Diversifying a Museum Collection and the Politics of Representation


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Abstract

Since 1958, Moderna Museet has housed Sweden’s largest collection of Swedish and international modern and contemporary art. This thesis examines the 21st-century collecting strategies and policy development of Moderna Museet, with a focus on diversity and representation, using intersectional theory and queer studies. Through both quantitative and qualitative methods, including statistics, archival research, discourse analysis, institutional ethnography and interviews with five curators, this study reveals how acquisition policies align with the museum’s aim to diversify its Eurocentric and North American-oriented collection. Fisher’s exact test shows differences between the Swedish and international collections, as well as significant gender disparities between donated and purchased artists, indicating a structural pattern regarding donations. Gender and nationality emerge as disciplinary parameters and social constructions for artist registration within the museum database. The findings underscore the slow, systemic change in Moderna Museet, influenced by power structures, external factors, and the museum’s institutional history. In contrast to the 1990s, diversity in the 21st century is continually negotiated and pursued performatively and discursively, rather than implemented through a goal-oriented policy.

Keywords: Moderna Museet, museum collections, art acquisition policies, diversity discourse, gender representation, intersectionality, queer studies, performativity, art donations, mixed-methods
THE GUERRILLA GIRLS ASKED
383 EUROPEAN MUSEUMS
ABOUT DIVERSITY

ONLY 1/4 RESPONDED

What were the rest afraid of?

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Collecting lies near to the hearts of many of us, and close also to our social mind and our ability to understand ourselves and the world we live in. Objects are our other selves; the better we understand them, the closer we come to self-knowledge.¹

1. Introduction

Since its founding in 1958, Stockholm’s modern art museum *Moderna Museet* has been collecting and acquiring works of modern and contemporary art from local and international artists. While the collection initially fell under the authority of the National Museum and mainly consisted of French and Nordic modernist art, during the 1960s, the attention shifted towards international contemporary art, especially Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art from the United States of America.² The entry of North American art into the museum impacted the museum to such an extent that its institutional identity has been deliberately cultivated around it ever since.³ A leading project during this time, driven by the aim of renewing the collection, was *The Museum of Our Wishes* (1963), which initiated an exhibition organised by *The Friends of Moderna Museet*. The objective was to show what a real modern art museum would look like, presenting 182 iconic works from modernist artists of the 20th century.⁴ Only three out of all artworks on display were created by women artists. By realising this exhibition, Pontus Hultén, the museum director between 1958 and 1973, simultaneously expressed his desire to purchase these works, for which the government made five million Swedish kroner available, making his wish come true. Over thirty works were acquired, but none made by a woman, which has been strongly criticised over the years.⁵ Yet, the influence

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of the project on the future of the museum was remarkable; the acquired works have gone
down in history as masterpieces and key features of the museum collection, such as works
by Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró and Piet Mondrian. Pontus Hultén donated his archive and
private art collection to the museum in 2005, consisting of 630 individual art objects. He
took on an almost mythological status due to his involvement in shaping the institutional
identity of the museum in its early days through his international network of artists, and
both the project and Hultén himself have remained a recurring reference in the literature
on the museum.

In recent decades, however, there has been a growing recognition of the need for
diversity in museum collections concerning the artists represented, such as a just
representation of marginalised or underprivileged groups of artists, beyond the ‘white
male gaze’. Research and cultural policies also emphasise that art museums should not
only cater to the cultural elite of society but should allow underrepresented groups to see
their histories represented in museum collections. Institutional discourses of diversity
seem to show a dedication to making this change. This may be a result of changing
discourses in the museological field from the 1970s onwards, often referred to as New
Museology. Concerning this, Njabulo Chipangura and Happinos Marufu (2019) write the
following: “If we understand Old Museology to be characterised by an emphasis on the
professional collection, documentation and interpretation of objects, then New
Museology is community focused with the emphasis on community needs.”

Museums nowadays prioritise their social function, especially regarding representation, inclusion,
and access. This implies and calls for a new attitude that advocates for social
responsibility: a dialectical relationship can only arise if underserved communities or

Martin Sundberg, “Representation and Regionalism: Moderna Museet and the Construction of a Narrative
of Swedish Women Artists” (University of Basel, 2011), 363.
7 See also publications such as: Anna Tellgren, et al. Pontus Hultén and Moderna Museet, The Formative
Years (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 2017), and Annika Gunnarsson, et al. Pontus Hultén and Moderna
8 Tintin Hodén, “The Museum of Contradictions: The Co-Production of Museum Ideals in the Swedish
182; Tony Bennett, “Thinking (with) Museums: From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental
Assemblage”, in The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory, ed. Andrea Witcomb et
al. (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2015), 7.
9 Njabulo Chipangura & Happinos Marufu, “Museums as Public Forums for 21st Century Societies: A
Perspective from the National Museums and Monuments of Zimbabwe”, in Museum Activism (Museum
'subalterns’ feel represented, heard, and welcome in a museum space.' Moderna Museet is inevitably subject to these developments and has made several attempts over the years to transform the collection or challenge its diversity to accommodate these needs. For instance, a follow-up to The Museum of Our Wishes was developed in 2006 to redress the gender imbalance of the collection, entitled The Second Museum of Our Wishes. This acquisition project attempted to foreground women in the modern art collection through the purchase of works by female modernists. The project included a public request for fifty million kroner, leading to the allocation of five million kroner from the government and thirty-seven million from private donors.

Despite the rich research into early collecting processes at Moderna Museet, some unaddressed gaps can be identified. Former acquisition projects grounded in balancing the representation of social identities, raise the question of what choices were made by the museum, and why, and what the current status is of its collection in terms of diversity and inclusion. The implications of the choices made have never been evaluated and explored from multiple angles. When diversifying a museum collection, politics become part of curatorial strategies, and in any case, independently or perhaps in combination with aesthetic judgment, certain artists with privileges on intersectional axes may be more likely to be acquired by the museum. This possibly leads to certain perspectives being represented more thoroughly than others. Additionally, museum discourses may not always be consistent with the chosen acquisitions, governmental guidelines or future aspirations of curators. Previous research projects on Moderna Museet’s collection have not taken into account these complexities that point to the fragile relationship between processes of in- and exclusion, acquisition outcomes, the influence of the art market, museum missions, policies and diversity discourses.

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1.1. Research Aims and Questions

This thesis aims to examine the policy development of Moderna Museet’s acquisition strategies to diversify its collection, with a focus on the 21\textsuperscript{st} century. A secondary aim related to this is to analyse the contemporary implementation of these strategies from an institutional and intersectional perspective. To study the diversification of Moderna’s collection and discover which discursive shifts or power structures become visible or manifest through the museum acquisitions, the following research questions were formulated to achieve the research objectives:

1. How have the acquisition strategies evolved at Moderna Museet, comparing its early collection until the mid-seventies with the acquisitions between 2000 and 2022?
2. What is the discourse surrounding diversity and the representation of marginalised groups of artists in the museum collection?
3. What trends can be discerned in the acquisitions of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century regarding the cultural backgrounds and social identities of artists, using an intersectional perspective encompassing gender, race and connections to Sweden?
4. Do the museum policies correspond with acquisition outcomes and future aspirations for diversifying its collection?

Asking these questions, this research fits in with the growing demand for reflection on diversity policies in the museum field, as Cuyler (2020) points out, for example: “(...) museums would benefit from a study that answers the question, what attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions do museum boards and staff hold about ADEI\textsuperscript{12} and its importance?”\textsuperscript{13}

This thesis builds on previous research into Moderna’s collecting strategies. Yet, it mainly starts from an intersectional perspective to destabilise social categorisations and nuance identity politics while taking into account the complex nature of representation. Thus, this research aims to bridge a gap in previous research by analysing institutional efforts concerning the representation and diversity of Moderna’s collection, building on

\textsuperscript{12} The abbreviation ADEI stands for ‘access, diversity, equity, inclusion’, and is a frequently applied management theory to describe the gradual steps towards more inclusivity within organisations or institutions, see Antonio C. Cuyler, “Looking Beyond What We’ve Done Before: Minding Potential Blind Spots in Diversifying United States Museums,” \textit{International Journal of the Inclusive Museum} 13, no. 4 (2020).
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 36.
evolving insights into the collection and adopting a mixed-methods approach that addresses both policy decisions and acquisition outcomes, and is informed by social constructionist and decolonial theories. This is further explained in section 1.3. An intersectional approach to the topic will hopefully contribute to an increased level of awareness and critical consciousness among curators during future collecting practices. As Nicole Robert puts it in *Getting Intersectional in Museums* (2014): “An applied intersectional approach within museums requires reflecting critically on the structures and systems that museum professionals rely upon to shape their work.”

### 1.2. Material

In the studied material, a distinction is made between qualitative and quantitative data. To obtain the available quantitative information about the acquisitions, lists were downloaded from the museum database, *The Museum System* (TMS), with overviews of the number of acquisitions per year and object counts per artist. In TMS, each acquisition contains detailed information about the work and its context, such as the year of purchase, exhibition history, the method of acquisition, and more. The collected qualitative material consists of textual material including website texts but mainly policy documents, such as acquisition policies, interviews, mission documents, annual reports, the donation policy and operational guidelines from the government. Besides that, notes from curatorial meetings, observations and the responses from the curators that I interviewed are part of the primary material. Their expertise in collecting processes has been essential material in this investigation. The curators interviewed, including function title, are as follows:

- Anna Tellgren, Curator of Photography and Head of Research, was interviewed on November 14, 2023.
- Asrin Haidari, Curator of Swedish and Nordic Art from 1974, was interviewed on December 15, 2023.
- Fredrik Liew, Head of the Department and Chief Curator, was interviewed on November 6, 2023.
- Hendrik Folkerts, Curator of International Contemporary Art from 1989 and Head of Exhibitions, was interviewed on October 31, 2023.

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Jo Widoff, Curator of International Art until 1989 and Head of Collections, was interviewed on December 4, 2023.

1.3. Methodology
The applied methodology in this research is based on a mixed-method approach, referred to as triangulation. The type of data required to achieve the research aim is of both qualitative and quantitative nature. Through the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods, I aim to offer a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the interplay between informal and formal curatorial strategies, policy documents, and shifts in the museum collection’s focus on diversity and representational aspects. This involved collecting quantitative data from the museum database, conducting interviews and delving into policy documents encompassing acquisition policies, donation guidelines, government appropriation directives, and website content. Thus, this data collection enabled a more holistic exploration of diversity and representation within this museum context.

Qualitative Data: Institutional Ethnography
This Master’s research was carried out during the period of an internship at the curatorial department at Moderna Museet, tapping into the first research method of this study. As an institutional participant-observer, I applied the qualitative method of institutional ethnography throughout the whole research period, as I functioned as an intern within a professional work environment. I gained access and insights into the museum’s policy documents, database, curatorial research processes, meetings, and the dynamics of the institution. In this way, some qualitative data was acquired by taking notes during curatorial discussions and general observations.

Institutional ethnography is a critical, more feminist approach to traditional ethnography that is rooted in Canadian sociology. Ethnographies enable the researcher to gain detailed knowledge about the cultural practices, behaviours, discourses and rituals within a specific situation, and in this case, Moderna Museet as an institution. In contrast to traditional ethnography, this approach attempts to pay more attention to how the institutional experiences of participants relate to ideological processes and systemic
power structures. Applied to this research, institutional ethnography can therefore reveal how the museum policy and discourses relate to larger processes of inclusion and exclusion, exposing how the evolving collection is subjected to institutional power dynamics.

**Quantitative Data: Frequency Distributions**

The quantitative data is obtained by counting the gender and nationality distribution of artists whose works Moderna Museet has acquired in the 21st century. The data was primarily collected on the basis of lists with object counts via the database of the museum, *The Museum System* (TMS). This data supplements the quantitative material from studies conducted by Martin Sundberg, who studied the gender distribution of Moderna’s collection throughout the 20th century, and by Martin Gustavsson, who dived into the economic and institutional entanglement of Moderna Museet with the state between 1958 and 2007. The statistical associations between categorical variables in the primary data were compared and tested for significance using a statistical test known as Fisher’s exact test. The purpose of this test is to determine if the correlation between variables, and thus the potential differences found in gender distributions, is either due to chance and contingency or reflective of an actual, perhaps unintended policy trend. Details about this test and the quantitative data collection are explained further in section 4.2.

TMS is a collections management system in which extensive information about objects and their contexts can be stored and managed, such as exhibition histories, contexts about an artist, credit lines on donations or purchases, media and bibliographies. Via an advanced query, reports can be generated based on various parameters, such as the date of acquisition, classification/medium, gender, nationality, et cetera. However, the possible categorisations in these reports are somehow limited, and therefore, the system may contribute in itself to marginalisation processes within it, as some parameters must be binary to generate various lists suitable for quantitative research. For instance, a

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genderqueer or non-binary category is missing, meaning that this entire group is excluded from quantitative research outcomes. When generating comprehensive lists of artists through TMS, gender refers to male/female and nationality to Swedish/non-Swedish. The catalogue system forces those characteristics into binary categories, which do not accurately reflect the complexity of identities or backgrounds. Thus, management systems such as TMS expose the disciplinary, oppressive frameworks and epistemologies that shape the particular knowledge about an artist, an object, its context and significance. The utilisation of this database within this research methodology is therefore linked to a broader question concerning how the museum has integrated discourses around inclusion into its knowledge systems.

Qualitative Data: Semi-Structured Interviews and Discourse Analysis

The qualitative, primary data for this research was obtained through semi-structured interviews with five curators involved in the collecting processes at Moderna Museet, each lasting thirty minutes to one hour. Seven questions were asked regarding the contemporary acquisition strategies and issues of representation and diversity focused on the museum collection:

1. What is the mode of operation for acquisitions at Moderna Museet and have the acquisition strategies changed over the years? If yes, in what way?
2. How are the concepts of diversity and representation understood at Moderna Museet?
3. Based on that understanding, which aspects are considered important in diversifying the collection at Moderna Museet?
4. What are the main challenges in applying diversity strategies for the collection?
5. Are there guidelines or methods to ensure the representation of marginalised groups, and if so, which groups? Why does the museum consider these important?
6. How does the policy document relate to this; is it helpful, and how is it actualised?
7. How is a diverse acquisition policy monitored in:
   □ ... donated works?
   □ ... works purchased through funds?

The scope of these questions is broad, allowing room to explore institutional interpretations of these concepts. The questionnaire is designed to avoid bias, to build on
previous answers and to avoid responses arising from pre-determined interpretations of representation, diversity and marginalisation. I tried to strike a balance between questions on changing working practices over time, their relationship to diversity, and reflective questions regarding the acquisition policy. The last question relates to possible differences between purchase and donation policies.

As a qualitative method, discourse analysis is deployed to interpret the transcribed interviews and to analyse archival material. This approach is not new. In fact, it is a commonly used research method within humanities as a result of poststructuralist theory. Postmodern ideas have shown that knowledge about topics such as identity, community or cultural norms, is related to power and manifests itself, for example, in the form of discourse. In particular, Foucault’s theories on discursive formations and epistemes have been influential in the field of museology and demonstrate how certain meanings and ways of thinking prevail within a given period, creating conceptions of truth and excluding alternative ideas. Based on these philosophical arguments, a number of scientific methodologies arose under the collective name of discourse analysis which have become established ways of doing research within the humanities and social sciences. Foucault points to so-called discursive formations or systems of dispersion as sites of evidence for a discourse; these systems show whether and how certain words, statements or labels are more likely to co-occur, creating norm-affirming and -deviating practices which allow views and approaches to diversity and representation to be mapped out. Thus, in and through discourse, social relations, inequalities, and power dynamics come to light or even come into being. This is perhaps Foucault’s most essential point about the concept of discourses: they are inherently subject to power relations and ideology, and do not merely describe the social realm, but actively contribute to processes of categorisation. In this way, discourses construct a part of the way in which we experience reality as human beings.  

The method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is one type of discourse analysis, aimed at analysing language, more precisely discursive formations, in relation to its social context. In this thesis, CDA is applied to policy documents, interviews and relevant textual material in order to discern trends, patterns, differences and developments in the museum’s acquisition strategies to increase its diversity. CDA has been frequently used

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17 Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 1969);
by academics and can be deployed to identify dominant, marginal, oppositional or alternative discourses within policy texts, interviews and even within constellations of artworks or collections. This method makes it possible to determine which ideological motivations exist for the choices made by museums regarding representation and diversity, establishing implicit hierarchies between groups of artists. Employing such a discourse analysis may unveil how acquisitions transform, twist and redefine a collection and thus, perhaps, the institutional identity of the museum, while pointing towards significant thresholds for artists to be acquired by the museum.

