

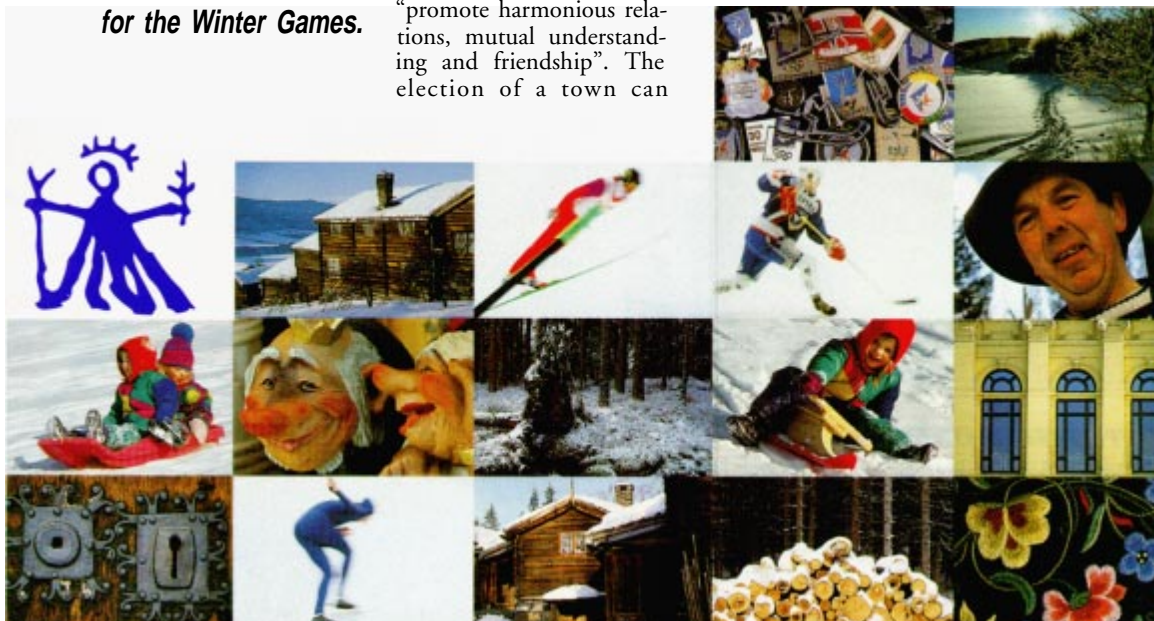
**Thousands of enthusiasts were fighting for a place on the ski slopes and the ice rinks of Lillehammer. The success of the five hundred artistic events that took place between January and March, alongside the two weeks of Olympic events, was equally spectacular. The cultural programme, which is prescribed by the Olympic Charter, often wavers between a sideshow and an incentive to creation, but here the organization was taken very seriously. Almost 14 million dollars were devoted to the Olympic arts festival - the biggest sum ever for the Winter Games.**

## **Meeting the artists**

From 1912 to 1948 architects, poets and musicians participated in the race for Olympic medals. The father of the modern Olympic Games was nostalgic for the ancient world, where art and sport went hand in hand. In the first half of this century competitions rang with the sound of odes to sport and anthems for champions. It is difficult today to imagine a Prix Goncourt or a Booker Prize winner on a podium.

Nevertheless, talented artists often lend a helping hand to the organizers of the Games. The Olympic Charter stipulates that a cultural programme must be implemented in order to "promote harmonious relations, mutual understanding and friendship". The election of a town can

transform its destiny: look at the urban metamorphosis of Barcelona in 1992, orchestrated by Catalan and Spanish architects, and a few international heavyweights such as Norman Foster of the United States. It can also inject new life into artistic activity. Lillehammer has made the most of it. At the beginning of the century Lillehammer, called "The Athens of the North", was considered a cultural centre. Its landscapes were captured by the Norwegian expressionist Edvard Munch, and its wintry and troll-haunted atmosphere was rendered by Ibsen: he wrote Peer Gynt



## XVII OLYMPIC WINTER GAMES



after spending a holiday in the valley. Cradled comfortably among its tourist attractions, the town wanted to recapture its sparkle: no organization has ever invested so much money in its cultural programme - almost 14 million dollars. The state put up half the stakes without even batting an eyelid. Often considered rather a chore, the cultural programme seems to have been taken more seriously by Lillehammer. From January to March the Olympic Arts Festival encompassed five hundred events at the Oslo Opera House, Hamar cathedral and Lillehammer church. The festival was the biggest cultural event the country has ever known;



there was something for everyone in this organized chaos. "Above all we wanted to share our traditional folk culture," explained Sissel Hanssen, the programme's communications director. So traditional music, concerts of a capella voices, military bands - so beloved of the Norwegians - and sacred music were all on offer.



### **STOPPING THE CREATIVITY DRAIN**

"The festival grew so big," stated Sissel Hanssen, "because we urgently needed to stop the region's artists from leaving to study at the Oslo Fine Arts Academy. Several public commissions were launched." Such as the ten or so urban sculptures scattered around the streets of the town. And in November 1992 the museum was enlarged by the addition of two new rooms in a wooden bunker.

Inside, amidst a more attractive decor of milk-white curved surfaces,



is the “Winterland” exhibition. Sponsored by Queen Sonja, it consisted of vintage local works from the 19th and 20th centuries. Munch could be seen there, along with numerous contemporary artists, who were asked to use their talents to enlarge the museums reserves. The exhibition has already travelled to Atlanta, Tokyo, Munich and Barcelona, giving Bard Breivik, Anne-Katrine Dolven and Kjell Bojroengen the opportunity to make a name for themselves abroad.



Sports fever spilled over into the arts. Classical, jazz and rock concerts played to packed halls. The museum was always busy. In the mountains, an ice sculpture competition involving around twenty countries was followed avidly. The winner was awarded a gold medal, just like the champions of the Olympic Winter Games.

**BÉNÉDICTE MATHIEU**

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