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Talking Back to Art Museum Practices

Seeing Public Art Museums in Norway Through the Lens of Institutional Critique, Feminism and Decoloniality

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**MUSEAT
EAI LEAT
NEUTRÁLAT**



**MUSEUMS
ARE NOT
NEUTRAL**

Abstract

The aim of this dissertation is to question status quo art museum practices and the predisposition to regard state-funded art museums in Norway as neutral institutions. Neutrality is notoriously difficult to define, one possible definition could be “the state of not supporting or helping either side in a conflict, disagreement, etc.; impartiality.”¹ The question surrounding neutrality in museums is a complex one. Museum neutrality is the implicit assertion that museums cannot risk doing anything that might alienate government and private funders (Janes and Sandell 2019, 8). Can art museums be impartial with regard to the political and social issues governing our society? The public relies upon art museums to construct content and inform. Hence art museum professionals likewise tend to maintain the status quo and function within prevailing uncontroversial frameworks. This presents a challenge in today’s world in which there is increased reliance on corporations and private donors whose stakeholders are grounded in marketplace ideology.

Three articles and a cover article (what’s known as “*kappa*” in Norwegian) comprise the dissertation and chronicle patterns in art museum practices within a 21-year time span from 2002 to 2023. These include collections, curatorial, education (learning-and-engagement), funding and sponsorship, and marketing and public relations. To demonstrate some of the challenges facing today’s art museums I research case studies of Norway’s public state-funded art institutions: Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (Northern Norway Art Museum; NNKM) in Romsa/Tromsø and Nasjonalmuseet (The National Museum) in Oslo. A third case study of NNKM takes a different approach as it analyses the “art museum as activist” to offer a possible solution in an effort to counter the challenges presented here.

The open airing of facts in this study might suffice to incite change, specifically the decolonization of museums. As a feminist, recognizing the dilemmas and insisting on them is “staying with the trouble” (Haraway 2016). By identifying the difficulties

¹ Oxford Languages, part of Oxford University Press.

facing art museums we may develop the critical language needed to foster practices shaped out of ethically informed values, for example the principles outlined in *Etiske retningslinjer for museer i Norge: Åpent, inkluderende, transparent og profesjonelt* (Ethical Guidelines for Museums in Norway: Open, Inclusive, Transparent and Professional; 2022).²

Broadly, the dissertation takes an art historical disciplinary approach. My methods include fieldwork, interviews, public discourse analysis, secondary literature review, and visual analysis. What does it take to learn how to effect change? Here I employ institutional critique, feminist standpoint theory, intersectional feminism (the “feminist killjoy”³), and decoloniality as theoretical and methodological frameworks.

The main findings in this research work are (1) with *art, gender, diversity, and representation* under the auspices of philanthropy and marketplace ideology, the art museum can guise the problematic ethical implications, including the origins of capital and potential threats to academic freedom, as progressive development; (2) institutional critique can acknowledge institutional blind spots and counter the notion of neutrality in art museum displays; and (3) the art museum as activist (through feminist intervention in the public space) can engage local communities on issues of gender justice and illuminate patriarchal ideologies.

Although my study is from a Nordic perspective the issues concerning art museums are not unique to Norway. This study will contribute to broader research with regards to the challenges facing the international museum community. Globally art museums struggle for sustainability in the ongoing process of marketization of cultural institutions in the neoliberal era.

² Document developed by ICOM Norway and the Norwegian Museums Association (NMF), ICOM Norway’s website <http://norski.com.no/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Retningslinjer-2022.pdf>. Accessed 1 August 2022.

³ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (2010) and *Living a Feminist Life* (2017).

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Abbreviations

ICOM	International Council of Museums
NM	Nasjonalmuseet (The National Museum)
NNKM	Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (Northern Norway Art Museum)
NFR	Norges forskningsråd (The Research Council of Norway)
NMF	Norges museumsforbund (The Norwegian Museums Association)

1 Introduction

This dissertation sets out to “see” in art museum practices and question the predisposition to regard art museums in Norway as neutral institutions. With seeing I imply more than simply opening one’s eyes and looking, I mean seeing from different perspectives—that is, understanding systems of power and hierarchical structures. By systems of power, I mean the beliefs, practices, and cultural norms on which institutions are encoded in, for example, race, gender, and class. Here, I contend that museums practitioners cannot or are unwilling to see the structural challenges in their institutions of employment. The question surrounding neutrality in museums is a complex one. The myth of “museum neutrality” is the implicit assertion that museums cannot risk doing anything that might alienate government and private funders (Janes and Sandell 2019, 8). This presents a challenge in today’s world in which there is increased reliance on corporations and private donors whose stakeholders are grounded in marketplace ideology. Can art museums be impartial with regard to the political and social issues governing our society? How might critical inquiry bring about institutional change in practices at public art museums in Norway?

To investigate these issues I employ institutional critique, feminist standpoint theory, intersectional feminism, and decoloniality as theoretical and methodological frameworks. Focusing on two state-funded art museums in Norway: Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (Northern Norway Art Museum; hereafter NNKM) and Nasjonalmuseet (The National Museum; hereafter NM) and chronicling patterns in their practices within a 21-year time span from 2002 to 2023, I conduct discourse analysis, fieldwork, interviews, public debate analysis, secondary literature review, and visual analysis. My evidence shows that NNKM and NM need to “open up” in several areas, among others: academic research, co-creation with local communities, inclusivity, transparency, and revitalization.

Three case studies and this cover article (called “*kappa*” in Norwegian) comprise the dissertation. The three articles address different sides of the political conditions of working with and in art museums in Norway today and examine the potential of

critical curatorial strategies to question “business-as-usual” practices. I apply critical inquiry to examine privilege and ways of being in curatorial practices. Perhaps most importantly my research involves understanding how the present is shaped by coloniality and highlights the roots of art museums as products and projects of colonialism. Within this context, recognizing the dilemmas and insisting on them is “staying with the trouble” (Haraway 2016).

Although my study is from a Nordic perspective the issues and challenges concerning art museums are not unique to Norway. On a global level art museums struggle for sustainability in the ongoing process of marketization of cultural institutions in the neoliberal era. Further, this dissertation turns on the finding of the importance of bringing critical contextual frameworks into the art museum regarding conditions for communication and marketing approaches, curatorial strategies, funding and sponsorship schemes, and educational programs.

1.1 Background

What constitutes a state-funded art museum in Norway today? What is its role and function in society? For example, one might identify art institutions as monumental buildings that preserve cultural treasures. Or perhaps one may think of the programming activities offered, or the art museum shops, restaurants, and cafés.

Within this context numerous questions come to mind. First, to situate the reader, I turn to the new museum definition, adopted on 24 August 2022 by the International Council of Museums (hereafter ICOM). While I discuss the ICOM museum definition in further detail in section 2, to carve out an understanding of what art museums are and do, here I extract a few keywords and phrases from the definition—“accessible and inclusive,” “conserves,” “researches,” “for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing,” “in the service of society,” “open to the public,” “operate and communicate ethically,” and “foster diversity and sustainability.”⁴ How do art museums in Norway fulfill these areas and tasks? According to ICOM, the new

⁴ ICOM’s website <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>. Accessed 5 January 2023.

museum definition is a way forward.⁵ However, the task of fostering “diversity and sustainability” might introduce a contradiction, and thus a potential challenge. On the one hand, art museums conserve, and on the other, are to be open to dialog and change. Moreover, how do public art museums operate inclusively? How do they uphold ethical principles? When challenged within their own fields of competence how do art institutions respond and how are they proactive when confronted with criticism? Such questions have no simple answers yet are important to consider. Later in my investigation I will add some specific topics to my discussion of the questions above.

My objective is to show that a “turn” is urgent and necessary in art museums in Norway. To investigate art museum practices, I point to some commonly articulated metaphors of the museum: shrine, market-driven industry, colonizing space, and post-museum (Marstine 2006, 8). As a shrine, the museum safeguards and conserves its objects and depends on its institutional authority. Here the director/curator is a connoisseur and might refer to the museum objects as “treasures” that possess aesthetic value. In addition, learning-and-engagement is little interested in two-way dialogic communication with the audience (10). Market-driven museums adopt business models to generate adequate revenues and often rely on corporate sponsorship to undergo extensive building campaigns and host temporary exhibitions called “blockbusters” to attract visitors (12). While a colonizing space interprets museum objects from a Eurocentric perspective to construct the “other” and justify the “self” (14). Of these four models of the museum the “post-museum” is the most aligned with feminist and decolonizing approaches. The museum scholar Eilean Hooper-Greenhill introduced the term “post-museum” to suggest an institution that reinvented itself; a museum that acknowledges the politics of representation and engages in critical inquiry (Marstine 2006, 19). With the politics of representation, I refer to the struggle over the meaning of images and depictions of a specific culture. Within this context museums construct representations of culture. Hooper-Greenhill

⁵ ICOM’s website <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>. Accessed 5 January 2023.

notes that “[v]isual culture within the museum is a technology of power. This power can be used to further democratic possibilities, or it can be used to uphold exclusionary values. Once this is acknowledged ... the museum is understood as a form of cultural politics” (162). The post-museum emphasizes theory and dialogue over objects, seeking to share power with the communities it serves. Moreover, it does not regard its visitors as passive consumers. Indeed, the models outlined here are not mutually exclusive, and most museums overlap the different paradigms, which raises interesting questions transferrable to public art museums in Norway.

These complex art institutions are characterized by contradictory ideologies and objectives; on the one hand they appear settler-colonial, and (conceivably) neo-liberal, while on the other hand, (possibly) decolonizing and socially engaged, “neutral,” yet intrinsically political. Here I enclose the word “neutral” in quotation marks to indicate the difficulty to define its meaning within the context of my study. Neutrality appears to manifest itself in the museum landscape as something implied and unspoken, making it challenging to use in a precise manner. One understanding of neutrality might be “not being engaged, or decided, on either side of an issue” (Evans et al. 2020, 19). By not claiming to take a position, an art museum is passively taking one—it means supporting the status quo (Steinhauer 2018). I am interested in the contradictory qualities of art museums and the position they occupy between the arts, the state, the private sector, and the market economy. While entangled in a complex system, art museums have the potential, and I argue the obligation, as social institutions with moral agency to respond to relevant civic issues. My hypothesis is that state-funded art museums in Norway today do not realize their potential as social actors. One of my objectives is to demonstrate that the art museum is a contested site, a term used in museology to describe the way museums are perceived as neutral, uncontested spaces, when in fact they have never been neutral. On the contrary, they are embedded within political, social, economic ideological networks of the nation, and as such are spaces of struggle and negotiation. I aim to present ways for taking advantage of this conclusion in activist as well as dialogic projects that are needed for art museums, as social institutions to grow more relevant to more communities.

Art museum professionals tend to do things according to non-verbalized customs. What the museum naturalizes as professional practice reflects the value system of the institution. In Norway, public sector employees in art museums should have a written description of their position, however, without a solid background in museological discourses practitioners are accustomed to conducting their work without a *modus operandi* for reflexive self-critical examination. This presents a challenge. Something done repeatedly in art museum practice becomes normalized. At some point, maybe even subconsciously, the things we do become perceived as “natural” or “business-as-usual.” In addition, there are other potential internal challenges. The museum scholar-practitioner, Robert R. Janes, points out that in a number of larger museums, the director has far too much authority and responsibility that is infrequently, if ever, challenged or shared with staff (2020, 593). With the director on top of the organizational chart, communication is top-down and there is fearful adherence among staff to follow orders and not raise concerns or ask questions. Such a work environment creates behavior that has been identified as “functional stupidity,” that is, museum practitioners are encouraged to emphasize positive interpretations of events, leading to “self-reinforcing stupidity” (593). If museum professionals, especially those in positions of leadership, are unwilling to remove the fear of criticism and see vulnerability as an asset in their work—to discuss the problems and mistakes openly and honestly—they will perhaps remain unable to address institutional blind spots and work toward future solutions. In a United Kingdom context, scholar Katherine R. Groninger (2016), in her research on ethical standards and fiscal transparency in museums, shows that numerous museum professionals do not understand terminology like governance, best practice, or conflict of interest; and particularly those employed in small museums do not understand or recognize the applicability of codes, policies, and ethics to the museum. Groninger’s findings—based on written surveys and structured interviews from museum professionals—also suggest that many individuals working as museum administrators or board members know little about their accountability duties (2011, 10). If museum practitioners cannot see the structural and systemic problems that exist, they cannot begin to fix them. Furthermore, Groninger posits that museum professionalization, that is, codes of ethics, conflict of interest

management, and agreed-upon standards within the museum sector has received little attention from researchers (2016).

With feminist standpoint theory (FST)—which I discuss in section 3.2—as a framework, I situate myself in this dissertation making my positionality clear to the reader. I am a curator at NNKM and when I started my career there in 2008, I had a master’s in art history from UiT The Arctic University of Norway, yet no educational background in museology or curatorial practice.⁶ Such is the case for many art museum curators in Norway. Museum professionals, perhaps in contrast to academics who have a theoretical focus, are committed to practical work, and create knowledge through practice. In the scope of this dissertation, using active language helps me to think through ways of being and becoming an art museum curator. I point to this by emphasizing verbs instead of nouns—for instance, decolonizing, hacking, seeing, talking back, undoing, unhighlighting, and untangling. The concept of “talking back” in the title of this dissertation is inspired by Black feminist scholar, bell hooks, who first introduced the term in her 1986–1987 article, “Talking Back.”⁷ Through describing her own childhood in which she was punished for talking back, or “speaking as an equal to an authority figure” she provides language to understand speaking truth to power (123). hooks asserts that racism, sexism, and class exploitation are structures of domination that work in ways to suppress and silence groups and individuals; and she explains that in situations of domination, the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and the dominated do not speak their truths or question authority because of the fear of punishment (hooks 1989, 6–8). Thus, she emphasizes

⁶ The only MA-program in museology in Norway is located at the University of Oslo (UiO), at the Department for Culture Studies and Oriental Languages (IKOS). UiO’s website <https://www.hf.uio.no/ikos/english/research/center/museum-studies/>. Accessed 2 January 2023. UiO and the University of Bergen offer MA-programs in curatorial practice. UiO’s website <https://www.uio.no/studier/program/kunsthistorie-master/studieretninger/kuratering/index.html>; and UiB’s website <https://www.uib.no/en/studies/KURATOR>. Accessed 2 January 2023.

⁷ In 1989 bell hooks (née Gloria Jean Watkins) published the book *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*.

the importance that dominated groups and individuals stand their ground and speak up—to *talk back* to authority and the status quo.⁸ hooks notes that

true speaking [talking back] is not solely an expression of creative power, it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges the politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such it is a courageous act; as such it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced (1986–87, 126).

For me, the idea of talking back is an approach to question status quo art museum practices, grounded in the idea of self-critical and reflective thought where I analyze the material in my study from multiple perspectives. My objective is to see my social and professional location as a resource and use this position in a way that another doctoral student from the discipline of art history may not. My insider-outsider position potentially bestows epistemic advantage. Here is some other information about my positionality: I write as an “outsider,” a non-Indigenous woman and immigrant to Sápmi/Norway. Also, I am a settler born and raised in Alaska. Since 2018 I have served as board member at ICOM Norway, the Norwegian National Committee of ICOM. Moreover, my PhD journey is an ongoing project of becoming a feminist indebted to the writings of other intersectional feminists—especially Sara Ahmed, a woman of color and scholar of feminist theory.

In the span of my employment at NNKM I worked with directors Knut Ljøgodt (2008–2016), Jérémie McGowan (2016–2020), and Katya García-Antón (August 2022–), and various trustees, in addition to different Norwegian coalition governments, Arbeiderpartiet (the Labour Party; social democratic, led by Jens Stoltenberg; 2005–2013), Høyre (the Conservative Party, led by Erna Solberg; 2013–2021), and Arbeiderpartiet led by Jonas Gahr Støre (October 2021–). What characterizes the eras of government during the time period 2008 to 2023? The state expects museums to utilize their potential to bring in their own income. While

⁸ bell hooks wrote her name in lowercase because she wanted to focus the substance of her work rather than herself, *The Sandspur* 112 (17): 1 <https://issuu.com/thesandspur/docs/112-17>. Accessed 9 August 2022.

Norway's right-wing government Høyre was in power they eagerly encouraged museums to generate their own revenue and sponsorship (Meld. St. 23. 2020–2021, 113). Indeed, self-generated income is one of six target areas in NM's 2020–2025 strategy plan.⁹ During this period the museum aims to increase self-earnings by being an attractive and professional partner. Yet at what price? In their struggle for sustainability, what are the non-negotiable values of public art institutions? How, when, and where to draw the line? These are some of the ethical considerations that art museums must address.

Three individual studies and this cover article (what's known as "*kappa*" in Norwegian) comprise the dissertation. The cover article comprises five parts: 1) this introduction where I situate my work in relation to the research field; sections 2) and 3) comprise a literature review and a discussion on the main theories and methods; 4) summaries of the three articles; and 5) a conclusion that assesses the findings in my investigation. Each case study considers the public art museum in situations of vulnerability and employs an open-airing-of-fact about the institution and its practices to acknowledge institutional blind spots. Perhaps it can be understood as a type of call-out approach, where mistakes are declared and discussed openly (Shaked 2020). From a Nordic perspective, the articles contribute to developing the critical language needed for working towards decolonizing the art museum. Here in the cover article I abbreviate the case study titles to: **Article 1:** "The Feminist Killjoy Untangles Philanthropy;" **Article 2:** "Unhighlighting *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*;" and **Article 3:** "Hacking from the Inside."

What ties the articles in this dissertation together? During Jérémie McGowan's tenure as museum director, NNKM operated with the core values *open*, *relevant*, and *co-creative*, with the target of all museum practices to reflect these values. The resultant trajectory shift at NNKM—from what previously could be described as a "shrine" (Marstine 2006, 9–11) or "treasure-based" (Heumann Gurian 2002, 79) metaphor of the museum—is perhaps best illustrated by the museum performance *There Is No*

⁹ NM's website <https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/om-nasjonalmuseet/styret-organisasjon-og-ansatte/nasjonalmuseets-strategi-2020-2025/>. Accessed 30 May 2022.

Sámi Dáiddamusea^x (SDMX) or Sámi Art Museum^x, as translated from North Sámi, an undertaking described in scholarship as a decolonial project co-authored and co-produced in 2017 by NNKM and RiddoDuottarMuseat (RDM) in Kárášjohka/Karasjok (Danbolt 2018; McGowan 2018a, 2018b; Shoenberger 2019; Rugeldal 2020, 2021; Caufield 2021; McGowan and Olli 2022).¹⁰ Some other changes, what one might identify as decolonizing strategies included: the incorporation of North Sámi (Indigenous language) into NNKM’s communication platforms, diversification of museum staff, and new communication strategies with a more inclusive language, in contrast to the idea that the institution speaks with a voice that attempts to remain neutral.¹¹ SDMX was an important milestone for NNKM and marked a clear before and after in the trajectory of the institution.

Starting in 2017, NNKM transitioned from a more conventional hierarchical leadership model to a flatter structure aligned with a new organizational chart implemented in 2018 (**Figure 1**).¹² What is the difference between a top-down model

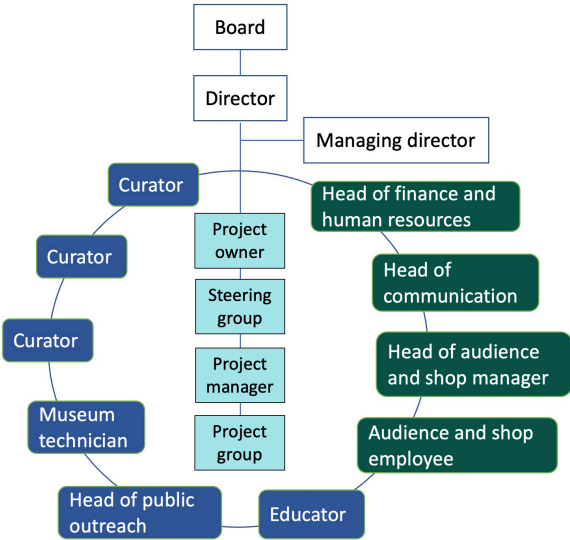


Figure 1. NNKM’s organizational chart, implemented in 2018.

¹⁰ RDM is a Sámi museum collective that consists of four Sámi museums (and the Sámi art collection) in West-Finmark. The “x” footnote is a disclaimer that points out that SDMX is a museum performance (partly a fiction).

¹¹ For example, trilingual signage throughout the museum building, Norwegian, North Sámi, and English, regardless of subject matter.

¹² This was NNKM’s first formalized organizational chart.

that is more typical of art museums than a flatter organizational structure? In the hierarchical type of organization, staff is divided into different departments and the chain of command goes from the top down. Specifically, the museum features a group of roughly six to eight departments, generally including administration, curatorial, collection management, education, marketing, communication, and public relations. The board of trustees is at the top, followed by the director, then the curatorial department, followed by the other departments, and finally the audience at the bottom. The lone director who is responsible for programming and determines the future destination of the museum, makes most of the major decisions regarding exhibition programming. In this pyramidal structure the museum staff—not the ones in authority—are subordinates to the director, not colleagues (Janes 2009, 63). With the curatorial vision already firmly in place, the other departments “learn about” the new exhibition and thereafter execute the plan. Here, there is little room for honest reaction, feedback, and collaborative influence over the exhibition concept, content, and design. In contrast, within a flatter structure, staff members (in temporarily organized teams), work in a collaborative manner from the outset. One resource NNKM utilized was NM’s *Verktøykassa* (Toolkit), a method for exhibition concept development through three phrases: the idea, the idea evaluation, and the exhibition development (Uldall 2016). This method challenged the conventional notion of the role of curators as one of the highest positions in the art museum hierarchy. Instead, museum employees from different disciplines work together from the project’s conception and there is an acknowledgement that all members of the team have different knowledges, skills, ideas, and perspectives to contribute. I argue that this narrows the idea of the top-down decision-making style and fosters greater ownership and purpose among staff members. While museum leadership ultimately makes the final decisions, in a flatter model staff members are invited to participate in major decision-making processes, such as strategic planning. In 2017 when NNKM shifted to a collaborative, project-based team structure, we changed the way we spoke about our work, focusing on the importance of each role and position in museum practice where all departments play equal roles of importance. What is noteworthy is that not all staff

members were on board with the institutional changes at NNKM, especially those in curatorial positions.

bell hooks's work on critical pedagogy which emerges from anticolonial, and feminist perspectives, provides a useful conceptualization for identifying some of the underlying challenges of institutional change in art museums. In her book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (1994, 140–141) hooks draws attention to professors who are progressive in their politics and willing to change their curriculum but refuse to change the nature of their pedagogical practices; hence they perpetuate the very hierarchies and biases they are critiquing. hooks focuses critical attention to how they teach and suggests that while many educators might see themselves as liberal, progressive, and embrace new ways of thinking, they remain authoritative in their ways of practicing teaching as their more conservative colleagues (140). While they supplement their curriculum with radical texts, they instruct through conservative, traditional educational practices—in a manner that repeats the tradition of power of the status quo (142). For hooks, there is no gap between theory and practice, that is, manners in practices exemplify theory (61). Accordingly, one can transfer hooks's scholarship to the context of art museums. The director might claim to take the art museum in a more progressive direction and for example incorporate new content to the already-existing canon by exhibiting and promoting artists who have been marginalized. Nonetheless, however radical the content might be, if the director does not transgress in their practices, they will not effect institutional change. As such their actions can be understood as performative—cosmetic cover-up that distracts attention from the underlying structures of power (Phillips 2011, 156–157)—and might be characterized as “settler moves to innocence”¹³ which I will return to in section 3. hooks describes such work as a “kind of narcissistic, self-indulgent practice that most seeks to create a gap between theory and practice so as to perpetuate class elitism” (64). Furthermore, hooks notes that

[o]ften individuals who employ certain terms freely—terms like ‘theory’ or ‘feminism’—are not necessarily practitioners whose habits of being and living most embody the action...Indeed, the privileged act of naming often affords

¹³ Tuck and Yang 2012, 9–28.

those in power access to modes of communication and enables them to project an interpretation, a definition, a description of their work and actions, that may not be accurate, that may obscure what is really taking place (62).

hooks asserts that any theory that cannot be shared in everyday conversation cannot be used to educate the public (64). Here she reminds us of the importance of language and the power it holds.

My way of using language(s) in this dissertation connects to processes of decolonizing. I engage North Sámi and Norwegian across the five sections of the cover article. Norwegian is the main official language in Norway, with two official written forms, Bokmål (the dominant of the two standards) and Nynorsk. The Sámi languages are spoken in Sápmi (Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia).¹⁴ Depending on the nature and terms of division, there are eleven Sámi languages (nine of which are living), each similar in structure and vocabulary but distinct from one another.¹⁵ Within Norway three languages are officially recognized: North Sámi, Lule Sámi, and South Sámi.¹⁶ North Sámi is the dominant language and spoken by around 90% of Sámi language speakers. After many years of assimilation politics, UNESCO regards all the Sámi languages as endangered.¹⁷ In Norway, *Fornorskning* (Norwegianization), an official state policy to assimilate the Sámi and the Kven, deliberately worked against these peoples' languages, cultures, and social structures from 1851 up to roughly 1980 (Nergård 2019; Hansen and Olsen 2022).¹⁸ As a means to suppress and erase Sámi ways of life and being, the policy conducted

¹⁴ See for instance, Giellatekno's (the centre for Saami language technology at UiT) website <https://giellatekno.uit.no/smilang.eng.html>.

¹⁵ South, Ume, Pite, Lule, North, Kemi, Inari, Skolt, Akkala, Kildin, Ter.

¹⁶ The Government of Norway's website <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/urfolk-og-minoriteter/samepolitikk/samiske-sprak/fakta-om-samiske-sprak/id633131/>. Accessed 8 June 2022.

¹⁷ Ságstallamin's website <https://site.uit.no/sagastallamin/the-sami-languages/>. Accessed 10 March 2022.

¹⁸ Kven is the Norwegian name for the Finnish settlers in Sápmi/Norway and their descendants. Originally, they came from the region around the Gulf of Bothnia. They began to settle in Finnmark in the Late Middle Ages. In 1851, the Norwegian Parliament established *Finnfondet* (the Lapp Fund), which was a government budget intended to support Norwegianization efforts in Sámi and Kven regions (Nergård 2019, 115).

various anti-Indigenous strategies ranging from schooling (including residential schools), land seizure, cartography, and discriminatory measures, amongst others. In schools, the dominant Norwegian language was mandatory (Minde 2005, 7). Today *giellaláskahttin* (language revitalization) efforts are taking place across national borders in Sápmi. As a gesture of *giellaláskahttin* I write place names in North Sámi followed by the Norwegian, for example Romsa/Tromsø. This contrasts with the conventional ordering of the Norwegian placed first. Unless otherwise noted, in each article I have translated Norwegian sources to English. In **Article 2**: “Unhighlighting *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*,” I translated sources in Swedish and French to English.

1.2 Research Questions

Here in the cover article I want to concentrate on four research questions, focusing foremost on the situation in Norway, but with comparisons and examples from elsewhere: 1) How can institutional critique, feminism, and decoloniality help us to “see” challenges of two kinds: a) within art museums, and b) as part of cultural politics; 2) How can institutional critique serve as a theoretical basis for the reshaping of the art museum; 3) How can the theorization of decoloniality help us understand the practices of two Norwegian art museums, NNKM and NM; and 4) How can feminism and feminist standpoint theory contribute to critical discourses of the art museum? These research questions carry relevance here as well as in my articles.

My methodology in the cover article centers a few central concepts and asks how they contribute to the discussion on the subjects in my case studies. To help bring readers closer to the internal workings of the public art museums in focus—NNKM and NM—I expand on the main concepts mostly through examples from recent times. The selection of these specific art institutions is not incidental. NNKM and NM share similarities as state-funded foundations. NM was established in 1837 and is in Norway’s capital city Oslo, while NNKM is a regional institution in Romsa/Tromsø

established in 1985.¹⁹ NNKM was founded by a group of local and national organizations: Nordnorsk Kulturråd, the University of Tromsø, Riksgalleriet (The National Touring Exhibition), and Nasjonalgalleriet (The National Gallery/Museum). When NNKM opened its doors in 1988, it was criticized in the popular press as a satellite of Nasjonalgalleriet (today's NM) based on the museum's lack of Sámi representation. Thus, NNKM did not represent something new within the framework of art museums in Norway, apart from, perhaps, an idea of delegating responsibility for art referring to or made within Northern Norway. For some stakeholders today NNKM maintains that vision. Indeed, in 2021 NNKM's board chair, right-wing politician and jurist, Grete Ellingsen, referred to NNKM as a "mini-National Gallery."²⁰ Envisioned as "an art museum for Northern Norway" (Aaserud 2006), NNKM serves a vast geographical area that stretches over Norway's two northernmost counties, including Svalbard. NNKM established a satellite in Longyearbyen (2015) and an additional location is underway in Budejju/Bodø (by 2024). While I investigate both art museums through case studies, NNKM is my primary focus of study. To widen the scope of these two art institutions I bring in comparisons regarding both practice and theory.

As a dissertation funded by the Research Council of Norway's (NFR) Public Sector PhD Scheme (OFFPHD), this study also aims to promote future collaborations and bridge the gulf between academia and the public art museum.²¹ Subsequently, it investigates the bond between theory and practice, considering them as reciprocal entities that enable one another, rather than perpetuating the false dichotomy between them (hooks 1994, 61). In addition, my research works toward the integration of

¹⁹ In 1836 Stortinget (The Norwegian Parliament) decided to establish a national museum for art in the capital city, for more information see NM's website <https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/visit/locations/the-national-gallery/history-of-the-national-gallery/>. Accessed 5 August 2022.

²⁰ Grete Ellingsen quoted in an article about her appointment as new chair of the NNKM board in the newspaper *Bladet Vesterålen* on 30 January 2020.

²¹ For more on NFR's Public Sector PhD Scheme, see NFR's website <https://www.forskningsradet.no/en/apply-for-funding/funding-from-the-research-council/public-sector-phd-scheme/>.

reflective assessment into art museum practices. By highlighting some of the specific challenges and issues facing art museums in Norway today, my hope is that readers may translate these issues into constructive approaches to appraise their own professional practice.

1.3 Conditions for Research at Art Museums in Norway

Research is one important task of museums and can be a vehicle to cultivate institutional critical self-reflection. Museums, by definition, are considered educational institutions. Moreover, research is an explicit requirement stipulated in guidelines by the granting authorities. In Norway at least since 1996, research in museums has been emphasized on the agenda of policy makers, for example in the green paper NOU 1996: 7 “Museum. Mangfold, minne, møtestad” (Museum. Diversity, Memory, Meeting Place)—the most extensive overview of the Norwegian museum sector to date—and in the white paper St.meld. nr. 49 (2008–2009) “Framtidas museum – Forvaltning, forskning, formidling, fornying” (The Museum of the Future – Management, Research, Dissemination, Renewal).²² Since 2011, museums in Norway have had to report on research activities and asked to provide research strategies (Brenna 2018, 118). Norges museumsforbund (The Norwegian Museums Association; hereafter NMF) is a proponent of research in the museum sector in Norway and implemented measures to promote and develop research in museums—for example, in 2015 with the establishment of an open access scientific journal, *Norsk museumstidsskrift* (The Norwegian Museum Journal) and in making museums part of the official research output register, Current Research Information System in Norway (Cristin). NMF is organized into nine subject sections open to all employees of NMF member museums. One the sections is research, and its main task is to strengthen research in Norwegian museums.²³ While cultural policies in Norway hold research as one of a museum’s principal tasks it remains an area that many museums find challenging to fulfill (Kulturdepartementet 2020, 5). Although art museums are

²² The Government of Norway’s website <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/nou-1996-7/id140531/>. Accessed 2 January 2023; <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/stmeld-nr-49-2008-2009-/id573654/> Accessed 5 January 2023.

²³ NMF’s website <https://museumsforbundet.no/fagseksjon/forskning/>. Accessed 2 January 2023.

expected to conduct and carry out research activities the necessary institutional frameworks are perhaps not in place. For one research demands an allocation of resources. In my experience there is little or no time to analyze and reflect on practices. Indeed, Emily Pringle, former Head of Learning Practice and Research at Tate in London, notes that time is without question the foremost critical issue when it comes to practitioners undertaking research (2020, 27). In addition, to procure the sufficient resources art museums must value research and mark it a priority, and particularly smaller institutions are likely reliant on external funding. To conduct research—for example produce an academic article—the manuscript goes through a process of peer review to assess its quality before publication. However, many art museums in Norway continue to produce exhibition wall labels and catalogs, not peer-reviewed publications. Nonetheless, art museums might collaborate with scholars and invite them to produce articles for the exhibition catalogues.