**Reflexive Methodology**

Especially in studying conceptions of diversity and representation, using the method of institutional ethnography, I consider it useful to acknowledge my positionality as a researcher within this study. After all, the interpretation of these concepts often depends on the chosen perspective. Theories from Pierre Bourdieu and Donna Haraway, among others, have shown that assumptions or biases of the author can influence research results, regardless of the degree of systematicity within the methodology. Haraway argues from a feminist epistemological point of view that knowledge on any topic is situated and therefore never impartial, meaning that it is generated within a specific political, historical and social context. Researchers should incorporate an awareness of the contingency of standpoints and how they are constructed, without dismissing them as merely subjective. Particularly knowledge about art, cultures and social dynamics is to a certain extent embodied. Knowledge of diversity stems from the perspectives of divergent human individuals and communities with different histories, memories and experiences. Bourdieu was also interested in the impact of subjective experiences on research results and developed the concept of ‘reflexivity’. Social scientists unconsciously embed their own sociocultural background in object analyses, which leads to biases and distorted interpretations of social reality. He argues that researchers should adopt a ‘reflexive’ mentality and become aware of how their position in society carries over in academic interpretations and analyses. Reflecting on my own socio-cultural position as

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a white, queer/gay man from the Netherlands studying in Sweden, I may be part of social
to be expected that this position will inevitably influence the analysis of my results and the
framework I chose for my conceptions of representation and diversity.

In the pursuit of diverse representation of different backgrounds and identities within museum collections, the categories of gender and nationality seem to dominate discourses, but they also seem to be deployed as stable, essentialist units in statistics. Some categorisations that have been out of focus within the field, such as age, are much more stable and therefore amenable to quantitative analysis than others, such as sexuality. Measuring queer representation would face methodological complications around distinguishing between the representation of queer themes or perspectives in works of art on the one hand, and the identification of represented artists on the other hand, which, for instance, Patrik Steorn discusses. Additionally, self-determination is an important factor here, as queer people often face societal challenges due to lifestyle deviations from heteronormativity conventions. This may also apply to other complex categorisations, such as class or religion.

Hence, in quantifying sexuality, class or religion, there is a hazard of an essentialist approach that reduces artists and their works to mere numbers or tokens, which nullifies the very purpose of providing a layered multitude of perspectives. The quantitative component of this research relies on the predefined parameters in TMS, which are typically binary for generating comprehensive lists of works, making an intersectional approach to this segment of the research nearly impossible using the existing datasets. Therefore, besides a binary, quantitative measuring of the frequency distribution of gender concerning the acquired artists, an intersectional approach is applied to destabilise these categorisations, in which gender, race and class are interpreted as complex social constructions that together potentially influence the social-cultural or even socio-economic position of an artist. In this way, a mixed-methods approach can assist in validating research findings from one method with another and thus, deal with shortcomings such as reductive categories in the quantitative part concerning

21 See the aforementioned research projects carried out or initiated by Moderna Museet: Sundberg, “Representation and Regionalism”, and Görts, “Routine and Selection”, but also research into other museum collections and publications such as Connie Butler & Alexandra Schwartz, Modern Women: Women Artists at The Museum of Modern Art (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2010).
insurmountable flaws in the intersectional approach, specifically regarding a queer or decolonial perspective.

1.4. Theory

To study diversity and representation in Moderna Museet’s collection, the second chapter provides a theoretical framework, including operationalisations and definitions of these concepts, based on a literature review. The applied theory relates to insights from the fields of cultural studies, museology and queer studies, and relies on decolonial, intersectional thinkers such as Kimberley Crenshaw as well as Patricia Hill Collins. Gender and race are both understood as social constructions impacting the opportunities of artists. At first, a genealogy of concepts and discourses of diversity and representation within cultural studies are discussed with reference to crucial scholars: Simone de Beauvoir, Michel Foucault and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Thereafter, I explore how their theories influenced developments in museum studies, using publications by Sharon Macdonald: *A Companion to Museum Studies* (2006) and *Doing Diversity in Museums and Heritage: A Berlin Ethnography* (2023). Another useful publication in this study is the handbook *Museums, Equality and Social Justice* (2012), edited by Richard Sandell & Eithne Nightingale, and *Queering the Museum* (2020) by Craig Middleton & Nikki Sullivan. Intersectionality and performativity are explained as useful concepts in connection to gender and power relations, followed by a brief introduction to the growing field of queering collections management and database research.

1.5. Justification and Delimitations

The scope of this investigation is limited for several reasons. First of all, the study is linked to a specific time frame in which the material was selected, focusing on the period between 2000 and 2022 referring to two years before the creation of the first acquisition policy document and the year after publication of the renewed policy. Particular attention is paid to a few major acquisition events and their impact, without losing sight of the historical development of Moderna’s collection before 1976. Moreover, the extent to which diversity and representation can be examined at Moderna Museet is tied to the specific operationalisations of these concepts, for which I rely on interviews with curators and theories from Foucault, Spivak, Sandell & Nightingale, and Macdonald, among others.
Besides that, the areas to which the concepts are applied are tied to the artists represented and the actors that control the art acquisitions, such as curators, donors and the state’s cultural policy. Focusing on the collection can be justified by the argument that collections are expected to form the heart or core of the museum, and financial resources for new acquisitions are linked to power and exclusionary structures. Diversity goals are not often paid attention to systematically or reflectively. Perhaps the motto ‘to put one’s money where one’s mouth is’, applies in this context. However, future research could focus even more on the influence of donors and their cultural, social and economic capital, to better understand the interaction between power and socio-economic class in the museum world. An investigation into the socio-economic status of artists at the time when a work is acquired would also be relevant to explore. Extremely relevant here is also studying the degree of representation in exhibition settings and the implications thereof.

Although a quantitative measurement of representation in recent acquisitions is taken into account, this research relies primarily on a qualitative, discourse-analytical approach to diversity in acquisition policies. Identity constructions can lead to vulnerable positions in society, and artists must experience ownership over the aspects of their identity. That is why, for example, no linear regression was performed to measure how many more works by ‘people of colour’ or ‘queers’ have been purchased over the years, to avoid a reductionist approach. In addition, the very process of marginalization does not lend itself to quantitative analyses, as marginalised categories are often not registered. These categorisations are therefore approached in an intersectional manner, in addition to the quantitative analysis of the gender distribution that is being carried out.

In addition, the available information about Moderna’s institutional ways of working is limited due to the restriction that acquisition meetings are inaccessible to external parties that are not part of the permanent curatorial team. Yet, as an intern and a participant-observer in this research, I inevitably have been exposed to certain biases about collection strategies with regard to ideological intentions and methods, that are embedded in institutional ways of working at any kind of museum. Nevertheless, the risk of bias ties in with the specific premise of this thesis, focusing on how Moderna as an institution deals with diversity and representation. Therefore, despite some attention, the study lacks a specific analysis of the needs of marginalised groups themselves and how their representation should be expressed.
1.6. Previous Research into Moderna Museet’s Collection

Research on Moderna’s collection in the 2000s has shown that despite the efforts to redress a gender imbalance, acquisition procedures until then had brought little change to the representation of women in the collection. For example, Sundberg is critical of the effects of *The Second Museum of Our Wishes* in his conclusions from the research project *Representation and Regionalism: Moderna Museet and the Construction of a Narrative of Swedish Women Artists* (2011). He states that the project did not “make a great impression in terms of works.”

Ultimately, twenty-six new works were acquired by fourteen artists and subsequently, a research project was set up to study these works, entitled *In the Shadow of: Women Modernists from a Gender-Oriented Art History Perspective* (2008-2010), resulting in several seminars and six academic essays.

In addition to the attention to gender, both Maria Görts and Martin Sundberg examined the cultural character of the collection in terms of the regional, national or international background of the artists acquired, taking into account the places of purchase. Based on this research, Sundberg concludes that Moderna represents a national art production that is concentrated around the capital, but to an even greater extent, the museum establishes an image of showing a sense of responsibility to put international art on the map of Sweden. For example, comparing the nationalities of the acquired artists, Sundberg claims that, at least in the 2000s, as an artist, you were more likely to gain visibility at the museum by being non-Swedish than by being Swedish. As a Swedish woman, one would have had the least chance of getting a seat at the Moderna Museet, Sundberg reveals. Moreover, Görts points out Moderna’s ambition to acquire more non-Western art. She writes:

Moderna Museet intends to monitor the gender balance in future acquisitions, while also ensuring that acquisitions are made of works by artists from outside the usual Western art centres as well as by artists with a different cultural background.

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24 “Highlighting & The Second Museum of Our Wishes”.
26 Ibid (Sundberg).
However, the effects of these ambitions have never been investigated properly. What have been the results of this effort in the 21st century? Which cultures are being represented, and is the representation-critical museum discourse in line with actual acquisition outcomes? Sundberg points to the fact that during the 20th century, almost every purchase for the museum was made through a gallery in Stockholm, which raises the hypothesis that a focus on non-Western art has never been that high on the priority list in the past. Has this changed over the years?

Regarding the acquisition procedure at the museum, Görts mentions that collecting processes used to happen informally, governed by accident and subjective choices because chance events and networks of active curators played a major role. She also refers to a possible turning point in this regard through the creation of an acquisition policy document drawn up by the museum in 2002, “which explicitly inscribed gender balance as a criterion of acquisition policy.” Until then, informal decision-making and the lack of such a formal policy most likely complicated comparisons between ambitions and outcomes. Such an explicit and accessible official document in 2002, setting out the museum’s objectives, was intended to help narrow down the criteria that had been applied to the process of collecting for many years. The policy was a response to the government’s appropriation directives, tasking the museum with promoting gender equality as well as contributing to diversity and reducing racism. Related to the influence of the state, Gustavsson (2008) conducted research into the development of this governmental cultural policy and how the operational objectives in the appropriation directives for Moderna changed between 1958 and 2007. The results of this study are included in this thesis; his findings are compared to the discourse of the directives for the following years of 2007–2022, see Chapter 3.2.4. Furthermore, Görts does not distinguish between purchases and donations in her research, as she does not consider it fruitful due to commonalities in the acquisition approach. In my study, there are indications that there may well be, albeit unconsciously, differences in working methods between the museum’s purchases and donations that may affect acquisition outcomes.

28 Sundberg, “Representation and Regionalism”, 364.
29 Görts, “Routine and Selection”, 27.
Modern Museets Vännerns tidsskrift published the document in 2003 (no. 1), thereby disclosing more formal documentation around the objectives for collecting strategies. Thirty-two years later, the new policy document was completed, in 2021, but no academic research has yet been conducted into its main points and outcomes, whether the objectives or discourse around representation and diversity have changed over the years and whether former goals have been achieved. Therefore, this research contributes to a more nuanced picture of the diversity discourse at Moderna Museet by analysing the correlation between art acquisitions, policies and directives imposed by the government.

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32 Görts, "Routine and Selection", 20.
2. Theoretical Framework

Studying diversity perspectives in a museum context requires critically evaluating the approach to social identity categorisations. Since the 1960s, social constructionist or decolonial thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Kimberley Crenshaw have demonstrated the instability and hybrid character of social identity formation which is based on a complex interplay between the recognition of a label as a social fact and processes of self-identification, reification and habituation.  

Thus, how people identify is fluid to a greater or lesser extent. According to these theories, identities are not merely constructed based on individual choices but are influenced by societal, cultural and political power structures. All kinds of personal parameters interact with each other in a complex way. Gender, sex, class, ethnicity, race, nationality and age, but also sexuality, religion or citizenship play a role in the formation of identities that together constitute social groups in hierarchical orders, leading to processes of in- and exclusion, and the marginalisation of groups within a specific culture or context. In this way, these factors influence how bodies are treated differently in society and become politicised, based on identifications, each of which has its complex parameters and cultural connotations. The art world too cannot escape how various identities and subjectivities are constituted within discourses. In this theoretical framework, the foundations of social constructionism and approaches to power are discussed and negotiated in connection with several perspectives on diversity, representation, marginalisation, and processes of in- and exclusion.

Diversity in the cultural sector is a frequently discussed topic. There have been many efforts to address the systemic marginalisation and oppression of certain social groups, but there is a lack of consensus on the approach. Despite a personal approach to the subject, a shared understanding of relevant and related concepts can be useful in achieving the missions of museums that serve communities to prevent situations of pinkwashing and tokenism, to be discussed later. Antonio Cuyler (2020) distinguishes four steps towards social justice: access, diversity, equity and inclusion (ADEI), where each concept forms a quadrant, and the scheme can be read consecutively. A successful

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33 Staffan Carlshamre, *Philosophy of the Cultural Sciences* (Preprint, Department of Philosophy: Stockholm University, 2022), 156.
focus on access within the organisation leads to quadrant #2, creating new challenges, ultimately leading to quadrant #4 with the aim of maximum inclusion and cultural justice. Cuyler conceptualises the meaning of each concept as follows:

Accessibility – is the removal of all barriers to participation. Diversity – is a qualitative and/or quantitative assessment of human difference and representation. Equity – is fairness in addressing the historic unfairness of HMOGs. Inclusion – is belonging, one of many measures of quality of life.35

Cuyler argues that a cultural organisation, in this case a modern art museum, can be at different stages concerning its ADEI policy, and each concept raises different questions.

In Museums, Equality and Social Justice (2012), Eithne Nightingale & Richard Sandell take on a similar approach to diversity, relating the concept to policies and practices within the cultural domain that generally include measures intended to celebrate and promote respect for and understanding of difference.36 Diversity encompasses visible and non-visible differences, entailing culture, socio-economic status, and value, among other factors. The definition is closely linked to equality and social justice, as equality of opportunity and acting upon inequalities are impossible when differences are not understood. Nightingale & Sandell argue that there is a pressing need to investigate the museum’s relationship to inequality and injustice as well as its potential subversive attitude; to explore how museums not merely reflect but actively construct normative conceptions of fairness and power relations between social groups. They also note a shift in policy and practice within museums and growing support for such investigative work as a result of the increasing influence of morally-based human rights discourses worldwide.37 As a partial conclusion, they state that change and social justice are to be achieved through collaboration, by a delicate balancing of power in the unstable relationship between the ‘mainstream’ and the ‘margins’, which must be addressed and implemented by practitioners in organisations.38 They emphasise a dependent relationship between the established and the marginalised.

35 Cuyler, “Access, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) in Cultural Organisations,” 87.
37 Ibid., 2-3.
38 Ibid., 57.
2.1. Social Constructionism and the Subaltern

Reflecting on Western notions of gender, contemporary sociological and cultural debates have been influenced by French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986). In her canonical essay, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), De Beauvoir unmasksthe hegemonic idea that gender is a purely biological or anatomical given. She exposes the power structures of the Western patriarchy that placed female identities in the box of ‘the Other’, that is to say: as created or constituted in relation to men. Dominant cultural discourses have thus defined women in a binary, hierarchical opposition to that which constitutes the identity of men. In this way, De Beauvoir argues, He is the autonomous subject and She is the dependent, passive object. He represents both the norm, the neutral, and the positive, while She, on the other hand, is automatically connected to everything that remains: the negative. It is the result of an othering process, De Beauvoir states; a process that is oppressive and in which ‘woman’ is made increasingly mysterious and inscrutable from a male, and often a heteronormative and essentialist point of view.39

Femininity is therefore a myth, De Beauvoir says, which has been associated with the body and therefore with nature and the animalistic, in a dichotomy with masculinity which has been associated with culture and the rational. However, these traits are not essentialist data, but social constructions. According to De Beauvoir, the maintenance of this myth would block a woman’s path to masculine transcendence, that is to say: a rise above the animalistic towards the domain of knowledge and intellectual ideas. This prevents women from escaping their social role of passivity, De Beauvoir states, which involves staying indoors and taking care of the household. The most important conclusion of her theory can be summarised in the following popular quote, which formed a symbolic kick-off for a social constructivist approach to gender: “One is Not Born, but Rather Becomes, a Woman”.40

De Beauvoir’s ideas inspired the ideas of French philosopher Michel Foucault. In *Histoire de la Sexualité* (1976), Foucault outlines a genealogy of the current thinking and speaking about identities and sexualities in particular, leading to constitutions of social realities and categorisations. He analyses the relationship between knowledge, power and truth, which impacts the formation of identities and subjectivities in culture-dependent

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40 Ibid., 13
frameworks, including the construction of gender. Relevant to this research is his theoretical framework for how power operates in society. He claims that power is not an abstract imposition from above, but a regulatory force in our daily life, becoming visible through discursive formations and bodily practices. Gendered or racialised subjects are not merely constructed and (re)produced through such discourses but also transformed and subjected to shifts and changes. Thus, Foucault argues, the more people generate discourses about social identity, the more they categorise themselves and each other while inventing new identities, institutions, diseases, abnormalities, and ideologies that frame and regulate the way people identify and live their lives. Self-disciplining acts become forces that subject people to dominant norms and conventions. That is what is truly meant by oppression, Foucault states. Power is therefore rather something diffuse and constantly present in the dynamics between individuals, institutions and groups, as well as reproduced or appropriated through social mechanisms and practices such as cultural texts and products. This conception of power leads to certain time- and culture-specific definitions of gender, race or nationality, with some forms being seen as the norm and others as deviant or subversive, iterated by the self. In summary, Foucault explains how disciplinary categories emerge as a result of dominant knowledge claims by the hegemony, empowered by general internalisations or beliefs thereof, dependent on the episteme in which a culture finds itself.

