

From country house to penthouse Sven-Harry's home and the Swedish period room

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Abstract: In 2011 a new museum opened in Stockholm – Sven-Harry's Art Museum – named after its initiator and funder, the building contractor Sven-Harry Karlsson. Besides a gallery for temporary exhibitions, the museum includes a permanent collection of art and applied art installed in a penthouse on top of the building. The installation is conceived as a full-scale replica of Karlsson's former home in an eighteenth-century manor house. This article focuses on the reconstructed home and aims at situating it within a tradition of full-scale displays of architectural interiors – so-called period rooms – in Swedish cultural history museums. Since the start of the twentieth century, eighteenth-century architecture has had a central position in the Swedish cultural heritage. Sven-Harry's replicated home, a small manor of the rococo era, fits perfectly into the national canon, which for a long time focused on the homes of the elites to illustrate development within the arts. Even though the recreated milieu in Sven-Harry's museum depends on traditional museum practice, it is also typical of contemporary innovations. In the last few decades, even prestigious cultural history museums have utilized the period-room format in unconventional ways, and the bold reconstruction of Sven-Harry's home is clearly a representative of this trend.

Keywords: Sven-Harry's Art Museum, Swedish period rooms, Swedish eighteenth-century architecture, Swedish manor houses, Swedish cultural history museums

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In March 2011 a new museum – Sven-Harry's Art Museum – opened in Stockholm, named after its initiator and funder, the building contractor Sven-Harry Karlsson. The museum is housed in a new building, located by a park in the very centre of the town. It contains two separate parts: an art gallery for temporary exhibitions, and a permanently installed collection of art and applied art. This article focuses on the latter, which is labelled «Sven-Harry's home and collection» and installed in what is officially announced as an exact replica of Karlsson's former residence, the eighteenth-century manor of Ekholmsnäs situated in Lidingö outside Stockholm. The setting makes the museum unique among the rather numerous privately funded art galleries established in Sweden in recent years, which generally include neither permanent collections nor references to historic architecture.

To recreate a historic milieu as a background to an art collection is extraordinary in a time when most such displays take place in what is generally referred to as a white cube, a neutral space where there is no direct relation between the artwork and the surrounding milieu.¹ The unique character makes it difficult to position Sven-Harry's museum against a contemporary horizon, but looking at it as part of a tradition of full-scale architectural display unfolds a number of interpretations. So-called period rooms – either performed as isolated rooms within a museum or as part of a historic building – were a common element in the growing number of European cultural history museums at the start of the twentieth century.² Contextualized installations of this kind corresponded to the emerging concept of cultural history, which combined several academic disciplines that were central to the museums, such as history, art history, archaeology and ethnology.³ This multidisciplinary background of the period rooms is evident in Sven-Harry's museum, where the reconstructed home includes elements of architecture, art and applied art in the same installation.

Fundamental to the period-room concept is the idea that development within the arts consists of a succession of distinctive periods, each with a set of typical characteristics that form a period style. Period rooms began to appear in western museums in the middle of the nineteenth century, and after a culmination in the early twentieth century, they decreased significantly in number at the end of this century. This trajectory roughly follows the trends within academic research, which in the post-war years gradually moved focus from ancient to modern histo-

¹ Charlotte Klonk, *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven, 2009), pp. 135–171.

² John Harris, *Moving Rooms: The Trade in Architectural Salvages* (New Haven & London, 2007), pp. 119–145.

³ See for instance Peter Burke, *What is Cultural History?* (Cambridge, 2008).

ry. The period styles, intimately associated with the elites of pre-industrial society, gradually lost their relevance. Most of the period rooms had been considerably manipulated at their installation, and when looked upon with a critical eye they began to appear artificial and outdated. Consequently, many museums eventually dismantled their old showpieces and put them in storage.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, a general turn towards history changed the situation, and new kinds of period installations began to appear at the museums. A carefully crafted copy of an eighteenth-century manor house was erected outside Nationalmuseum in central Stockholm in 1994, and in 2013 Nordiska Museet installed a small apartment representing the Swedish welfare state, both of which will be discussed here. At this time, even contemporary artists began to utilize the period-room format in their work.⁴ The reconstructed home in Sven-Harry's museum may be seen as part of this period-room revival.

Parallel to the recent return of period rooms in public displays, academic researchers have engaged in this kind of installations.⁵ Most contributions to conferences, anthologies and journals dealing with period displays are presented in the form of case studies. The case-study method allows for a comprehensive view of specific installations as well as the use of a variety of source material. The reconstructed home in Sven-Harry's museum offers a rich opportunity for this kind of contextualization. In order to approach the installation from various angles, a number of different sources have been used in this study; museum catalogues, the museum website, observations on site, articles in journals, archival sources, a real estate prospectus, among others. Besides examining the actual installation, this article aims at situating it in a tradition of full-scale exhibitions at Swedish museums, with emphasis on displays of eighteenth-century architecture and interior design.

⁴ An example is the artist duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, who several times have used domestic environments as essential parts of their work, see Peter Weibel & Andreas F. Beutin (eds), *Elmgreen & Dragset: Trilogy* (Köln, 2011).

