

Sverige, Norrland



Jean Almqvist

Skolungdemens riksmästerskap i skytte fortsatte på lördagen på Stora Skuggan med omkring 500 deltagare från hela Sverige. Den spännande mästerskapsavtlingen vanns för fjärde gången i rad av Sten Nerstrem från Beskowska skolan — en enastående prestation, som blir svår att göra om eller överträffa.

So. Dgbl. Sept. 1935.

Archive sheet made of newspaper clippings, by Otilia Adelborg, 1935. Archived in a box labeled Sweden's Landscape, Trees and Boats.

## The Collector

By Sara Rossling, 2018

In one of Otilia Adelborg's self made archive boxes, labeled *Sweden's Landscape, Trees and Boats*, there is a newspaper clipping from a youth's national championship in shooting. The black and white photograph shows a young man in profile, half kneeling with one leg stretched out supporting his arm holding the rifle he is aiming with. Adelborg has separated image and caption from each other and re-arranged them into a new composition. The pieces are carefully mounted and glued on a stiff brown carton paper sheet with the same dimensions as the box. Adelborg's new composition makes the two clippings' shared origin less obvious. The cut out picture becomes elevated and evoke connotations beyond the context of the newspaper. The sheet is classified "Sweden, Norrland" with pencil and dated "Sv. Dagbl. Sept. 1935", about half a year before she passed away. Every detail in her montage is carried out in a meticulous way which makes me think of a professional archivist who preserves documents.

The box contains about thirty archival sheets with different montages made from various clippings referring to places around Sweden and to phenomena that fascinated the artist, illustrator and author Otilia Adelborg. Windmills, large oak trees, images of sublime nature, ships and portraits of Sápmi people. There is also a picture of the peculiar building Wiks castle in Uppland. Originally a medieval defense castle, renovated in the French style of the 15th century and again in the 1850s in the shift between neoclassicism and empire style.

In total there are about twenty archive boxes fabricated by Adelborg. They were mostly made during the period she spent living in Gagnef, between 1903-1936. Today the boxes are kept in the archive of the Otilia Adelborg Museum in Gagnef where also many of Adelborg's private belongings can be found. Therefore, the boxes' status is somehow hard to define, but they very much speak the professional language of museology. They contain assembled compositions of images labeled and organised into various topics and categories such as folklife culture, history, prehistory, different countries, exotic places, art, architecture, churches and sacred objects, textiles and lace. The clippings stem mostly from newspapers and magazines that Adelborg purchased. She also saved acquired postcards from her journeys and other image material. Adelborg was a collector of many things, primarily lace and cultural artefacts but also various magazines. Many of them are stored together with the boxes.

It is quite a comprehensive collection of journals for a person with limited resources who lived in Gagnef in the early 19th century. Adelborg subscribed to both Swedish and international magazines such as *Fataburen*, *Lantbrukstidskrift för Dalarna* (Agricultural Journal for Dalarna), *Tidskrift för hembygdsvård* (Journal about preservation of local history and architecture), *Nordisk Tidskrift* (Nordic Journal), *Hemslöjden* (The Handicraft), *Nordiska museets minnesblad* (The Nordic Museum memorial publication) and British periodical journals such as *The Studio* and *The Artist*. Additional to that she bought single copies of publications in German and French, exhibition catalogues, church related booklets and other visual material such as product images from Näfteqvarns styckebruk. A foundry from the

15th century in Södermanland County which at the time manufactured gardening and interior products that could be found in many Swedish homes.

Why did Ottilia Adelborg collect all these images? And where did she learn how to archive professionally? One trace leads to her good friend Hans Hildebrand who was the Swedish National Heritage Council (Riksantikvarie) between 1884-1903. Hildebrand was also the chairman of The Fredrika Bremer Association where her sister Gertrud Adelborg, an important figure in the women's movement, was the Principal for twenty three years. Thus there were several connection points and shared interests between the two. They socialised in Stockholm where the sisters were amidst a cultural circle of upper class and highly educated people in the late 19th century.

