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Renegotiations

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC ART IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM



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The Art of the Million Program in Today's Living Environment.

//Annika Öhrner

Under the framework of the Million Program, a series of artistic initiatives were undertaken in the form of permanent works in new residential areas.¹ The welfare state had a strong belief in the power of art to bring about political change and promote democracy. This faith in the power of art abides; architecture, form and design are considered to be able to counter “the effects of globalization, increasing segregation and ill-health, and the declining attractiveness of many of our cities,” as expressed in the governmental investigation *Gestaltad livsmiljö (Designed Living Environment)* (SOU 2015:88). “I believe we can change the world, at least our daily living environment,” the investigator writes confidently in the introduction.² Today, public art in Sweden has seen a series of publicly-run, often temporary, art projects around the outskirts of large cities, but also in rural areas, as several chapters in this anthology will address. These temporary projects are also interwoven with ideas of promoting democratic processes. By creating encounters with and between inhabitants, such art is considered to have the ability of accomplishing more than any stagnant sculpture and color scheme from previous projects could. This chapter presents a critical discussion of the strong faith in art's ability to change, which tends to obscure the ways in which traces of earlier, parallel initiatives remain in public spaces with a low-intensity impact.³ The article highlights examples of how the simultaneous presence of art

1 The Million Program was a state program for improvement of housing, suggested by the Swedish Social Democratic government in 1964. The program ran from 1965 to 1975, and resulted in high raised building blocks in the outskirts of many Swedish cities, that still prevail. See f.e. Lisbeth Söderqvist, *Att gestalta välfärd. Från idé till byggd miljö, [To Design Welfare. From idea to built environment]* (Formas & Riksantikvarieämbetet, 2008).

2 Christer Larsson, *Gestaltad livsmiljö – en ny politik för arkitektur, form och design [Designed Living Environment – A new policy for architecture, form and design]*, 2015, SOU 2015:88, s. 13.

3 In Stockholm, a long-term project is currently underway that aims to re-activate existing public designs in the city, a project that was initiated by Stefan Hagdahl, Stockholm Konst/Stockholm municipality. Artists work in various sub-projects to create works that become part of a dialogue with existing sculptures. This forward-looking project is expected to generate unique experiences on how public design can be developed while remaining sensitive to its unique temporality.

with different dates of origin can be understood as an alternative to succumbing to a simplistic dichotomy between the old and the new, the enduring and the changing, the outdated and the innovative.

What experiences can arise around the very superimposition of art in a physical place or in a space that activates the consciousness of the viewers or a collective memory? This perspective on public space is unfortunately overlooked in contemporary discussions on public art. In order to capture the encounter between existing art and contemporary practice in a place, I have chosen to use British cultural geographer Doreen Massey's concept of temporality, what she called *space-time*. Massey sees public space as a socially differentiated place where a number of relationships and narratives intersect.⁴ She used the concept of space-time in order to describe the disintegration of a linear conception of time in relation to the era of global capitalism. When applied to a Swedish cultural policy context, the concept can serve to provide a view of the contemporary presence of artworks in public space, something that is important to consider in policy, for artists themselves, and those responsible for drawing up public designs. I discuss some of these relationships by looking at two different kinds of sites: first Flemingsberg, an urban environment in Huddinge outside Stockholm established in the context of the Million Program, and second the 'station' as such, as a conceived space for public art. Works by Gert Marcus, Siri Derkert and Goldin+Senneby problematize the notion of public space as an untouched playing field for art intended to benefit democracy.

A neighborhood and a Million Program area.

"Did you know that the county's and perhaps even all of Sweden's largest work of art is a collection of houses?", proclaims a film on the Stockholm County Museum's website about the Grantorp residential area in Västra Flemingsberg.⁵ The "work of art," to which the county museum refers, is the eighteen residential buildings produced in 1965-1974 with 2,500 apartments designed by architect Hans Matell and painted in fifteen colors, from green to yellow-red, as well as in shades from white to light grey in the north, by artist Gert Marcus. Västra

4 Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place," *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

5 Rebecka Wan, "I'll paint the whole world..." Stockholm County Museum website, www.stockholmstansmuseum.se [accessed 11/01/2020].

Flemingsberg was built in the middle of what was then a forest and agricultural landscape. Marcus' design is still a dominant feature in the area. The color compositions interact with the people who navigate through the development or between the houses on foot and can also be glimpsed by those walking in the adjacent woodland groves. They are also clearly visible to the traveler passing by on train or by car.

