



National Museums in Sweden: A History of Denied Empire and a Neutral State

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Summary

The history of Swedish national museums is in many ways the story of the problematic relation to the nation's expansionistic past. During the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, Sweden had imperial ambitions in the Baltic area, ambitions that reached their zenith in the latter part of the seventeenth century and then slowly faded away during the eighteenth century. After some very turbulent decades around the turn of the century 1800 – that included the assassination of a king and several coup de états, as well as the loss of Finland, a third of the country's territory – the following two centuries were, on the whole, a very peaceful affair in Sweden. The latter part of the nineteenth century saw the industrialization of the country and during the first quarter of the twentieth century parliamentary democracy was introduced.

The development of the national museum landscape in Sweden more or less followed the same pace. The first national museums (in the modern sense), *Statens portättgalleri*, *Nationalmuseum*, the *Naturhistoriska riksmuseet* and *Historiska museet*, came to be as reaction to the loss of Finland and the nationalistic impetus that followed. These were all (except *Statens portättgalleri*) existing public collections that, as the result of pressure from the public sphere, were made into state-financed public museums. The late nineteenth century saw the creation of *Nordiska museet* and its open-air counterpart *Skansen* that were both museums of ethnography and cultural history and may be seen as a response to industrialization. *Nordiska museet* and *Skansen* were private initiatives that met with great opposition from parts of the state that saw them as an intrusion in the state's affairs. The affair was settled in the early twentieth century when *Nordiska museet* was incorporated into the state system of heritage management while still keeping its independent position.

During the twentieth century, all national museums got their own buildings, the last being *Historiska museet* that, before 1943, had lived under the same roof as the national art gallery in *Nationalmuseum* (the name usually refers to the art gallery only, after 1943 rightfully so). The latest important additions to the national museums are *Moderna Museet*, a gallery of modern art that opened in 1958 after the united efforts of a group of *Nationalmuseum* curators and public sphere pressure groups and *Världskulturmuseet* in Gothenburg that opened in 2004 after a governmental initiative.

The problematic relations with Sweden's imperialistic history are visible mainly in the way it is not dealt with in the national museums. Exhibitions are, with few exceptions, only dealing with present-day Sweden, leaving out objects and history connected to e.g. Finland but including the province of Skåne that has only been a part of the country for the last 350 years. The political ambitions of expansion during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries are also very seldom dealt with; instead most of the modern period is treated as cultural history rather than political history.

Summary table, Sweden

Name	Inaugurated	Initiated	Actors	Ownership	Type	Values	Temporal reach	Style Location
National Portrait Gallery <i>Statens porträttgalleri</i>	1823	1821	Court, Monarch	State	Portraits of merited Swedish citizens	Territorial	Renaissance to present	Existing building, Gripsholm's Palace in Mariefred, solitary location, outside Stockholm.
National Gallery <i>Nationalmuseum</i>	1866	1828 1844	Parliament, Aristocracy, Civil Society	State	Archaeology, Cultural History and Art, only Art after 1943.	Territorial and universal, mainly universal after 1943.	Renaissance to late 19 th c.	Eclectic neo-renaissance style in central location, Stockholm.
Museum of National Antiquities <i>Historiska museet</i>	1866 1943 (reopened in own building)	Ca. 1800	Academy of Antiquities	State	Archaeology	Territorial	Pre-History to Middle Ages	National romantic and modern, central location in Stockholm.
Museum of Scandinavian Ethnography and Cultural History and Skansen Open Air Museum <i>Nordiska museet och Skansen</i>	1873	1872	Individual initiative, Civil Society	Foundation, with state funding.	Ethnography, Cultural History	Territorial	Renaissance to present	National romantic style, in solitary location, Stockholm.
Museum of Modern Art <i>Moderna Museet</i>	1958	Ca. 1953	National Gallery, Civil Society	State	Modern Art	Universal	Mainly 20 th c.	Post-modern style in central location, Stockholm.

Introduction

Sweden has a very long history as a state. The entity, known today as Sweden, began to take form in the eleventh or twelfth century and was definitely in place at least from the middle of the thirteenth century. During most of the fifteenth century, the country was part of a union between Denmark, Sweden and Norway, a union that ended in 1523 after a long period of civil war when Swedish nobleman Gustav Eriksson (Vasa) (1496-1560) was elected King of Sweden as Gustav I. This has traditionally been seen as the founding moment of the nation – together with the Lutheran reformation from 1527 and onwards and the establishment of the hereditary kingdom in 1544 – and Gustav I was given the role of "father of the nation" in the nationalistic narrative of Swedish history.

From about the 1560s, Sweden exhibited signs of imperial ambitions in the Baltic area, mainly directed towards Russia and Denmark. This development escalated during the early seventeenth century and the 30-year war. In the latter part of the seventeenth century, the Swedish empire reached its zenith and consisted of most of the Baltic shores, parts of Norway and substantial areas in northern Germany. During the first decade of the eighteenth century though, these ambitions proved to be futile and the Swedish eighteenth century is, in many ways, a story of the decline of the empire with the gradual loss of the Baltic provinces as well as parts of the 'heartland', especially in present day Finland.

The final blow to the Swedish ambitions to be one of the great powers of Europe came when – on the fringe of the Napoleonic wars – Russia declared war in 1808, a war that would profoundly change the country. After a year of disastrous warfare, parts of the Swedish political and military elite performed a coup de et'at, dethroned the king and rewrote the constitution. The peace that was signed with Russia in 1809 deprived the country of present day Finland; a third of its territory, a fourth of its inhabitants and a part of the Swedish mainland since the thirteenth century.

These events – were the culmination of three decades of political instability with three coup de et'ats (1772, 1789 and 1809), the assassination of Gustav III (1746-1792) in 1792 and political unrest in Stockholm – shocked the establishment and led to a, hitherto unseen in Swedish history, cultural self-examination and nationalistic frenzy. The new regime focused Sweden's interest on Norway, which after the treaty of Kiel in 1814 was forced into a personal union with Sweden, a union that was to last until 1905.

The 1813-14 alliance against Napoleon and the short war with Norway in 1814 was the last time Sweden was at war and since 1815, the country has been able to avoid armed conflict and remain neutral. During the nineteenth century, the country was industrialized at a slow pace followed by the rapid face of industrialization and urbanization during the years around 1900. The first decades of the twentieth century also saw the introduction of democracy with full and equal right to vote in 1921. The 1930s then saw the development of the modern welfare state, a trajectory that has continued since.

The slow pace of the development of democracy is due to the peculiar organization of the Swedish parliament in the early modern era where not only the nobility were represented but also the clergy, the bourgeoisie and the peasants. This broad representation of the people in the parliament led to a political culture that was rather conservative and slowed down both the

democratic introduction and different infrastructural projects of the state like canals and railways. It also slowed down the introduction of national museums and other cultural heritage projects. Together with a late but fast industrialization and urbanization, this forms not only a background to the slow introduction of national museums, but also to the need for a cultural negotiation of citizenship and a strong nationalistic ideology.