Producing exhibitions is a main part of a museum curator's job, yet there is not an equivalent peer review system for exhibition assessment. Furthermore, the art museum may not have staff or leadership with research qualifications. Most art museum professionals have an education at the postgraduate level, for instance a master's degree, not a doctorate. Nevertheless, the art museum may have staff with research qualifications—that is, those qualified in other ways, such as “NMF authorization” by NMF.²⁴ In Norway, the national average of the proportion of museum employees with a doctorate and the number of peer-reviewed articles in relation to the number of positions was at 3.4% in 2020 (Kulturrådet 2021, 6). At the institutional level, NM is an approved research organization while NNKM is not.²⁵ As such NM is ineligible to

²⁴ NMF's website <https://museumsforbundet.no/om-museumsforbundet/autorisasjon-konservator-nmf/>. Accessed 10 July 2022. Jérémie McGowan was NNKM's first director and only member of staff with a doctorate. Knut Ljøgodt has a Dr. Phil. degree (2016) from UiT The Arctic University of Norway which he completed during his director tenure at NNKM.

²⁵ Other approved research organizations include Norsk Folkemuseum (The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History) and Stiftelsen Norsk Teknisk Museum (Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology). For a complete list of approved research organizations in Norway see NFR's website <https://www.forskningsradet.no/en/apply-for-funding/who-can-apply-for-funding/research-organisations/approved-research-organisations/>. Accessed 10 July 2022.

apply for the NFR Public Sector PhD scheme (OFFPHD) on support for an employee to complete a doctoral project.²⁶ Considering the low numbers of museum professionals with PhDs and the limited number of academic articles produced by museums professionals might indicate that art museums do not prioritize research.

1.4 The Marketization of the Museum Sector

To put NNKM and NM into an international context, I now shift to introduce some themes concerning art museums on a broader level. A dominant logic of privatization has united art institutions in the global museum community over the past thirty years. As European governments gradually withdraw public funding from culture under the auspices of “austerity,” increased reliance on private sponsorship is becoming normative (Bishop 2013, 9). Then again, this has long been the case on Turtle Island (the United States of America) and reflects the ongoing process of marketization of cultural institutions in the neoliberal era (Ekström 2019, 1).²⁷ On the contrary, with its long-standing democratic approach to the arts and generous public arts funding, Norway is one of few countries in the world grounded on the idea that arts and culture are a vital part of a welfare society. Here the infrastructure requirement in the Constitution of Norway is key; namely, the last subsection of Article 100 that states, “[t]he authorities of the state shall create conditions that facilitate open and enlightened public discourse.”²⁸ With freedom of expression and ALP, artists in Norway are well protected. However, ALP is not explicitly enshrined in Norwegian law. As such, and in addition to other factors, Norway’s arts and culture scheme is increasingly under pressure and at risk. While an analysis on this vast topic is outside the scope of this dissertation, the governmental paper NOU 2022: 9 “En åpen og

²⁶ In February 2023 NFR closed the OFFPHD application for museums, see NMF’s website: <https://museumsforbundet.no/alarm-offentlig-sektor-phd-er-ikke-lenger-for-museene/>. Accessed 21 March 2023.

²⁷ The name Turtle Island originates from the creation story of the people who have been living on the continent that is commonly known as North America for millennia. For two Anishinaabe accounts of the origin of the term, see Johnston 1976, 11–20 and Simpson 2011, 65–83. To engage with decolonization I use the term Turtle Island when I refer to the United States of America.

²⁸ The Lovdata Foundation’s website <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1814-05-17>. Accessed 8 May 2023.

opplyst offentlig samtale” (The Norwegian Commission for Freedom of Expression Report) recommends that ALP should be codified to strengthen the formal independence of art and cultural institutions (297).

In their struggle for sustainability, what are the existing strategies in the art museum sector in Norway? Within recent years it appears the focus has centered on major expansion and the idea of the museum facility as world-class signature building.²⁹ A similar tendency, referred to as the “Bilbao Effect,” is also observed in the international museum community, described by Robert R. Janes as the “‘If you build it, he [she/they] will come’ syndrome” (2011, 59). For instance, during this three-year research project (2019–2022) two public art museums opened in the very center of the Norwegian capital in monumental new premises: Munchmuseet (The Munch Museum)—rebranded as MUNCH—in October 2021 and NM in June 2022.³⁰ Moreover, both of these art institutions comprise prime locations in the long-term urban redevelopment project “Fjord City,” which relocated Oslo’s arts and culture institutions to the waterfront.³¹ Opponents align these developments with processes of neoliberalization, as observed with mega-museums elsewhere in the world in cities such as Bilbao, Liverpool, and Sydney. I argue that Fjord City appears to use arts and culture as a trope to increase real estate values. Furthermore, the relocation of Munchmuseet from a traditionally working-class, multi-ethnic urban district called Tøyen depleted this mixed-income and culturally diverse neighborhood of an arts institution, thus raising questions about who art is for. Conversely, supporters of the centralization of art and cultural institutions in Bjørvika argue that the museum’s proximity to the central railway station increases accessibility to those audiences who do not reside in Oslo. There was much political strife in the debate related to the location of the new Munch Museum—with three different demands by the large

²⁹ Kunstsilo’s website <https://kunstsilo.no/kunstsilo/?lang=en>. Accessed 11 July 2022.

³⁰ Another example might be Sørlandets Kunstmuseum (SKMU; The Southern Norway Art Museum) and its “Kunstsilo”—an underway project to convert a former grain silo complex in Kristiansand into a new art museum facility, Kunstsilo’s website <https://kunstsilo.no/kunstsilo/?lang=en>. Accessed 12 January 2023.

³¹ For more on this topic, see for example: Røyseland 2017.

political parties—Høyre for the Lambda project in Bjørvika; Fremskrittspartiet (The Progress Party, considered the most right-wing party to be represented in Parliament) for the former National Gallery building; while Sosialistisk Venstreparti (Socialist Left Party) and Arbeiderpartiet were for Tøyen.³²

With NM and MUNCH in mind, why is monumental museum facility seen as the model of success? On an epic scale the new premises of NM make it the largest art museum in the Nordic countries, with 13,000 square meters of exhibition space and 54,600 square meters in total. Likewise, MUNCH is one of the biggest museums dedicated to a single artist in the world. “We will be an open museum, where you feel welcome no matter who you are and whatever background you come from. That is why we are building a new national museum in Norway,” stated NM’s director Karin Hindsbo in the newspaper *Dagens Næringsliv* on 27 February 2019. With the ambition of “open museum,” NM’s stated values—*open, fearless and giving acknowledgement*—appear progressive, yet I intend to show a gap between these values and the museum’s actions.³³ According to Hindsbo: “people will be able to see the whole history of Norwegian cultural heritage and regional cultural inheritance in a global perspective under one roof.” Furthermore, NM’s vision is to “make art accessible for everyone—and every single individual. Reflect the society and the time we live in.”³⁴ Part of NM’s content in the new museum building comprises a large display of artworks sourced from a private collection.³⁵ Works from Fredriksen Family Art Company Limited (hereafter Fredriksen Family Art) have high commercial value and are claimed by NM and Fredriksen Family to be world-class works of art. NM

³² Article in the newspaper *Verdens Gang* (VG) on 14 September 2012

<https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/8gg0W/fullt-kaos-om-nytt-munch-museum-etter-nye-rapporter>.

³³ These values are in NM’s 2020–2025 strategy plan, NM’s website

<https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/contentassets/eab0ab72e7c9400f8625e348bb4f7c2b/strategi.pdf>.

Accessed 28 May 2022.

³⁴ NM’s website

<https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/contentassets/eab0ab72e7c9400f8625e348bb4f7c2b/strategi.pdf>.

Accessed 11 July 2022.

³⁵ Works from Fredriksen Family Art Collection are on display in a 700-square-meter gallery called *Søylrommet* (The Pillars). NM’s website <https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/exhibitions-and-events/national-museum/exhibitions/2022/soylrommet/>. Accessed 11 July 2022.

often draws attention to the fact that the museum could not afford to purchase the works on its own accord. This situation is not unique to Norway. Private collectors on a global level buy the artworks that museums can no longer afford. While Fredriksen Family Art aims to assist the museum in attracting international recognition, what does NM signal to Norway's citizens? I argue that the public art museum aligns itself with global capitalism, thus celebrating consumption and the benefit of global currency.

While NM appears to have good intentions on increasing accessibility and access, a new museum facility is expensive and in 2023 costs visitors 200 Norwegian crowns (NOK; \$20 USD) in entrance fees. In contrast, on 1 February 2016, Norway's neighbor Sweden introduced free entry at its eighteen state-owned museums to make art and culture more accessible. As a result, Sweden's Nationalmuseum in Stockholm offers free admission to the collections while tickets are required for admission to the temporary exhibitions.³⁶ Similarly, public art museums in Norway have ambitions to advance accessibility and inclusivity. Nevertheless, one can perhaps speculate that the high admission rates create barriers for low-income households as well as for public and private institutions with tight budgets. Visitors pay entrance fees of 160 NOK (\$16 USD) at MUNCH. Granted, both NM and MUNCH are newly opened premises. However, they are unlike other new buildings for learning in the same vicinity, for instance the Deichman Bjørvika public library, a free-to-use facility for anyone. From 2007–2018 NNKM was a free-entry museum. On 1 January 2019, on the recommendation of its previous board of trustees (2016–2019), admission fees of 80 NOK (\$8 USD) were introduced. Typically, overall visitor numbers fall when entry fees are introduced and NNKM experienced a 33.6% drop in visitor numbers in 2019.³⁷

³⁶ Nationalmuseum's website <https://www.nationalmuseum.se/en/bes%C3%B6k-museet/entr%C3%A9priser-och-biljetter>. Accessed 5 July 2022.

³⁷ NNKM had 30,714 visitors in 2018; 19,778 in 2019; 7,902 in 2020 under the COVID-19 pandemic, 8,378 in 2021, and 15,429 in 2022. In the first six months of 2017 during the museum performance Sámi Dáiddamusea^x, 18,472 people visited NNKM, an increase of 38.5% compared to 2016. The total visitor numbers for 2017 was 32,054—the museum's highest year attendance in the institution's history.

What are some of the incentives for art museums to become fee charging institutions? Admission fees were introduced at NNKM while the right-wing coalition government was in power (October 2013–October 2021); however, the decision was also contingent on Norway’s amendment of its value added tax (VAT) regulations (extended tax liability on the areas of culture and sports) in 2010, under the previous government.³⁸ According to the Norwegian VAT act (amended as law on 25 June 2010):

§ 5-9. Museums etc.: VAT shall be calculated at a reduced rate for sales, withdrawals and dissemination of services in the form of access to exhibitions in museums and galleries.

As a result of the law, museums charging admission fees incurred reduced tax liability.³⁹

1.5 NNKM in Center-Periphery Politics

Why is it important to investigate NNKM within the center-periphery framework—that is, the systemic structures that the institution is inseparably bound? From outside the Circumpolar North, colonial views perceive it as the “periphery,” as suggested by the legendary Indigenous activist, Sámi *dáiddar* (artist), writer, musician, and *juoigi* (a practitioner of *joik*⁴⁰) Áillohaš/Nils-Aslak Valkepää:

Ultima Thule is in truth a far-off land. An exotic land of ice, snow and Samis. The cradle of Arctic hysteria. The ice-box of Europe. Blue tinted mountains, a frighteningly long dark period, and fairy-tale, sun-filled summer nights. At any rate, it’s a damn long way from Helsinki [Helsset] (9).

Of course the world doesn’t end at the upper edge of the map. Naturally I know that nobody thinks like that ...

And yet they do think like that. That’s just how it seems to most people: beyond the upper edge of the map, in the north, there’s nothing, or if there is anything, then it must be on quite another page of the Atlas, and concern a totally different culture, something completely isolated from the rest of the world ([1971] 1983,11).

³⁸ The Lovdata Foundation’s website https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2009-06-19-58/KAPITTEL_6-1#%C2%A76-6. Accessed 26 May 2022.

³⁹ This new law came into place while the Labour Party was in power.

⁴⁰ *Joik* is a Sámi musical expression—a medium for the performance of narratives.

The North, a co-called periphery and remote place, often inspires great creativity and innovation, as I have experienced in collaboration with other museums in northern places—for example the Anchorage Museum, an interdisciplinary museum on Dena’ina land in Alaska. As part of my dissertation, I conducted fieldwork there from August 2020 to July 2021. The Anchorage Museum’s Director and CEO, Julie Decker, argues that museums of the Arctic, from Alaska to Canada to Finland, have long been resisting the colonization of urban centers further south (2020, 642). Resistance is a more recent development in NNKM’s trajectory. By resistance I mean a shift in the vision and direction of the institution.

How can we locate NNKM in the context of Norwegianization? Here Jérémie McGowan and Sámi museum director Anne May Olli (2022, 62) refer to NNKM as a settler institution and argue that it can and should be positioned alongside other apparatuses of the state (the church, courts, and schools) within the broader structures of colonialism in Sápmi.⁴¹ We can understand a settler institution as one that promotes colonial narratives that position the settler state as universal and benevolent in the interest of Indigenous people (Macoun and Strakosch 2013, 428; Kuokkanen 2020a, 298). Analyzing the trajectory of the art museum from this standpoint might help demonstrate why art institutions operate the way they do. Further, to investigate an art museum’s inner workings, its structure, and practices it is necessary to map out the actors, agents, and stakeholders that comprise the complex socioeconomic system in which the museum is situated.

To examine the machinery of the art museum, it is necessary to identify its approved role and mandate. With that in mind, what are the approved statutes of NM and NNKM as of 2023?⁴²

NM’s statutes state that

The foundation shall under its purpose conduct the following activities:

- a) collect, document and preserve collections within visual art, craft, design and architecture

⁴¹ Anne May Olli (Sámi) is director at RDM in Kárášjohka.

⁴² My translations of the statutes.

- b) research and development work within the institution’s professional areas of responsibility
- c) exhibitions and other dissemination activities as part of the work to raise knowledge and increase engagement for visual art, architecture, craft and design

NNKM’s statutes state that

§ 3 The purpose of NNKM is to create interest in, awareness of and knowledge about art and craft in the north of Norway.

§ 4 Through purchases, gifts and deposits the museum collects and exhibits Norwegian and international art and craft. Special emphasis is placed on showing art associated with the north of Norway. The collection also seeks to provide an overview of the general development of Norwegian art and craft and its connection to international trends.

Despite the importance of Sámi cultural heritage as a natural part of the Norway’s cultural heritage, the words, “Sámi,” “Sápmi,” “*dáidda*” (art),⁴³ and “*duodji*” (a Sámi concept involving “craft” making, philosophy, and cosmology)⁴⁴ are not mentioned in either NM or NNKM’s statutes. I argue that this is a blind spot in Norwegian state-funded art museums and indicates a need for decolonizing these institutions.

NNKM’s institutional change—what we might call critical museum practice or decolonizing practices—met with an extremely hard counterattack. On 10 August 2020 in the newspaper *Nordlys*, Norwegian lawyer and civil economist, Oddmund Enoksen, publicly assaulted Jérémie McGowan’s decolonizing leadership at NNKM as being “in total contempt of the museum’s approved purpose and tasks.”⁴⁵ Enoksen

⁴³ The word *dáidda* was invented by Sámi makers at the end of the 1970s; it comes closest to what in the West is called visual arts.

⁴⁴ *Duodji* is an ancient but dynamic Sámi body of knowledge still practiced today with a holistic perspective encompassing Sámi ethical, material, aesthetic, and spiritual knowledges, and is influential to *dáidda* makers.

⁴⁵ Oddmund Enoksen is the lawyer the museum board selected to represent NNKM in February 2021 when Jérémie McGowan pursued a court case against NNKM in the aftermath of the museum’s sudden decision to terminate his tenure as museum director on 27 March 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. For more on this topic, see McGowan and Olli 2022. According to her resume, board chair, Grete Ellingsen, worked in Enoksen’s firm for eight years, first as a paralegal (2001–

described decolonization as a totalitarian wave that has hit Norway, and now Northern Norway. Furthermore, he correlated decolonization with antidemocratic forces and stated that “both the media and public space in general must be wiped clean of utterances and visual expression that anyone might imaginably be offended by.” Enoksen’s utterly conservative sentiments indicate support for the paradigm of the art museum as shrine, and thus emphasizes the importance and necessity for institutions to critically revisit histories and negotiate colonial legacies.

1.6 Arm’s Length Principle

The “arms’s length” principle (ALP) is the situation that the parties of a transaction are independent and on an equal footing. The principle was first introduced in American domestic law on Turtle Island in 1920–30.⁴⁶ It is a public policy applied in law, politics, and economics in most Western societies; and in some countries ALP is also applied to the support of the fine arts (Chartrand and McCaughey 1989). ALP refers to the view that represents the ideal of artistic freedom—that art must be free. The principle is intended to ensure that the arts are free of political governance and that political interests should not challenge the autonomy of art. In 1989, the cultural economists, Harry Hillman Chartrand and Claire McCaughey, carved out alternative modes of public support where there are four alternative roles for the State: “Facilitator,” “Patron,” “Architect,” and “Engineer.” In short, the Facilitator State funds the fine arts through foregone taxes; the Patron State funds the fine arts through arm’s length arts councils; the Architect State funds the fine arts through a Ministry or Department of Culture; and the Engineer State owns all the means of artistic production (Chartrand and McCaughey 1989). The principle is implemented and organized in various ways in different countries. For instance, Great Britain appears to be the “homeland of the arm’s length principle” due to its organization of public

2003) and then as a lawyer (2003–2008), the Government of Norway’s website <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/historical-archive/solbergs-government/kmd/state-secretary-grete-ellingsen/id2460416/>. Accessed 25 March 2022.

⁴⁶ Skatteetaten’s (The Norwegian Tax Administration) website: https://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/georg_borresen_-_the_arms_length_principle_-_application_in_norwegian_and_international_tax_law.pdf. Accessed 25 April 2023.

support through an autonomous arts council since 1946 (Mangset 2012, 50). French cultural policy, meanwhile, is often referred to as the fundamental opposite of the British version of cultural policy; here the French Ministry of Culture has long played a far more direct intervening role in cultural policy. Whereas the Nordic countries all represent a kind of compromise between the British arts council model and the French culture ministry model, as they all have both fairly strong culture ministries and more or less autonomous culture council.

What role does the arm's length principle play in how art museums in Norway operate in practice? The white paper, Meld. St. 8 (2018–2019, 32) asserts that ALP has been called the foundation of cultural policy in Norway. Furthermore, the document (2018–2019, 32) says that

[t]he principle is linked to the democratic states' need to prevent the state as a source of power from exerting pressure, censoring or distributing resources to artists based on bias... The arm's length principle is not only about keeping a necessary distance from political interests. It is also a matter of ensuring that organised interests do not influence the exercise of free artistic and cultural discretion.

Norway has a “double” state cultural management structure since both the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Equality (KUD) and Kulturdirektoratet (Arts and Culture Norway) provide support for art and cultural life.⁴⁷ It is claimed that the arm's length principle is followed as regards the relation between politics and art, that political decision-making bodies do not involve themselves in evaluating the artistic quality internal to the supported projects. While there are potentially several factors that may influence decision-making processes, art museums on their own accord decide what and how they choose to express. However, when politicians appoint (their) politicians as chairpersons and vice-chairpersons of museum boards, or appoint them as members of other steering bodies, we see the state's long arm as challenging, detail steering and, in some cases, upturning a museum's autonomy. While cultural institutions in Norway

⁴⁷ Arts and Culture Norway's website <https://www.kulturradet.no/english>. Accessed 25 March 2022.

operate under the arm's length principle, I argue that they can also serve as an extended arm of the Norwegian state.

Within the arm's length principle NNKM and NM have the possibility to be critical spaces. For Robert R. Janes museums are privileged institutions because their purpose is their meaning (2009, 16). Accordingly, any museal activity unaligned with organizational purpose could jeopardize the meaning. Janes notes that “unlike the private sector, museums do not have production or sales quotas [and] ... are not forced to administer unpopular government policies” and as such are “potentially the most free and creative work environments on the planet” (15–16). However, it appears NNKM and NM have yet to fully harness this potential. To understand we must first identify their relation to the Norwegian state. Three of NNKM's board positions, including the chair, are appointed by the Norwegian Ministry of Culture and Equality and the state-appointed members may decide in voting as ensured by the chair's double vote.⁴⁸ Similarly, three of NM's board members, including the chair, are state-appointed.⁴⁹ And yet, although NM and NNKM are state-funded, they are established as foundations and not state-owned. This type of organizational model is the makeup of most museums in Norway.⁵⁰ As a result, the state has large influence on NNKM with the state-appointed trustees. However, if there is a breach in trust, for example between the trustees and staff members, the state can refuse to get involved in accountability demands because of ALP. During the Erna Solberg governments (2013–2021), public museums in Norway were challenged to increase their own

⁴⁸ The NNKM board includes six members and six alternates. In addition to the three KUD members, the other members are appointed by NNKM staff, the Artist Associations of Northern Norway (NKNN and NNBK), and SKINN (See Art in Northern Norway). In the event of a board tie, the chair's vote is decisive, except in matters of election and employment which must be decided by a simple majority (NNKM's governing document, approved in 2016).

⁴⁹ NM's website <https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/om-nasjonalmuseet/styret-organisasjon-og-ansatte/vedtekter-stiftelsen-nasjonalmuseet-for-kunst/>. Accessed 27 March 2022.

⁵⁰ Specifically, 58 of 80 museums in Norway that receive state-funding are organized as foundations (Fossestøl, Breit, and Heen 2013); 66 percent according to the white paper Meld. St. 23 (2020–2021) “Musea i samfunnet – Tillit, ting og tid” (Museums in Society – Trust, Things and Time; 135); see The Government of Norway's website <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-23-20202021/id2840027/>. Accessed 16 April 2022.

earnings through private financial arrangements. These demands are most likely to continue regardless of which political parties are in the government in the future. Such factors reinforce the need to discuss the potential ethical challenges to maintain and strengthen well-founded museum practice. These developments also emphasize the importance of the arm's length principle (against government interference) in Norwegian cultural policy.

2 The Conflicting Term “Museum”

This section clarifies how the dissertation relates to previous research in Norway and beyond pertaining to cultural policy on art museums, critical museology, and curation. Before I discuss the idea of institutional critique in section 3, it is important to provide an understanding and background on the object of critical inquiry, the art museum.

To determine what an art museum is and the role it plays in society where does one begin? First let us consider the claim *an art museum is a museum* as a starting point. In doing so we can think and work through ICOM's museum definition. Founded by and for museum staff in 1946, ICOM is a non-governmental global organization that sets minimum standards of practices and professional performance for museums. In short, ICOM provides guidelines for desirable professional practice and a forum for professional discussions. ICOM comprises 119 national committees and offers institutional and individual membership.⁵¹ Members must comply to ICOM's museum definition and its Code of Ethics for Museums. As institutional members this applies to both NNKM and NM. Hence, ICOM's museum definition is transferrable to this study and a point of departure to discuss what an art museum is and does in Norway today.

As an advisory organ, ICOM (and its national committees) can make recommendations for museums, yet it lacks the authority to enforce compliance over its members. However, in the event of infringement of ethical standards, institutional membership may be voluntarily withdrawn or revoked by a decision of the ICOM

⁵¹ ICOM's website <https://icom.museum/en/about-us/committees/>. Accessed 7 February 2023.

Executive Board. Additionally, ICOM and its committees can perform institutional critique on its members. As an example, ICOM Norway together with NMF criticized in the popular media NM's partnership with Fredriksen Family Art, as discussed in **Article 1**: "The Feminist Killjoy Untangles Philanthropy." In their assessment of the agreement, Kathrin Pabst and Liv Ramskjær, on behalf of ICOM Norway and NMF, stressed in the newspaper *Aftenposten* on 24 July 2019 that "[a]s we read the contract, a private actor has purchased access to a public art museum that is unparalleled in Norwegian art history. ... Therefore, the agreement with Fredriksen Family Art Company should not have been signed in its current form."⁵² Further, they asserted that Fredriksen Family Art gains too much control over assessments such that the partnership jeopardizes the museum's integrity. NM put itself in a defensive position in response to criticism and did not make changes to the agreement after dialogue with ICOM Norway and NMF, whereas in other cases in Norway art museums altered course in response. For instance, after dialogue with ICOM Norway and NMF in 2021, MUNCH decided not to follow through on permitting Grev Wedels Plass Auksjoner to rent the museum's *Festsal*⁵³ for its Annual Norwegian Edvard Munch Sale because of the ethical implications, for example in the *Ethical Guidelines* document, section 7.5 "Governing body, sponsorship, and partners" (2022, 19).⁵⁴

Serving as its "backbone," ICOM's museum definition outlines what museums are and what they do (Sandahl 2019). The same applies for institutions seeking to qualify for NMF membership which is open to all museums in Norway that fulfill ICOM's

⁵² Kathrin Pabst, the then chair of ICOM Norway, holds a PhD in professional ethics. Since 2019 Pabst is chair of ICOM's International Committee on Ethical Dilemmas, IC Ethics. Liv Ramskjær is secretary general of NMF.

⁵³ For more information about Festsalen see the museum's website <https://www.munchmuseet.no/en/venue-hire/festsal/>. Accessed 3 May 2023.

⁵⁴ Grev Wedels Plass Auksjoner is an auction house in Oslo specializing in works by Edvard Munch and Norwegian nineteenth and twentieth century art, see its website <https://gwpa.no/en/about-gwpa>. Section seven, point five of the *Ethical Guidelines* document states: "Museums should not be involved in activities that may undermine the ethical standards of the professional community, in the autonomy of museums or the reputation and trust museums hold in the public and society."

definition of a museum.⁵⁵ Furthermore in 2019, ICOM committed its members to implementing the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Adopted by ICOM in 1974, the previous version of the definition (valid from 2007 to 23 August 2022) was as follows:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.⁵⁶

From this definition one can infer that the art museum is a knowledge based, social institution with a role and responsibility in society.

On one level of thinking, an art museum is a type of museum, a repository for works of art deemed historically and aesthetically significant, devoted to the exhibition, preservation, and research of those works. And as I show, according to current views of thinking, an art museum performs the above-mentioned activities *and* serves as a meeting point for communities to exchange ideas—a place for thinking, co-creativity, and experimenting. The art museum is an institution with unique affordances and privileges, distinct from other types of museums because it collaborates with artists—not average members of society, but rather fearless critical thinkers who question and challenge assumptions, and provide new perspectives for audiences through their art. On several occasions in my years of experience as art museum curator, I witnessed other colleagues in the field remark on how art museums are different from other types of museums, such as cultural historical museums. One claim is that art museums have different display tactics, with fewer wall labels that provide visitors with “uninterrupted” focus on the objects. In this setting the notion is that works of art are left to speak for themselves (Vergo 1989, 49). Here it is important to understand that art museums do not just represent cultural identity, they produce meaning through

⁵⁵ NMF is comprised of 132 institutional members, 100 personal members and eight associated members. Membership is open to all museums in Norway that fulfill ICOM’s museum definition, see NMF’s website <https://museumsforbundet.no/om-museumsforbundet/>. Accessed 12 August 2022.

⁵⁶ ICOM’s website <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>. Accessed 13 January 2022.

active and passive framing. In a series of three articles in *Artforum* in 1976, the art critic and artist, Brian O’Doherty, discusses the white cube display model in the context of the twentieth-century modernist art gallery. The basic principle behind the model, he posits, is that “[t]he outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light ... The art is free, as the saying used to go, ‘to take on its own life’” ([1976] 1986, 15). As such, the gallery functions as a ritual space where the artworks appear to exist in a “timeless” space. The curator and art historian, Miwon Kwon, reminds us that the white cube display model was a series of coded mechanisms, a framing device to render the institution as “objective,” “disinterested,” and “true” (1997, 88). With status as a producer of “objective” knowledge, the art museum could claim its truths. Thus, a perceived “framelessness” is also a type of framing device.

What can discourses in museology tell us about the role and purpose of art museums? Here I trace the history of defining museums back to museum director, Duncan Ferguson Cameron’s, article “The Museum, a Temple or the Forum” from 1971.⁵⁷ In his article he outlines the traditional museum—that is, the museum as temple, and suggests that while reforms of museums have been proposed for decades, many of the great museums have yet to do much about it (18). In the temple model, the museum was established with a private collection opened to the public to educate, enlighten, and provide recreation (16–17). In this setting the public museum represented a standard of excellence with the purpose to enshrine things it deemed significant and valuable—“[i]f the museum said that this and that was so, then that was a statement of truth” (17). What is the role of social class in this? Cameron argues that an exclusive, private club of curators seemingly replaced private collectors (16). Further, he points out that this tendency was most particularly true of art museums (17). As a result, the public collections were structured as models perhaps only meaningful to those

⁵⁷ While outside the scope of this dissertation, there are earlier examples of progressive thinkers on museums, for instance John Cotton Dana’s “The Gloom of the Museum” (1917) and Theodore Low’s “What Is a Museum?” (1942). In addition, in 1968, the deliberately provocative question: “Are museums necessary?” posed by Wilcomb Washburn was put again in 1994 by Charles Alan Watkins in his article “Are Museums Still Necessary?”

introduced to prevailing theories in history through an education, or those familiar with an academic approach to art and art history (16). Within this understanding, art museums do not represent a collective reality. Despite the fact the museum said “this is your collection” to the general public, the institutional value systems represented the upper-middle-class elite. In this context, Cameron argues that museum reform is long overdue, for example through the reestablishment of role definition—in other words the museum’s social function (17). In addition to museum reformation, he proposes that the concurrent creation of forums is what is needed as an institution in society (19). Functions of the forum include to experiment, to debate, to confront established values and institutions, and to create opportunities for the artists and the critics of society to produce, to be heard, or to be seen (19). Cameron proposes that a museum (of art, history, or science) not only be democratic and open to all, but also interpret matters of public importance no matter how controversial (21). Further he argues that society will no longer accept institutions that only serve a minority audience of the elite, and as such suggests that museums institute these reforms or perish (18). Cameron posits that “[m]any institutions cannot decide whether they wish to be a museum, as a temple, or wish to become the public forum” (20). Why might this be the case? Are museums uninterested in structural change, too passive, lacking understanding or perhaps lacking resources? Perhaps the museum might weaken its integrity by inviting all manner of innovation and experimentation? Can the forum function inside the museum, as a temple? According to Cameron, bringing the forum inside the temple impedes and castrates the performance in the forum (20). The limitations of opening a space for confrontation, debate and experimentation inside the museum means acceptance by the establishment, that is, corporations, governments, and private individuals. As such, Cameron regards the museum and the forum as distinct, but with a relationship such that they share common services and the audience (22). To me, the distinction between Cameron’s two models—the temple and the forum—suggests institutional passivity versus proactivity. A model of the museum that passively disacknowledges colonial legacies is complicit, while decolonizing the museum is about initiating change within the organization and restructuring power dynamics. In a Norwegian context, the shift in the role of museums to work as

dialogical and active social agents relates to for instance the museum scholar, Brita Brenna's (2016), research on how the evaluating criteria of museums in Norway has shifted towards measuring their *innflytelse* (influence) and *påvirkning* (social impact), with *deltagelse* (participation) as important goals. Brenna notes that audiences should be involved and activated, and participation is the word used to cover many of these different activities (36). Participation can also mean involvement, where the public takes part in the design of exhibitions or collections, or it can mean forms of co-creation where the public is involved in deciding what activities will take place in the museum (37).

What is museology? A broader understanding of the term is the study of museums. It emerged alongside the museums and cabinets of curiosity themselves—that is, from the sixteenth century and onwards. Museology, as it we understand it today, a platform for debate over the definition of its own terms, concepts and paradigms based on academic research, was established in the second half of the nineteenth century. Later, ICOM officially acknowledged Museology as an academic discipline in 1971 (Soares 2019, 26). As a discipline it signaled new ways of understanding and questioning the term “museum,” for example with regard to discussions of feminism, colonialism and institutional critique. For example, following Duncan Ferguson Cameron's work, in the late 1980s, the term “the new museology” was introduced to the academic discourse with the art historian, Peter Vergo's, 1989 anthology *The New Museology*. In the book's introduction Vergo defines the “old” museology as a discipline that “is too much about museum *methods*, and too little about the purposes of museums” (3). This indicated a turn in museology from what one might describe as a practical vocational discipline to a more academic, critical discipline. Through his investigation on the display of objects and the production of exhibitions in museums, Vergo asserts that the exhibition-makers focus too much attention on exhibition content and presentation and think too little about their intended audiences (52). Vergo argues that both the creating and the consuming of exhibitions remain unreflective activities (43). For Vergo, while the public might assume exhibitions as a fact of cultural life, many questions—about what kinds of exhibitions a particular institution will mount, by what means, and for what reasons—remain unexamined. Not only did Vergo expose a lack of reflexivity on

behalf of the museum professionals regarding their audiences, but also in terms of defining their intellectual, educative, or social aims of the exhibition (45). While some of the “acceptable” reasons for exhibition-making, might include “to make accessible the rarely seen,” or “to alter or enhance perception of the already known,” Vergo points to some of the actual motives for “high-profile” exhibitions: “to raise money, to celebrate meaningless anniversaries, to cement diplomatic alliances, or to promote the careers of museum directors” (45).⁵⁸ Vergo’s publication called for a radical reexamination of the role of museums within society and initiated what has become a vast area of museum studies. Later theorists (around 2000) furthered Vergo’s concept of “the new museology,” sometimes operating under the terms “critical museum theory” or “new museum theory.” New museum theory holds that museum professionals commonly naturalize their policies and procedures as professional practice; “the decisions these workers make reflect underlying value systems that are encoded in institutional narratives” (Marstine 2006, 5).