For several decades, the cultural administration in Huddinge municipality has placed public works on streets and squares, often in cooperation with the municipal property company Hüge.⁶ Institutions such as Södertörn University, Karolinska Huddinge, state archives, Södertörn District Court and others, have gradually moved to Flemingsberg and brought with them even more art. The most extensive art collection is however held by the region through the art collection at Huddinge Hospital, inaugurated in the early 1970s. In addition to Marcus' color scheme, a large number of works find a home in Flemingsberg, like a polyphonic choir and a manifestation of the faith in the power of art to shape a neighborhood.

A first step in understanding the relationship between artworks and place is to investigate where the works are placed and how they physically relate to the surrounding environment. In a master's thesis in art history in 2015, Matilda Sjöblom explored this very matter as a first step of her study. She compiled a list of all publicly owned works placed outdoors in Huddinge, one of the district's two municipalities.⁷ She then looked up each of the 108 works, made GPS notations for where they were located, and converted them into a map. Rather than grouping public art by age and date of creation, or by the authority that commissioned the works, as is often done, Sjöblom approached things differently in order to make their spatial relationships and contemporary relevance visible.

In the next step of her analysis, Sjöblom chose also to identify secondary characteristics, like the artist's gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status. These values were then compared with the corresponding values for the population of the various individual districts within Huddinge municipality. Several interesting results emerged during this process. For example, it was found that works by female artists,

6 See *Offentlig konst i Flemingsberg [Public Art in Flemingsberg]*, ed. Håkan Bull & Dan Karholm (Huddinge: Hüge Fastigheter, 2007), and *Konsten på Södertörns högskola [Art at Södertörn University]*, ed. Annika Öhrner (Huddinge: Annika Öhrner (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2016).

7 Matilda Sjöblom, *Männen på fältet - En georeferentiell analys av den offentliga konsten i Huddinge kommun [The Men in the Field: A georeferential analysis of the public art in the municipality of Huddinge]*, master's thesis (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2016) Full text in Diva.

a strikingly small proportion of the total number, were often placed outside places with female connotations, such as preschools. On the other hand, works created by men were predominantly in areas of the municipality where decisions are made or where academic institutions are located. Sjöblom's study thus shows the consequences of a cultural policy practice superimposed in time. Through an analysis of the decision paths and power relations within the municipality, she also painted a picture of how the producers of public art have shaped the selection of works. In the final discussion, she concluded that "it is fundamentally about a 'general sense' of participation in the common that is lost when public commissions are given to a homogeneous group of Swedish-born men, often with local roots and broad networks."⁸ At the time, the art projects had likely been conceived with the good intention of creating a more artistically appealing and democratically designed environment, but Sjöblom's study painted a more complex and problematic picture of the municipality's public art inventory – in map form.

8 Sjöblom, *Männen på fältet [The Men in the Field]*, op.cit. , p. 27.



Gert Marcus' Color composition, Västra Flemingsberg.

Photo: Henrik Peel, Södertörns högskola. © Gert Marcus / Bildupphovsrätt 2021

How then did the “apparatuses” surrounding the two giant projects in Flemingsberg function around 1970; that is, the art program for Huddinge Hospital and the design of Västra Flemingsberg? This I think can be related to something the art critic Patricia C. Phillips famously highlighted in 1988, namely the idealism of what she called “the public art machine”, which she said had developed in New York. Committees and a new decision-making model were established to safeguard both democratic and artistic values. Inherent in these, Phillips argued, was a peculiar blend of idealism and bureaucracy that she said had to do with the temporality of the works themselves, i.e., their permanence. Art that was expected to remain in public spaces created its own parameters for the production process.⁹ Do we find traces of such a “public art machine” in a Swedish context?

At the time of its founding in the early 1970s, Huddinge Hospital was the largest hospital in northern Europe. The hospital and its artistic design had a high status and were subject to a careful public planning process. The steering committee, the “Working Group for Physical Environmental Issues” at Huddinge Hospital (AgMiljö), included the hospital’s overall project manager, Sune Björklöf, the then leading cultural personality and art gallery director, Eje Högstedt, professor at the Royal Institute of Art, Olle Nyman, and several architects and representatives from civil society. Sune Björklöf describes how the art program was incorporated as part of the overall planning of the hospital’s lines of communication, and carried out in dialogue with the contemporary international organizational research community. In addition to the art program, responsibility was taken for selecting colors and the hospital’s interior design in a broader sense.¹⁰ Holger Bäckström and Bo Ljungberg’s large-scale relief *Hej Patient* (Hello patient), which was then placed on a screen outside the entrance, could be said to be representative of the visual and digital approach. Today, *Hej Patient* has been placed in a new installation on top of the exterior wall, out of view of incoming vehicle traffic but also for the direct interaction of citizens. AgMiljö would not only be responsible for the artistic design; the hospital was perceived as a “self-contained environment” where factors such as sound, textiles, signs, light,