The family moved from Karlskrona in 1866 to live with relatives in Uppsala. This was due to the lack of money when the father Bror Jacob Adelborg, a naval officer who suddenly died soon after being appointed as a commander. Bror Jacob Adelborg was also a skilled illustrator, foremost known for drawings and paintings he made during a notorious expedition to Latin America in 1840. The ship never reached its destination and faced several bad incidents during the journey. The father was situated among a succession of military officers who at the same time were active as artists. Today, both Otilia's father and grandfather are represented at The Maritime Museum and The National Museum in Stockholm.

Anne Marie Rådström, journalist and theater director who researched Ottilia Adelborg life story based on her diaries and letters, points out that despite the lack of money, the sisters managed to find support to complete advanced education and got themselves professional careers. Ottilia studied in Stockholm, first at the Technical School between 1876-78 and later at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts between 1878-1884. The eldest sister, Maria Adelborg, became a textile artist and leading designer for the Association of Friends of Textile Art. Ottilia Adelborg traveled abroad several times between 1886-1898, with support from prize money from Gertrud Adelborg's Idun award and capital donated by wealthy relatives. She foremost went to central Europe like France, Holland and England. A handful of times she visited the South Kensington Museum in London. She kept writing her diary through the various journeys; making notes to herself, collecting impressions and experiences from different parts of the world, just like her father.

The diary was probably a good way for Adelborg to organise her numerous ideas, as she writes about herself as a rather careless person. Perhaps, collecting and organising images was also a way for her to structure her mind. Philosopher and culture critic Walter Benjamin, contemporary with Adelborg, wrote in his never finished *The Arcades Project* about the city life in Paris in the 17th century, describing collecting as "...a form of practical memory..." and that "of all the profane manifestations of "nearness" it is the most binding." Perhaps images of windmills with their symbolic references to holism, spiritual transformation and religion, reminded Adelborg about her faith and her guiding principles.

There is one archive box labeled *Unsorted* which is interesting in comparison to the other ones. In the context of organisation I imagine this box as a metaphor for an unstructured mind. The box is filled with all kinds of clippings and images from different fields which yet haven't been transformed by Adelborg's structuring formula.

Barbro Klein, ethnologist and folklorist, has written about the cultural debate amongst upper class and cultural workers in the late 19th century in Sweden, which the Adelborg sisters took part in. A protagonist at the time was the influential philologist and folklore researcher Artur Hazelius. He founded the Nordic Museum in Stockholm in 1873 and the neighbouring open-air museum Skansen in 1891. Institutions exhibiting typical life in Sweden from different time periods and regions. At the end of the century it was rather common amongst Swedish museum creators to collaborate with social, economic, and aesthetic reformers. At the same time many artists, like Adelborg, Carl and Karin Larsson, Emma and Anders Zorn moved to Dalarna, inspired by national romantic ideas depicting the region as the core of Swedish culture. However, the ideas of the influential Arts and Crafts movement can sometimes be difficult to distinguish from the general national romantic features such as rustic materials, craftsmanship and authenticity. According to Klein there was also a need amongst these people in rescuing the old extinct culture; museums, artists, ethnologists, the homecraft movement, and the local history movement together "...laid the foundation for a heritage canon of folk objects with a recognizably "Swedish" flavour." Adelborg's extensive preservation work with creating the Memory house in Gagnef in 1909 place itself amongst those ideas. This early open-air museum was founded together with Clara Wahlström, Anna and Lotten Falk; old rural cabins on a hill exhibiting traditional clothing and a plethora of historical cultural objects from the peasant culture.