In a Foucauldian manner and inspired by Antonio Gramsci, Spivak theorises the challenges in representing the ‘subaltern’ within colonial discourses: a figure who is not part of the hegemony but belongs to an oppressed and marginalised group. To be more precise, Spivak conceptualises the subaltern as so marginalised as to not even have the voice of the oppressed. The concept of representation, she argues, is in use for two different phenomena: political representation (speaking on behalf of a social group) and representation within the arts or philosophy (speaking about a social group), but even discourses on behalf of marginalised groups do not necessarily lead to these groups be heard. Colonisation would strip people of their ability to speak. The practice of speaking on behalf of ‘the Other’ therefore holds a risk of an ideological, epistemic violence,
according to Spivak, as it confirms the violent hierarchy within dominant discourses.\textsuperscript{44} Using the example of the \textit{Sati} practice, referring to Hindustani widows who commit suicide after the death of their husbands, she illustrates that a counter-narrative is impossible.\textsuperscript{45} The only way for subalterns to assert themselves is by deploying their bodies and lives as political tools, showing how they fall outside the scope of dominant discourses. Then, what can be done in terms of representation within dominant discourses? Spivak argues that researchers should look for silences in discourses, instead of filling in what should be said because Western attempts to represent the subaltern often degenerate into practices of appropriation, in which an imperialist image of the subaltern is constructed. In this way, an adverse effect could be the result as the voice of the subaltern translates into an increase in the imperialist’s visibility.

Spivak’s theory provides a framework from which the composition of Moderna’s collection can be interpreted. First of all, a distinction can be made between active and passive forms of representation, referring to democratic participation and the reflection of cultures or identities, respectively. Regardless of this distinction, represented artists co-construct and shape a collection’s narrative through their art, cultural background and social identity. Typically, conventional attention is directed to the prominent features or accents of a museum collection in terms of styles, art movements, nationalities of the artists, and the influence of canonical artists on art history. However, Spivak allows for an alternative perspective that seeks out the silences and subaltern voices excluded from dominant narratives. Instead of associating Moderna Museet with a Rauschenberg, Warhol or Niki de Saint-Phalle, curatorial researchers can look for marginalised voices within the collection.

\textbf{2.2. Museum Collections, Diversity and Representation}

Macdonald emphasises that museums play an influential role in institutionalizing the conception of a collection as something different from and more than the sum of its parts.\textsuperscript{46} Museums primarily \textit{recontextualise} objects. This act of placing objects within a museum collection, primarily based on their perceived relationships to other objects, is a fundamental element of collecting practices legitimised by the museum. Within a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{44} Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, 280-81.
  \item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 305.
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Sharon Macdonald, “Collecting Practices,” in \textit{A Companion to Museum Studies} (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 82.
\end{itemize}
collection, objects gain added significance by being part of that collection, so their lives and meanings unavoidably change once they become part of a collection, marking a new phase in the object’s history. Collections distinguish themselves from other cultural practices through unique forms and levels of attention, involving specific storage, cataloguing, and display techniques. Additionally, they are typically assembled to be preserved for the long term, even indefinitely, essentially striving to give the object an enduring and meaningful existence.  

Perhaps related to the abovementioned reasoning that collections are charged with such an amount of meaning, questions of representation in museums emerged in the 1980s, which Macdonald links to the development towards a New Museology. As stated before, Old Museology is characterised by a focus on methods of education, conservation and exhibition-making, while New Museology has shifted its attention to the conceptual foundations of the museum and its role in society. She distinguishes three aspects characterising New Museology. Firstly, New Museology recognises the contingent, contextual and changing nature of museum objects. In this way, this new approach to museology sees the meaning of artworks as something unstable and situated, rather than fixed and inherent. Secondly, matters that were previously not included in the field of museology gained more interest, such as the intertwining of museums with commercialism and entertainment. New Museology began to question the idea that museums somehow stand “above” market concerns and amusement purposes, causing public and private sectors to become more connected and the traditional separation of high and low culture to slowly fade away. The third premise is an acknowledgement of how the museum and its exhibitions may be perceived differently by various kinds of communities and audiences.

This perspective shift in New Museology paved the way for a critical approach to representational practices, that is, according to Macdonald, “to how meanings come to be inscribed and by whom, and how some come to be regarded as ‘right’ or taken as given”. Academia was subject to this development as well, as there was a move towards viewing knowledge as inherently political. The choices made regarding research or exhibition

47 Ibid., 81.
48 Ibid., 2
49 Ibid.
topics, how they were approached and why, but also what was left behind, ignored or marginalised, came to be seen as areas of political and social concern.

“In particular, the ways in which differences, and especially inequalities, of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class, could be reproduced by disciplines – perhaps through exclusions from “the canon,” “the norm,” “the objective,” or “the notable” – came under the spotlight.”

The effects of this type of representation, it was argued, were considered as follows: stereotypical representations of social identities flow back into the world outside of academia and support particular regimes of power, usually the status quo. Macdonald argues that this development of representational critique led to a call for greater “reflexivity” regarding knowledge production systems, for example, through deconstructing texts or exhibitions. It also caused a politics of recognition aimed at investigating fundamental matters, such as whether the concerns of marginalised voices made it onto the political and cultural agenda.

2.3. Intersectionality

The reasoning that issues of representation and inclusion are linked to social inequalities and an activist pursuit of justice, is what Patricia Hill Collins demonstrates in her theory of *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (2019). Introduced to the international academic community by Kimberley Crenshaw in the 1990s, intersectionality has become central as a form of critical inquiry and both as a theory and methodology to analyse and deal with the interconnectedness and complexity of people’s identities, social problems, inequality, oppression and power. The concept has been characterised as an analytical sensibility, the meaning of which emerges through its application. What makes an analysis intersectional is not necessarily the use of the concept ‘intersectionality’, nor its embeddedness in a known genealogy or roots in lists of standard citations. Rather, Collins emphasises the adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about “the problem of sameness and difference, and its relationship to power”.

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50 Ibid., 3.
Crenshaw recognised the commonalities in feminist and antiracist activism, pointing towards blind spots in a structural pattern among intersecting systems of power. She underlined the insurmountable intertwine ment of struggles in systems of racism and sexism, recognizing identities that did not fit into a binary model or mono-categorical framework to question the status quo. Besides the fact that processes of racism and sexism perpetuate social inequalities, they can marginalise groups that do not fit into gender-only or race-only idealism. As a consequence, even within antiracist as well as feminist movements, women of colour remained politically marginalised. Crenshaw's conceptualisation of intersectionality was a recognition of the complexity of structural constellations of power, and how groups deal with these intersections.52

Intersectionality is a heuristic or pragmatic way to deal with the complexities and nuances of social structures and power relations when faced with perpetuating oppression and inequalities. Through an intersectional lens, it is possible to examine how gender, race, class, sexuality, age or other factors intersect and interact, creating different constellations of social hierarchies. Collins argues that intersectionality is distinct from race/class/gender studies in its approach to social problem solving.53 The latter is involved with specific analytical categories, each with its own history and theoretical foundation. Therefore, the scope of this field is limited, based on particularities, and the potential absence of one category in an analysis of the other leads to methodological dilemmas in academia. Intersectionality offers more flexibility as it demands no specific configurations or strict requirements for the categories under study. Rather, it relates to the sociological theory of social stratification and helps identify markers of difference that create unequal identities. However, in deploying intersectionality, researchers or curators have to be aware of its applicability in each context, and the potential risks of paralleling systems of power.54

A critical scholar who engages with intersectional and feminist theory in institutional contexts is Sara Ahmed. In her influential analysis, Racialized Bodies (2002), Ahmed shows how bodies become racialised through identification processes whereby race is the effect, rather than the cause of these processes.55 In that way, one's racial identity is not pre-determined by skin colour, but inscribed in time and space. 'White' and

52 Ibid., 26.
53 Ibid., 39.
54 Ibid., 40; Robert, “Getting Intersectional in Museums,” 26-30.
‘black’ come to be *invested* with meaning to such an extent that they start functioning as racial identities instead of mere descriptions of skin colour. Bodies become *sites* of this racialisation process, and understanding the production of race is impossible without referring to embodiment.  

Through a phenomenological analysis of whiteness in institutions in the United Kingdom and Australia, Ahmed mapped out institutional habits of ‘doing diversity’. In her research project, she noticed so-called ‘institutional desires for good practice’, often leading to expectations that the funded research carried out is aimed at providing techniques for challenging institutional racism. She points to a paradox between the formal language of diversity and the experience of those who ‘embody’ it. Often those perceived as ‘diverse’ are also the ones charged with the workload of representing or supporting diversity. Diversity must be a “happy sign”, a shorthand for inclusion, and is often instrumentalised or used as a solution or evidence to the problem of racism. It may become institutionalised as the “happy point” of intersectionality, Ahmed argues. Therefore, Ahmed pleads for a critical assessment of institutional diversity measures, as I aim to do through this study. Systemic transformations are needed not only at the policy level but also in everyday practices and interactions.

### 2.4. Queering the Museum and Performativity

An example of a diversity strategy is incorporating queerness into the museum by exploring it as a toolbox, rather than as a theme. In *Queering the Museum* (2020), Nikki Sullivan and Craig Middleton deconstruct the heteronormative logic of representing queer stories and histories in museums as reproductions of the status quo, or conformations to homonormativity. Instead, museums should opt for integrating queerness into permanent programming and carefully research how histories are presented and whose histories they narrate. Sullivan and Middleton explore practical

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56 Ibid.
strategies for queer engagement with collections and collection documentation, recognizing the shift from an object-centred approach towards audience engagement, in line with the ideas from the New Museology movement, that results in a dialogic process around meaning-making with the public.\textsuperscript{61} They look at queer curatorial practices as a way to critically analyse habituated knowledges, identities and practices in an attempt to move beyond them, as a “perpetual interrogation from within”.\textsuperscript{62} As opposed to assumptions that identities are innate, singular, fixed and autonomous, they interpret identity as constructed, intersectional, relational, contingent and always-in-process. Despite this, they do acknowledge that “strategic essentialism”, a term coined by Spivak, is sometimes effective and necessary for varied reasons, perhaps in attempts to quantify marginalisation. Queering in that regard, serves as a form of museum activism that can take many forms, such as cataloguing diverse interpretations, or facilitating the emergence of previously marginalised voices.\textsuperscript{63}

Institutional practices of queerness can run the risk of becoming solely a performative gesture, leading to tokenism and othering. Performativity as a concept here is derived from the speech act theory of the British language philosopher John Langshaw Austin (1911-1960). He describes three different utterances: locutions, illocutions and perlocutions. These distinctive layers of a linguistic expression refer to the denotation of a statement (locution), its reality-affecting charge (illocution) and the intended effects or consequences (perlocution). Illocutionary speech acts include a degree of performativity: uttering the speech act in itself brings about a change in reality, such as ‘saying yes’ at a wedding ceremony or making a promise. These expressions are performative because they constitute people’s social relations in and through speech acts. Our speaking is therefore a deed of action. Such expressions are not merely tied to conventions or a single moment, but ritualised, constantly repeated. They do not solely describe our surroundings, but constitute our relations as such and, as it were, produce an event that affects our social interactions.\textsuperscript{64}

The North American philosopher of language and gender, Judith Butler, popularised the concept of performativity in academic fields, such as anthropology,

\textsuperscript{61} Middleton & Sullivan, *Queering the Museum*, 64.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 108-110.
cultural studies, art studies and other disciplines of the humanities. She applies Austin’s theory to gender relations and argues that through a stylised repetition of bodily and discursive practices, people constantly realise their gender over and over again; they do it, they ‘perform’ it as it were. In doing so, Butler uses terms from theatre discourse, not to be confused with the idea that gender is merely a matter of play. These ritualisations produce actual effects in the social reality, showing how the meaning of an expression is not static, but situational. By constantly repeating certain actions (referred to as *iterability*), people renew, reinforce, and revise their gendered practices with social sanctions in mind. A consequence of this is the institutionalisation of gender and the illusion of a stable, natural identity that is created.65

As mentioned, related to the concept of performativity, a frequently articulated challenge in the cultural field is the pitfall of falling into strategies of tokenism when engaging with diversity, representation and queer culture. Attempts to diversify the collection then become instrumentalised to enhance the reputation of the institution, leading to reproductions of privilege rather than challenging it.66 Van den Berg defines tokenism as the occasional and performative inclusion of minorities in programming, exhibitions, or collections, as opposed to their incorporation into the museum.67 For instance, pinkwashing situations occur when museums do offer queer tours, but only during Pride month.68 To combat tokenism, institutions should aim for permanent collaborative relationships with queer communities, as queer culture transcends a singular culture, and is not solely tied to gender and sexuality, but also serves as a theoretical disposition against heteronormative lifestyles.

Tokenism is closely connected with processes of othering too. This process occurs when queer or black identities are reduced to reproductions of heteronormative or colonial structures, and when the histories of LGBTQ+ people, people of colour, disabled people, or in fact, each social identification category that applies, are constructed as those of an exoticized Other, as argued in the section on social constructionism. Othering emerges when queering or decolonizing is pursued from an essentialist point of view that each person identifying as such is subject to a universal, lived experience, rather than

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67 Van den Berg, "Queering the National Museum of Antiquities", 182.
68 Ibid.
seeing queerness or the black experience as contextually or (sub)culturally dependent.\textsuperscript{69} The terminology thus loses its intended effects and becomes meaningless and redundant. To avoid othering, museums can intensively research these histories, perhaps through structural investments, reflecting on the narratives they present, the norms they (re)produce, the queer elements in the collection, and confronting heteronormativity and disciplinary frameworks present in policies and displays.

2.5. Collections Management and Databases

“Finding the right collections management system for your museum is like trying to find your soul mate.”\textsuperscript{70} As Macdonald points out, collecting practices produce knowledge about objects, but also particular ways of knowing and perceiving. The procedures can affirm identities and create morally charged discourse on dealing with people and objects.\textsuperscript{71} For instance, she notices an increase in questions about the validity of existing classificatory categories for collecting principles and about the pedagogical role of collections in museums, especially later in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{72} Questions not only about what to collect but about the very purpose of collecting started to rise, leading to dilemmas in collection management and reflections on normative practices in database systems. Museum staff relies on collection management documentation systems not only to locate and learn about objects or to produce knowledge, but databases also enable them to make decisions about modes of exhibition and conservation.\textsuperscript{73} Re-installing conceptual art, for example, requires knowledge about the components needed for the artwork, different at each venue. Decisions about registration methods are therefore important.

Besides their focus on queer strategies within art and curation, Sullivan and Middleton explore ways of questioning and queering the knowledge and documentation systems of museums, such as their cataloguing or collection systems.\textsuperscript{74} They encourage museums to expose their interpretative frameworks to combat the myth that collection information is neutral, and in doing so, they promote queering documentation.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 177-183.
\textsuperscript{71} Macdonald, “Collecting Practices”, 95.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 88.
\textsuperscript{73} Deena Engel & G. Wharton, “Managing Contemporary Art Documentation in Museums and Special Collections”, \textit{Art Documentation} 36, no. 2 (2017), 294.
\textsuperscript{74} Middleton & Sullivan, \textit{Queering the Museum}, 67.
example, curators can be more transparent about policy decisions, and their chosen frameworks or resources for interpreting an object, thereby acknowledging the context in which an artwork is collected. Which criteria were used for collecting and interpreting the work and why? Were there competing interpretations that the curator was aware of? The purpose here would not merely be administrative, Sullivan and Middleton argue, but rather reflective of an acknowledgement that these processes are political, as they contribute to the construction of knowledge, norms and relations between objects through a situational and subjective framework. Museum documentation may also reveal, rather than conceal, the disciplinary and epistemological foundations that constitute the particular meaning-making of objects and artworks. These strategies can potentially challenge deeply held investments in order, authority, linearity and expertise, thus troubling professional identities.

75 Ibid., 75-78.
3. Moderna Museet: Collections, Policies and Resources

3.1. The International Collection in its Early Days

Moderna’s collection also relies on epistemological, ideological foundations, perhaps reinforced by registration methods and databases. The compilation of Moderna Museet’s international collection of sculptures, paintings and (mixed-media) objects up to the year 1976 gives a solid impression of those founding focal points and the gender distribution among the acquired works up to that time. The list of artworks and data was obtained through the museum database used before by art historian Maria Görts, who analysed the early realisation of the collection as part of a research project for *The History Book: On Moderna Museet 1958-2008*. The collection was previously owned by the former Department for Modern Painting and Sculpture at the National Museum, the objects of which were transferred to Moderna Museet before its opening in 1958. In 1998, with the inauguration of a new museum building, the National Museum expanded its transfer to include modern and contemporary graphics and drawings. Additionally, Fotografiska Museet contributed its extensive photography collections dating from 1840 onwards to Moderna Museet. This stock catalogue until 1976 only includes the more traditional mediums; photography and graphic prints are excluded from the list because they were acquired through those independent departments at Moderna Museet at the time.