In more recent scholarship on museums (Decker 2020; Janes 2020; Merriman 2020; Moore 2020; Salguero 2020), it appears that the rhetoric that *museums must change* is still relevant over three decades since *The New Museology* was first published. Furthermore, the evolving conversation on the paradigm shift in museums is evidenced by a new museum definition proposed by ICOM on 25 July 2019. Following a worldwide consultation, the organization’s two-paragraph proposed definition stated as follows:

Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the future. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people.

Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to

⁵⁸ Here Vergo references an editorial in the *Burlington Magazine* which followed the November 1987 conference organized by the Association of Art Historians under the title “Why Exhibitions.”

contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing.⁵⁹

I perceived the proposed definition as an aspirational road map for transformation in art museum practices, and a natural progression in the evolution of (art) museums. In contrast to the definition from 2007, the proposed definition is a more politicized version of the museum that eschews a neutral position of privileged authority and significance. Several aspects point toward more ethical museum practice, for instance, “democratizing,” “critical dialogue,” “addressing conflicts,” “global equality,” “transparent,” “with and for diverse communities,” and “planetary wellbeing.” Also, these points align with the progressive aspirations for museums resonating in the international museum field in recent decades.

I hoped the proposed definition would pass when put to vote at ICOM’s General Conference in September 2019 in Kyoto, Japan. On the contrary, opponents objected to the process leading to the new definition, and after several hours of heated debate approximately seventy percent of the representatives decided to postpone the decision to the following assembly.⁶⁰ More inclusivity in the decision-making process was promised, but for others the core of the disagreement was that the proposed definition was aspirational as opposed to an actual definition (Salguero 2020, 594). Others condemned the definition’s “political tone,” decrying it as an “ideological” manifesto and expressing concerns that it did not address the traditional functions of a museum (Haynes 2019). The disagreement led to the resignation of several members from ICOM’s executive board and the council’s committee.⁶¹ Moreover, it unleashed significant turmoil in the global museum community. The controversy is perhaps additional evidence of the inherent contestability of the museum’s role and function and reveals the divergence between the traditional and progressive camps of ICOM.

⁵⁹ ICOM’s website <https://icom.museum/en/news/icom-announces-the-alternative-museum-definition-that-will-be-subject-to-a-vote/>. Accessed 23 September 2021.

⁶⁰ Atle Ove Martinussen, chair of ICOM Norway, email correspondence with this author, 8 March 2022.

⁶¹ The Museums Association’s website <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2020/07/icom-museum-definition-row-rumbles-on/>. Accessed 15 June 2022.

Although I did not attend the conference in Kyoto, I received reports from fellow ICOM Norway board members who participated. One colleague recalled that the Indigenous representatives from former colonial nations were positive to the new definition whereas representatives from Western European nations expressed strong resistance. Were the established European museums fearful that the new definition would strengthen demands for the repatriation of artifacts to peoples from whom they had been acquired illegally or unethically? Indeed, repatriation is one among several contested topics for museums worldwide. While some museums have begun such processes, others, like the British Museum in London are reluctant to do so. Historically, museums are known as instruments in the service of nation-states founded on colonial discourse and practices. Within this framework Indigenous groups and other minorities have clamored for self-representation in exhibitions, in addition to substantial change in museum narratives (Soares 2021, 451). While art museums may aspire toward diversity, equity, and inclusion, they appear to perpetuate the status quo. In spring of 2022, what some called “warfare” between reformers and conservatives over the new definition continued.⁶² While this is the case, the ICOM Define Standing Committee responded to the critique by endorsing active member participation, and on 25 February 2022 launched the slogan: “On the way to a new museum definition: We are doing it together!” while asking members to rank five new draft proposals.⁶³ In Prague, on 24 August 2022, the Extraordinary General Assembly of ICOM approved the proposal for the new museum definition with 92.41% (For: 487, Against 23, Abstention: 17). Following the adoption, the new ICOM museum definition is:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and

⁶² The Museums Association’s website <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2021/03/ideological-rift-persists-as-icom-restarts-museum-definition-consultation/>. Accessed 15 January 2022.

⁶³ ICOM’s website <https://icom.museum/en/news/on-the-way-to-a-new-museum-definition-we-are-doing-it-together/>. Accessed 22 March 2022. The methodology is based on four rounds of consultation, divided into 11 steps with a duration of 18 months, ICOM’s website <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>. Accessed 15 June 2022.

with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing.⁶⁴

In comparison to the previous (2007) definition, research is placed first in the line of museum tasks, and the words “ethical,” “professional,” and “sustainable” are new add-ons. Additionally, compared to the definition proposal from 2019 it appears to be less ambitious regarding the potential for change in museum practices. The new definition appears to operate somewhere between the definition of 2007 and the definition proposal from 2019. For example, phrases such as decolonization and repatriation are absent from the new definition. Nonetheless, the new definition includes new language about museums operating and communicating ethically. As such, one could suggest that repatriation is an ethical imperative.

ICOM’s work on a new museum definition is echoed on a national level in Norway with *Etiske retningslinjer for museer i Norge: Åpent, inkluderende, transparent og profesjonelt* (Ethical Guidelines for Museums in Norway: Open, Inclusive, Transparent and Professional; 2022), developed by ICOM Norway and NMF.⁶⁵ While an analysis of the *Ethical Guidelines* document is out of the scope of this dissertation, it is helpful to point out that a few main points have similarities with ICOM’s museum definition. For instance, the underlying tone of the four core values highlighted in the document’s subtitle. Moreover, the document affirms that museums ask critical questions about the past and present, challenge established truths, and share knowledge that enables more people to participate in society (11, 12). Another point the guidelines emphasize is that museums protect the culture, language, and rights of Indigenous peoples, with reference to the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169 § 1) which defines Indigenous peoples as those

in independent countries who are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country, or a geographical

⁶⁴ ICOM’s website <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>. Accessed 4 January 2023.

⁶⁵ ICOM Norway’s website <http://norskicom.no/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Retningslinjer-2022.pdf>. Accessed 10 May 2022.

region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonisation or the established of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (2022, 16).⁶⁶

In Norway, the Sámi fulfill the conditions in this definition, and their rights are enshrined in Article 108 of the Constitution of Norway and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Consequently, according to ICOM Norway and NMF's *Ethical Guidelines* document, the Sámi language and cultural heritage is an important part of Norway's cultural heritage that at the same time requires special respect and follow-up after decades of neglect (14). Traditionally, Eurocentrism and Western art histories have excluded underrepresented groups of people from participating in museum exhibitions and activities. In a Norwegian context, with the intent to promote national identity many art museums still cater to the affluent members of the dominant culture, and thus display tendencies of passive disacknowledgement of Nordic colonial history. As such, it is important to consider what is and what is not collected and exhibited. Until recent years Sámi *dáidda* and *duodji* have largely been under-represented and misrepresented in Norwegian art history and at state-funded art institutions (Grini 2019 and 2021).

The *Ethical Guidelines* state that “[t]hey [museums] are not neutral, but have a position that defines, influences and helps shape our understanding and interpretation of history and the present” (11).⁶⁷ What is the “myth of museum neutrality” (Janes 2015)? Scholars and others in discussions on museums posit that there exists an assumption that museums are neutral, uncontested spaces. This is what Robert R. Janes calls “authoritative neutrality” (2009, 59) and “institutional neutrality” (2020, 593). For museum ethics scholar, Janet Marstine, museum professionals make up museums, and their individual subjective choices and decisions impact the way we understand objects. Marstine notes that “[m]useums are not neutral spaces that speak

⁶⁶ International Labour Organization's (ILO) website https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312314. Accessed 24 March 2022.

⁶⁷ My translation from the Norwegian.

with one institutional, authoritative voice. Museums are about individuals making subjective choices” (2006, 2). The public invests trust in museums to produce and generate content and information. As an example, on Turtle Island (the United States of America), museums are seen as the most objective and trustworthy of all the institutions regarding the education of American children (4). How does the assumption that art museums are neutral spaces play out in a Nordic context? In 2019, Susanna Pettersson, Director General at Sweden’s Nationalmuseum stated that “[m]useums are fairly neutral places where we can raise the biggest and most difficult questions.”⁶⁸ Art museums in Norway might not necessarily openly declare institutional neutrality, as exemplified by Pettersson, perceivably because of the fallacy of museum neutrality. Janes and Sandell assert:

The unspoken argument is that museums cannot risk doing anything that might alienate government and private funders, real or potential. The simple truth is that corporations and the business community are themselves special interest groups, grounded in marketplace ideology and the political ideology that accompanies it (2019, 8).

Therefore, art museum professionals tend to do things a certain way and operate within uncontroversial frameworks. At the same time public art institutions are inseparable from their social and historical context. In day-to-day practices museum staff members do not consciously reflect upon “museum neutrality”—it acts as a hidden paradigm manifested in “business-as-usual” practices. For museum director of research, Steve Lyons, and scholar Kai Bosworth, “[n]eutrality prevents museums from seeing (let alone acting upon) their transformative social power” (2019, 178). This presents a challenge to museums today given an increased reliance upon corporate and private funding, that is, stakeholders who are grounded in capitalist ideology.

Where and how is the myth of museum neutrality manifested in the Norwegian museum landscape today? A recent point of reference is museum director Petter Snekkestad’s (2022) *debattskrift* (debate paper) *Museale tilstander—en konservativ*

⁶⁸ Susanna Pettersson quoted in Nina Kraft, “Sveriges Nationalmuseum, Lange linjer, lekne løsninger,” *Kunst 2* (2019), 95.

kritikk av norsk museumstenkning (Museum Conditions—A Conservative Critique of Norwegian Museum Thinking). Snekkestad carves out how discourses on museums reflects in Norwegian museum policy from 1996 until today. Through an in-depth reading of white papers, he combatively argues against the idea that museums should act as critical, activist social actors. For Snekkestad, “a conservative critique of Norwegian museum thinking involves a rejection of the idea that the museum’s task is to be critical of society” (22). His discussion primarily focuses on three governmental documents, NOU 1996: 7; Meld. St. 23 (2020–2021); and St. meld. Nr. 49 (2008–2009). From here he extracts phrases that describe the museum as: a dialogic institution, a meeting place, a powerhouse for diversity, and a space for critical reflection and creative insight (23–24). Critical to these ideological aspirations for museums, Snekkestad says that museums “should not take a position on political issues—an idea that, strangely enough, is strongly challenged by self-proclaimed activist museums who claim that neutrality is impossible” (74). With this assertion Snekkestad suggests that in political issues there is an opportunity for museums to be neutral. He posits that the “non-questioning and non-dialogical professionalism and *objectivity* is central to the museum” (73; emphasis added) and that research should not be political (22). In short, he is a proponent of the conventional understanding of museums as “object-focused instructors” (20), a term he borrows from museum consultant/advisor, Elaine Heumann Gurian (2006, 3).⁶⁹ In this model museum education is based on “trickle-down” theories with the curator as expert. While Snekkestad does not suggest a possible solution for museums to work or strive towards, he argues that if museums take a political stance, it may well erode the public’s trust in Norwegian museums (74).

What are the implications of museum neutrality? Snekkestad argues that the critical tradition does not speak the truth about today’s Western museums because its *modus operandi* is to expose oppression in every “nook and cranny.” Further he posits that neither the museum nor society at large is “crying out for an overhaul” (22). To

⁶⁹ Elaine Heumann Gurian is a proponent of museum as “client-centered inclusions” which she discusses in the same source (2006).

understand Snekkestad's standpoint it is helpful to turn to feminist perspectives, as the art historian Linda Nochlin tells us that "[i]n the West, greatness has been defined since antiquity as white, Western, privileged, and above all, male."⁷⁰ As such, sexism and racism continue to be the natural hierarchies that are systemically engrained in the society as a whole and the museum. Thus, it follows that the white, masculine prerogative assumes a disinterest in injustices regarding race, gender, and ethnicity. I argue that to "see" that change is necessary in the art museum and in society requires perspectives of critical inquiry.

How can institutional critique undermine the false consciousness that "all is well" in the art museum and society? Maura Reilly's book *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (2018) is a case in point. Reilly, museum director and curator, uses statistics (mainly from Europe and Turtle Island) in terms of race, gender, and sexuality in the art world to demonstrate the need to address inequality.⁷¹ She draws on research of postcolonial, race, feminist, and queer theory to discuss possible strategies to tackle these issues. Reilly defines curatorial activism as "the practice of organizing art exhibitions with the principal aim of ensuring that large constituencies of artists are no longer ghettoized or excluded from the master narratives of art."⁷² In practice, curatorial activists are interested in art world injustices and work to develop strategies to erode, destabilize and dismantle the existing canon. They dedicate their curatorial endeavors to artists who are non-white, non-Euro-US, as well as women-, feminist-, and queer-identified (22). For example, curatorial activism employs counter-hegemonic strategies to level hierarchies and challenge assumptions, initiate debate, and circulate new knowledge (215). In the context of art museums, Reilly suggests that museum directors diversify their boards, demand broader representation in exhibitions and hire non-white and female curators and staff (222). Also, she asserts that curators

⁷⁰ Linda Nochlin quoted in Reilly 2018, 17.

⁷¹ Reilly writes "Europe and North America," 15.

⁷² Maura Reilly, "With a Majority-Female 2022 Edition, the Venice Biennale Will Make History for Women Artists," *ARTNews*. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/venice-biennale-2022-women-artists-maura-reilly-1234618777/>. Accessed 8 January 2023.

should be amendable to self-critique and be aware of their positionality in relation to discourses of power, authority, and privilege (224, 217).

3 Methodological and Theoretical Perspectives

Since my task is learning how to “see” in art museum practices, it is necessary to put forward what theoretical lens(es) I use to examine the material in this dissertation. For the past three years I have applied institutional critique, feminism, and decoloniality to answer my research questions. To prepare the reader for the three case studies I now turn to discuss the theoretical and methodological structures that unify the articles. My aim is to carve out an approach to address the specific issues concerning art museums in a Norwegian context. Two questions frame this discussion: what are institutional critique, feminist standpoint theory, intersectional feminism, and decoloniality, and how can they be applied as method and theory within the context of art museums?

For my case study on NM’s collaboration with Fredriksen Family Art I applied intersectional feminism and Sara Ahmed’s concept of the “feminist killjoy” as a method to analyze the museum’s press photographs and the Art Collaboration and Loan Agreement. While in my investigation of NNKM’s *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* I used decoloniality to analyze the work within the original colonial context in which it was painted, as well as the time when the museum acquired the painting in 2002. Here in the cover article, I expand on the methodologies and the main concepts addressed in my articles. In addition, I examine NNKM and NM in the context of international discussions on museums.

3.1 Institutional Critique

Institutional critique is by no means new, rather it is a broad idea that stretches far back in time, touches on many subjects, and resonates in many disciplines. The concept can be applied to any type of institution. Moreover, several theorists invoke a type of institutional critique in their scholarship. As an enormous field comprised of numerous studies, an in-depth study on this vast topic is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In this study, institutional critique involves the systematic inquiry into the

workings of art museums. Here I leave the concept “open” as a tool to be developed under different perspectives.

How do scholars in art history approach institutional critique? A traditional approach may investigate it through the lens of Michel Foucault, for instance as exemplified in Gerald Raunig’s article “Instituent Practices: Fleeing, Instituting, Transforming” in the anthology *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (2009).⁷³ As an important figure in Western critical theory, several of Foucault’s concepts, analyses of governmentality, and interpretations of authorship are relevant and touch upon a number of the issues underpinning institutional critique. The Foucauldian perspective is concerned with the interconnectedness between power, knowledge, and the subject—that is, the relation between social structures and institutions and the individual. Foucault asserts that “power is exercised, rather than possessed” (Leitch [2001] 2018, 1391). Further, he argues that “there is no outside,” meaning that nothing (selves, desires, or truths) are separate from the productive power/knowledge that creates the categories by which something is apprehended and conceived (1393–94). Within this context he concentrates on bureaucratic institutions (like hospitals, prisons, the military, and schools) that administer individuals. For Foucault power does not belong to anyone, nor does it all originate from one specific location, for instance the state or any one institution. Instead, power is derived throughout social institutions and exercised through daily disciplines and routines; in this way power can be perceived as depersonalized (1391). As an example, teachers exercise power over students, yet as replaceable functionaries, teachers only hold that power in their role and position in the institution. Rather than viewing power as regressive, Foucault usefully posits the potential of power as “productive” in pointing out how it operates within everyday relations between people and institutions. For him the critical attitude in the art of governing people appears to be “partner” and “adversary” at the same time (Foucault 1997, 28). Foucault’s perspective on the relationship between *government* and *not to be governed like that* is still an underlying idea today for reflecting on the contemporary relationship between institution and

⁷³ The book is edited by Gerald Raunig and Gene Ray.

critique (Raunig 2009, 4). In short, Foucault's (1997, 28) critical attitude shifts the focus from "not to be governed at all" to "how not be governed *like that*."

I argue that, to "see" in art museum practices, one must address patriarchal and colonial structures. This is where we need to go beyond Foucault. As such I pivot my approach toward intersectional feminist and decolonial frameworks which I deploy as lenses. Further, they help tease out the complexities of the discriminatory and ecologically unsustainable capitalist paradigm. Because of these complex social matrices, intersectionality insists that feminism must be anticapitalistic, eco-socialist, and antiracist. While I do not have room in the scope of this dissertation for a proper analysis of these wide-ranging and entangled concepts, I mention them for the reader as key issues that concern art museum practices. And as I show, feminist and decolonial approaches aim to address the legacies of unresolved grief by talking the hard truths of coloniality. This requires working from a decolonizing paradigm, a broader intellectual project situated in the Indigenous studies field that draws heavily on the work of Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Her book *Decolonizing Methodologies* ([1999] 2012) has been a major force in the global discourse of Indigenous research. Smith opened a space for other Indigenous scholars who felt the need to do research differently than applying the dominant Western paradigms. Smith, in addition to numerous other scholars working under the term decolonization (and its derivatives), has set in motion Indigenization and Indigenous methodologies (Kovach 2009). Decolonial approaches to museum practices are an important component of Indigenization that involves recognizing and addressing the ways in which museums have historically been complicit in the colonization of Indigenous peoples and their lands and working to dismantle these legacies. The process of Indigenization is a complex and ongoing process that involves incorporating Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and values into museum practices and displays to decolonize collections and practices. In a Canadian context, the art historian Ruth B. Phillips supports the belief in the positive potential of museums to play activist social roles (2011, 157) and that art museums can and should contribute to contemporary projects of decolonization (298). She asserts that collaborative curatorial practice between Indigenous communities and museums is essential for achieving meaningful Indigenization, and

that it has the potential to contribute to the broader project of reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and settlers (185). Similar ideas have been articulated in Sápmi/Norway. For instance, Sámi scholar Torjer Andreas Olsen argues that a key issue with the approach of Indigenization is moving beyond critique to make use of Indigenous concepts, methods, and/or institutions (2018, 185). It goes beyond inviting Indigenous people into the museum to improve exhibitions; it is an overhauling of the entire system and decentering the Eurocentric view. This body of scholarship, along with the call for museums to address colonial legacies and historical unresolved grief, is advancing an “Indigenous paradigm” (Lonetree 2012, 7).

What is a “paradigm”? In his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) Thomas Kuhn claims that a mature science experiences alternating phases of normal science and revolutions (Bird 2022). For Kuhn, during normal periods of science things that make up the disciplinary matrix—the key theories, instruments, values, and metaphysical assumptions—stay fixed, whereas in a scientific revolution the disciplinary matrix undergoes revision to permit the solution that disturbed the previous period of normal science (Ibid.). When Kuhn refers to paradigm he means exemplars of good science, that is, the consensus on exemplary occurrences of scientific research (Ibid.). As the concept of paradigm is not necessarily derived from Indigenous modes of thinking, Indigenous scholars approach it with caution. As an example from Sápmi, Sámi scholar Rauna Kuokkanen/Jovvna Jon Ánne Kirstte Rávdná⁷⁴ theorizes an “Indigenous paradigm” from a Sámi standpoint (2000).⁷⁵ She argues the need for less dualistic and less hierarchical forms of paradigms for Indigenous societies to reach states of self-sustainability and self-determination, and to undo the ongoing consequences of colonialism. Because Western paradigms dominate the social sciences in the Nordic countries, Sámi research tends to follow and imitate prevailing Western paradigms and Eurocentric thinking (413). To counter this, an “Indigenous paradigm” challenges and transcends dominant values and recenters

⁷⁴ Jovvna Jon Ánne Kirstte Rávdná is Rauna Kuokkanen’s Sámi name. In the cover article I refer to her as Rauna Kuokkanen because this is the version of her name she has used when publishing academic texts.

⁷⁵ This is why she uses quotations to mark “Indigenous paradigm.”

Indigenous values, thus placing Indigenous peoples and their issues into dominant, mainstream discourses. Here there is a clear connection to the researcher's own culture and cultural practices are reflected in the ways of conducting research (417).

Kuokkanen suggests that the main objectives include: the criticism of Western dualistic metaphysics, the rejection of dualistic splits between mind and body, and the criticism of biased privileging of Western systems of knowledge. For Kuokkanen this work means the recognition and acceptance of alternative epistemologies on an equal level to Western systems of knowledge within academia, and the incorporation Sámi epistemologies “traditional knowledges”—that is, using cosmologies, spirituality, and relationships with the natural environment. Kuokkanen notes that “[t]aking Sami cosmology as a basis of Sami criticism allows us to be aware of the trappings of Western rationality and positivism” (416). This approach allows for recognition and acceptance of the existence of other realms than our visible daily reality. Within this holistic approach “one does not consider her/himself[/themselves] separate from or outside the observed but rather as part of a larger process” (419). Also, Kuokkanen emphasizes that it is crucial for the researcher to center reciprocity and bring back and share the information with their own people to benefit societies—not only the pursuit of self-advancement in career terms (420). Based on Sámi cultural concepts, values, and knowledge systems, Kuokkanen's work reminds us that the “Indigenous paradigm” is culturally specific, and she notes that her work should not be seen as the only possible model within this context (427). While I aim to introduce new perspectives, as a non-Indigenous person I do not claim to work from an Indigenous ontology in this dissertation. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge scholarship on Indigenizing methods when working with a decolonial framework.

Let us return to the initial question of what is “institutional critique.” And how is it relevant for an analysis of the art museum? To understand the embedded power structures, institutional critique situates the art museum in a complex network of social and economic relationships (Fraser 2005, 283). In response to critique from partakers both outside and inside the institution, art museums can make necessary adjustments to

alter and hopefully improve their practices. How has the artist, historically, activated institutional critique?⁷⁶ What is the role of today's artist in this regard?

3.1.1 Artistic Practices of Institutional Critique

While diverse in their tactics, artistic practices of institutional critique provoke important questions relevant to this study. One could argue that rebellion and disobedience are a few of its foundational principles. The American performance artist Andrea Fraser occupies a unique position in this realm and suggests the need for works of art that criticize cultural institutions. In her work Fraser critically and reflexively examines herself as part of the problem.⁷⁷ Fraser notes:

It's not a question of being *against* the institution: *We are* the institution. It's a question of what kind of institution we are, what kind of values we institutionalize, what forms of practice we reward, and what kinds of rewards we aspire to. Because the institution of art is internalized, embodied, and performed by individuals, these are the questions that institutional critique *demand*s we ask, above all, ourselves (2005, 283; emphasis added).

Fraser fleshes out the central importance in my understanding of institutional critique—it is not about being for or against the institution, but rather what kind (or model) of art museum and what kind of institutional values.

Artists contributed by opening up the discourse on institutional critique, as something comparable to the thinking (theoretical/political texts) published by activists, academics, critics, etc. Now canonized as part of art history (Raunig and Ray 2009, xv), scholars identify various projects that fall under the term (Raunig 2009, 3–12; MTL Collective 2018, 213; Tello 2020, 636).⁷⁸ The proponents of institutional critique work with a range of strategies (e.g. conceptual art, interventions, critical writings or

⁷⁶ NNKM has artist representation on its board, with one member appointed by the Artist Organizations of Northern Norway (NNBK and NKNN).

⁷⁷ Andrea Fraser (2005, 279) claims to be the first person to put the term “institutional critique” in print in a 1985 essay on Louise Lawler, “In and Out of Place.”

⁷⁸ Artists who are often referred to as the main representatives of institutional critique include Michael Asher, Robert Smithson, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, and Marcel Broodthaers. While scholars have questioned this canonized list of artists, concerning who it includes and excludes, that task is outside the scope my research project.

[art-]political activism) to expose the ideologies and structures of power underlying the circulation, display, and discussion of art.⁷⁹ For instance, members of the Fluxus network “were bent on subverting the very notions that are central to a museum’s identity: permanence, posterity, quality and authorship” (Corrin 1994, 3).⁸⁰ The *Fluxus Manifesto* (1963) clarified that the objectives of the artistic movement were “to purge the world of bourgeois sickness, ‘intellectual,’ professional & commercialized culture ... Fuse the cadres of cultural, social & political revolutionaries into united front & action.”⁸¹ Fluxus artists used a range of media and processes that valued anti-commercialism, chance, and simplicity, often using whatever materials were on hand to make art. Fluxus art prioritized the process over the product and events. Fluxus “Happenings” were a form of creativity open to anyone. Collaboration was encouraged between artists and with the audience or spectator. For example, they staged free Fluxus Happenings in the streets to get the public involved. Fluxus artists shared the attitude that art was for everyone, and art could be anything. Another important Fluxus-objective was that we cannot leave the power to define art to the institutions (alone). Art is, as life (ideally), changing, dynamic, interactive, and so forth. Institutions are, in this way of thinking, far more rigid, hierarchical, and exercise power.

Exercising “truth to power” is another characteristic of artists who engage with institutional critique, in addition to assailing the perceived neutrality of art institutions (Wilson and Halle 1993, 170). Through their practice, artists “strove to collapse the boundaries between the ‘white cube’ and the world” (Corrin 1994, 3). Conceptual art questioned the authoritarian role of the art institution and aimed to disrupt and break

⁷⁹ Stefan Nowotny (2009, 21) argues that canonizing the artistic practices of institutional critique is a paradoxical endeavor because canonization itself is what institutional critique refers to. Here there is potential risk of the co-optation of institutional critique by the institution, wherein the radical practice, that is method, is reduced and then loses its critical edge (Sheikh 2009, 31). For instance, as put forward by Miwon Kwon, market forces commodify “critical” art practices (1997, 95).

⁸⁰ Some of the key proponents that took part in Fluxus in the 1960s include Joseph Beuys, Dick Higgins, Alice Hutchins, Yoko Ono, Nam June Paik, Ben Vautier, Robert Watts, Benjamin Patterson, and Emmet Williams.

⁸¹ The Museum of Modern Art’s (MoMA) website <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127947>. Accessed 7 June 2022.

out of rigid institutional frameworks, the same institutions that bought and exhibited the artists' work. However, within this context there are two potentially incompatible art worlds: one committed to inclusion, artistic freedom, and change, the other a commercial art market driven by money.⁸² By engaging the institution as a network of social and economic relationships, institutional critique challenged the authority accumulated in cultural institutions that operated within the structure of the nation state, wherein the museum had a governmental function and played a role in the formation of colonial nation states (Steyerl 2009, 14–15). Further, since most cultural institutions were funded by the state, institutional critique challenged the notion why institutions were not representative of its citizens (15). The three main strategies included: radically negate institutions altogether, build new institutions, or try to be included in mainstream ones, for example demands for cultural institutions to include minorities and disadvantaged majorities such as women (15–16).

Gerald Raunig contends that artists who instigated practices of institutional critique in the late 1960s and 1970s sought a distance from the institution, while in the late 1980s artists shifted to concentrate on their inescapable involvement in the institution (2009, 9). In other words, whereas artists in previous decades tried to escape to an “outside” of the art institution, these artists reasoned that they had been trapped inside the institution from the start (Morariu 2014, 144–145). As a result, the idea of an inside and outside became more diffuse and complex. Rather than a dichotomy of inside versus outside, the institution was seen as a porous membrane, inextricably linked to socioeconomic relations. These developments coincided with the rise of postcolonial theory in the humanities and social sciences, and thus prompted more attention to the violent colonial and racial histories and legacies underlying and embedded in cultural institutions (MTL collective 2018, 209). Feminism and gender studies also informed the movement, generating works that targeted forms of gender and racial inequities persisting in the art world (Ibid.).⁸³ Artists conducted the practice against the art

⁸² Article in *The New York Times* on 1 May 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/01/opinion/decolonizing-art-museums.html>. Accessed 3 June 2022.

⁸³ As an example, the emergence of the Guerrilla Girls in the late 1980s.

institution to draw notice to what it represses. While it might appear that artists who performed the critique took on an antagonist role, their intention was to defend the art institution from instrumentalization by political and economic interests (Fraser 2005, 283).⁸⁴ Additionally, artists sought to bring transparency to the complicities among the apparently opposed spheres of art, the state, and corporations.

Today art museums find themselves subjected to increased public scrutiny. In recent years various forms of institutional critique have highlighted the art institution's complicity in perpetuating, concealing, or disacknowledging unjust and oppressive practices using a range of tactics and strategies including boycotts, callouts, disruptions, hacks, infiltrations, occupations, petitions, pickets, shutdowns, and strikes (MLT Collective 2018, 193). What do some of these initiatives look like in practice? For example, what are the main points of critique raised during the activities by the artist collective Liberate Tate?⁸⁵ In 2011 Liberate Tate issued an open invitation for concerned members of the public to act and ensure that Tate art galleries (Tate) ends its oil sponsorship.⁸⁶ Liberate Tate called for transparency in response to Tate's refusal to disclose information about its sponsorship agreement with oil giant British Petroleum (BP). As a result, the UK's Information Commissioner ruled that Tate was breaking information law by refusing to remove a series of black squares covering information about the sponsorship deal in the meeting minutes of the Tate's Ethics Committee and Board of Trustees. During their campaign Liberate Tate organized several performances, for instance *Hidden Figures*, a reanimation of Malevich's *Black Square*, during a blockbuster exhibition of the artist's work, reinterpreting it into a participatory mass emblem staged in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2014. The performance started with the unfolding of a sixty-four square meter black cloth

⁸⁴ Here Fraser references artist Hans Haacke's work and his engagement with institutional critique.

⁸⁵ Founded in 2010 during a workshop on art and activism at Tate, Liberate Tate consists of a core group of 15 people, including artists Mel Evans and Kevin Smith. In the wider Liberate Tate network there are about 500 people who have been involved in the different performances. Article by Benjamin Sutton in *Hyperallergic* on 4 April 2016 <https://hyperallergic.com/288254/liberate-tate-activists-look-back-on-six-years-of-fighting-bp-sponsorship/>. Accessed 9 January 2023. See Liberate Tate's website <https://liberatetate.wordpress.com/>.

⁸⁶ Tate galleries is a family of four art museums in London, Liverpool, and Cornwall.

smuggled into the museum. The group's hundred performers gathered around the edge of the massive black square and raised it into the air. One by one individual performers took turns entering underneath the square striking a series of poses while the fabric settled on top of them. After two hours *Hidden Figures* ended with all of the performers lying underneath the black textile; then two of the participants carried it quietly out of the Turbine Hall with a long fabric trailing behind them.⁸⁷ The performance contributed to the debate regarding the trope of corporate benevolence in its sponsorship of cultural institutions.⁸⁸ Further, Liberate Tate's examination of the museum through the lens of institutional critique demonstrated how external forces have affected museum accountability—pushing the institution to be more transparent by making accurate financial records available to all stakeholders.

