

Deborah Bell Photographs

Dag Alveng: Photographs from Telemark

September 12-November 2, 2024

Deborah Bell Photographs will present ***Dag Alveng: Photographs from Telemark***, an exhibition of large-scale black-and-white photographs the artist made in Norway's scenic Telemark region from 2020-2021. The exhibition will be on view from September 12-November 2, 2024.

In 2015, the historic Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site in Telemark, Norway, was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List. Soon afterward, the Telemark Kunstmuseum commissioned Dag Alveng to create an exhibition and accompanying catalogue of photographs to celebrate the preservation of this important territory. Five of those photographs comprise the current exhibition.

Telemark is a large county in southern Norway that stretches from the mountains to the North Sea. Not only is this idyllic terrain the seat of Norway's technological progress and economic expansion in the first half of the 20th century; it also marks the site of Norway's spectacular achievement in preventing possible atomic disaster during World War II.

Alveng travelled throughout Telemark's various municipalities -- Fjone, Nesland, Notodden, Rjukan, and Tinn -- where he photographed its stunning terrain of clear lakes, broad rivers, deep gorges and cliffs, and its magnificent waterfalls, nature's stage for this incredible story of industrial development.

The prints in this exhibition are large-scale, measuring 49 x 60" (120 x 150 cm). Faithful to the analog tradition, Alveng exposes his images on sheet film using an 8 x 10" Deardorff view camera. His negatives are developed by hand, and his prints are made on gelatin-silver fiber paper using an 8 x 10" enlarger and processed in a wet darkroom. As a result, his photographs have luminous presence.

Some history about Telemark and its importance as a World Heritage Site:

A key character in Alveng's photographic narrative of Telemark is the Norwegian energy company Norsk Hydro, which was founded in Telemark in 1905 and is still in operation today. Aided by the natural gift of Telemark's forceful waterfalls, Norsk Hydro built many power stations, voltage masts, water stations, and dams throughout the region during the first quarter of the 20th century, thus converting flowing water into energy and electricity. Among its earliest achievements was processing nitrogen at its plant in Notodden (now Hydro Industrial Park) for the creation of mineral fertilizer, an invention that changed food production worldwide and transformed the economy of Norway. In 1911, Norsk Hydro opened Vemork, just outside of Rjukan, a town nestled against a cliff in a deep valley about 2-1/2 hours west of Oslo. One of the first hydroelectric power plants and the largest in the world at that time, this majestic building, designed by the Norwegian architect Olaf Nordhagen, now houses the Norwegian Industrial Workers Museum, where the hydroelectric generators remain visible but are no longer in use.

Soon after Germany occupied Norway in April of 1940, during World War II, the Germans discovered that the Norsk Hydro plant in Vemork was the only source for "heavy water" (water that contains the heavy isotope of hydrogen called deuterium) in the world. Knowing that the heavy water could be used to create an atomic bomb, the Nazis overtook Vemork and began sending the water to Germany by train for chemical treatment. In February 1943, seven Norwegian volunteer soldiers who are now immortalized in textbooks, literature, and films as *The Heroes of Telemark* (also the title of a Hollywood

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movie starring Kirk Douglas) risked their lives in a clandestine nighttime sabotage mission known as *Operation Gunnerside* to destroy the heavy-water room of Vemork. Their incredible success in thwarting the Nazis from reaching their deadly goal is crucial to the lasting international significance of Telemark's Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site.

In Alveng's richly rendered photographs, traces of the mighty fortress of Vemork, seen from a distance, punctuate the dense mountainside forests of Rjukan. Alveng pays close attention to intricate details of the industrial apparatus inside and outside Vemork, including the vertiginous cascade of water pipes descending into the building and the room where the heavy water was processed. As the Norwegian author Amalie Kasin Lerstang explains in her catalogue essay, "Heavy Water and Deep Valleys,"

[Norsk Hydro] was the beginning of the industrial adventure that would spread throughout the rest of Norway. Dammed-up water, once released, was deadly. ... Alveng offers a dynamic and contradictory representation of what this region is made of -- landscape that has been tamed, regulated, restrained, and capitalized upon. ... Alveng's photographs do not constitute a polemic between nature and industry. Rather, they reflect on how these two magnitudes stand in relation to one another and are of equal value.

Dag Alveng was born in Oslo in 1953. He gave up his medical training to study photography at Trent Polytechnic in Nottingham, England, under Thomas J. Cooper, Paul Hill, and Christopher Seiberling from 1975-1976. In 1977, with Tom Sandberg, Alveng founded the Fotogalleriet in Oslo, one of the first photography galleries in Scandinavia. As Alveng explains, "We wanted to bring important work to Norway, and showed people like Diane Arbus, Edward Weston, and other contemporary photography. We paid the rent ourselves and worked for free." Alveng lives and works in Oslo.

Alveng's earlier monographs include *Asylum* (1987), *Layers of Light* (1995), *Summer Light* (2001), *This is MOST Important -- The New York Multiple Exposure Series* (2003), *Racing* (2012), *Summer Light* (2013), *Wilse -- The Humanist and His Lab* (2015), and *Still Time* (2018).

Alveng's photographs have been exhibited internationally in galleries and museums. They are held in numerous institutional collections worldwide, including The Museum of Modern Art, NY; The New York Public Library; Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Hasselblad Center, Göteborg, Sweden; Sprengel Museum, Hanover, Germany; Museum Folkwang, Essen, Germany; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, France; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Moderna Museet, Stockholm, Sweden; The Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo, Norway; Henie-Onstad Art Center, Høvikodden, Norway; Museum for Photography, Odense, Denmark; The National Museum of Photography / Preus Photomuseum, Norway; The Art Collection of the City of Oslo, Stenersenmuseet, Norway; The Art Collection of the Norwegian Council of Cultural Affairs, Norway; and in private and corporate collections including Norsk Hydro, Norway; Statoil, Norway; Bank of America, Chicago, IL; Reader's Digest Collection, Pleasantville, NY; Joseph T. Baio Collection, NY; Holly Solomon Collection, NY; SAS Collection, Stockholm, Sweden; Storebrand Art Collection, Norway; Olav Løkke Collection, Norway; and the ABG Sundal Collier Collection, Norway.

The exhibition catalogue *Dag Alveng: Photographs from Telemark* is available from D.A.P. at <https://www.artbook.com/9788232804313.html>.

Gallery hours for the exhibition are Thursday through Saturday, 11-5. For further information please contact the gallery by phone at 212-249-9400, or by email at info@deborahbellphotographs.com. High-resolution scans are available to the press.