Almost a Fairytale

The re-presentation of Folktales in contemporary Norwegian Culture
Aina Borge

3058486

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Master of Arts (Fine Art)
School of Art
College of Design and Social Context
RMIT University Melbourne
June 2010
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the artist alone. The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. The content of the ADR is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program.

Signature:

Name:  Aina Borge
Date:  June 2010
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The photographic re-presentation of folktales in contemporary Norwegian culture
THE PROPOSAL

Through this research project I will investigate the influence of Norwegian folktales on the contemporary imaging of the natural environment. The project will result in a body of photographic work for exhibition.

Research investigations will include the history and cultural significance of the folktales on traditional and contemporary Norwegian visual culture, specifically the role of the characters and their connections with the landscape.

Introduction

After spending many years living away from my home country Norway, I developed an increased interest for my cultural background and identity. Looking into my heritage I instantly found the one thing that for me personally eclipsed all other aspects of what it means to be a Norwegian. The Folktales.

This research project will draw upon the values, rules and general attitudes as portrayed in traditional Norwegian folktales, and contribute to the influence these now have on contemporary visual and artistic expressions.

The project will culminate in a series of photographic images that demonstrate and evidence the historical connection between the folktales and the personification of Norwegian nature and rural landscape.

The folktales, whilst historically significant, have been diluted through non Norwegian cultural influence in the expansion of international media, entertainment, cartoons, film and tv-productions, yet they remain a crucial aspect of the national identity. My aim is to create images that will reference the folktales and act as contemporary markers to readdress their significance.

Background

Norwegian folk tales do not have a specific author but were passed by storyteller to storyteller through generations till they were written down by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen (1812 - 1885) and Jørgen Moe (1813 – 1882). These stories very often reflected every day living and the relationships between people. Delivered as innocent bedtime stories, they were meta-narratives of courage, dreams and magical creatures that strongly reflected on the values of Norwegian society, including fears, rules and conventions, as well as material and spiritual needs.

The tales were based on real life, yet never confined to reality or what people consider true and reasonable. The most famous character and often the hero character is Askeladden, known as the Aslad. Represented as the common boy, the dreamer, the fool, who wins the heart of the princess and the loyalty of kingdom.

Given that the original authorship remains a mystery, these tales are considered to be the true voice of the people, meaning the Norwegian cultural
heritage. Asbjørnsen and Moe travelled throughout Norway, collecting tales told by people in towns and remote villages, publishing several booklets of
folktales between 1841-1844. This collection was published in its entirety in 1870, becoming what is now considered the current version. The stories
are considered today one of Norway’s greatest historical treasures and a significant part of the countries national identity. It is the meta-narrative and
genealogical timeline that differentiates these stories from contemporary fantasy.

The folktales were published for the first time accompanied by illustrations in 1936¹, in *Norske Huldresagn og Folkeeventyr*. The illustrations were
important because they were, and still are, the visual expression closest connected to the folktales. These illustrations are to this day the main visual
expressions of the characters in the folktales such as the Ashlad and the troll and are very much integrated into Norwegian consciousness and cultural
identity.

Once the stories became a collected part of the Norwegian culture, they penetrated other aspects of culture such as Henrik Ibsen’s five act play, *Peer
Gynt*. This play blends folklore and realism and moves between consciousness and the unconscious, shifting through historic, present and future events.
The main character, Peer, reveals aspects of Askeladden through character development, culminating with his perspectives on moral identity.

*Out there, where sky shines, humans say: ‘To thyself be true.’ In here, trolls say: ‘Be true to yourself-ish.’.* ²

It is the folktales historical significance and continued invisible yet conscious existence that fascinates me and that is the driving force for my research
and visual goals. The moral inclinations and connection to the natural surroundings of the forest and mountains and the mysterious and serious aspects of life intertwined within the stories of the Norwegian folktales.

Contemporary artist Thomas Klevjer presented the exhibition “HISTORISME” in 2002 that dealt with identity through our mutual culture and nature.
Some of the images in this exhibition had a direct connection to Norwegian folktales, like the image Ivo Caprinos Askeladden (Ivo Caprino’s Ashlad)
where he has painted his own interpretation of Ivo Caprino’s vision of the Ashlad. He also use Erik Werenbskiold’s images and reproduces them by taking
objects from several of Werenskiold’s paintings and painting them all into one image. The idea of this exhibition was not to create a thematic display, but
to let each painting tell it’s own story, so it does not visually represent the folktales as a whole but uses some references to existing illustrations of the
folktales as being part of our history and culture.

