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There She Goes Again: A Project on Gender Representation in Norwegian Museums' Collections and Exhibition Practices

by Mona Holm and Thea Aarbakke



REISEN

I 1814 begynte reisen mot allmenn stemmerett i Norge. Før det hadde ingen hatt stemmerett her i landet. Valg fantes ikke.

Reisen gikk langsomt. Befolkningen i Norge vokste raskt. Mange ble gårdarbeidere eller fabrikkarbeidere. De eiendomsløse ble flere. Andelen av nordmenn med stemmerett sank utover 1800-tallet.

NYE STEMME

Først i 1864 ble stemmeretten utvidet. Du trengte ikke lenger eiendom, men måtte ha en viss inntekt. Mange arbeidere i byene fikk nå rett til å stemme. På landsbygda fikk den utvidede stemmeretten like å si. Mange arbeidere i byene fikk nå rett til å stemme. På landsbygda fikk den utvidede stemmeretten like å si. Mange arbeidere i byene fikk nå rett til å stemme. På landsbygda fikk den utvidede stemmeretten like å si.

FOR FOLK FLEST

Kvinnene begynte også å stille for stemmeretten sin på slutten av 1800-tallet. De hadde lenge vært aktive i foreningslivet og i samfunnsdebatten. I 1907 fikk kvinner som var gift med rike menn, stemmerett ved stortingsvalg. Først i 1913 ble det allmenn stemmerett for kvinner, på lik linje med menn. Men fortsatt hadde stemmerett sammenheng med hvor mye du eide. De aller fattigste hadde ikke rett til å stemme.

Først i 1919 ble det virkelig stemmerett for folk flest. Nå fikk alle norske statsborgere over 25 år delta ved stortingsvalg. Det hadde tatt over hundre år fra de første mennene fikk stemmerett i 1814, til allmenn stemmerett var innført i Norge. Nå fikk demokratiet vind i seilene!

UNGT DEMOKRATI

Synet på når man er gammel nok til å stemme har forandret seg. I dag har alle norske statsborgere over 16 år rett til å delta i valg. I 1814 ble stemmeretten satt til 25 år, rundt denne alderen etablerte menn seg med jobb og eiendom. Og viktigst av alt: De bestemte å betale skatt.

FOR PASSIV

Ettervalgslovene mente at du var en passiv borger. Ikke en du på alvorste, men du var med på å bestemme hva som skulle skje i landet. Du hadde ingen stemme, du hadde bare å betale skatten.

I dag er stemmeretten 16 år i Norge. Det betyr at alle som er 16 år eller eldre, har rett til å stemme. Unge under 20 har de som er eldre stemmerett om lag 80 prosent.

UNG OG AKTIV

Stemmeretten har fått gradvis lavere de siste hundre år. I dag er det 16 år, og det er en god ting. Vi gir senere ut i arbeidslivet.

Ungdomsengasjementet har økt. I 1960- og 70-tallet var det mange unge som var aktive i politiske organisasjoner. De hadde rett til å stemme, og de brukte det. De hadde rett til å stemme, og de brukte det.

Forskjellen i ungdomsengasjementet har vært stor. I 1960- og 70-tallet var det mange unge som var aktive i politiske organisasjoner. De hadde rett til å stemme, og de brukte det.

FAKTA

VOKSEN NOKT

Stemmeretten ble satt til 25 år i 1814. Det var en høy alder for den tiden. Det var en høy alder for den tiden.

I 1814 fikk 25 år gamle menn rett til å stemme.

I 1864 ble stemmeretten senket til 21 år.

I 1907 kunne 20 år gamle menn ved stortingsvalg.

I 1913 ble 20 år gamle kvinner ved stortingsvalg.

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Thea Aarbakke works at the Women's Museum in Norway. She is project coordinator for There She Goes Again: A Project on Gender Representation in Museums' Collections and Exhibition Practices. Aarbakke holds a PhD in Museology. She authored a thesis on contemporary literary museums and writers' homes in Norway (2019) where she was part of the research project Transforming Author Museums (TRAUM). One of the project's aims was to investigate how and why certain writers and literature have been turned into cultural heritage while others have not. Aarbakke is co-editor of the book *The Changing Spaces of Literary Museums* (forthcoming).

Mona Holm is academic Director and a curator at the Women's Museum in Norway. She is a co-founder and since 2015, President of the International Association of Women's Museums (IAWM). Holm holds a Candidata philologiae in Art History; she authored a thesis on Argentine comic book writers and their socio-political engagements. She has curated numerous exhibitions on women's history and feminism for the Women's Museum. Her article 'Kvinner og menn på utstilling, Anno 2017' contributed to spearheading the project There She Goes Again.

One small museum cannot compensate for existing gender representation imbalances within all of a given country's museums. What the Women's Museum could do, however, was give visitors the possibility of seeing an alternative version of history.

n 2008, the feminist critic Rebecca Machin argued that there were androcentric biases visible in the displays of the natural history galleries at the Manchester Museum:

In most species, the ratio of male to female individuals is around 1:1. Therefore, if a museum were to seek to display a representative sample of biodiversity, one might expect it to display male and female specimens in similar proportions. The Manchester Museum's displays tell a different story. Of the specimens displayed on the mammal gallery, 71% were male and 29% female [...]. In the bird gallery, the distribution was slightly more balanced, with 66% male specimens and 34% female (2008, p. 57).