National museums and cultural policy in Sweden

As mentioned, the loss of Finland in 1809 generated a massive nationalistic impetus that led, among other things, to the establishment and restructuring of several museums with national ambitions. An example of this is *Nationalmuseum* (National Gallery), *Naturhistoriska riksmuseet* (The Swedish Museum of Natural History) that were both created and given status as objects of national interest by the parliament in the following decades. Other examples are the preexisting museums *Livruskammaren* (the Royal Armory), *Historiska museet* (The Museum of National Antiquities) and *Kungliga myntkabinettet* (The Royal Coin Cabinet) that were all established as public or semi-public collections during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but were restructured during the first half of the nineteenth century until, in 1866, they were incorporated into *Nationalmuseum*.

All of the museums mentioned above were organized in the intersection between state, court and civil society. During the first half of the nineteenth century, the royal academies played an especially important role in the history of national museums in Sweden. The academies had, and still have, a place in between state and civil society, being both state entities and self-governing bodies outside of governmental influence. *Naturhistoriska riksmuseet* was organized by the *Royal Swedish Academy of Science* as means of making their collections accessible for both public and scientists. It first opened as a public collection as early as the late 1740s and opened in a special museum building in 1778. In 1819, after the museum had received a grand donation in form a large collection, the museum received funding from parliament. At the same time, parliament also agreed to guarantee the future care of the collections. At least from that point, the museum received status as a national museum (Beckman 1999).

Both *Historiska museet* and *Kungliga myntkabinettet* share the same background but were made up by the collections of the *Royal Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities*, that, from the 1780s, collected Swedish antiquities and archeological findings. Part of the collections, especially the coin collections (today in *Kungliga myntkabinettet*), was older though and had its background in the royal collections. The collections were from, at least, circa 1800 and more or less accessible to the public, and in the 1840s the academy opened a proper museum in central Stockholm. In 1866, the museum, now known as *Historiska museet*, moved in to the new *Nationalmuseum* that opened the same year and in 1943, they got their own museum building again (Thordeman 1946).

Livruskammaren, on the other hand, was a museification of parts of the royal collections and was part of the court until the mid nineteenth century. *Livruskammaren* is perhaps the oldest museum in Sweden and it is said to have been founded in 1628 when king Gustav II Adolf (1594-1632) ordered that the bloodstained clothes he had used during his Polish campaign should be kept “in the armory as an eternal memorial”. This created an incitement for later monarchs who consequently saved clothes and objects considered to be of special interest in the armoury (Bursell & Dahlberg 2003).

Nationalmuseum finally traces its roots to the court and the probate of the assassinated Gustav III. Gustav had bought large amounts of classical sculpture in Italy during a journey in 1783-84, as well as paintings collected by his parents – art that he had paid for with state money. During work with the king's estate inventory, a decision were made that art bought from state funds should be considered state property and therefore should not be included in the late king's probate. Instead, Gustav III's brother, duke Karl (XIII), who served as the guardian of the young king Gustav IV, made the collection into a public art museum in one of the wings of the royal palace and (*Kongl. Museum*), the so-called Royal Museum opened in 1794 (Söderlind & Olausson 2004). *Kongl. Museum* was transformed into *Nationalmuseum* in the years between 1845, when parliament decided that a new museum building should be erected, and in 1866 the new museum opened its gates to the public. *Nationalmuseum* came to be as the result of pressure from parts of the civil society as well as the court, but was decided by and given grants from the parliament (Bjurström 1992, Widén 2009a).

The same era also saw the emergence of one of the most important and interesting additions to the Swedish museum landscape, *Statens porträttgalleri* (National Portrait Gallery) that opened at the palace of Gripsholm in 1823. Presumably the first national portrait gallery in the world, it drew on a tradition of Gripsholm being a palace with a large collection of portraits that had been more or less publicly available since at least the 1720s. What was new though in the 1820s was that what had been a collection of royal portraits, mainly of relatives to different Swedish royalties, was now converted into a national collection of, as it was said, "merited citizens". The initiative to create the gallery came from persons belonging to the court, but king Karl XIV must have at least been informed about the plans, and have made his approval there of, since the gallery is placed in a royal palace (Widén 2008).

For most of the period up until (at least) the late nineteenth century, it is clear that the state had no real interest in, or plans for, the museum and cultural heritage sector. The *Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities* e.g., had during the last decade of the 18th century been more or less deprived of its duties to collect and make inventories of archaeological remains, and during the first decades of the nineteenth century, its most important duty was to read and approve inscriptions in stone in e.g. churches and on public monuments (Hillström 2006: chapter 2). Instead, most initiative came from either private individuals or public or semi-public associations like *Götiska förbundet* (Gothic Society) – a group of former Uppsala university students that wanted to spread the perceived "gothic" ideals of the old Norse, and that also revolutionized the view of cultural heritage and archaeology in Sweden (Molin 2003) – and *Stockholms Konstförening* (Stockholm Art Association) (Widén 2009a). The outcome of these initiatives, in most cases mentioned above, was a museum that was owned and financed by the state. Two of the examples are a bit unclear, *Naturhistoriska riksmuseet* was owned by the *Academy of Science* until 1965, but received state funding from 1819 (Beckman 1999). *Historiska museet* and *Kungliga myntkabinettet* was owned by the *Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities* but was, on the other hand housed in, and part of, *Nationalmuseum* from 1866-1943 (Thordeman 1946). The conclusion seems to be that Sweden during the nineteenth century did not have any cultural policy worth mentioning, but that when initiatives were made, the state responded by taking responsibility for funding and housing of the museums.

If the loss of Finland and the coup de'etat in 1809 was the first impetus to create a set of museums with the ambitions to represent and create the nation, the next challenge that led to the creation of new museums was, as in most countries, the industrialization of the late nineteenth century. The two national museums that were created during this period, *Nordiska museet* (National museum of cultural history) and the open-air museum *Skansen* are interesting exceptions among the Swedish national museums since they are not state-owned. *Nordiska museet* was founded in 1873 by the linguist and collector Arthur Hazelius (1833-1901) who put up an exhibition in central Stockholm with the name *Skandinavisk-Etnografiska samlingen* (Scandinavian Ethnographic Collection). In 1897, the museum moved to its present location at Djurgården in Stockholm (Hillström 2006, Bäckström 2010a). By then, Hazelius had also created the open-air museum *Skansen*, also at Djurgården (Rentzog 2007, Bäckström 2010a).

Both museums were dedicated to the ethnography and cultural history of Sweden, but they also had pretensions to cover the same topics in all Scandinavian countries. Of this, very little is visible today though. The Scandinavian approach to cultural history and ethnography in the museums was due to the personal union between Sweden and Norway but also to the strong scandinavianism movement that was prevalent in the middle of the nineteenth century (Hillström 2010: 589f). The scandinavianism movement of the nineteenth century was a movement, similar to the pan-slavistic movement that meant to promote a Nordic or Scandinavian identity, inside which it was perfectly possible to promote a patriotic Swedish, Danish, Norwegian identity. Scandinavianism emerged in the 1840s as a transformation of the gothic ideas of the early nineteenth century and became an influential political force during the middle of the nineteenth century, but lost its political power during the latter part of the century (see e.g. Aronsson 2009). The final blow to the idea of a Scandinavian state came in 1905 when Norway proclaimed its independence from Sweden, but the idea of a special bond between the Scandinavian countries has held strong during the twentieth century. Interestingly enough, the collapse of the scandinavianism idea in 1905 did not make the museum board change the name of this museum when *Nordiska Museet* opened in its new building in 1907.