⁵ Harris 2007 gives a valuable overview of the history of the period rooms in the western world. Some recent publications deal with the history of a specific institution, as for instance the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, which has revised its own period rooms: Christopher Wilk & Nick Humphrey, *Creating the British Galleries at the V&A: A Study in Museology* (London, 2004). In the last few decades, period rooms have been the subject of conferences and joint research projects, some of which are published as books. See for instance Penny Sparke, Brenda Martin & Trevor Keeble (eds), *The Modern Period Room: The Construction of the Exhibited Interior 1870 to 1950* (London, 2006); Sandra Costa, Dominique Poulot & Mercedes Volait (eds), *The Period Rooms: Allestimenti storici tra arte, collezionismo e museologia* (Bologna, 2016). Period rooms have been discussed from various perspectives in scholarly journals, as for instance Frédéric Dassas, «Les *period rooms* serait-elles de retour?», *Dix-huitième Siècle*, 50 (2018), pp. 145–158. <https://doi.org/10.3917/dhs.050.0145>.

A new museum in town

When Sven-Harry Karlsson opened his museum in Stockholm in 2011, it was one of several privately funded galleries established in Sweden in a rather short time.⁶ Most of these projects were performed as architectural manifestations, and their founders generally had a strong commitment to art, having acted as collectors and patrons themselves. With the exception of Sven-Harry's museum, these establishments did not contain permanent collections, and none of the other instigators stepped forward and exposed themselves in the forefront as he did. The museum is not only named after Sven-Harry Karlsson; his person and his life story are essential parts of the museum's communication with the public.⁷

Sven-Harry Karlsson was born in 1931 and grew up in the south of Sweden, where his father ran a construction company. Karlsson started his career in the family business, but in 1968 he set up a firm of his own in the same trade.⁸ His company – Folkhem – has not been one of the major actors in the market, having mainly engaged in building one-family houses and apartment blocks of moderate size in the Stockholm region. However, Karlsson has a reputation of striving for high-quality building and of engaging prominent architects for his projects, which have proved successful strategies to make the smaller firm competitive on a tough market.⁹ His long professional and personal involvement with architecture is now an integral part of what can be seen as the branding of the museum.

Another strong element in the museum's official narrative is Karlsson's commitment to art, which has resulted in a substantial collection. For thirty years he kept the artworks in his private residence Ekholmsnäs, an eighteenth-century manor just outside Stockholm. In order to keep the collection together for the

⁶ See Natalia Kazmierska, «Konsthallsbyggarna», *Arkitektur*, 5 (2012), pp. 34–35. The author discusses five contemporary establishments: Magasin 3 in Stockholm (2001), Bonniers Konsthall in Stockholm (2006), Vandalorum in Värnamo (2011), Sven-Harry's Museum in Stockholm (2011), and Artipelag in Värmdö (2012).

⁷ The museum is presented in a book, which also serves as a catalogue to the collection. It has been published in two editions with different titles: Sven-Harry Karlsson, *Sven-Harrys konstmuseum* (Stockholm, 2011), and a re-edited, slightly extended version: Therese Sheats (ed.), *Sven-Harrys hem och konstsamling* (Stockholm, 2014). Both editions contain a full English translation of the text. The museum is also presented at the website: <https://www.sven-harrys.se>.

⁸ Sheats (ed.) 2014, pp. 222–230. See also: «Muraren som utvecklade småhus i samarbete med bra arkitekter», *Murmästareämbetet årskrift 2000* (2001), pp. 71–81.

⁹ Eva Rudberg, «Byggmästaren och hans arkitekt», in Eva Rudberg & Anders Gullberg, *Byggare i Stockholm: Byggmästarrollen under 1900-talet* (Stockholm, 2001), pp. 125–221.



Fig. 1. Sven-Harry's Art Museum in central Stockholm opened to the public in 2011. Except for the public spaces, the house also contains rental apartments. The penthouse on top of the building includes a permanent art collection, designed as a replica of Sven-Harry Karlsson's former home at the eighteenth-century manor Ekholmsnäs. [© Photo Tord-Rikard Söderström, Wingårdh. Reproduced with permission.]

future, and to make it fully available to the public, he decided to establish his own museum, including a gallery for temporary exhibitions. For practical reasons this could not be realized at the existing location, so Karlsson chose to implement his vision in the centre of Stockholm.¹⁰ To design the new museum, he engaged the architect Gert Wingårdh and his firm, with Anna Höglund as main architect and project manager.¹¹ The result is a square, clean-cut volume of contemporary

¹⁰ Sheats (ed.) 2014, pp. 9–11.

