

Ingrid Fischer Jonge
Brandts Museet for Fotokunst
Odense

I am very pleased to tell you about Museet for Fotokunst – The Museum of Photographic Art – in Denmark, where I have been director for a little more than a year now. Museet for Fotokunst has existed for about 25 years and is thus one of the younger “vintages” in the world of photo museums. Museet for Fotokunst was established because there was an awareness in Denmark that a special museum for photography was needed.

There already existed a small private collection of historical photo equipment, which was exhibited in the small town of Herning in the North of Jutland. Furthermore, there were the historical collections of photography at The Library at The Academy of Fine Art in Copenhagen and at The Royal Library. But a specific museum whose main purpose was to promote photographic art did not exist. In the late seventies, there was a large empty textile mill in the centre of Odense. A local architect, Kristian Isager, saw the possibilities in the old industrial building with its many big solid rooms. He worked out a project transforming the mill into a house of exhibitions. Other local forces pitched in and the local politicians were persuaded to buy the mill and transform it into a cultural centre. As a result, the old mill now contains an art centre, a photo museum and a media museum plus an academy of fine arts. The whole complex was named after its previous owner and became Brandts Klædefabrik – Brandts Textile Mill.

In 1987 the doors opened to the new Museum for Photographic Art, a year later the three institutions in the cultural centre were awarded the *European Museum of the Year Award* and 18 years later, in 2006, the museum alone was named *Danish Museum of the Year* which - besides the glory - meant a prize of € 66.000. In the beginning of the new millennium, the textile mill was expanded with a wing for the administration and the former office space in the old building was divided between the three institutions. The exhibition spaces of the photo museum are on two floors. On the second floor is the exhibition space of The Permanent Collection, which is currently being renovated and brought up to date. The 132 m² were the only exhibition space of the original museum. Today the museum has a total of 520 m² of exhibition space and we have an average of five to six exhibitions a year, mostly divided into four bigger and two smaller exhibitions.

Apart from this, we share a library space with Kunsthallen, we have a common lunch room, a small meeting room, and an apartment available for visiting photographers who come here to put up exhibitions, give lectures etc. We also share staff with both Kunsthallen and the media museum. Our press liaison is working for all of us as well as our head of administration, IT-responsible, HR and accounting. This staff community enables us to offer attractive full time positions, which in return secures a professional administrative service. The community also means that at any given moment we are surrounded by and can consult knowledgeable colleagues. This way, we all benefit from each other's experience, both professionally and administratively, concerning both big and small issues.

The museum is a self-governing institution and has a board of directors with 16 members, where among others the municipality of Odense is represented together with The Society for Danish Photography, The Danish National Gallery, The Press Photographer's Association, and so on. Thus, it is a representative board and therefore not a board with neither the qualifications nor the network for raising a lot of money for a renovation or an expansion or just knowledge of how to run a business. I am sure this will pose some challenges in the future, because in Denmark we have to run museums as a business. The board contracts the director and so far there have only been two, Finn Thrane, with a master's degree in literature and film science and, from August last year, yours truly with a master's degree in Art History. Our budget is € 1 million. 15,5% of our finances comes from the state, 77,5% from the municipality of Odense and 7% we obtain from founda-

tions and overhead from projects we are involved in. The last part we have to increase because it is here we get the financing for all "the fun"... The contribution of 15,5% of our budget from the state was an extension to the state approval and this means that we are a part of the Danish community of museums but also that we are obliged by the existing Museum Act.

According to the Danish museum legislation it is our duty to collect, register, conserve, research and disseminate within the area of responsibility each museum is attributed with through the state approval. Where my museum is concerned, the area of responsibility is Danish and international photographic art from 1945 until today. This area of responsibility was originally formulated by the board and here the other two collections already existing in Denmark were considered, namely The Library at The Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and The Royal Library. At the same time, it was a realistic move because as opposed to the origin of many other museums, Museet for Fotokunst began its museum career with empty shelves in the storage room. The former director Finn Thrane has worked hard on this and he alone can be credited for the fact that the museums collection today holds 9.000 pictures. He has constituted a collection that focuses on photography from Scandinavia and Northern Europe, especially the Baltic Countries. He was also very fond of photography from South and Central America.