During the first years, Hazelius himself privately owned *Nordiska museet* and *Skansen* but in 1880, the ownership was transferred to a foundation that is owned by the state but still controlled by an independent board of trustees. *Skansen* was, in 1963, transferred to its own foundation that is owned by the state and the city of Stockholm together. The collections in the two museums were originally collected by Hazelius himself, but very soon he created a network of correspondents who went around the countryside to collect interesting objects. He also sought to get private donations from interested persons, who in turn got their name published in the newspapers as donors.

The two Hazelius museums are interesting because they are more or less unique in the history of Swedish national museums. Not when it comes to the private initiative, that seems to be the regular way of creating a new museum, but in the fact that they are not and have never been under state control. Nevertheless they are both publicly funded, but like the royal academies they are both self-governing entities.

In the period between the inauguration of *Nordiska Museets* new building and the Second World War, a few new museums with national ambitions opened. The first of several military museums opened in 1879 under the name *Artillerimuseum* (Museum of Artillery), from 1932

Armémuseum (the Army museum), which should be followed in 1938 by *Sjöhistoriska museet* (Maritime museum) that at least in part was dedicated to the navy. In 1923-24 *Tekniska Museet* (The National Museum of Science and Technology) was founded, a museum that got its own building in 1936. *Tekniska museet* is, like *Nordiska museet* and *Skansen*, a foundation. But as opposed to *Nordiska museet*, it did not have an individual as its founder, but one of the royal academies; *Ingenjörsvetenskapsakademien* (Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences) together with the *Swedish Inventors' Association*, the *Swedish Association of Graduate Engineers* and the *Confederation of Swedish Enterprise*. The museum is a foundation that, since 1965, has received state funding.

When looking upon the museums created during the early twentieth century, it is striking that they are all named in a very matter of fact way, one might also say a non-nationalistic or maybe functionalistic fashion where the national content of the museums are only implicit. This is also true when it comes to *Historiska museet* (literally “the historical museum”) that, although it has a much older history, got its own building only in the 1940s.

As mentioned, *Historiska museet* became a part of *Nationalmuseum* when the new building was finished in 1866. During the first decades of the twentieth century, plans were being made by the museum staff and the *Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities* to separate the museum from *Nationalmuseum*, and, between 1934-1939, a new building was erected in Stockholm to house the museum. Due to the Second World War, the collections at first couldn't be moved and the new museum couldn't open until 1943. The museum's permanent exhibition called “10 000 years in Sweden” became a huge success both with the audience and as a new museum exhibition ideal (Bergström & Edman 2004). It also brought forward the view that ethnic Swedes had inhabited Sweden since the ice age, a view that would strengthen the perception of Sweden as an ethnically homogeneous state even further.

After the Second World War, the most important addition to the museum landscape was *Moderna Museet* (Museum of Modern Art) that opened in 1958. The new museum started as a department within *Nationalmuseum*, but situated in a building of its own. As in most other cases, *Moderna Museet* came to be as the result of collaboration between private and public where large donations of art (and means to buy art) were made, but where the state took responsibility for the housing of the museum and for staff salaries etc. (Tellgren 2008, Widenheim, af Petersens & Hahr 2004, Bjurström 1992, Granath & Nieckels 1983).

The latest addition to the group of national museums in Sweden though, is *Världskulturmuseet* (Museum of World Culture) in Göteborg that opened in 2004. It has its background in *Etnografiska museet i Göteborg* (Ethnographic Museum of Göteborg) that opened in 1891 as a communal museum in the country's second largest city. In 1996, responsibility for the museum was taken over by the state, which then incorporated it into the new body of museums known as *Statens museer för världskultur* which included *Etnografiska museet*, *Östasiatiska museet* and *Medelhansmuseet*, all of them existing museums that had been built around collections of ethnographic (i.e. African, Pacific, American), East Asian and Mediterranean objects respectively during the twentieth century (SOU 1998: 125). It was also decided that there would be a new museum building erected in Gothenburg and that the restructured museum should be called *Världskulturmuseet*. The new museum is, according to its instructions, supposed to promote contacts between Swedish and non-Swedish cultures and was created as an answer to the “change towards a multicultural society that is at present in our country” and is focusing on the “heritage

of the multicultural society” (SOU 1998: 125). The museum also hoped to protect cultural diversity in Sweden and help counter xenophobia and segregation. (Kulturutskottets betänkande 1996/97: KRU01). On the whole, the creation of *Världskulturmuseet* is one of the most visible outcomes of the late twentieth century’s political struggle to handle the new globalised world and the fact that Sweden was not the homogenic country it was thought to have been.

While not being a national museum as such, *Vasamuseet* – dedicated to the wrecked flag ship of the Swedish navy that, on its maiden voyage in 1628, sank in the harbour of Stockholm – is an interesting museum in that it is one of the few to deal with the Swedish imperial ambitions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (other exceptions are, of course, the military museums mentioned above). Interestingly enough, these imperial ambitions and Swedish warfare in Europe are illustrated with the failed ship of the line ‘Vasa’ that never harmed anyone except for the members of the crew that drowned when the ship sunk. The shipwreck is not presented as a tool for Swedish domination of the Baltic, but rather as an archaeological finding and as an example of Swedish technological development (even if this particular one was a failure). The ‘Vasa’ was relocated during the 1950s and finally salvaged in 1961. After extensive conservation (during which visitors were allowed to see the ship in a temporary museum) the museum would open in 1990 and is today one of the main tourist attractions in Sweden (Hocker 2006).

This disinterest in the political implications of Swedish imperial ambitions of mainly the seventeenth century is very much the case with other Swedish museums too. The army museum deals with the development of the army, with the logistic problems of warfare in the early modern period and with the sufferings of civilians (and soldiers) in wartime. But the question of *why* and *for what* the army was needed is seldom posed. War is more or less presented as one of many kinds of natural disasters, and not a result of politics. In fact, the first exhibition case in the permanent exhibition (opened in 2000) of the army museum shows a group of chimpanzee fighting, suggesting that war is an inherent aggressive behaviour in primates like ourselves.

Another signifier of this denial of the imperial Sweden is the fact that the history of Sweden in most museums is presented as the history of the geographical area that is Sweden today, thereby avoiding not only the question of Finland that was an integrated part of Sweden during 600 years, but also the different Baltic territories like Estonia, Swedish Pomerania and the city of Riga that, for centuries, were important parts of the Swedish domain. On the other hand, the province of Skåne is almost always included although it has only been a part of Sweden for the past 350 years.

This avoiding of the expansionist heritage is also obvious in the division of labour between the *Historiska museet* and the *Nordiska museet*. In 1919, the government decided that the areas of responsibility for the different historical museums (*Historiska museet* and *Nordiska museet*, but also *Nationalmuseum* and *Livrustkammaren*) should be divided so that the museums should not have to compete about the same objects (Hillström 2006: chapter 11). The division meant that *Historiska museet* took responsibility for the period before 1523, and that *Nordiska museet* took care of the period thereafter. This was the end of decades of struggle between *Historiska museet* and *Nordiska museet* about responsibility for the nation’s heritage.

