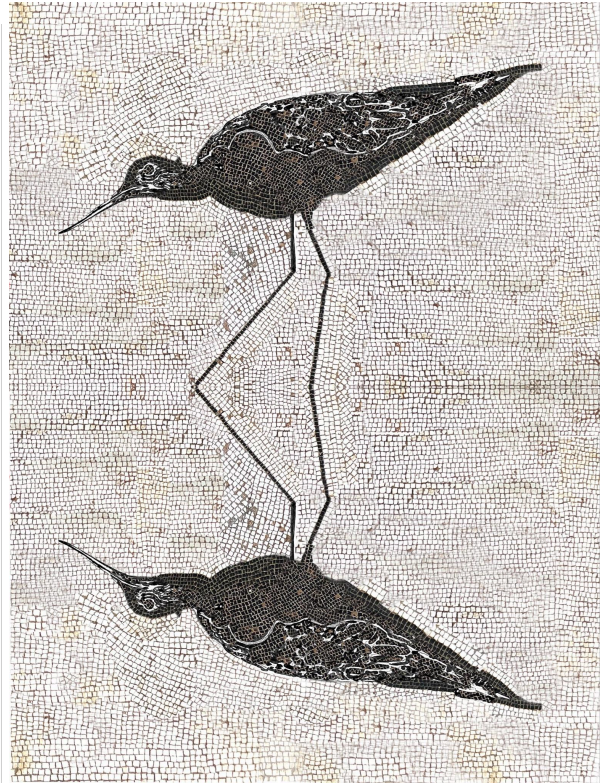
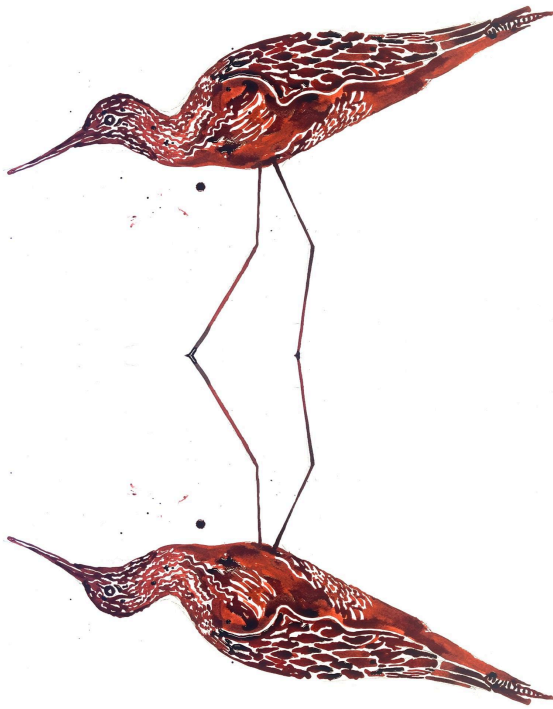
Drwaing of Greenshank in red ink

One of the days I was on the island, it was perfectly still. In all directions, there was a spectacular reflection in the water — sky and earth flowed into each other and became one. The elements completely enveloped the island in an incredible double light, coming from both above and below.



Reflection in the Tyri fjord seen from Utøya

I transferred this reflection onto the greenshank. It became an image, almost an emblem, expressing stillness and calm. But with a duality. As if in every world, there is also an upside-down world, a situation where the horizon line disappears in a strange overexposure. Where each peaceful bird is followed by a counter-bird.



Reflected Greenshank in red ink and as mosaic sketch

I made various versions. A bird and a more emotional abstraction in combination, both mirrored. A silent witness and a perspective shift. A living being and an abstract pattern. This version, I think, has something.