Norwegian artist Mikkel Mcalinden’s photographs often revolve around the theme of recognition, combining the new with the familiar. There is a rec-
ognition of his cultural history in relation to fairy tales embedded in his images.

Norwegian artist Leif Rubach started building a troll in a small town of Norway called Senja in 1985, he finished it in 1993 as a part of a national park.
In 1997 it was registered in Guinness Book of Records as the worlds largest troll, with a height of 17.96 m. The Senja Troll based on an old Senja leg-
end of a troll seen both on land and at sea. Inside the troll he has created a world of folktales as a tourist attraction.

¹ The most famous folktale illustrators and first artists to illustrate Asbjørnsen and Moe’s folktales were Erik Werenbskiold (1855-1938) and Theodor Kittelsen (1857-1914), they started their collaboration in 1883 and were joined by many others in years to come, some of the most famous would be Otto Sinding (1842-1909), Per Krogh (1889-1965), Adolph Tidemann (1814-1876), and Hans Fredrik Gude (1825-1903).
The most prominent visual expression of these fairytales still remain Norwegian writer and film director Ivo Caprino’s (1920-2001) stop motion puppet films of the Ashlad, alongside his work for the family theme park Hulderfossen Fairytale Park. Ivo Caprino’s son and grandson, Remo and Mario are now managing Caprino Studios and currently working on a 3-D video game based on the Ashlad and his adventures, digitalising the characters made by Ivo Caprino in his puppet films, though it is yet to be released.

Apart from Ivo Caprino’s stop motion animations the only true visual expressions of the fairytales are the illustrations made by Theodor Kittelsen (1857-1914), Erik Werenskiold (1855-1938), Adolph Tidemann (1814-1876), Hans Fredrik Gude (1825-1903), Otto Sinding (1842-1909), Per Krogh (1889-1965) and several others.

Thomas Klevjer’s exhibition “HISTORISME” 2002 is the closest thing to a contemporary visual expression closely linked to the Norwegian fairytales, although it does not visually represent the fairytales as a whole but uses some references to existing illustrations of the fairytales as being part of our history and culture, focusing on identity1.

Contemporary artists and photographers like Mikkel McAlinden and Simen Johan refer to heritage and fantasy in their work but either one of them makes a statement that incorporates the Norwegian folk tales.

**Review of literature and current practice:**

The best known contemporary visual representation of the Norwegian folktales is Ivo Caprino’s stop motion animation of a collection of Asbjørnsen and Moe tales featuring the Ashlad. Ivo Caprino (1920-2001) was a Norwegian writer and film director who made stop motion puppet films, and is the creator of Flåklypa Grand Prix (Pinchcliffe Grand Prix) 1975. He produced several puppet animations of selected folktales in conjunction with a live action sequence used as an introduction to the folktale featuring the character Peter Christen Asbjørnsen as the storyteller. The first short film about the Ashlad was released in 1961. His films include titles like The Ashlad and his good helpers and The Ashlad and the hungry troll.

During the 1970’s he developed attractions based on his folktale films for Hunderfossen Eventyrpark a theme park outside Lillehammer in Norway, one of the biggest tourist attractions in Norway.

The folktale mythology permeates a range of contemporary Norwegian art, specifically in the way these artists deal with the natural environment.

Norwegian photographer and artist Simen Johan depicted animals like the fox and the moose with the backdrop of Scandinavian nature in photographs from his 2006 exhibition *Until the Kingdom Comes*. This type of imagery is often related to heritage though Johan’s work deals with imagination, consciousness and escapism.

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A company called Nord Suvenir AS founded in 1981 distributes Norwegian souvenirs nationally and are most famous for their little troll figures that are widely popular collector items also internationally.