In effect, this also meant that, with *Nordiska museet* being an ethnographical museum, the entire modern period was being treated as an example of ethnography, and not as political history. Effectively the modern history of Sweden was ethnified, turned into a history of ethnicity rather than the nation or the state. In this context, the history of Sweden was shown as the

history of Swedes, defined as the people living inside the borders of the post-1809/1905 country. Sweden is often described as a form of state nationalism, as opposed to an ethnically-based nationalism, which is probably true, but this state-based nationalism was based upon the notion that Sweden was an ethnically homogenous country where state and nation were one. *Nordiska museet* contributed to this idea by exhibiting people and popular culture from different areas of Sweden, but all flagged as Swedes, and then by contrasting this Swedish cultural history with other Nordic and Baltic cultures, thereby presenting a multifaceted set of regional identities as a homogenised Swedish ethnicity.

There are also other significant silences present in the museal history of Sweden, minorities like the Sámi or Romani are seldom treated, and, when they are, they are often treated as “the other” (Bäckström 2010b). As mentioned, Finland is seldom treated, but Norway and the union between the two countries during the nineteenth century are also treated very poorly. Swedish neutrality during the world wars, especially the second, is another topic that is often treated with silence.

The division of labour between *Historiska museet* on one hand, and *Nordiska museet* on the other, made *Nordiska museet*, together with its pendant *Skansen*, one of the most important producers of Swedishness, which, in fact, also was the outspoken goal of the museums founder Arthur Hazelius (Bäckström 2010a). This is also the reason I would consider *Nordiska museet* and *Skansen* to be among the most important national museums in Sweden. Together with, especially, the *Statens porträttgalleri* at Gripsholm, it created a national canon on Swedishness and a pantheon of memorable persons. *Statens porträttgalleri* is also an interesting example of the early phase of national museum development where royal collections were transformed into national museums.

During the late twentieth century, the need for security and deep historical roots seems to have lessened and I will make the case that the museum that really illustrates the Swedish self image of the late twentieth century was *Moderna museet*, not least because it, to a large extent, helped to uphold the idea of Sweden as the most modern country in the world. I will also consider *Nationalmuseum* and *Historiska museet* as two important national museums that have contributed significantly to the Swedish self-image.

The National Portrait Gallery - Statens porträttgalleri

For a very long time, the palace of Gripsholm has had a very special place in Swedish history. Most of the palace was built in the sixteenth century and it is heavily connected with the “father of the nation” figure of Gustav I, who had most of the palace built for himself. Due to their high symbolical value, Gustav I and the Vasa dynasty were used in royal propaganda from the eighteenth century onward, and Gripsholm Castle was early on used for propagandistic reasons. Gustav III, for instance, used the castle to emphasize his own, very distant, relationship with the Vasa dynasty. Gripsholm Castle was seen as an important monument and, as such, early on attracted visitors and what we might, somewhat anachronistically, call tourists. The first tour guide of the palace was published in 1755 (Widén 2008).

Other than this, the palace also got a reputation, early on, for having a very large collection of portraits, mainly of European royalty that was, in some way, related to the Swedish royal houses of Vasa, Pfalz, Prussia or Holstein-Gottorp. During the first half of the eighteenth century, Gripsholm was used more or less as a storage place for less modern furniture and portraits, but

from the middle of the century, the hanging of the portraits was systemized as a means to enhance the palace's historical importance. It was still a very traditional royal portrait gallery though.

In the late 1810s however, the idea was brought forward among members of the court to transform the collection at Gripsholm into a National Portrait Gallery, comprised of pictures of 'merited citizens' and foreign persons that had somehow affected Swedish history, thus creating the world's first National Portrait Gallery. The creator of this new museum was Baron Adolf Ludvig Stjerneld (1755-1835) and most probably in collaboration with other members of the court (Widén 2008). Stjerneld was former Chief Chamberlain of the Queen Dowager Sophia Magdalena (1746-1813).

Stjerneld was born in 1755 and served as an officer and courtier from his early youth. During the 1780s, he was one of the leading members in opposition against Gustav III. After the assassination of Gustav III, in which he apparently had no part, Stjerneld served as a loyal courtier during the reign of Gustav IV Adolf. After Queen Dowager Sophia Magdalena died in 1813, Stjerneld's life took a new turn and he dedicated the rest of his life to the study of history and the collecting of old manuscripts and historical portraits. In 1817, he founded *Kungliga samsfundet för utgivande av handskrifter rörande Skandinaviens historia* (Royal Association for the Printing of Manuscripts concerning Scandinavian History) and the same year he was made honorary member of *Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities* (Widén 2009b).

From at least 1822, Stjerneld worked with the gallery, enlarging the collections by donations and rearrangements of portraits from other palaces. Stjerneld's position at court and his widespread connections with scholars and the landed gentry made the task to find suitable portraits for the gallery easier, but although it was presented as a patriotic deed to donate pictures to the gallery, it seems like Stjerneld sometimes almost forced people to hand over interesting portraits (Livstedt 1987: 25).

The archival sources to the creation of the portrait gallery are very sparse, even though some of the activities, such as the transportation of different paintings to the palace, often over the ice of Lake Mälaren during wintertime, are possible to reconstruct. This archival sparsity is probably due to the informal character of the project. No formal decisions seem to have been made. Instead, all work was conducted by a small group of courtiers, all closely tied to King Karl XIV Johan.

The function of the gallery seems to have been at least twofold. First, it was a place where visitors could see the marvelous line of merited Swedish citizens that could set an example for their own time. In one of his numerous guidebooks to Gripsholm Stjerneld writes that "The Swede can proudly know that Sweden owns more exceptional men, from the sceptre to the plough, than any of the most brilliant countries, when the number of inhabitants is taken into account" (Stjerneld 1833: 21).

The persons represented in the gallery were, apart from royalty, also politicians, famous authors, scientists and scholars and other persons that might fit the description of being a 'merited citizen'. Set in the historical environment the marvelous line of depicted persons became a national and patriotic example of the classical "historia magistra vitae" where the visitor, peasant, noble or royal, could and should, see and learn. A similar purpose was also expressed

when, some thirty years later, the British *National Portrait Gallery* was founded (Pointon 1993: 227-245).

The second function, the dynastic aspects of the gallery, seems to have been central from the start. Among the first portraits to be transferred, already in 1821, was one of King Karl XIV himself and one depicting his predecessor and adoptive father Karl XIII. By displaying the line of Swedish kings, beginning in the late middle ages and ending with the new king, Karl XIV Johan, the new dynasty could place itself in a line of predecessors and thereby show the visitors that the new royal family was in fact royal and the latest link in a long chain. The two parts of the gallery, the traditional royal portrait gallery and the newly invented gallery of merited citizens thereby worked together, thus creating something at the same time modern and traditional.