According to the raw data, the oldest part of the international collection consisted of approximately 890 unique paintings/sculptures/objects, the artists of which 478 were labelled as male artists and only 50 as female. Indeed, several artists were represented early on with more than just one artwork. This roughly equates to a percentage distribution of 90% male and 10% female artists. The ratio of purchases to donations was approximately 60/40, of which 60% was purchased and 40% donated to the museum. Noteworthy is that within this list, the gender of roughly 10 artists was undefined, not to be confused with non-binary, indicated with an ‘M?’ or a ‘K?’.

Further research indicates that a significant portion of these undefined genders in the list belonged to female-identifying artists, increasing the initial count from 42 to 50. However, several artists who

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76 Görts, “Routine and Selection,” 11-32.
77 The data from the Excel list “Sammanställning Samlingen 1976” consists of an uncategorised list of artists, including information on their gender, nationality, medium and how many works were acquired in which year. By applying SOM- and COUNT formulas in Excel, the numbers mentioned in this chapter were obtained.
were pushed into the binary gender dichotomy may have identified more as queer, such as the Czech artist Marie Čermínová Toyen.

Thus, the chosen parameters influence the meaning or interpretation of these results. Another example of this emerges when taking into account the photography collection. For instance, the British photographer Julia Margaret Cameron and especially the Russian-born photographer Anna Riwkin are represented in the collection with large photo series. Photography together with the prints section, actually make up the majority of the total collection, but when these mediums are included within the international collection, the database shows that during the 1960s, the proportion of male/female artists in acquisitions amounted to 188 objects made by women and 4,067 by men; representing a ratio of 95.5% against 4.5%. Following the modernist market logic of genre valuation until the 1970s, further in this section, the international collection refers to the aforementioned list of traditional media.

Certainly, the dominant narrative of the museum can be discerned regarding the international collection. Overall, when gender is not taken into consideration, the majority of painters and sculptors come from France (81 artists) and the United States (70), as evidenced by, for instance, the 19 objects from Marcel Duchamp, 7 paintings by Henri Matisse – his Jazz series (1947) –, or the 8 artworks by American sculptor Claes Oldenburg. These male artists were strongly represented by the museum in its early days and have remained anchor points of the collection over time. In 2023, 105 objects by Duchamp were included in the database, showing the museum’s maintenance consecration for this artist. Importantly, in that respect, once an artist is established in the collection, there is a good chance that new objects will be acquired in the future. Their representation is also evident from the renewed collection presentation in 2023, Seven Rooms and a Garden: Rashid Johnson and the Moderna Museet Collection (30.9 2023 – 8.9 2024)\(^\text{78}\), in which a room full of Duchamp’s was curated, and Matisse’s Jazz series (1947) enter a dialogue with a selection of contemporary video works.

In 1976, Matisse, Duchamp and Oldenburg were the artists represented with the largest oeuvre, along with the Spanish artist Picasso (represented with 13 works) and Danish painter Jens Ferdinand Willumsen (10 works), pointing towards another bulk in

\(^{78}\) “Seven Rooms and a Garden”, Moderna Museet, accessed November 2, 2023.
the collection: Nordic art. It is mainly the Finns (64), the Danes (50), and then the Norwegians (41) who constitute the ‘runners-up’ of this early collection. The Germans accounted for 28 artists, and the Italians provided 27. The rest of the list remains fairly Euro-centric, with 15 artists from Spain, 11 from Belgium, 10 from Switzerland and England, and artists from the former Soviet Union and its sphere of influence are also relatively well represented, evidenced by 14 artists from Russia, 6 from Czech, 5 from Hungary, 3 from Rumania and former Yugoslavia, and 2 artists from Estonia.

The share of international female artists in the collection shows a slightly different picture than the general distribution of nationalities, but not to a large extent. The Finns make up the biggest amount of female artists with a number of 11, of which Helene Schjerfbeck predominated this group with 7 works of art. She is still highly celebrated by the museum, as evidenced by posters of her art and the acquisition of more works throughout time. There are 9 women artists from the United States, 7 from France and 5 from Denmark. Other women who are relatively well represented with multiple works in the early collection are the Danish sculptor Astrid Noack (4), the French painter Sylvette David (3) and, evidently, Niki de Saint-Phalle (5) who acquired herself a spot in the museum’s history books through the exhibition *HON – a cathedral* (1966.) This was a sculpture in the shape of a gigantic, pregnant Nana lying on her back. This symbolic temple in tribute to female power included a planetarium in her left breast, an “orgasm machine”, a milk bar in her right breast, a cinema in her left arm and a moving sculpture in the shape of a brain in her head.79 Other female international artists were only represented by 1 or 2 works, even canonical artists such as Meret Oppenheim and Eva Hesse.

**Marginalised Artists in Moderna's Early Collection**

Upon decolonial and global developments, the dominant narrative about the invented, mythological core of the collection is untenable.80 Perhaps a more relevant question for this research is therefore: who were the marginalised 'Other' artists in the early collection formation? By using an intersectional approach, it is possible to focus on the pioneers of Moderna who have remained relatively under the radar and can be considered subalterns, due to dominant imperialist discourses on the main origins of the museum collection.

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80 See the information from the museum about Moderna Museet’s collection formation and development at [https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/the-collection/](https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/the-collection/).
From a sociological point of view, it is an exceptional position, especially for non-Western women artists, to acquire a seat at the table of a fairly white, male-dominated, Eurocentric collection. One of the artists who does not fit into this dominant narrative outlined above is Tahia Halim (1919-2003) from Sudan/Egypt, whose work *Burden of Life* (1961) was donated to the museum in 1967 by the diplomat Adolf Croneborg. Her work seems to have been donated by chance after Croneborg had seen her work in the Modern Art in Home Environment Gallery in Stockholm.81

According to the database, the painting has never been exhibited and received no attention from the museum’s communication channels, except for a label about Halim’s painting on the collection website. It was not until 2018 that this text was written about her work, which particularly highlights her parallels with European contemporaries and impressionists, in addition to a reference to her inspiration from ancient Egyptian art (“rural aesthetic styles”).82 Halim is known for her participation in the Expressive Movement of Egypt and exhibited three times at the Venice Biennial in Italy. In 1958, she was awarded the Guggenheim International Prize as the first female artist in history.83

One can only speculate about the reasons why, despite her international success, she has never been shown over the years. The cause is probably tied to the Eurocentric logic of the art system. She did not fit in the picture of an international collection that revolves around artists from France, the Nordic countries and the United States, and had therefore become marginalised over the years.

An artist who has been considerably more visible than Tahia Halim, for instance through a recent reappraisal of her work in 2018, is the Czech artist Marie Čermínová Toyen.84 Nevertheless, their name has never become canonical. In the collection list, they were categorised as ‘woman’, but Toyen actually resisted heteronormativity through a rejection of the gender binary. They invented their gender-neutral alter-ego Toyen in the 1920s, referring to the French word for citizen (*citoyen*). Toyen was active in the movement of Surrealism in both Paris and Prague, but their recognition remained

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relatively marginal. However, after the donation of their painting *The Myth of Light* (1946) to the collection in 1972 by The Friends of Moderna Museet, they were exhibited several times by the museum, including a solo exhibition in 1985, an exhibition on International Surrealism in 1998 and they were included in the collection presentation between 2019 and 2022. Thus, their marginalisation is not evident from how often they were shown by the museum, but rather from the discourse surrounding those exhibitions. The exhibition of 1998 encompassed 17 international surrealist artists, of whom Toyen was the only non-male identifying artist. The museum refers to Toyen as “den märkliga konstnärinnan” (the ’strange’ ‘female’ artist) in a curatorial text about the exhibition, which mystifies their identity as ‘the Other’.\(^85\) A few artists from this group also originated from outside of Western Europe and had been acquired by the museum early on in the 1950s, such as Roberto Matta from Chile and Victor Brauner from Romania. Yet it is remarkable that, for example, the surrealist artist Alberto Anido from Cuba, two of whose works were purchased and donated to the museum in 1964, is missing from this list.\(^86\) His works have received little to no attention from the museum over the years, whereas Surrealism is one of the museum’s strongest areas, according to the acquisition policy document of 2002 and evidenced by several exhibitions and symposia on the art movement throughout time.\(^87\) Why do some artists remain invisible, even though they were acquired by the museum so early on?

The explanation for the marginalisation or ‘othering’ of women or queer artists in the 20\(^{th}\) century should not be sought in judgments of quality, as several feminist authors have shown, such as Linda Nochlin. Informed by De Beauvoir’s insights, Linda Nochlin exposes the very definition of what makes an artist “great” as a question that has been historically constructed in a way that privileges men and their contributions.\(^88\) In her essay “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” (1971), she argues that it was not


\(^86\) The museum collection website shows that both works *Afro-Cuban motif* (1961) and *Myth* (1960) have never been shown. A text and image about the works are lacking and a search on the museum’s main website gives no results. “Afro-kubanskt motiv”, Moderna Museet, accessed November 7, 2023. [https://sis.modernamuseet.se/objects/782/afrokubanskt-motiv](https://sis.modernamuseet.se/objects/782/afrokubanskt-motiv).


a lack of talent or quality, which is constantly negotiated in the art world, but rather a patriarchal system, structurally putting up both cultural and institutional barriers, that kept women from gaining money and recognition as artists. These barriers and limitations, such as expectations of women’s roles in the domestic sphere, systemically excluded them from access to education, art academies and participation in society in general. The same question Nochlin raised about women can perhaps be asked when it comes to the inclusion of queer artists in modern art collections and artists outside Western Europe or the United States. Why have there been no “great” transgender artists? Why have there been no “great” African, Asian or South American artists? Colonialism and historically legal measures against queer lives left their mark on the art world and canon formation too, often by displacing queer or Indigenous arts and cultures with heteronormative and Western narratives. This led to the exclusion of certain artists from most Western European art collections of modern art, at least from the collection of Moderna Museet.

3.2. Acquisition Policies in the 21st Century

Since 2002, a public formal acquisition policy document has been in use at Moderna Museet that explains both the principles of acquisition processes and important focal points of interest for the museum. In 2021, simultaneously with a project that inclined to strengthen the Swedish collection, the Swedish Acquisitions 2021, the document was rewritten by director Gitte Ørskou in consultation with curators and in line with the mission and vision of the museum. This new vision for Moderna was created by Ørskou in 2020 and serves as a manifesto and compass with seven broad goals for Moderna’s future,

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89 Philosophical discussions about judgments of taste and artistic quality, as well as processes of canon formation, fall outside the scope of this thesis. For more information on the influence of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) and Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002) on contemporary aesthetics, see Gregor Landfeld’s publication “The Canon in Art History: Concepts and Approaches,” Journal of Art Historiography 19 (December, 2018), 1-18. This text also explains how canon’s hierarchies, processes of canonisation and marginalisation, and the aesthetic gaze can evolve according to power struggles and ideological or political goals.

90 See also Ariella Azoulay’s work Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism (2020). In this book, Azoulay explores unexplored histories and reflects upon the imperial foundations of historiography, museums and knowledge. She calls for a refusal of the imperial violence that caused devastation to cultures, humans and communities, spanning from Indigenous peoples in the Americas to dispossessed Palestinians in 1948. Azoulay reworks cultural history by unlearning imperial modes of thinking, showing how the “past” is an invention rather than a reality. She does not necessarily advocate fighting imperialism through alternative narratives. Instead, she proposes to use our imagination and strive for an ongoing process of unlearning the knowledge structures attempted to naturalise the dissociation between objects and people, events, timelines, and facts.
influencing acquisition aims. Two major goals are formulated as follows: “We want to be inclusive and to celebrate diversity by recognizing that people arrive from different starting points. (...) our view of art is global.” The acquisition policy was revised again on September 20, 2022. Comparing these documents from 2002 and 2022, informed by the interviews with responsible curators, shows the shifts that have taken place over time in terms of modes of operation and focus areas for art acquisitions. To what extent is the museum’s vision reflected in its policy for acquisitions?

3.2.1. Acquisition Processes

Although the 2002 document describes the acquisition procedure in less detail, the general principles of Moderna Museet’s acquisition process have remained considerably unchanged over time. Moderna Museet, as a government agency, is responsible for acquiring works of art in various mediums from the 20th and 21st centuries both from Sweden and internationally. Under the previous policy, each new acquisition was assessed against a set of pre-defined questions regarding the work itself and its relationship to the collection as a whole, such as how a work can serve as a “contextual catalyst” for other groups of artists. This is addressed in more detail under the heading ‘special focus areas’. However, broadly speaking, the museum bases its case for new acquisitions on three possible lines of justification:

1. The work is a contribution to strengthening or building on existing parts of the collection, such as American Pop Art, Surrealism, etcetera;
2. The proposal creates a point of contrast or interest to the collection by filling a ‘gap’ for a strand that is currently missing;
3. The proposed artwork is crucial for the oeuvre of a particular artist, often already represented by the museum.92

Art pieces find their way into the museum collection through two primary methods: as a purchase or a donation. A third way of acquiring is the transfer of an artwork from another government institution. The curators are tasked with the responsibility of keeping up to date on the state of the art world by visiting galleries and maintaining contact with artists.

Thus, curators in particular make proposals for potential purchases that fall within their area of responsibility. However, in principle, all museum employees and external parties too can submit acquisition proposals that are reviewed by the curators responsible for the collection. This is specifically emphasised during the interviews; the museum attempts to act on its role as a public institution and strives to include visitors’ suggestions during meetings, such as e-mail suggestions for new purchases from audiences. The majority of proposals for acquisitions and the decisions to be made are negotiated in acquisition meetings with the curatorial team held five to seven times a year, which are prepared by the collection coordinator. Each curator is responsible for a specific specialisation. To ensure the meeting runs as efficiently as possible, a pre-selection is made in advance for proposed donations following the donation policy, so that the proposed donations and purchases that are under actual consideration are discussed and substantiated during the meetings.

Acquisitions are made as much as possible in connection with temporary exhibitions. As a result of changing museum ideals, the museum is increasingly striving for an institutionally *holistic* museum practice and perspective: the activities, exhibitions and acquisitions in both Malmö and Stockholm, should complement and promote each other. This is also emphasised in the annual reports and interviews. Often, works on view are acquired for the collection just before or after their temporary display, as has been the case with Björn Lövin, Annika von Hausswolff, and Rashid Johnson, to name a few. Acquisitions regularly occur after a collaboration with one artist or a group, and in that way, the museum is able to secure a deal that is of economic and symbolic advantage to the museum for multiple reasons, such as transport costs, as the work is already there and the fact that by showing the work, the object becomes self-evidently a part of the museum’s historiography.

From comparing the two policy documents, it is evident that the mode of operation regarding the acquisition process has become more formalised over the years, or at least, it has been written down extensively through added guidelines, including information about the Public Procurement Act, disposal of items, special provenance, provenance and due diligence, risks around conflicts of interest, donations, shared acquisitions and documentation of acquisitions. Besides that, information has been added about the

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responsibility structure within the organisation. The superintendent is the only employee with the power to make decisions on all types of acquisitions, after discussions with and recommendations from participants in the acquisition meetings. In fact, the director has the authority, although not preferable, to make decisions without consulting the acquisition meeting at all. Despite Moderna’s democratic ideals as a public art institution, the structure of the organisation is arranged in such a way that, after consultation with employees, decisions ultimately come down to the director of the institution. Canon formation is therefore not based on consensus but dependent on a handful of influential individuals. According to the interviews with curators, this is considered an efficient organisational hierarchy because acquiring quickly may be necessary in time-sensitive scenarios such as art auctions or gallery events.

### 3.2.2. Discursive Comparison of Acquisition Policies

Apart from the museum’s ambition to acquire historical artworks that complement, expand or nuance the existing collection, and to prioritise key works from contemporary artists, Moderna Museum delineates two distinct general geographical focal areas for acquisitions, both of which require different curatorial strategies. This distinction seems to be in accordance with the government’s directive to excel particularly in the realm of Swedish art.