¹¹ The architects presented the project in the journal *Arkitektur*. See Gert Wingårdh & Anna Höglund, «Sven-Harrys konstmuseum och lägenheter, Stockholm», *Arkitektur*, 1 (2012), pp. 57–61.

design, although with clear references back to early modernism. Besides the museum, the building holds a mixture of private and public facilities.¹²

Within the building, the museum is subdivided into two separate parts, situated on different levels. The lower floors contain a gallery for temporary exhibitions, basically designed as a white-cube space. The reconstructed home with the art collection is placed in a special volume on top of the building; a penthouse surrounded by a terrace that is conceived as a sculpture park. Although the museum is now owned and run by a foundation, the funder is still virtually present. At the obligatory guided tour in the reconstructed home, visitors learn that the connection with Sven-Harry Karlsson is uninterrupted. Although he actually does not live there, he often revisits his «old home» and even uses it on special occasions.¹³

The integration of a reconstructed historical milieu in Sven-Harry's museum may seem remarkable in contemporary architecture; however, seen from a wider perspective it is part of a well-established practice of installing relocated or reconstructed interiors in museums. Even if period rooms in a classical sense are rare today, museumgoers are trained to appreciate both objects and milieus that belong neither to the time nor to the location where they are on display. The ability to transcend time is central to visual culture, and it is used in a constantly growing number of films, television series and computer games set in historical milieus. Human dwellings in particular seem to have a special potential to bring history to life, a capacity that both old and new period installations fully exploit. Sven-Harry's replicated home provides a very interesting example of this phenomenon, but a further discussion will benefit from a brief outline of the Swedish tradition of displaying full-scale domestic interiors in museums.

The Swedish period room

In the nineteenth century, full-scale historical interiors occurred in various forms of public display. Popular arenas such as wax museums, dioramas and world fairs often contained carefully crafted milieus of this kind.¹⁴ Such was the situation in Stockholm when Artur Hazelius opened his first exhibitions of folk art in 1873, which included rudimentary stage sets representing Swedish farmhouse interiors. He developed his ethnographical concept further at the open-air museum

¹² Wingårdh & Höglund 2012, p. 59.

¹³ Guided tour at Sven-Harry's Home and Collection on 6 December 2018.

¹⁴ Mark B. Sandberg, *Living Pictures, Missing Persons: Mannequins, Museums and Modernity* (Princeton, 2003).

Skansen, inaugurated in 1891, where visitors enjoyed carefully arranged full-scale examples of vernacular architecture.¹⁵ Hazelius's project grew into a large institution, Nordiska Museet, which is still the leading cultural history museum in the country.¹⁶ It is also without doubt the main reference when discussing methods of displaying cultural history collections and the use of period rooms in Sweden.¹⁷

At the death of Hazelius in 1901, and facing the opening of a new museum building, a younger generation of academically trained staff strove for more scientific methods of display. The museum organization was divided into two separate departments, one for the vernacular culture and one for the culture of the upper classes.¹⁸ The division, which was considered particularly relevant to pre-industrial society in Sweden, was based on two academic disciplines then under formation at the universities – ethnology and art history. In practice this also meant two different historical perspectives. Vernacular culture was treated as a more or less timeless phenomenon, while the elite culture was fully inscribed in a historical timeline, consistent with international currents within the arts.¹⁹

Nordiska Museet inaugurated the new museum building in 1907. In the upper-class department the installation followed a strictly chronological scheme, with a sequence of galleries that also included relocated old interiors – period rooms.²⁰ This extensive display of Swedish elite culture, from the early sixteenth century to the start of the twentieth century, contained over thirty rooms in all, around a dozen of which could be defined as period rooms.²¹ Although slightly

¹⁵ See Arne Biörnstad & Nils Erik Bæhrendtz (eds), *Skansen under hundra år* (Höganäs 1991); Sten Rentzhog, *Open Air Museums: The History and Future of a Visionary Idea* (Stockholm, 2007).

¹⁶ The background and early history of Nordiska Museet is described in Magdalena Hillström, *Ansvar för kulturarvet* (Linköping, 2006). For a more comprehensive account of the museum's history, see Bengt Nyström, Hans Medelius & Elisabet Stavenow-Hidemark (eds), *Nordiska museet under 125 år* (Stockholm, 1998).

¹⁷ See Victor Edman, «Från monument till utställningsmaskin», in Anders Bergström & Victor Edman, *Folkhemmets museum: Byggnader och rum för kulturhistoriska samlingar* (Stockholm, 2005), pp. 15–59.

¹⁸ Hillström 2006, pp. 259–308.

¹⁹ Victor Edman, «How National is a National Canon? Questions of Heritage Construction in Swedish Architecture», in Raymond Quek, Darren Deane & Sarah Butler (eds), *Nationalism and Architecture* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 233–243.

²⁰ The installation is described in Hans Medelius, «Installationen», in Nyström, Medelius & Stavenow-Hidemark (eds) 1998, pp. 126–153.

²¹ See Nordiska Museet, *Vägledning genom museets samtliga avdelningar* (Stockholm, 1919), pp. 40–53. The period rooms in the upper-class department at Nordiska Museet are discussed in Hans Medelius, «Nordiska museets stilrum», *RIG* (1999), pp. 211–224. See also Hedvig

modified over the years, the installation remained relatively intact until it was totally dismantled in the early 1970s.