**Proposed Project:**

For this project I intend to produce a series of photographic images that references the connections between the Norwegian folktale tradition and the natural environment. I plan to travel to different parts of Norway photographing aspects of the environment that relates to the characters and stories, such as mountain ranges, lakes and especially forests. I do not intend for my work to contribute to the already existing illustrations of these tales, but rather to consider the role of the tales in the contemporary identity of Norway. I am interested in the re-presentation of these tales given that they are still of cultural value today.

My aim is to create images of Norwegian nature that are constructed in Photoshop to look natural yet not entirely realistic. Through the digital process I am hoping to depict nature reminiscent of its role within the Norwegian folktales. The idea is that construction of nature will reflect the folktales own symbolic language and their element of fantasy, even if the natural expression of Norwegian landscape remain the key aspect it will accentuate the folktales mythological forests and its perseverance.

**Main objective**

To create a body of work titled *Almost a Fairytale*, consisting of photographic images that explores a visual representation of the Norwegian folktales to reintroduce the folktales visually into contemporary Norwegian visual culture.

**Aims**

- To produce a resolved body of photographic work for exhibition that contributes to the influence of folktales on contemporary Norwegian culture
- To consider the connections between traditional folktales and the influence these have on the contemporary imaging of the Norwegian environment.

My aim is to create photographic images that represents the Norwegian folktales, not as illustrations of each tale but I want to explore through my work what it is that defines them as a whole. Through the different expression of Norwegian nature I am hoping to expand on the existing visual link between the folktales and the Norwegian forest.

I will try to depict the folktales through their own symbolic language by photographing Norwegian nature as a representation of their undertone of realism, incorporating their element of fantasy through digital processes.
Research Questions

1. In what ways can I reinvigorate Norwegian culture by representing the traditional folktales through manipulated landscape images?

2. What photographic imaging strategies can be used to re-present the oral and written tradition of Norwegian folktales?

Rationale for program

Even though there is not too much evidence of contemporary art exploring the visual expression of the Norwegian folktales there seems to be a widespread representation of the troll, a reoccurring character in Norwegian tales and a well known symbol of the Norwegian forest and historical culture. There is artist Leif Rubach’s Senja Troll, Nord Suvenir AS and their popular troll figures, and there are also several Scandinavian artists that are known for painting trolls and pixies without illustrating a specific folktale, these include artists like Andreas Bloch (1860-1917), Christian Skredsvig (1854-1924), John Bauer (1882-1918) and Rolf Lindberg (1925-2005).

Being a Norwegian living away from my home country for long periods of time it has become clear to me that the familiar surroundings of Norwegian nature that once might have been a mundane part of my peripheral world all of a sudden was something that I missed, not just as a scenery but as a part of my identity. This ignited a curiosity that led me straight to the Norwegian Folktales.

Given that these folktales are such an important part of Norwegian culture and maintain an influence on the visual language of the country, it seems timely to investigate their contemporary relevance further.
Methods:

This research project will be completed over two years. It will result in an exhibition of digital photographic images. **Timeline:**

Semester 2. 2008  
**RESEARCH / JULY - AUGUST**  
- Peter Christian Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe Biography / Asbjørnsen & Moe Folk Tales  
- Norske Folke Eventyr (Norwegian Folk Tales)  
- The fairytales in contemporary imaging and culture  
- Folktale Illustrations  
- Erik Werenskiold and Theodor Kittelsen  
- Ivo Caprino – Stop motion animation  
- The Troll  

**SHOOTING / SEPTEMBER - NOVEMBER**  
- Location Scouting - Backgrounds: The elements - sky, water, mountains, forests  
- Objects representing related symbolism of the fairytales

Semester 1. 2009  
**DIGITAL PROSESSING / FEBRUARY - APRIL**  
- Image capture and processing  
- Masking  
- Preparation and adjustments  
- Outlining the subject matter - Composition and placement  
- Implementation of light and shadows for a deeper perspective  
- Reviewing personal expressions in juxtaposition to existing art within the same thematic field.

**ADDITIONAL RESEARCH - MAY**  
- A deeper look into Norse Mythology  
- Other expressions of the fairytales  
- Heritage within art – Various artists and their expressions

**EVALUATION AND NARRATIVE CONCIDERATION - JUNE**
Semester 2, 2009

**ADDITIONAL RESEARCH cont. / JULY - OCTOBER**
- Photoshop – using images I have already taken and experiment with different expressions.
- Additional Research – Norwegian History and the early settlement of the Vikings.
- Travel east and west of Norway Photographing the different expression of the Norwegian forest.