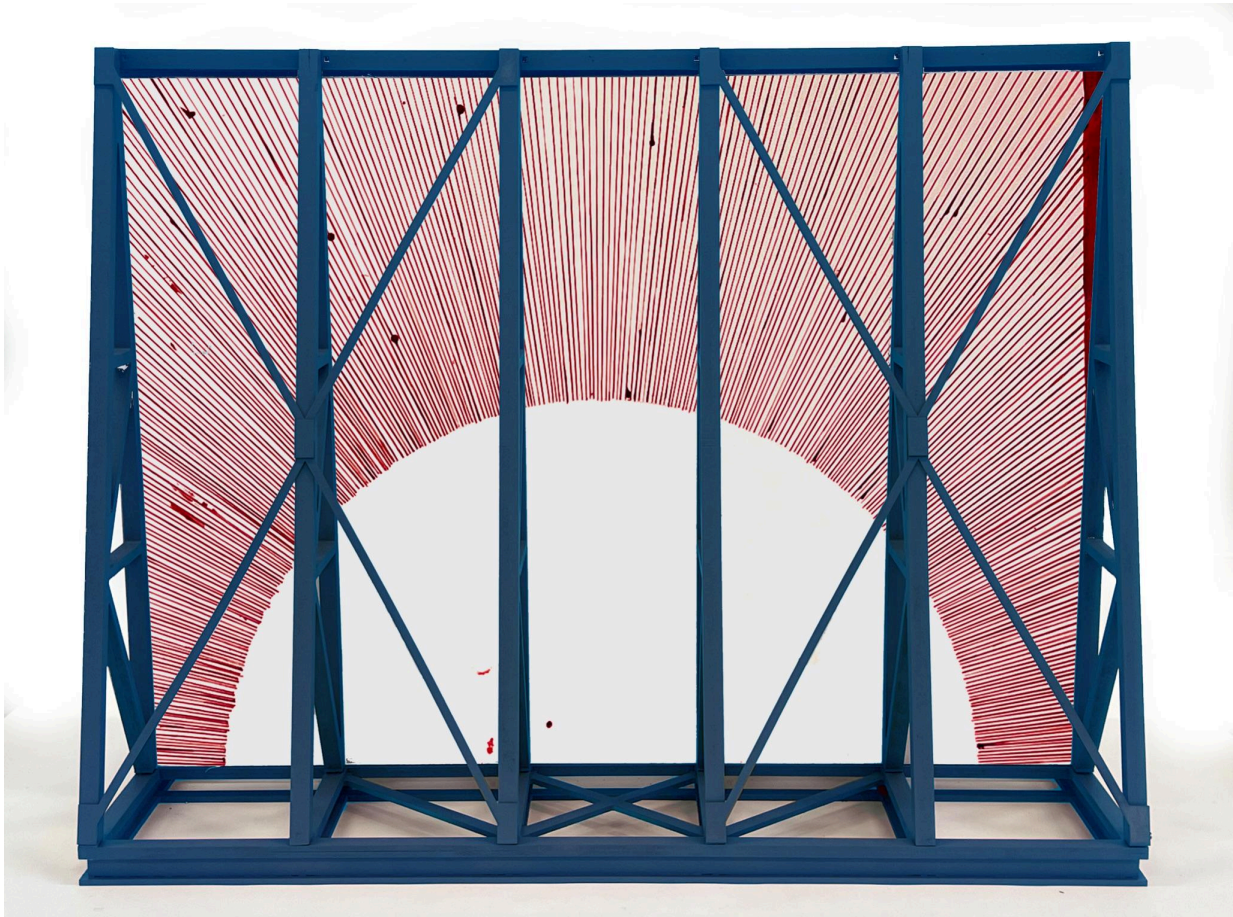


Scale modell with drwaing in red and black ink. Human figures for measurement

But I was still unsure whether the motif would last in the right way.

The reflection motif holds an experience of a smooth water surface and light. A double light – I thought more and more about the exceptional light conditions I had experienced on Utøya, and whether it would be possible to represent this light in a stone image.

I found an older drawing of something that could resemble a tunnel or a sun with rays. Such a motif of rays could work. Power. Light. A memorial as a life-affirming presence instead of an absence-oriented void. Munch's 'The Sun' is swaying behind here, possibly also the playful, jagged sun in the corner of Picasso's 'The Fishermen'.



