

A Motivation and Model for Collecting – The Norwegian Craft Acquisition Fund

Nanna Melland

The Norwegian Craft Acquisition Fund (*Innkjøpsfondet for norsk kunsthåndverk*, INK) is a unique institution that secures high quality contemporary craft for museum collections. Since its founding in 1990, it has contributed significantly to increasing the profile and public acceptance of the field of contemporary craft in Norway. The combined efforts of INK's members (past, present and future) raise the quality of the contemporary craft collections at the three museums which specialise in Norwegian craft: KODE Art Museums of Bergen, the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Oslo, and the National Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim. There is therefore no shadow of doubt that the Fund is one of the most significant institutions for the field of Norwegian craft today. In addition to its immense contribution to the field, it ultimately has an impact on Norwegian heritage and the nation's cultural value.

History

INK's establishment was the result of a congruence of interests between the three museums of decorative art in Norway, on one hand, and the Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts (*Norske Kunsthåndverkere*, NK) on the other. All these institutions strove to secure an important – but in many respects neglected – part of the visual field of art, namely, contemporary craft. In 1990, the Ministry of Cultural Affairs bent its ear to the requests from NK and the three museums and came up with a joint solution. Since then, INK has had a mandate to make autonomous decisions with respect to buying contemporary craft for KODE, the National Museum in Oslo and the National Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim. These are the only Norwegian museums with particular expertise in the field of contemporary craft.

Structure

Today, INK operates as a seven-member committee (also called a work group). Four members are practising artists who are elected at NK's annual meeting: one represents the field of metal art, the second represents ceramics, the third represents textiles and the fourth represents glass, wood and leather. The other three members are museum representatives (usually academically trained scholars and curators) from KODE, the National Museum in Oslo, and the National

Museum of Decorative Arts in Trondheim. Their involvement in the committee is a duty that comes as part of their regular professional job description.

The artists in the committee have four-year posts (very second year two new artists are appointed), and the museums representatives are members for as long as their respective employers decide – often for more than four years. The long-term posts create stability while the short-term posts create change. Based on my own three years of experience as a member of INK, I am convinced that the structure and the mix of long- and short-term posts functions well.

Collective competence

The collective competence (the knowledge and skills of all the members) and the group dynamic, which necessarily includes friction between the independent artists and the museum scholars, provide a platform for healthy dialogue. This means the Fund functions as a key forum for the contemporary craft discourse. It is a meeting place for practicing craft artists and scholars which ensures the development of a balanced body of knowledge within the field. It results in members being able to discuss, evaluate and make relevant acquisitions that can complement the museum collections. The system, however, can only work properly if all the members have deep respect for each other's competencies. They must also share a common goal: to make interesting, relevant and high-quality craft acquisitions for the museum collections.

Exhibition schedule and visits

In order to visit as many exhibitions as possible, it is necessary to make an exhibition schedule in advance and to be open to revising and adapting it to the constantly changing field of craft. All the members are involved in this important task. It is of great value that the artists can and do use their time and networks in the wider field of craft to investigate exhibitions and artists. Without this investment of time and effort, INK as a working group would have fewer possibilities of staying abreast of what is happening in the field, of finding out about exhibitions, visiting them and evaluating artists' works.

Each year the group visits approximately 160 exhibitions in Norway. It is unfortunately impossible to visit all the shows, but the members still do research on the ones they do not see. It is therefore very important that galleries and artists send exhibition information and photo documentation to INK's e-mail address kontakt@innkjopsfondet.no. This information is

accumulated and evaluated, and when the opportunity arises, INK members make new efforts to see the given artist's production. INK buys on site, in actual exhibitions, and each member's vote on whether or not to purchase a work has equal weight.

INK's purchases

INK's purchases vary in nature: they can be object based, site-specific installations or even time-based works. The primary goal is to purchase the works perceived to be the most relevant craft at whatever time in the ever-changing field of craft. After a work is purchased, it is sent to one of the three museums and administered by that museum as part of its own collection. INK is obligated to provide public information about its purchases. All the basic details of its purchases are therefore available on the webpage www.innkjopsfondet.no.

In sum, the collaboration between artist and scholars is extremely fruitful in providing an optimal setting for buying high quality contemporary craft as well as for discussing contemporary craft in a constantly changing field.

Conclusion

As a craft artist, it is a great honour to be selected as a member of the Norwegian Craft Acquisition Fund and to represent the interests of other craft artists for the four year period. You are selected for the post at the Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts' (NK's) annual meeting, and therefore have a serious and professional responsibility to represent not only the interests of your own colleagues and other craft artists, but also the interests of the wider field of contemporary craft. Each member is fully aware of this responsibility and performs the duties in a serious way, exercising professional integrity and respect.

Due to its structure, INK is able to avoid the pitfalls of becoming a powerful and biased cadre of decision makers who promote their own interests and those of their closest colleagues. The potential abuse of decision-making power is constantly addressed through the dynamic discussion between the members. They have mutual respect for each other's competencies and freely share their knowledge and insight with each other. These collective efforts result in the acquisition and preservation of relevant contemporary craft. They succeed in acknowledging the field of craft as an important part of the visual art scene and an important part of the Norwegian state's cultural value.