Foreword

The Editorial Committee
Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum, Stockholm
One of the biggest challenges facing the Nationalmuseum is to create a new presentation of the collection for the refurbished museum premises in 2018. This involves identifying what makes the Museum unique in an international perspective, what has previously not been highlighted, and what needs to be enhanced. Over the past year, several project teams have performed inventories on the Museum’s rich collection, and made acquisitions for the parts that needed to be developed.

Research has been conducted for a long period, to improve our knowledge about the collection and uncover its hidden potential to both specialists and the general public. This activity has resulted in several publications and exhibitions. The latest of these included the Italian project headed by Associate Professor Sabrina Norlander Eliasson. Italian Paintings: Three Centuries of Collecting, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Volume 1 – the first volume of two catalogues raisonnés – was published in spring 2015. This part of the collection has long been neglected, but a consequence of the Italian project is that we now have the opportunity to see one of last year’s most spectacular acquisitions, Domenico Fetti’s David with the Head of Goliath, painted around 1620 at the court of Mantua (see article on p. 11).

One specific shortcoming in the Museum’s collections concerns the number of women artists and designers. The Nationalmuseum now intends to correct this with targeted acquisitions for various parts of the collection. We are already seeing the concrete results of this effort. The Museum already has the world’s finest collection of women miniaturists, and it was extended this year with further artists. The same is true of portrait paintings and portrait photography, where key works have been acquired. Most recently, some thirty photographic works by Kerstin Bernhard (1914–2004) were added to the collection (see article on p. 57).

This volume of Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum, Stockholm describes in detail how the crafts section has similarly been enhanced through systematic acquisitions. These are primarily focused on the inter-war period’s large generation of women artists active in metal crafts, a field that is not traditionally associated with women. Among these are the now-forgotten silver designers Wilhelmina Wendt (1896–1988) and Märta Rockström-Lindh (1904–1996). Another noteworthy example is the more well-known Greta Magnusson Grossman (1906–1999), whose famous lamp was bought for the collection.

Swedish book design is an important, yet relatively unknown, area of collecting for the Nationalmuseum, along with children’s book illustrations. No deadline has been set for this collecting activity. By acquiring Elsa Beskow’s Tomtebobarnen, the Museum now owns one of the finest objects in the field. An equally invaluable part of Swedish children’s literature is Elsa Beskow’s illustrations to Alice Tegnér’s book of children’s songs, Mors lilla Olle och andra visor (1903). The Museum already owned three illustrations and was able to add Ekorn satt i granen (Squirrel in the spruce tree) and Småjäntorna (Little girls are standing by the door) to its collection (see article on p. 43).

Nordic art is often presented in the Nationalmuseum’s exhibition, but the Museum previously owned relatively few works from our neighbouring countries. Read more in the article on p. 23 about the Museum’s acquisitions, especially from the Danish golden era, with artists such as Constantin Hansen, Christen Købke, Peter Christian Skougaard, Martinus Rørby and the Norwegian artist Thomas Fearnley, who studied art in Denmark.

The Nationalmuseum has always played a vital part in preserving the Swedish cultural heritage. Unfortunately, our government assignment allows only limited possibilities when it comes to rescuing crucial treasures. Against this background, the Museum’s own funding has occasionally been used for such specific acquisitions – in 2014, a few priceless remnants of the collections at the manor houses of Biby and Skärfva could be saved, partly thanks to the Friends of the Nationalmuseum. In view of this, it is especially pleasing that a large tapestry on the theme of October, woven at Les Gobelins and a gift from Louis XV to Erik Sparre could be repatriated, after having left Sweden nearly a century ago (see article on p. 49).

The introduction of a photographic collection within the National Swedish Portrait
Gallery has not only added numerous artists who had been missing, but has also substantially democratized the representation of a wide variety of persons. With the acquisition of some 20 portraits by a younger generation of Swedish photographers in connection with the exhibition Crossing Borders (see article on p. 123), the situation has changed significantly in this respect. The very successful exhibition, which was shown at several Swedish airports and at Gripsholm Castle, is an excellent example of how an outreach activity has influenced our collecting. Crossing Borders is also an example of how joint projects can generate new possibilities to show art in settings other than those traditionally associated with art exhibitions. By collaborating with Swedavia, the Nationalmuseum reached a large and wide audience that usually does not visit museums and galleries.

Inversely, some exhibitions are based on targeted collecting. For instance, this was the case with Slow Art, which was about time perspectives and production methods in the field of design. Originally opening at the Nationalmuseum in 2012, the exhibition toured Sweden before going on to Paris, where it was widely acknowledged. The same can be said, to an even greater extent, of the exhibition Carl Larsson – L’imagier de la Suède at Petit Palais in Paris, co-produced by the Museum. This was the first monographic exhibition of Carl Larsson in France, an ambitious venture, entirely in keeping with the Museum’s mission to promote international knowledge of and interest in Swedish applied art and design.

Similarly, in Sweden, the Nationalmuseum has introduced several less known aspects of international art history, thereby offering some powerful art experiences. The exhibition From Tsars to Commissars: Russian and Soviet Painting from the Russian Museum is one example from a successful series of exhibitions on the theme of Russian art.

This volume of Art Bulletin of Nationalmuseum, Stockholm is the second to be an exclusively digital publication. It is our hope that this will make it easier to share knowledge about the Museum and its activities with a broader public. The Nationalmuseum is striving to enhance its digital resources by establishing new methods and guidelines for digital publishing of research, including previously processed materials in our collections and research reports. The ambition is to make all the Museum’s digital resources more useful, informative and scientifically stringent.