As the new director, I have to know the collection better than I do now in order to decide how the acquisition policy shall be in the future. But I will definitely focus much more on new photography than it has been done before, both from Denmark and internationally.

Another field we naturally have to nurture is the preservation of the existing collection. Our storage facilities are okay but way too small. We are working on getting a storage room in cooperation with a string of museums in our area, placed at a central location for all of us. This means a remote storage room which will enable us to store big formats. However, the financing for this is nowhere near in place. Right now, the ball is in the court of the municipality and they are not too fond of expenses resulting in bricks on a field. And when we talk about conservation this also includes the condition of the work acquired. If you buy a photograph already in bad shape in terms of preservation, you are asking for trouble. But the collection in Odense is in good condition.

In the happy youth of computer science more or less all museums developed their own electronic registration systems and so did Museet for Fotokunst. All in all, this database is okay, but it is local and can not be accessed via the internet. The government wants the Danish cultural heritage to be available on the internet for all Danish citizens. This task was given to the Heritage Agency of Denmark, which is an agency under the Danish Ministry of Culture. They have established a digital system for registration for the art museums. This new digital database was named Regin Kunst, some of the data is public and the rest is only accessible to the individual museum. All information about prices, insurance value, and condition report is for instance only accessible to the individual museum. The database also contains digital images of all the works and all this information is available on the internet either through the homepage of the Heritage Agency of Denmark or through the homepage of the individual museum. Because we are included in the Danish Museum Act, our collection also has to be made available by Regin Kunst, and currently we have two employees working daily on registrations and one IT-expert working on exporting what is possible from the old database into the new digital system. This is a time consuming process, but by New Year we should be up to date with a complete digital registration. The Heritage Agency of Denmark pays all copyright expenses for displaying the works on the internet.

The fourth of our obligations according to the Museum Act is presentation. We have an Educational Service in charge of promoting knowledge to children and young people. They are experimenting with the form and have different types of programmes including

outreach initiatives, special education in photography for children, and for the moment a collaboration with *Victorian and Albert Museum* in London with the project named *Inspired By*. And there are guided tours of the exhibitions for grown-ups, Artist Talks, dialogues, seminars, lectures, and so on. These activities are all very popular.

The former director Finn Thrane had a soft spot for narrative photography and this has been reflected in his exhibitions. Theme exhibitions and solo exhibitions were often on the programme, not so often retrospective nor Danish photography. In the future, Museet for Fotokunst will show a lot more Danish photography and not least contemporary Danish photography. Right now we have a generation of young, talented photographers. Therefore, we have started a string of exhibitions called *THIS WAY*. Here we will focus on what is happening right now in Danish contemporary photography, and it is our aim to pick up this subject every second or third year. But of course we will not forget the international photo scene and we have a good cooperation with the Hasselblad Centre in Gothenburg in Sweden. The yearly Hasselblad exhibition often comes to Odense. Thus we have the Mexican photographer Graciela Iturbide scheduled for next year.

We have just finished the schedule for the programme of 2009 and besides Graciela Iturbide, we will show a retrospective exhibition by the Danish landscape photographer Kirsten Klein which will be the prelude to our photo festival next year – more about that later. We will show the Annual Press Photo Exhibition and furthermore we have planned a show with photographers from the Middle East and a small exhibition of video projections by the young Danish artist Nanna Debois Buhl. And we will re-open The Permanent Collection after the renovation. In order to activate the permanent collection we will let people outside the museum create small shows with works from the collection. It could be artists from different fields or well known intellectuals. We will get a new look upon the collection. We are also planning the programme for 2010 with exhibitions by Duane Michals among others.