9 Patricia C. Phillips, “Out of Order: The Public Art Machine,” *Artforum* 27:4 (1988).

10 Sune Björklöf, “Konsten i Huddinge sjukhus” [The Art at Huddinge Hospital], in *Huddinge Sjukhus 1972–2002* [*Huddinge Hospital 1972–2002*], ed. Anders Persson & Folke Sjöqvist (Huddinge, Karolinska University Hospital, 2010), pp. 31–48.

surfaces, actors and activities had to be considered. There is not enough space here to discuss the project in a way that explores its full scope with different exhibition spaces, larger permanent works, the presentation of artworks such as paintings, drawings, graphic art, as well as architecture and external landscape art. The overarching aim of the artistic design, which was the committee's assignment to fulfill, was to "engage, delight, and comfort." Thus, the Huddinge Hospital project, aggregated a solid trust in the democratic potential of art, paired with an equally robust "machinery" that was set up to secure the outcome.

What was the motivation behind the construction of Västra Flemingsberg?

For the municipality, it was about attracting workers to the new hospital by offering access to good housing in the area. However, the artist Gert Marcus distanced himself from that position, pointing out that his role in Grantorp, as the area is called, was purely artistic. It is not entirely clear what he meant by this. While he rejected notions that art should be integrated into a residential area as an idea that emanates from municipal administrations, he also rejected the notion that the role of the artist's commission was to add something to the architecture as a kind of contemporary ornamentation.¹¹ The qualities that he would like to see added were elaborated in what he considered an objective, albeit artistically based, investigation. If it is an objective line of reasoning, it could also be valid in a later "space-time," and there is therefore reason to examine Marcus' ideas more closely.

In his art, Gert Marcus aimed to inspire the viewer to move around works in which color exhibits both spatial and temporal aspects.¹² He was also interested in the spatial relationship between the viewer and the work. Flemingsberg is characterized by hilly terrain. Matell's eighteen residential buildings vary in height to compensate for differences in the hilly landscape but are the same height in relation to sea level. Minimal excavation work was carried out on the site in order to preserve existing vegetation in line with the ideals of the French architect Le Corbusier. Marcus constructed a color combination of fifteen colors and shades from white to light grey in the north, sprayed in enamel onto the sheet

11 Gert Marcus & Hans Matell, "Colors on the Exterior Walls of the Buildings of the Apartment Complex at Västra Flemingsberg, Huddinge, Sweden," *Leonardo*, 12:2 (1979), p. 90.

12 See Håkan Nilsson, *Måleriets rum [The Space(s) of Painting]* (Stockholm: Axl Books, 2009), and his "Gert Marcus: Konstformernas fenomenologi" [Gert Marcus: The Phenomenology of Art Forms] in *Gert Marcus: Distansens förvandling [Gert Marcus: The Transformation of Distance]*, ed. Françoise Ribeyrolles-Marcus (Stockholm: Carlssons förlag, 2013), pp. 87-104.

metal applied to the façades, which rose from the concrete pedestals of the foundation. Beyond the natural surroundings and the constructed contrast – the concrete-grey hospital – the area's space-time was still relatively open and could be received visually. Since then, a number of sculptures have been added to the site as well.

Marcus also developed an idea of "color space," which he called *dispositions*.

He said he wanted to create a spectrum of colors that would have a spatial impact on the viewer. He explored this idea in a series of sculptures, paintings, and designs for public spaces from the mid-1950s onwards. Marcus' color design for Västra Flemingsberg was conceived in relation to those who walk beside the buildings and those who view the buildings from a distance. To accentuate the buildings' placement and spatial relationships, he created a color scheme that took into account the color dimensions of the intended material, how its colors related to each other, and the opacity versus transparency of the paint. In a 1974 article for the art history journal *Leonardo* (published by MIT Press), Marcus described his quest for more nuanced conceptions of color. He objected to the psychological studies carried out by color scientist Lars Sivik through interviews with test subjects in which terms such as "friendly," "refined," or "vulgar" were associated with different color shades. On the contrary, Marcus believed that an individual's aesthetic sensibility is too limited to be valid as a starting point for modern social construction.¹³

However, in the artist's texts about the objective relationship between color, the building and the viewer, ideas of subjective qualities also emerge. In the *Leonardo* article, Marcus wrote that the residential area, together with the nearby hospital, could be seen as "a self-contained community."¹⁴ He also acknowledged that the color compositions could readily create "positive emotions."¹⁵ Consequently, what Marcus wanted to achieve in Flemingsberg was an objective, color-space design on an architectural scale. This, in turn, was intended to influence the viewer's subjective visual perceptions and movements in relation to the colored surfaces, as well as the interrelationships between those surfaces.