How do Liberate Tate's activities on disclosure compare to a callout tactic? On 22 March 2019 Decolonize This Place (DTP) launched *9 Weeks of Art + Action*, an initiative with the objective to pressure Warren B. Kanders to step down from his position as vice chair of the Whitney Museum of American Art's board of directors. DTP is a New York City-based activist collective facilitated by MTL Collective (Amin Husain and Nitasha Dhillon) that seeks to unsettle settler colonial structures, among other things decolonize the art world.⁸⁹ The scrutiny against Kanders was based on his role as CEO for a company profiting from crowd-control weapons—for example, bullets, handcuffs, batons, body armor, and tear gas designed for use by police forces, prison guards, militaries, and border patrols.⁹⁰ DTP's effort to oust Kanders from the Whitney Museum's board was a collective effort with other actors (artists, art collectives, community groups, journalists, museum professionals, and scholars) and included a diversity of strategies. The pressure that led to Kander's

⁸⁷ For more information on these actions, see McKee (2016) 1–6; 172–180; also see the press release at Liberate Tate's website <https://liberatetate.wordpress.com/2014/09/06/giant-black-square-unveiled-in-tate-modern-as-part-of-bp-sponsorship-performance-protest/>. Accessed 27 July 2022.

⁸⁸ In 2017, after its six-year campaign, Liberate Tate succeeded in pressuring Tate to end its twenty-six-year-long sponsorship agreement with BP.

⁸⁹ See DTP's website <https://decolonizethisplace.org/>

⁹⁰ Article by DTP in Hyperallergic on 30 July 2019 <https://hyperallergic.com/511683/decolonize-this-place-after-kanders/>. Accessed 3 June 2022.

resignation involved: nearly 100 Whitney staffers circulating a letter in which they called on the museum's management to consider having Kanders resign, journalists breaking the story, an artist declining to participate in the Whitney Biennial before it opened, eight artists withdrawing their work from the Biennial exhibition, 400 writers, scholars and artists circulating an open letter, and groups convening over a weekly series of protest-minded events inside the Whitney's blockbuster exhibition, *Andy Warhol—From A to B and Back Again*.

What are some common traits that characterize campaigns of institutional critique? Scholars point to a decentering of institutional authority and increased demand for institutional accountability from the institution's frame of reference—that is, their stated institutional commitments. The objective with critique is not to tear down the art museum, but rather make visible complicities among the apparently oppositional spheres of art, the state, and corporations (Fraser 2005, 283). The aim is to help art museums become more progressive institutions.⁹¹

In summary, institutional critique focuses on problematizing museal practices in their entirety. That is, not just squarely around the artist and artistic practices, but also museum leadership and administration, collections and management, curatorship, education (learning-and-engagement), forms of display, funding and sponsorship, and marketing and public relations. When used as an analytical tool, institutional critique sheds light on the art museum's entanglements. Such an approach exposes the inner workings of the art museum—the complicities, compromises, or even censorship, and complexifies what the museum communicates as “natural,” celebratory or positive. A critical awareness can show how much of what might appear as progressive develop in art museums is not about institutional structural transformation.

⁹¹ Mark Dion, “The Museum Divide: Beyond Institutional Critique,” panel discussion, The Natural History Museum, 14 September 2014 <https://thenaturalhistorymuseum.org/tv/the-museum-divide-beyond-institutional-critique/>. Accessed 5 May 2022.

3.2 Feminist Standpoint Theory

What can feminist standpoint theory (FST) do in my approach to institutional critique and how might it operate in this context? In the following I focus the main ideas to establish how FST informs my research. Originally, FST emerged from Marxist feminism as a critique to the traditional epistemological assumption that science is objective.⁹² FST denies the conventional postulation that through rigorous methodology researchers can hold a neutral or unbiased perspective when examining their subject matter. Moreover, FST challenges the perhaps more standard notion that politics can only obstruct and damage the production of scientific knowledge (Harding 2004, 1). Conversely, FST suggests that knowledge is socially situated, as demonstrated by the relations between the production of knowledge and political and social power. This involves a commitment to the view that all knowledge is historically and socially situated; in this way socially situated knowledge aims to be properly objective.⁹³ FST insists that in addition to one's social positions, race, and class shape what and how one knows, and sets limits on it (1). Situating one's knowledge means recognizing the ways in which knowledge is shaped and mediated by things like race, gender, ethnicity, class, physical capacities, and sexuality. The scholar Sandra Harding coined the term "standpoint theory" in the 1970s, while Dorothy Smith popularized it in the late 1980s. For Harding, social location deals with lived experiences (Hirsh, Olson, and Harding 1995, 193). In this way oppressive relations are not static categories.

A standpoint is an ongoing process of becoming conscious of one's social situation. FST posits that a standpoint is not merely a perspective but rather a starting point that is earned and formed by one's social location.⁹⁴ FST helps one to understand how, by self-asserting one's own identity, one occupies a standpoint. Harding argues that anyone can have a perspective, but a standpoint is earned through the lived experience

⁹² In short, Marxist feminism is a critical framework that aims to understand and explain gender oppression in a systematic way (Holmstrom 2002).

⁹³ Tracy Bowell, "Feminist Standpoint Theory," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/>. Accessed 16 June 2022.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

of political struggle. Because of their position, marginalized groups have a potential advantage over the dominant group. That is, through their underprivileged position they possess greater potential awareness of social realities. While those at the top of social hierarchies lose sight on social issues, and perhaps miss the critical questions, those on the other end of the spectrum—the dominated—are better equipped to see and ask. This idea originates from the Marxist claim that people from an oppressed class have access to knowledge that is unavailable to the capitalists.⁹⁵ Within a simplified Marxist understanding two types of classes make up society, the working-class (proletariat) and the capitalists (the bourgeoisie) who own the means of production. Since their privilege depends on exploiting the working class, the capitalists have a motivation to uphold the status quo. As a result, this interest interferes with the capitalist's ability to understand the position of the socially underprivileged. On the contrary, from the working-class position, through lived experiences of being exploited one can potentially have dual vision on understanding the capitalists' view of the world. bell hooks in her book *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* ([1984] 2000, xvi) notes that “[t]o be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body.” Living from this standpoint, the marginalized develop a particular way of seeing reality, what hooks calls “an oppositional world view”—a mode unknown to most oppressors, and writes that

[f]or black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of our marginality. Across those tracks were paved streets, stores we could not enter, restaurants we could not eat in, and people we could not look directly in the face. Across those tracks was a world we could work in as maids, as janitors, as prostitutes, as long as it was in a service capacity. We could enter that world, but we could not live there. We had always to return to the margin, to beyond the tracks, to shacks and abandoned houses on the edge of town (xvi).

hooks shows how, by looking from the outside in and from the inside out, the marginalized understand the center and the margin. Furthermore, she points out that

⁹⁵ Heidi Grasswick, “Feminist Social Epistemology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/feminist-social-epistemology/>. Accessed 16 June 2022.

survival for the marginalized is dependent on the ongoing work of bringing to public attention the separation between margin and center and the ongoing private acknowledgement that the marginalized are an essential, vital part of that whole (xvi).

FST insists that researchers focus their attention on the standpoint of the underprivileged. According to FST, to survive within social structures in which one is oppressed one is required to understand the practices of oppression, both as oppressed and oppressor.⁹⁶ For instance, the colonized must learn the language of the colonizer. In Norway, the state's former policy of Norwegianization was an effort to make the Sámi (and the Kven) drop their own language and learn Norwegian. In contrast, Norwegians need not learn the Sámi language. FST teaches us that the colonized have the potential to understand how the world works from the perspective of the colonizer, while the colonizer on the other hand is shut out of the world of the colonized and has a mono-visual view. The oppressed have an embodied experience of power that provides the basis of their knowledge.

I argue that FST raises important issues of concern for museum professionals who as practitioners need to recognize that they are a privileged group (Handy 1994, 183; Janes and Sandell 2019, 2). For Harding, this is not simply a confession of being a member of the dominant group but of seeing reflexivity as a positive resource; she argues that strong objectivity asks us to take a critical look at the frameworks that comprise our social location (Hirsh, Olson, and Harding 1995, 205–206).

3.3 Intersectional Feminism

What is intersectional feminism? First and foremost, there are many variants of feminism. Gender identity by itself does not make a process feminist; situations also include other social dimensions and categories. In short, some forms of feminism marginalize and overlook certain groups and individuals. Indeed, this is how many Black women, Indigenous women, trans women, and women of color experience

⁹⁶ Tracy Bowell, "Feminist Standpoint Theory," *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <https://iep.utm.edu/fem-stan/>. Accessed 16 June 2022.

feminist spaces. The term intersectionality was introduced in 1989 by Black scholar of critical race theory, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, within the context of the American court system and legal discrimination against Black women as the “outsider within”—that is, those caught between groups or categories of power.⁹⁷ To illustrate the abstract concepts that are at work, Crenshaw’s analysis aimed to contrast the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories by centering the multidimensionality of Black women’s experiences (1989, 139). Her objective was to develop language critical of the dominant view (167). In her study Crenshaw considered three different court cases to show how intersecting oppressions overlap, as exemplified in the 1976 case *DeGraffenreid v General Motors* (Crenshaw 1989, 141–143).⁹⁸ In this specific case five Black women brought suit against General Motors for race and gender discrimination, alleging that they were not hired because they were Black *and* female. The judge in question concluded with the argument that the employer did hire African Americans and women, and instead of addressing the problem to broaden the frame to include Black women, dismissed the suit on the grounds of preferential treatment—that the women “should not be allowed to combine statutory remedies to create a ‘super remedy’” (141). What the judge failed to acknowledge was that the employer in question hired *only* Black (and white) men and white women. Crenshaw argued that there was no name for this type of double discrimination, which led her to propose the analogy of the intersection—a meeting point where two or more roads meet or cross to demonstrate how social categories overlap and their cumulative effects. Within this metaphorical understanding of discrimination there were three main parts: 1) the roads: the way the workforce was structured by race and gender, 2) the traffic: the hiring policies and other practices, and 3) the ambulance: the law. The ambulance was ready to provide treatment yet only to those harmed on the race or gender side of the road. Since the Black women were situated where the roads meet, they were impacted

⁹⁷ Patricia Hill Collins introduced the term “outsider within” in a 1986 article, “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought” in *Social Problems*.

⁹⁸ Crenshaw speaks about this case in her TED talk titled “The Urgency of Intersectionality,” November 2016, retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en. Accessed 14 July 2022.

by multiple forces and thus abandoned by the law. In this way Crenshaw demonstrated how social dynamics come together and discriminate against socially marginalized people. Further, Crenshaw argued that feminist theory derives from a context constructed around white women's experiences, and thus overlooks the role of race (154–155).⁹⁹ As a result, women of color are not only overlooked, but their exclusion is reinforced by those white feminists who speak for and on behalf of “all” women.

What can intersectional feminism teach us about art museums and their practices? Other intersectional feminists, like Sara Ahmed, argue that intersectionality is “the point from which we must proceed if we are to offer an account of how power works” (2017, 5). For Ahmed, feminism is “a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world” (21). In her discussion on the process of becoming a feminist she posits that “[t]o live a feminist life is to make everything into something that is questionable” (2).

Therefore, the feminist's task is to keep insisting on the something, that is to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway 2016). Critiques of patriarchal conceptual frameworks and knowledge production typically do not come from the dominant group (Moreton-Robinson 2011, 413; Olsen 2018, 193). As such, Ahmed argues that when a feminist points to structures, “the powers that be” say it is in your head (6). In this way being a feminist is aligned with being wrong. Ahmed suggests that “when you expose a problem you pose a problem” (37). Ahmed centers on diversity work at universities, which aims to open up institutions to those who have historically been excluded from them. Diversity hires are employed by the institution to transform it, yet while this might signify the institution is willing to be transformed, Ahmed's study shows that practitioners often meet institutional reluctance. Ironically a diversity hire does not necessarily mean the institution is willing to change. As a result, much diversity work is not about structural transformation but rather a strategy co-opted by the institution to appear progressive. In Ahmed's interviews with diversity practitioners, many of them described their institution as a “brick wall” in their efforts to transform its norms.

⁹⁹ Intersectionality has a long history and existed as a method and politics before Crenshaw introduced the term. For instance, late nineteenth and early twentieth century black feminists such as Maria W. Stewart, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, and Sojourner Truth also worked on examining the interconnections between racism and sexism but did not use the term intersectionality.

These practitioners experienced feelings of coming up against something that does not move; something solid and tangible. For instance, one practitioner described diversity work as a “banging your head against a brick wall job” (135). The wall represents a mechanism that appears when someone tries to change the status quo. Although Ahmed’s experiences are grounded in academia, I aim to demonstrate how her ideas are transferable to the mechanisms of art museums.

What does Ahmed’s concept of the “feminist killjoy” do in my dissertation?¹⁰⁰ The term “feminist killjoy” implies an individual, regardless of gender, whose main task is exposing the patriarchal norms that are displaced and negated under public signs of joy (Ahmed 2010, 65). Discontent with the status quo, the feminist killjoy aims to expose false realities, that is—lay bare the deeply ingrained inequities of class, gender, and race in heteropatriarchal society (Ahmed 2017, 5). Similar to bell hook’s concept of “talking back,” the feminist killjoy is willful, and her method is to get in the way of other people’s happiness by speaking up on injustices like racism and sexism. By not showing happiness the feminist kills joy at the “wrong” moment. Ahmed notes that “[s]he is doing more than saying the wrong thing: she is getting in the way of something, the achievement or accomplishment of the family or some *we* or another, which is created by what is not said. So much you are supposed not to say, to do, to be, in order to preserve that *we*” (37). Because patriarchal reasoning is so deeply embedded in our existence, we are subconsciously trained to overlook injustices. Ahmed suggests that we learn not to be conscious, and do not see what occurs right in front of us (2010, 83). For Ahmed:

Making feminist points, antiracist points, sore points, is about pointing out structures that many are invested in not recognizing. That is what an institutional brick wall is: a structure that many are invested in not recognizing. It is not simply that many are not bruised by this structure. It is also that they are progressing through the reproduction of what is not made tangible (158).

Therefore, much of the work of a feminist is trying to convince others to end something they do not recognize as existing, like racism and sexism. Ahmed reminds

¹⁰⁰ Sara Ahmed writes about the concept of the “feminist killjoy” in her books, *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), *Living a Feminist Life* (2017), and *The Feminist Killjoy Handbook* (2023).

us that to become a feminist is to stay a student (2017, 11). For me becoming a feminist killjoy is about on-going learning. Drawing on scholarship by other feminists—Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Sunera Thobani, and Indigenous (Goenpul) scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson—Ahmed aligns the feminist killjoy with the figures of the angry Black woman, the angry woman of color, as well as the angry Indigenous woman within the context of intersectional feminism (Ahmed 2010, 67; 2017, 177). Here one could feasibly include the figure of the angry Sámi woman, for instance Sámi artist Carola Grahn’s idea of Sámi *suhttu* (Sámi rage).¹⁰¹ What do all of these figures have in common? Their rage and anger are consequences of oppression. Here it may help to understand oppression’s relationship with happiness. Feminist scholar Marilyn Frye argues that it is often a requirement upon oppressed people to show signs of happiness (1983, 2). Following Frye, if an oppressed person does not smile or show signs of happiness they are read as angry, hostile, mean, unhappy, and perhaps even thankless. As such the feminist is often the one who is viewed as the cause of the argument and as a disruptor of the peace.

While intersectionality is a Western construct, not an Indigenous concept, certain aspects appear to dovetail with Indigenous ways of knowing about interconnectedness. For instance, Ahmed’s reference to the figure of the angry Indigenous woman. With intersectionality, Torjer Andreas Olsen usefully posits that the terms one employs are of less importance than the action put into them (2018, 191). This is helpful in thinking about how art museum professionals might practice decolonial approaches that instead of working to restructure power dynamics, work from a place of performance or concern about image—how they appear metaphorically, versus how they work in practice. Intersectional approaches, like Indigenous studies, take their starting point in the “margins” rather than the “center”—the margins being Sámi knowledges and epistemologies, and the center being dominant, mainstream Western epistemologies. Olsen suggests that scholars of Indigenous studies might add to intersectionality that

¹⁰¹ Carola Grahn introduced the idea of “Sámi rage” for a commissioned work at the Sámi music festival *Márkomeannu* in 2015 <https://www.ht.no/kultur/i/ePV9jg/bestillingsverk-for-alle>. Arts and Culture Norway borrowed the title for its annual conference in 2017. To see the conference and Grahn’s presentation, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixKI9w8AOXg>. Accessed 13 July 2022.

Indigeneity also intersects “Modernization Boulevard, Privilege Alley, Religion Road and Rue du Langue” (2018, 186). By looking into a case study of the 2016 feature film *Sameblod* (Sámi Blood) Olsen illustrates how intersectionality might be a tool to understand the different levels of colonialism. Clearly an intersectional approach is needed to understand the film’s protagonist, Elle-Marja, who is Sámi *and* a girl, a sister, a less-privileged citizen, and a young individual (183). In the face of repeated mortification and dehumanization by boarding school officials, racial biologists, and Swedish neighbors, Elle-Marja attempts to break with everything related to being Sámi by burning her *gákti*, opting instead for cosmopolitan dress, and renaming herself the more Swedish-sounding Christina.¹⁰² She is a privileged Sámi girl at the beginning of the film, but from there becomes an unprivileged outsider in Swedish society who, by the end of the film, ends up as a privileged middle-class Swede. Through this example Olsen reminds us to treat binaries with caution. Although intersectionality is complex, the key takeaway is that gender is not only about gender, and Indigeneity is not only about Indigeneity. While Indigenous groups are seen as belonging to marginalized and vulnerable communities, there are also internal relations of privilege and oppression (194). Like gender, Indigeneity also crosses axes of identity and power. While Indigenous groups are seen as belonging to marginalized and vulnerable communities, there are at the same time a diversity of contexts and/or identities.

In summary, intersectional feminism shows the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group and the interlocking forms of discrimination and/or disadvantage. To apply this to the art museum, as mentioned earlier it is prudent for museum practitioners to recognize that they are a privileged group. Here intersectional feminism can help art museums professionals to check and determine their privilege, and to listen to voices of criticism and dissent, instead of seeing activists as antagonists. For example, as a curator, to ask: Am I the right person to be telling this story? Am I an ally for groups I

¹⁰² *Gákti* is an item of clothing embedded in Sámi cultural values and developed collectively for generations (Finbog 2020, 6).

do not recognize with, or am I speaking on behalf of someone and/or others to benefit myself? Also, regarding positions within art museum hierarchies, it helps to understand power dynamics. It is about having a critical awareness to insist on going against the flow. A curator practicing intersectional feminism can empower staff from other departments to raise concerns to leadership; to not be afraid to speak as an equal to an authority figure.

3.4 Decoloniality

To carve out a decolonial approach to institutional critique I support my discussion with two principle works: Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh's *On Decoloniality* (2018) and Amy Lonetree's *Decolonizing Museums* (2012). Mignolo and Walsh (non-Indigenous scholars) write in the context of Abya Yala, otherwise known as the Americas, specifically the Americas of the South (Central and South America) and the Caribbean, while Ho-Chunk scholar Amy Lonetree's scholarship is situated in the context of Turtle Island. Indeed, these contexts are geographically and geopolitically distant from the material in my case studies. However, Mignolo and Walsh's intention is to open space for different local histories, as opposed to provide global answers (1). In this way other scholars can enter conversations on the practices of decoloniality from their specific contexts and areas of interest. I aim to actively align my study and specific context—art museums in Sápmi/Norway—to Walsh's work on “decoloniality in/as praxis” and Lonetree's study on museums as possible sites for decolonization.¹⁰³

Why is decoloniality relevant in this study? Walter D. Mignolo reminds us that “[c]oloniality is not over; it is all over” (2018a, 119). All forms of life today live in the colonial matrix of power.¹⁰⁴ In contrast to the term post-colonialism, decolonization

¹⁰³ Decoloniality, decolonial, and decolonize are derivatives of decolonization. According to Walter D. Mignolo (2018a, 121) “decolonization” originally meant freeing a colony to allow it to become self-governing or independent.

¹⁰⁴ The “colonial matrix of power” or what Mignolo and Walsh refer to as coloniality, underpins decoloniality and evokes an ongoing pattern of colonial power in society on domestic, transnational, interstate, and global levels. Aníbal Quijano (2000) introduced the concept of coloniality in the 1990s. The colonial matrix of power and the struggles that resist it (diverse forms of decolonial contestation)

asserts that settler colonialism is an ongoing process, a structure rather than an event (Wolfe 2006, 390; Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). Decolonization has become a defining part of Indigenous studies and is used by many scholars in preference to the term post-colonialism (Olsen 2018, 184). As a framework it carries significance in Sápmi and aligns with the workings of settler colonialism in the Nordic context. Rauna Kuokkanen asserts that “settler colonialism is a structure characterizing Sápmi, both in the past and present” (2020a, 299). Her investigations of how the Nordic countries seek to “erase the presence and rights of the Sámi” help ground my investigation on art institutions in Norway and how they resemble power structures in international discussions on coloniality (Kuokkanen 2020b, 520).

Decoloniality is a vast concept and Mignolo and Walsh focus methodology and theory in combination. How might one assume decolonial practices in art museums? I argue that it is a mindset and activism. How could a decolonial lens carry value in the scope of this study? Notably, many decolonial sentiments resonate with an intersectional feminist lens. For example, once one views material through a critical lens one cannot unsee. Consequently, when one is committed to decolonial approaches one cannot *not* do the work. The alternative is perhaps to lose one’s integrity and social capital. Like Sara Ahmed, Mignolo and Walsh invert theory-practice and theorize decoloniality from and with practice—that is, they disobey the dominant hierarchical understanding that locates academic theory above and over practice. For Mignolo decoloniality is an option, standpoint, project, and way to disobey and delink from the colonial matrix of power (2018a, 125). Although the word decoloniality is a noun, they describe the idea as action, struggle, and responsibility to open a space, acting from decolonial fissures and cracks to make more cracks within spaces of the dominant order (84). In my mind

span a history of more than five hundred years (Walsh 2018, 99). Decolonial responses emerge of and from people who do not want to be oppressed, exploited, and disposed (Mignolo, 2018b, 145). Quijano contends that the coloniality of power is on-going. It is a structure, not a historical event. Drawing from Quijano, Mignolo (2018a, 112) posits that “thinking decolonially made it possible to see coloniality.” Practices of decoloniality seek to make visible the hidden forces that exercise control over “humanity, subjectivity and being, gender and sexuality, spirituality, knowledge production, economy, nature, existence and life itself” (Walsh, 23).

this act, each expanded rift and new crevice illuminates institutional structures and thus has the potential to enable one to grasp complexity. For Walsh:

Decoloniality denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede, the colonial enterprise and invasion. It implies the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought, structures that are clearly intertwined with and constitutive of global capitalism and Western modernity (2018, 17).

Decoloniality aims to make visible radically different standpoints that displace Western rationality as *the* framework. Like institutional critique, it aims to be constructive resistance against for the possibilities of an otherwise (50).

Amy Lonetree applies decolonization to the context of museums by investigating the representation of Native Americas in museum exhibitions. Her book *Decolonizing Museums* opens with the statement: “Museums can be very painful sites for Native peoples, as they are intimately tied to the colonization process.” Similarly, we know that museums can be painful sites for the Sámi. Counter-narratives in the form of artist voices attesting to decolonization can be found today and have long existed in Sápmi. Building on the “Indigenous paradigm,” Lonetree’s *Decolonizing Museums* (2012) comprises case studies on three different museums on Turtle Island.¹⁰⁵

For Lonetree, the core tenets of decolonizing methodologies involve “speaking the hard truths of colonialism and thereby creating spaces for healing and understanding” and a willingness to make change (5, 9). That is, difficult aspects of history can and must be told in museum spaces (9). Hence, the museum poses as problem and possible solution. With a case study of the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways (a tribally controlled project), Lonetree shows how the museum’s exhibitions speak the hard truths of colonization in a clear and concise manner, and its ongoing effects, with programming designed to complement the decolonizing vision of the galleries to promote healing and understanding (166). Lonetree asserts that decolonizing

¹⁰⁵ The museums in Lonetree’s study are: The Mille Lacs Indian Museum in Minnesota; the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC; and the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways in Michigan.

inevitably involves painful experiences. She argues that a deep understanding of the colonial context is essential and required to cut through “the veil of silence around colonialism” (5). In so doing Lonetree rejects the idea of victimage and the critique of offending museum visitors (6). Rather, she argues that decolonizing museum practice opens a space and invites dialogue on the difficult histories we need to talk about (5). For example, in the “Effects of Colonization” gallery wall labels present brutal realities of the period:

Government policies included ruthless efforts to remove the Anishinabek from their lands. Genocide, smallpox, and forced removal were ways to secure the highly valuable and fertile grounds of the Michigan Territory. For the Anishinabek who would not move, the government brought an era of cruel acculturation through the establishment of government and missionary schools (139).

While visitors at the museum may choose to overlook the wall labels, the exhibition also features audio with voices reading some of the documents featured on the nearby wall panels. In this way viewers cannot miss hearing the racist opinions of the colonizers as they move through the exhibition. For Lonetree, confronting painful experiences such as these engages viewers in an authentic, transformative process (170).

In the context of my research, what does it mean to decolonize the art museum? I understand decoloniality as a lens to situate the art museum as a settler institution and a site for the reproduction of a privileged class of values, of elitism. Decoloniality offers an approach to consider and address the impact of coloniality—issues of agency, power, representation, and voice that have been normalized in art museum practices. Decolonial perspectives challenge art museum practitioners to acknowledge privilege. Moreover, decoloniality emphasizes the need for institutions to recognize and acknowledge the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization and to work collaboratively, in real, genuine, and committed ways, with Indigenous communities to develop more ethical and inclusive approaches to the representation of cultures and histories. In this framework the biggest challenge of developing a decolonial praxis is refusing “settler moves to innocence” that long has characterized Norwegian art

museums. Scholars Eve Tuck (Unangaŕ) and K. Wayne Yang define settler moves to innocence as “those strategies or positioning that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all” (2012, 10). These are performative actions that only serve the settler.

4 Summary of Dissertation Articles

4.1 Article 1

Title: **“The Feminist Killjoy Untangles Philanthropy: Norway’s National Museum (Nasjonalmuseet) and Fredriksen Family Art Company Limited”**

Published in the special issue “Samlinger, utstillinger, kjønn” (Collections, exhibitions, gender) in *Kunst og Kultur* (Art and Culture), released on 14 June 2022. Possibly one of Norway’s only scholarly journals in art history, *Kunst og Kultur* is open access and published by Universitetsforlaget (Scandinavian University Press) in collaboration with NM.¹⁰⁶

Permanent link to article: <https://doi.org/10.18261/kk.105.1.4>.

Publishing an article about NM in their own journal was my strategy to align with practices of institutional critique. Additionally, my aim was to open a space for others to enter and participate in critical dialogue that might encourage museum self-critique. My case study investigates NM’s ten-year collaboration with Fredriksen Family.¹⁰⁷ To date there is little or no scholarship on the challenges and ethical implications of this type of alliance. An important context is the opening of NM’s new facility, on 11 June 2022 after an eight-year wait. It is a museum on an epic scale—the largest art museum in the Nordic countries. The partnership aims to publicly recognize Fredriksen Family’s efforts to make a substantial contribution to Norwegian society, and to introduce a stronger diversity perspective to the new museum.

I used Sara Ahmed’s concept of the “feminist killjoy” as a framework for analysis by which to disentangle the complex relationship between philanthropy and public art

¹⁰⁶ *Metode* by ROM for kunst og arkitektur is a new (2022) online peer-reviewed journal platform in the field of art and architecture, see the website <https://metode.r-o-m.no/en>.

¹⁰⁷ The contract expires on 31 December 2030.

museums (2010, 2017). Within this space philanthropy, ethics, and social issues of class, gender, and race are all entangled. In my analysis I talk back to NM's celebratory stance on the partnership and show how an intersectional feminist perspective offers an alternative reading of the agreement. Intersectional feminism asserts a framework that kills joy surrounding the alliance of the patriarchy and capitalism to expose patriarchal ideologies that hide in plain sight. From this standpoint one insists on the convergence of race, class, and gender—that is, the ingrained inequities in heteropatriarchal society.

My investigation focused on 1) a visual analysis of The National Museum's press photographs that followed the public launch of the agreement in 2019;¹⁰⁸ 2) a critical reading of the Art Collaboration and Loan Agreement; 3) an analysis of discussion in the popular media; and 4) telephone interviews with NM's director of communications, Eirik Kydland, and photographer of the press images, Morten Qvale. My correspondence with NM is limited to my interview with Eirik Kydland as Hindsbo and Högvist were unavailable when I inquired to speak with them in November 2019 and August 2021.

My study shows how art museums embrace marketplace ideology, and thus engage as players in global capitalism. I argue that when public institutions like art museums become largely dependent on private funding, their operations are vulnerable to exploitation by corporate interests under the guise of progressive development. The amount of private influence Fredriksen Family has on the museum works against the academic freedom of the public art institution. Equally important, corporate capital buys prestige at the cost of the public institution.

My findings indicate that NM, perhaps unintentionally, appropriated the female body to portray generosity, diversity, and gender equity. Indeed, this is not a one-off

¹⁰⁸ The two press photographs show NM's leadership, directors Karin Hindsbo and Stina Högvist, alongside the new benefactors, Cecilie Astrup Fredriksen and Kathrine Astrup Fredriksen, daughters of John Fredriksen—a Cypriot citizen who resides in London and is perhaps the richest man in Norway's history.

example. These findings reflect a global pattern within the ongoing process of marketization of cultural institutions internationally. In this context art museums adopt corporate strategies, for instance relentless expansion, the acquisition of world-class (expensive) works of art, and glossy advertising to gain users and international recognition. While the partnership between NM and Fredriksen Family could indeed prove successful in advancing diversity and representation in the new museum, drawing from Robert R. Janes I argue that marketplace ideology and capitalistic values are not the way forward. Instead, by applying “new museum ethics” as proposed by Janet Marstine (2011), we may come up with alternative solutions. In short, transparency and the idea that museums have moral agency may provide the critical language necessary to expose tropes for generosity and progressive development.

4.2 Article 2

Title: **“Decolonizing the Museum: Unhighlighting Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum’s Iconic *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* (1840)”**

Published in the special issue “Counter-Stories from the Arctic Contact Zone” in *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, released on 8 March 2023.

Permanent link to article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2022.2161063>.

This case study presents a decolonial analysis of the French painter François-Auguste Biard’s *Le Pasteur Laestadius instruisant des Lapons* [The Minister Laestadius Teaching Laplanders] (1840). A collection highlight at NNKM, Biard’s work depicts the pastor Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861) preaching to a group of Sámi people outside their *goahtis* (tents) in winter. Exhibited at the Salon in 1841, the painting originates in sketches Biard did during his travels with the French expedition *La Recherche* to Scandinavia and Spitzbergen in 1839.

I argue that this core collection piece is inseparably bound to the colonial context in which it was painted, as well as to NNKM’s institutional history. As such, putting the painting in context is key in this investigation. The article begins in the primary context when *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* was created, with particular focus on Laestadius’s role in assisting the French explorers with the collecting, without consent,

of Sámi human remains in the name of science. Carl-Gösta Ojala, scholar in archeology, notes that although extensive literature about Laestadius's life and work exists, few scholars have focused on his participation in grave robbing (2016, 999). To my knowledge, Laestadius's own writings on the practice have not been translated into English before. Similarly, NNKM has never addressed this issue in their displays of Biard's painting.

After a discussion on *Laestadius Teaching Laplander's* original colonial context, the article then jumps forward in time to 2002, when the art museum acquired the painting. Here I analyze the trajectory of NNKM within the center-periphery politics to understand why and how the acquisition happened. At that time, it was the costliest acquisition in NNKM's history, requiring substantial media coverage and fundraising to secure the painting. From there the article traces the acquisition after the finalized purchase in London. For instance, the painting was displayed for a week in Oslo at Nasjonalgalleriet (The National Gallery/Museum) while in transit to Romsa (**Figure 2**). Once in-house, *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* was straightaway presented in a "neutral" chronological presentation. As one of the museum's most treasured works, the object was left to "speak for itself."

By examining the usual methods of museum practices such as collection acquisition and fundraising, exhibition display, curatorial selection, and public relations, the study addresses the curatorial challenges of *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*. In this way I investigate how art museums produce meaning through active and passive framing. I argue that choosing not to address local histories of colonialism is museum passivity, not neutrality. The possibility that for some NNKM visitors the embedded colonial histories are hiding in plain sight is deeply disturbing.

