

INTRODUCTION TO ROSE CASTLE 2020 PRESS CONFERENCE

Welcome everyone!

I wish you a warm welcome to this launch of the project Rose Castle 2020 – a big moment for many of us – not least myself, who has the honour and pleasure to be part of something so exciting, as the so-called mentor of the project – and you may be wondering what on earth it is all about.

For a long time, those of us who have been working on the project have looked forward to finally being able to say something about what Rose Castle actually is. Some snippets have filtered out along the way – but it is not until today that we will provide a full description of the project. As the mentor, I would like to start mainly by focusing on WHY we are doing this, and then Vebjørn and Eimund will follow by telling you something more about the specific installations, and all the exciting things you can expect to see appear at the edge of the forest in only one year from now.

In fact, in exactly one year from today, it will be 80 years since Germany invaded Norway on 9 April 1940. Norway would then endure five long years of occupation and suffering before being liberated again on 8 May 1945. So Rose Castle will be focusing on the following three areas:

- The five years of war and occupation, the sufferings that this entailed, and how famous and unknown everyday heroes rose up to fight against injustice.
- How fundamental social values like democracy and human rights were taken away from us.
- How important it is to maintain these values in the future, and fight against anyone who opposes them – both in Norway and the rest of the world.

Those of us who are behind Rose Castle 2020 are convinced that the 80th anniversary of the invasion of Norway and the 75th anniversary of its liberation must be commemorated in 2020. We are certain that there will be hundreds of different commemorations all over the country. What makes Rose Castle special is the fact that the installation will remain there for 13 months – through four seasons – and that it is a combined art project and educational project, which will present different types of art and will focus on learning. Although this has not yet been confirmed, we also hope that Rose Castle 2020 will form part of the government's official 75th and 80th anniversary commemorations

We think that we have found the most beautiful place in Oslo for the installation. Only a few hundred metres up the hillside here – a stone's throw from Frognerseteren metro station – in an area measuring 75x75 metres, we will install hundreds of large-format paintings, which will be exposed to all winds and weathers. Rose Castle also contains other elements intended to inspire visitors to reflect on the atrocities of war – but also to remind us that the most important thing for those of us alive today is to ensure that nothing like that can ever happen again. We can only do that by cultivating our fundamental social values, and not taking them for granted.

I am not a war historian. So when I was asked to become a mentor for Vebjørn and Eimund on this project, it was not because I would lend any historical or artistic expertise. But after 43 years in the Armed Forces, I know a little about war and its consequences. And since I retired three years ago, I have reflected a great deal on the direction in which the international community and our own small Norwegian community is now moving. I believe there is cause for concern. We are seeing a trend towards more authoritarian governance in many countries across the world. We are seeing a growing pressure on freedom of religion, freedom of expression and freedom of the press. We are seeing an increase in xenophobia, anti-Semitism and racism. And we are seeing that the truth – the very mainstay of democracy – is being threatened by systematic lies and fake news. The international legal system is crumbling under the pressure from nationalism and protectionism. Dear friends – we naturally do not need to be hysterical to see parallels between this and what led to the Second World War.

And it is this to which Rose Castle is striving to draw attention. It will be lit up above Oslo for almost 400 days, and every day may remind us that we still have a battle to fight.

But we must also remember our history. Because on that day – 79 years ago – there were many good people who rose up to fight for what was good and against what was evil. We must honour them.

Many of them have been honoured in various ways in the post-war years – books are full of stories about what they accomplished. We have chosen instead to focus on those of them whose names are rarely mentioned in the history books. Between 20 and 30 everyday heroes – or contemporary witnesses, if you prefer – are allowing their portraits to be part of the Rose Castle installation, accompanied by their accounts of how they experienced the war and the years of occupation.

And around the Rose Castle area, almost 100 paintings in the 3x4 and 4x6 metre formats will describe many aspects of the war and period of occupation – just as the people experienced

them. We will see Norwegian forces fighting – on land, sea and in the air. We will see the civilian and military resistance. There will be illustrations of anti-Semitism and the extermination of the Jews. We will encounter the sufferings of Russian and Serbian prisoners of war. We will see heroism, betrayal and collaboration. And we will see the many aspects of the everyday lives of quite ordinary people.