The entire exhibition was closely related to the museum's extensive exploration of Swedish architecture, interior decoration and applied arts. Such efforts included inventories, research projects and publications.²² All period rooms on display were Swedish examples, with particular emphasis on the highly esteemed eighteenth century. Despite the national origin of the interiors, it was important for the museum to stress their connections with the leading currents on the continent. The upper-class installation can be seen as part of the formation of a national canon within Swedish cultural history.²³ However, the period rooms and their furnishings were not only highlighted as historical examples, they were also meant as models for contemporary design, to be carefully studied by architects, designers and artists.²⁴

In the post-war years, the period rooms began to lose their relevance, at the same time as their authenticity was disputed. Modernism's critical attitude to history made period displays increasingly problematic, not least from a scientific point of view. In architectural research, the focus on period style and pre-industrial culture gradually gave way to other areas. Consequently, many period rooms disappeared from European museums during the latter part of the twentieth century.²⁵ In the late 1960s, Nordiska Museet made plans for a new permanent exhibition to replace the old upper-class installation from 1907. Neither period style nor the separation of the elites and the rest of the population were to determine the forthcoming display, although two of the old period rooms were actually included and reinstalled.²⁶ The new exhibition opened to the public in 1973, and it is still standing, although revised and complemented in later years.²⁷

The start of the twenty-first century brought with it a renewed interest in history, which also meant an urge to reconnect with old times in various ways. Con-

Mårdh, *A Century of Swedish Gustavian Style: Art History, Cultural Heritage and Neoclassical Revivals from the 1890s to the 1990s* (Uppsala, 2017), pp. 147–158.

²² Cecilia Hammarlund-Larsson & Lena Palmqvist, *Kulturhistoriska expeditioner: Nordiska museets fältarbeten 1888–1992* (Stockholm, 1993).

²³ Edman 2012.

²⁴ See Victor Edman, *Sjuttonhundratalet som svenskt ideal: Moderna rekonstruktioner av historiska miljöer* (Stockholm, 2008), pp. 25–50.

²⁵ Harris 2007.

²⁶ Ove Hidemark & Elisabet Stavenow-Hidemark, «Kring svensk bostad: Ett utställningsprojekt», *Fataburen* (1972), pp. 119–136.

²⁷ The exhibition is presently named «Hem och bostad», see <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/utstallningar/hem-och-bostad> (accessed 1 February 2019).

servation of ancient buildings and urban areas played an important role in this. The general attitude to reconstruction also changed significantly, and many such projects were implemented. Hence, even period rooms experienced a modest revival, and they began to reappear even at the national museums.

In 2013, Nordiska Museet opened a new permanent exhibition called *Folkhemslägenheten*, illustrating the housing ideals of the Swedish welfare state.²⁸ The public was invited to a modest apartment from the post-war years, modelled on a residential block from 1947 in a small Swedish town. Unlike the former period rooms, the installation does not contain objects from the museum's collections. Instead, the whole equipment was bought at flea markets and second-hand shops, to illustrate an ordinary home at the time. This also means less restriction for the museum visitor, who can make herself «at home» in the milieu, sit in the sofa and peek into the cupboards.²⁹

Both *Folkhemslägenheten* and the contemporary installation of Sven-Harry's home are obviously connected to the revival of the period-room concept in Swedish museums in the early twenty-first century. Although they both aim at a more complete experience of a domestic environment, and therefore approach the historic house museum, they clearly depend on the old period-room format. Neither of them evokes a built environment that is individually inscribed in the architectural canon, but both present well-established architectural types in Swedish historiography; the standardized apartment of the welfare state and the almost equally standardized small manor house of the eighteenth century.

Ekholmsnäs – the original and the replica

From 1981 and thirty years onwards, Sven-Harry Karlsson had his private residence at Ekholmsnäs manor on the island of Lidingö. The estate was sold in connection with the opening of the museum, so today's museum visitors are not able to assess the relation between the role model and the replica. The museum's narrative, communicated through books, website and guided tours, claims that Sven-Harry's former home has been truthfully transferred to the new building. In

²⁸ In the Swedish/English leaflet available on site, «*Folkhemslägenheten*» is translated as «The Apartment from the era of *Folkhemmet*, the Swedish Welfare State». See Nordiska Museet, *Folkhemslägenheten* (Stockholm, 2013). See also <http://www.nordiskamuseet.se/utstallningar/folkhemslagenheten> (accessed 1 February 2019).

²⁹ Interview with education officer Wenke Rundberg regarding *Folkhemslägenheten*, Nordiska Museet (6 February 2015).



Fig. 2. Ekholmsnäs manor was photographed in connection with an inventory in the early 1930s. Later on, the estate became Sven-Harry Karlsson's residence for many years and the place where he kept his art collection. Planning for the museum in central Stockholm, he decided to include a replica of the lower floor of his former home. © Unknown photographer; Nordiska museet. Reproduced with permission.

the end this is a matter of credibility and trust, and of course Sven-Harry Karlsson himself remains the ultimate authority on the issue.

Compared to the old estates of the Swedish nobility, Ekholmsnäs does not have a very long history. Johan Norlin, a wealthy member of the Stockholm bourgeoisie, acquired the land in the 1770s and erected the buildings that still exist: a manor house accompanied by two pairs of wings.³⁰ From an architectural point of view they are perhaps not very remarkable, and the architect is not known, but as a whole the ensemble offers an almost emblematic image of a small Swedish country residence of the rococo era. The main apartment on the ground floor originally consisted of six symmetrically distributed rooms: a hall and a salon in the central axis, flanked by two rooms on each side. The layout reflects the very strong French impact on Swedish architecture at the time.³¹

³⁰ Curt Malmgren, *Ekholmsnäs gård, Lidingö* (Stockholm, 1937).

³¹ Curt Malmgren, *Lidingögårdar* (Stockholm, 1936).