What has the impact of the major projects in Flemingsberg been on the

13 Marcus & Matell, "Colors on the exterior walls of the buildings of the apartment complex at Västra Flemingsberg, Huddinge, Sweden," *op.cit.*, p. 89

14 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

time period that the district represents today? The construction of Huddinge Hospital and the works of art that were successively added to the space have generated a significant sediment of art and visual expression. A 2008 inventory of works of art at Huddinge Hospital counted almost 8,000 works by 2,000 artists.¹⁶ Some of the works have been taken down or disappeared, but even more designs are being developed on a large scale by Region Stockholm's cultural department.

A relatively recent work in the hospital is *Färgrum och gränslinjer* (*Color Spaces and Borderlines*) (1997). It is a later work by Gert Marcus in which his theory of color space is translated into a human height sculpture in lacquered iron sheet, and has been placed in the main entrance of the hospital. The colored metal plating suggests a spiral movement and is meant to create a similar cognitive movement in the viewer. The sculpture and its placement in the hospital is an example of how a contemporary curatorial practice can revitalize older public works. Indeed, *Color Spaces and Borderlines* were not created for this site but were moved from another hospital in Stockholm, St. Göran's, by the county council's art producers, Renée Lord and Martin West, around 2005.¹⁷ Several of Marcus' works have been placed in the Flemingsberg area through similar initiatives. In the municipal library in the center of Flemingsberg, there is a sculpture placed on the ceiling that was commissioned by Marcus late in his life, *Tre steg från det obestämda* (*Three Steps from the Undefined*), (2002), consisting of three rods in Plexiglas. The artist's painting *Färglinjer* (*Color Lines*) (1953), from Moderna Museet's collection, has been placed in a conference room at the top of the F building in Södertörn University, next to a window from which one can also look out at the color composition he created for the residential buildings in Västra Flemingsberg.¹⁸ Through these placements, a genealogy is constructed that in some ways dissolves the time of the works and actively allows them to coalesce into a common temporal space. These examples show how the art machinery has continuously given rise to multiple artistic expressions in Flemingsberg, expressions that vie for the public's attention in their everyday lives.

16 Björklöf, "Konsten i Huddinge sjukhus" [The Art at Huddinge Hospital] op.cit. , p. 31. The art budget at the time was SEK 6.2 million, which Björklöf recalculates to SEK 52 million in 2010.

17 Information from Martin West, Project Manager, Department of Art, Cultural Administration, Region Stockholm (e-mail to author 11/30/2020).

18 *Konsten på Södertörns högskola [Art at Södertörn University]*, Öhrner ed. op.cit., p. 14.

In the fall of 2020, the Netflix series *Love and Anarchy* became a hit. In this rom-com with a class perspective, a young IT technician who has moved to Stockholm lives in a collective in an apartment in one of Marcus' colorful buildings, here constructed as a counterpoint to the centrally located townhouse where his love interest lives. The juxtaposition of the young, fresh but also poor life in the suburbs and the more rigid, propertied lifestyle in the city is reinforced by the choice of setting, Grantorp, which is presented as both an attractive and exotic place. Marcus' design thus defines a space that reappears in both popular culture and in the day to day lives of real inhabitants. During this period, I also read a litany of instructions from the board of a housing association in Grantorp, about how satellite dishes must not be attached directly to the façade or protrude from the wall. At the end of the more technical arguments for this ban, the artistic origin of the façades is mentioned. Marcus' color scheme thus becomes, as I understand it, an argument for aesthetic discipline and established decorum.

The Station

In this section, I turn my attention to the Station as such, by which I mean a conceived space with a particular capacity to harbor and shape notions of movement and the future, but also the past. In both its physical and imagined versions, the Station recurs in the discourse of public art in post-war Sweden. The background, of course, is that transport systems are publicly funded and are thus, in the best case and often in Sweden, allocated funds for artistic design. One such example is the Västlänken project, the railway tunnel being built under central Gothenburg. Public Art Agency Sweden, in collaboration with the Swedish Transport Administration, has proposed designs at four stations in a project with the thought-provoking name in our context, *Kronotopia* (from the Greek χρόνος [chrónos] for time and τόπος [tópos] for place). The jury for the commission included representatives from both authorities and from Västtrafik, the Art Unit of Västra Götaland Region, the City of Gothenburg and Göteborg Konst, as well as members with artistic and curatorial expertise, following the same organizational model we have already encountered in this chapter. In the project, as expressed in the invitation to artists, the concept of *Kronotopia* is described as follows:

