

ZON MODERNA



MODERNA MUSEET

What is it with Zon Moderna that the Japanese museums in particular find so attractive? The question suggests itself quite naturally when I receive my third invitation from Japan to talk about Moderna Museet's art learning project for teenagers. On each occasion, teachers, curators and museum directors have come from all over Japan, and their interest – and the interest of the media – has been enormous. I myself was at a loss to find the answer, but it was obvious when I consulted a Japanese colleague. She explained that while Europe was battling with the consequences of a rapid transition from relative cultural homogeneity into multicultural, or rather, intercultural, societies, the big challenge in the still extremely culturally homogeneous Japanese society was the »youth issue«. There is a great concern over the fact that an increasing proportion of the younger generation choose to become »dropouts« and refuse to become part of the prevailing Japanese social structure. The »youth issue« is about how society can continue to function in the future.

As this book will demonstrate, Zon Moderna is an art learning programme that is unusually direct in its approach to art and art

creation – while also addressing what both we and the Japanese would call youth issues and the consequences of greater cultural diversity.

The role of art in the development and character-formation of an individual is an old theme in our culture. The exact importance of this role has varied over the centuries, but it is safe to say that it has gradually gained significance the closer we get to the present day. It was considered important already during the Enlightenment and even more so in the Romantic period, only to become a central element in Modernism. It is hardly surprising that educational activities, and especially educational activities for children, were given prominence in the model for European museums of modern art that evolved in the 1950s: The Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, Louisiana outside Copenhagen, not to mention Moderna Museet in Stockholm. Guided tours and workshops for kids, where they could draw, paint and model, were soon *de rigueur* for any ambitious modern art museum.

Behind this trend lies the idea that »art« has a generally beneficial effect on the child's development. This is probably true, but I believe that it is primarily a focus on *the visual* that is good. Undoubtedly, the slogan that stemmed from the famous Reggio Emilia pedagogy, that the child is born with 1,000 languages but loses 999, conveys a profound truth. The visual dimension plays a vital part in the development of the small child, but eventually gives way to the focus in society and school on the textual.

One hitch in this context is that museums sometimes equate art with *visuality* – a mistake indicating that even though nearly 100 years have passed, we have not quite taken in the significance of what Marcel Duchamp tried to convey. Could it be that we still slip into the old romantic ideas – ideas which were inherited by modernism – of the close affinity between »the artist, the fool and the child«? This mindset is in direct conflict with a contemporary definition of art that, besides pointing to the fundamental importance of the institution and the context in even beginning to define something as art, also emphasises the extreme complexity of the work of art. In its attempt to formulate something about life or society that cannot be formulated in any other way, art challenges the limits of *visuality* while actively working with several planes

of significance generated in a play with art history and with the many boundaries in culture and art.

One intriguing and rarely discussed side of the romantic-modernist perspective on the child's privileged relationship to art is that it is in direct opposition to one of the fundamental assumptions of art education, namely that »the more you know, the more you see«. Obviously it is beneficial for children to see pictures and objects and to discuss what they see, both with educators and with other children – and obviously it is both fun and creative to have the opportunity to paint, model, cut and paste in the museum workshop, activities that are becoming less and less common at home, in kindergarten and in school. However, it is far from certain that it is better for one's development to look at a Picasso painting than to look at something else – say, a stick, a pie or a piano. It may even be worse, considering the immense complexity of a Picasso painting.

Now, there are so many other reasons why it is exceedingly important and beneficial for a museum to have educational activities for children. firstly, children are familiarised with the museum – eventually they feel at home there, a feeling that we know often survives well into adult life. They also learn at an early age that there are people called artists in our society – in other words, that grownups can have roles in society other than those children most frequently encounter. And, not least, a belief that it is crucial that our society has zones of freedom, places where you can paint and express yourself freely without fear of spilling and getting mucky, where there is loads of material, loads of freedom and helpful adults. These zones are becoming fewer in our kids' hectic schedules.

Where is this discussion about the modern museum, children, art and education leading? To continued efforts in education for children. But also, perhaps, to a re-assessment of how the museum focuses on children and youths.

While the modern museums have achieved a great deal since the 1950s – albeit not enough – for small children, another group of young people were more or less excluded from the museums. I am referring to teenagers. They are not always as endearing as five- or seven-year-olds. Boisterous, pimply and loud, we often think.

But at the same time, they are most likely the group among the museum's audience for whom modern art – and the artist as an alternative role model – may be the most important! In that very phase of life, when they are breaking away from the past, from their parents' values and perspectives, in an attempt to formulate, or rather, reformulate, their identity. Is it not so, that a teenager's position is very like that of art? Like art, the teenager challenges boundaries and conventions, reformulates the given and formulates the new. And we can rest assured that teenagers perceive much more in art than five-year-olds – simply because they know so much more!