- **Swedish and Nordic Art.** The museum explicitly takes on the responsibility of being the ‘best’ or ‘central’ museum for Swedish art of the 20th and 21st centuries. While the 2002 policy exclusively focuses on Swedish art for this collection segment, the 2022 revision broadens its perspective, stating that Moderna should prioritise a good representation of art from its “geographic vicinity, the Nordic region”. This collection section is intended to have both “breadth” and “depth”, meaning that the museum aims to broadly cover various artistic expressions from all over Sweden and every period between 1900 and the present. In addition, Moderna should acquire the “most important artistry of each period in depth”, such as through maintenance consecration of an artist’s work over time, accommodating the need to present major oeuvres thoroughly. The 2002 document mandates that the purchasing policy be deemed “generous” for the Swedish collection, a provision no longer articulated in the revised version. Additionally, the interviews indicate a tendency to avoid acquisitions early on in the careers of Swedish artists, as
acquiring in Sweden is seen as an affirmation of quality. This is somewhat in conflict with the older policy document, which argues that there is “always” an (economic) advantage to purchase early on in an artist’s career. Apparently, the museum has become more aware of its normative function. Due to the aim of wide coverage, discussions on Swedish art history also tend to be more contested, as more accountability and normative consequences are at stake.

- **International Art.** Regarding the international collection, the museum claims to have one of Europe’s foremost collections of modern and contemporary art, but acknowledges the impracticality of achieving the same “breadth” as in the Swedish and Nordic collection. Hence, Moderna strives to accomplish more “depth” by acquiring central works in an artist’s oeuvre, especially when it comes to living artists. In both policy documents, it is stated that the collection is based on a global vision or perspective. However, the discursive implications of this statement have changed significantly over time. While the updated policy only states that ‘special priorities’ must be made and that Moderna’s ‘special context’, such as the existing collection, is of great importance for new acquisitions, the older policy document is more elaborate. The 2002 policy gives explicit substance to this global vision by recognizing that much of the work done in art nowadays is created in places that used to be blind spots on the international, heavily Western-oriented art map and that the art system does not always fully reflect this fact. The text continues emphasizing that artists with an ‘immigrant background’ from the ‘big cities in the West’ have the hardest time making their work visible in the established art world, showing an awareness of processes of in- and exclusion in the art system. The policy calls for revising recent art history by supplementing the collection with previously suppressed historically important stages and places, such as Brazilian art from the 1950s-60s and Romanian art from the 1910s-20s. Yet, a search in TMS shows that ever since the policy was created, no artworks from these regions within these specific periods have been acquired. This absence of a reflection on unachieved objectives implies that the focus points set at the time for enriching the collection seem to have been contingent non-priorities for the museum, rather than crucial aspirations the museum felt responsible for.
The 2002 document, in contrast to the renewed version, furthermore includes a table explaining how different works should be financed, in a priority order. The table thus provides a hypothesis for the quantitative part of this study, revealing the distinctive dominant areas and methods of acquisitions. From the table, it is expected that Swedish and international classics tend to be the most expensive types of art, as most of those acquisition resources would be obtained through donations, compared to the more affordable contemporary art. However, currently, tables are often turned, and contemporary art prices are skyrocketing, according to the curators interviewed.

Table 1. Priority Order of Financial Resources for Acquisitions at Moderna Museet | Acquisition Policy, 2002-2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Swedish Contemporary Art</th>
<th>State Grants (Anslag) and Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Classics</td>
<td>Donations, Funds, Anslag, MMV94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Contemporary Art</td>
<td>Anslag, MMV, Funds, Donations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Classics</td>
<td>Donations, Funds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite statements from interviewees and the museum’s mission that Moderna Museet is increasingly concerned with diversity issues, certain explicit or concrete objectives for renewing or challenging the collection have disappeared from the revised 2022 policy document. The explicit objectives for a representative gender balance, age balance and a multicultural or global perspective have been dropped, as has the discursive framework of what constitutes a 'global' vision. Paradoxically, the 2022 document does contain a more explicit statement to be inclusive, to 'highlight' diversity, to strive for artistic and cultural innovation and to reflect on the view of history. What is notable here, however, is the word choice ‘to highlight’ (framhāva in Swedish), which creates a discursive formation suggesting a degree of performativity. Diversity does not seem to be an inherent characteristic of the museum policy, embodied or practised through an intersectional methodology, for instance. Instead, it appears to be a facet that requires explicit emphasis. Indeed, the introduction refers to the importance of “special acquisition initiatives”, such as The Second Museum of Our Wishes, which completely focused on acquiring female artistry, but no proactive policy suggestions for the future are presented, nor does the text establish specific criteria for representation based on gender, age, or culture, akin to the

94 MMV stands for 'Moderna Museet’s Vänner', The Friends of Moderna Museet.
provisions and set examples delineated in the 2002 document. The opposite has been added to the 2022 policy: a short paragraph arguing that, if a work of art is of great interest to the museum, the acquisition proposal can be at odds with the museum’s mission or objectives. In this way, the museum appears to strive for more autonomy or flexibility in its policy decisions, while becoming less accountable to strict criteria or goals for the future, accommodating to potentially fluctuating political landscapes in the future. When asked about these policy decisions in interviews with curators, it is stated that a focus on particularities within acquisition interests would establish an ethical framework that the museum attempts to avoid.

This shift towards a diversity policy taking place in the informal sphere rather than a formalised policy is also reflected in the absence of predefined, in their entirety quite intersectional, questions, to which a proposed acquisition was subjected in the past. According to the 2002 document, any acquisition proposal should consider the following questionnaire about the work itself and its relationship to the collection:

How central is the work to the artist’s oeuvre? How significant is the artistry as a whole? What does this work do to activate and create a context for other works and groups of works in the collection? What does this acquisition mean for the gender balance in the collection and in recent years’ new acquisitions? What does the acquisition mean for the global or multicultural perspective in the collection - and in recent years’ new acquisitions? Does the acquisition contribute to a balanced age profile among recent years’ new acquisitions? And of course - is it “good”?95

Two elements stand out concerning the discursive formations in both documents that point towards the deployment of a morality discourse around collection diversity. The words ‘broadening’ and ‘deepening’ are applied to Swedish and international acquisitions respectively, suggesting two distinct acquisition strategies. Specifically concerning the international collection, the ‘deepening’ strategy seems to be part of an apology discourse, where this strategy is used as if it were an excuse to compensate for the impossibility of acquiring the artistic breadth intended for the Swedish collection. Thus, the deepening

95 This text is a translation from Swedish to English from the following document: “Förvärspolicy – 2002.08.23”, Moderna Museet, accessed on November 15, 2023.
strategy performs a ‘sorry’ for not fulfilling the perhaps moral requirements implied by a changing society itself, of accommodating societal needs for a diverse collection.

A second observation is the frequent use of the word ‘gaps’, specifically in the phrase ‘filling gaps’, in interviews, museum discourse and articles. The reasoning seems to sprout from a sense of duty or moral responsibility to cover areas of art that had not been acquired before. Filling gaps thus refers to the idea of acquiring works for the collection from social communities or artist identities that were excluded from the existing collection, and lacking due to oversights. In that way, the collection is presented as if it were a static vessel one can fill with a certain token, whereas a museum collection is perhaps more a house of imagination, a transformative entity or compilation of objects with a constructed identity, akin to Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community”, charged with a meaning that changes over time through every other, renewed constellation.

The 2002 policy similarly sheds critical light on this frequent discursive formation when speaking about collections in museum discourse. Gaps presuppose a truthful, linear narrative of art history to be told. The document, however, notes a shift in the field towards the idea that art history entails multiple narratives, whereby the same object can take on different meanings in different contexts. It is stressed that instead of filling gaps in an abstract art history, the goal should be to identify works that create new and different stories in a concrete display situation. Art that serves as a ‘contextual catalyst’, works that are not merely important in their own right, should be acquired as much as possible. Thus, the text shows an acknowledgement of the shift from modernist to postmodernist discourses; the mythical meta-narrative has given way to plurality and a multiplicity of voices, nowadays increasingly reflected in museum policies.

Specialised and Longer Lines of Inquiry

Although at first sight, Moderna Museet has been pursuing a less concrete policy on diversity and representation since 2021, this should be understood from the museum’s plans and intentions under development in 2023. Its acquisition policy has become more abstract with fewer objectives to acquire autonomy, flexibility and independence as a
public art museum, perhaps from state influence. As is clear from the interviews, the policy document does not serve as an actualised and alive document to relate to. Thus, it is implied that the actual plans are forged in the backrooms. Different lines of inquiry for current and future areas of interest can be discerned from the interviews, annual reports and recent acquisitions, but there is no institutional decree providing substance or direction to work with diversity issues. Instead, various ideas and practices intertwine; each curator has a personalised understanding of these concepts. Curators seem to agree that “the work is never done”, but rather continuous and always in flux.98

Relevant goals for the collection, beyond the acquisition policy, are expressed in both the annual reports of the museum, the interviews with curators and strategic meetings about future acquisitions; an initiative that the museum started in 2022. These meetings are meant to carve out space and time for critical reflections on art, history, and the future. The museum is developing several so-called “longer lines of inquiry” that are important to the museum in carrying it forward, keeping them in mind when planning exhibitions as well as making acquisitions. It is a relatively recent development in the museum to organise and structure future acquisition plans in this way. In that sense, the museum’s curatorial process has become more democratic, rather than driven by individual curatorial agendas, but based on discussions about future long-term directions for the museum, creating common focus areas for research.

The museum tries to anchor its ambitions regarding globality in relation to what Moderna Museet is as an institution. Concerning the international collection, the discussions about representation differ from the ones about the Nordic collection because the aim of acquiring is different. Instead of using quota, Moderna claims to consider the full scope of diversity. For example, Sweden has certain historically geopolitical links with different parts of the world, either through migration, politics or lineages of history that make sense to build on when writing a global history. Rather than being arbitrary about choices, the goal is to relate decisions for new acquisitions to these tropes, while expanding the scope and tropes in the collection and opening up to multiple art histories.

One of these longer lines of inquiry is based on the intention to strengthen the relationship of the Sámi minority to the majority society, formulated as such in the annual report of 2022, creating a binary dichotomy.99 This can perhaps be interpreted even more

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broadly as a desire to work closely with historically subalterned Indigenous practices in general, both regionally and internationally. In 2022, for instance, Anders Sunna’s work was acquired after being exhibited in the Nordic Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 2022. His painting, *Illegal Spirits of Sápmi*, reflects on the consequences of the Reindeer Husbandry Act of 1971, and the conflicts with Swedish authorities, leading to a loss of their right to engage in reindeer husbandry for Sunna’s family. The apparent trivial, personal story is symbolic of a broader narrative with colonial undertones. Another acquisition in 2022, is a sculptural object by Rose-Marie Huuva, entitled *Ijár*. The work is made of organic reindeer hide and black seal fur, materials that relate to Sámi craftsmanship and culture. In the new collection presentations that the museum has been organizing since 2023, there is a larger focus on Sámi perspectives than before. Here, in the exhibition *Pink Sails – Swedish Modernism in the Moderna Museet collection* (17.6 2023 – 1.1 2025), a room is set up that reflects on Swedish colonial history, representing several Sámi artists, such as a work by Lars Pirak, acquired by the museum in 2020. The new collection presentations are part of the museum policy to curate more thematically instead of from a more traditional, art historically chronological point of view, whereby more attention is paid to historically marginalised narratives and communities.

From the annual reports, it appears that Moderna Museet aims to develop a world-class international collection, fighting for art, being an active part of the world and conveying both a local and international view of art. In recent years, as regards international art, the museum seems to have set an informal mission for itself to focus on queer histories by acquiring works of queer-identifying contemporary artists that are also involved with queer political issues, as is seen from the upcoming exhibition on Vaginal Davis in 2023, and acquisitions in 2022 by Nicole Eisenman, Soufiane Ababri, and Igshaan Adams, among others. For instance, through his *Bed Series* (2017-2018), Soufiane Ababri is able to shed light on his lived experiences as a queer Arab man in French society by taking ownership of the othering effects of the *male gaze*. His characters appropriate the positions of historically constructed objects of the *male gaze*; places on the canvas that

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were reserved for naked women or enslaved people. Ababri queers these situations by placing himself, as the artist, in a culturally othered position, becoming the subject and object of desire at the same time.\(^{103}\)

Other lines of inquiry appear to have not been fully developed yet, but one relates to the recent history of immigration in Sweden, where communities have been formed in and around Stockholm with roots in the SWANA region: Southwest Asia and North Africa. The purpose is to look at art histories and contemporary practices from artists connected to this geographical and cultural area. The relationship between Sweden and the Baltic region will also be further explored in the near future. In general, the aim of these longer lines of inquiry is also to provide access to subaltern voices, which is said to be a challenge due to a lack of in-depth knowledge of underrepresented histories, as well as the dilemma that the more established names among artists in those groups are often already represented by collections of state museums.

3.2.4. Resources and Funding

Financial resources for purchasing art through state grants are only available to the museum to a limited extent. Gustavsson (2008) shows that the allocation of funds from the government increased twentyfold for administrative costs between 1958 to 2006, including inflation corrections, while the appropriations for acquisitions and exhibitions have remained consistently low and even seem to decrease.\(^{104}\) The recommended minimum allocation of resources for acquisitions of a few million Swedish kronor was worth much more in the late 1950s than in the early 2000s, given the inflation and the rise of prices on the art market in general. Exemplary is the response of the social-democratic Minister for Culture in the mid-1990s, who noted that “there simply is no money.”\(^{105}\) Therefore, the museum is inevitably and increasingly dependent on public and private funding from third parties. Since the early 2000s, Moderna Museet has been involved in fundraising from the private sector, which was previously held back by the

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\(^{104}\) Gustavsson, “Money, Politics and the Public”, 36; The museum’s allocation of funds from the government were traditionally split into three destinations: acquisitions, exhibitions and administrative costs, such as salaries.

\(^{105}\) Ibid.
Although sponsorship from private companies has been representative of a relatively low percentage share of the total revenues, growth can be observed. In 2007, the government called for an increase in the level of private funding for Swedish cultural life, specifically concerning the acquisition campaign of *The Second Museum of Our Wishes*, which succeeded. Ultimately, 37 million Swedish kroner was generated from private donations and only 5 million from the state, showing the high dependency on external parties for generating resources.

The sponsorship policy document from 2010 states that of all museum activities, including new acquisitions, 60% is financed through state subsidies and 40% through self-generated income. It appears that those percentages have shifted to a larger share based on income from foundation resources. In any case, when it comes to regular acquisitions, only certain campaigns such as *The Second Museum of Our Wishes* and the *Swedish Acquisitions 2021* generated sufficient government funding for the museum to be able to purchase art. A closer look at how money is made available in particular shows that foundation and fund capital are increasingly important, as are donations and contributions from The Friends of Moderna Museet, or the 100 Friends, a group of collectors, donors and supporters with a link to the museum. Private individuals such as the Swedish publisher Gerard Bonnier and his family have also been among the most crucial donors to the museum. The museum has a consistent tradition of patronage with a transparent exchange of value, either financially or symbolically, of which the founding of the American Friends in 2007 is another expansion. This is a public charity fund that relies on contributions from members and patrons who can choose between different types of memberships that enable American supporters and donors to make tax-deductible gifts to the museum regularly. The establishment of this foundation is a clear reflection of the continued connection to the North American art world that the museum has actively maintained since Pontus Hultén. Contact with such funding bodies – collectors, donors or funds – works both ways: offers are made to the museum and the museum actively reaches out to foundations as well, for example through subsidy

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106 Ibid., 35.
107 Ibid., 36-38.
https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/about/support/the-american-friends/.
applications to the New Carlsberg Foundation intended to purchase more art from the Nordic countries.\textsuperscript{110}

### 3.3. Acquisition Methods: Donations versus Purchases

As mentioned before, there are two main ways in which artworks become part of the collection, and will be preserved until eternity: through donations to or purchases by the museum. As regards donations, Moderna Museet distinguishes between different types that entail a discrepancy in the degree of control. A donation can either be in the form of cash for the purchase of an artwork, the production of an exhibition, general support to the museum, or in the form of a work of art in itself. Most donations of the latter do not involve discussions with donors but rather consist of offers from individuals, often relatives of an artist, or those with a small collection of artworks. In those cases, decisions about accepting donations are limited to an acceptance or rejection, with a preference for works deemed of significant importance to the museum, such as drawings by Vera Nilsson, who has been represented by the museum for years. Moderna Museet has a strict guideline that artists are not allowed to donate themselves into the collection. In those cases, if the curatorial team or the director is convinced by an artist’s proposal, sometimes a deal is made, in which a purchase is made first and then a work is donated by the artist.