[it should] inspire an examination of our present, a review of the potential of the past and a potential insight into the future combined with an interest in site-specific exploration. Artists are given the opportunity to highlight the complex web of identities, heritage and the relationship to a globalized world that characterizes the city of Gothenburg and to allow this to be expressed in the city's shared spaces.¹⁹

The potential client's vision regarding what the artist could achieve aims high, and includes lofty expectations regarding the physical and temporal extent of the work. The winning proposal for one of the stations was *Evig anställning (Eternal Employment)* (2017) by the artist duo Goldin+Senneby. This will be examined below as part of the idea of the Station as such as a kind of ideal space for public art.

A design competition is a genre in and of itself, and it is perhaps only natural that a producer, an actor within "the Machine", in this context will present high expectations. Before returning to the *institutional* practices that proliferate in the Station, I would first like to call attention to some perceptions expressed by *users*. The artist and participant observer Monica Sand's report from her 2016-2018 study of *Art is Happening*, a project by Public Art Agency Sweden, is mentioned in several places in this anthology.²⁰ The report describes, among other things, the wishes expressed through the applications submitted by people from civil society or municipal administrations to receive funding for art projects intended for the Million Program areas. The material offers indications regarding how works created forty or fifty years ago live on, not only in the memories of a bygone era but also, in the wishes for the public spaces of the future. One example is the updating of the playful *Ballongen [The Balloon]* (1968) piece in Råby, a Million

19 Competition program. Kronotopia: Haga and Korsvägen 2017 Competition 2, Public Art Agency Sweden and Swedish Transport Administration, 04/06/2017, p. 4.

20 Monica Sand, *Tro, hopp och konst. Konst som politiskt verktyg, forskningsrapport om Statens konstråds satsning Konst händer 2016-2018 [Faith, Hope and Art. Art as a political tool, research report on Public Art Agency Sweden's initiative Art is Happening] 2016-2018* (Stockholm: Ark-Des, 2019). *Art is Happening* was a response to the government assignment *Dela rum (Sharing Space)*, to Public Art Agency Sweden and the Swedish Arts Council 2016-2018 and was realized in fifteen locations in the country, in projects where professional artists were invited to collaborate with residents and civil society based on a proposal for a specific location for the artistic intervention.

Program area outside Västerås, in an idea proposal entitled *Ballongen - lek på riktigt* (*The Balloon - play for real*). The legendary exhibition *Modell för ett kvalitativt samhälle* (*Model for a Qualitative Society*, often referred to as “The Model”), which was shown at Moderna Museet in 1968, was then moved to Råby, and the exhibition’s curatorial idea – to let children’s games serve as a model for a more humane society – had an impact. The new proposal from Råby for *Art is Happening* is to reactivate this. Other applicants draw on memories of their youth, when they were involved in a mural painting project as eighth graders in primary school in 1978. It is proposed as a follow-up to the project, at a time when their neighborhood is being transformed into a cultural center. Another application discusses how works from the time of the Million Program call on the surrounding community to “act for the common good,” as “the issues are just as relevant 40 years later.”²¹ The informant is referring to “Henschen’s cave paintings” which speak of siblinghood, peace, and community and “Derkert’s metal wall sculpture”, which portrays heroes fighting for the environment. The works referred to are probably Helga Henschen’s *Min gröna dröm är röd* (*My Green Dream is Red*) (1975), the design of the Tensta subway station, and Siri Derkert’s *Sverigeväggen* (*Sweden Wall*) (1967-69), on the façade of the *Sverigehuset* in Stockholm. The station and certain iconic works from the 1960s and 1970s seem to be recreated in the viewer’s memory in this way, as good role models. Monica Sand also emphasized in her report how the belief in the democratizing effects of culture and art permeated the *Art is Happening* project. The notion that access to art in public spaces is a democratic right and that the presence of art raises the awareness of residents was echoed both in programs and, as we have seen, by the users themselves.²²

Some works from the period when the Million Program was first established and local transport was being developed have gained particularly strong, iconic status. The commissioning of Siri Derkert’s seven public works from the late 1950s through the 1970s coincides with the institutionalization of public art as a welfare state project. The main significance of Public Art Agency Sweden for public sculpture during this period was its role as a normative and legitimizing body, running parallel with the overall discourse of *Folkhemmet*.²³ The bureaucracy

