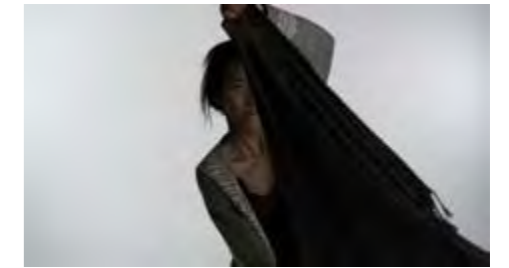


The THIEF: Hotel Art Redefined

By Nathalie Salas

A visit to The Thief Hotel in Oslo results in an intriguing array of Contemporary art. Nathalie Salas reports.



Another art hotel. Yes, we have read about so many hotels that promote themselves as the place to stay for those who love everything about art. However, most of the time they are hotels that just happen to have art in them – a kind of afterthought that usually ends up looking like a dog’s dinner. With art, there needs to be passion: A deeply rooted desire to bring art to the forefront of everything, and a willingness to add an element of risk into the mix.

You could call Petter A. Stordalen a risk taker. He is one of Scandinavia’s most successful business persons, worth – according to the Forbes World’s Billionaires list – an estimated \$1.2 billion. Named as the most successful strawberry seller in Norway at the age of 12, his talent for business and entrepreneurship has helped him to successfully build a large portfolio of property development investments, including 170 hotels under his Nordic Choice Hotels group. When Stordalen was asked whether he wanted to develop a hotel on Tjuvholmen (Thief Island), a new cultural and urban development in Norway’s capital of Oslo, he knew that it needed to be different from the majority of mid-size chain hotels that already existed in the city.

The consequential opening of The Thief hotel earlier this year has been the result of Stordalen’s creative vision to not only make art the catalyst of the hotel experience, but to create a synergy with the arts and culture lifestyle that has been cultivated on the island. It is ironically located on Thief Island – once a home to criminals and shady dealings, and now a power center for Contemporary art and good city living at the water’s edge.

“Art is what defines the experience of The Thief.”

Petter A. Stordalen



“Art is what defines the experience of The Thief,” says Stordalen, “and all of this hard work has truly come from the heart.” Conveniently, the hotel’s next-door neighbor is the Renzo Piano-designed Astrup Fearnley Museum of Contemporary Art. Therefore, it made perfect

sense for Stordalen to become the sole sponsor of the museum, making The Thief possibly the only hotel in the world that has dedicated itself to Contemporary art through this form of collaboration.

To go one step further, Stordalen appointed the renowned Swedish art historian, Sune Nordgren, as The Thief’s curator. Mostly known for his time as the director of the National Museum in Oslo, Nordgren has assembled a combination of art for the hotel, using works from Stordalen’s own personal collection, as well as art borrowed from Astrup Fearnley. “The term ‘hotel art’ has been associated with bad taste, mass production and random positioning,” says Nordgren. “Redefining hotel art is about giving the guests quality experiences, using reflection and perhaps changing their perception of reality for a brief moment.”

Whether it is contemporary, controversial or both, art at The Thief is geared for viewing by guests. Each of the 119 rooms, including six junior suites, is decorated with carefully curated individual art that has been curated by Nordgren. They include works by a number of leading artists from around the globe, including Sir Peter Blake, Magne Furuholmen, Kjell Nupen and

Left: A view of Richard Prince’s 1999 inkjet on canvas work *Cowboy - The Horse Thief* in the Thief’s lobby. Image courtesy of Studio Dreyer Hensley.

Above, left to right: Charlotte Thiis-Evensen. *Untitled*. Three screen video installation, 2011. Location: Entrance of hotel restaurant Fru K. Images courtesy of Charlotte Thiis-Evensen.



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Christopher Jensen. “We chose from established international artists and the best Norwegian ones, primarily in photography and graphic art,” explains Nordgren. Standard bad-taste porn-on-demand has also been replaced with art-on-demand and interactive themed maps that take guests on a curated tour of the neighborhood’s design, architecture and art, as well as alternative Oslo culture, creating another dimension to the positive experiences at the hotel.

The Thief cost more per room to build than any other hotel in Scandinavia. This definitely shows in its impressive design and quality, which is based on well-balanced interaction between local Scandinavian design and international preferences. Each room has its own balcony and guests are treated to custom-made ‘his n’ her’ woolen slippers as well as extremely warm and luxurious bathrobes that were created by the Norwegian fashion designer Maggie Wonka.

Of particular attention is the Apparatjik suite. It is not the biggest or the most posh of suites, but it is certainly the quirkiest. “Treating guests like rock stars and rock stars like guests is why we invited super band Apparatjik to give them free reign in designing one of our suites,” says Stordalen. A collective of international music artists – formed in 2008 by Jonas Bjerre of the Danish band Mew, Guy Berryman of Coldplay, Magne Furuholmen of a-ha and music producer Martin Terefe – Apparatjik is not only a group of talented artists, but also über-experienced hotel guests. “We wanted to design a space which would make the person staying there smile and shake their head a little at the same time,” says band member Furuholmen. In addition, as it is well known that rock stars can trash hotel



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Sune Nordgren



rooms in periods of excess, Apparatjik has done just that in their own distinct way.

There are shining disco-ball textiles, pixel-patterned blankets and a roof-mounted projector showing Apparatjik’s video art on the bed. If that wasn’t enough of a clue, then the disco balls in the bathroom and lounge leave you in no doubt about who is responsible for the interiors. The suite is also decorated with eight prints signed by the super group.

Every flat surface, niche, corridor and elevator in The Thief has been used to create a sensory impression for guests. Even before entering the hotel, a cast-iron sculpture by Antony Gormley lies as if in a prostate prayer position, aligned towards the direction of Mecca. Once inside the lobby, there is a towering cowboy taming his horse by American artist and photographer Richard Prince. It depicts the ideology of American masculinity and portrays substance, strength and fearlessness.

Even in the elevators, guests are entertained for a brief moment by British visual artist Julian Opie. These exclusively made animated films feature Joo Yeon contemplating her imminent wedding and Italian female entrepreneur Marina Deserti gracefully poised in a purple shawl.

Positioned in the entrance of Fru K, the hotel’s restaurant is a thought provoking video installation by Norwegian artist Charlotte Thiis-Evensen. Aestheticizing the concept of individual freedom, Thiis-Evensen displays three Somalian sisters taking their hijab on and off. Representing a crucial turning point in their lives, these women are faced with a genuine choice of whether they should continue to wear their hijabs, knowing the consequences that this choice will have on them as they enter adulthood. Although there is no intended moral or political message, this work of art certainly illustrates the ongoing social debate surrounding the wearing of the hijab within Muslim communities across the globe.

The art experience at The Thief has been carefully curated. What is more is that the works on display heighten the viewer’s curiosity as well as play with the concept of unpredictability through a continuous exchange of artworks with its next-door neighbor, the Astrup Fearnley Museum. The fast-moving modern traveler, searching for ‘something different,’ will certainly find it here – a hotel stay that provides at once the intrigue and enchantment of a work of Contemporary art. ♦

For more information visit thethief.com

Left: Peter Blake. *World Tour Norway - Norwegian Dancers with Native Americans*. Collage 2012. Location: Oslo Suite. Image courtesy of Studio Dreyer Hensley.

Above: Sune Nordgren, Art Curator. Image courtesy Sune Nordgren.