I apply decoloniality (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) as a framework for acknowledging institutional blind spots, countering museum neutrality, and recognizing the interwoven complexities of Indigenous and settler coexistence. Furthermore, I use literature scholar, Mary Louise Pratt's, concept of the "contact zone" to help understand the imbalanced power relations in Biard's encounters in Sápmi ([1992]

2008). I argue that *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* is the result of ethnocentric encounters in the contact zone and demonstrates how asymmetrical power relations found their visual expression in European painting. Since my investigation analyses the painting within a museum context, I also draw on, the interdisciplinary scholar, James Clifford's, application of Pratt's work to museum studies with his idea "museum as contact zone" (1997). In his book *The Social Life of Things* (1986), scholar Arjun Appadurai argues that objects have a social life. As such, artworks change meaning as they enter and being a new life in the museum space. Appadurai's work helps strengthen my argument that *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* is not simply an object or commodity, it is emblematic of NNKM. In the same way collection highlights are not the result of accidental decisions. Museums perform decision-making based on systems of judgement.



Figure 2. NNKM board chair, Ben Schei, and NNKM director, Anne Aaserud, with *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* at Nasjonalgalleriet (The National Gallery/Museum) in Oslo, May 2002. Photo: Trondar Lien.

The evidence in the article exposes the museum's disregard for and implication in the colonial legacy of the painting. I argue for the ethical inability of neutrality in museum displays and the inherent need to "unhighlight" *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* and other art with similar, problematic histories and contexts. This article demonstrates the art museum's role in the ongoing need for healing from colonial trauma, repatriation, and reclamation. Furthermore, it contributes to larger international discussions on the need to decolonize and Indigenize museums.

4.3 Article 3

Title: **"Hacking from the Inside: The Art Museum as Activist"**

Draft submitted for review at *Curator: The Museum Journal*. I received the comments from the peer review and invited to revise my manuscript for resubmission.

This article is a reflective analysis on my experiences with *Museum Hacks*—feminist intervention developed as a learning-and-engagement program with *Like Betzy* (2019–2020), an exhibition produced by NNKM that featured Norwegian/Dutch painter Betzy Akersloot-Berg (1850–1922). Practice preceded theory in working on this project. Thus, this case study applies theory to the exhibition strategies within a framework of decolonial and intersectional feminism.

The art historian Trix Scherjon and I co-curated *Like Betzy* in a collaborative interdisciplinary team at NNKM. One aim was to demonstrate today's relevance of nineteenth century art. How did NNKM activate and challenge the general public to see Betzy Akersloot-Berg's paintings in light of our own era's relevant issues? With the project, NNKM wanted to direct critical attention to marginalized stories from and in the North. For instance, how can the art museum do more than add female artists to art history? How could we use the exhibition as a communication platform and open a space for critical discourse?

This study shows how the art museum can (legally) engage as activist in the public space to instigate debate and dialogue on relevant civic issues. NNKM "hacked" its own exhibition and monuments in public spaces to engage with local communities, critically question, and instigate dialogue and debate on issues of gender inequity. As

such it exemplifies the art museum's response to issues on gender injustice using a strategy that diverges from a traditional mode of art historical exhibition. Specifically, in a more conservative approach, the art institution features artworks in a "neutral" display and produces a catalogue. The exhibition provides little or no context about the artworks. Framed as objects of aesthetic contemplation, the paintings speak for themselves. In contrast, NNKM wanted to develop critical perspectives on Akerslout-Berg's artist practice and realize a type of exhibition that it had not previously produced.

One approach was to establish relations between Akerslout-Berg's historical oeuvre and today. Hence, NNKM "hacked" the exhibition with (un)fun facts about today's art world. Printed on white paper, 21 *Museum Hacks* were mounted throughout *Like Betzy* among the displayed artworks. They were meant to disrupt and generate discomfort. Another essential point, several *Museum Hacks* were self-critical and exposed NNKM's own role in systemic inequality.

NNKM put itself in a vulnerable position by creatively experimenting in the public space. The art museum temporarily performed interventions on male sculptures (Roald Amundsen and Carl Gustav Fleischer) with a reconstructed replica of Akerslout-Berg's crate (a wooden box she sat inside when she painted in the open air). NNKM's intention was to critique systemic gender inequalities by framing the men inside Akerslout-Berg's reality. *Museum Hacks* performed on male monuments received praise, but also angered local politicians and individuals in communities, provoking understandings on art, in addition to the role and function of the art museum in society. The interventions triggered a strong emotional response in the local media. Many in the popular press perceived *Museum Hacks* as an attack on the heroic images of Amundsen and Fleischer. As a result, *Museum Hacks* showed that the *vox populi* judged temporary interventions on public monuments to be more provocative than a female artist forgotten from Norwegian art history. The project taught us that people and officials in local communities did not desire a debate on gender equality. While this is the case, *Museum Hacks* also raised awareness of the fact that while there are

monuments honoring men in Romsa/Tromsø, the public space does not have sculptures that commemorate named women.

Although *Like Betzy* and Hack is a case study, specific to a particular place and context, it addressed issues on gender equity that are relevant and transferrable to other geographical contexts. Furthermore, by activating public monuments, NNKM engaged individuals from communities that otherwise do not use or visit the art museum. As such it provides an example of how the art museum can go beyond its walls and engage with the general public—that is, those outside its echo chamber.

5 Conclusion

This dissertation aimed to “see” in art museum practices. Rooted in critical inquiry, I wanted to learn how to understand the systems of power and hierarchical structures that characterize public art museums in Norway to bring to light some of the challenges facing these institutions. From my position of outsider-insider I set out to recognize my own power and privilege within those systems.

The three case studies addressed different sides of the political conditions of working with and in art museums in Norway today and thus examined the potential of critical curatorial strategies. *Why* do we as art museum professionals do what we do in our practices? My study is an awareness-raising process that involves understanding how the present is shaped by coloniality—highlighting the roots of art museums as products and projects of colonialism. Here I have considered how state-funded art museums in Norway have responded to their institutional entanglements in unfinished projects of nation building and settler colonization. In my examination of NNKM and NM I have demonstrated that these institutions do not realize their potential as social actors and that a “turn” is necessary. I have taken as basis that museum neutrality prevents institutions from “seeing” their potential transformative social power. As such, it is imperative that art museum workers recognize that their institutions are not “neutral” or divorced from society. As I have discussed, art museums in Norway lack a tradition or framework for reflexive self-critical examination. Consequently, in the day-to-day work in art museums, institutional habits get naturalized and normalized as

“business-as-usual” practices. As I have shown, historical contextualization is vital. Studying incidents—for better or worse—surrounding the art museum helps one to understand how events in the past shape current realities. My evidence suggests that art museums must examine their embedded colonial histories.

This dissertation turns on the finding that on a global level art museums struggle for sustainability in the ongoing process of marketization of cultural institutions in the neoliberal era. Within this context, recognizing the dilemmas and insisting on them has the potential to improve art museum practices, make art museums more relevant for diverse populations, and unleash the art museum’s potential as social actor. Drawing from developments concerning ICOM’s new museum definition, I demonstrated how the aspirational desires of the museum as an institution were ultimately rejected in favour of what some may term a more realistic assessment of the museum’s actual capabilities. This tension, I argue, exposes the limits of a “new museology.”

My study provokes critical questions that warrant serious considerations before advancing a roadmap to reshape the role of the art museum and how the curator will function within that role.¹⁰⁹ First and foremost this dissertation underscores the importance of bringing critical contextual frameworks into the art museum. How can my findings contribute to “open up” the otherwise conventional art museum and its practices? And more specifically, how can those who are not in positions of leadership, in this case curators, incite institutional change? Throughout the course of this project, I have realized that the human actors who make up the museum—an empowered team—may be one of the institution’s greatest assets. What are their individual values, how are they trained, and what propels their actions? When

¹⁰⁹ For this dissertation my proactive strategy to work toward institutional change was to grow a collective in Sápmi/Norway to dispel the myth of (art) museum neutrality. For the manifesto, see the website <https://www.museererikkenoytrale.no/>. To personalize our collective, we translated the phrase “museums are not neutral” to North Sámi (*Museat eai leat neutrálat*) and Norwegian (*Museer er ikke nøytrale*) and were given permission to adapt the logo from Museums Are Not Neutral—a U.S.-based movement which began on social media and seeks to “expose the myth of museum neutrality and demand equity-based transformation across institutions” (Autry and Murawski 2019).

employees leave the art museum, they take with them valuable institutional knowledge. Failing to capture these intellectual assets has costly repercussions that take time to negotiate. As the scholar Nizan Shaked notes, “[i]t is not surprising that Black and Indigenous people are constantly leaving institutions. The system rewards those who do not try to change it. So how do we break the cycle?” (2020, 3). Although Shaked writes in the context of Turtle Island, I often ask myself the same question. Where do we—practitioners employed at institutions who want to incite institutional change—go from here? I suggest it is a matter of fostering collectivity, for example, sharing strategies on how to “see” with fellow colleagues.

Is it possible to implement strategies so that art museums operate in feminist and decolonial ways? I have suggested curatorial strategies to develop a decolonial praxis that refuses institutional traditions of “settler moves to innocence” that have long characterized art museums in Norway. I approach decolonizing strategies with caution as the scholar la paperson (K. Wayne Yang) reminds us that “neocolonial systems inadvertently support decolonizing agendas” (2017). While I have suggested “unhighlighting” and “hacking” as possible ways to undo, further efforts are needed to propose specific ways in which art museums might respond to the findings of this dissertation. Most importantly my findings demonstrate that processes of institutional change require museum workers to do this difficult and necessary work from their own positionality and within their own specific institutional context. While I contend that change is vital, I insist there is no easy fix.

6 References

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APPENDIX 1

Article 1



The Feminist Killjoy Untangles Philanthropy

Norway's National Museum (Nasjonalmuseet) and Fredriksen Family Art Company Limited

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Abstract

In June 2019, The National Museum (Nasjonalmuseet) in Norway announced plans for a decade-long collaboration with Fredriksen Family Art Company Limited. The agreement gives the museum access to the Fredriksen collection of art and intends to generate a series of major exhibitions and significantly strengthen research. While this public-private partnership received some criticism in the press at the time, to date there is little or no academic research on the challenges of such an alliance. This article considers Sara Ahmed's concept of the "feminist killjoy" as a method to untangle the complexity of philanthropy.

Keywords

feminist killjoy; intersectional feminism; museum ethics; Nasjonalmuseet; philanthropy

Philanthropy and patronage in the arts are nothing new. Art museums have cultivated relationships with wealthy patrons throughout history. While Michael Massing claims art patronage dominates the museum world, Iain Hay and Samantha Muller argue we are now entering a "golden age of philanthropy."¹ This case study considers the ethical implications of a new public-private partnership, a ten-year collaborative agreement between Norway's National Museum and Fredriksen Family Art Company Limited (Fredriksen Family Art).² The partnership aims to publicly recognize Fredriksen Family Art's efforts to contribute to Norwegian society.³ By providing The National Museum with long-term loans, that is, access to what Fredriksen Family Art and The National Museum claim to be world-class works of art from their private collection, Fredriksen Family Art will assist the museum in attracting international recognition.⁴

This article is centered on: a visual analysis of gender represented in The National Museum's photographs that accompanied the press release following the launch of the agreement (ill. 1 and 2); a critical reading of the Art Collaboration and Loan Agreement; an analysis of discussion in the popular media; and telephone interviews with The National Museum's director of communications, Eirik Kydland, and photographer of the images, Morten Qvale.⁵



III. 1. From left: Cecilie Astrup Fredriksen, Kathrine Astrup Fredriksen, Karin Hindsbo and Stina Högvist. Photo: Morten Qvale / Nasjonalmuseet.



III. 2. From left: Cecilie Astrup Fredriksen, Stina Högvist, Karin Hindsbo and Kathrine Astrup Fredriksen. Photo: Morten Qvale / Nasjonalmuseet.

Drawing on critical scholarship regarding philanthropy, this article gives attention to the implications and significance of philanthropy from a Nordic perspective to the broader emerging research that encourages the scrutiny of significant benefactors of global capitalism.⁶ I examine this philanthropic endeavor in Norway in the context of international discussions on philanthropy in art museums. I selected Fredriksen Family Art's private donation for my case study in response to my observations of The National Museum's conflicting motives—the discrepancy between the museum's intentions and its public relations practices, as communicated through its press images.

In his book *Just Giving*, professor of political science, Rob Reich, suggests that philanthropy should be scrutinized as an exercise of power rather than celebrated as generosity.⁷ Drawing on Reich's research and feminist critique, this article argues that: when *art*, *gender*, *diversity* and *representation* are utilized in the face of philanthropy and marketplace ideology, problematic ethical implications, including the origins of capital and potential threats to academic freedom, become disguised as progressive development. As a framework for analysis I turn to Janet Marstine's "new museum ethics," a theory situated in a feminist-inspired mode of critical inquiry and founded on the idea that museums have moral agency.⁸

The Partnership

A key point in my analysis is that Fredriksen Family Art's generosity does not go unrewarded. Using its resources, The National Museum will provide art consultancy to build Fredriksen Family's private collection and increase its visibility and value. Arguably this aspect of the partnership agreement conflicts with Fredriksen Family Art's claim of serving the public good as they set out to benefit personally and substantially from its own philanthropy.⁹

"The first thing we did was decide what profile we wanted," stated The National Museum's director of exhibition and collections, Stina Högvist, about the development of The National Museum-Fredriksen Family Art partnership.¹⁰ *Diversity* and *representation* are the pivotal points of Fredriksen Family Art's collection profile.¹¹ An important frame of reference is the coincidental timing of The National Museum's new facility scheduled to open 11 June 2022 at Vestbanen in Oslo. The new National Museum will be the largest art museum in the Nordic countries.¹² According to The National Museum's director, Karin Hindsbo, Fredriksen Family Art's artworks will "bring in a stronger diversity perspective" to the new museum.¹³

Philanthropy in Norway and Beyond

How is the partnership between The National Museum and Fredriksen Family Art relevant to Norwegian cultural politics? Norway's long-standing democratic approach to the arts and generous public arts funding has established a model that is unique to the world and grounded on the idea that arts and culture are a vital part of a welfare society.¹⁴ This is apparent in the substantial governmental funds channeled into the arts. For instance, the Arts Council Norway, the advisory body to the central government and public sector on cultural affairs, handled around €150 million in state funding earmarked for arts and culture in 2020, which is about 10% of the national cultural budget.¹⁵ While this is historically the case, a shift occurred with the change of government in 2013. Norway's ruling right-wing government (led by Erna Solberg), in power from 2013 to 2021, zealously encouraged museums to generate their own revenue and sponsorship. In pursuit of sustainable funding models and with Norwegian political ambitions for museums to increase private funding, it is essential

for museums to consistently address institutional ethics.¹⁶ More often than not, museums, among other nonprofit arts organizations, are underfunded. As such they enlist a wide range of tactics to bring in income. Traditional models of philanthropy are subject to class, prestige and wealth. The nonprofit business model is complex and museums struggle for sustainability within this framework.¹⁷ Dedicated to its mission, The National Museum seeks out private funding to promote inclusion, diversity, gender equity and access for sustainable growth as it negotiates its place in a global cultural field.

Historically in Norway a number of art museums were founded with donations of private art collections.¹⁸ Donors have played and continue to play a significant role for museums. Well known donors include Knud Christian Langaard, Rasmus Meyer, Haaken Andreas Christensen, Rolf Stenersen, Asbjørn Lunde, Viggo Hagstrøm, Jon Dobloug, Christian Ringnes, Christen Sveaas and Nicolai Tangen. Meanwhile, the more recent tendency to increase private sponsorship in the arts and culture presumably arrived with Norway's right-wing government.

How do Fredriksen Family Art's philanthropic activities in Norway align with international discussions on philanthropy in art museums? As indicated by professor of marketing Karin M. Ekström, within prevailing market ideologies in society, businesses appear to have more agency than art.¹⁹ As governments gradually withdraw public funding from culture in the name of "austerity," increased reliance on private sponsorship is becoming normative in Europe and reflects the on-going process of marketization of cultural institutions in the neoliberal era.²⁰

The museum-philanthropy relationship is vast in its complexity and philanthropy itself is a contested concept, particularly in its "normative valence," as suggested by Siobhan Daly, who claims that what the public good is and how it should be served are inherent to philanthropy's contestability.²¹ In response to increased public pressure, art museums internationally continue to make strides toward greater transparency in endowment and general fundraising practices. Much of the critique and response to the patronage of cultural institutions is driven by the artists themselves, calling for art institutions to decline funding from controversial sources or what they refer to as "dirty money."²² As a result, a number of art museums turned down donations from long-term beneficiaries. Specifically, a month prior to the public announcement of the partnership between The National Museum and Fredriksen Family Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (The Met) in New York announced that it would no longer accept donations from Sackler family members with ties to the opioid epidemic in the United States.²³ Subsequently, in 2021, The Met announced its decision to remove the Sackler name from its walls.²⁴ In the UK, the National Portrait Gallery and the Tate art galleries also halted donations from the Sackler Trust.²⁵ Similar decisions have been made regarding supporters from the fossil fuels industry. BP (British Petroleum) ended its 26-year-long sponsorship of the Tate in 2017.²⁶ In November 2019, the Scottish National Portrait Gallery announced it would not show exhibitions sponsored by BP.²⁷ After an eighteen-year partnership with Shell, the Van Gogh Museum halted the agreement in 2018.²⁸ In July 2019, Warren B. Kandors, then vice chair of the Whitney Museum of American Art, stepped down after scrutiny from the protest group Decolonize This Place (DTP) for his role as CEO for a company profiting from crowd-control weapons—for example, rubber bullets, batons, stun grenades and tear gas being deployed against migrants attempting to cross the southern border into the United States.²⁹

Philanthropy and Gender

In her book *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, Carol Duncan demonstrates the art museum as a “ritual space” where philanthropy, ethics and social issues of class, gender and race are all entangled.³⁰ Within this complex space, art institutions are the sum of their practices, funding and sponsorship included.³¹ Another essential point is that structural inequities and hegemonic forms of power are not immediately visible. “It’s a man’s world,” Duncan poignantly reminds one.³² She insists that the museum’s immediate space is gendered, and female images are normally scripted for men.³³ While female images are present, they masculinize the museum space by perpetuating existing heteropatriarchal norms.³⁴

As a means to illuminate patriarchal ideologies and identify what The National Museum-Fredriksen Family Art partnership embodies, essentially what the museum is “selling” to the public, I use Sara Ahmed’s concept of the “feminist killjoy”—that is, an individual, who could be of any gender, whose main task is exposing the patriarchal norms that are displaced and negated under public signs of joy.³⁵ Situated within intersectional feminism, the figure is discontent with the status quo and aims to lay bare the deeply ingrained inequities of class, gender and race in heteropatriarchal society.³⁶ Ahmed posits that we learn not to be conscious, not to see what happens right in front of us.³⁷ Acting as a “feminist killjoy” enables one to sharpen an oppositional feminist gaze to expose the patriarchal ideologies hiding in plain sight. In this case study, the “feminist killjoy” emerges in response to The National Museum’s celebratory stance on its new partnership backed by a positive consensus in society. From here I explore how the “feminist killjoy,” from an intersectional feminist perspective, might offer an alternative reading of the agreement.

The Ideology of Generosity

What motivates philanthropists to give to society? According to Cecilie Astrup Fredriksen and Kathrine Astrup Fredriksen, twin daughters of the Norwegian-born billionaire John Fredriksen (ill. 3), their underlying motivation for the partnership with The National Museum is to honor their late mother, Inger Katharina Astrup Fredriksen, who was related to Norwegian painter Nikolai Astrup and was the passionate art collector in the family.³⁸ The Art Collaboration and Loan Agreement stipulates that while on display, artworks from Fredriksen Family Art’s collection will be labelled: “Kindly provided to the New National Museum in memory of Inger Katharina Astrup Fredriksen.”³⁹ Use of the word “kindly” underpins an ideology of generosity, feasibly leading the public to the assumption that philanthropy is pure benevolence. Furthermore from a feminist perspective, adding a woman’s name to the male-dominated list of art patrons in Norway could be perceived as a progressive gesture. Or might it also imply the appropriation of gender so as to soften the ethical implications of John Fredriksen’s capital?

The ethical implications of the charitable generosity of private stakeholders are under scrutiny among scholars and institutions. To illustrate, the “feminist killjoy” exposes the ideology of generosity cloaking colonial legacies. Capitalism cultivates divisions of culture, race, ethnicity, ability, sexuality and gender.⁴⁰ For these reasons, critical attention needs to be directed at the colonial past, forms of violence and power that made the Fredriksen fortune possible. Regularly credited as the richest man in Norway’s history, John Fredriksen is a Cypriot citizen who resides in London and relinquished his Norwegian citizenship in 2006. Accordingly he avoids paying taxes to his country of birth. His companies include: oil tankers, dry bulkers, LNG carriers and deep-water drilling rigs, with capital made moving

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This Shipping Magnate Is Calling a Bottom in the Oil Rout

John Fredriksen wants to double down on the battered oil tanker business, even as his offshore drilling business sinks in debt



John Fredriksen in his Oslo office with his twin daughters—Kathrine, left, and Cecilie, who are increasingly taking responsibilities in the group.

PHOTO: ELIN HØYLAND/DAGENS NÆRINGSLIV

By [Costas Paris](#)

Updated June 27, 2017 10:24 am ET

III. 3. John Fredriksen with his daughters Kathrine Astrup Fredriksen, left, and Cecilie Astrup Fredriksen, screenshot from *The Wall Street Journal*, 27 June 2017. Photo: Elin Høyland / Dagens Næringsliv.

Iranian crude oil during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, as well as shipping oil to South Africa during apartheid.⁴¹ As the largest shareholder in MOWI, one of the world's biggest salmon farming companies, Fredriksen's greatest assets today are in fish farming.⁴² Might the destructive environmental consequences of salmon farming and Fredriksen's use of tax avoidance strategies present key issues of ethical accountability? Then again, how accountable are museums for the activities of their private sponsors? In recent literature on innovative and sustainable museum development, scholar-practitioner Robert R. Janes argues that marketplace ideology, capitalistic values and corporate self-interest are not the way forward.⁴³

While The National Museum's directors expressed their happiness with the partnership in the newspaper *Morgenbladet* on 21 June 2019: "We have a lot of fun when we are together,"⁴⁴ it may be that not everyone is happy. The "feminist killjoy" might interpret their happiness as a defense against feminist critique; the myth that feminists kill joy because they are joyless.⁴⁵ By rejecting patriarchal norms, the "feminist killjoy" shows there are more perspectives to the situation, and that signs of happiness may conceal forms of power and

violence.⁴⁶ Specifically, intersectional feminism kills joy surrounding the alliance of the patriarchy and capitalism to reimagine gender justice in an anticapitalistic form.⁴⁷

Arguably, philanthropy is rarely pure generosity but results from a donor's desire for prestige or social licensing.⁴⁸ As Susan Raymond, Iain Hay and Samantha Muller explain, the trend in contemporary philanthropy is not only that donors strive to maintain power and control over the funds they give away, but that they actively attempt to shape the frameworks of public institutions, such as art museums.⁴⁹ A clear example of this trend is the partnership Fredriksen Family Art landed with The National Museum. With an agreement that is framed as a collaboration, Fredriksen Family Art ensures that the access they give to art and funding is repaid. For example, as part of the agreement Fredriksen Family Art will establish an advisory committee comprised of four members or fewer appointed by them.⁵⁰ Moreover, in collaboration with Fredriksen Family Art, The National Museum will conduct an exhibition series called the "Fredriksen Commissions."⁵¹ One of the downsides of giving a privately held corporation the power to influence and frame a public institution like The National Museum is that it poses a risk to academic freedom. With integrity at stake, the museum must be independent and free from pressure from other interest groups, whether organizational, strategic, financial or political, such pressure that could influence and perhaps compromise its practices and results.⁵²

Central to the "new museum ethics" is radical transparency and sharing of ethical challenges with diverse stakeholders to encourage problem-solving and build trust.⁵³ A specific example of The National Museum's hesitancy to critique occurred on 2 July 2019 during an NRK public radio interview, when art historian Tommy Sørbø asked The National Museum's director Karin Hindsbo the source of the Fredriksen capital. The program host, Gry Elisabeth Veiby, interrupted Sørbø mid-sentence and said: "We are not going to go there." Although the public debate failed to address the source of the capital, the public must assume that museums evaluate their philanthropic sources to ensure the benefactor's practices reflect the museum's core values, vision and mission. What is notable is The National Museum's willingness to grant prestige in a public space to a donor who uses tax avoidance strategies.⁵⁴ Fredriksen's tax-dodging practices are inherent to the partnership itself. According to the Art Collaboration and Loan Agreement, Fredriksen Family Art will not be liable for any obligation to pay either Value Added Tax or any other import tax to Norway in relation to the collection.⁵⁵

Women as Image

How does The National Museum "sell" its agreement to the public? Author of *Civilizing the Museum*, Elaine Heumann Gurian, stresses that "all decisions [made by museums] are signaling."⁵⁶ She suggests that tone and content are as important as the position one takes.⁵⁷ As such, everything the museum does involves endless signaling, for example, from conventions in emails, to the appearance of the museum front desk and what food is served in the museum café. For this reason, one can interpret that the partnership between The National Museum and Fredriksen Family Art and the way in which it is communicated convey a subliminal message. The National Museum advertises itself as an institution that embraces diversity and representation, with ambitions to provide art experiences in "completely new ways" and advance inclusivity.⁵⁸ "We will be an open museum, where you feel welcome no matter who you are and whatever background you come from. That is why we are building a new national museum in Norway," stated The National Museum's director Karin Hindsbo in the newspaper *Dagens Næringsliv* on 27 February 2019. Does the partnership between The

National Museum and Fredriksen Family Art along with the accompanying press images convey this message? To address this question, let us examine the publicity photographs, the museum's vehicle for "selling" the partnership agreement.

The press took a largely celebratory tone and praised the partnership as a bold initiative. Their approval extended to their reaction to the press images, which the newspaper *Aftenposten* deemed "fantastic" and added that they should be awarded picture of the year.⁵⁹ The two photographs show The National Museum's leadership, directors Karin Hindsbo and Stina Högbkvist together with the new benefactors, Cecilie Astrup Fredriksen and Kathrine Astrup Fredriksen, daughters of John Fredriksen. The glossy pictures appear to celebrate the female body, glamor and attitude, while devoid of the core element of the agreement, notably art.⁶⁰ The photographer, Morten Qvale, is renowned in the fashion and advertising industry. Taking into account that Qvale was commissioned by the Fredriksen sisters is a specific example of how the private sector can direct The National Museum's marketing and public relations. Nor do the Fredriksen sisters have educational backgrounds in art. What is the meaning and significance of these representations; how is gender performed; who are the images for; and what is the communication strategy?

In one respect the images are novel in that they differ from the typical representations of philanthropists in the Norwegian press. The conventional subject is a middle-aged male photographed with artworks in the background. For example, Stein Erik Hagen, one of Norway's wealthiest and most high-profile businessmen, appears in the Edvard Munch room at The National Museum (the former National Gallery; ill. 4). The visual associates capital wealth with art and in this case a wealthy businessman with art history. Hagen's Canica Art Collection is one of Norway's most extensive private art collections, built with consultation from art historian Steinar Gjessing. In another example, art collector and museum patron Nicolai Tangen (who holds a master's degree in art history from the Courtauld Institute of Art in London) appears with artworks from his personal art collection in the office work environment (ill. 5). In sharp contrast are the Fredriksen sisters who dominate the photographs and are the front and center of attention.

While the "new museum ethics" stimulate public trust through transparency and relevance, corporate sites often use images of humans as an effective way to engage users and



III. 4. From left: Stein Erik Hagen and then director of The National Museum, Audun Eckhoff, in 2016. Photo: Tor Stenersen / Aftenposten / NTB.



III. 5. Nicolai Tangen in his London office in 2018. Photo: Signe Dons / Aftenposten / NTB.

to build trust.⁶¹ According to Eirik Kydland, The National Museum’s director of communications: “The aim of the images was to share the news of a new and important collaboration. A big accomplishment of which The National Museum was proud. All involved parties wanted good, press-worthy images, quality pictures that would draw attention. In the aftermath we were surprised by some of the reactions.”⁶² Kydland’s positive commentary reinforces The National Museum’s insistence that the agreement is *good*. Despite this, how might a “feminist killjoy” perspective counter a different reading of this publicity?

The concept of the “male gaze,” first put forward by Laura Mulvey to characterize the scopoc regime of Hollywood film, and later further developed in studies of representations of femininity in visual culture, might aid our understanding.⁶³ Both images present frontal figures who look directly at the viewer. Although the women perform femininity in diverse ways, “diversity” is framed within a capitalist (or conceivably neoliberalist) system. The Fredriksen sisters reinforce a stereotypical image of corporate wealth, while Karin Hindsbo and Stina Högvist embody the cultural elite. While the “attitude” or perhaps androgyny performed by Högvist could be read as representing “girl power,” within marketplace ideology, girl power is a feminist trope. Embraced by high-powered women and linked to elitism and individualism, this variant of feminism propounds a market-centered view of equality, and thus supplies the perfect alibi for neoliberalism.⁶⁴ Sarah Banet-Weiser argues that the key selling point from a marketplace ideology sees “the ‘power’ in girl power as almost exclusively about consumer power—not a challenge of gendered power relations and rationalities.”⁶⁵ Corporate marketing and advertising campaigns adopt “glossy feminism” in

order to appear socially progressive and deflect criticism on the ways capitalism depends on oppressive gendered divisions of labor.⁶⁶

Considering that representation is the core function of museums, the press photographs have agency and must be taken seriously. Moreover, positive relationships are fundamental to successful public relations practice. Yet in my interview with Kydland, he revealed that decisions regarding *women as image* and photographer were simply a matter of practicality. No strategic planning was involved. Kydland added that “[i]t is unusual with young female art collectors and female art directors.”⁶⁷ One of The National Museum’s missions is to actively include more women artists in the collection and learning and engagement programming.⁶⁸ Perhaps the agreement will strengthen the position of women and women’s art at The National Museum? Is there possibly a new feminist perspective to this collaboration? To answer this, it is important to consider for whom the images are intended. Might the use of women only be an inspiring alternative to male museum directors and male art collectors? After all, there is a dearth of women in museum leadership roles and this quartet may be interpreted as progressivism from a feminist perspective.

The four women in the photographs represent positions of power and privilege, and in so doing hold considerable social, cultural and economic advantages. However, gender identity alone does not make this setting feminist. Women’s studies professor Chandra Talpade Mohanty asserts that women cannot be characterized as a singular group on the basis of a shared oppression.⁶⁹ When insensitive to class, race, and socioeconomic constraints, feminism underpins a market-centered view of equality that dovetails perfectly with capitalism and the prevailing corporate enthusiasm for “diversity.”⁷⁰ As a counter to this trend, intersectional feminism centers the convergence of race, class and gender to underscore that feminism must be anticapitalistic, eco-socialist and antiracist. In addition, intersectional feminism brings patriarchal power structures into question, helping one understand how the present is shaped by coloniality. Arguably, The National Museum appropriated, perhaps unintentionally, the female body and the novelty of the photographs to portray generosity, diversity and gender equity.

The National Museum accepted private wealth built on colonial legacies and tax avoidance to promote diversity and publicized the new partnership with press photographs through the lens of wealth, whiteness and privilege. It is ironic that the partnership between The National Museum and Fredriksen Family Art could indeed prove successful in advancing diversity and representation at The National Museum. While this may be the case, a key concern are Fredriksen’s business and investment activities which participated in creating conditions of inequity in the first place. Considering the ethical implications and what’s at stake, the “feminist killjoy” does not “buy” it. As indicated in my analysis, the agreement appears to embrace the superficial truisms of the marketplace within the on-going process of marketization of cultural institutions.⁷¹ By applying the “new museum ethics” as proposed by Janet Marstine and intersectional feminism we may develop the critical language needed to expose tropes for generosity and progressive development and move beyond status quo understandings of diversity and inclusion.

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Noter

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APPENDIX 2

Article 2



Decolonizing the Museum

Unhighlighting Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum's Iconic *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* (1840)

Charis Gullickson

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DECOLONIZING THE MUSEUM

Unhighlighting Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum's Iconic
Laestadius Teaching Laplanders (1840)

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art
art history
collection highlights
decoloniality
Sápmi
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*This essay presents a decolonial analysis of the French painter François-Auguste Biard's *Le Pasteur Laestadius instruisant des Lapons* (1840). A highlight at Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (Northern Norway Art Museum) in Romsa/Tromsø, Biard's work represents the pastor Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861) preaching to a group of Sámi people outside their goahtis in winter. Exhibited in 1841 at the Salon (1667–present) in Paris, the painting originates in sketches Biard did during his travels with the French expedition La Recherche to Scandinavia and Spitsbergen in 1839. Taking this centrepiece from Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum's collections as a reference point, I discuss the original colonial context in which it was painted, with particular focus on Laestadius's role in assisting the French explorers with the collecting of Sámi human remains in the name of science. I then make a leap in time to the museum's acquisition of the work in 2002 and its subsequent display in Romsa. At that time, the painting represented the institution's costliest acquisition, and substantial media coverage and fundraising were used to come up with the funding to secure it. Once in-house, Laestadius Teaching Laplanders was immediately presented in a "neutral" display as one of the museum's most treasured works. My analysis applies decoloniality as a framework for acknowledging*

institutional blind spots, countering museum neutrality, and recognizing the interwoven complexities of Indigenous and settler coexistence. It aims to intervene in art museum practices to emphasize the ongoing need for healing from colonial trauma through reconciliation and reparation. By exposing the museum's disregard for and implication in the colonial legacy of this work, I will insist on the ethical inability of neutrality in museum displays and the inherent need to "unhighlight" Laestadius Teaching Laplanders and other art with similar problematic histories and contexts.

