

December 2022

Dear friends,

The year is drawing to a close, and I have just returned after some time in Chile, that is part of the Global South. Moving through the capital, Santiago, I was reminded of how social movements use visual art as a natural form of expression. Art—graphic expressions in particular—has had an important role and presence in the Chilean people’s struggle for democracy. Graphic arts, in the broadest sense of the term, is still present on the streets of Santiago, both as visual slogans and as ongoing memory work.

Within Samlande tankar/Collecting Thoughts, the expert council has been to see the graphics collection at Moderna Museet, where curator Annika Gunnarsson introduced the collection consisting of approximately 13,000 prints. We were also given a tour of the museum’s different acquisition projects. From “Önskemuseet” (The Museum of Our Wishes, an initiative to broaden the international, Western collection), to “Andra önskemuseet” (The Second Museum of Our Wishes, focusing on female artists), followed by “A Greater World” (acquisitions of works outside the Anglo-Saxon West) and finally “Svenska förvärv” (Swedish Acquisitions, an initiative to support the domestic art field during the pandemic).

Gunnarsson discussed the way a collection is always built in a specific context, shaped by a particular understanding of what a collection should be, what its purpose is, and who builds it. This made me think about how the latter in particular is important in relation to history and communal memory, which museums create through their collections. Who the collectors are is an indication of who writes history and who articulates memories, which in turn raises questions around what it preserved and what is excluded.

After Annika’s presentation I led a workshop on the reasoning around including contemporary artworks in a collection. The group was presented with three graphic art works to discuss in terms of how they viewed the work and why it should or should not be part of a collection. A salient theme in the discussion that resulted was that the motivation for including a particular artwork is always in relation to the agency of the collection—the purpose it seeks. Additional parameters include the relevance of the work, but also subjective taste. We talked about the definition of a collection, how art

gets institutionalized, how it is stored and commoditized, and how a collection preserves even as it can exclude.

A museum collection constitutes knowledge, for instance national museums which maintain the history associated with the community of the nation state. History and memory are produced and reproduced through memory, which entails a risk that the official version “forgets” and makes invisible certain aspects of that history. Maybe this is why Chilean artists remain active on the streets with their work: to make sure that history is not forgotten, to stop the memory from being erased.

Within the contemporary art context we can see that different museum collections all contribute to a wide-ranging idea of what is part of the collective. Moderna Museet’s acquisition initiatives, which sought to fill gaps in the museum’s collection, provide a teachable example. “A Greater World” (2017), for example, was a result of an understanding that the collection should reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences contained by society in order to make the collection more relevant for its audience. The extant collection had a presentation that was too narrow and homogenous, excluding broader perspectives and histories.

In a time when received ideas and norms are being turned on their head, how can a collection make visible, rather than obscure, an era characterized by transformations? This “how” may be one of the central questions, and it is one we will continue to ponder in the continuation of Samlande tankar / Collecting Thoughts. Perhaps the key is finding not one but rather several methods for collecting, enabling fluidity and renegotiations.

/Macarena Dusant

Samlande tankar/Collecting Thoughts
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