Truly, the currents of the time and her broad social network must have influenced her cross disciplinary way of working; documenting old culture, working socially and politically with strengthening women's situation as well contributing to a new field of children's literature. Museum builders, cultural workers, scholars, protagonists from the women's movement and artist friends like Ellen Jolin, Hilma af Klint and Hildegard Thorell, to name but a few, were people she had an ongoing exchange with. During the years, Adelborg developed an enthusiasm for craft, education and children's situation. Her engagement took the form of collective activities, social and feministic deeds and writings yielding both children's books and novels. Her fascination for culture in a broad sense reached beyond the nation border, which her archive boxes indicate. The box *Exotic* contains images of Chinese art, mosques, Indian folk traditions and Haile Selassie which also tells something about her interest in spirituality, religion, mysticism and distant places. The boxes named after countries highlights assorted characteristics that Adelborg associated with these countries, attributes she visualised in her compositions. Not so much in her selection of images, but rather in her writings and in a few newspaper captions in the boxes, one can discern the prevailing nationalism and race-biological ideas circulating at the time.

In relation to Adelborg, it is probably more appropriate to reflect upon an exoticisation or a romanticisation of people and places, which some of her fields of interests can be associated with. At the same time Adelborg always paid her models, she treated them with dignity and is acknowledged by others to have given their portraits inner depth.

However, systems of classification could have their backsides and they need to be scrutinized, particularly if the intention is to preserve and publicly represent a specific image of the world where no other stories are being told. For example, this view could be applied to

archives which The Oxford English Dictionary defines as collections of historical documents or records providing information about a place, institution, or a group of people. It is a place where historical documents or records are kept. If we compare Ottilia Adelborg's Minnesstugan (Memory house) with her archive boxes, to me Minnesstugan, in a more direct way, produces information about a specific place and group of people.

Perhaps my observation is due to the deeply rooted connection between museums and a systematic gathering of artefacts. Although not all museums have physical, tangible collections today, some online museums rely on digital collections for instance. A museum collection is often the foundation to the museum and can thus be understood to represent the institution's identity. The collection also defines what type of museum it is by its classificatory terms such as "natural history", "history" or "contemporary art" etc. Hence, Ottilia Adelborg's collection, the boxes, can be viewed from the perspective of a museum creator. If we use that idea- what type of museum would then the boxes represent?

Although, the collecting, the work of categorising and the preservation act are all present in Minnesstugan and in the boxes, the latter ones are somewhat different and rather connected to a personal logic than to a canon of folk objects that Klein refers to. In what other way can particular buildings, oak trees and ships make sense together in an archive box? Except for the visual expression and the symbolic meaning which can be associated with boats, they might as well be emotional references related to her father. Through her diary we know she felt strongly for him; the two were also interlinked through the artistry they shared. In her home in Gagnef, in a door mirror in the house, she had carved out and painted a characteristic ship from Karlskrona (Blekingeskuta). Below she wrote: "The ninth of May in 1908 the boat reached its port". This specific date most likely refers to the day when the sisters moved into their own newly built house in Gagnef. It was an important and exciting family moment which Ottilia Adelborg might have associated with her father coming home from his sailing trips. The images of oak trees seem to have been collected due to their spiritual, magical and religious connotations; she was faithful to the church throughout her entire life.

Against the background of these ideas I would like to argue that the archival boxes were not aimed to be museum objects, or to become official documents. In his *Arcade Projects*, Benjamin asks himself rhetorically, - What is this "completeness"? and answers: "It is a grand attempt to overcome the wholly irrational character of the object's mere presence at hand through its integration into a new, [...] system: the collection." He continues: "...for the true collector, every single thing in this system becomes an encyclopedia of all knowledge [...] . It is the deepest enchantment of the collector to enclose the particular item within a magic circle, where, as a last shudder runs through it [...], it turns to stone."

Let it be that the boxes together carry an encyclopedic ambition due to their references to various countries and categories. Nevertheless, I see little intention in the collected material to constitute a completeness or an objective and representable "whole" of the world. Instead I see an unfinished work based on collecting images and references in relation to subjective values. The way the paper clippings are arranged and mounted points to an artistic sensibility, as well as to a satisfaction in spending time working with this material. Therefore,

I would rather approach the boxes as some kind of a personal reference archive, or an artist's library with inspiration material. I find something interesting occurring in the encounter between the systematic and professional method of archiving, the very personal selection and treatment of images which could only be created by Otilia Adelborg; an artist who investigated different methods and blended visual aesthetic qualities with personal references and current issues.

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