Introduction

Did anyone tell you
that we live in Sámiland

Did they say
this is Sápmi
Did they also admit
that this is ours

Or did they talk about
the primitive culture
with simple people

did they also state
that they brought the light

(Áillohaš/Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, 1994)

This essay presents a critique of – and an argument for change in – art museum practices at Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (hereafter NNKM) in Romsa/Tromsø, Northern Norway. In 2002, NNKM acquired the work *Le Pasteur Laestadius instruisant des Lapons*¹ (The Minister Laestadius Teaching Laplanders) (1840; [Figure 1](#)) by François-Auguste Biard (1799–1882), portrait painter to the French court.

1 Title provided in the *Salon de 1841* exhibition list (see [Ténint 1841](#)).

The painting combines elements from genre and history painting and depicts the minister Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861), who founded the conservative Lutheran revivalist movement *Laestadianism*. In Biard's painting, Laestadius is preaching to a group of Sámi people outside their *goahtis* (tents) in winter. In representing a historical character and his recorded work as minister in the Sámi communities of Gárasavvon/Karesuando and Bájil/Pajala, Biard's work aligns with elements of history painting. And yet the scene does not refer to a specific historical event, as Laestadius's



Figure 1 François-Auguste Biard, *Le Pasteur Laestadius instruisant des Lapons* (The Minister Laestadius Teaching Laplanders), 1840. Oil on canvas, 131 × 161 cm. Collection of Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (NNKM.00952). Photo: Kim G. Skytte.

sermons and preachings to the Sámi were a recurring feature. In this way, Biard’s work likewise represents, and perhaps to a greater extent, the everyday scene of a genre painting.

Exhibited at the Salon in 1841, *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* originates in sketches Biard did during his travels to Scandinavia and Spitsbergen in 1839 with the French scientific expedition *Commission du Nord*, commonly known as *La Recherche* (Matilsky 1985, 78; Aaserud 2005, 29, 31). Altogether he spent approximately a month in Sápmi during which time he also met Laestadius.²

Even before it arrived at the museum in 2002, Biard’s painting became the highlight of the collection. Museum collection highlights are showcased as iconic works of art and are what comprise the art-historical canon. Typically displayed on permanent view, visitors can discover and explore these objects in a variety of ways, for example through programmes, online resources, publications, and branded merchandise. Critical to the status of *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* as a museum highlight, this essay starts by discussing the object within the colonial context it was painted, with particular focus on Laestadius’s role in assisting the French explorers from the *La Recherche* expedition with

2 After fourteen days in Hammerfest, Biard and d’Aunet sailed to Svalbard on 17 July 1839 (D’Aunet 1854, 85). On 14 August they headed south, arriving in Hammerfest on 26 August (105, 107). Departing Hammerfest on 28 August bound for Kåfjord (108), they

travelled in Sápmi until they turned south, arriving outside Torneå, Finland, on 21 September (146), before arriving in Stockholm on 12 October (*Aftonbladet*, 12 October 1839). Sápmi is the Sámi name for

the collecting of Sámi human remains for race biological research. From there, the essay examines the time of acquisition and subsequent display of the painting by the museum. Contextualizing the painting against the history from which it is inseparably connected, I aim to problematize the institutionalized colonial legacy and to highlight the inherent need to address the curatorial challenges of a work of this origin.

Decoloniality as practice

the borderless region that its Indigenous people inhabit in four nations, stretching across large parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia.

This case study applies decolonial theory as a framework of analysis to acknowledge institutional blind spots, counter museum neutrality, and address the institutional tendencies of passive disacknowledgement of Nordic colonial history. Drawing on the theoretical work of Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (2018, 5), I use decoloniality as “a way, option, standpoint, analytic, project, practice, and praxis” to provide a more accurate historical contextualization and recognize the interwoven complexities of the past, present, and future of Sámi and Norwegian coexistence.

3 Jérémie McGowan was director of NNKM from 2016 to 2020. Prior to his position at NNKM he was a senior curator at The National Museum – Architecture in Oslo.
4 A term coined by Jérémie McGowan.
5 The “x” footnote is a disclaimer that points out that SDMX is a museum performance (partly a fiction).

I write as curator at NNKM (an insider) and a settler born and raised in Alaska, and an immigrant in Sápmi, Norway (an outsider). As an act of self-critique from within the institution, it questions the validity of collection highlights. Part of this work deals with the core values of the institution and demonstrates that museums produce meaning through active and passive framing. Like many other museums in Norway, NNKM is haunted by colonial legacies. I argue that choosing not to address local histories of colonialism is museum passivity, not neutrality.

This essay participates in a larger international discussion on the need to decolonize and Indigenize museums (Phillips 2011; Lonetree 2012; Coombes and Phillips 2015; Gibling, Ramos, and Grout 2019; Shoenberger 2019) and the potential of museums as agents of change (Janes and Sandell 2019; Murawski 2021). My self-reflexive questioning in museum practice is informed by recent institutional change at NNKM, initiated in 2017 by former museum director Jérémie McGowan (2018a, 2018b).³ This shift in direction is perhaps best illustrated by the museum performance⁴ *There Is No Sámi Dáiddamusea*^x or Sámi Art Museum,⁵ as translated from North Sámi, a project characterized as a decolonial project co-authored and co-produced by NNKM and RiddoDuottarMuseat in Kárásjohka (Danbolt 2018a; McGowan 2018a, 2018b; Shoenberger 2019; Rugeldal 2020, 2021; Caufield 2021; McGowan and Olli 2022).

Encounters in the contact zone

In this part, I account for the creation of *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* from its origin in the cultural contact zone in Sápmi to its exhibition and reception at the Salon in Paris in 1841. A significant amount of the secondary literature on Biard's experiences from the expedition comprises scholarship from NNKM's former director Anne Aaserud, in addition to the French author Louis Boivin's biography, written in 1842 and dedicated to Biard's expedition (Berthoud 1839–1840; “M. Biard” 1843; Aaserud 2005, 2006a, 2017; Krane 2005; Gille, Henriot, and Alvim 2020). I have not succeeded in identifying sources by Sámi knowledge holders, nor have I found first-hand descriptions by Biard from the limited primary sources that exist (Biard 1839a, 1839b, 1840–1841, 1862). The closest we come to Biard's personal account is the French author Léonie Thévenot d'Aunet's (1820–79) travel journal from 1854. Biard's fiancée at the time, d'Aunet travelled with him on the expedition and was purportedly the first woman to set foot on Svalbard (Urberg 2007, 169).

As we will see, ethnocentric attitudes and genre requirements strongly influenced and limited Biard's visual representation of the Sámi and Laestadius's role and personae. *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*'s visual rhetoric represents Biard's Western interpretation of the space of interaction between the Sámi and Laestadius. Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the “contact zone” helps one to understand the inherently imbalanced power relations of Biard's encounters in Sápmi. In her book *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Pratt ([1992] 2008, 8) defines “contact zone” as “the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict”. Within these unequal and deeply asymmetrical spaces of colonial encounters, the dominant culture provides a “negotiated” space for cultural exchange to ensure the maintenance of the imperialistic programme (Boast 2011, 57). Pratt shows how European travel writing about non-European parts of the world shaped relations between the (European) centre and the (non-European) periphery. Arguably in her theoretical work Pratt ([1992] 2008, 8) shifts the binary opposition of the “colonial frontier”, softening it into a more nuanced relation of cross-cultural negotiation and translation with the “contact zone”. In this sense, *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* is the result of ethnocentric encounters in the contact zone, and exemplifies how asymmetrical power imbalances found their visual expression in European painting.

As this essay examines the painting within a museum context, it is helpful to consider James Clifford's application of Pratt's work to museum studies. His conception of the “museum as contact zone” (Clifford 1997) frames the

museum as a potential site of collaboration, shared control, complex translation, and honest disagreement (208). Museum practice in a contact perspective moves beyond consultation, opening to the possibility of subversion and reciprocity. In short, this plays out through dialogue and collaboration, such as inclusionist programmes in exhibitions, shared curatorship, and access to collections (Boast 2011, 56). Clifford argues that encounters, even though ethnocentric, open the possibility to produce reflection and cultural critique (Clifford 1997, 198). Through his example of the Portland Museum of Art’s consultation with Tlingit elders over objects from the Rasmussen Collection, he demonstrates how these objects can never be entirely possessed by the museum from a contact perspective; on the contrary, he identifies the objects as sites for negotiation (194). Further, he poses an important question that we can apply to the circumstances surrounding *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*: “Can museums claim political neutrality?” (205, 206). Could Clifford’s concept offer a possible framework to redress the work’s “colonial status” within the context of the art museum?

To focus this question, let us first examine the painting. *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* shows a group of Sámi people – four women, a young girl, and three men, some seated, others standing – at the feet of a man wearing a top hat in the foreground. The man, Laestadius, holds an open book, presumably a Bible, in his left hand while speaking to those gathered. Contributing to a long lineage of missionary imagery, *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* confirmed to the Salon visitors that due to the hard work of missionaries, modernization and enlightenment could reach even the “periphery of the North” (Decker 2021, 277). The presence of Laestadius and the way he is portrayed seems illustrative of the importance the expedition’s French members assigned to his clerical work. With his back half turned, Laestadius directs our attention by way of his posture and gaze towards a group of Sámi who have congregated outside a *goahhti* and in front of a tall wall of solid ice whose dark and grey colour can be mistaken for stone. The facial expressions of the Sámi figures range from attentive, curious, and intrigued to sceptical and disgruntled. Due to their diverse expressions, one can perhaps speculate that Biard wanted to show different stages of enlightenment in the group. For instance, the icy landscape could suggest that the Sámi are emerging from the ice and into civilization. According to Paul Gaimard (1796–1858), the leader of the *La Recherche*, Laestadius “spreads civilization among his people, he enlightens them and helps them in their sufferings” (Posti 2003, 19). Their small figures and passive postures, against the grand standing position of Laestadius, suggest that these Sámi have been “conquered” by Christianity and the Swedish crown. As put forward by Sigrid Lien (2018, 8), in Biard’s eyes, “the Indigenous people of the North were about to leave the distant past”. Elevated in an open space, they stand in the face of the civilized Christian world.

Laestadius Teaching Laplanders is based on studies and sketches Biard executed in the field (i.e. the contact zone) in 1839. While biologists of the *La Recherche* accounted for and catalogued new organisms by arranging them into a system of classification, Biard ordered the Sámi figures he discovered into specific types in his sketches, with titles such as *Young Lapp Rowing. Study* (38.5 × 29.5 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm), *Old Lapp Nomad in the Snow* (38.5 × 30 cm, private collection), and *Female Lapp. Study* (38.5 × 30 cm; Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Oslo; Figure 2). Sketched in oil on paper and mounted on canvas, the depicted figures and their garments are finely detailed. For instance, *Female Lapp. Study* shows a young woman seated inside a *goahiti*, dressed in a white *gákti* and wearing a *ládjogahpir* (an upright headdress worn by Sámi women). Although the strong attention to detail observed in the sketches transferred over to *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*, Biard labelled the figures homogeneously as “Lapons” (Laplanders) in the title of the painting. Thus the Sámi individuals Biard met and interacted with in the contact zone became silenced and nameless objects of study.

Biard’s fascination with the Sámi is evidenced by his possession of various artefacts from Sápmi and other parts of the world that turned his Paris studio into a museum of his travels. Boivin (1842, 44) writes that Biard returned from the *La Recherche* expedition with a precious collection of costumes and all kinds of interesting and unknown objects, complete with a series of plant and mineral samples. Among other things, Biard kept the *goahiti* he used in Sápmi, along with a sled and a set of reindeer antlers. Described as “curiosities” and “precious bibelots”, it remains uncertain how Biard acquired these items. According to Boivin, Biard was extremely fascinated by the Sámi and worked nearly twenty-four hours a day sketching them (29). During the expedition Biard executed fifty-five paintings of the Sámi, which Boivin described as “exact portraits” (43). That these aspire to be ethnographic representations is evidenced by Boivin’s comment that the proper place for Biard’s paintings of the Sámi would be “in the great museum of natural history” (43). These same sketches formed the basis for Biard’s *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*, painted on his homecoming to Paris, most likely in 1840 (Aaserud 2006a, 152).

Within history painting, “history” relates to a narrative or story, not the accurate or documentary description of actual events. Importantly, the painting dates to the era of pre-photographic Arctic expeditions. As sketched types, separated from their natural cultural environment and specific historical context, the Sámi individuals became suitable figures Biard could move around to make his paintings cohere to then current genre requirements, aesthetic tastes, and the cultural perceptions of his audience. Indeed, like aesthetic props, we can identify the same figure across several of Biard’s paintings.⁶ Biard’s work demonstrates the discrepancy between his real and visualized meetings and the final work.

6 For example, the hunched-over man in *Laestadius Teaching*

Laplanders also appears in *Campement en Laponie* (<https://digitalmuseum.org/021047997103/sami-camp>).



Figure 2 François-Auguste Biard, *Femme lapon. Étude* (Female Lapp. Study), 1839. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 38.5 × 30 cm. Collection of the Fridtjof Nansen Institute. Photo: Kim G. Skytte.

A series of imagined elements in the painting underscore the colonial context of the painting and Biard’s outsider view of Sámi people and the northern landscape. Although Laestadius may have owned a top hat, it was not part of his customary clerical attire. For example, it is well known that he lived in utter simplicity, condemned worldliness, and preached in vernacular language (Heith 2018, 50). This unrealistic element places emphasis on Laestadius as representative of the dominant culture (the “centre”), as minister of the Swedish Lutheran Church (Heith 2016, 92). Moreover, the

scene would have taken place in the warmth of a church, not out in the snow. According to French author Xavier Marmier, also a member of the expedition, the reindeer-herding Sámi belonged to specific parishes and would travel long distances to go to church once a month in the summer. Each winter, by contrast, the reindeer-herding Sámi of Laestadius's parish returned to the village of Gárasavvon, where they would attend church sermons almost every Sunday (Marmier [1840] 1997, 104). In addition to representing an ethnic type, the painting's outdoor scene demonstrates the reindeer-herding Sámi's way of life in a wholly imagined polar landscape with sensational snow formations, perhaps true to Biard's experience on Svalbard in July 1839, but which do not reflect the snow-free, rainy conditions that Biard and d'Aunet actually experienced in Gárasavvon in early September.

As a Salon painting in the Romantic tradition, Biard's work had to fulfil certain criteria, which may explain the dramatized, unrealistic components. Stylistically, the painting's naturalistic rendering in combination with vivid romantic imagination catered to its audience (Lien 2018, 6). Exhibited at the *Salon de 1841*, along with two other of Biard's works, the critic Ulysse Ladet in his review in *L'Artiste* writes:

The temple is outside and certainly the most bizarre ever formed by nature. The eternal icefields raise their threatening heads here and there and form a sort of frigid but sheltered valley, where the worthy minister has gathered some hideous creatures that one would scarcely believe have been created in the image of God. Men and women, standing or crouching, covered with raw pelts, blue eyes, unintelligible expressions, pay devoted attention to the words of Laestadius. ... He is the civilized in the presence of barbarians. The sky is grey, the atmosphere glacial, and everything bears a stamp of truth and desolation that could not be reasonably disputed. (Ladet 1841, 279–80, my translation)

Ladet's commentary responds to popular and artistic tastes for the Arctic sublime, presented for the consumption of the Salon audience's appetite for the fantastic and the unknown. Inscribed by colonial fantasies, the Arctic sublime is a Romantic and Victorian aesthetic category comprised of threatening landscapes, terrible creatures, and deathly danger (Morgan 2016). The Sámi seem caught within this landscape of snow and ice, awaiting rescue through religious enlightenment.

The use of the Arctic sublime and Ladet's remarks about the Sámi echo d'Aunet's sentiments. In her travel journal, D'Aunet (1854, 65, my translations) describes her experiences as a woman who: "The more I travel, the more I feel the sun and civilization, this other sun, fades away". Throughout the book, her tone clearly reflects the ethnocentric attitudes towards the Sámi and Norwegian people, writing: "It's only with a feeling of deep pity that one

can think of the destiny of those poor people doomed to spend their whole life in such dire conditions” (134). In descriptions of a “gloomy country, nothing enchants the ear; everything is sad, even the birds!” (191), she transfers this perspective on to the non-human world. D’Aunet’s reflections stem from her position in the bourgeois circles in Paris. Defining culture as French, d’Aunet writes that the Sámi, “a strange population” (137), are spiritually and materially poor, “do not eat bread, nor wear underclothes ... he ignores all science and art ... The Lapp never sings; He even does not have that music, which we could call natural and of which, it is believed, any primitive tribe knows” (148). She continues: “Bordered by civilization on three sides (Norway, Sweden, and Russia), they did not borrow, understand or desire anything; They spent their lives in complete apathy, almost without needs, pleasures, or wishes” (149–50). To sum up, “they are a miserable and coarse people, surviving in a kind of moral and physical paralysis, suitable only for life at the end of the frozen world, where life withdraws from the sun” (149–50). Although one cannot assume that Biard’s opinion of the Sámi was similarly demeaning, d’Aunet’s Eurocentric viewpoints resonate with the colonial context from which Biard operated and his art was received.

Missionary and Grave Robber

In Sámi history Laestadius is a complex figure who is both respected and contested. Of South Sámi descent himself, Laestadius was married to the Sámi woman Brita Katarina (Kajsa) Alstadius (1805–88) who bore their twelve children. Preaching in Sámi and Tornedalian Finnish (today called Meänkieli), Laestadius is seen by many as a saviour of the Meänkieli, Kven, and Sámi languages, who empowered the Tornedalians, Kvens, and Sámi to engage in opposition against the politics of assimilation by using their mother language (Heith 2016, 90). One of Laestadius’s primary concerns was tackling social problems associated with the widespread use of alcohol. Despite this defence of the Sámi, he also represented the church that actively engaged in oppressive and humiliating practices towards them. Moreover, he successfully integrated Sámi traditions and beliefs into his teachings (Harlin and Pieski 2020, 84), and in this respect he was more efficient in eliminating elements of pre-Christian Sámi religion than his Swedish colleagues, Lutheran pastors situated outside of Sámi society (Harlin and Pieski 2020, 84).

As a botanist, Laestadius had contact with several leading naturalists and was invited to join the *La Recherche* expedition based on his expertise in local botany and as a “connoisseur of Lapland” (Larsson 2004, 50–52;

Heith 2016, 93; 2018, 47–50). Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the collecting of Sámi human remains through barter, excavation, and grave robberies was common practice throughout large parts of Sápmi. As the existing collections of Sámi skulls at central Nordic universities in Stockholm, Lund, Uppsala, Helsinki, and Oslo bear witness of, European scientists exhumed human remains for race biological research. Although Sámi communities protested, scientists ignored this and pursued their work (Ojala 2016, 995). One undertaking of the *La Recherche* expedition was to plunder graves and burial sites to steal “true Sámi” crania and other human remains (Pohjanen 1981). As a guide for the expedition, Laestadius showed the Frenchmen where skulls and skeletal parts were available and helped procure them, as described in an unsigned newspaper article attributed to Laestadius (Franzén 1973, 213; Broberg 1982, 27–86; Lundmark 2008, 145–46; Ojala 2016, 999–1001; Heith 2018, 150–51). In 1838 the group made an excursion to Eanodat/Enontekiö in Finnish Sápmi. Laestadius writes (and please be warned: the following quotations are deeply offensive):

Here [at Eanodat] President Gaimard, Mr Robert and Sundevall found a big treasure, perhaps the best find made during the whole trip, that is 2 storage sacks full of Lapp [Sámi] skulls and human bones. At the end the President himself eagerly collected every bone fragment that came out of the grave. Only Dr Sundevall worried that our work as gravediggers might become known among the Lapp people; we should rather have taken a gravedigger from Karesuando with us to dig up the graves.

Indeed, a settler later also asked me if it was right to plunder the sacred tombs of the dead in this way, but I consoled him that the bones which were now taken out of Enontekis [Eanodat] cemetery would be arranged in the same order in which they had been in the bodies, in such a way that the whole skeleton would stand upright in a very beautiful space, which would mean almost half a resurrection. But I didn't get off as easily another time when I took several other naturalists to the same Enontekis cemetery who took only skulls; afterwards an old woman who had heard of the circumstances brought up the Sadducees' question how the resurrection of the dead was supposed to happen when the head was separated from the body by several hundred miles. (Laestadius, *Nyare Freja*, 27 November 1838, my translation)

Eight years later, in a letter to the zoologist Carl Jakob Sundevall,⁷ Laestadius again writes about the practice in cold-hearted detail:

If Brother would be so kind to give my message to Dr or Professor Retzius (whichever of the brothers you meet first) that it isn't easy to get a cranium of a newborn Lapp child. But Wretholm sometimes travels here in the winter and the grave[yard] is open all winter long[.] Couldn't he as a surgeon cut off the neck of such a child's

⁷ Letter from L. L. Laestadius to C. J. Sundevall, September 1846. Laestadius brev till akademiker 1818–1860, Læstadiusarkivet,

<http://www.laestadiusarkivet.se/>
(accessed 5 November 2020).
Original in Lund University Library.

corpse? Otherwise nothing new – All fruit grew and ripened here this year. We feel well. Sincerely, L. L. Laestadius. (Letter from Laestadius to C. J. Sundevall, September 1846, my translation)

Laestadius’s tone of nonchalance and abrupt turn of topic, from Sámi infant bodies to produce, sheds light on his view of the Sámi. Arguably, it also sheds light on the authority of science as beyond any human or ethical consideration. For Laestadius, the activity of selling “Lapp skulls” to the (in)famous anatomist Anders Retzius (1796–1860) in Stockholm was a means of income to lift his family out of poverty and starvation (Pohjanen 1981, 72; Heith 2018, 150–51). His association with the explorers of the *La Recherche* expedition demonstrates his complicity in the racial sciences that justified and supported European supremacy and colonialism. Indeed, his accounts here, filled with the glee of a treasure hunt, express no internal conflict regarding his engagement in grave robbing. To the contrary, the group cracks vulgar jokes and laughs about displaying the collected items in “grand rooms” (*granna rum*, Pohjanen 1981, 81; Heith 2018, 151) in reference to the numerous institutions that would acquire the human remains for their collections. Sámi crania taken from Guovdageaidnu by the *La Recherche* expedition are today part of the collection at the Musée de l’Homme in Paris (Ojala 2016, 1000). Sámi *dáiddar* (artist) and poet Peaká Heiká Bigá Nilsá Ragnel Rosmare/Rose-Marie Huuva is one of the leading activists demanding the return and burial of Sámi crania and bones stored in Swedish museums and archives (Ojala 2009, 242).

As Carl-Gösta Ojala (2016, 999) points out, although extensive literature about Laestadius’s life and work exists, few scholars have focused on his participation in grave robbing. To my knowledge, the above passages have not been previously translated into English.⁸ Similarly, NNKM has not addressed this issue in their displays of Biard’s painting. The possibility that for some visitors these embedded colonial histories are hiding in plain sight becomes deeply disturbing.

8 Anne Heith (2018, 151) paraphrases excerpts of these passages in English. Carl-Gösta Ojala (2009, 245–56) cites portions of these passages in English in his PhD dissertation.

Colonial semantics

Norway carried out a thoroughgoing and brutal process of assimilation of its Indigenous people with massive repercussions for the Sámi and Kvens, at its most intense from 1850 to 1970 (Nergård 2019, 114). As a consequence of nationalism and in accordance with the ideology of the nation-state based on cultural, ethnic, and linguistic unity among its dominant people, the Sámi should, it was upheld, be assimilated into the Norwegian ways of life and languages (Aamold 2017, 78). This official policy of assimilation was

9 See https://uit.no/kommisjonen_en.

10 Nergård has four decades of research experience with Sámi people.

called “Norwegianization” (*Fornorskning*), and it is the term Norway’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission⁹ uses today. While the same term is used in the Norwegian curricula and public reports on Sámi languages and social conditions (Kramvig 2020, 89), the professor of education Jens-Ivar Nergård¹⁰ contends that given the harsh practices it entailed, the term “Norwegianization” is too “peaceful” (Olsen 2012). “Colonization” would more accurately describe the violent nature of the policies that enforced cultural purification. Indeed, artists, politicians, and academics in Sápmi use the term colonization to describe this history of systematic assimilation (Brattland, Kramvig, and Verran 2018).

Despite this documented history of assimilation and trauma, the majority culture in Norway understands colonialism as something that happened elsewhere. As Mathias Danbolt has found, this is also the case for Norwegian art history; colonial history is a blind spot (Danbolt 2018a, 2018b). The belief in Nordic exceptionalism, that Norway does not have a colonial past, and what scholars call the “Nordic colonial mind”, extends to the other Nordic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden (Palmberg 2009, 35; Höglund and Burnett 2019, 6).

As Lorenzo Veracini (2015) points out, settler colonialism is a global phenomenon that many scholars emphasize is a structure, not an event (Wolfe 1999; Tuck and Yang 2012; Glenn 2015). A forerunner in employing settler colonial theory to current affairs in Sápmi, Sámi scholar Jovvna Jon Ánne Kirstte Rávdná/Rauna Kuokkanen’s recent work is an important contribution to expose the Nordic states’ colonial, assimilationist practices and policies, sentiments almost entirely unknown to the mainstream population, and often also to the Sámi themselves. Kuokkanen (2020, 299) emphasizes that “settler colonialism is a structure characterizing Sápmi, both in the past and present”.

NNKM in Centre – periphery politics

In 2002 NNKM acquired Biard’s *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*. To understand why and how the acquisition happened, it is crucial to provide the institutional context and the centre – periphery politics to which this core collection piece is inseparably bound.

According to the centre – periphery framework developed by professor of comparative politics Stein Rokkan (1999), regional identities are formed by economic, political, and cultural tensions in relation to the centre. From this perspective, the cultural tensions indicate the centre’s lack of integration and respect for regional cultural expressions (Stein, Buck, and Bjørnå 2021, 39). Thus the spatial dimension (distance from the centre) matters and affects

trust in politicians (Stein, Buck, and Bjørnå 2021, 39). Concerning the circumstance of the acquisition, the centre–periphery dimension has explanatory value for the voices critical of the acquisition.

NNKM opened its doors on 17 March 1988 as the “northernmost art museum in the world” (*Nordlys*, 16 September 1986). It has a similar institutional makeup as The National Museum in Oslo. Both museums are state-funded, but as foundations are not state-owned. While they operate under the arm’s length principle, arguably they can function as an extended arm of the Norwegian state (Mangset 2012). Three of the NNKM board positions, including the chair, are appointed by the Ministry of Culture and Equality. NNKM was founded in 1985 by a group of local and national organizations: Nordnorsk Kulturråd,¹¹ the University of Tromsø, Riksgalleriet (The National Touring Exhibition), and Nasjonalgalleriet (The National Gallery/Museum). The museum’s objective is “to create interest in, awareness of, and knowledge about art and craft in the north of Norway” (§ 3).¹²

Envisioned as “an art museum for Northern Norway” (Aaserud 2006b), the institution serves a vast geographical area that stretches over Norway’s two northernmost counties including Svalbard.¹³ Prior to the museum’s opening in 1988, the local paper *Tromsø-magasinet* (19 February 1988) proudly announced that “[a]rt history has arrived in Northern Norway”. Understanding art history as something arriving and settling (from the south), this statement suggests colonial implications. In a 1988 television programme about the museum opening, a reporter seems to mirror this understanding about where art comes from when asking: “Is there a strong tradition of Northern Norwegian art? If so, is it good enough to fill a museum?” (Hansen 1988).

How did the process of defining Northern Norwegian art operate, and was Sámi *dáidda* (art) a part of the concept? Despite the art museum’s location, presence, and geographical mandate in Sápmi, the words “Sámi”, “Sápmi”, “*dáidda*”, and “*duodji*”¹⁴ (a Sámi concept involving “craft” making, philosophy, and cosmology) are not mentioned in the museum’s statutes. Arguably, this oversight reflected a suspicion that art was absent in Sápmi/Northern Norway. Starting from scratch, the early NNKM collection comprised long-term loans from The National Gallery/Museum, Norsk Kulturråd (Arts Council Norway), and Riksgalleriet. “We got everything we could of Northern Norwegian art. Everything ... is sent north to us”, stated the museum’s first director, Frode Haverkamp¹⁵ (*Tromsø-magasinet*, 19 February 1988). The new collection was intended to systematically document “the development of artistic life in the north of Norway, including that of the Lapps [his term]” (Haverkamp 1988, 226). Haverkamp selected contemporary works (as long-term loans) by artists included on the membership lists of the Artists’ Associations of Northern Norway (NNBK and NKNN).¹⁶ A minimal number of

11 Nordnorsk Kulturråd (Northern Norway Arts Council) was decommissioned in 2007.

12 “Nordnorsk Kunstmuseums formål er å skape interesse for, øke kjennskapen til og kunnskapen om billedkunst og kunsthåndverk i den nordnorske landsdel”. See <https://www.nnkm.no/nb/innhold/nordnorsk-kunstmuseums-vedtekter>.

13 In 2015 NNKM established a satellite called Kunsthall Svalbard.

14 For more on *duodji*, see Gaski and Guttorm (2022).

15 Frode Ernst Haverkamp was the first leader at NNKM, from 1986 to 1994, and senior curator at Nasjonalgalleriet for several years.



16 Nordnorske Bildende Kunstnere and Norske Kunsthåndverkere Nord-Norge.
 17 John Gustavsen specializes in Sámi rights and socio-political issues related to the Barents region. Gustavsen, Marry Áilonieida Somby, and Nils-Aslak Valkeapää initiated the founding of the Sámi Girječálliid Searvi/ Sámi Writers Association.

works by Sámi and Kven artists, such as Ánddir Ivvar Ivvár/Iver Jáks and Kåre Kivijärvi, were selected from collections in the south.

Sámi writer and journalist John Gustavsen¹⁷ (1988, 28) criticized the opening exhibition for its lack of Sámi *dáidda* representation. Instead of leaning into criticism, Haverkamp (1988, 226) responded, “neither the architect nor the author of this article, who were jointly responsible for the exhibition, feel they should reply to criticism that the arrangement of the pictures, sculptures, and objects is too tidy, too ‘museumy’, and not exciting enough. Readers are cordially invited to visit our museum and judge for themselves!” Further, NNNKM was criticized in the popular press as a satellite museum of Nasjonalgalleriet (today’s National Museum of Norway). These allegations were substantiated by the fact that Haverkamp, along with all three directors that followed, were all previously employed at The National Museum in the capital.

Gustavsen, in addition to other critical voices in the media, seems to have experienced NNNKM as what scholars term a “settler museum” (Phillips 2011, 24–26) that operates within the logics and system of settler colonialism, and can be understood as an institution promoting colonial narratives that position the settler state as universal and benevolent in the interest of Indigenous people (Macoun and Strakosch 2013, 428; Kuokkanen 2020, 298). Without having “Sámi” and “Sápmi” in its mandate, the museum can then comfortably include or exclude Sámi *dáidda* and *duodji* at its own convenience. Arguably, through an absence of information, the museum participates in the naturalization of colonial legacies by educating museum visitors to ignore its existence (Kosasa 2011, 154).

Institutional critique resurfaced again in 2014, during NNNKM’s international exhibition *Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People*.¹⁸ In his review of the two-volume book set (Gullickson and Lorentzen 2014; Hauan 2014) that accompanied the exhibition, John Gustavsen (2014) accused the museum of colonizing Sámi art. He called for more contributions by Sámi writers and authors and asserted that when academics write from an outsider’s perspective, one can get the feeling the artist’s agency is taken from them and the curators and academics know best. As one of the curators involved at the time, I failed to understand Gustavsen’s critique and acknowledge my role in the museum’s disacknowledgement of coloniality in Sápmi/Norway.

18 *Sámi Stories* was organized and produced by Norges arktiske universitetsmuseum (The Arctic University Museum of Norway) in collaboration with NNNKM.