**DIGITAL PROCESSING Cont. / NOVEMBER**
- Composition – Extracting elements within landscape Photography to create a new expression
- Experimental Expressions – The language of Fairytales expressed in Norwegian nature through photography
- Cropping and digital enhancements
- Photoshop – Combining images and new creations

Semester 1, 2010

**MAKING THE CONNECTION / FEBRUARY**
- Unify subject matter and canvas – looking at paper selections
- Test printing and additional touch ups
- Telling a story

**DIGITAL PROCESSING Cont. / MARCH - MAY**
- Finalizing digital details
- Profiling
- Image selection
- Selecting images and finalising the layout of the documentation of the journey

**THE FINAL PRINT / JUNE**
- Final Paper selection, ready
- Large-scale printing
- Framing
- Presentation

**FINAL PRESENTATION / JULY**
FOLKLORE AND ADVERTISING

One of the most prominent visual representations of the folktales in contemporary Norwegian culture can be seen in commercial advertising.
Dovre

Dovre is a Norwegian underwear brand. In February 2010 they launched their new campaign; Enchanting Quality since 1922 using images depicting The Ashlad out in the forest wearing Dovre clothing either walking with a backpack or eating a match with the troll.¹

Fjordland

Fjordland is a Norwegian company that is well known for their production of pre packaged dinners. They have used a series of themes from different folktales in their advertising since 1994, the latest one is a TV commercial based on the tale The Ashlad and his good helpers, featuring the stone eating Gudbrand one of the characters that helps the Ashlad on his Journey.²

Freia (Chocolate)

Freia is Norway’s most popular chocolate brand known for the slogan; A little peace of Norway. After launching their Fairytale campaign in 2006 they increased sales with 25% or about NOK 100 million. They are now selling bags of chocolate shaped as little trolls, with the name Fairytale Bag on the front and a printed folktale on the side. It has to be said that even though Freia is still marketed as all things Norwegian, it has been owned by an American company since 1993.³

The Beginning - A philosophical point of view

The most famous character in these tales is the Ashlad who is portrayed as the dreamer, the fool, the brave but kind adventurer that by his kindness and strong moral wins the heart of the princess and the loyalty of the kingdom. The Ashlad’s childlike appreciation of the world is filled with wonder and awe for all the elements that comprise of his world; in this way he is the symbolic representation of being present in every moment.

The initial thought was to use objects that relates to folklore and fairy tales within my images to show their presence within my frame. As my research went on I realised that even though we still have these texts available to us and a preconceived idea of what folklore looks like, the origin of these stories lies within our nature and is still present within the natural expressions of Norwegian nature today. The folktales symbolic language through personified descriptions of Norwegian nature then became a key element of my interest.

Because nature still carries traces of our historical past it is through nature I can connect my art to our historical identity.
Fig. 3.1. Troll
Myth awakens and supports a sense of awe before the mystery of being. It reconciles consciousness to the preconditions of its own existence. Myth induces a realization that behind the surface phenomenology of the world, there is a transcendent mystery source. Through this vitalizing mystical function, the universe becomes a holy picture.¹

Joseph Campbell

Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
A closer look

Fig. 4.1. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
Fig. 4.2. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
Fig. 4.3. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
Fig. 4.4. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
Fig. 4.5. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
Fig. 4.7. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
Fig. 4.9. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
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Fig. 4.20. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
Fig. 4.21-4.22. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
Fig. 4.23-4.24. Natural Expressions of Norwegian Nature
LOCATION SCOUTING
A WIDER PERSPECTIVE
Fig. 5.1. Hvaler
Fig. 5.6. Liafjell
Fig. 5.7. Løvstakken
Fig. 5.8. Våkendalen
Fig. 5.10. Planes, trains and automobiles
planes, trains and automobiles. bergen - oslo
Titles of Norwegian Folktales

A morphed expression
I have constructed images of nature to incorporate the supernatural aspect, and to make that connection to the past. Inviting the viewer at different points in time both within each image and their separate expression of beginning, middle or end of a journey. In other words; Images that embodies the quality of transcendence. Where each moment is new but experienced with the maturity of knowledge.