But I would like to add that this is not a historical documentary. We may have tried not to be too 'way out' in our portrayals – but neither the chosen themes nor the individual paintings have aimed to be 100% historically correct. Artistic licence allows us to condense situations, which both in time and space may have unfolded rather differently. In other words, it is not a 'photo exhibition', but a collection of illustrations – each of which has a message to convey.

As I have mentioned, it is the importance of remaining focused on our fundamental social values – and maintaining them – which has been the most important motivation for us in this project. That was also one – and the most important – reason why I decided to agree to become the project's mentor. But I also had my own, very personal reason.

My father, Eivind Grandhagen, died in 2013 – just before his 95th birthday. At the age of 21, in April 1940 he was brutally thrown into the war against the Germans, and fought in the front line at Stryken and Harestua before the Norwegian forces had to retreat. After demobilisation, he lost no time in reporting for duty in what would eventually become the Norwegian resistance movement. And he took part in several sabotage missions before he was arrested by the Germans in autumn 1943 – thanks to an informant. He spent some time in the cellar of Møllergata 19, and was taken by the Gestapo for interrogation under torture on Viktoria Terrasse. When – despite vigorous attempts – the Germans did not manage to get anything out of him, he was then transferred to Grini, where he remained until he was released in early 1945.

Throughout the post-war period – for as long as he lived – my father continued to be affected by what he had suffered during the war. He was woken by nightmares almost every single night. But he did not want to talk about what he had experienced – neither about the feats he had performed nor the pain he had felt. But at the very end of his life, he wrote down some accounts of his time as a prisoner, albeit omitting what he himself had been subjected to – he contented himself with praising some of the fellow prisoners he had met in Møllergata 19.

To this day, I cannot forgive myself for not asking him more about his experiences. But through my involvement with Rose Castle – and now towards the close of my own life – I have been inspired to search through all the available literature touching on my father's

involvement in MILORG. I found some interesting stories there which told me a great deal about him as a person.

At the end of his period as a Grini prisoner, my father was moved to a small prison camp at Fornebu, where the prisoners were put to work arming German bomber planes which would then be used in the war. My father organised for the bombs to be sabotaged by removing their detonators. This meant that they would not explode when they hit the ground. It was a high-risk activity – and inevitably one day he was discovered. Standing above him was Unteroffizier Noll – the German commander of the prison camp – whispering ‘sabotage’ in his ear. Then Noll walked away. My father was convinced that he would be shot, but nothing happened. Instead, my father was released, and immediately reported back for duty with MILORG. He then became second-in-command of area D-13-3-11.

In May 1945, he was given the mission of taking over Fornebu Airport from the German Luftwaffe. He negotiated the German surrender and – at the head of 30 men in anoraks and plus fours – he took over command of the airport. He then secured and administered Fornebu – which then became the most important ‘bridge’ into Norway from the United Kingdom – for several weeks. One of those who arrived by plane there was Crown Prince Olav.

One day, my father went to the barracks where Unteroffizier Noll was staying, and gruffly ordered the German to come out. My father ordered Noll to give him his pistol, which Noll did, but he then gave the German an extremely personal gift as a thank you, while whispering in his ear: “Sabotage”. The German was extremely moved, and gave my father his wristwatch. Both that and the pistol are still in our family’s possession. My father and Noll remained in contact throughout the post-war period. This shows how, despite former hostility, respect can develop.

My father never received any recognition for his war efforts, other than the Defence Medal, which everyone got. And that did not mean very much to him. Nor did it mean much to many of the other wonderful people – everyday heroes – who are now being brought into the limelight by Rose Castle.

No, dear friends. Rose Castle is not media hype, it is not a pompous commemoration project or a commercial business concept. It is a wonderful, worthy, modern art installation, which for 13 months will bring pleasure to the population of Norway – young as well as old. And which will remind us about a chapter in history that we hope we will never experience again. But first and foremost, Rose Castle will remind us about the values in our society that we must protect – and never take for granted.

Kjell Grandhagen – 9 April, 2019, grand hall in Frognerseteren.