In other cases, an indirect connection with the art market influences the acquisitions, through wealthy philanthropists, donors, patrons and collectors who wish to contribute to Moderna Museet.\textsuperscript{111} While engaging with them, the museum acknowledges its responsibility to push artists who are not part of the established system such as being represented by North American galleries. However, those discussions only occur when a direct donation to the museum applies, as curators associated with the museum cannot take on the role of an art advisor. This dynamic points to the complexity of dealing with collectors and donors, as their decisions to purchase works, that later could be donated to the museum, are often influenced by revenue considerations, market factors, their art historical knowledge and their relationships with galleries, art advisors and dealers. Moreover, at present, prices for contemporary art are sometimes as high as

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{110}“Grants”, Ny Carlsberg Fondet, accessed on December 29, 2023. \url{https://www.ny-carlsbergfondet.dk/en}.
  \item \textsuperscript{111}“50 Years of Gifts”, Moderna Museet, accessed on November 15, 2023, \url{https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/en/exhibitions/homage-50th-anniversary-of-mmv/50-years-of-gifts-from-the-friends-of-moderna-museet/}.
\end{itemize}
for historical works, meaning that the dependency on the generosity of this group of donors is most likely to increase. Evident from field notes and interviews is that the museum has indeed been taking agency in recent years by engaging in more active fundraising than before, reaching out to and relying on private funding for donations of both contemporary and historical art that is too expensive to acquire through the museum’s resources for purchases.\textsuperscript{112}

The agency to decide which work should be donated, however, in principle lies with the curatorial team; every acquisition must fit within the collection according to the curatorial guidelines, so not any offer will be accepted. Donation offers for artworks must be subjected to the same procedures and discussions as potential purchases, taking into account ethical factors linked to the donation. The museum does not accept restrictions, limitations or other types of requirements or demands for compensation regarding proposed donations, to avoid situations where private interests masquerade as public interests.\textsuperscript{113} Furthermore, in its policy document, Moderna Museet emphasises its moral responsibility, vision, norms and values when it comes to donations. Donations must be in line with the museum’s commitment to democracy, objectivity, freedom and respect for equal value. The museum therefore refuses to accept offers from organisations linked to human exploitation, dictatorships or hatred against minorities.

Besides the increase in project-generated grant applications and long-term relationships with donors and patrons, Moderna Museet relies on support from four funds for its art purchases, which generate resources on a yearly basis.\textsuperscript{114} The four different funds are the Gerard Bonnier Foundation, the Carl Fribergs Fund, Österlindska Foundation and the fund of Anna-Stina Malmborg and Gunnar Höglunds. The museum has specific agreements with the funds, whereby income is generated based on the yield from the funds through government bonds. The museum’s income is thus to some extent dependent on the art market and differs year by year depending on market logic, which turns this financing system into a reliable, yet uncertain source of income. At least 80% of the funds’ income must be used for art purchases before other types of funding may be sought for acquisitions. Thus, the freedom of acquiring is somehow tied to, or shaped by,

\begin{small}
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\cite{112Interviews with curators at Moderna Museet, November – December, 2023.}
\cite{113"Förvärspolicy – 2022.09.20", Moderna Museet, accessed on November 15, 2023;}
\cite{114"Modernas Museet’s policy for donations – 2022.04.19", Moderna Museet, accessed on November 26, 2023.}
\end{small}
the deals with these funds. Following the interviews with curators, Moderna Museet expresses its gratitude for these funds. However, its long-term dependency on those organisations establishes and preserves a power dynamic, whereby the types of artworks acquired depend on the conditions set by those funds and the revenue they generate. This power relationship, to say the least, is discursive in nature, as the predefined conditions map out an aesthetic perspective on the value of certain criteria above others as a conception of truth that is taken for granted, raising questions about curatorial agency. The criteria that these funds prescribe are described below.

Each fund imposes specific conditions on art purchases and allows for investments in different geographical areas. Most funding comes from the Gerard Bonnier Foundation, which allows art to be purchased for both the Swedish and international collections. Another fund is the Carl Friberg Foundation, mainly aimed at works by Swedish artists. The artworks purchased through this fund must be of “exceptionally good quality” as determined by the director of the museum after consultation with the current chairman of the Sala Konstförening, a non-profit art association founded in 1941. Apparently, the subjective interpretation of what is meant by “artistic quality” is measured by merely a few people in power. The first chairman of this association was a local town doctor of the municipality of Sala, Carl Friberg. The story goes that Friberg once visited his patient Anna Aguéli, the mother of the Swedish artist Ivan Aguéli (1869-1917). Friberg was so impressed by Aguéli’s works that he bought a painting; the first in his extensive Swedish art collection.\textsuperscript{115} He became a philanthropist, founded the Sala Art Association and, on his death, donated his entire art collection to the Swedish state. All works of art purchased through the yield of this foundation must therefore be in the spirit of Ivan Aguéli.

Thus, concerning the purchases through this foundation, the conditions for newly acquired works must relate quite directly to the work of an individual artist, Ivan Aguéli. This raises questions about curatorial agency and freedom, which, while perhaps not in practice, are on paper bound to a framework that instantaneously relates to Aguéli’s legacy. The acquisition conditions imposed by these funds influence, or perhaps even fixate the museum’s institutional identity to a certain extent, potentially impacting the museum’s future goals. Transforming a collection or redefining its identity may be a challenging process due to this dependency and vulnerable reliance. What do these

\textsuperscript{115} “Om Aguélimuseet”, Aguélimuseet, accessed on November 29, 2023. \url{https://aguelimuseet.se/om-museet/}. 
limitations imposed by the funds mean for the objective of maintaining a representative balance in, for instance, gender or cultural diversity? An influence or correlation may be food for speculation, which further research could clarify.

The third fund is the Österlindska Foundation, centring around Swedish and Norwegian art.116 The proceeds of this fund, after the annuities have been paid and one-tenth of the same has been added to the fund annually, have to be used for the purchase of works by living Swedish and/or Norwegian artists. Lastly, the fourth fund is the Gunnar Höglund’s and Anna-Stina Malmborg’s Foundation, which, together with the Gerard Bonnier Foundation, contributes the most to Moderna’s purchases. The couple Anna-Stina Malmborg and Gunnar Höglund have been two of Sweden’s most influential collectors since the 1960s.117 Their foundation is aimed at the promotion of living North American or West-European artists, who should not be active in the Nordic countries, at least not to a significant extent, and the art should be of “high quality”. Funds from the foundation must be used for the acquisition of works of art that broaden or deepen Moderna Museet’s existing collections. Another requirement of funding through this foundation is that Anna-Stina Malmborg is informed about each new purchase proposal. Here again, it seems as if formally speaking, an individual’s artistic judgement has far-reaching consequences for the possibilities of art acquisitions at Moderna Museet. According to interviews with staff, this, in practice, is often more a formality, but the dynamic does reveal the inherently vulnerable position of the museum and the extent to which Moderna, particularly the transformation of its collection, is dependent on the power and generosity of a handful of individuals with cultural and economic capital.

3.4. Cultural Policy
Besides Moderna Museet’s heteronomous relationship with patrons, donors and funds alike, and its ties to their cultural and economic capital, the museum policy does not stand alone either. In this respect, as a public institution, Moderna Museet is guided by tasks assigned to the museum by the government. Every year, the Swedish Ministry of Culture sends a regulatory letter to Moderna Museet that is published through The Swedish

National Financial Management Authority. This sets out the operational objectives assigned to the museum in different areas for which it is held accountable, such as audiences, sponsorship and exhibitions. Regarding accessibility and visitors, the 2022 letter states that Moderna Museet must report on its activities that respond to the needs of the youth and on efforts to increase young audiences, or on the measures taken to increase accessibility for people with disabilities.\textsuperscript{118} However, an age range or definition of ‘disabilities’ is not provided. The letter also states, for example, that the museum should reduce its emissions for business trips and find alternatives for physical meetings to reduce its climate impact.\textsuperscript{119}

Looking specifically at the development of diversity objectives concerning the collection, and more broadly the museum’s activities, several patterns stand out. From the museum’s opening until the 1990s, the government adopted a hands-off approach: it did not prescribe any socio-political measures or specific target groups aimed at diversifying the collection or including marginalised groups. The objectives back then granted the museum a degree of institutional autonomy for socio-political issues, which is at odds with the national cultural policy used by the Social Democratic government of Sweden. Until the 1990s, that policy was highly ideologically and socio-politically charged, aimed at listening to the necessities of "disadvantaged groups" in society.\textsuperscript{120}

More specific goals for the museum appeared in the regulatory letter from 1993 onwards until 2006, precisely when the national cultural policy took the opposite turn. Throughout the 1990s, the government started to incorporate the imperative of “diverse perspectives” within its museum collection, with a particular focus on variables such as gender, class, cultural background, and age. Sweden’s Social Democratic government introduced more and more reporting requirements for Moderna Museet and specific targeted measures aimed at underrepresented groups in the period 1995-2006, as opposed to the Ministry of Culture itself trying to adopt a more ideologically neutral and freer cultural policy. A specific focus on “disadvantaged groups” was replaced in the national policy by the phrase that “everyone” should be able to participate in art and culture, while the target groups for the regulatory letters had become more specific, such

\textsuperscript{118} “Regleringsbrev för budgetåret 2022 avseende Moderna Museet”, Ekonomistyrningsverket (ESV), accessed on December 10, 2023. \url{https://www.esv.se/statsliggaren/regleringsbrev/Iindex?rbId=22316}. For this paragraph, all regulatory letters addressed to Moderna Museet between 2003 and 2023 have been consulted through this website.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.; Gustavsson, “Money, Politics and the Public”, 45-47.
as a requirement that the museum collection should better reflect perspectives on social class. In summary, the institutionally more autonomous museum policy before the 1990s seems to have been changed by more stringent requirements from the regulatory letter, which contrasts with the more liberal approach of the 1990s at the national cultural policy level.121

As the share of state grants for acquisitions declined, the regulatory letters from the government between 1997 and 2005 imposed stricter demands on diversifying Moderna's museum collection through specific goals for which reporting was required, reflecting increasing identity politics. Goals are formulated for various focus areas, such as museum and exhibition operations, audiences, knowledge building and organisational governance, and thus, a goal aimed at the collection.

**Goal 2**

The goal is that the composition of the collections should better reflect different perspectives, e.g. gender, class, cultural background and age. Different perspectives must also be noticed and prioritised when it comes to the ongoing work with the collections.

**Reporting back**

The result must be reported and assessed according to quantitative and qualitative performance measures. The report must allow for comparisons between different operating years and be related to the authority's collection policy.122

It is unclear how quantitative measurements were expected to be performed; for a variable like "class", complex factors interact that are not easily captured in statistics. Surprisingly, or perhaps not from a liberal policy perspective, two of the specific diversity goals that the museum should pay attention to, "class" and “age”, have disappeared from the operational objectives from 2006 onwards, whereas a more general aim of an equality and diversity perspective throughout Moderna Museet’s overall operations is introduced. From 2007, part of these overall goals includes a call for more international exchange and collaboration as well as a children’s perspective to be integrated into all of Moderna’s operations, for example by increasing the influence of the youth through participation. A

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121 Ibid., 47-50.
reflection of this can be seen recently in the establishment of Moderna Museet’s Youth Council in the spring of 2020, aimed at incorporating the ideas of people between 16 and 23 in the activities of the museum.123

Remarkably, in 2008, the subgoal for the operating area of museums and exhibitions no longer contains diversity targets or requirements for different perspectives in the collection. Solely the overall operational goals call for attention to general diversity and equality, without a focus on the composition of the collection. However, in 2009, even the general demand for diversity disappeared from the regulatory letter, and it is significantly shorter, showing an increasing institutional autonomy for the museum with fewer demands from the government, and thus less targeted or formalised attention to diversity issues. Focusing on gender and cultural diversity appears to no longer be a governmental guideline.

In 2012, attention is drawn to a regional perspective and its effects on the country of Sweden, and the children’s perspective is further developed, but from 2015 onwards, these specific goals fall away too.124 Only the demand for reaching visitors with disabilities remains, and a general goal of making art and culture accessible throughout the country. In 2021, the letter states that the museum must report on its investment in state acquisitions aimed to support Swedish art life during the corona crisis.125 The result of this task is reflected in the campaign Swedish Acquisitions 2021. Despite the tendency of the government to set fewer targets for the collection, it is notable that a relatively comprehensive mission is formulated in 2023 demanding the museum to expand its audience target groups and reach new visitors. Linked to this are two specific dates for the museum to report on the effects of its work, in 2024 and 2025. In this paragraph, it is stated that a museum must contribute to society and its development by promoting knowledge, cultural experiences and free opinion formation.126 Exhibitions and other public activities at a museum are seen as an inalienable part of a living and accessible cultural life.

The trend in the 2000s indicates a relative decline in explicit objectives set by the state, prompting speculation about a greater degree of institutional autonomy granted to

https://www.modernamuseet.se/stockholm/sv/aktiviteter/ungdomsradet/.
125 “Regleringsbrev för budgetåret 2021 avseende Moderna Museet”, Ekonomistyrningsverket (ESV).
126 “Regleringsbrev för budgetåret 2023 avseende Moderna Museet”, Ekonomistyrningsverket (ESV).
the museum since then. From a bird’s eye view of these cultural policy developments, the focus on diversity within the collection seems to have shifted to objectives around accessibility for different types of visitors, such as children, people with disabilities or ‘new target groups’. Considering Cuyle’s theory around ADEI, a few conclusions can be drawn. Reading Moderna’s steps in the process of access, diversity, equity and inclusion, the museum has taken a step backwards on the aforementioned ladder in its institutional policy, perhaps to reflect on the existing barriers and thresholds that offer opportunities in the cultural landscape of Sweden. The previous focus on diversity now seems to be giving way to a commitment to an egalitarian access to the museum in general.

As discussed, newly acquired works enter Moderna’s collection in various ways, leading to different working methods. The museum makes a distinction between works that are purchased by or donated to the institution, although they are assessed through an equal selection procedure. That is why, in the context of acquisition strategies, it seems relevant to explore the relationship between the number of purchased works that enter the museum against the number of donated works throughout the years. The tables, diagrams, and graphs included in this thesis are intended to provide visual support to the analysis of Moderna’s acquisition policy. Any static conclusions following the visual presentation of the data are to be drawn with caution. The art registrations, editing, and operations of the database are based on human efforts, and as such, not all artworks may be accurately represented or registered in the database. The data for Figure 2 was collected from the annual reports, and other graphs and figures by counting categories in the database. The reliability of the data can thus be assumed due to the systematic method implemented to handle TMS, which will be elaborated on further in the following section.

Figure 2 shows the total number of independently registered acquisitions by the museum; a distinction is made between donations and purchases. An important side note is that individual sketches are each registered separately, such as those by Vera Nilsson, with whom the museum has maintained a strong maintenance relationship over the years. The chart reflects the policy that additional works by artists already represented by the museum are continually purchased, as is also the case for Siri Derkert, Lena Cronqvist, Törsten Renqvist and Öyvind Fahlström, to name a few.127 What can also be examined from the numbers are the effects, in terms of numbers, of the museum’s major acquisition campaigns on the collection over the past 20 years: The Second Museum of Our Wishes in 2007, A Larger World (2010-2018) and the Swedish Acquisitions 2021, all three with a different focus point, intended to restore, transform or change the gender balance, the proportion of non-Western art and the balance in Swedish purchases, respectively. The parameters that the museum considers important, according to these campaigns, appear to be gender and nationality in particular.

Figure 1. Total Amount of Acquisitions (Donations and Purchases) at Moderna Museet | 2000 – 2022.
Figure 1 shows how and which donations have considerably contributed to the total number of acquisitions over time, although the donation-to-purchase proportion is not that simple to determine. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that large collections of drawings or photographs are each counted as separate objects in the annual reports. Additionally, there does not seem to be a general trend in the number of donations over the years; it is rather arbitrary or incidental when donations take place. In this regard, the donation of former director Pontus Hultén’s private collection in 2005 (shown in the chart in 2006), helped expand the international collection in particular. His private collection consisted of almost only male artists, which I will discuss in more detail in the next paragraph. Another noticeable observation concerns the purchases. Years with large purchase events seem to be occasional, but apart from those, such as the Second Museum of Our Wishes, a downward trend in purchases emerges between the years 2002 and 2012. Around 2012, purchases suddenly shot up again, perhaps related to the acquisition campaign of A Larger World (2010-2018), for which several purchases were made throughout the decade. The museum writes about this campaign in its 2018 annual report:

In the Modern Museum’s effort to open itself to a larger world, beyond the Western modernist tradition, the museum has received funds from private individuals to acquire, among others, Dayanita Singh, Atsuko Tanaka, Lygia Clark and Walid Raad with roots in India, Japan, Brazil and Lebanon respectively.129

Comparing the effects of the other acquisition campaigns, the Swedish Acquisitions 2021 stands out with a greater numeral impact on the collection than The Second Museum of Our Wishes in 2007. Redressing the gender balance through the latter event can therefore perhaps be seen more as a performative act, focusing on a few established female artists such as Louise Bourgeois and Judy Chicago. Through a performative focus on ‘women artists’ – where the action brings about a direct change in social reality, the status quo or

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128 This graph has been compiled based on information from Moderna Museet’s annual reports between the years 2004 to 2022, and by examining the outliers in the database. The numbers before the year 2004 were obtained by Gustavsson (see “Money, Politics and the Public”) from the annual reports by Statens Konstmuseum (SKM), the former museum authority between 1976–1999 that included the National Museum, the Modern Museum and the East Asian Museum.

the status of the subject—, the focus on societal criticism about the male-dominated canon in art history can be shifted to a pursuit of emancipation and equality aimed at the future.