The acquisition of a museum highlight

19 Anne Britt Aaserud was director at NNNKM from 1994

In 2002, shortly before the acquisition of *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*, the museum’s director, Anne Aaserud,¹⁹ suggested it would be great to have the opportunity to tell Her Majesty Queen Sonja of Norway the

to 2008. Aaserud was the administrative leader at Nasjonalgalleriet from 1984 to 1994.

20 Due to delays in the acquisition process, the painting was not displayed in NNKM until after the inaugural opening on 15 June 2002.

history behind the painting and the enthusiasm of acquiring it for Northern Norway at the inaugural opening (*Nordlys*, 5 March 2002). Part of the strategic rationale for the acquisition was the museum’s relocation to another building. Aaserud made it clear that the painting would be displayed when the museum reopened on 3 April 2002 (*Tromsø*, 27 February 2002).²⁰ Intended to be a centrepiece “with a place of honour”, the painting would serve as the main attraction for museum visitors (*Tromsø*, 27 February 2002). Making use of a metaphor many associate with the British Empire’s acquisition of India, the most important of all the British colonies, Aaserud stated that “it would be the jewel in the crown in the presence of the Queen and the [Norwegian] Minister of Culture” (*Nordlys*, 5 March 2002). She further described the painting as “commissioned by the King [of France] along with two other pictures from the [*La Recherche*] expedition. One hangs in Versailles; another is now for sale. That’s why this is a pearl that will fit perfectly in our type of museum” (*Nordlys*, 21 February 2002).

Dependent on external funding to secure the acquisition and bring it “home” (*Avisa Nordland*, 21 February 2002), substantial media coverage and fundraising were used to come up with the 1.75 million Norwegian crowns (NOK), negotiated down from the 2 million NOK asking price (*Nordlys*, 6 April 2002), to purchase the painting from the art dealer Hazlitt, Gooden & Fox in London. Anyone could join the cause by depositing a contribution into the “Laestadius bank account” (*Nordlys*, 5 March 2002).

Supporters of the acquisition focused on the painting’s cultural historical value as a documentation of the Sámi and the heroic figure of Laestadius. As emphasized by local businessman and cultural entrepreneur Kåre-Bjørn Kongsnes (*Nordlys*, 22 February 2002), attention also centred on honouring the memory of Laestadius, “who means a great deal to the region. ... Especially considering his work to strengthen the self-respect of the Sámi people”. Critics, on the other hand, raised their concerns about the problematic aspects of the work, its associations with the bourgeoisie, and the unrealistic representation of the scene and landscape. Groups in the local community felt the painting conveyed more about the French than the Sámi or Laestadius.

Critical to the acquisition, Sámi *dáiddar* and writer Odd Marakatt Sivertsen questioned why Aaserud emphasized the grandeur of a painting he described as a “distorted perception of Laestadius depicted in the name of exoticism, where outsiders again resort to cheap effects that seem heroic, with a dubious understanding of culture. Should that be perpetuated?” (*Nordlys*, 6 March 2002). Sivertsen suggested that Aaserud should “search for better paintings of Laestadius in a landscape where he actually was – without the fanfare of a class-distinctive top hat, submerged in an ice and snow hellscape” (*Nordlys*, 6 March 2002). He also brought up the museum’s commitment to ask questions and guide the public in asking critical questions concerning art.



Ben Schei, chair of the museum’s board, called Sivertsen’s commentary an attack against the museum, and Aaserud noted that “Odd Sivertsen shows a certain arrogance by criticizing an artist’s choice of motif 150 years later” (*Nordlys*, 9 March 2002). Sivertsen replied by deeming the painting an exotic mystification that produces peripheral constructs and stated, “My hope for Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum is that it may eventually become a place that reflects the power of survival, the creative necessity and history of a people in an area that, to borrow from the words of the author Magnar Mikkelsen, have lived ‘hundred years under the whip’” (*Nordlys*, 19 March 2002).

Despite local resistance (*Nordlys*, 9 and 14 March 2002), the museum was able to purchase the painting with funding from the Arts Council Norway, the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, the Fritt Ord Foundation,²¹ and the Norwegian Church Endowment (OVF), in addition to the funds raised from businesses and private donors. At the time, it was the museum’s costliest acquisition.

After the finalized purchase in London, the painting was displayed for a week in Oslo at Nasjonalgalleriet while in transit to Romsa, “largely in part to show the central allocating authorities an example of what we [NNKM] do” (Aaserud in *Tromsø*, 16 May 2002). Impressed by the quality of the painting, museum colleagues at Nasjonalgalleriet praised the acquisition (*Tromsø*, 16 May 2002). Sivertsen reached a different conclusion, however, arguing that the display of the painting in the centre was evidence of systemic power, a means of seeking southern approval to lessen critique in the north (*Nordlys*, 8 June 2002). If we return then to Rokkan’s centre–periphery framework, Sivertsen’s sentiments can be understood as endorsement from museum professionals in the south appropriated by NNKM to gain trust in the north.

Once installed, “the treasure” (*Nordlys*, 5 March 2002) was on continuous display for nearly eighteen years, taken down on two occasions, described below.

21 The Fritt Ord Foundation is a private non-profit foundation that is intended to protect and promote freedom of expression, public debate, art, and culture in Norway. See <https://frittord.no/en/about/what-is-the-fritt-ord-foundation>.

Collection highlights and contested monuments

In his book *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Arjun Appadurai (1986, 5) argues that “we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories”. In their entangled relationships with people, other objects, and places, all things are moments in a longer social trajectory (Appadurai 2006, 15). In short, objects have a social life. Within this framework, *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* changes meaning as it enters and begins a new

life in the NNKM museum space. With status as a collection highlight, *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* is not simply an object or commodity, it is also emblematic of the museum. Appearing on the cover of the collections catalogue (Aaserud, Ljøgodt, and Berg 2008), Biard’s painting has been referred to by former NNKM directors as a “signature piece” and “one of the most prominent works in the collection” (Aaserud 2006b, 82; Ljøgodt 2007). Framed as an object of aesthetic contemplation, the work has been displayed together with other “more or less exotified depictions of the Sámi and the Northern landscape” (Heith 2018, 50) and museum “tombstones”, wall labels providing bare-bones information about the objects. In a “neutral” chronological presentation, the painting is left to “speak for itself”.

The museum’s behaviour surrounding the acquisition and its subsequent display until recent years points to what Janet Marstine (2006, 9–11) defines as the “shrine” and Elaine Heumann Gurian (2002, 79) the “treasure-based” museum. Within this paradigm, the purpose of works of art is to be beheld as things of beauty (Duncan [1995] 2005, 16). When dislocated from history and placed in another context without contextualization, however, works like *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* perpetuate the colonial legacy.

Highlights are not the result of inadvertent decisions. Art museums arrive at these works through systems of judgement (Fraser 2005, 142–43). Like contested monuments, museum collection highlights are markers of the past and reminders of memory. Indeed, as indicated by Elaine Heumann Gurian (2014, 476), art museums and other “institutions of memory” are part of the visible “soul” of society. In light of the ongoing BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) movement, nations are forced to reckon with their racist histories and colonial legacies. In nations around the world, monuments to colonial, imperial, racist, and sexist figures are being confronted, moved, replaced, and in some cases destroyed. Stepping the figures down from their pedestals makes it possible to confront these monuments (Buchan 2020).

While monuments may have an aura of permanence, they are not made to last forever. On the contrary, they change over time and require maintenance and mindsets to keep them standing.²² If we return to Appadurai’s (2006, 15) perspective, similar to monuments, works of art are invested with the properties of social relations. In spite of the object’s aspiration to the illusion of permanence, Appadurai reminds us of the fragility of objecthood itself (2006, 15). As such, the artwork’s status as a highlight is not as eternal as one might expect; upholding its stability requires maintenance and action in its social life.

The Biard painting was taken down on two occasions, first in 2017 during *There Is No Sámi Dáiddamusea*^x, and in 2020 during *HOS* (At) when

22 Paul Farber, “Monumental Conversations: What We Found When We Analyzed America’s Monuments”, Mellon Foundation, 29 September 2021; <https://mellon.org/news-blog/articles/monumental->



conversations-what-we-found-when-we-analyzed-americas-monuments/ (accessed 4 October 2021).

NNKM temporarily transformed into a craft and *duodji* museum. Here it is important to consider what replaced *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*. Western categories of high art (such as architecture, sculpture, and painting) and low art (such as prints and crafts) are anchored in hegemonic power structures. By removing an iconic painting, replacing it with Sámi *dáidda*, *duodji*, and craft, NNKM intended to challenge dichotomies in Western understandings of art.

Unhighlighting

I will now return to Pratt’s concept of the contact zone to demonstrate how it might serve as a decolonizing tool by offering an alternative reading of *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders*. Importantly, the contact zone can emphasize the value of spaces of interaction to offer a lens for better appreciating the complexity of entanglement and a plurality of perspectives. Can we, regardless of Biard’s intention, imagine that the artefacts depicted in Biard’s painting have agency? One example is the women’s *ládjogahpirs*, which were in use and highly valued by Sámi communities until the end of the nineteenth century. Due to colonist suppression, the *ládjogahpir* nearly vanished from Sámi culture.²³ Recent efforts such as the project *Máttaráhku Ládjogahpir* (Foremother’s Hat of Pride), a collaboration by Finnish archaeologist and doctoral candidate Eeva-Kristiina Nylander and Sámi *dáiddar* Outi Pieski (2017–), work to revitalize and reclaim the *ládjogahpir* as a symbol of rematriation in Sámi society.²⁴

23 There are other speculations that the *ládjogahpir* simply fell out of fashion because of its impractical nature (Harlin and Pieski 2020, 86).

24 Eeva-Kristiina Nylander’s former surname is Harlin.

Indigenous scholar and curator Nancy Marie Mithlo (Fort Sill Chiricahua Warm Springs Apache) suggests that objects are flexible and can be mobilized to speak at will to the concerns of the maker, the viewer, or the subject represented in the artwork (Mithlo 2012, 112). Drawing on Mithlo’s perspective, could Biard’s representation of *ládjogahpirs* redress the colonialist and hurtful narrative of the painting? How then could a refocus on the *ládjogahpir* work in practice? Could we apply Clifford’s notion of the museum as contact zone? From this perspective, museum practice extends beyond consultation and sensitivity to active collaboration and sharing of authority (Clifford 1997, 210). Further, it requires museums to think of their mission as contact work, and understand themselves within spaces of interaction as opposed to a centre and position of dominance (204, 213). While Clifford offers positive potential in drawing on Pratt’s idea, he proposes his concept with a note of caution in pointing out “the long history of ‘exotic’ displays in the West” and uneven reciprocity (197). Until museums do more than consult with the relevant

communities or continue “business as usual”, the museum as contact zone will remain a utopian ideal (207–9). As indicated by scholar Robin Boast (2011, 66) in his critical analysis of the contact zone, although the periphery may win some small, momentary, and strategic advantage, ultimately the centre gains. Boast argues that despite postcolonial status and progressive aspirations of inclusion and collaboration, the intellectual control has largely remained in the hands of the museum (58). While NNKM initiated institutional change in recent years, Boast’s exposure of the contact zone as “a site in and for the center” reiterates the imminent need for art museums to operate at times self-critically and confront neocolonial pitfalls (67).

Although the potential agency of the *ládjogabpirs* in *Laestadius Teaching Laplanders* may open up to different readings of the painting, it risks becoming a trope and what Tuck and Yang (2012, 1) identify as a settler move to innocence. Given the asymmetry of the contact zone and the violent colonial content and context of the work, acknowledging agency is too easy. A better approach may be to *unhighlight*, through confronting and demoting, the Biard painting and other art with similar problematic histories and contexts in order to create space for a more accurate historical contextualization, nuance, and ambiguity. Such a space would be open precisely to the kind of counter-narratives in the form of artist voices attesting to decolonization that have long existed in Sápmi (Sandström 2020). Áillohaš/Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, the legendary Indigenous activist, Sámi *dáiddar*, writer, musician, and *juoigi* (a practitioner of *jouigan*²⁵), illustrates this beautifully in the poem at the opening of this essay. The poem was written six years after NNKM opened, and in it Áillohaš calls out the dominant colonial narrative of history from a Sámi perspective.

25 The North Sámi word for the Sámi vocal genre, a medium for the performance of narratives.

Aligning with such projects to decolonize museums and evoke institutional change, the analysis presented here aims to provide museum professionals with tools in terms of language and perspective that they can use going forward. As demonstrated, the path of learning to see from different perspectives and undo colonial silences is in-depth, ongoing work, and invoking a decolonized future is a slow and delicate process (Minott 2019, 573). Processes of institutional change require scholars and museum professionals to do this hard and necessary work from their own positionality and within their own cultural and institutional context while developing a sensitivity and openness towards Indigenous histories and perspectives. Failure to acknowledge self-reflective work as critical, ongoing, and complex may risk perpetuating colonial perspectives and centre-periphery structures this essay aims to expose (Tuck and Yang 2012). By bringing these problematic issues to the reader’s attention, I insist there is no easy fix.

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APPENDIX 3

Article 3

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Hacking from the Inside: The Art Museum as Activist

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Charis Gullickson is a curator at Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum and a public sector PhD student at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Her research project aims to disrupt the status quo in art museum practices within a theoretical framework of museums as agents of change. She has curated numerous exhibitions on craft and Sámi *dáidda* [art].

Abstract

How can the art museum illuminate patriarchal ideologies for the general public? In this article I share my experiences with Museum Hacks—feminist intervention developed as a learning-and-engagement program with the exhibition *Like Betzy* (2019–2020) by Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in Sápmi/Norway. The art museum “hacked” its own exhibition and monuments in public spaces to attract engagement with local communities, critically question and instigate dialogue, and debate on issues of gender inequity. Using institutional critique, intersectional feminism and decoloniality as a framework, my analysis demonstrates the art museum as activist. Although this case study is specific to a local context, I argue that monuments can serve as a site for public vulnerability, a place where museums step beyond their walls, outside their echo chambers, to perhaps incite social justice-oriented change in communities. As such Museum Hacks is transferrable to other social, cultural, and political contexts and contributes to future strategies for re-imagining the status quo in art museum practices.

Key words art history; art museum; Betzy Akersloot-Berg; feminist intervention; Museum Hacks; monuments; museum activism; national narratives; public space

Introduction

Despite significant strides over the past decades gender inequity persists in many professions in a variety of fields, including the academic, political, and scientific fields, as well as the art world. It is a highly complex situation where part of the fault lies within our institutions and our education. While our cultural institutions such as public art museums may be part of the problem, they also have the capacity to address and respond on relevant civic issues with the potential to facilitate progressive change, like social justice. As social institutions, art museums can critically question the ways in which society is manipulated and governed. For instance, they may instigate debate that perhaps contributes to possible solutions. And yet in the past five years, how did public art museums in Norway respond to issues on gender injustice? Some of them adopted and implemented gender quotas to address gender imbalance in their collections by increasing the representation of women artists.¹ Monographic art exhibitions on women artists—for example, *Fri luft* (Open Air) featuring Norwegian nineteenth century painter Kitty L. Kielland at Stavanger Kunstmuseum (Stavanger Art Museum) in 2017—constituted another approach. As a strong advocate for equal rights for women, Kielland participated in social debate and in 1884 co-founded the Norwegian Association for Women’s Rights. *Fri luft* presented a wide scope of Kielland’s artist practice, featured central paintings that had rarely been exhibited, and prioritized showing “newly discovered” works (Gudmundson 2022, 291). In addition, the project published the first monograph on Kielland. While it produced *Kitty Virtuell* (Virtual), an innovative form of digital learning-and-engagement, *Fri luft* appeared to fall under a traditional mode of art historical exhibition.² The various examples of art museum practices and approaches given here could indeed prove successful in advancing diversity and representation in exhibitions and collections. While this is the case, some feminist scholars reject the “add women and stir” approach to inclusion as inadequate; it feasibly falls into the pitfall of perpetuating the status quo and does not

necessarily challenge and confront social injustice and inequality (Noddings 2001, 29).

How might the art museum be a site of critical discourse and activate critical perspectives that reach a broader audience—the general public? How might the art institution dig down to the root of gender inequality and illuminate patriarchal ideologies? Specifically, how can the art museum engage with institutional critique? While critical approaches are common in academia and scholarly articles, art museum visitors and the public are less familiar with an inquiry that focuses reflective assessment and critique to reveal and challenge power structures. Here we need to address the concept of institutional critique in order to understand the idea of “hacking” from within the art museum. In my mind, it is about challenging the status quo in art museum practices to propose new strategies for art institutions to engage with. For example, rather than inviting artists to present critical art, the museum itself can learn from artists. That is, the art museum can apply institutional critique to its practices to transform institutional structures and hierarchies. In short, the art institution aims to reform the institution by engaging with critical reflection and self-critique.

Along these lines I argue that the public art institution has the potential to perform self-critique and involve in critical projects directed at other societal institutions. In this way it is helpful to consider the art museum’s role in society and draw from scholarship on progressive aspirations to reform museums. For instance, the idea of “museum activism,” which Robert R. Janes and Richard Sandell (2019, 1) describe as “museum practice, shaped out of ethically-informed values, that is intended to bring about political, social and environmental change.” Moreover, I turn to Kylie Message’s (2018) idea of “the disobedient museum.” Message suggests critique as disobedience; in other words, disobedience as a form of critique (30). The “disobedient” framework is helpful in understanding how museums can challenge the normativity of traditional disciplinary approaches and enact activism. Drawing on Message, this article exercises an example of the “dirty thinking”; that is, what she describes as a methodological approach for developing engaged modes of critique—an approach that is disobedient rather than oppositional (28).

Although there is significant literature on transformation and the museum of the future, Portin and Grinell (2021, 8) emphasize a gap in the literature on concrete advice on *how* in practice to realize these progressive ideals. Moreover, Laura-Edythe S. Coleman (2020, 9) argues that despite the growth of scholarly writing about museums, the field lacks a body of research into museum practice. This article is a contribution to this gap by offering a case study of how a small art museum responded to issues on gender injustice and proposes the concept of Museum Hacks (hereafter Hack).³ Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum [Northern Norway Art Museum] (hereafter NNKM) developed Hack within its learning-and-engagement program to engage local communities on gender inequality.⁴ I write as NNKM curator and turn to decoloniality and intersectional feminism to support my investigation of Hack. My main objective is to contribute to ongoing debates on art museums—what they are and reimagining what they could be. Equally important I aim to advance critical thinking about the role a public art institution can play in public discourse.

Why Hack the Art Museum?

Practice preceded theory in developing the curatorial and learning-and-engagement strategies for the exhibition *Like Betzy* (hereafter LB) on view at NNKM in Romsa/Tromsø, Northern Norway from June 15, 2019 to February 16, 2020. As such, this article applies theory to these practices. Rooted in design thinking and rapid prototyping, Betzy Akersloot-Berg’s artistic practice was the driving inspiration behind Hack (Gullickson and Rydland, 2022a, 2022b).⁵ Design thinking involves prototyping and can be understood as a “systematic and collaborative approach to identifying and creatively solving problems” (Luchs 2016, 1–2). In other words, one approaches problems and their solutions as a designer would. The following study will demonstrate the contents of the two concepts. Art historian Trix Scherjon and I co-curated LB in a collaborative interdisciplinary team. Our tools and starting point for the project were the institutional values: openness, co-production, and relevance. This article begins with a presentation of Betzy Akersloot-Berg and an overview on the art historical aspect of LB. From there I discuss Hack—that is, feminist interventions performed inside the exhibition—followed by an investigation of Hack performed

outside the walls of the art museum on two male monuments in public spaces. NNKM's intention with Hack was to inspire dialogue and instigate a debate on gender equality. On the contrary, the debate led in other directions with strong reactions from politicians and the public, in addition to acts of vandalism and destruction. Indeed, Hack generated significant enthusiasm, yet what did NNKM do to prompt such violent responses?

To focus this question, it is helpful to consider the art museum within a framework of decolonial scholarship. First, gender is one of the hierarchical structures that decoloniality aims to recognize and undo (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 17). Equally important, Amy Lonetree (2012, 166) asserts that museums are still haunted by colonial legacies and can therefore be sites of oppression and exclusion. Similarly, one can start from the hypothesis that art museums are not innately "useful," "safe," or even "'public' spaces" (Message 2018, 1). This enables one to recalibrate common perceptions of art museums and employ a framework for critical engagement. However, while art institutions are intimately tied to the colonization process, Lonetree (1, 124) also proposes museums as a possible solution, as sites for decolonization and Indigenization to transform them from places of colonial harm into spaces for community healing and understanding. She argues that decolonizing museum practice opens a space to talk about the hard truths and difficult histories of coloniality that need to be addressed (5). This idea challenges the widespread notion that museums do not like to offend their publics (Clifford 1997, 209). However, if the art museum aims to promote progressive change, might discomfort be an unavoidable aspect of embracing change? Might discomfort be seen as an asset in museum practices? Change can be uncomfortable.

Badass marine painter?

In this part I provide a background on the artist Betzy Akersloot-Berg (1850–1922) to enable a better understanding of Hack and ground its relevance. Akersloot-Berg was born to Norwegian parents and grew up in Aurskog, a village east of Christiania (today's Oslo, Norway).⁶ In her early 20s, before deciding to pursue a career as an artist, Akersloot-Berg obtained a nursing education in Christiania, most likely at

Diakonissehuset (the Deaconess House), and then traveled to the north of Norway to Sápmi (Wumke 1962; Bell 1997, 19; Scherjon 2010, 103) and worked for five years as a nurse and missionary in Sámi communities, most likely in Gjesvær on Magerøya (Bell, 20–21).⁷ Upon returning to southern Norway in the mid-1870s she started her art education at Den Kongelige Tegneskolen (the Royal School of Drawing) in Christiania.⁸ Possibly no European art academy in the 1870s and '80s accepted female students, thus she studied privately under established male painters in Central Europe, for example the Norwegian landscape painting Otto Sinding in Munich (1881–83), Dutch marine painter Hendrik Willem Mesdag in The Hague (1885–88), and French painter Pierre Puvis de Chavannes in Paris (two months in spring of 1890).⁹ Although she studied abroad, her connection to Norway remained strong and influenced her work. She spent the winter studying on the continent, and in early spring to late fall took trips to Norway to study the cliffs and the sea.¹⁰

We defined Akersloot-Berg as a badass marine painter. The sea was the main source of inspiration in her work and she asserts its importance in her paintings in a letter to Norwegian art historian Carl Wille Schnitler (March 16, 1907): “Never for a moment did I doubt what I was going to paint, it was the sea that was my only great longing.”¹¹ Indeed, Akersloot-Berg was a hardworking and independent marine painter, but we opted “badass” as a less conventional art historical descriptor because it is a word we use ourselves and thus enhances the public’s understanding that her life is both distant and near to our own time. The project group formulated three ways of describing a badass: 1) one who remains true to herself, always; 2) one who never gives up; 3) one who will always strive to do better, regardless of how difficult it is.

Akersloot-Berg’s sea scenes usually include human elements. While marine vessels are a preferred motif, they do not appear in all her paintings. In 1893 at age 43 she married Netherlander, Gooswinus Gerardus Akersloot, and settled on the island of Vlieland in the Netherlands.¹² According to Anne Wichstrøm (1983, 18), almost without exception women painters in Norway at the turn of the nineteenth century quit their careers as professional artists after they married. Unlike her female contemporaries, marriage did not interrupt Akersloot-Berg’s travel or productivity as an artist; in this way one can perhaps speculate that her spouse encouraged her as a

painter. Here, an important factor is that Akerslout had the economic means to provide a comfortable life for the couple; Akerslout-Berg wanted to travel and paint, and he followed along (Bell, 54).¹³ She returned regularly to Sápmi/Northern Norway to visit friends and relatives; her brother-in-law was a minister in Loppa parish in Finnmark from 1883–1888 (Scherjon 2010, 10, 59).¹⁴

During her lifetime Akerslout-Berg exhibited in many countries throughout Europe, for example in France, Germany, Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands. She participated at the World's Fair in Paris (1889) and the Salon (1889, 1900, '01, '02, '04), in addition to *Høstutstillingen* [Norway's National Autumn Exhibition] (1882, '84, '91, '98). Her paintings sold to collectors throughout Europe in such places as St. Petersburg, London, Switzerland, and Paris. In a letter to C.W. Schmitler (March 16, 1907), Akerslout-Berg apologized for being unable to produce an exhibition because she sold the available works: "Of all my pictures I only have two left, the others have found their respective owners, so I am unable to bring together my widely distributed paintings for an exhibition."¹⁵ Other collectors of her work include Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands and the German Emperor Wilhelm II. In an article in the newspaper *Aftenposten* (July 19, 1892) about the Emperor's visit to Norway and a whaling station on Skorøya outside of Romsa/Tromsø, the author notes: "With special Interest, the Emperor considered ... Picture of the North Cape in the light of the Midnight Sun, due to the Norwegian Paintress Miss Betzy Berg."¹⁶ An article in *Aftenposten* (November 8, 1892) mentions that during his visit the Emperor commissioned a painting from Akerslout-Berg on a whale scapula to decorate his new Norwegian pavilion in Potsdam.¹⁷ LB featured a similar work with a motif of "Fugløya" (Fig. 1).

As demonstrated here, Akerslout-Berg was educated as an artist, exhibited her work at art institutions, had ties to society's elites, and her paintings sold well. This activity indicates that she was an important and perhaps well-known artist in her own time. Nevertheless, she is barely mentioned in Norwegian art history.¹⁸ Today she is perhaps more renowned in the Netherlands than in Norway. Then again, since her lifetime some scholars in a Norwegian context (since the 1980s) have made efforts to expand the art historical canon. Here, art historians like Anne Wichstrøm, Brit Bell,

and Trix Scherjon have made important contributions of knowledge on Akersloot-Berg's work. To help the public learn about and engage with her artistic career, it was important for NNKM to draw attention to systemic problems on gender inequality—issues that impacted Akersloot-Berg's career as a female artist and still have relevance today, nearly 100 years after her death. In other words, the art museum took on the role of activist to advocate for the public on the prevalence of these issues and was the starting point for Hack.

One of the project's aims was to challenge the traditional mode of art historical exhibition and realize a type that NNKM had not previously produced. In a traditional approach, the exhibition (accompanied by a catalogue) showcases works of art in a "neutral" display. That is, visitors are provided little or no context about the artworks, which are instead framed as objects of aesthetic contemplation. Furthermore, information flows from the institution to the visitor. As a result, the exhibition provides content for visitors to consume, rather than provide opportunities for co-produced experiences (Simon 2010, 2). Among other things, NNKM wanted to make Betzy Akersloot-Berg's art relevant in ways that would start a debate on equality and gender perspectives in today's artworld and in society as a whole. NNKM's desire to organize an exhibition on Akersloot-Berg dates back well over two decades. However, the want to develop critical perspectives on her artist practice was a recent development for the institution under the visionary leadership of former director Jérémie McGowan (2016–2020). In 1999, during Anne Aaserud's tenure as museum director, NNKM purchased Akersloot-Berg's *Kystparti, Lofoten* [Coastal Area, Lofoten] (1883; Fig. 2), the one single work by the artist in the museum's collections. With a depiction of Steine, a fishing village in Lofoten, the acquisition helped to strengthen NNKM's Northern Norwegian profile (Aaserud 2006, 81). Also, in 2002 NNKM awarded a stipend to art historian Trix Scherjon to support her pursuit of a master's degree (2010) on Akersloot-Berg at UiT The Arctic University of Norway. Scholarship in Norway on Betzy-Akersloot-Berg over the past four decades, compared to what was written in her lifetime, indicates a renewed interest in her painting.¹⁹ Here, art historian Anne Wichstrøm has used feminist perspectives to focus on nineteenth century female artists since the 1980s.²⁰ Wichstrøm's scholarship is an

important contribution, for example her monographic studies (*Oda Krohg* 1988) and (*Asta Nørregaard* 2011), in addition to her critical surveys on female artists (*Kvinner ved staffeliet* 1983) and (*Kvinneliv Kunstnerliv* 1997), which arguably “re-discovered” Akersloot-Berg’s artist practice in Norway.²¹

Wichstrøm suggests that regardless of motif or style, work by women artists in Norway before 1900 was exhibited, compared, and critiqued only with work by other female artists, as opposed to work by male artists (1983, 117). In the same way, art critics had biased expectations about Akersloot-Berg’s work. For instance, in a review of *Høstutstillingen* in the newspaper *Aftenposten* (31 October 1885), a critic with the initials S. S. wrote:

In Miss Berg’s paintings from the Sea and the Beach, there is a strange Energy. Particularly in her largest picture, ‘Baalandsvind,’ Nothing indicates that it is precisely a Lady who painted it. She goes Straight to the Point as it is, and there is nothing sweet about her Depiction of Nature, which one cannot say Miss Tannæs quite free from. Both the Cliffs and the Sea, which relentlessly breaks toward land, are depicted with Freshness and Strength.²²

While the critic’s remarks indicate preconceived ideas on work by female artists, the comment about “going straight to the point” is an accurate observation of her paintings as they reflect a desire to realistically portray experiences she witnessed at sea, events and moments that left a lasting impression on her. Her choice of motifs stands out from other female nineteenth century painters. She made only a few portraits. Indeed, she had Norwegian female colleagues who were landscape painters—for example Annette Anker, Hulda Grønneberg, Kitty Kielland, Johanna Siqueland, Mathilde Smith, and Marie Tannæs—but unlike her female contemporaries she painted marine landscapes, a European tradition in painting dominated by men. Her pictures of Norway’s distinctive nature, also of its modern harbors, whaling ships, and merchant vessels bear witness of national pride in the same way as do works by her contemporaries, for example the so-called “Lofoten painters” Gunnar Berg, Anna Boberg, Adelsteen Normann and Otto Sinding. LB presented paintings by Akersloot-Berg’s male colleagues and contemporaries, such as Peder Balke, Christian Krohg, Hendrik Willem Mesdag, Adelsteen Normann, and Otto Sinding. Further, paintings by

her female colleagues and friends Sina (Sientje) Mesdag-van Houten and Elisabeth Sinding (Otto's cousin) were also featured.

It was important for Akersloot-Berg to paint the world then and there, to get as close as possible to her subject matter. Her desire to paint outdoors and employ a realistic style emerged early on, in the mid 1870s when she started her studies in drawing and painting. One of her signature tools was a crate, which she sat inside when she painted in the open air (Fig. 3). The idea of her crate and its image became a key component of Hack. The crate contained an easel, a bench, and space for equipment—everything she needed in order to remain outdoors for extended painting sessions. She would raise a flag to signal that she was ready to be picked up. Her early paintings have a more refined style, while in the 1890s she developed a looser style dominated by brown and gray-green colors. In her later works the brushstrokes became even looser and thicker verging on an impressionist style; her strokes of paint lost their descriptive function and added painterly complexity to the dramatic scenes at sea.²³

Divided into thematic rooms, LB featured a selection of Akersloot-Berg's seascapes from Sápmi/Northern Norway as well as depictions of historical events in the Netherlands.²⁴ She wanted to paint truthful and accurate portrayals of her own experiences of the sea. *Zeppelinere over Vlieland* [Zeppelins over Vlieland] (1916; Fig. 4) depicts a fleet of German Zeppelins bound from Hamburg to London that she saw on October 1, 1916 in flight above Vlieland, with Terschelling in the background. *Drenkeling op het strand* [Drowned on the Beach] (1897; Fig. 5) depicts a dead body washed up on the beach, a victim of the shipwreck of the barque "Pearl" on Vlieland in 1897.²⁵ This painting demonstrates Akersloot-Berg's interest in depicting realistic interpretations, not imaginative idealizations. After participating in the hours-long rescue mission, the mayor of Vlieland refused Akersloot-Berg to paint the corpse, forcing her to hire someone to serve as a model so she could complete her painting (Bell 1997, 63; Scherjon 2010, 94–96). Her motifs are evidence that she had a clear sense of extreme and intense experiences related to the sea: the shore, the storms, the boats, the shipwrecks, the human casualties, the whaling industry, WWI-related themes—a passion that draws me to her work.

The Meaning of “Hack”

In this part I carve out a definition of Hack. How can an art museum activate historical art? One main intention with the project was to demonstrate the relevance of Akersloot-Berg’s art today, and thus respond to gender inequality in the artworld and society at large. For that reason, NNKM hacked the exhibition by incorporating 21 (un)fun facts about today’s art world, mounted adjacent to Akersloot-Berg’s paintings, thus establishing relations to her historical oeuvre (Fig. 6). Hack can be understood as a feminist inquiry, technique, or tool to illuminate and interrupt accepted patriarchal norms. Hack is manifested as a concept and object component—what comprises the intervention, in this case a wooden crate, flag, signage and paper labels. Moreover, it opens the art historical exhibition as a space for critical discourse. With their theoretical work on critical pedagogies exemplified with “the Feminist Museum Hack,” Darlene E. Clover and Kathy Sanford define hacking as “a means to enter without authorization or authority” (2018, 69). As interventions authored from within, by the art museum, Hack is distinct. In other words, the museum hacks itself, thus engaging with practices of critique and self-reflexivity. While in another context, there is transferrable knowledge on hacking the academy: “clever gaming of complex systems to produce an unprecedented result” (Suiter 2013, 8). Suiter posits that when a system fails, you hack around it (9). In this way, with a sense of play, NNKM creatively experimented so as to identify the systemic problems for a broader audience, the general public.

