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Review of Ludwig Qvarnström (ed.), *Swedish Art History: A Selection of Introductory Texts*, Lund Studies in Arts and Cultural Sciences 18, 2018. ISBN: 978-91-983690-6-9, 408 p.

In his introduction to *Swedish Art History: A Selection of Introductory Texts*, its editor Ludwig Qvarnström asks, 'Do we need another national art history in these days of globalisation?' He goes on to reply to his own question by citing the practical needs of, for example, exchange students who have come to study art history at the University of Lund. The history of Swedish art, any more than that of other Nordic countries, is not to be found in so-called general works of art history. For this reason, there has been a focus in all these countries on providing general presentations of the country's art history, of either broader or more limited scope. English-language versions of these works, however, have been rare. With this in mind, it is understandable that the University of Lund has chosen to publish the book discussed here, especially since the previous general work on Swedish art history in English, *A History of Swedish Art* by Mereth Lindgren et al. (1987), has been out of print for many years.

This new work presents Swedish art history from prehistoric times to the 21st century. The book's heading, however, specifies that it is a selection of introductory texts by various experts. Although the texts are in chronological order, the editor underlines that in comparison with earlier works of a similar nature there is no single, uniform narrative.

There are 20 contributions by 18 authors. Eleven articles focus more closely on specific subjects in accordance with their authors' research interests. The idea was to offer a plurality of voices, especially where there is an explicitly critical attitude to major narratives and national schools. The book presents prehistory and the Middle Ages briefly, while art from the 16th to the 18th century is given twice the number of pages as the preceding sections. Half of the pages

of the book are devoted to the period from the 19th century to the present day.

In this review, I discuss the overall organisation of the book, its possible new contributions and whether it meets the goals that it has set itself. Reading it as a non-Swedish reviewer, I also point to various choices for which reasons are either given or not. To begin with, the authors should have been presented in some way. While they include well-known names in the discipline, there are also fresh contributions from young researchers who have only recently completed their doctorates. Regarding them in particular, presentations of the authors would have helped the reader gain a grasp of their specific research interests.

The texts forming an overall chronology are by Björn Magnusson Staaf, Cecilia Hildeman Sjölin, Måns Holst-Ekström, Martin Olin, Merit Laine, Hedvig Brander Jonsson, Charlotta Nordström, Ludwig Qvarnström, and Björn Fritz. There are also specialist articles by Hildeman Sjölin, Ylva Haidenthaller, Greger Sundin, Emma Jönsson, Åsa Bharathi Larsson, Alexandra Herlitz, Ludwig Qvarnström, Helen Fuchs, Jens Arvidson, Max Liljefors, and Moa Petersén. It is assumed in the book that these texts will benefit students in various workshops for small groups and that they can be a pedagogical aid for discussing the various dimensions of art.

The book is richly illustrated, with a total of 226 pictures, 183 of which are in colour. There appear to have been some problems regarding the illustrations as it was necessary to refer to webpages in connection with the works of Öyvind Fahlström. Art by women is represented by less than 10 per cent of the illustrations. Wherever possible, the sources of the book include the latest research, though naturally many of the articles also refer to general works of broader scope, such as *Konst och visuell kultur i Sverige* (2007) edited by Lena Johannesson.

In its heading, the section by Magnusson on prehistory gives whole of Scandinavia as its focus, but otherwise the book delimits the art history of

Sweden to the present official borders of the country. A Finnish reader finds this to be problematic. One might assume that it would be hard for historians to ignore the fact that Finland was part of Sweden for 600 years. On the other hand, I have often noticed that this detail of history is seldom remembered in present-day Sweden. The book, however, selects its material accordingly, though not quite consistently, especially with regard to the 18th-century fortress of Sveaborg. As a Finn, I may be partial with regard to this focus, but it is obvious that any history of Sweden will remain incomplete if this aspect is ignored. In art history, it concerns, for example, several important works of architecture, not just Sveaborg. Another interesting example of delimiting material in Swedish general works on art history is to leave medieval secular architecture almost completely undiscussed, particularly with regard to castles and fortresses. This excludes an important political dimension of architecture, although the large building sites of the Catholic church were no less political. In other respects as well architecture is slightly set aside in the book the closer it comes to the present day.

It must be noted that the book's chronological articles on the Middle Ages by Hildeman Sjölin do provide an overview of some of the main works of ecclesiastical art and their stylistic history with cited examples. This part of the book has a clearly southern emphasis, with only Härkeberga Church in Uppland as a visual example of churches further north in Sweden. Uppsala Cathedral is mentioned only briefly in the text. With students in mind, a clearer picture of Sweden's archbishopal and bishopal churches would have outlined this subject area as a whole.