4.1. Measuring the Gender Distribution in Moderna Museet’s Acquisitions

This section explains how representation, a specific aspect of diversity, can be measured quantitatively, in this case, the museum’s goal of redressing the gender balance in all acquisitions. As mentioned, the museum database was used containing mainly binary divisions, whereby a distinction is made between the dependent variable of male/female-registered artists and the independent variables of the year and method of acquisition (donations versus purchases) and the geographical background of the artist (Swedish versus non-Swedish), in line with the parameters that the museum uses for its acquisition policy. What impact does a factor such as gender have on an artist’s chance of being acquired by Moderna Museet? Based on the null hypothesis, no correlation was expected between the artist’s gender and place of residence/birth (Swedish or non-Swedish), nor between the artist’s gender and method of acquisition (gift or purchase), nor between the method of acquisition and the artist’s place of residence/birth.

As this chapter is concerned with a quantitative analysis, an additional methodological reflection seems appropriate. Cultural scholars have become reluctant to explore the field of cultural analytics, ever since the emergence of gender critical and feminist theories. This hesitance becomes apparent when conclusions are drawn in terms of the usually biologically determined categories “male” and “female”. Queer theory demonstrates that the use of a biologistic binary to speak of gender is a disciplinary act in itself and reinforces the naturalisation of a culturally constructed opposition. For instance, Butler emphasises that gender is not simply the cultural inscription of meaning on a predefined body, but in fact, the very apparatus of production through which the sexes themselves are established. The biological binary “M/F” therefore is more of a discursive framework, rather than a pre-existing fact, and datasets using this variable have no apparent pre-existence apart from their parameterisation.130

Nevertheless, a restraint in deploying “M/F” categories would not solve the issue, because the very qualitative knowledge that gender is a historicisable product offers

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opportunities to interpret quantitative data on binary categories with nuance. Factors contributing to gender as a category in the making can be explored, pointing to the insight that statistical results in cultural analyses are not self-evident, but require critical reflection on the parameters selected. Indeed, data in cultural or social sciences is not objective, but a product of human parameters and researcher’s decisions.

The selection of categories, including “M/F”, is not neutral and affects the results of data analysis, requiring evaluation of conceptions of gender in cultural analytics, such as the meaning of significant differences in that regard. Taking into account cultural factors is essential when interpreting the following quantitative data in this chapter. Numbers have to be *read* and interpreted; they are not static. In doing so, the outcomes of numerical processes are made dynamic, and put into perspective and context. As a result, this quantitative analysis, ultimately, offers more insights into the database, registration practices, the museum and collection system itself and its disciplinary foundations, than into the actual works or artists under study. Similarly, another risk lurks in applying data analytics to the database: quantitative analysis may reinforce the marginalisation of certain social identities because they do not fit within the parameters.

To generate the lists of data, ‘advanced queries’ were used in the database TMS. Within the field group of constituents or subjects, various fields of information can be selected regarding catalogued artworks, such as classification, exhibition history, curatorial remarks, credit line of culture, nationality and gender of the artist. Then, the relation to the constituent should be defined using the parameters ‘equal to’, ‘not equal to’, ‘less than’, ‘greater than’ or ‘contains words’. An example of a generated list including all the parameters M/F, donation/purchase, year and Swedish/non-Swedish is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field name</th>
<th>Relation</th>
<th>Field value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credit Line</td>
<td>Contains</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituent Type</td>
<td>Equal to</td>
<td>Konstnär</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationality</td>
<td>Not equal to</td>
<td>Sverige</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term (Attributes</td>
<td>Equal to</td>
<td>Kvinna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituent Xrefs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Line</td>
<td>Contains</td>
<td>Donation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For each year from 2000 onwards, lists of artworks were generated with every possible combination of parameters. After this, I counted every donated artist in each year, for which the following counting rules applied:

- If multiple artists contributed to one artwork, then one count for each gender represented (to avoid false overrepresentations);
- If multiple artworks are acquired by one artist, then one count per artist;
- If one artist is both donated and purchased in one year, then one count per acquisition method.

Collecting data through TMS was not without methodological obstacles. For example, multiple corrections were made for errors in the system, such as female-identifying artists labelled as male artists, or vice versa. Besides that, non-binary artists were counted double, as the system registers them as both M/F. Blind faith in the veracity of the database would be naive, if only when considering the meaning of ‘Swedish’ in the context of nationality. Discursive oppositions of Swedish/non-Swedish do not do justice to the complex situation of immigrants and bicultural artists. According to TMS, much effort is required to ‘become Swedish’, as is evident from artists who do not fit into a specific box. Madhat Kakei, whose work was acquired in 2016, was born in Iraq, but has lived in Sweden since the 1980s, and was labelled only non-Swedish, which is different from Santiago Mostyn who lives in Sweden, but is from the USA, and was labelled both Swedish/non-Swedish. The same issue applies to Lisa Tan from the USA, Salad Hilowle (who was born in Somalia and acquired in 2021), or Meric Algün (born in Turkey and acquired in 2013). Another case is Öyvind Fahlström (1928-1976), who was born in Brazil but mainly lived in Sweden throughout his life, and is only labelled Swedish in the system.

The thought experiment to include a non-binary category for artists in the gender registration is not that speculative, as several countries worldwide indicate by legally recognizing non-binary genders in official identification documents. Amongst these are, e.g., Pakistan, New Zealand, India, Argentina, Denmark, Colombia and Canada. Sweden is absent from that list. Furthermore, other art museums worldwide acknowledge the category, such as The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. MoMA offers openly

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accessible research datasets with records representing all artists in MoMA’s collection that have been catalogued in the database; data that Moderna does not publish.¹³²

Thus, a seemingly simple database search reveals a debate about citizenship and belonging, in terms of nationality or gender. Some artists labelled as international/non-Swedish foster a strong connection to Sweden, in one way or another, that is not apparent from the quantitative data, which may reinforce a reproduction of the status quo, possibly limiting or slowing down societal change. Increased awareness that the collection database has the power to function as an actively constructing and disciplining mirror of society, a manifestation of identity politics, can likely contribute to more nuanced perspectives on artists, as is also shown from the conversations with interviewed curators.

https://github.com/MuseumofModernArt/collection
4.2. Gender Proportions per Collection and Acquisition Method | 2000 – 2022

As shown in Figure 2, the gender proportions notably differ between the Swedish and international collections of art, which demands further clarification. The Swedish collection achieves a more equal gender balance than the international collection. When considering both collecting strands, the total gender imbalance results in 36% of the artists registered as female and 64% as male in 21st century acquisitions. These percentages call for an explanation of the cause or nature of these differences and whether they should be attributed to an incidental acquisition event, such as the large donation from Pontus Hultén in 2005, or structural preference.

Figure 2. Gender Proportions in Acquisitions at Moderna Museet | 2000-2022

To analyse this hypothesis in detail, annual gender proportions were examined. The annual trends reinforce the conclusion that the Swedish and international collections differ in terms of gender distribution: almost every year, the Swedish acquisitions are slightly more equal in terms of gender than the international policy line.

The observed difference could perhaps be attributed to, for example, cultural gender norms in Sweden as compared to other countries, but it is also relevant to look at the influence of donor interests. Thus, another distinction is made, namely between purchases and donations. In the software program R, Fisher’s exact test was used to

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133 To be more precise, the gender proportion in the Swedish collection is 43/57 (female/male), which compares to a percentage of 27/73 in the international collection line.
determine a potentially significant association between gender and the method of acquisition, which was also done between the artist’s gender and the factor Swedish/non-Swedish. The significance of the $p$-value ($p < 0.05$) indicates the extent to which the observed frequency distributions show an actual difference. The lower the $p$-value, the less likely it is that the observed differences are based on chance or a contingency, but are most likely indicators of an underlying trend, or in this case, a socio-cultural, perhaps socio-economic power mechanism. Using this statistical test, several patterns can be observed regarding differences in the gender distribution between methods of acquisition.

*Figure 3. Gender Distribution (f/m) in % of Total Purchased Artists at Moderna Museet*

*Figure 4. Gender Distribution (f/m) in % of Total Donated Artists at Moderna Museet*

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134 For more information about Fisher’s exact test, see the following publication: John H. McDonald, “2.7: Fisher’s Exact Test,” in *Biological Statistics* (University of Delaware, April 24, 2022).
Comparing the gender balance between purchases and donations in *Figures 3 and 4* reveals a structural imbalance when it comes to donations; significantly more than 60% of donated artworks (often even 70%) have been made by male-registered artists each year. The years 2020 – 2022 are an exception to this pattern. Thus, an incipient development towards an equalised gender balance in donations can be observed. This is in contrast to the purchases, where a structural change towards a balanced gender policy is already clearly noticeable. This gender analysis of both acquisition methods, gifts and purchases, thus exposes a structural difference, but the magnitude of this difference varies when studying the exact numbers throughout the first twenty years of the 21st century. Most data comparisons and conclusions are based on the counts from the database using the three categories as shown in *Table 3*.

*Table 3. Total Gender Distribution of Acquired Artists per Method and Collection | 2000-2022*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Purchased Swedish Collection</th>
<th>Donated Swedish Collection</th>
<th>Purchased International Collection</th>
<th>Donated International Collection</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>309</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>1266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>281</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>705</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>1971</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over the timespan of twenty years, Moderna Museet has received significantly 2.75 times more donations of artworks created by artists registered as male (796) than art by female artists (268), when compared to the purchased works of female artists (437) and male artists (470). The data shows a difference in gender percentages between these

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135 Categorisations of ‘male’ and ‘female’ artists refer to the way that they are registered in the museum’s database. Self-determination and awareness of social constructs are crucial in gender analyses. These results and numbers may thus be more valuable for analyzing how different bodies are politicised and the shortcomings of the system, than for studying the art and artists themselves.

136 This result was calculated with Fisher’s exact test in *R*, generating a 2x2 cross-tabulation with the gender proportions for both donations and purchases to examine the association between the two categorical variables. The result contains information about the *p*-value, the alternative hypothesis, the 95% confidence interval (CI) for the odds ratio (OR), and the odds ratio estimate. The calculation outcome is as follows: \( OR = 2.76, 95\% \ CI = 2.27 \ldots 3.36, p < 2.2\times10^{-16} \) (close to zero). Based on the exceptionally small *p*-value and the confidence interval, which does not include the value 1, there appears to be a significant association between the two acquisition methods and gender. The odds ratio (\( OR = 2.76 \)), higher than one, points to the effect size and the degree of correlation between binary variables. Combined with a significant *p*-value, the OR suggests that the distribution is almost three times more likely to occur in donations when compared to purchases, thus demonstrating the effects of the difference found.
methods of acquisition, which justifies further research efforts to better identify the factors behind this difference. In summary, there is a persistent, unequal gender gap in donations, and to be more specific, works by male artists are almost three times more likely to be donated to the museum than works by female artists.

In contrast, the gender balance in purchases has been fairly equal more or less since 2006, especially concerning Swedish purchases. Upon closer examination of the more recent period of acquisitions, between 2011 and 2022, there were more purchases from female artists (237) than male artists (204), mainly due to an exceptional peak in the event of the Swedish Acquisitions 2021. To be precise, the Swedish Acquisitions 2021 can be considered a milestone in the gender history of Moderna Museet’s collection: the proportions in acquisitions have never been that high for women, and the exact numbers tell the tale. In total, approximately 71 female artists were acquired in 2021 compared to 50 male artists, good for 100 works of art by women, compared to 60 works by men. The transition phase to an equal balance from 2006 onwards and the peak in female artistry in 2021, is evident from Figure 5, showing the exact quantities of the artists purchased.

Figure 5. Total Gender Distribution of Purchased Artists per Year | 2000-2022

The exact numbers of donated works between 2000 and 2022 were made by 309 male versus 154 female artists, creating a difference in gender proportions between donations and purchases that is highly significant, although the nature of these gender gaps is evolving.\(^{137}\) Here, as mentioned, a discernible contemporary trend emerges towards an

\(^{137}\) OR = 2.33, 95% CI = 1.76 ... 3.08, \(p = 0.0003\). This \(p\)-value shows an exceptional significance, as the number is close to zero, and the odds ratio is higher than 1, pointing to a structural underlying pattern.
increase in female acquisitions, and this development is occurring significantly faster in the Swedish collection compared to the international collection. This is mainly due to the purchasing policy, although even regarding donations, the gender gap is smaller in the Swedish segment than in the international part of the collection. As the numbers indicate in Table 3 and Figure 5, more Swedish female artists were bought than male artists when looking at the total purchases in the 21st century, whereas more male than female artists were purchased for the international collection.\textsuperscript{138}

When it comes to purchases from Swedish artists, the gender balance has been equalised from 2007 onwards, but looking at donations, there is still a structural disparity. For the international segment, men have significantly twice higher odds of being acquired than women, with 688 male artists in total competing against 267 female artists. Compared to the Swedish segment, this is a significant difference, as it involves a proportion of 578 male against 438 female artists.\textsuperscript{139} Regarding non-Swedish artists, the general gender balance here is thus almost two times more unequal than in the Swedish collection, and the gap for non-Swedish donations appears to be larger in comparison with the more equally cleaved purchases.

Another difference between the Swedish and international collections is the dominant method of acquisition. With regard to that, purchasing seems to be the dominant acquisition method for Swedish acquisitions, as opposed to international acquisitions that are more often donated to the museum.\textsuperscript{140} This result can be explained by the fact that it is practically more feasible and economically advantageous for the museum to purchase geographically closer to Moderna Museet itself, saving both transport costs and time. After all, it is evident from the interviews that transport costs are sometimes higher than the actual artworks themselves. Besides that, international art might be more expensive.

All in all, considering both segments of the collection and methods of acquisition, a clear pattern emerges: male-registered artists continue to dominate art acquisitions between 2000 and 2022, especially regarding donations. However, it would be imprudent to lose sight of emerging and perhaps accelerating developments. From the late 2000s onwards, a discernible shift has gained momentum to acquire more female artistry at the

\textsuperscript{138} \textit{OR} = 0.74, 95\% \textit{CI} = 0.56 ... 0.98, \textit{p} = 0.03.
\textsuperscript{139} \textit{OR} = 1.95, 95\% \textit{CI} = 1.61 ... 2.37, \textit{p} = 0.01.
\textsuperscript{140} \textit{OR} = 0.51, 95\% \textit{CI} = 0.42 ... 0.60, \textit{p} = 0.002.
expense of male artists, a trend that especially appears in the Swedish part of the collection. Despite this tendency, the results underscore that irrespective of geographic origin, men are overrepresented compared to female artists in both facets of the acquisition policy. Notably, the donation policy leaves a heavy mark on the total gender balance of acquired artists, as men have almost three times higher chances to be donated to the museum. This particularly raises questions about curatorial decision-making regarding donation offers and the influence of donors on the policy. The international acquisition policy continues to perpetuate gender inequality in particular. While Sundberg in 2011, concluded that Swedish women artists have been the least likely to get a seat at Moderna Museet’s table, this pattern has shifted towards an increased ‘marginalisation’ of international women artists in the 2010s and early 2020s.141

141 Sundberg, "Representation and Regionalism", 368.
4.3. The International Collection in the 21st Century

The collection of Moderna Museet nowadays comprises more than 130,000 objects, including approximately 6,000 paintings, sculptures and installations, 25,000 watercolours, prints and drawings, 400 moving images, and 100,000 photographs (from the birth of photography to today). A general look at the collection website and counts in the database reveal where the emphases are in terms of geographical scope. Has anything changed since the compilation of the collection in the 1970s?

Table 4. Top Distribution of Non-Swedish Artist Geographies in Acquisitions at Moderna Museet | until 1976

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography</th>
<th>Number of Artists</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>15 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>13 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing Table 4 with Table 5, showing the distribution of the international collection in 1976 and the numbers of the 21st century, a few observations stand out. First, it appears that the Scandinavian neighbouring countries Finland, Denmark, and Norway used to be prominently present in the first museum acquisitions, but have been surpassed by the USA, the UK and Germany. Regarding German art, the museum reflects on the increase of acquisitions in the annual report of 2013, stating that a previously successful call for Nordic art has been replaced by a call for the German-speaking cultural sphere, which was intended to balance the overall American and French dominated collection. Due to developments of globalisation, the share of Scandinavian neighbours is significantly lower.

than in the pre-1976 collection. This may be the reason for the museum to invest more in Nordic art again, as shown by the adjusted acquisition policy that includes the Nordic as a whole since 2021, instead of Swedish art as a primary line of inquiry.