The fact that the gallery was situated in what, already at the time, was considered to be a heritage site in the modern sense, also invited the visitor to draw parallels between Karl XIV and his predecessors, especially Gustav I, the builder of the palace. Gustav I was often used by Karl XIV to enhance the new Bernadottean dynasty's legitimate place on the throne. Not only had Gustav I a very important role in the founding myth of Sweden, the similarities between the careers of Karl XIV Johan and Gustav I were also striking. Both were successful commanders who had earned their crowns by their successes on the battlefields in spite of their lack of royal blood. That Gustav I, and the similarities between them was seen as important by Karl XIV Johan are not least underlined by the fact that the personal coat of arms of the Bernadottes are made up of the arms of the principality of Ponte Corvo, given to Karl XIV Johan by Napoleon I, and the arms of the Vasa Dynasty.

This line of thinking was, if not obvious, communicated to the visitors by the palace guides or by the different guidebook that were published and sold on the site. In them, Stjerneld underlined the palace's historical significance and told the reader that the palace was the place where the "Chronicles preferably should be read; surrounded by the proud of bad individuals of history" (Stjerneld 1826: preface). It is clear that Stjerneld wanted to put the visitor in a special kind of mood that would make him or her more perceptive towards the nationalistic or patriotic message of the museum.

This invitation to nationalistic feelings was then turned into royalism when confronted with the abundance of royal portraits and the overall royalist tendency in the guidebooks, where the kings are generally portrayed as "proud", "self-sacrificing", "a safeguard" and, in the case of Karl XIII, one who "saved the fatherland twice". In his texts, Stjerneld tries to draw a picture where he places the King Karl XIV Johan in a line of glorious predecessors bearing the name Karl and then turns to the future and the grandson of Karl XIV Johan, the forthcoming Karl XV. The young prince – to whom the book was dedicated – is then encouraged to use the gallery and the depicted persons as a model for his own actions as for the person reading the guidebook (Stjerneld 1833: 19-21).

The inspiration for the gallery seems to have been a mixture of enlightenment ideas about the role of the citizen and 'Sturm und Drang' romantic ideas about feelings and patriotism. In many ways, the portrait gallery at Gripsholm palace shows a striking resemblance with the *Musée des monuments français*. Both museums were arranged in historical buildings and wanted to be something more than the scientific museum of its time, a sort of *gesamtkunstwerk* where the environment were intended to support a certain narrative. Both museums also seem to have

drawn inspiration from the way contemporary garden architects worked with paths leading towards an object that, together with its settings, should awake certain feelings in the visitor (Carter 2010: 92ff).

The portrait gallery became very popular in the eye of the public early on, and with the help of new technological ways of travel, e.g. steamboat, it attracted large amounts of visitors during the summertime (Widén 2008: 85f). More importantly, apart from its popularity among tourists and visitors, the gallery established a national pantheon of Swedish history. This set of historically important persons was then reproduced in lithographic print as well as text to a much larger audience than the museum itself could ever meet. The paintings of the gallery became a source bank whenever pictures were needed of historical persons, but also the source you went to when you needed to know who was noteworthy and who was not in Swedish history. Perhaps the most important impact of the gallery was when compulsory elementary school reform was introduced in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the pantheon of Gripsholm became not only the main picture source of the historical parts of the elementary school textbook – *Läsebok för folkskolan* (Stockholm 1868 and numerous later editions) – but might also have inspired the selection of persons dealt with in the text and maybe some of the structure of the text with its focus on heroic persons and examples to follow.

The National Gallery - Nationalmuseum

In 1866, the national portrait gallery was organizationally incorporated into the new *Nationalmuseum* that opened the same year, although it was left at the palace of Gripsholm and was not moved into the new museum building in Stockholm. The new *Nationalmuseum* housed the state's collection of fine arts, archeological artefacts (*Historiska museet*), the royal coin cabinet and *Livruskammaren*. It was essentially four museums in one and was the parliament's attempt to solve several problems in one blow. Almost all of the state-owned museums had problems with their premises; they were too small and ill-equipped for their purposes. And when the decision to erect a new museum building for the state art collection – that since 1794 was on exhibition in the so-called *Kongl. Museum* (Royal Museum) in the royal palace in Stockholm – drew near, parliament thought to include the other museums as well in the building.

The discussions about the need for a new national museum had started much earlier though, already in the 1810s. As opposed to the national portrait gallery that was initiated by high officials of the court, the discussions about the need for a new art museum took place in what could be called civil society, even if some of the advocates had ties to both court and parliament (Widén 2009a: chapter 3). The persons most active in the quest for a new museum were a mixture of artists, civil servants and academics. Most of them were also part of the same generation; they grew up during the turbulent years between 1800-1810 and shared an interest in the rejuvenation of the nation following the loss of Finland. The plans for a new national museum were part of this and several of the involved persons were members of the above-mentioned *Gothic Society*. An even more important organization was the *Stockholm Art Association* (Stockholms konstförening) that was founded in 1832, modeled on the German *Kunstvereins* that had emerged in the 1820s.

The art association had, as its goal, to promote art life in Sweden by arranging exhibitions and buying art from promising young artists (to raffle among the members) and to promote the formation of a national art museum. To reach this last goal, the art association worked as a

pressure group against the monarch (with aid of the crown prince who was the protector of the association) and the parliament as well as engaging in public advocacy work in the form of art historical exhibitions that should serve as an example of what a new art museum could be.

Most important though, was that the art association could serve as a place where people could meet and discuss matters of art and the need for a new museum. The Swedish political situation with the four estates of parliament meant that it was equally important to get the support of the king, as it was to win parliament for a question. It was also very important to get support from the right persons, as a person could hold several important positions at the same time. For example, even though the art in *Kongl. Museum* was state-owned; the museum was situated in the palace that was the home of the king, and its director, curator and staff were listed among the courtiers and palace staff. As the director was also patron of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, as well as superintendent of the board of public works and buildings, this shows how deeply entangled court, state and also civil society were. During most of the 1840s and 1850s, the museum director/academy patron/superintendent Gustaf Anckarsvärd also was the chairman of the art association. During the 1820s and 1830s, he had also held positions at court when he, as an officer of the life guards, served as aid-de-camp to both the king and the crown prince. And he was no exception but rather an illustrating example. (Widen 2009a: 46f)

The first proper bill to parliament, suggesting the building of a new national art museum was put forward in 1828 in the estate of the nobility by Baron Fredrik Boije, publisher, graphic artist, chamberlain and cavalry officer (and later one of the founders of the art association). The bill was met by some positive remarks in the nobility, but was turned down, and met with more or less complete silence in the other three estates. A new bill was put forward with greater success in 1840 that led to parliament ordering the board of public works and buildings to make plans for a new museum for the next parliamentary session. That session was held in 1844-45, and this time the decision to build the new museum was made (Widén 2009a: 185f). The museum that was decided upon was a bit different from what had been discussed earlier though.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, discussions about the need for a national museum were all about the need for a new art museum. During the discussions in parliament in the 1840s, the members of parliament soon came to the conclusion that a new national museum should also have place for the other museums in need of space, but the discussions were more or less only about art and the art museum.