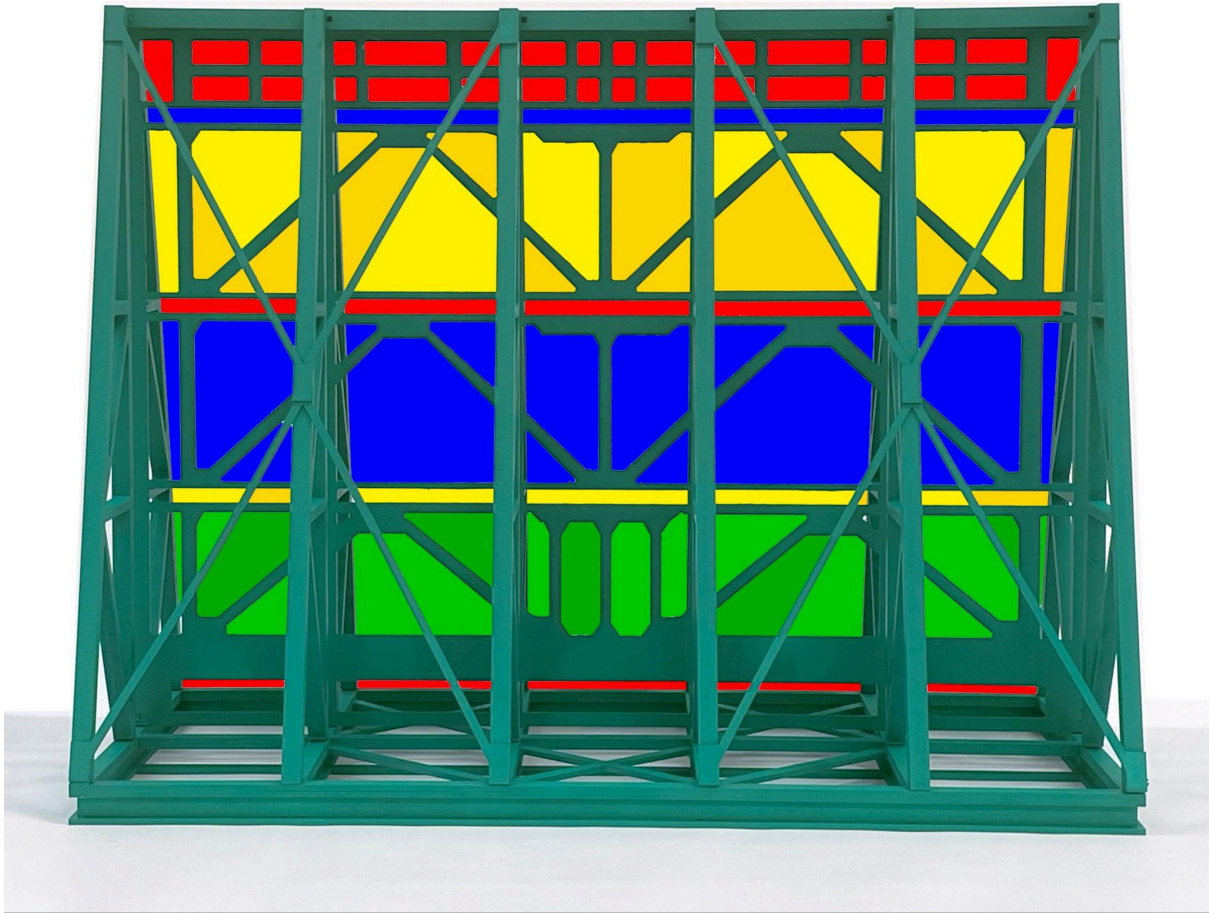
Drawing of sun/tunnel in red ink - you have to imagine this as classic mosaiv as shown above

05. Glass / light

A stone mosaic in a rig in the government quarter as a window towards Tyrifjorden and beyond, I still think is a decent idea. I would like to work more on the motif, preferably in dialogue with all involved.

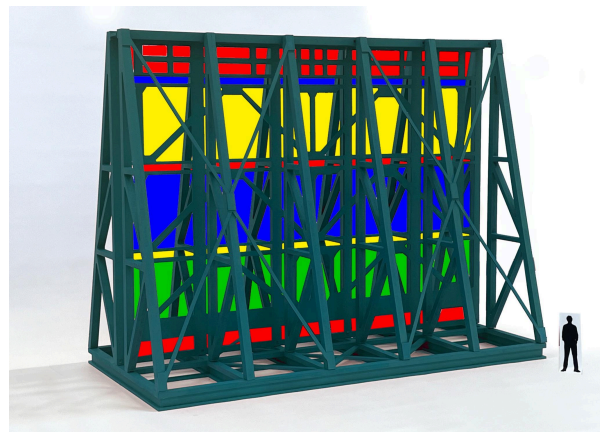
Then my wife, Ida, said something about it being nice to be able to see through the rig so that it is no longer a barrier but a literal window. I went back to the drawing board one last round and began thinking of the rig as a window frame.

An alternative idea came: The differently shaped openings in the rig, between the front and back sides, are window openings. If one places colored glass in them, like stained glass, then light will be the actual motif, and the rig a frame for the light itself.



Scale model with glass painting in primary colours

Such a setup would create light play on sunny days. Colored light would still shine on darker days. One would see the surroundings in the government quarter as through a filter. One alternative is pure, vibrant primary colors in abstract composition. Another is to grade the glass, like a sunrise over Tyrifjorden. The possibilities are many.



Sunrise and primary colours in composition

06. Conclusion

Instead of designing a square or an environment, I have always thought I would create an artwork to those who perished on July 22, and their bereaved. My proposal is therefore also a question: Can this rig uphold what is worth holding up?

Whether it becomes a mosaic gathering myriads of unique stones into a small, yet large motif, or with the rig as a frame for stained glass, hopefully, this work can stand there as a preservation of the light of the 77 people who were taken from us on July 22, 2011.

Their names will be engraved in the bottom beam of the structure holding this light up. For the light that was taken from us that day is, strangely, the same light we have to move forward with in the time to come.