Ekholmsnäs had a number of successive owners through the years, which naturally also meant changes to the environment. We get a glimpse of the situation in the early 1930s, when Nordiska Museet made an inventory of the major farmsteads of Lidingö.³² The historical development of the estate was described in a written essay, and the documentation also included measured drawings and photographs of the main building. It was obvious that the building had been altered several times, and that very little of the original interior decoration remained, except for the relatively intact floor plan. At the time of the inventory, the two rooms to the left of the entrance hall were still separate. They have since been merged into one large room.

When Karlsson offered his home for sale, the estate agency presented Ekholmsnäs in a separate prospectus.³³ This document gives an idea of the relation between the role model and the replica at the museum. The overall impression is that there is a large degree of resemblance between the two interiors, although a quick glance at drawings of the old and the new premises reveals that the replicated rooms do not have exactly the same proportions as the original ones. Some features, like the modern parquet flooring in the old house, have not been repeated in the new installation. A more exact replica would have been possible to obtain, for instance with the help of modern laser scanning, but such a high level of conformity was obviously not intended.

Not the whole house at Ekholmsnäs was recreated at the museum – only the traditionally more public rooms of the lower floor – while the private quarters upstairs were omitted in the installation. The reconstructed home is of course included in a contemporary building, erected with modern materials. It is mainly the space itself and the visible surfaces that contribute to the illusion of an eighteenth-century house. However, the plain walls are clearly modern and do not allude to any eighteenth-century decoration. All the woodwork, such as doors, windows and panels, are manufactured in accordance with the original ones at Ekholmsnäs. Only the tiled oven, the centrepiece of the drawing room, is antique and originates from another old house.

Even though the consistency between Ekholmsnäs and the replica can be discussed, the architectural framework is a crucial element in the installation.

³² Nordiska museet examined Ekholmsnäs in connection with an inventory in 1932–35, see Nordiska museets arkiv, Stockholm: Städer, Lidingö, vol. 2. Some of the material was published in two essays in the local history society's yearbook, *Lidingöboken*, in 1936. These articles were also published separately as offprints: Malmgren 1936 and Malmgren 1937.

³³ Skeppsholmen Sotheby's International Reality, *Ekholmsnäs gård*, [pdf], (accessed 10 August 2012).

For obvious reasons the built structure in the new museum lacks any claims to historical substance – other than conveying an image of an eighteenth-century milieu. Despite this, it offers a stage set where the illusion of a surviving home may take place. By referring directly to a role model that is historical and even still existing, it evokes the widely acclaimed architectural heritage of the Swedish eighteenth century. This is a reference that is likely to be familiar even to a modern visitor to the museum.

Back to the eighteenth century

The partial reconstruction of Ekholmsnäs manor clearly associates Sven-Harry's museum with a particularly cherished Swedish heritage – the architecture of the eighteenth century. In the early twentieth century, the epoch grew in popularity all over Europe, and in Sweden it became a vital source of inspiration to contemporary architecture and interior design.³⁴ The enthusiasm for eighteenth-century architecture and applied art became particularly strong in the 1920s and 1930s, not least inspired by a series of carefully restored historic houses.³⁵ House museums from this period have grown in number since then, and visitors to Sven-Harry's museum are thus likely to have a rather thorough pre-understanding of the milieu they enter.

At the start of the twentieth century, when eighteenth-century architecture was rediscovered in Sweden, most surviving remnants were in a state of fragmentation or decay. Environments where buildings, interior decoration and furnishings all remained intact were extremely rare. As the period grew in popularity, so did the urge to restore the existing fragments, in order to obtain coherent environments.³⁶ Extensive historical research, in combination with a considerable supply of antique furniture, made such dreams seem attainable. Temporarily, these ambitions were held back by antiquarian doctrines, which firmly advised against any form of historical reconstruction. In the 1930s, however, architectural historians, museum

³⁴ See for instance Eva Eriksson, «Rationalism and Classicism 1915–1930», in Claes Caldenby, Jöran Lindvall & Wilfried Wang (eds), *20th-Century Architecture: Sweden* (München & New York, 1998), pp 46–79. See also Kristina Knauff, *Den klassicistiska vändningen i det tidiga 1900-talets svenska arkitektur* (Stockholm, 2013). The relation between historiography and conservation of eighteenth-century architecture is discussed in Edman 2008. For a discussion of the reception of the Gustavian period, see Mårdh 2017.

³⁵ Edman 2008 contains case studies of three built environments restored in the early twentieth century, each representing a distinctive epoch in Swedish eighteenth-century architecture.

³⁶ Edman 2008, pp. 25–51.



Fig. 3. The eighteenth-century manor house of Skogaholm was relocated to the open-air museum Skansen in 1930. It was meant to illustrate the living conditions and the architectural traditions of the Swedish country house. The baroness's antechamber is one of the carefully reconstructed period rooms within the building. © Photo Sander Rosén, Nordiska museet. Reproduced with permission.

curators and architects joined forces to recover a number of Swedish eighteenth-century environments in full scale. These projects were generally carried out within a museological context and involved the most skilled experts available.³⁷

The installation of the eighteenth-century manor house of Skogaholm at the open-air museum Skansen in the 1930s is a case in point.³⁸ It involved the leading experts at Nordiska Museet and can be seen as a full-scale experiment under controlled, scientific conditions, as well as an illustrative example of heritage construction at the breakthrough of modernism in Sweden. The project was influential, and it introduced a new method for restoring domestic environments, which combined academic scholarship with skilled craftsmanship. Skogaholm paved the way for numerous restoration projects in the following years, many of which dealt with eighteenth-century environments.