Making a Connection
Fig. 7.1. Thor’s hammer
First trials
The initial thought
Merging the images together using different blending modes, level and curve adjustments, masking, placement of objects and experimenting with the different elements to see how they work together and what the expression becomes. The idea of the Viking was to draw attention towards Norwegian history, and the element of water represents time. One step closer to finding the right expression.

Fig. 8.1 - 8.11. Originals and process Trial.
This process was about blending different elements of nature considering each of the originals characteristics to create a place that is familiar yet completely new. Also placing an object within that sphere to find an expression existing between places or in multiple places at once. The steps are illustrated below to show the layering of the image and how this creates a certain depth or a floating quality that was not present in the original shots separately.

Fig. 8.13 - 22. Originals and process Trial 2
Fig. 8.23. Final Image Trial 2
A visual presentation of the preparation for each image from original photo files to final image. Showing step by step layering, masking, level curve and colour adjustments, cropping, stamping, blending modes and placements.

These are constructed images yet depicting recognisable existing places within Norwegian Nature.

This methodology shows how multiple images from different moments in time are combined with elements representing a different presence, how light and shadow illuminates pathways symbolising the journey and the components of my artistic expression. Here is a display of all the elements and creative solutions to place the final work beyond time and place between lore and reality.
Fig. 9.8. Digital Processing Something else
TITLE 2
FURTHER THAN FAR
Fig. 9.9-9.16. Originals Further than far
Fig. 9.17. Digital Processing Further than far
Fig. 9.18. Digital Processing Further than far
Fig. 9.19. Digital Processing Further than far
Fig. 9.20. Digital Processing Further than far
Fig. 9.21. Digital Processing Further than 1.
TITLE 3
PERIPHERAL JOURNEY
Fig. 9.22-9.23. Originals, Peripheral Journey
Fig. 9.24. Digital Processing Peripheral journey
Fig. 9.25. Digital Processing Peripheral journey
Fig. 9.27. Digital Processing Peripheral journey
TITLE 4

PRIMORDIAL
Fig. 9.33. Digital Processing Primordial
Fig. 9.34. Digital Processing Primordial
Fig. 9.36. Digital Processing Primordial
TITLE 5

APPARITION OF MIND
Fig. 9.37-9.39. Originals, Apparition of mind
Fig. 9.40. Digital Processing Apparition of mind
Fig. 9.41. Digital Processing Apparition of mind
Fig. 9.42. Digital Processing Apparition of mind
Fig. 9.43. Digital Processing Apparition of mind
Fig. 9.44. Digital Processing: Apparition of mind
TITLE 6
DESTINY
Fig. 9.45-9.46. Originals Destiny
Fig. 9.47. Digital Processing  Destiny
Fig. 9.49: Digital Processing  Destiny
Fig. 9.50. Digital Processing: Destiny
Fig. 9.51. Digital Processing. Destiny
TITLE 7
ETHEREAL GHOST
Fig. 9.52-9.53. Originals, Ethereal Ghost
Fig. 9.54. Digital Processing Ethereal Ghost
Fig. 9.55. Digital Processing Ethereal Ghost
Fig. 9.56. Digital Processing Ethereal Ghost
TITLE 8
KINGDOM
Fig. 9.66. Digital Processing Kingdom
Fig. 9.67: Digital Processing Kingdom
Almost a Fairytale is a series of images depicting places that exists through the folktales and within natural expressions of Norwegian nature. In the twilight of lore and reality where knowledge becomes wisdom, where ancient myths are waiting to enter the realm of human experience and open our eyes to the magic within.
Almost a Fairytale
Fig. 10.1 Something Else 2010. Digital Pigment Print 90 x 180cm
Fig 10.2 Further than far 2010. Digital Pigment Print 90 x 180cm
Fig. 10.3 Primordial 2010. Digital Pigment Print 90 x 180cm
Fig. 10.4 Peripheral Journey 2010. Digital Pigment Print 90 x 180cm
Fig. 10.6 Apparition of Mind 2010. Digital Pigment Print 90 x 180cm
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Fig. 10.8 Kingdom 2010. Digital Pigment Print 90 x 180cm
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The End