In 2007 we had 38.000 visitors which places the museum in the group of the larger museums in Denmark. From audience surveys we know that 50% of our visitors are local, 25% come from the area around Copenhagen and the last 25% are a mix of other areas in the country and tourists from abroad. In 2007, Denmark suffered a decrease in tourism of 16%. This is quite serious and of course we feel it as well. We fear that this is a tendency that will continue especially now with the global financial crisis. Therefore we must seek new pastures and find ways to make new audiences interested – and this is one of the big challenges of the coming years.



Rigmor Mydtskov. Susanne Brøgger, 1985 @ Rigmor Mydtskov



Lewis Koch. Mailbox and Tree. 1986 @ Lewis Koch



Christer Strömholm: The Pale Lady
in Barcelona. 1959
@ Nachlass Christer Strömholm



Antanas Sutkus: Blind Pioneer, 1962.
@ Antanas Sutkus

Museet for Fotokunst supports the publication of the magazine *KATALOG – Journal of photography & video*, now in its 20th year of publication. The magazine addresses an international audience and often opens with an article on a current show at the museum. Thus it also suits a purpose as an exhibition catalogue. Yearly, there are three issues in a run of 1.000 copies.



Pia Arke: Perlustration. IV, 1996
@ Nachlass Pia Arke



Gregers Nielsen: Aunt Henriette's Birthday.
Farstrup, Funen, 1967 @ Nachlass Gregers
Nielsen

The museum is also responsible for a Photo Triennial. Next year it will open on the 1st of October and the theme is landscape. We have a lot of local collaborators and this means that we will have, all in all, 25 exhibitions in Odense and all the major coastal towns in Funen. In connection to the festival we also host a three day portfolio review where photographers get the opportunity to show their photographs to a group of international curators. This is very popular and gives everybody involved important contacts.

The fifth obligation we have according to the Museum Act is research and that needs to be strengthened in the museum. We need to work out a research strategy with a primary point of departure in our collection but also dealing with issues that might result in exhibitions. And we need to qualify the staff so that we can have a Ph.D. candidate at the museum. And this leads to another subject: The future for a photo museum. These

years, the Danish museum world is undergoing a major change and many small museums have merged into bigger units. Especially the cultural history museums are experiencing this, but other constellations are appearing as well, for instance in the South of Jutland where Museum Sønderjylland have art historical museums forming a new big institution with cultural historical museums. They become a sort of administration museum, and the amount of smaller museums like for instance Museet for Fotokunst will be seriously reduced. At the same time it becomes clear that more and more art museums have adopted photography and not only exhibit photography but also acquire photographs for their collections. In order to survive as an independent institution under these new terms, we have to be top tuned specialists in photography.

At all times and whatever we do, we must never lose sight of the fact that we have to be regarded as the specialists in photography. We must show that our institution is necessary and establish ourselves as the first and main special museum for photography in the country.

Afterword:

A year after the symposium was held in Berlin, many new activities have been developed at the museum. The triennial has got a new name – *Fototriennale.dk*, we now have a research policy, an acquisition policy and we are hosting a huge project called *Denmark in Transformation*, where 14 photographers are photographing different parts of the Danish landscape.

Diskussion

Frage:

You were talking about the visitors. I think you said 15% locals, 20% from Copenhagen, and the rest from the rest of the world. Yesterday we heard from C/O Berlin that they try to attract a larger public, through activities for kids and workshops. Are you also trying to get young kids interested?

Ingrid Fischer Jonge:

We do have a small education department in charge of school programmes etc. In that respect we try to grow new visitors for the museum. In addition, we have a university nearby and we are developing a program for its students. We are aware of the challenge to increase the visitor numbers. People from Jutland hardly visit us. So here we have something to do, too. Should anybody ask how many staff members we are: about ten people.