This is basically the foundation for Zon Moderna. The realisation of the potential of art for teenagers – coupled with an awareness that they are paradoxically the audience to whom the museums have given the least priority. Zon Moderna is an art education project – or perhaps it should merely be called an art project – for teenagers. Both the goal and the means are simple yet complex. It involves some twenty upper secondary school pupils, one of the museum's art educators and an artist – but it reaches many other by spreading rings on the water – actually thousands of pupils and teachers each year. At Zon Moderna pupils and schools from different parts of Stockholm meet – we interact across the boundaries that divide a major city: class, ethnic and cultural divides. After six terms with Zon Moderna we can now see that the results of the project have exceeded the museum's wildest dreams. This book is an attempt to convey something of all this – to tell a few of the many stories that the project has engendered so far, and account for experiences we have made that could be useful to others. Personally, I would like to relate what joy I feel when a pupil suddenly takes the leap from producing something nice – a nice picture, a nice dress – to producing art. How the picture is suddenly imbued with unique meaning, how it suddenly formulates something unique with the literally incomparable precision and openness of art.

I believe it may have been something of this that my Japanese hosts had seen – and that they had understood the great potential of investing in art education for teenagers. Perhaps they had also perceived the hope that is always inherent in art and the artist role.

In an era when young people could reasonably feel pessimistic about the future, in light of world poverty, war and repression, and while the media and entertainment industry have a firm hold, art points towards unknown escape routes. When it feels like there's nowhere to run to, art represents another feeling – there is always a way forward, always another way of opening up the closed structures. Art can simply give hope to the younger generations! Zon Moderna proves that.

The idea for Zon Moderna was conceived by Moderna Museet curator Karin Malmquist and art educator Ulf Eriksson, who then developed the project together with art educator Lena Malm, in close cooperation with the selected artists. They have all done a fantastic job. But without the commitment of our now 148 »Zonies« – the core groups of upper secondary school pupils – not much would have come of it all. The same goes for the commitment shown from the very start by Zon Moderna's sponsor, Investor. The fact that Investor and its leadership, especially Fredrik Lindgren, Vice-President Corporate Communications, supported the idea so wholeheartedly from day one meant that the project has been adequately funded throughout. Many thanks!

Investor's aim in supporting Zon Moderna was to give young people an opportunity to participate actively in artistic processes – to give free rein to their imagination and inspiration. With this project, Moderna Museet has created a unique space for creativity, diversity and meetings – something that is vital for both young people and our common future. To invest in children and teenagers is essential to our company and also to society as a whole. We have already seen that Zon Moderna ultimately generates new art projects, creative joy and entrepreneurial spirit. At Investor we are proud and happy to be associated with Zon Moderna. We congratulate Moderna Museet and its staff on their successful project.

Fredrik Lindgren

Vice-President Corporate Communications, Investor AB

Introduction

Karin Malmquist
Curator

Sometimes, the spark and starting point of a project can be traced back to a specific, defining moment – what the hosts of a well-known Swedish reality show would call the »Hallelujah Moment«. A few of us who were involved in educational activities had been thinking for some time about what would be a good way of lowering the threshold to Moderna Museet for teenagers. We decided to devote a few hours to mulling over this issue, and one autumn day in 2002, we made a huge pot of coffee and sat down to a brainstorming session to generate the ideas that would eventually be the basis of the art education project Zon Moderna. We envisioned that:

- The core group of a Zon project would consist of 15–20 upper secondary school pupils from schools all over Stockholm.
- The starting point for each Zon project would be a current exhibition at the museum.
- Each Zon project would be led by an artist together with one of the museum art educators.
- The pupils would visit the museum regularly throughout a complete school term.

The purpose of working with a core group of a small number of pupils from different parts of Stockholm is to generate encounters and exchanges. In addition to the 15–20 key members, their friends are often involved on the margins of the project. They pop up in various situations at the museum, and at the final opening the teenagers' family and friends come to Skeppsholmen. With regard to creativity and group dynamics it is also preferable that the group is not identical to a school class, where everyone has their set roles as the goody-goody, the clown or the shy one, which can be limiting.

The most complicated and, apparently, most heavy aspect of Zon Moderna is the planning and contriving concerned in scheduling activities. You have to plan far ahead. We start with sending letters to each respective school head, describing the project and inviting their school to be one of the »Zon Schools« the following term.

In this way, Zon Moderna has approval from »the top«, and if there is an interest we can then proceed to make plans with the teachers concerned. We have often sat at meetings in the museum with five different teachers and as many schedules, trying to coordinate these with the artist's and our own diaries. The schools have found various means of making time for the pupils to take part in the project, sometimes by integrating the work with a course or project work. Other times they have incorporated it with workplace experience or other traineeship.

