

Conference
Nordic museum histories
31 January 2018

Titles and abstracts

Peter Aronsson

The making of nations and museums: Nordic national museums in a European context

The making of modern museums will be interpreted as part of a complex cultural negotiation of European modernization and nation-making. The varied structure of Nordic national museums will be explained as related to various challenges and paths taken to meet them in each nation-making project. They will in turn be placed in a wider European context based on the extensive comparative research made in [Eunamus](#) (European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen). The capacity to perform that institutional and cultural negotiation is a decisive factor in the political culture and in the relative success of the modernization process. Later research in European programmes following Eunamus, like MeLa, Traces, CoHere and UNREST will be mentioned to inspire further research.

Peter van Mensch

Profession or occupation? Fifty years' discussion about the training of museum workers

At the first international conference on training of museum personnel (Seventh International Conference of the International Council of Museums, New York 1965) the term "profession" was avoided. A document published in 2008 by the ICOM International Committee for the Training of Museum Personnel (*Museum professions: A European frame of reference*) listed twenty "professions" in the museum context. Both perspectives reflect the same ambivalences concerning the identity of the professional status of museum work. A growing number of universities offers masters programmes in museology, but "museologist" is not among the twenty professions defined in the aforementioned ICTOP publication. The lecture will discuss the hypothesis that the problem is twofold: Museum workers fail to recognise the importance of a museological basis of their work, and as an academic field of interest museology (or museum studies) has alienated itself from the realities of museum practice.

Camilla Mordhorst

Reimagining the museum through its history

For more than 400 years, the museum has been an important societal institution. Today, the museum is especially acknowledged for its tradition-preserving role, but the museum has primarily survived the time shift due to its ability to address current societal agendas. One can say that while the museum has retained its special *modus operandi*, the goals of these procedures have changed substantially. It is this ability that has made the museum particularly durable as an institution. Thus, when we dive into the stories of museums, it is not only in order to reflect upon our traditions, but also in order to see all the possibilities that the museum holds.

Mattias Ekman

The first century of Nordic museology: Memory and epistemology in the early modern *Kunstkammer*

In the Nordic countries of Europe, most museums were established during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But museology, the concern with theory and practice of collecting, classifying and arranging objects, was established and advanced already in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by our most illustrious scientists – Ole Worm, Thomas Bartholin, Olaus Rudbeck the Elder, Carl Linnaeus and others. During the period, the epistemological rationales were constantly in the melting pot and in exchange with European developments.

The lecture introduces some of the main features of the cultures of collecting from their inception in the early seventeenth century until the mid-eighteenth century in Sweden, Denmark-Norway and the duchy of Schleswig-Holstein-Gottorp. The first part gives a museum-historical and culture-historical introduction to the kinds of collections, their architectural organisation and role in society. The second part positions collecting in relation to intellectual currents of the period and scrutinises its museological and memory-theoretical underpinnings.

Mattias Bäckström

To animate the past for the benefit of the present: Ideal realism as concept and technique at museums of cultural history

Around 1900, curators at museums of cultural history in the Scandinavian countries were truly dedicated in shaping museum activities for the improvement of society. In this presentation, I will discuss how aesthetic, didactic and scholarly ideas were integrated with museum techniques and historical remains and reproductions when shaping these living-museum activities. Starting with a brief outline of the concept ‘ideal realism’, I will focus on how it was brought into play in folk museums and museums of cultural history at the turn of the twentieth century, i.e. in museum cottages and museum stagings such as national performances and historical re-enactments. Then I will address the following question: In the context of ‘ideal realism’, what were the similarities and differences between the society-oriented practice of the Danish Folk Museum in Copenhagen and the society-oriented practice of the Nordic Museum in Stockholm? My presentation will continue with an outline of ‘animation’ in comparison to ‘ideal realism’, the former a concept which was essential in the socio-cultural outreach activities in the museum and exhibition sectors of the 1970s. These concepts will finally be the point of departure for my closing remarks on the importance of understanding historical museum practices when shaping activities in present-day museums. The concept of ‘ideal realism’ is central to my PhD thesis *Hjärtats härdar: Folkliv, folkmuseer och minnesmärken i Skandinavien, 1808–1907* (Gidlunds förlag, 2012). The 1970s concept of ‘animation’ is important in my scholarly monograph *Att bygga innehåll med utställningar: Utställningsproduktion som forskningsprocess* (Nordic Academic Press, 2016).