In the decision that was made in 1845, all four museums but also *Kungliga Biblioteket* (national library) were said to be housed in the new building. In the time between the decision and the opening of the museum, some 20 years later, it was decided that the library needed its own building, but the other museums moved in. It was soon concluded that the premises were too small for all four museums, and already in 1883 *Livruskammaren* moved out of the museum (Bursell & Dahlberg 2003). *Historiska museet* and the coin cabinet stayed in the building until 1943 when a new building in central Stockholm was finished (Bergstöm & Edman 2004: 62ff; Thordeman 1946).

The four museums that shared the new building all had their own identities when they moved in, something they continued to have. The only museum that really shifted its identity was the *Kongl. Museum* and its art collection. It became synonymous with the *Nationalmuseum* building in which it took up the majority of space. *Historiska museet*, on the other hand, never really seemed

to have identified itself with the building, and very early on planned for a new museum building of its own, already in the 1880s (Hillström 2006: 235ff). But between 1866 and 1943, *Nationalmuseum* was the home of the national museum of fine arts and the national museum of archaeology and was not, as today, a national gallery rather than a museum.

The prime value of *Nationalmuseum* when it comes to the nation-building process is that it, and the prolonged debate about it, was the starting point of Swedish national cultural policies. Before that, culture and cultural heritage weren't really seen as part of the state's responsibility (with the exception of the preservation of ancient monuments and objects made of gold or silver which had been subjects of the state's interests since the seventeenth century) but that changed during the debates on the building of *Nationalmuseum* (Widén 2009a). During the late nineteenth century, the museum took up a new role in the nation-building process when it started buying and promoting the production of historical nationalistic paintings, a genre that became popular all over Europe during the period (Bjurström 1992: 152f). Before that, the nationalistic content of the museum was downplayed. The museum did, from the 1850s onwards, buy contemporary Swedish art, but to a very limited degree, and the permanent exhibitions also displayed a national history of Swedish art, but the main theme of the museum was to imprint Sweden in the European art historical tradition. The other parts of the museum, *Livruskammaren* and *Historiska museet* did, of course, have a more nationalistic theme but did not explore it to the degree that they could have. The historical department in particular looked upon itself as a scientific institution where science should dominate over the more popular nationalistic ideas. During the late nineteenth century, the historical department/*Historiska museet* did try to play a role in the growing national romantic movement though, but that niche was already more or less filled by the private initiative *Nordiska museet* and *Skansen* that opened in the 1870s and 1890s respectively.

The Museum of Scandinavian ethnography and cultural history and Skansen outdoor museum - Nordiska museet and Skansen

Nordiska museet and its counterpart the open-air museum *Skansen* were, from start to finish, the work of Arthur Hazelius. Hazelius had started his career as a promising young linguist, but had, early on, started collecting Scandinavian ethnographical objects. In 1872, he announced that he intended to open what he called *Skandinavisk-etnografiska samlingen* (The Scandinavian-Ethnographic collection) and the following year, the first exhibition was opened. It was situated in a pavilion alongside one of the main shopping and walking streets of Stockholm, in an area that also contained several scientific institutions.

The first exhibition consisted of three tableaux with interiors typical to three different provinces of Sweden (Skåne, Halland and Södermanland). The centerpieces of the tableaux were several life-sized dolls complete with costumes typical to the different provinces (Hillström 2006: 157ff). In many ways the tableaux resembled the, at the time, fashionable genre pictures of farmhouse interiors, sometimes they were actually modeled directly after well-known paintings (Hillström 2006: 379). They were also a kind of frozen version of the popular *Tableux Vivant* games, where live models imitated a popular work of art.

The museum immediately became very popular and soon began to grow as Hazelius expanded his collections, not least by gifts from individuals that shared Hazelius' ideas. This complicated matters a little, because of uncertainty over the legal status of the collection. Was it a private or

public collection? Was it the private property of Hazelius or was it, as Hazelius himself said, the property of the state (Hillström 2006: 169-180)? The definite answer came in 1880 when Hazelius transferred the museum and its collections to a new foundation that would be under control of a board (with Hazelius as chairman) and owned by ‘the Swedish people’. The foundation should not be state-controlled but be a public body of its own which meant that its independence was secured. It was also said in the founding documents that the museum should forever remain in the capital and that the collections could not be scattered.

The rapid expansion also raised questions. In 1873, when it opened, the museum was a small pavilion with three interiors and less than twenty years later, the museum in 1890 filled up two entire town houses in central Stockholm, and the year after its open-air division *Skansen* opened at Djurgården in proximity of the city. What was the museum really about, was it an ethnographical museum, a museum of cultural history or an arts and crafts museum? Or, was it intended to become a national museum of cultural history, because that would be a serious intrusion into the state’s area of interest (Hillström 2006: 193ff), especially as *Historiska museet* was also making plans to create a role for itself as a national museum of cultural history and not only as a national museum of archaeology.

The magnitude of Hazelius’ plans for the museum became clearer when he, in 1891, presented the drawings for a new museum building, located at Djurgården. The drawings showed a very large building with four wings as a square in a northern European renaissance style with reminiscences of both Danish and Swedish palaces, not least the so-revered Vasa castles of the sixteenth century. The building should contain not only room for exhibitions, staff and storage areas, but also an enormous vaulted hall, called Folkhallen (Folk Hall), intended for large festivities (Hillström 2006: 206ff). The hall is one of the keys to understanding the intentions behind the museum, which by now had changed its name to *Nordiska museet*. It was not only intended to be a national museum of cultural history, but also a place of nationalistic and patriotic celebrations.

Together with its open-air counterpart *Skansen* that opened the same year, *Nordiska museet* was intended to be a socially reforming institution that would create bonds between high and low in the Swedish community as well as awaken the spirit of the Swedish people or “folk” (Bäckström 2010a: 69f). The civic ownership of the museum in Hazelius’ mind also enabled the museum to represent the Swedish people organically through patriotic love as opposed to the more modern institutions of the Swedish state (Bäckström 2010a: 75).

The most visible account of these patriotic and socially reforming ambitions of Hazelius were the so-called spring festivals at *Skansen*. The spring festivals were a way to reenact the idea of Swedishness and to tell the story of the Swedish ‘folk’, or people, to visitors, all done to make them aware of their cultural heritage and their belonging to this particular ‘folk’. The spring festivals were filled with national songs and national speeches, its nucleus being a traditional fair, and all framed by people dressed up in national dress. The persons in national dress were mainly women of good families, living in Stockholm, parts of the high society of the capital (Bäckström 2010a: 77f).

This was opposed to the everyday inhabitants of *Skansen*’s houses and cottages that were selected by their authenticity. On a normal day, it was crucial that the inhabitants of the *Morastugan* (cottage from the parish of Mora) or the Sámi of the Lapp camp dressed up in

traditional garb were actually from the parish of Mora or were actually of Sámi origin. Everything else would have been a betrayal to the scientific ideals of *Skansen* and *Nordiska museet*. At the spring festivals and other arrangements of the same kind though, these scientific ideals were abandoned in favour of a vision of the good, patriotic society, where good manners and breeding became more important than authenticity (Bäckström 2010a: 80ff).