³⁷ Edman 2008.

³⁸ Edman 2008, pp. 53–101. See also Edman 2012.

An example of this is Carl Linnaeus's former home in Uppsala, which was reconstructed and opened as a museum in 1937.³⁹ In the early twentieth century, many objects that had once belonged to the famous Swedish eighteenth-century scientist were brought together, with the aim to exhibit them publicly. Sigurd Wallin at Nordiska Museet contributed to the project in several ways. As an expert on the rococo era he examined the whole collection, and his previous experience of installing period interiors helped turn the newly restored building into a house museum. The Linnaeus museum was implemented at a time when statues in public places no longer sufficed to celebrate persons of national historic significance. A house museum, particularly if supported by academic expertise, had a much greater potential to bring such a person to life.

Not only the most distinguished dwellings attracted interest in the early twentieth century, even the smaller manor houses were appreciated, especially if they originated from the eighteenth century.⁴⁰ While the major palaces and manor houses were perceived as individual examples of high culture, the modest dwellings were looked upon as generic types, approaching the vernacular architecture.⁴¹ Buildings erected for the lower gentry and the wealthy bourgeoisie belonged to this category, and so did the smaller variants of the same type that usually accommodated clergymen, military officers and civil servants. Ekholmsnäs, originally built for a wealthy clerk, clearly belongs to this category. Although not an outstanding historic example in its own right, the humble manor has a given place in the architectural typology of the Swedish eighteenth century.

Sven-Harry's replicated home is without a doubt consistent with the architectural canon developed in the course of the twentieth century, where the small manor house occupies a place of its own.⁴² Even though Sven-Harry's exhibited home is in line with the tradition of recovering eighteenth-century architecture that emerged during the twentieth century, there are significant differences. The unrestrained attitude to reconstruction, for instance, clearly reveals that Sven-Harry's home is conceived and implemented in a different cultural climate.

³⁹ Edman 2008, pp. 103–147.

⁴⁰ The Swedish manor houses were included in several inventory campaigns conducted by Nordiska Museet in the twentieth century. See Hammarlund-Larsson & Palmquist 1993.

⁴¹ Sigurd Wallin, curator at Nordiska Museet, regarded the Swedish vicarages as a «middle class» in the architectural heritage, a connecting link between the magnificent manor houses and the humble farmhouses. See Sigurd Wallin, «De svenska prästgårdarna som objekt för kulturhistorisk forskning», *Fataburen* (1919), pp. 129–142.

⁴² See Mats Hellspång, Karin Lindvall, Nicole Pergament & Angela Rundquist, *Herrgårdsmantik och starelände: En studie av ideologi, kulturarv och historieanvändning* (Stockholm, 2004).

Postmodern serial production

The last decades of the twentieth century meant a new turn towards history as well as the breakthrough for a general appreciation of architectural heritage in the western world. During the post-war years, an accelerating modernization process gradually lost momentum and was followed by a series of crises. Starting as a counter-movement, conservation of urban areas and individual buildings brought the old architectural traditions back to the forefront. Not only the iconic monuments but also what can be described as everyday built environments, including the industrial heritage, gained both academic and political attention. In Sweden, the extensive demolition of old town centres in the previous years became a major issue and a target for lively protests in the 1960s and 1970s. Built heritage and conservation now definitely entered the public awareness.⁴³

Swedish eighteenth-century architecture and interior decoration, the favourite of the early decades of the century, had maintained its position in the national canon through the years. In the 1980s and 1990s, this was accompanied by an awakening interest in using historical references within contemporary architecture, which relates directly to a current discourse on postmodernism and a renewed commitment to classicism. The academic literature on Swedish eighteenth-century architecture grew substantially from now on, and references in the form of design elements or direct quotations appeared in contemporary architecture.⁴⁴ A couple of ambitious reconstruction projects implemented in the early 1990s – a series of replicated furniture and an exhibited replica of a manor house – show that the general attitude towards using historical models had changed.

In 1993 the Swedish furniture company IKEA launched a special line of products based on eighteenth-century prototypes. At this time the company's department stores began to spread across the world with their wide range of affordable furniture and household goods. The eighteenth-century collection was developed in collaboration with Riksantikvarieämbetet, the Swedish National Heritage Board, and thus officially supported by a state agency and its expertise. Compared to IKEA's regularly low prices, the eighteenth-century collection was rather expensive, and it did not remain on the market for very long. Still, it was a marketing success, and it helped spread the idea of a graceful and functional

⁴³ Victor Edman, *En svensk restaureringstradition: Tre arkitekter gestaltar 1900-talets historiesyn* (Stockholm, 1999), pp. 141–201.

⁴⁴ Replicas and pastiches were discussed in the heritage sector at the time, for instance in a thematic issue of the journal *Byggnadskultur*, 4 (1986).