21 Sand, *Tro, hopp och konst* [*Faith, Hope and Art*], op.cit. , p. 55.

22 Ibid.

23 Jessica Sjöholm-Skrubbe, *Skulptur i folkhemmet; den offentliga skulpturens institutionalisering*,

and structure that Public Art Agency Sweden built up in the post-war period for art commissioned by the state became a model for working with public art at other levels as well. This institutional set-up paved the way for progressive and innovative projects to be placed in central locations around the city, where Derkert's *Ristningar i naturbetong* (*Carvings in Concrete*) occupies a special position. Even from the outset, the Station is a powerful space that captures the traveler, and a place characterized by concentrated time and accelerated movement. Siri Derkert's *Carvings in Concrete* was commissioned by Stockholm's *Spårvägar* in 1961-65 and still sit in the Östermalmstorg metro station in Stockholm. Because the platform is 165 meters long, there are four enormous wall surfaces for design, and the waiting traveler is embedded in the work. Through motifs with peace and environmental themes, combined with images from everyday life, several temporal and political positions are established. The rhythm of musical notation is echoed in the composition itself, with drawn images placed along the wall. When Siri Derkert was asked whether in the future, people would recognize the people she had portrayed on the platform, she replied that they would have the opportunity to learn something about these historical figures. One of the clearest markers of time in *Carvings in Concrete*, however, is a drawn hand holding a wrist, entitled: "Women take the pulse of patriarchy. Time is short."

In Siri Derkert's work, there is thus both an eye to the future and an artistic desire to historicize. But the work also contains explicit hopes for political change, hopes that still rest in today's space-time. The motifs that appear in the sandblasted drawings in the concrete recur as references in Derkert's later projects and, as we have seen, in overall discourses on public art and democracy. *Carvings in concrete* came to convey messages of peace, environmental messages and political markers, such as *The Internationale*, the song of the international labor movement that was also the national anthem of the Soviet Union from 1917-1944. The commission was neither something that happened by chance nor was the political content simply 'timely,' as is sometimes claimed when drawing the cultural climate of the 1960s. The artist was established in the art field by virtue of her position in the mass media and in exhibitions. In 1961, her art was shown in what, at the time, was

referentialitet och rumsliga situationer [*Sculpture in the Swedish welfare state : Institutionalisation, referentiality and spatial situations 1940-1975*], doctoral thesis (Gothenburg: Makadam, 2007), pp. 292-293.

the newly established Moderna Museet's first retrospective featuring a Swedish artist, and in 1962, she was Sweden's representative at the Venice Biennale.²⁴ This strengthened her position and shielded her when the station opened. Her political approach was met with both enthusiasm and criticism. When Stockholm's Spårvägar's director Hans von Heland asked Derkert to remove *The Internationale's* notation from the walls of the metro station, she refused and that was the end of the issue. The machinery of public art in this case protected and strengthened the integrity of the work; the motif was preserved for futurity.



Siri Derkert, Engravings in concrete (1961-65), Östermalms tunnelbanestation,
Photo: Jonas Bergsten, 2005/Wikipedia commons. © Siri Derkert / Bildupphovs rätt 2021

The ambition to give artists access to building processes at an early stage has been a common thread running through public art institutions since the post-war period.²⁵ The winning concept proposal for the West Link and Korsvägen Station was called *Evig anställning (Eternal*

24 See, for example, Mats Rohdin, "Konst, politik och klotter. Siri Derkert och Östermalmstorgs tunnelbanestation i mediarkiven" ["Art, Politics and Scribble. Siri Derkert and Östermalmstorg metro station in the media archives"], in *Att alltid göra och tänka det olika. Siri Derkert i 1900-talet [To Always Do and Think Differently. Siri Derkert in the 20th Century]* ed. Mats Rohdin & Annika Öhrner (Stockholm: Kungliga biblioteket, 2011), pp. 226-276.

25 Sjöholm Skrubbe *Skulptur i folkhemmet [Sculpture in the Swedish Welfare State]*, op.cit. , p. 104.

Employment) (2017), designed by the Stockholm-based artist duo Goldin+Senneby. French economist Thomas Piketty's thesis that wages for labor grow much slower than the growth of invested capital was the inspiration behind their idea. It is a conceptual work with a two-part design based on the idea that the project budget should be invested so that any return finances the salary of a person given what the artists call "eternal" employment at the station. Within the position, the employee gets to choose his or her duties, while contractual benefits, such as vacation and pension, are also provided. The duration of the position will be determined by what happens in financial markets, though the artists estimate that it will last around 120 years. The physical design of this station takes its point of departure from the Station as such –that is, as a typical space – while it transfers meanings from a different kind of space, the factory. It recreates the working environment of an industrial worker with a time clock and "factory-like lights above the platforms that turn on a fluorescent light – a work light – when the employee is working." *Eternal Employment* thus relates closely to the historical materialist conception of history and its notion of social criticism, which underlies Derkert's conceptual program for Östermalmstorg. With its long time span, however, *Eternal Employment* is not intended to be a static work, a point that was highlighted as a reason for its selection; this presentation is intended to change with people's understanding of the concept of 'work' as well as with financial markets.