Furthermore, a quarter of the international collection in 2022 consists of artists from the United States, who live, were born, or mainly work there. In the collection until 1976, North American art comprised about 13% of all international art. Over the years, the proportion of North American art in the international collection has thus increased by 84.6%, a lot more than the initial share of acquisitions of North American art that Pontus Hultén worked on until the end of his term, through the New York Collection, for example.\textsuperscript{144} With the exhibition \textit{New York Collection for Stockholm} of 1973, Hultén secured several works from leading North American artists in the 1960s for the museum. The initiative proved to be Hultén's 'swan song' as director of Moderna Museet before he moved to Paris to take care of the Centre Pompidou.\textsuperscript{145} At the time, there was no interest in diversity issues or representation. It was precisely the well-known, established names, the powerful artists, that had to be acquired in order to boost the museum's reputation, name, authority and credibility. What the statistics show, in connection with this event, is that North American art has not merely remained a constant point of interest for Moderna Museet since then but its focus on the United States of America has increased significantly.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Top Distribution of Non-Swedish Artist Geographies in Acquisitions at Moderna Museet \textit{| 2000-2022}}
\begin{tabular}{ |l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Geography} & \textbf{Number of Artists} & \textbf{\% of Total} \\
\hline
United States & 205 & 24 \% \\
France & 63 & 7 \% \\
Germany & 59 & 7 \% \\
UK & 46 & 5 \% \\
Finland & 34 & 4 \% \\
Italy & 27 & 3 \% \\
Denmark & 26 & 3 \% \\
Norway & 26 & 3 \% \\
Russia & 24 & 3 \% \\
Japan & 18 & 2 \% \\
Belgium & 14 & 2 \% \\
Argentina & 13 & 2 \% \\
Swiss & 13 & 2 \% \\
Poland & 10 & 1 \% \\
Romania & 9 & 1 \% \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{144} \((11/13) \times 100 = 84.6 \%.
\textsuperscript{145} Stuart Burch, "Review of the Pontus Hultén Study Gallery," \textit{Museum Practice} 43 (2008), 18-23.
The interviews reveal that curators aspire to critically reflect on this legacy of North American art and try to expand and diversify in that regard too. For example, several perspectives by contemporary North American artists that engage with the violent history of slavery, racism and Apartheid in the United States, prove to be important to the museum, as evidenced by the acquisition of works from Kevin Beasley, and Tony Cokes, among others. In that respect, it is relevant to mention that a generation of black artists is moving beyond societal expectations of dealing with racism, countering dominant modes of representation. This group of artists is represented by the museum as evidenced by purchases from Stanley Whitney, Rashid Johnson, and more. Self-construction, identity ownership and agency for the black character, mostly through abstraction, are at the core of these artists’ practices. Their art can be read as a refusal to be the token, a resistance to deal with the common logic or expectations from the art world of a specific, mainly figurative, kind of representation.

Through its renewed collection presentation, in *Seven Rooms and a Garden*, the museum investigates multiple histories of abstraction through works by Whitney, Beasley, and Johnson, amongst others. Here, abstraction serves as a political site for imagining the world otherwise, as a mark-making gesture, exploring the physical relationship of the body with the object.146 Stanley Whitney (b. 1946, USA), an Afro-American artist whose work *Off Square* (2016) was acquired by the museum in 2016, turned to abstraction when he realised he was not a storyteller, unlike many African American artists at the time who painted figuratively to engage with their lived experiences as black artists. After travelling to Rome and Egypt in the 1990s, Whitney got inspired by grid structures and building blocks from ancient architecture. In *Off Square*, we see his method: the artist fills canvases with bold, soft rectangles of colour, applied in a breathing, geometric rhythm. With experimental jazz from Charlie Parker as his soundtrack, Whitney picks each colour intuitively, based on call-and-response. The outcome is a loose grid with fluid borders, destabilizing the rigid rules of minimalism.

Whitney’s squares are irregular, and the blue band slowly seeps into the green and red at the bottom of the canvas.147

An artist who engages in the narration of North American history through the materiality of his works is Kevin Beasley (b. 1985, USA). To create his so-called “slabs”, sculptural assemblages, such as Dawn Chorus, acquired by Moderna Museet in 2023, he places cotton balls in a metal framework before pouring resin over them in different colours, thus painting with this material. Beasley deploys cotton as a material that confronts viewers with the impact of the transatlantic slave trade and the centuries-long cultivation of the plantations through the exploitation of enslaved people, particularly in rural Virginia, his place of birth. After the resin dries, the shape of his abstract landscapes unfolds, allowing Beasley to draw with a Sharpie marker on the solidified surface. The result is a narrative told through the emotional and cultural layers of raw cotton. Exploring both the topographical and historical transformation of the land during slavery, as well as the art historical foundations of North American landscape paintings, Beasley reinvents this traditionally figurative genre.148

Through materiality or abstraction, and a self-determined mode of representation, these artists are able to subvert dominant representative practices and disciplinary frameworks, offering insights into histories or lived experiences based on research, rather than accommodating processes of marginalisation as a singular entry point of departure. Their practices point towards a change in public discourse regarding black culture that seems more prominent in the United States than in Sweden; one that explores potentialities and possibilities within black culture, rather than merely identifying it as a resistance against racial oppression.

Also notable is that the museum pushed its geographical boundaries through more acquisitions of artists from non-Western countries, such as Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Iran, Colombia, and Venezuela, amongst others.149 The museum is, in fact, aware of its Western-focused collection and aims to combat it through strategic objectives; not as fixed points but as flexible goals on the horizon. An outcome of this can be seen in the co-

organisation of a three-day conference by Moderna Museet in 2014, called Collecting Geographies. The museum writes about this project that the claims by American and European art institutions of having extensive acquisition policies for their collections need to be re-examined, questioned, and put into context, in light of the frequently differing self-understanding of non-Western institutions. The acquisition project A Larger World, for example, arose from this ambition, explained in more detail in the following section.

4.4. Acquisition Campaigns | Reconsidered
Moderna Museet pursued three major acquisition campaigns in the 21st century: The Second Museum of Our Wishes (2006–2008), A Larger World (2010–2018), and Swedish Acquisitions 2021 (2021). They each had a different objective, but the overarching aim was indeed to diversify or enrich the collection, considering gender, multiculturalism or acquiring artists with a strong connection to Sweden. As discussed, The Second Museum of Our Wishes (2006–2008), intended to restore the gender imbalance in acquisitions, as one of the first major modern art museums in the world that initiated such a curatorial initiative. However, the project had relatively few effects in quantitative terms. The 14 female artists acquired were already established names in the Western art historical canon, referring to artists such as Dorothea Tanning, Louise Bourgeois, Judy Chicago, Barbara Kruger or Carolee Schneemann.

In relation to reflections on gender and class, the project of the Swedish Acquisitions 2021 is remarkable when intentions and effects are compared to The Second Museum of Our Wishes project from 2006. On October 9, 2020, it was announced that the museum would receive a sum from the government of 25 million SEK for the acquisition of works by Swedish living artists; that is to say, artists that, regardless of nationality, practice mainly in Sweden or Sápmi, and Swedish artists who work from abroad. It was meant to boost Swedish cultural life during the pandemic. Although the objectives of this project were considerably different from The Second Museum of Our Wishes, its effects on the gender balance of the collection were more substantial, as evidenced by the 100 female artists being acquired. Furthermore, the Public Art Agency of Sweden and the art

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151 Ibid.
consultancy organisation Konstkonsulterna were involved in systemically researching potential proposals. They initiated an open invitation to the public, gallerists, practicing artists and curators for acquisition proposals, allowing a direct open call to influence the selection procedure. In this way, by expanding the committee for the selection procedure and opening up the process to non-established artists by moving beyond gallery representation, a potentially more egalitarian procedure was created. The purchased 373 works seem to stem from a diverse group of 169 artists, active in Sweden, internationally, in Sápmi, and with an age range from 27 to 91. The project resulted in two exhibitions: Swedish Acquisitions: Insights (5.2 2022 – 24.4 2022), with artists exploring bodily and mental experiences, and the exhibition Swedish Acquisitions: Matches (7.5 2022 – 14.8 2022), exploring art’s power to push boundaries.

A Larger World (2010-2018) was a project initiated by Daniel Birnbaum and Ann-Sofi Noring, superintendent and deputy museum director at Moderna Museet at the time, and was aimed at creating cultural contexts other than those that dominated the museum historically, a move beyond Paris and New York. Through this campaign too, the museum submitted a request to the government for financial support in art acquisitions that explore ‘other’ geographies than before. Here again, the museum discourse seems to instantiate a dichotomy creating a mythological framework of Us versus Them, the established West, referred to as the ‘centre’, against the non-Western ‘periphery’. The project was conceived with quite a general scope spanning 8 years, and resulted in the acquisitions of 19 works by artists that, in practice, seemed to be disconnected from each other regarding artistic practices, such as Kader Attia, Etel Adnan, Walid Raad and Meriç Algün. In addition, the museum lists exhibitions that claim to break the Western status quo. However, these were 17 divergent exhibition concepts, curated between the years 2010 and 2018. Perhaps the only exhibition that directly relates to the project is Towards A Larger World (19.3 2016 - 16.10 2016) in Malmö. The museum argued that the common

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feature of the artists included is that they bridge the gap in languages and continents, thus reflecting on a complexity increasingly characteristic of this era.156

Analysing the core and character of these acquisition campaigns, their commonality seems to be their governmental support and a certain degree of performative action for diversity goals. Creating a framework for acquisitions simultaneously instantiates and realises its intended effects, perhaps regardless of the actual acquisitions made. The acquisition frameworks produce a discourse in themselves with instant effects in the social realm, resulting in a belief that is perceived as truth. These frameworks can be compared to a performative utterance with specific reality-changing effects, creating the illusion of a stable curatorial or cultural concept.157 The actual figures and numbers of acquisitions do not necessarily correlate by default with the frameworks of diversity, gender balance, multiculturalism or a Swedish cultural identity that the museum had already created for itself in the first place. Perhaps, a common belief in the museum’s idealistic intentions, and its sense of moral responsibility, is enough for the general public to believe in the achievements of these projects, which have had divergent outputs and outcomes.

More closely looking at how performativity applies in this context, statements about these projects in policies and website texts can be read as discursive formations regarding diversity, understood as deeds of action and ritualised in a way in which they not merely describe Moderna Museet as a progressive institution, but constitute its institutional identity as such, as well as its relationship to the art world as a whole. The campaigns thus produce normative practices around the complex, perhaps untenable endeavours of being inclusive, as a museum that rests on the foundations of a modernist imperialist and exclusionary past. Yet, this analysis of acquisition campaigns as performative expressions is not simply an institutional critique, as they can also be read as effective measures towards equity, in line with the museum’s mission. In the slow process of progressive and cultural change of collections, this performative approach by Moderna Museet may accelerate on a broad level what is set in motion on a smaller scale.

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5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study was aimed at looking into the policy development and collecting strategies of Moderna Museet, from an intersectional perspective and related to the museum’s mission to diversify its collection. What is the discourse around diversity and representation in Moderna Museet’s museum collection? In what way do policies align with actual acquisitions and future aspirations? The mixed-methods approach that I conducted in this research, using both qualitative and quantitative data, proved to be fruitful in comparing policy statements with statistics and discursive, curatorial frameworks. Results from the qualitative part can be corroborated with quantitative analyses, increasing the validity of the research. In conclusion, systemic, cultural change in museums appears to be an inherently log and slow process, influenced by external factors. Moderna Museet is a modern art institution in a heteronomous and vulnerable position. Although the strive for autonomy is evident from the revised acquisition policy, its acquisitions are dependent on interests and support from both public and private third parties. Visions for the future do not always correspond with actions, outcomes, events and patterns from the past or present. In that regard, discursive formations point to a morality discourse and performative focus on diversity engagement, seemingly contingent and trying to ‘fill gaps’ in the collection, correcting what went wrong in the past as a response to a politics of recognition. Performative attention to specific acquisitions can be effective in transforming, challenging or subverting the status quo, but it can also trouble or distort the sight of what has been acquired over the years in its entirety.

The results highlight the complexities of measuring representation and diversity in both a qualitative and quantitative way, as the operationalisation of the concepts used is situational, contextual and always incomplete, as collections are in themselves. Categorisations are often inadequate to do justice to socially stratified ways of identity construction. Parameters that are relevant and necessary for keeping track of the collection diversity and multitude of perspectives are contested territory at the same time. Gender and nationality are perhaps outdated, but analyses thereof can still make visible what power structures are at play in the museum space. In addition, attempts to diversify the collection may result in consolidating hegemonic categories of difference, as acquisitions of art do not occur democratically but rather are based on individual judgments by agents in powerful positions that influence the assessment and definition
of art. An intersectional approach offers insights into these power dynamics but proves difficult to apply to quantitative analysis.

Statistical tests have shown differences in patterns concerning the distribution of gender between the Swedish and international collections of art and between methods of acquisition. The Swedish collection is more balanced than the international collection concerning gender, encompassing a proportion of 43/57 (female/male) against 27/73 respectively in the museum’s 21st century acquisitions. The question arose whether this difference is due to contingency or structural preference. Annual gender balances were examined to answer this question, taking into account distinct variables of purchases and donations. There appears to be a structural imbalance in donations, with a significant proportion of acquisitions made from artists registered as male annually. Regarding purchases, however, a structural change towards a more gender-balanced policy is noticeable. The high peak in female artistry, especially in the event of the Swedish Acquisitions 2021, indicates a trend towards purchasing increasingly more female artists.

The strive for a gender balance on the one hand and the careful assessment of donation proposals on the other hand, are at odds with the acquisition results, suggesting that this goal for acquisitions is less important concerning donated artworks. Representative balances always reflect policy-making decisions. Holistic curation is the core approach: all museum activities, purchases and exhibitions must complement and inform each other. The deliberate choice of moving from a goal-oriented and reflexive acquisition policy towards a mode of operation model is ideologically charged to accommodate current political and cultural climates. The structural imbalance in donations, however, points to the consequences and dilemmas that arise for Moderna Museet when a public art museum in the form of a state institution becomes increasingly dependent on both public and private third parties.

From the interviews, it is emphasised that curatorial agency applies to all types of acquisitions, including donations. Yet, it becomes evident that the museum’s institutional identity is anchored in dominant narratives and canonical processes from the past to such an extent that deviating from this path takes time. The consistent tradition of patronage, predetermined conditions by foundations, interests of individual collectors, and the impact of those with economic and cultural capital, contribute to a scenario in which the control over acquisitions, and thus power, may occasionally shift from the curatorial team to the art market. The free market may be a challenging field to bend to curatorial
aspirations, thus reflecting the influence of established hierarchies. Despite this conclusion, a reduction of the power struggle in the art field to the hegemony of men over women or 'Western' over 'non-Western' artists would be misleading, as nuances and other factors may play a role, such as ideological differences, including the hypothesis that the art market is more conservative as compared to the museum world which can be seen as more progressive.158

Faced with the gender differences between purchases and donations, the curators interviewed point to a curatorial responsibility to have an ongoing conversation with donors, patrons and collectors while pushing artists that the museum considers important; not merely the artists represented by galleries. These actors are influenced by art advisors and markets, functioning on a different playing field. In terms of the museum collection, however, Moderna Museet does not thoroughly engage in this, as acquired works are not on sale. Yet, it would be impossible to build an acquisition strategy focusing on diversity counting on donors only. What curators can do, as mentioned in the interviews, is introduce donors to several other artists to watch, offering alternatives to the established order.159

Future research in the field of diversity and representation, digital humanities, as well as collection and museum studies could analyse the dynamics between museums and the market logic more thoroughly. This complex relationship between curatorial practice, collectors, donors and galleries could be better explored, especially in relation to the discursive moments in the museum space such as acquisition meetings and decision-making conversations. Additionally, comparisons between the amount and types of acquisitions of historical “classics” with contemporary artworks are relevant, a perspective that was underexamined in this research. This also applies to a reflection on the factor of social class in acquisition dynamics, with regard to gallery representation for artists. Gender distribution and engagement with cultural diversity issues throughout time could be investigated more systematically and methodologically when it comes to the exhibitions at Moderna Museet, a highly relevant and related endeavour that has not been addressed enough in this study, due to the limited research time frame. Another focus point would be measuring what types of practices are underrepresented in the collection, such as performance or olfactory art forms.

158 See also Langfeld’s conclusion in “The Canon in Art History”, 17.
159 Interviews with curators at Moderna Museet, November – December, 2023.
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Interviews with curators at Moderna Museet, November – December, 2023.160

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- Fredrik Liew, Head of the Department and Chief Curator, was interviewed on November 6, 2023.
- Hendrik Folkerts, Curator of International Contemporary Art since 1989 and Head of Exhibitions, was interviewed on October 31, 2023.

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160 Due to ethical considerations, a full transcription of these interviews as an appendix is excluded from this thesis. For complete transcripts, please contact the author.
Jo Widoff, Curator of International Art until 1989 and Head of Collections, was interviewed on December 4, 2023.


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