Subjectivities: Selected Design

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THE EXHIBITION  Subjectivities: Selected Design was the first event in the project Nationalmuseum Design at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern in Stockholm and opened in February 2015. Nationalmuseum Design will continue throughout the refurbishment of the Museum’s permanent premises, and is an opportunity for the Nationalmuseum to find new formats for a dialogue between the design collection and its visitors (see articles on pp. 135 and 139).

The opening exhibition, Subjectivities: Selected Design, was created in partnership with the architecture and design podcast Summit, operated by Daniel Golling and Gustaf Kjellin. Summit began as a podcast in 2013, but has developed into an exhibition organiser and publisher. In order to encourage exchanges between Nordic designers, Golling and Kjellin introduced a Summit Travel Grant in 2014, for up-and-coming designers in the early stages of their career. The first recipient, Thórunn Árnadóttir from Iceland, was presented at Nationalmuseum Design in connection with the opening of Subjectivities: Selected Design.

The exhibition title alludes to the fact that nothing is truly objective in our surroundings, or, for that matter, in a national museum. We always use ourselves as a reference point – our knowledge, experience, taste, and so on. In this case, we allowed ourselves to be more personal and subjective in our choices – which had to be argued in writing in the exhibition, which is not usually the case.

Interior from the exhibition Subjectivities: Selected Design.
The process behind the exhibition was implemented in three phases and began with Summit’s selection of 24 designers or designer teams. One of their selection criteria was that the designers should be active on the Swedish design scene and demonstrate different ways of being and acting in that capacity. Another criterion was age diversity, resulting in ages ranging from 31 to 82 among the selected designers. The choice of each designer was motivated in writing in the exhibition.

The participating designers and teams were: Anton Alvarez, Åke Axelsson, Lena Bergström, Thomas Bernstrand, Jonas Bohlin, Ulla Christiansson, Claesson Koivisto Rune, Jonas Forsman, Front, Samir Alj Fält, Monica Förster, Gunilla Hedlund, Matti Klenell, Anna Kraitz, Jonas Lindvall, Erika Lövqvist, Note Design Studio, Gustav Person, Lycke von Schantz, Snickeriet, Per B. Sundberg, Uglycute, Veryday, and Ann Wåhlström.

In the next step of the process the designers chose their favourite piece from the Nationalmuseum’s unique collection of some 35,000 crafts and design objects. This generated several creative and enjoyable meetings in our storage facilities, with the Nationalmuseum’s curators of applied art and design, Anders Bengtsson and Micael Ernstell. The task was approached in different ways; some designers’ choices seemed natural, not to say predictable. Other designers were initially overawed by the sheer volume of the collection but could nevertheless select their favourite fairly quickly. And a few were probably astonished by their own final choices. With no restrictions regarding epoch, the designers were free to choose objects dating from the 16th century to the present day. Choices were explained in texts in the exhibition.

The last phase of the procedure consisted of the Museum’s curators Anders Bengtsson and Micael Ernstell making a subjective selection of objects from each designer’s output. These choices were also explained in texts in the exhibition. The process was enjoyable, but it was also a great
challenge and an unfamiliar situation for a museum curator to write such extremely subjective texts.

The purposes underpinning Subjectivities: Selected Design were multiple. One was to show objects from the Museum’s collection while the permanent premises were closed for refurbishment. Another was to initiate and enhance the relationship between the Nationalmuseum, Sweden’s oldest institution for applied art and design, and the practitioners and producers whose works are to be preserved in the Museum for future generations. A third, and at least as urgent purpose, was to present a cross-section of the diverse Swedish design scene, the people who shape it, and its scope of qualities and styles.

The exhibition consisted partly of objects from the Museum’s own collection, but the project would have been impossible without the products generously lent by the producers. Not just objects that are in production, but pieces that are no longer made and where the manufacturer somehow managed to conjure up new ones. The Swedish producers made a huge contribution here.

The Nationalmuseum is a museum with a government mission to document and collect applied art and design dating from the 16th century to today. The government does not provide the present day funding for acquisitions. Instead, the furthering of the collection relies on donations and private foundations and funds. Our collection of contemporary applied art and design has, for many decades, depended on donations from manufacturers. Several of the participating companies were therefore asked after the exhibition if they would consider donating the featured objects to the Nationalmuseum. Swedish companies have always been aware of the value of having their products in the collection and thereby preserving them for posterity. This time, once more, many of the items exhibited in Subjectivities were incorporated with the Nationalmuseum’s collection thanks to the generosity of Swedish and foreign com-
companies. Added to this, a few unique pieces were acquired and donated to the Museum by the Friends of the Nationalmuseum, Bengt Julin Fund.

The exhibition in the Nationalmuseum’s new venue at Kulturhuset Stadsteatern received great attention from visitors and the media. The press preview was attended by some 120 journalists. This success was partly thanks to the fact that it opened during the Stockholm Furniture & Light Fair.

Due to the large number of people involved in the exhibition, the process was far more unpredictable than usual. Achieving an interesting selection is one thing – but to create an aesthetically appealing experience for visitors is an entirely different matter. The resulting exhibition in the modernist venue in central Stockholm was a raving success, however, with many exciting juxtapositions of objects in a congenially designed setting.

**Exhibition curators:** Anders Bengtsson and Micael Ernstell (in-house curators), Daniel Golling and Gustaf Kjellin, Summit (guest curators)

**Exhibition design:** Joakim Werning

**Lighting design:** Jan Gouiedo, Jan Gouiedo AB

**Exhibition technology and installation:** Tomas Emtemo, Pär Lindblom, Thomas Lundgren and Carl Rehnström

**AV technician:** Thomas Junegard

**Graphic design:** Agneta Bervokk

**Conservation:** Maria Franzon and Nils Ahlner

**Exhibition coordinator:** Anneli Carlsson

Interiors from the exhibition *Subjectivities: Selected Design.*