The jury's statement emphasized that Goldin+Senneby's proposal was conceptually magnificent, encompassing the entire main station and having the ability to "travel through its walls," as well as "the potential to become part of Gothenburg's oral history through word of mouth."²⁶ In a commentary, cultural theorist Josefin Wikström has stated that to ontologically place art speculation on the same level as that of the financial markets is to skew the perspective, thereby ignoring the critical potential of art.²⁷ I would like to rephrase her thoughts here and suggest that the widely held belief at an institutional level in the ability of art to fill and pass through spaces as if they were immaculate

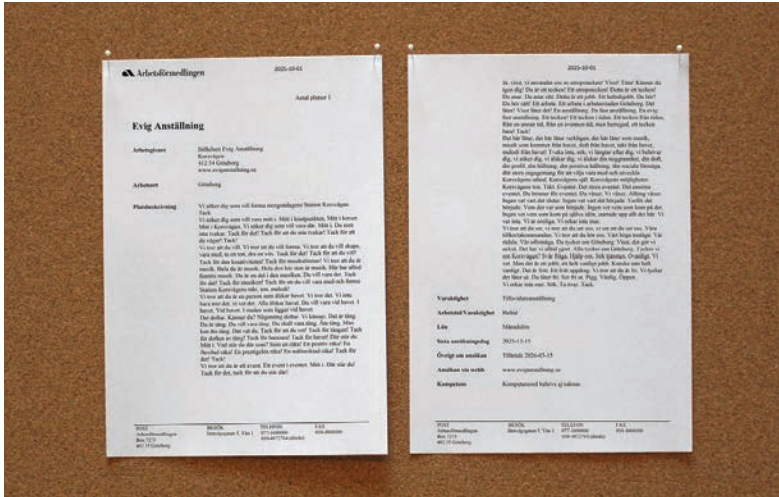
26 *Kronotopia Competition 2. Haga and Korsvägen 2017. The jury's overall statement for the artistic design of the urban transformation project Västlänken (West Link) in Gothenburg.* Public Art Agency Sweden and the Swedish Transport Administration 2018.

27 Josefine Wikström, "Entrepreneurial subjectivity," in *Radical Philosophy*, issue 2.05, Autumn (2019).

and without boundaries is also ontologically suspect. As I see it, this work will be able to survive the entire estimated space–time on one condition: that the art machine persists over the same space–time and is able to protect it.

Historical art was also used as a critical approach in the debate about the winning entry. The critic Frans Josef Petersson argued that by designing the environments in which citizens live their daily lives, public art in Social Democratic post war society was able to preserve “the democratic ideals of equality and justice as living elements in public environments.” Twentieth-century public art thus had “a distinct ‘futurity,’ a view of the future,” something that *Eternal Employment* lacks, according to him.²⁸ The comparison with 20th-century art was made with a broad gesture, while the image painted in one of the articles in which Petersson criticizes Public Art Agency Sweden’s initiative was precisely Siri Derkert’s *Sverigeväggen (Wall of Sweden)* (1969). In the caption, the work is described as “one of the foremost expressions of socially conscious public art in post-war Sweden.” This idealization of the art of the welfare state returns to what Wikström understood as Goldin+Senneby’s blurring of the distinction between the speculation of art and the speculation of financial markets. In this line of thought, the very prospect of the future is the capacity of older art to deal with societal problems that have become increasingly evident over time. As democratic values are threatened, these works become increasingly relevant and have greater impact. From this perspective, the relevance of older public art is seen to increase, rather than decrease, over time.

28 Frans Josef Petersson, “Statens Konstråd sviker sitt sociala och demokratiska arv” [Public Art Agency of Sweden betrays its social and democratic heritage], *Kunstkritikk.se*, [accessed 11/17/2017].