This conflict between the scientific museum and the socially reforming museum was hard to solve and became a problem not only in the internal affairs of the museum, but also in the conflict with *Historiska museet* about its status as a national museum of cultural history. As mentioned above, *Historiska museet*, which was housed in *Nationalmuseum*, was, already in the 1880s, planning to open a new museum in a separate building, dedicated to the cultural history of Sweden. Cultural history in the mind of Hans Hildebrand, head of *Historiska museet* and director general of the *Swedish national heritage board*, did not include the lower classes or the peasantry but was all about the gentry and the bourgeoisie and their culture. The history of the peasantry and their culture was, in the mind of Hildebrand, the subject of ethnography and therefore the natural role for Hazelius' museum of Scandinavian ethnography (Hillström 2006: 235ff). Needless to say Hazelius did not share, with Hildebrand, the same vision of his museum, and the conflict between the two ways of viewing cultural history were to continue well into the twentieth century. This meant that the two museums, during the years around 1900, often competed for the same objects on the market and that the collections of the two museums gradually became more alike and overlapping. The conflict escalated when Hazelius made public his plans for *Nordiska museet's* building in 1891 and was not settled until 1919 when, by government decision, the borders between the respective areas of interest for the large state-owned museums *Historiska museet*, *Nationalmuseum* and *Livrustkammaren* were laid down.

The decision did not formally include *Nordiska museet* and *Skansen*, but, in effect, it did give the museum the responsibility to collect and display the cultural history of Sweden from the 1520s (when after the ascension of Gustav I to the throne, the modern history of Sweden was meant to have begun) and onwards. This meant that *Nordiska museet* kept its independence, continued to be a self-governing body in the public sphere, but, at the same time, became a part of the state system of heritage management (Hillström 2006: 337f). This agreement on the division of period responsibility between the museums was to be honoured until 2010 when *Historiska museet* opened a new permanent exhibition called "*Sveriges historia*" (History of Sweden) that intended to tell the cultural and political history of Sweden during the last 1000 years.

The impact of *Nordiska museet* and *Skansen* on the Swedish nation-building process can hardly be overestimated. The museum has, in many ways, defined what it is to be Swedish, both in the sense that it has published extensive research in the field of Swedish ethnology/ethnography, but also in the sense that it has created traditions and holidays as well as having harmonized the different local traditions of the big holidays like Christmas, Midsummer's Day etc. Before 1900, there were a lot of local ways of celebrating the different holidays, as well as there were local holidays that were only celebrated in certain parts of the country. Throughout the twentieth century, these local traditions have, with few exceptions, gradually been converted into more coherent forms.

This development is, of course, an effect of better communications and lesser divisions between the classes and modern media, but *Nordiska museet* and *Skansen* have also played a crucial

role in the process. The museum is an excellent example of what Hobsbawm called the “Invention of traditions” in his influential article of 1983 (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). An example of this are the above-mentioned “Spring festivals” where one of the days, the 6th of June, was celebrated as a patriotic day of festivity (Bäckström 2010a: 76). The 6th of June date goes back to the time when the new constitution of 1809 was decided, which in turn alludes to the date when Gustav I was elected king of Sweden in 1523.

As Hazelius and his allies also were stout proponents of a more public and extensive use of the national flag, *Skansen* was covered in flags and the celebration was soon to be known as the day of the flag. In 1916, this, until then, informal celebration was formalized as the day of the flag (Svenska flaggans dag) by the government. The flag day had then, since 1905 and the dissolution of the union with Norway, become more important as the flag from that moment was the signifier of Sweden only, and not, as during most of the nineteenth century, of the union between Sweden and Norway.

In 1983, parliament decided that the day of the flag should be the official National Day of Sweden and, in 2005, it was decided that it should also be a national holiday. Hazelius and *Skansen* were absolutely crucial for this development. Without his involvement during the 1890s, there would have been no national day as we know it. The *Skansen* festivities of the 1890s still echo in today’s National Day ceremonies held at the same location. The royals still attend, handing out flags to merited citizens and organizations in a ceremony that traces its roots to the spring festivals.

The National Historical Museum - Historiska museet

After the establishment of *Nordiska museet*, the great era of nineteenth century museum building was over – with the exception of *Naturhistoriska riksmuseet* where a new building was erected between 1907 and 1916. New ideals on exhibition and museum design entered the stage after the First World War when a new generation of museum curators with new ideas about scholarly professionalism and pedagogy entered the institutions. The foremost example of this development is probably the new building for *Historiska museet* that opened in 1943 with the exhibition “10 000 år i Sverige” (10 000 years in Sweden) that was to change the way museum exhibitions all over Sweden were organized over the next decades (Bergström & Edman 2004: 101ff).

As noted above, *Historiska museet* had a long history before 1943 and was a part of *Nationalmuseum* from 1866 when it was housed on the bottom floor of the building. The exhibitions and collections were of Swedish history, prehistory and numismatics. During the late nineteenth century, the museum competed with *Nordiska museet* for the role as the national museum of cultural history, a competition that *Historiska museet*, in a way, lost after the governmental decision in 1919 mentioned above. The museum, because of that, refocused on prehistory and medieval ecclesial history (Hillström 2006: 337f; Thordeman 1946: 130f). The exhibitions of the museum had always been very scientifically oriented – quite the opposite of *Nordiska museet’s* cottage interiors – with exhibition cases containing typological series of objects describing the evolution of e.g. stone axes, medieval swords or ceramics (Nerman 1946). Like the other national museums in the country, the geographic area covered was the land inside the

borders of 1809/1905, even though the southernmost parts of the country had been Swedish for only the last 300 years or so.

Furthermore, the exhibitions claimed a cultural continuity from prehistory until today, where the first inhabitants of the region were said to have been ethnical Swedes. This claim was actually strengthened during the first half of the twentieth century and reached its climax in the 1943 exhibition “10 000 år i Sverige” (Bergström & Edman 2004: 109f). Unsurprisingly, the world war had further strengthened the want for nationalistic interpretations and rhetoric and the museum told a story of a people and their deep roots in the Swedish soil, claiming that the oldest human remains found in Sweden were, in fact, examples of the “Nordic race”, just like the inhabitants of the day (Bergström & Edman 2004: 109f, Aronsson 2011).

Technically, the exhibition – that at least in part was to be in place well into the 1970s – was groundbreaking insofar that it broke with the old tradition of the scientific museum and focused on the mass audience and how to mediate the story to them (Thordeman 1946: 158). Exhibition design inspiration was taken from, among others, the *Museum of Modern Art* in New York. This groundbreaking way of exhibiting prehistory also made its way into the regional museums (*Länsmuseer*) that were created during the 1930s and 1940s. In this way, the idea of the popular exhibition that connected the Swedish people of today with the prehistorical inhabitants of the region, ethnically and racially, spread all over the country during the 1940s and 1950s (Nerman 1946: 211f).