Swedish design tradition.⁴⁵ In view of the company's general claim to «democratic design», the venture reveals that the formerly exclusive legacy of the Swedish eighteenth century now had become attainable for ordinary people on a mass market. The separate catalogue that promoted the collection contained a presentation of each individual item, including a description of the prototype and its provenance.⁴⁶

Not only period furniture was reproduced for the mainstream market at this time. In the summer of 1994, a small timbered manor house was raised outside Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, the national museum of art and design. Curator Lars Sjöberg, who had also been engaged in the IKEA collection, initiated the project. His idea was to present an alternative to an ordinary villa by launching a replica of the eighteenth-century manor of Sörby, furnished – of course – with the IKEA collection of the previous year.⁴⁷ At the time there was a falling market for single-family houses, and there was an animated debate regarding technical and sanitary problems following modern materials and airtight constructions. But although Sörby was promoted as a healthier choice, the campaign was apparently not a great success, and the modern manor was never reproduced in large quantities.

In 2016 IKEA opened its own museum, with the intention to communicate the company's history to the public.⁴⁸ It was installed in the very first department store from 1958 in the town of Älmhult in southern Sweden. Among a variety of exhibition formats the museum contains a series of period rooms. About ten such installations are displayed, representing interiors that appeared on photographs in IKEA catalogues from the 1960s onwards. These rooms are hypothetical in more than one sense, as they were already in their first version merely stage sets arranged for a photo session. A glance at the old catalogues reveals that the reconstructions in the museum are not always very true to the original setting, and that a great deal of the furniture has been replaced.

When launched in the 1990s, both IKEA's eighteenth-century collection and the reconstructed Sörby manor were accompanied by detailed declarations regarding provenance and historical context. This emphasis on genuine prototypes reflects the academic context of both projects, but it also indicates the role that

⁴⁵ Staffan Bengtsson, «When the 18th Century Came to IKEA», in *IKEA the Book: Designers Producers and Other Stuff* (Stockholm, 2010), pp. 372–378. For a further discussion on the design history of IKEA, see Sara Kristoffersson, *Design by IKEA: A Cultural History* (London, 2014).

⁴⁶ *Svenskt 1700-tal på Ikea* (Älmhult, 1993). The reported provenance of IKEA's copied items was not always reliable; see Mårdh 2017, pp. 254–258.

⁴⁷ The project was presented in Lars Sjöberg & John Sjöström, *Sörby gård* (Stockholm, 1995).

⁴⁸ <https://ikeamuseum.com/en/> (accessed 8 February 2019).



Fig. 4. In the summer of 1994, a replica of Sörby manor was placed outside Nationalmuseum in Stockholm. The small country house highlighted the treasured architecture and interior decoration of the Swedish eighteenth century. The display included IKEA's collection of replicated eighteenth-century furniture. Photo from Sörby gård (1995). © Photo Hans Thorwid, Nationalmuseum. Reproduced with permission.

the relation between original and copy still played in a time marked by a liberal attitude to reconstruction. The narratives accompanying these particular ventures highlight true background stories as well as official authorization, duly provided by Riksantikvarieämbetet and Nationalmuseum. Sven-Harry's replicated home, installed a few years later, with its clear reference to an existing house, can be seen as a continuation of the innovative use of Swedish eighteenth-century heritage that started in the 1990s. Still, it is very unlikely that we would find any of IKEA's copies of antique chairs or tables in this museum.

A home and a collection

The collection presented in Sven-Harry's museum consists of both art and applied art – paintings, drawings, sculpture, furniture and carpets. Some everyday objects, such as books and family photographs, are also included in the installation and add a personal touch to the milieu. The oldest items are a selection of furniture from the second half of the eighteenth century, mainly displayed in the central drawing room. These antique pieces are contemporary with the early days of Ekholmsnäs and give an adequate historical dimension to the display. The artworks are mainly by Scandinavian artists from the late nineteenth century until the present day. Besides the art collection, which is of course highlighted by the museum, the collector – Sven-Harry Karlsson himself – is an important part of the message.

One key to interpreting the home and the collection is the book *Sven-Harrys hem och konstsamling* (2014), which also serves a catalogue of the collection and the reconstructed home.⁴⁹ In the introduction Karlsson gives the background story of the museum. The main part of the book, however, is written by academic experts and focuses on the collection and the individual artworks. In accordance with the conventional period-room practice, the collection is presented room by room, following the spatial organization of the premises. This is also the order of the guided tour, obligatory to the visitor. The rooms are labelled The Library, The Yellow Room, The Blue Room and The Terrace. Some of the artists are introduced individually in short essays. The final section of the book is dedicated to the collector and museum founder himself. This includes a conversation between Karlsson and the well-known art critic Ulf Linde, focusing on the former's personal relation to art and to collecting art. The book ends with a short autobiography written by Karlsson, supplemented with photographs of some of the buildings erected by his company.

Unlike most guidebooks or catalogues of historic environments, the book about Sven-Harry's home and collection remains almost silent regarding the physical location in which it is displayed. Except for a photograph of Ekholmsnäs, and the statement that it is the model for the whole installation, nothing further is said about the original manor house. Nor is there any information about the reconstruction process or the architectural features that are to be seen in the museum. This silence concerning the framework contrasts strongly with the detailed information about the exhibited objects. The collection is fully inscribed in an academic discourse, while the background is obviously left to speak for itself.