Sketch for *Eternal Employment* by Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby
 © Simon Goldin and Jakob Senneby / Bildupphovsrätt 2022

However, when one goes back to the start of that project, to the competition program where the commissioning body draws visions of what should be achieved, a clear artistic boundary is also established. The program stipulates that a winning proposal should not be “typical public art, or typical station art [sic], or the like.”²⁹ Exactly what this means is hard to interpret except for the obvious, namely that the Station remains especially bound by space-time, though the organizers of the competition seem to hold out hope that successful proposals, contrary to the art-critical stance, will be innovative precisely by breaking free from the history of public art. It should be art that is placed in a station but not look like art in a station, it should occupy a space based on ideas of both history and the future, but at the same time carefully avoid artistic, historical references. This seems contradictory for a project that in many respects rests on an artistic and institutional platform established decades ago, a platform that we have seen in various ways lingering in the space–time the new design occupies.

29 Kronotopia competition program, p. 5.

A broader concept of public design

The problem of how to preserve the public art of the era of the Million Program, is a pressing issue today and is the subject of state investigations.³⁰ In the government's bill on *Kulturarvspolitik* (Cultural policy for the heritage sector) (prop.2016/17:116), it was concluded that, after a few years of inventorying the physical vulnerability of public art of that period, the conditions for preserving building-related art from the 20th century should be enhanced. In the Heritage Conservation Act (1988:950), for the first time, the concept of cultural heritage included works of art in the public environment. It argued that while cultural heritage had previously been used to refer to objects, works of art and buildings, it needed to include intangible cultural heritage, such as customs and exchanged knowledge. Another essential dimension, according to the bill, is that cultural heritage should be defined for things that are of concern to all. This concern needs to be rooted in the place in question; the bill states that “in a general sense, cultural heritage can be understood as traces and expressions of the past that are attributed value and are used in the present.”³¹ With this understanding, it becomes less important to draw a line between an object and its use, which is a perspective that I also advocate.³² If cultural heritage policy is opened up in this way, the question of permanence or temporality need not structure public art or determine which works are relevant.

At the policy level, there is thus an indirect readiness to consider public art other than art that can be linked to physical artefacts or objects of a respectable age, as part of the cultural heritage. This opens the door to the consideration of a number of different aspects of art's effects in space. The study *Byggnadsanknuten offentlig konst Kunskapshöjande insatser för förvaltning av den offentliga konsten som del av kulturmiljön* (*Building-related Public Art. Knowledge enhancement for the management of public art as part of the cultural environment*) articulates the tremendous need for changes in regulations around supervision practices and conservation as a whole, but also in terms of knowledge enhancement. An interesting passage discusses conflicts

30 See, e.g., the report Karin Hermerén and Henrik Orrje, *Offentlig konst – ett kulturarv. Tillsyn och förvaltning av byggnadsanknuten konst* [*Public Art - A Cultural Heritage. Supervision and management of building-related art*] (Stockholm: Public Art Agency Sweden, 2014).

31 Cultural heritage policy bill (prop. 3016/17:116), p. 58.

32 Cultural heritage policy bill (prop.2016/17:116), pp. 57-58.

that can arise in the valuation of cultural heritage, aesthetic, social, environmental and economic aspects. The same phenomenon can be interpreted differently by different “areas of interest, such as artistic interests, art history or cultural heritage” with their perspectives. The space–time concept of public art as I have established, which would also include institutional practices and considerations for how art and cultural policy practices from different times interact, could serve as a useful tool in this change.

This chapter has presented some examples to highlight an inherent contradiction between, on the one hand, a strong belief in the art of creating solutions to problems that fall within the political sphere and, on the other, an insufficient ability to see how previous initiatives can linger and operate in a low-intensity fashion over time. Public sculpture is an articulation of social power relations rooted in institutionalizing practices.³³ The main focus of this chapter has been art that coalesces in space, creating dynamic and sedimented layers – not only in relation to artistic practices but also institutional practices. When art is to be placed in public spaces based on a strong democratic and cultural-political vision, a tension arises between two distinct fields: on the one hand, the art world, where we find art with different aesthetic expressions and artists with individual preferences; on the other hand, we have the commissioning bodies, the machine, where political processes and authorities interact. Analyses that arrive at highlighting the complex space–times in which public art is placed, are called for, as well as explorations of the ideas of political and artistic trust in the agency of art, on which public art seems to depend.

33 Important studies in this area include Catharina Gabrielsson, *Att göra skillnad. Det offentliga rummet som medium för konst, arkitektur och politiska föreställningar* [To Make a Difference: Public Space as a Medium for Art, Architecture and Concepts of the Political], doctoral thesis, (Stockholm: Royal Institute of Technology, 2006). and Jessica Sjöholm *Skulptur i folkhemmet* [Sculpture in the Swedish Welfare State], op.cit.