The idea of the long continuity of the Swedish nation or people in the geographical area of present day Sweden not only served a more traditional nationalistic claim, but also served the social democratic welfare state and its claim for consensus and harmony in society. The understanding that the entire people had common and extremely old roots should serve democratic society and create harmony between the classes (Bergström & Edman 2004: 109f). The new building, although a modernistic “exhibition machine” in its functions, had clear ties to the national romantic movement and its taste for renaissance castles of the sixteenth century, which further strengthened the museum’s nationalistic claims.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, *Historiska museet* was the leading actor in a movement to deconstruct the nationalistic history of Sweden, leading to major reconstructions of the exhibitions. A new kind of museum pedagogy was also established in which the audience was invited to ask questions about the exhibitions, and also to give their own answers. The idea was to be a more open, less authoritarian museum (see e.g. Svanberg 2010: 13, 23). This development has continued and is perhaps even more prominent today. In the newly reconstructed exhibition “Forntider” (Prehistories) there is no mention of state or nation at all. The exhibition starts with the statement that “There have been people living in what we call Sweden in thousands of years” and when individuals or groups of people are mentioned, they are referred to as people living at a certain place and not as parts of any people or ethnicity. There is a distinct non-nationalistic and non-ethnic idea in the exhibition, but the geographical borders of the exhibition are still present day Sweden that includes Skåne but excludes e.g. Finland. (see e.g. Aronsson 2010, 2011).

In 2010, *Historiska museet* also broke the 1919 agreement with *Nordiska museet* about the responsibility of the different epochs when they opened the exhibition “Sveriges historia” (History of Sweden) that deals with the last 1000 years. The exhibition – part of a collaboration between the museum, Norsted’s publishing house and TV4 that also includes a documentary TV-

series and an eight-part book on Swedish history – is rather small given its large scope, but, in relationship with the museal history treated above, it has some rather interesting features in that it explicitly wants to discuss some of the silences mentioned (Historiska museet 2009). Women's history is treated extensively as is migration in and out of Sweden. Ethnic minorities like the Sámi and the Romani are also present although, like most other subjects, they are treated very sketchily. The most striking thing about “Sveriges historia” though is that it still does not deal with the seventeenth century imperial ambitions in a political way. The expansion is briefly mentioned, but the focus is, like at the army museum, on the sufferings of the civilians and of the soldiers. The reason for this might be that the general perception is that this is part of the old, nationalistic, way of telling the history, when an analytical political retelling of Sweden's expansionist history in reality has been lacking for a very long time.

When it comes to understanding the political climate and view of history in Sweden during the decades around the turn of the millennium, *Historiska museet* is probably a good starting point. But even though *Historiska museet* was a very influential museum when it came to museum architecture and design of historical exhibitions, and probably helped to uphold a post-war nationalism in Sweden, the museum that meant the most when it came to nation-building and Swedish self image in the second half of the twentieth century is probably *Moderna museet*, the museum of modern art.

The Museum of Modern Art - Moderna museet

The idea of a new museum of modern or contemporary art seems to have originated around 1950 as the result of interior problems in *Nationalmuseum*. Although the art museum had acquired the entire building when *Historiska museet* got its own building in 1943, the need for more exhibition space was felt in the museum. This was especially so in the department that dealt with contemporary art. During the early fifties, a group of curators at *Nationalmuseum* put together several exhibitions on contemporary art in the museum and outside of it to raise the question of the need for a new exhibition space for the art of the twentieth century. Together with *Föreningen för nutida konst* (The association of contemporary art) that, in 1953, donated 149 works of art from contemporary Swedish artists and, at the same time, changed their name to *Moderna museets vänner* (Friends of the museum of modern art) the curators started to raise an opinion in the matter, a venture that was very successful (Bjurström 1992: 283ff).

In 1955, the decision were made that the naval base in central Stockholm would be moved out to the southern archipelago, which made several buildings close to *Nationalmuseum* on the island of Skeppsholmen available. The choice fell on the old exercise building and, in 1956, the rebuilding of the premises started, only to be interrupted a few months later when the opportunity arose to exhibit Picassos “Guernica” together with the sketches to the painting. The painting was put on display in the semi-finished museum, with no ceiling and a tarpaulin roof. The exhibition was a great success with the audience and the media though and made the new museum well-known and talked about before it even existed (Bjurström 1992: 291).

In May 1958, the museum was inaugurated and the decade that would follow came to be an extremely creative period under museum director Pontus Hultén. The first years saw groundbreaking (and nowadays canonized) exhibitions like “Rörelse i konsten” (Movement in art) – that introduced artists like Jean Tinguely and Alexander Calder to Sweden and sometimes

to Europe – and “4 amerikanare” (4 Americans) with pop artists like Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg (Granath & Nieckels 1983: 36, 39f, 80ff). The latter also introduced what would later be the iconic work of the museum to the Swedish audience, Robert Rauschenberg’s assemblage work “Monogram”, more commonly known to the public as “The goat”.

Even more important was the museum’s policy of participation. The museum, early on, adapted an idea of public participation and democracy that has since been an important part of its self image, expressed in a wish to engage both children and adults, a goal that became more or less equally important as showing the art itself (Eriksson 2008: 78, Burch 2010: 230ff). This participatory ideology was manifested in different performance works and in a pioneering children’s activity program and a children’s workshop (Göthlund 2008); the supreme manifestation of this being the 1968 exhibition “Modellen – En modell för ett kvalitativt samhälle” (The model – a model for a qualitative society) which was a social reformatory experiment, a play zone for kids and a performative work of art.

“Modellen” was a work by Danish artist Palle Nielsen and consisted of a long wooden platform above a sea of foam blocks in different shapes and colours. The surrounding walls were covered in paper giving the visiting children the opportunity to paint whatever they wanted with the materials that were supplied. There were also a lot of costumes, wigs and masks (depicting political figures of the day like Mao, Lyndon B. Johnson and de Gaulle) for the children to play with. It was stressed that “Modellen” was not a completed work of art, but rather that all those who participated in the play, children and adults, were part of the work, or rather were the actual art work (Burch 2010: 230ff).

“Modellen” became a hugely influential work of art that attracted hoards of visitors, not least children, and gave *Moderna Museet* the reputation of being a progressive and important museum suitable for children. The exhibition also initiated a discussion in society about children’s play and the importance of good environments for children’s play, and to some extent also about democracy and participation (Göthlund 2010: 267f). “Modellen” is probably the best example of the kind of exhibitions that made *Moderna Museet* into a symbol of Sweden in the post-war era. In a country that looked upon itself as being progressive – perhaps even the most progressive country in the world – a museum of modern art that invited children to participate in its exhibitions was the perfect symbol. The museum was taken into the arms of more or less the entire society and a visit to *Moderna museet* soon became a compulsory part of a visit to the capital, irrespective of whether you were a visiting school class, a group of elderly or a regular tourist. In a much reproduced photograph, the Minister of Education, later Prime Minister, Olof Palme – himself a symbol of the progressiveness of the country – threw himself merrily towards the foam blocks of “Modellen”. The (social-democratic) politician at play among the kids in the museum of modern art was an emblematic picture of the Swedish self-image in the late twentieth century, the essence of modernity, progress and rationality. In many ways, *Moderna Museet* also succeeded in being an active part of the debates in the public sphere, especially during the 1960s and 1970s with “Modellen” as the prime, but far from only, example.

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