⁴⁹ Sheats (ed.) 2014.



Fig. 5. The penthouse on top of Sven-Harry's Art Museum is designed as a full-scale replica of the lower floor of his former residence at Ekholmsnäs. Both art and applied art are included in the collection, which is displayed as it was in the old home. Visitors enter the premises in small groups accompanied by a guide. © Photo Per Myrehed, Sven-Harrys konstmuseum. Reproduced with permission.

Yet the architectural setting is indispensable to the museum, and Karlsson's own narrative in the introduction to the book explains why. As he approached old age, he began to make plans for the future of his collection, which he wanted to be kept together as well as being made available to the public. If he donated the whole lot to a museum, he saw the risk that it would end in some depository and soon be forgotten. He considered extending his present suburban home and turning it into a museum, thus retaining the collection in its accustomed milieu. For practical reasons he abandoned the idea, and opted for a new building instead. Notwithstanding, he still wanted his old home to be preserved, as the whole space was intimately connected with the art collection and with himself: «I have always been interested in interior design and always hang my paintings myself because I know exactly how I want it. Everything goes together, carpets, furniture, the room and the art – they form a totality, and that is how they should be shown.»⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Sven-Harry Karlsson, «Ekholmsnäs gård», in Sheats (ed.) 2014, p. 9.

This leads to the conclusion that Sven-Harry's home and collection, as installed in the new premises, are intended to appear as an inseparable whole, as a thoroughly designed milieu that bears the distinct mark of its author. Perhaps it is even to be perceived as a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a work of art in itself, in which each component actively correlates with the others. Consequently, the art collection is placed in a historical setting. It could not be presented to the public as separate items in a neutral space, such as, for instance, in the art gallery on the lower floors of Sven-Harry's museum.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the reconstructed home in Sven-Harry's museum against a long and diverse tradition of full-scale architectural display in Sweden. Already at the start of the twentieth century, Nordiska Museet installed a sequence of period rooms. They each represented a specific period in the nation's past and were carefully selected to communicate this to the public. The replica of Ekholmsnäs in Sven-Harry's museum, which represents a small manor of the rococo era, fits extremely well in the Swedish architectural canon, which for a long time focused on the homes of the upper classes to illustrate both international and national currents within the arts. In fact, the architectural framework of Sven-Harry's home fits so well into the modern image of the Swedish eighteenth century, that it obviously needs neither description nor explanation in the narrative communicated by the museum. The visitor is expected to feel at home nevertheless.

Even though Sven-Harry's exhibited home is quite openly a replica of a still existing house, almost nothing is communicated when it comes to the reconstruction process or how the copying was implemented. This corresponds with the restoration practice that was introduced in the 1930s, which aimed at interiors without visible limits between original and reconstructed substance. Partial reconstructions did occur, but they were rarely accentuated. Ideally, the milieu should speak for itself, and no signs were allowed to disturb the illusion of a site with an uninterrupted history. In the case of Sven-Harry's home, an emphasis on the reconstructed architectural setting would perhaps draw the public's attention from its content, the artworks, and the illusion of a home that remains intact.

As Sven-Harry's installation aims at a coherent environment and presents a complete image of a home, it clearly transcends the limits of a separate period room within a museum. In this regard it approaches the historic house museums, which in Sweden increased greatly in number during the twentieth century. Particularly houses originating in the eighteenth century became a favourite, even

though most of them were made public through a radical restoration process. The house museums vary a lot in character. Some of them, like Skogaholm manor at Skansen, are presented as outstanding examples of period style, while others, like Carl Linnaeus's house in Uppsala, highlight their former inhabitants. Both these aspects seem relevant to Sven-Harry's museum. The art collection is strongly emphasized, but at the same time the collector and museum founder himself has an almost equally important role in the museum's narrative. His life story and his personal commitment to art and architecture are fundamental to the museum.

Although the recreated home in Sven-Harry's museum leans heavily against earlier museum conventions, such as period rooms and house museums, it is typical of contemporary practice. Such an open attitude to architectural reconstruction would have been controversial during the greater part of the twentieth century. It was not until the 1990s, when the modernist pursuit of authenticity weakened, that reconstructed historic environments made a comeback in public display. Even prestigious cultural history museums were soon prepared to reintroduce the period-room format, although sometimes performed with an ironic twist. Sven-Harry's home is clearly a representative of this trend, including its inherent contradictions. While the architectural setting is a straightforward replica, the artworks within the newly erected walls totally depend on being regarded as highly valued originals.

Since Hazelius's days, the method of exhibiting collected items integrated in domestic interiors has proved a success, even though the ways by which to achieve this effect have changed considerably over the years. Sven-Harry Karlsson's statement that his artworks should be experienced exactly as they were positioned in his old home, and that art and architecture form an inseparable entirety, is significant. This holistic image obviously constitutes something far greater than the mere total sum of collectible items on display, something that could never be achieved in the neutral surrounding of a white cube. The historical staging efficiently serves this purpose, even though the entire home interior has been transferred from a rural country house to a penthouse in the city centre. It is also possible, although there are no such implications, that the whole installation should be perceived as a site-specific work of art in its own right.

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