The rise of the Vasa dynasty to power in the early 16th century is described by Holst-Ekström mainly with focus on the rulers concerned. It is noteworthy that the building of castles now appears in the book for the first time. The next article on the period when Sweden was a leading European power, by Olin, commendably describes the 17th century in terms of major social change involving the rise of the nobility. This article is perhaps the book's best account of architecture in the context of Swedish art history. The specialist articles

concerning the 17th century by Haidenthaller and Sundin contain additional information on the various ways in which royalty and the nobility visualised their own power. In this connection, the art of medals played a highly important role and the *Thesaurus nummorum Sveo-Gothicorum* (1691), a major work by the Finnish-born Elias Brenner, is also mentioned.

The article on the so-called Age of Liberty and the Era of Utility of the 18th century by Laine describes the period with reference to selected concepts of politics, society and the economy, such as power, faith, war, trade, learning and collecting. It presents a clear and concise picture of how art in Sweden evolved in terms of style and underlying organisation and discusses works of art and architecture commissioned by the state, the church and private bodies. The author's list of sources is long, and she notes that 18th-century art in Sweden has been studied extensively for over a century. It is worth noting here that historical studies have been more focused on Sweden's period as a leading European power in the 17th century and its numerous wars.

Art and society in the 19th century, discussed by Brander Jonsson, also marked the beginning of a truly long period of peace that led to the growth of population and increasing affluence. Brander Jonsson's article discusses these developments with selected examples including new churches, railway stations and hospitals, and, with reference to the universities, the new main building of the University of Lund. The examples, however, do not give a comprehensive idea of new and growing urban architecture. In view of the evolution and organisation of art in the 19th century, limiting the presentation to less than 30 pages makes the included specialist articles highly important.

One of the specialist articles on 19th-century art, by Bharathi Larsson, discusses a darker side of history, namely how colonialist visual culture had a presence in the Nordic countries even though they had no significant colonial past in other respects. This is one of the most critical articles in the book as it addresses Sweden's own racial policies regarding the Sámi. The strong views presented at the time in Sweden on the Mongol origins of the Finns could also be added to this. A critical perspective continues in the following special article,

by Herlitz, on the diversification of the field of the visual arts in Sweden in the 19th century when so-called angry young men formed their own opposition group. They also managed to take over positions in the Swedish art world. This article aptly describes how women artists who studied in Paris alongside these males were forgotten for decades, which was partly also due to the biases of art-historical writing.

The chronological article covering the years from the beginning of the 20th century to the Second World War, by Nordström, fast-forwards the history of painting with various orientations, from expressionism to surrealism, briefly listed as a cavalcade of names. The article does not offer any critical approach or problematisation of its subject matter. For example, only four lines of text are devoted to the work of Hilma af Klint.

By way of contrast, the first of the specialist articles on the period, by Qvarnström, takes a critical view with its discussion of the artist couple Isaac Grünewald and Sigrid Hjertén in the field of the arts in Sweden. This article describes in distinct terms how the art world of the period and its critics functioned. There is always a further problematic in understanding the roles of artist couples, which often contained an explicit or hidden notion of the lesser contribution of the female partner. The so-called darker side of Swedish history presented in the previous section also emerged in connection with Grünewald's ethnic background. The article contains an excellent description of how Grünewald's ethnicity was addressed in art criticism in the period. Hjertén's failing health and the sad end of her career in mental illness find parallels in the lives of many women artists, also in Finland, such as the painter Greta Hällfors-Sipilä and the poet L. Onerva.

Of the chronological articles, Qvarnström's concise text on the development and construction of the welfare state has its emphasis on architecture and illustrates the connection between the housing shortage of the period, architectural modernism and the Folkhemmet (People's Home) ideology. A few works by the two leading architects of the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930 are highlighted, but the article also takes a critical view of the more negative

aspects of modernism in which the idea of a new man led in Sweden to forced sterilisations and a markedly race-biological ideology. The article is too brief to provide a comprehensive account of the emergence of architectural modernism in Sweden, but architecture of the 21st century fares even worse as it is not mentioned at all in the whole book.

The last chronological article, by Fritz, is on art and society from the 1950s to the 2010s. It is practically the only article in the book that also discusses its choices, pointing out that its selection of material is to be understood as only one perspective on the subject. While this caveat is understandable when dealing with recent history, it would also have been called for in all the other articles.

Swedish Art History. A Selection of Introductory Texts leads its readers from prehistoric times to the 21st century. Its articles, in chronological order, provide mostly a familiar narrative of Swedish art history over the centuries, albeit with a slight southern emphasis this time. The critical approach promised in the introduction emerges, albeit in only a few articles, but there is no doubt that the issues that are addressed are not to be found in similar form in earlier general works on the subject of Swedish art history. The reader is thus offered completely new perspectives on Swedish art. I would hope, however, that any new editions of the book would be bound better, for in the present edition the pages start to come apart after being read only a few times.

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