Produced in-house and printed on strips of white copy paper, Hack were individually attached on the museum’s walls with masking tape on four corners. As rapid prototypes, Hack were intentionally made to look low-grade to disturb the overall high quality polished expression of the exhibition, appearing at random among the displayed artworks—some high on the wall, others at low levels, some sideways, and a few in the museum’s restrooms and even in the elevator. NNKM wanted them to generate discomfort, plus draw associations to activism and guerilla tactics. By creating disturbances NNKM hoped to spark critical reflection and foster curiosity. When confronted with Hack, the audience could engage by reading or actively

overlook. QR codes were used to encourage museum visitors to gain additional information on gender inequality by connecting with citation sources. Several Hack were directed at inequality, for example “Men earn on average 14% more than women in Norway. Male artists earn 27% more than female artists in Norway.”²⁶ I was approached by visitors on numerous occasions who were surprised on reading the facts. Other Hack were directed at NNKM, exposing the institution’s own role in systemic inequality, for instance “Artworks by women currently make up 29% of Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum’s collection” and “This painting is the only artwork by Betzy Akersloot-Berg in Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum’s collection” (Fig. 6). NNKM responded self-critically by exposing its own complicity in systemic inequality. This aspect was picked up by art critics in exhibition reviews in the newspaper *Nordlys* on August 26, 2019, and in the online journal *Hakapik* whose critic asserted: “By asking questions about the social role of museums, they [NNKM] front a clear and distinct message” (Mitchell Itland 2019).

What a Triumph! / Heave the Rubbish!²⁷

What happens when the art museum assumes the role of activist? NNKM put itself in a vulnerable position by going outside its walls to creatively experiment in the public space and perform Hack on public monuments. In this scenario the art museum had less control over the outcome. Monuments throughout history have primarily been larger than life figurations of heroic men that perpetuate patriarchal ideologies and communicate national narratives (Catterall 2020). One of NNKM’s intentions was to draw attention to the fact that while there are monuments honoring men in Romsa/Tromsø, the public space does not have a single commemorative sculpture of a named woman (Herming, 2017). The existing female statuary is anonymous and archetypal, and sometimes semi-clad or naked. For instance, in the town center one can find: Arne Durban’s *Ung pike* [Young Girl] (1958), Ørnulf Bast’s *Mor og barn* [Mother and Child] (1961), Solveyg Schafferer’s *Passasjer* [Passenger] (1991) and Marit Viklund’s *King Olav V and a Girl* (1994). One notable exception is Gunn Harbitz’s wooden sculpture *Alberte og bølgen* [Alberte and the Wave] (1984) that commemorates a character from a trilogy by the renowned Norwegian author Cora

Sandel (pseudonym for Sara Fabricius, 1880–1974).²⁸ The male statuary largely represents figures from WWII, polar explorers, and royalty.

Developed as a learning-and-engagement project, Hack intended to recontextualize existing monuments, to disrupt and reframe the statues, visually and conceptually. Two monuments were selected: a 1937 bronze sculpture of Norwegian polar explorer Roald Amundsen by Norwegian artist Carl Edvard Paulsen and a 1950 bronze sculpture of Norwegian general Carl Gustav Fleischer by Norwegian artist Finn Eriksen.²⁹ Selection of the monuments was not based on who the statue represented, nor as a response to the international discussion and controversies in regard to contested monuments and statues; rather, NNKM chose the two monuments based on their proximity to the art museum and to the *Festspillene i Nord-Norge* (FINN) [the Arctic Arts Festival] venue in Hárstták/Harstad.³⁰ The Carl Gustav Fleischer monument stands in a town park known as Generalhagen (The General's Garden), while the sculpture of Roald Amundsen stands on a pedestal in the park next to NNKM, gazing across Romssanuorri/Tromsøsundet (the Sound) and the harbor area Prostneset. From here, Amundsen launched several expeditions, and the statue is a regular stop for sightseeing tourists, along with the occasional seagull. Many local inhabitants, especially adults from the demographic aged 65 and over, are very proud of the statue and the fact that Amundsen chose their town as the starting point for some of his expeditions.

While many in the popular press perceived Hack as an attack on the heroic image of Amundsen or Fleisher, it was not intended as such. In contrast, the critique was aimed at the systemic gender inequalities, for example the lack of representation of women in (art) history. Therefore, Hack can be understood as a “critical aesthetic” to expose the vices that exist within monumental aspirations of the past. Furthermore, it collapsed distance, bringing something perceived of as far away into immediate proximity, thus demonstrating the relevance of nineteenth century art.

Outside the walls of the museum, in the public space, NNKM remade and transformed the male sculptures (Roald Amundsen and Carl Gustav Fleischer) with a reconstructed replica of Akersloot-Berg's crate. The project group did a thorough evaluation in advance of Hack, both with respect to the monument's condition and

public reactions. The Roald Amundsen Park and statue belong to Tromsø Municipality, which NNKM contacted to gain permission for the intervention. The municipality replied, saying the park and the statue were public, so they did not see the project as anything they could or could not allow. Knowing it was not doing anything illegal, NNKM boxed Amundsen, and thus framed him inside Akerslott-Berg's reality (Fig. 7). Due to the pedestal's size, we made a simple square crate that rested on it. The crate encased Amundsen's body up to his hips and displayed her characteristic signal flag. Hack served as a feminist approach that invited people to regard Akerslott-Berg on par with other men. While Amundsen and Fleischer continued standing on their pedestals, they were conceptually altered through her presence and became "like Betzy" (Fig. 8).³¹ In addition, Hack "activated" statuary that was previously left out of sight and out of mind. Now, with one turn of the head, those who passed the monuments hundreds of times before were forced to notice the monument and to (hopefully) reflect on and question who has or has not been elevated in our communities.

Might not monuments in our collective landscape influence and perpetuate issues on gender bias? While we know little about the effects of monuments on how people think, the Austrian writer Robert Musil (2006, 42), in a lecture delivered in 1927, suggested that "there is nothing in this world so invisible as a monument," thus implying that people tend to forget what monuments commemorate. At the same time, mindsets are required to keep monuments standing. In rethinking the role of monuments, Brenda Schmahmann (2019, 185) usefully suggests that interventions on honorific monuments and sculpture may constitute a type of "curriculum" and contribute towards the acquisition of critical insight for the public. Drawing from Schmahmann, I argue that monuments enable critical questions on gender inequality, and Hack demonstrates how this can play out in practice.

A study from 2018 (Atir and Ferguson) shows that gender influences the way people speak about professionals; thus, it is more common to refer to male professionals by surname alone than females. Consequently, professionals referred to by surname are perceived as more famous and eminent (7278). As a response Hack included a linguistic tactic often used on women artists, the sexist tradition that refers

to male artists exclusively by their last name, for example Balke, Munch, Sinding or Tidemand.³² While people might refer to female artists by their first and surname, or only on a first name basis, for example, Kitty, Oda, or Betzy.³³ This use of language works against a woman's ownership, professionalism, identity, and recognition. It can be used to rob her of authority. Although we also referred to Akerslout-Berg by her first name, Betzy, we chose to refer to any mentioned male artist or male monument by also using their first names. Moreover, from the crate, NNKM suspended (with fishing line) a two-part sign that covered his last name, such that the text on the monument pedestal became "Han Roald som Betzy," which in informal local parlance means "Roald Like Betzy," using the "Roald" from the original inscription on the pedestal. On the back of the crate, NNKM posted a picture of Akerslout-Berg with her painting box, plus a poster explaining why Roald had become "like Betzy." The basic idea was to put Roald inside the frame of Betzy's reality. As a representative of "men on pedestals," he now had the same conditions women have lived with throughout history; he had to be expressed through Betzy Akerslout-Berg's framing conditions.

Hack on monuments inspired, challenged, and provoked. Let one not forget the positive response in the local media. For example, one response: "Imagine that an art project made the keyboards in this region of the country melt with art criticism from old and young.... What a triumph!"³⁴ Moreover, another stated: "I think it's cool. They [NNKM] do something about the issues, even though it's only a temporary stunt. Thanks!"³⁵ The mayor of Romsa/Tromsø at that time, Kristin Røymo (the Norwegian Labour Party; social democratic), expressed her support of the project in response to the negative critique: "Art must be free, independent and groundbreaking. If it is provocative that is fine too ... There are many men who have been good at raising phallus-like pillars around the world. There are astonishingly few women."³⁶ Røymo's sentiments remind one of the art museum's potential to spur thinking, engagement, and even action.

While some praised Hack on Roald Amundsen in newspaper columns, in editorials, and in the social media, others expressed negative comments:

"Gruesomely ugly!!!" (Bente Arnesen)

“Totally agree, remove the shit ... whoever allowed this should lose their job.”
(Børge Johan Jenssen)

“See that you remove the idiocy of so-called art right away 😞 It is, incidentally, not anywhere near being able to be called art; it is pollution. I am very angry!” (Svein-Ingvar Pedersen)

“Awful and disgusting. Should be removed!!!” (Harriet E L Larssen)

“[...] That director there for the horror is Scottish, after all.³⁷ He hasn't understood where he's landed. Heave them out!” (Dagfinn Holmang)

“Why is all this allowed in Tromsø???? No one dares put a stop to it.... there's an election soon????” (Eva Johnsen)

“Such things cannot continue!!! One cannot let anyone continue in this way!!!!” (Eva Johnsen)³⁸

The commonality of strong emotional responses from people residing in the two respective towns is evidence that Hack rattled preconceptions on art and its purpose. Some individuals thought Hack lacked aesthetic appeal and therefore was not art. Furthermore, although Hack was a temporary intervention, its opponents wanted it gone immediately. Whoever “let” this happen should be held liable. Notably, some criticism was directed toward the NNKM director instead of the art museum itself. Additionally, several critics used Norway's copyright law as an argument against Hack, particularly § 5. The right to be named, and protection against injurious use (ideal rights): “A work must not be distorted/alterd or made accessible to the public in a way or a context that harms the author's or the work's reputation or uniqueness.”³⁹ NNKM's evaluation was that the project was temporary and did not change the work itself, only the context, and that the art museum therefore was on safe legal ground. Other people (outside the museum) contacted Billedkunst opphavsrett i Norge (BONO) [Norwegian Visual Artists Copyright Society] about Hack, but NNKM never received any inquiry from that organization. Our experience was that the use of § 5 mainly represented a juridical strawman intended to work against the project. Others criticized the local government and referenced the upcoming election.

In addition to these remarks, some comments encouraged vandalism (which repeatedly happened). On several occasions, the strings holding up the modified name plates were cut, and on two occasions the name plates were stolen. Accordingly, new ones were ordered and reinstalled.

Immediately after NNKM built the crate around the Carl Gustav Fleischer statue on June 24, 2019, there were strong reactions from politicians and the general public, especially from staff and others affiliated with the Norwegian Military. The reactions to Hack on Roald Amundsen were strong, but they paled in comparison with the response to Hack on Carl Gustav Fleischer. The project was described as vandalism, grave desecration, a humiliation, and ridicule of a war hero. Late in the evening on July 1, 2019, the wooden crate around the statue was destroyed with brutal force by a passing motorist, a white male using a four-way lug wrench. He saluted the statue twice. The event was filmed from a nearby building that also houses the local newspaper's headquarters, and the video was used in a report published by the national newspaper *Verdens Gang* (VG) on July 3, 2019.⁴⁰ Much criticism was voiced in the comment column for VG's report, most of it not very serious, but some contributions had more substance:⁴¹

"It's unbelievable, the things public funding is used for in this country. The millions burn a hole in the pocket when <FAT BUREAUCRATS> and artists want a party."⁴²

"Well done!!! Lots of garbage is erected, presented as art!"⁴³

"So instead of creating sculptures or, in other ways, presenting female artists and talking about their work, time and resources are used to set up a useless wooden crate that actually doesn't convey anything at all, unless you know exactly what the art museum is trying to achieve. Garbage is easy to throw together; try to make something of full value next time. <Art>, sort of."⁴⁴

"Totally pathetic. He was a highly respected General!! This clearly is something you do not believe, you who appropriate him for your own agenda, right or wrong. Disrespectful!"⁴⁵

"If Harstad has so little respect for what General Carl Gustav Fleischer did, then we can move the statue to Narvik, where people got to feel the war on their

bodies much more than you art-interested folks in Harstad did. World War II was never about gender equality, and it never will be. This project is devoid of respect, it's stupid, and far removed from reality.”⁴⁶

People viewed Hack on Carl Gustav Fleischer gravely disrespectful given his status from World War II and assumed that NNKM was ignorant of history. While Hack was vandalized several times in Romsa/Tromsø, in Hárstták/Harstad it was destroyed after eight days. Moreover, there were numerous derogatory remarks about art and art professionals. People regarded Hack as a useless waste of public funding. From the perspective of museum communication, it was challenging to engage with the commentary without ending up in time-consuming and minimally constructive discussions on social media. NNKM's then head of communications, Kjetil Rydland, made an effort in VG's comment column, but sensed that he fell short. NNKM chose to engage with the criticism through the one newspaper article and in other mass media outlets, in addition to a debate organized by the museum. Perhaps this might appear like an elitist way to face criticism, but it seemed like the only way NNKM could respond in practice.

How long are we [in Norway] going to keep portraying the woman as a victim [of patriarchy]?⁴⁷

What did Hack teach us? One outcome is that it raised awareness of the fact that there are no named women statues in our town's public space. Perhaps the answer also lies in the public criticism. Hack triggered a “kill the messenger” reaction, revealing that people and officials in the community did not want a debate on gender inequity. Norway is often perceived as a progressive country regarding gender equality. For instance, according to the 2021 Social Progress Index, Norway ranked first as one of the most equal countries to live in the world.⁴⁸ With equal access to education, health, social services, and the same opportunities in the workforce, women and men in Norway are formally on equal footing. Indeed, this is a great accomplishment. Yet while this is the case, such progress also calls for examination and reflection. With parts of Norwegian society still lacking complete gender equality, formal equity versus real equity remains the principal challenge. Hack showed that the *vox populi*

judged temporary wooden crates on public monuments to be more provocative than a female artist forgotten from Norwegian art history. The public pushback against Hack indicates a continued need for feminism. While Hack is a case study specific to a particular local and national context, it addressed issues on gender equity which are relevant in other geographical contexts.

What are other key takeaways to make this project more comprehensible and useful in your context? While art museums strive to be accessible, inclusive, and open to the public, they are not innately public spaces. Hack engaged a broader audience of individuals who rarely (if ever) visit NNKM in a relevant and necessary debate. Hack demonstrated how the art museum can go beyond its walls to avoid preaching to the choir and engage with the general public, that is, those who do not belong to its core audiences. The art museum can (legally) engage as activist in the public space to incite critical dialogue about relevant issues. Another essential point is that NNKM put itself in a vulnerable position to creatively experiment in the public space. As a result, the art museum had less control over the outcome—a situation NNKM viewed as an asset. Moreover, instead of responding with the removal of Hack, NNKM leaned into public criticism by welcoming dialogue, organized a debate, and published a commentary in the local newspaper.⁴⁹

Conclusion

NNKM wanted to direct critical attention to marginalized stories from and in the North: Who is “like” Betzy Akersloot-Berg today? In this context, we can pose a series of questions to the curatorial and learning-and-engagement strategies that framed LB: How can the art museum do more than add female artists to art history; how can the art museum activate the stories of forgotten people; who writes history and who has the power to make definitions; how did NNKM activate and challenge the public to see Akersloot-Berg’s works in light of our own era’s critical issues; and what role did NNKM play in informing dominant master narratives?

Art museums are sites of contestability in what function and role they play in society. In Norway, art museums tend to adopt conservative approaches residing in the known, accepted, and uncontroversial frameworks. While art museums often

support artists to use the institution as a platform for contemporary issues, they seem rather unwilling to initiate or present these agendas themselves (Gellatly 2016, 12). Hack did precisely this. “More museums should be doing this type of work” commented Robert R. Janes when I spoke about Hack at *Landscapes of Change*, a virtual international convening for museum professionals, organized by the Anchorage Museum in February 2021.⁵⁰ Janes, together with Richard Sandell, co-edited the book on *Museum Activism* (2019). In addition to a values-informed, ethical, institutional position, Janes and Sandell assert that “being open to listening and genuinely working with others lie at the heart of museum activism” (9).

In my analysis of Hack, I observed a pattern of apprehension in Norway towards nontraditional forms of art museum practice. One criticism was that the art museum took on the role of artist. In an article titled “Why is there no Norwegian feminist art history?” art historian Øystein Sjøstad (2021, 120) argued that LB would be remembered for Hack, what he referred to as “rather banal demonstrations.” Furthermore, he claimed that Betzy Akersloot-Berg was used as a straw woman to mimic a feminist commitment; how would this inscribe her in art history? He also pointed out that the project did not produce a catalogue. What is notable is that Sjøstad did not see the exhibition; the sentiments in his article were founded on his observations of the reception and discussion of the project in the media.⁵¹ Still, his remarks offer helpful insight on traditional modes of art historical exhibition and beg the question: who are art museums for and why do they exist?

As demonstrated with Hack, art museums have the potential to be social actors in their communities. Hack offers an example of how the art institution can assume a proactive role and engage in museum activism. While my analysis of Hack does not provide a cookie-cutter recipe for other museum professionals, it offers ideas that are transferrable so that other museum practitioners and museum leaders may learn from it then adjust, extend, and nuance. This article acknowledges that the work must be done in a process that is context- and place-specific. Also as evidenced, when the art museum took an unconventional approach, it evoked discomfort and resistance. Let us not forget that enthusiasm was another response. Indeed, these are all common emotional reactions to change. However, to be relevant and incite progressive change,

art museums may need to get comfortable about making audiences and participants uncomfortable.

Figures

Fig. 1. Betzy Akersloot-Berg: *Fugløy, midnatt* (The Island 'Fugløy' at Midnight). Oil on whale scapula, 65 × 92 cm. Collection of Museum Tromp's Huys. Photo: Kjetil Rydland.

Fig. 2. Betzy Akersloot-Berg: *Kystparti, Lofoten* (Coastal Area, Lofoten), 1883. Oil on canvas, 52 × 76 cm. Collection of Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum. Photo: Kim G. Skytte.

Fig. 3. Betzy Akersloot-Berg at work in the open air. Photograph. Collection of Museum Tromp's Huys.

Fig. 4. Betzy Akersloot-Berg: *Zeppelinere over Vlieland* (Zeppelins over Vlieland), 1916. Oil on canvas, 70 × 100 cm. Collection of Museum Tromp's Huys.

Fig. 5. Betzy Akersloot-Berg: *Drenkeling op het strand* (Drowned), 1897. Oil on canvas, 42 × 57 cm. Collection of Museum Tromp's Huys.

Fig. 6. Museum Hack on *Like Betzy* exhibition. Photo: Kjetil Rydland.

Fig. 7. Museum Hack on Roald Amundsen monument outside NNKM in Romsa, 2019. Photo: Ingrid Skovgaard.

Fig. 8. Museum Hack on Carl Gustav Fleischer monument in Hárstták, 2019. Photo: Ingrid Skovgaard.

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¹ For more on collection strategies at art museums in Norway, see Jorunn Veiteberg's *Å samla kunst: Samlingsutvikling ved norske kunstmuseum på 2000-talet*, Norsk kulturråd, 2019.

² A learning-and-engagement program comprised of two apps and a project involving AR-technology.

³ "Museum Hack" is an American based tour group company that offers "renegade tours of the world's best museums." Accessed December 7, 2021. <https://museumhack.com/>.

⁴ Ingrid Skovgaard, then head of learning and engagement, saw an opportunity to point both to an imbalance in the public space and to draw attention to LB.

⁵ Sápmi is the Sámi name for the borderless region that its Indigenous people inhabit in four nations, stretching across large parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. The Norwegian placename Tromsø is Romsa in North Sámi. Throughout this article I write place names in North Sámi and Norwegian.

⁶ The capital was in 1624 re-named Christiania, from 1877 spelled *Kristiania*. The name changed back to the medieval name Oslo in 1924, officially from January 1, 1925.

⁷ From ca. 1870 to 1875. Akersloot-Berg was confirmed in the Church of Norway in 1865; she practiced a personal creed but did not attend any denominations (Scherjon 2010, 59).

⁸ Before 1880 she studied several semesters at Den Kongelige Tegneskolen, took drawing lessons from Norwegian architect Andreas Friedrich Wilhelm von Hanno and copied works by Norwegian landscape painter Peder Cappelen Thurmman under his guidance.

⁹ Although it took a considerably long time for female artists to be taken seriously as Academicians, women have been instrumental in the development of the Academy across the centuries. Here are two examples, one from the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Accessed May 16, 2022.

<https://artuk.org/discover/stories/a-brief-history-of-women-at-the-royal-academy>; and the other from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. <https://kunstakademiet.dk/en/schools-visual-arts/history-schools-visual-arts/teaching-women-1870s-1920s>, accessed May 16, 2022.

¹⁰ Letter from Betzy Akersloot-Berg to C.W. Schnitler, 16 March 1907. Museum Tromp's Huys Collection. Unless mentioned otherwise, translations from the Norwegian to English are my own.

¹¹ Letter from Betzy Akersloot-Berg to C.W. Schnitler, 16 March 1907. From private collection, Belle-Île, France.

¹² They did not have children.

¹³ Akersloot was a widower (from 1891) and hotel owner. He inherited the Hotel Rauch at Scheveningen from his deceased wife. Hendrik Willem Mesdag rented a studio at the hotel (Bell 1997, 53).

¹⁴ Her brother-in-law was a minister in Láhpi/Loppa from 1883–88 (Scherjon 2010, 59).

¹⁵ Letter from Betzy Akersloot-Berg to Mr. C.W. Schnitler, 16 March 1907. Museum Tromp's Huys Collection.

¹⁶ Telegram from the newspaper's special correspondent, "Keiser Wilhelms Rein og hvalfangst," *Aftenposten*, July 19, 1892.

¹⁷ "Keiser Wilhelms hvalfangst i sommer," *Aftenposten*, November 8, 1892.

¹⁸ Akersloot-Berg's work is represented in several public art collections in Norway: Nasjonalmuseet (The National Museum) in Oslo (two paintings), Stavanger Kunstmuseum (Stavanger Art Museum; one painting) and Perspektivet Museum in Romsa/Tromsø (four paintings).¹⁸ Outside of Norway her work is included in collections at Nationalmuseum Stockholm (two paintings), Frans Hals Museum in Haarlem (1) and Museum Tromp's Huys. In 1960 her home "Tromp's Huys" on the island Vlieland was converted into a museum and today holds the largest collection of her works, 195 paintings and

148 works on paper (drawings and prints).¹⁸ Organized in collaboration with Museum Tromp's Huys, most of the works featured in LB were borrowed from their collections.

¹⁹ Also, an exhibition at Aur Prestegård in 1996 was the first to feature her work (in Norway) in nearly one hundred years. Secondary literature on the artist includes art historian Brit Bell's master's thesis (1997; published in 2000); exhibition catalogs from Aur Prestegård (1996), Haugar Vestfold Kunstmuseum (2002), Nordkappmuseet (2003) and Museum Tromp's Huys (2010). Additionally, Akersloot-Berg is included in Paul Grøtvedt's (1999, 78–82) *For fulle seil* on Norwegian maritime painting and mentioned in Norsk Kunstnerleksikon (the Norwegian Artist Encyclopedia; vol. 1 A–G, 1982–86). In the Netherlands, academic literature includes Cora Hollema's (1979) doctorate in sociology, titled *De Noors-Nederlandse zeeschilderes Betzy Akersloot-Berg*, in addition to an article by Hollema from 1982. Further, her work was included in a large group exhibition on women artists in Belgium and the Netherlands from 1500–1950, *Elck zijn wærom*, in 1999 at Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Antwerp and in 2000 at Moderne Kunst Arnhem. The exhibition featured a 500-year span of female artists from Belgium and the Netherlands.

²⁰ Wichstrøm served as curator at Oslo City Museum from 1982 to 1992 and in 1995 became professor of art history at the University of Oslo.

²¹ With her feminist approach, Wichstrøm's scholarship is still regarded as central and groundbreaking in Norwegian art history (Sjåstad 2020, 114).

²² Marie Tannæs was another woman artist represented in the exhibition. S. S, "Fra kunststillingen," *Aftenposten*, October 31, 1885.

²³ For example see Øysten Sjåstad's (2014) study on *tache* (blot, dot, patch, stain; plural *taches*) in nineteenth century painting.

²⁴ Wall labels in each thematic room included an introductory trilingual text in Norwegian, North Sámi and English, in addition to individual labels that provided a short text about each artwork.

²⁵ A type of sailing vessel with three or more masts.

²⁶ Accessed March 25, 2022. <https://forskning.no/kunst-kjonn-og-samfunn-kunst-og-litteratur/menn-tjener-mer-enn-kvinner-pa-kunsten-sin/1240504>.

²⁷ Both quotes from the public debate.

²⁸ For more on the background on the monument and the commission see Olsen and Spring 2020.

²⁹ Carl Gustav Fleischer was the highest-ranking Norwegian officer for the Norwegian forces at Narvik in 1940, thus responsible for Germany's first defeat during World War II. Later, he was the senior Norwegian general in London, but was, according to some sources, humiliated and in actual fact demoted when he was sent to the USA as a military attaché. He committed suicide in December 1942. For many in Norway's armed forces, he is an important officer and war hero.

³⁰ As part of the festival program, FINN invited NNKM to perform *Hack*. Accessed May 16, 2022. <https://festspillnn.no/nb/program/2019/han-carl-som-betzy>.

³¹ Located on one side of the crate were photos of Betzy Akersloot-Berg with her painter's crate and information about the project.

³² Peder Balke, Edvard Munch, Adolf Tidemand.

³³ Harriet Backer, Kitty Lange Kielland, Oda Krohg.

³⁴ Maja Sojtaric, *Nordlys*, December 19, 2019.

³⁵ Åsne Ø. Høgetveit, *iTromsø*, July 2, 2019.

³⁶ *Nordlys*, June 19, 2019.

³⁷ Jérémie McGowan is an American expatriate who grew up in North Carolina. His father is Irish and his mother is French.

³⁸ Comments from the Facebook Groups "Nye & Gamle Tromsø" (New & Old Tromsø) and "Gamle Tromsø" (Old Tromsø). Translated from the Norwegian into English by Arlyne Moi.

³⁹ The Norwegian Copyright Act, 2018. Accessed 27 March 2022. https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2018-06-15-40/#KAPITTEL_1.

⁴⁰ Accessed March 27, 2022. <https://www.vg.no/rampelys/i/opVGkm/her-knuser-han-kunstprosjektet>,

⁴¹ *VG.no*, July 3, 2019 <https://www.vg.no/rampelys/i/opVGkm/her-knuser-han-kunstprosjektet>.

Translated from the Norwegian into English by Arlyne Moi.

⁴² Geir R. Bjørnsen, July 3, 2019. Accessed May 2, 2022.

<https://www.vg.no/rampelys/i/opVGkm/her-knuser-han-kunstprosjektet>.

⁴³ Leif Vidar Gullstad, July 3, 2019, *ibid*.

⁴⁴ Janna Åmodt, July 3, 2019, *ibid*.

⁴⁵ Ørjan H. Hansen, July 3, 2019, *ibid*.

⁴⁶ Ronny Simonsen, July 3, 2019, *ibid*.

⁴⁷ Quote by critic Anki Gerhardsen in her review of LB in the newspaper *Nordlys*, August 26, 2019.

⁴⁸ Accessed May 18, 2022.

https://www.socialprogress.org/static/9e62d6c031f30344f34683259839760d/2021%20Social%20Progress%20Index%20Executive%20Summary-compressed_0.pdf.

⁴⁹ The project group also wrote a newspaper article, signed “Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, with Jérémie McGowan, director, Ingrid Skovgaard, head of learning and engagement, and the rest of the staff.” It was published in the local paper *iTromsø*, June 21, 2019. Accessed May 19, 2022.

<https://www.itromso.no/meninger/2019/06/21/Har-vi-plass-til-Betzy-19323337.ece>.

⁵⁰ Robert R. Janes, email correspondence with the author, May 18, 2022. For more on *Landscapes of Change*, <https://www.anchoragemuseum.org/major-projects/projects/landscapes-of-change-conference-2021/>. Accessed May 19, 2022.

⁵¹ Øystein Sjøstad, email correspondence with the author, October 5, 2021. Sjøstad did not specify this piece of information in his article.

Hacking from the Inside: The Art Museum as Activist

Figures:



Fig. 1. Betzy Akersloot-Berg, *Fugløy, midnatt* (The Island 'Fugløy' at Midnight). Oil on whale scapula, 65 × 92 cm. Collection of Museum Tromp's Huys. Photo: Kjetil Rydland.



Fig. 2. Betzy Akersloot-Berg: *Kystparti, Lofoten* (Coastal Area, Lofoten), 1883. Oil on canvas, 52 × 76 cm. Collection of Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum. Photo: Kim G. Skytte.



Fig. 3. Betzy Akersloot-Berg at work in the open air. Photograph. Collection of Museum Tromp's Huys.



Fig. 4. Betzy Akersloot-Berg: *Zeppelinere over Vlieland* (Zeppelins over Vlieland), 1916. Oil on canvas, 70 × 100 cm. Collection of Museum Tromp's Huys.



Fig. 5. Betzy Akersloot-Berg: *Drenkeling op het strand* (Drowned), 1897. Oil on canvas, 42 × 57 cm. Collection of Museum Tromp's Huys. Photo: Kjetil Rydland.

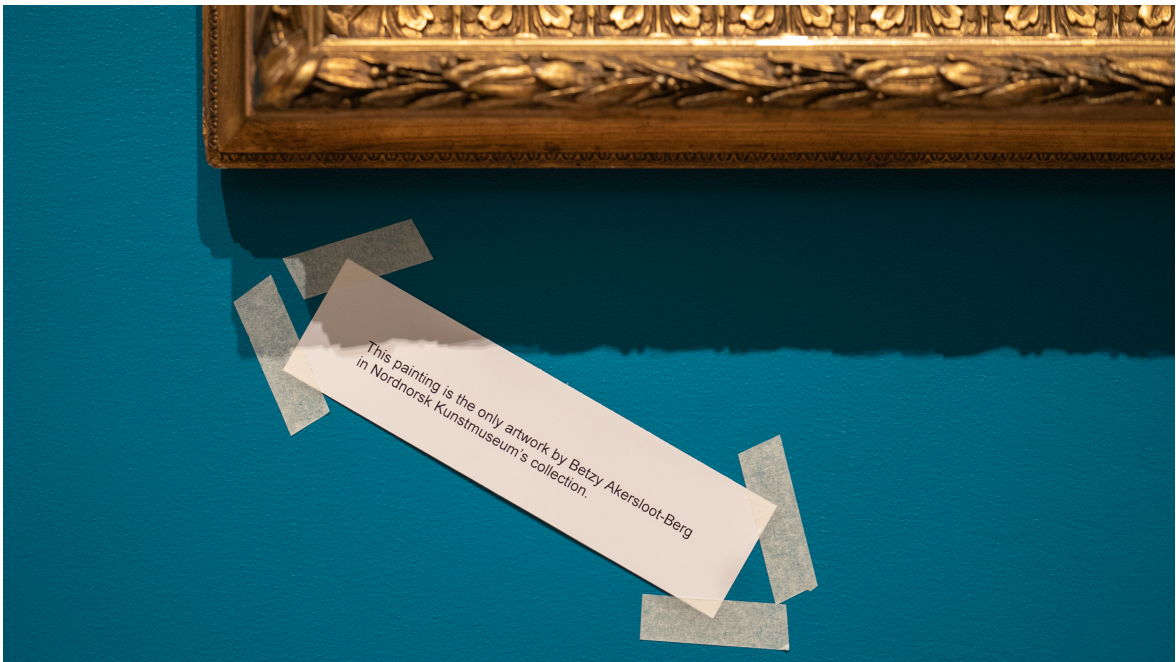


Fig. 6. Museum Hack on *Like Betzy* exhibition. Photo: Kjetil Rydland.



Fig. 7. Museum Hack on Roald Amundsen monument outside NNKM in Romsa, 2019. Photo: Ingrid Skovgaard.



Fig. 8. Museum Hack on Carl Gustav Fleischer monument in Hárstták, 2019. Photo: Ingrid Skovgaard.