It has been invaluable for us as a museum to have this close contact with upper secondary schools in Stockholm. It has given us an understanding of the framework in which schools operate and their interest and flexibility in taking part in projects such as ours. It is no secret that it can be difficult for the vastly different structures of school and museum to interact favourably – countless seminars and meetings have been devoted to this topic over the years. Without going deeper into this issue, we can simply say that we have repeatedly been amazed by the enormous difference between schools when it comes to entering into projects with external organisations. What one school regards as totally impossible poses no problem at all to another.

One critical prerequisite seems to be that the teachers are good

at cooperating with each other and work in teams. Schools that have a good dialogue between teachers are better at perceiving the cross-disciplinary benefits of participating in Zon Moderna, and the teachers are thus more generous when it comes to establishing a viable schedule.

The procedure of selecting pupils varies from school to school. The first step is often that we visit the schools and they visit us to get some idea of what the project entails. Then pupils can announce their interest in participating, and the teachers then select the participants. Alternatively, they organise a draw. The schools are also offered free guided tours of current exhibitions with a view to keeping the core group's friends up-to-date with what is going on and involving more pupils.

Exhibitions and what we do with them

Art education can sometimes tend to develop its own approach that occasionally is far removed from the essence and ideas of an exhibition. Often, the upper secondary pupil's encounter with an exhibition is limited to a 60-minute guided tour. At Zon Moderna we want to get right to the heart of the exhibition, through repeated visits and discussions about them. And, as this book demonstrates, that is where the voyage begins, in the exhibition, in the art itself. So, what is it about art, in this case modern and contemporary art, that is so beneficial to these pupils? Perhaps we should differentiate between two perspectives when it comes to using modern and contemporary art in education: learning *about* art, and learning *through* art.

An example of the latter is that we can develop an awareness that there are many different ways of visually communicating an idea. The various kinds of works give the pupils an opportunity to encounter images other than those that make up our most common visual reference-points: TV, advertising, etc. Artistic images show that there are many different ways of experiencing, interpreting and reflecting the world around us. At their best, the versions of the world presented by many artists show us alternative interpretations and new perspectives other than the generally accepted ones. This can help to make young people more aware of differences and promote critical thinking. The subjects dealt

with in contemporary art are often relevant to these teenagers' everyday lives, and there is an interest in issues relating to identity, but also to social issues. Art can simply be a tool for examining our existence – in general and on a personal level. Upper secondary school is a period when many are seeking to formulate their own world view, far from that of parents and other persons of authority.

The artist in Zon Moderna

For each project an artist is invited to serve as the artistic director. He or she determines the guidelines for what is to be achieved and the ideas that should govern the work.

The artist is selected on the basis of our belief in his or her ability to communicate with young people, but also with a view to how interesting the artist is in relation to the exhibition that is the starting point for the project.

The goal is that the group will follow an artistic process from idea, via implementation, to the final result. As this book shows, all the projects are radically different. The biggest difference perhaps lies in whether they have chosen to work together on a collective project or if the pupils work on individual works of art based on certain defined parameters. The artist launches the project with a personal and work presentation in the museum auditorium or cinema. Both the core group and their class mates from each respective school are invited to the presentation. The key pupils and the artist then meet for several sessions throughout the term, for workshops, personal and instructional discussions, planning for the exhibition opening, etc.

Contemporary artists are in touch with current topics and know about modern materials that the teenagers are also familiar with; they often know more about CD burning than about firing clay. The artists inspire the teenagers to choose materials other than those they are familiar with from school. Johan Thurfjell for instance, who was the Zon Moderna artist during the Munch exhibition, declared his love to Clas Ohlson (a Swedish hardware store), where he finds many of the things he needs for his art. However, the primary concern in Zon Moderna has been the artists' thoughts around and approach to art and its processes. They often deal with problem solving in a way that is different

to what we are accustomed to. Many artists also seem to be habituated to a degree of uncertainty, to keeping things open and handling apparent contradictions. The contact that arises between the teenagers and the artists is one of the most essential features of Zon Moderna.

Over the three years that Zon Moderna has been pursued, several of Sweden's most prominent artists have participated in the project. We have got to know many teachers and also visited their schools. But, above all, school children from all over Stockholm have come to the museum, made themselves at home and created fantastic things. Zon Moderna has affected the entire museum, since the pupils have been in contact with everyone, from technicians to press officers and photographers, from conservators to curators. And after three years, occasionally something happens that makes us especially happy: former »Zonies« come back to us with their own suggestions and initiatives.