Crossing Borders

Magnus Olausson
Director of Collections and Exhibitions

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Fig. 1 Interior from the exhibition Crossing Borders.
In 2014, an exhibition project was launched together with Swedavia, to show art and design from the Nationalmuseum collection at Swedish airports, with the object of reaching a wider and more international audience. This idea was prompted to a large degree by our ambition to show the Nationalmuseum’s collections while the museum building is closed for refurbishment. Our first project was the photo exhibition Crossing Borders which opened at Stockholm Arlanda Airport, where some 20 million travellers pass through each year. The next exhibition venue was Umeå, when the city was Cultural Capital of Europe. Last summer, we also showed a similar selection at the Swedish National Portrait Gallery, Gripsholm Castle. The exhibition featured more than 20 photographic portraits of internationally famous Swedes who had challenged or crossed borders in one way or another (Fig. 1).

Another vital aspect has been that the portraits we show reflect contemporary portrait photography. The photographers belong to different generations, from Hans Gedda and Denise Grünstein to Sanna Sjöswård and Magnus Laupa. They have different styles and are inspired by both advertising and fashion photography, films and videos. This sometimes lends a theatrical air to their work, with carefully staged portraits. Other photographs exemplify intimacy or detachment, the personal and the official.

In Hans Gedda’s portrait of the Nobel laureate Tomas Tranströmer, no one would suspect that a stroke had left the author hemiplegic (Fig. 2). The picture is remarkably meditative, with a beetle moving in the opposite direction across the table. It could be a reference to the scarab, the an-
cient Egyptian symbol for the morning sun, but more specifically to the fact that a newly-discovered species of beetles was named after Tranströmer, in honour of his 80th birthday – *Mordellistena transtroemeriana*. Thomas Wågström’s portrait of Ingvar Kamprad signals ingenuity in simplicity – his key to success rests lightly in one hand (Fig. 3). The Ikea hex key is a familiar symbol of the company whose flat-packed furniture is found in so many Western homes. Wågström is also the photographer behind one of the two portraits commissioned for this exhibition, that of the biochemist and inventor Petra Wadström. The other is of former foreign minister Carl Bildt, immortalised in Parliament in Stockholm by Sanna Sjöswär (Fig. 4).

The other portraits originate in other contexts. Fredrik Etoall’s picture of the recording artist Robyn, and Eric Broms’ photo of the footballer Zlatan Ibrahimovic are two examples of this (Figs. 5 and 6). Zlatan, with his spectacularly acrobatic style on the pitch, has been one of the greatest football stars for more than ten years. But Broms’ portrait of Zlatan, like Peter Cederling’s of swimming champion Therese Alshammar, demonstrate new trends in the genre (Fig. 7). Here, cropping is used to create evocative effects. All the new portraits that were acquired and shown in the exhibition, were funded by Gripsholmsföreningen av år 1937.

With this manifestation of photographic portraits, as highlighted in the exhibition *Crossing Borders*, our own contemporary times have gained a stronger presence in the Swedish National Portrait Gallery. From the very start, the idea was to feature people who have made a valuable contribution to Sweden. Formerly, this was almost
exclusively synonymous with being an elderly male member of the establishment. Now, however, the world’s oldest national portrait gallery has extended its range to include representatives from many different parts of society. The artists include both Swedish and international names, from Alexander Roslin to Irving Penn.

**Project leader:** Per Hedström  
**Working party:** Mikael Ahlund, Eva-Lena Karlsson, Magnus Olausson, Paula Röhrs  
**Exhibition design:** Joakim E. Werning  
**Lighting design:** Jan Gouiedo  
**Exhibition technology and installation:** The Technical Department at Nationalmuseum and Lars Johansson  
**Project coordinator:** Erik Järmens  
**Graphic design:** Agneta Bervokk

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**Fig. 6** Eric Broms (b. 1968), **Zlatan Ibrahimovic (b. 1981)**, 2011. Gelatin silver print mounted on aluminium, 60 x 44.4 cm. Nationalmuseum, NMGRH 4951.

**Fig. 7** Peter Cederling (b. 1966), **Therese Alshammar (b. 1977)**, 1998/2014. Gelatin silver print, 50.5 x 40.5 cm. Nationalmuseum, NMGRH 4947.