Gustav Vigeland - A virtually unknown giant of the art world

Unknown, that is, outside of Norway. (Unless you have visited his sculpture park in Oslo.)
His early background and the period through which he lived had a strong influence on his style and work. It is necessary to have this in the mind when viewing his great masterpieces.
During his lifetime he saw Norway gain Independence from Sweden in 1905, Suffragettes in early 1900s, Art Nouveau and Art Deco periods, World War I, Depression of the 30s, World War II, occupation of his country by the Nazis, and was a contemporary of Ibsen, Grieg and Nansen.
Had a hard home-life with a religious fanatic as a father. A stern puritanical atmosphere which marked him for life. e.g. dragged out of bed on Good Friday and beaten, not because done anything wrong but because on Good Friday one was meant to suffer. Then this paragon of goodness fell in with the drink and took up with a younger woman, eventually dying of TB when Vigeland was 17. Gustav wrote in his diaries ‘Too much Satan and not enough Jesus’, ‘Too much darkness and not enough light’. His fears, anxiety, sorrow and suffering found its way into his works with little joy.
Father was a carpenter and as Gustav clearly had a talent for drawing, when he was 16 his father sent him to Oslo as an apprentice woodcarver for two years where he struggled with hunger and poverty. Eventually that business went broke and he returned to the family farm.
Aged 19 he went back to Oslo to learn modelling, plaster casting and carving from a real master (Brynulf Bergusen). He had a work accepted for the Norwegian Annual National Exhibition.
This was his making. As a result he was awarded many grants to enable him to travel to Copenhagen, Paris, London, Berlin and Florence. Spent his time in museums and churches making sketches (some 1600 in total) which he used throughout the remainder of his life.
By age 28 he was very well known but the Norwegians didn’t buy his works. Took a job sculpting stonework figures for the Gothic Cathedral in Trondheim which was being restored. Obtained a further grant and spent a year visiting France and eleven of the great English cathedrals.
During his tours met with Auguste Rodin on several occasions and stayed in the same hostel in Berlin as Edvard Munch and one can see similarities in their works. He was also a contemporary of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung and their influence can be seen in his works exploring the meaning of life and relationships between people.
Dreamed up the idea of a giant statue to be placed outside the Parliament building in Oslo. Oslo City Council supported and funded the project. Took several years to complete by which time he had added considerably to the design. Too big for original site so persuaded the city council to let him use the 80 acre Frogner Park to house his work. Also persuaded the city council to fund his living and production costs in return for which they would become the owners of all his work. (Eventually 1600 sculptures and 400 woodcuts)
This park, now known as Vigeland's Park is where he assembled 212 of his bronze, granite and wrought iron sculptures (composed of 600 figures) created throughout his 74 years of life.
All figures nude so that timeless, classless and transcends country boundaries. He did not name his works, leaving it up to the imagination of the viewer.
He was too impatient to carve the hard grey Norwegian granite. So he sculpted in clay and then let professional craftsmen copy the work in granite or mould it in bronze e.g. Sinnataggen (Tantrum Boy)