This quote has during the course of this project served as an eye-opener for various museum practitioners in Norway. It shows that a natural history museum also is a product of the patriarchal structures Western museums are built on. At the same time, it demonstrates how quantifying gives an immediate effect in revealing gender disparity. Amy K. Levin, who has conducted extensive research on museums and gender, evidences how women in the 19th century were excluded from the professional workforce in museums (2012). In Norway, the location of the investigation, women could not become museum curators before first being accepted into higher education institutions, and this did not occur before 1884 (Hagemann 2010).

However, today in Norway, many women occupy key roles in museums. In fact, after museums were acknowledged as educational institutions in the early 20th century, curation has since become a female-dominated profession at several museums around the world (Deepwell 2013). Nevertheless, directorships and museum board positions are still mostly held by men (2013, p. 66). Statistics released by the Arts Council Norway in 2018 reveal that museum boards are comprised of 47% women and 53% men, and that 67% of board leaders are men. Women, however, represent 56% of total museum staff (Arts Council Norway 2019). These numbers show that although women are not equally represented in museums' top positions, they make up a significant percentage of museum staff. They have taken positions as curators, educators, archivists, support staff, board members and some also as directors. These statistics presented positive developments in an institution where female employees have gone from occupying no positions to more than half in a little over a century. How can the claim that women and women's histories are not sufficiently included in museum collections and represented in exhibitions be made, and that action is needed to redress such inequities?

In order to explore possible answers to these questions, this article first presents the Women's Museum in Norway. This is followed by an overview of the Norwegian museum sector's general organisation, including a short presentation of how this project was made possible and its sources of funding. Thereafter, a broader discussion of *There She Goes Again: A Project on Gender Representation in Museums' Collections and Exhibition Practices* and the projects and theories that have been important for its development are considered. Now is the midpoint of the project, which was launched in January 2019 and will finish in March 2021. A status report on the results and experiences gathered thus far, will be presented along with the remaining steps in the process and thoughts on how to move forward. Concluding remarks will reflect on the limitations and possibilities of working from within the museum sector while challenging museum practice.

The Women's Museum in Norway

The Women's Museum in Norway was founded in the town of Kongsvinger in the late 1980s, with the purpose of collecting, studying and disseminating the history and culture of women. It had a clear feminist approach and an emancipatory vision 'to contribute to a better development of society' (Kvinnemuseet 2020). The founders were influenced by emerging academic fields of women's history (now: women's and gender history) and interdisciplinary women's studies (now: gender studies), whose early common goal was to increase women's visibility and status (Blazevic 2015, pp. 60–70). Very little women's history was included in other museums at that time, and the founders were concerned about the possible negative effects of this absence. Would it bring society to believe that women had historically not achieved anything and thus were not important?

The Women's Museum opened in 1995 after years of networking, fundraising, building a collection and finding a suitable building. The museum moved into the former childhood home of the avant-garde poet, Dagny Juel (1867–1901). At the time Juel was nearly forgotten, but thanks to the Women's Museum her story was made visible again. Of course, one small museum cannot compensate for existing gender representation imbalances within all of a given country's museums. What the Women's Museum could do, however, was give visitors the possibility of seeing an alternative version of history. It could serve as a source of inspiration and as a valuable resource for society as a whole. Thus, the museum began its work from two different positions; while concentrating on the task of developing 'a room of one's own' for women's history, it also quickly gained a public voice and encouraged

change within the established museum sector. These dual, internal and external functions of the Women's Museum can be related to the conclusion drawn by Kari Gaarder Losnedahl, the first scholar in Norway to specifically research gender and museums. She argued that museums need to take two approaches to render their collections more gender equitable. First, to establish proper women's museums where staff and visitors can focus exclusively on women's history and culture. The second approach is to change existing practices within established museums (Losnedahl 1993).

The power of the margins

From the beginning, the Women's Museum in Norway worked closely with other museums in the region. In fact, the drive for this new museum came from the established local museum in Kongsvinger which had worked systematically with local women's history since the beginning of the 1980s (Stolpe 2007, pp. 4–12). However, the Women's Museum's collaborations with other museums—including their audiences and supporters—have not been entirely without friction. Regardless of the Women's Museum's efforts to take part in the communities and practices of conventional museum institutions, it has often found itself at the margins. Namely, the focus offered by the Women's Museum did not always correspond with the accepted norms that most museums follow. This observation echoes historian Ross J. Wilson's reasoning in

his introductory chapter in *Gender and Heritage. Performance, Place and Politics*: 'Gender appears fated to be regarded as a niche topic as assessments of power, discourse, identity, consumerism and authority have become the established fields of enquiry within heritage studies' (2018, p. 3). This position should not, however, be regarded as exclusively negative, he holds. On the contrary, the position of the margin is very powerful, and by having such a liminal position, gender can challenge the 'tyranny of the normal', Wilson claims (pp. 6–8).

A women's museum is a radical project that distances itself from the conventional Western way of thinking about museums and history, or from the 'storytelling practice' that feminist theorist Donna Haraway challenges (1992, p. 3). These radical ambitions

have manifested themselves globally. Today there are nearly 100 women's museums worldwide, with some favouring the name 'gender museum'. In addition, there are currently 46 initiatives underway to open new women's museums. What they all have in common is their recognition of a need for alternative spaces to engage with women's history and culture. In 2008, 29 women's museums met for the first time and formed a global network (Schönweger 2010). The International Association of Women's Museums (IAWM) was established four years later. By 2019, the network counted around 60 museum members from all five continents (International Association of Women's Museums 2019).

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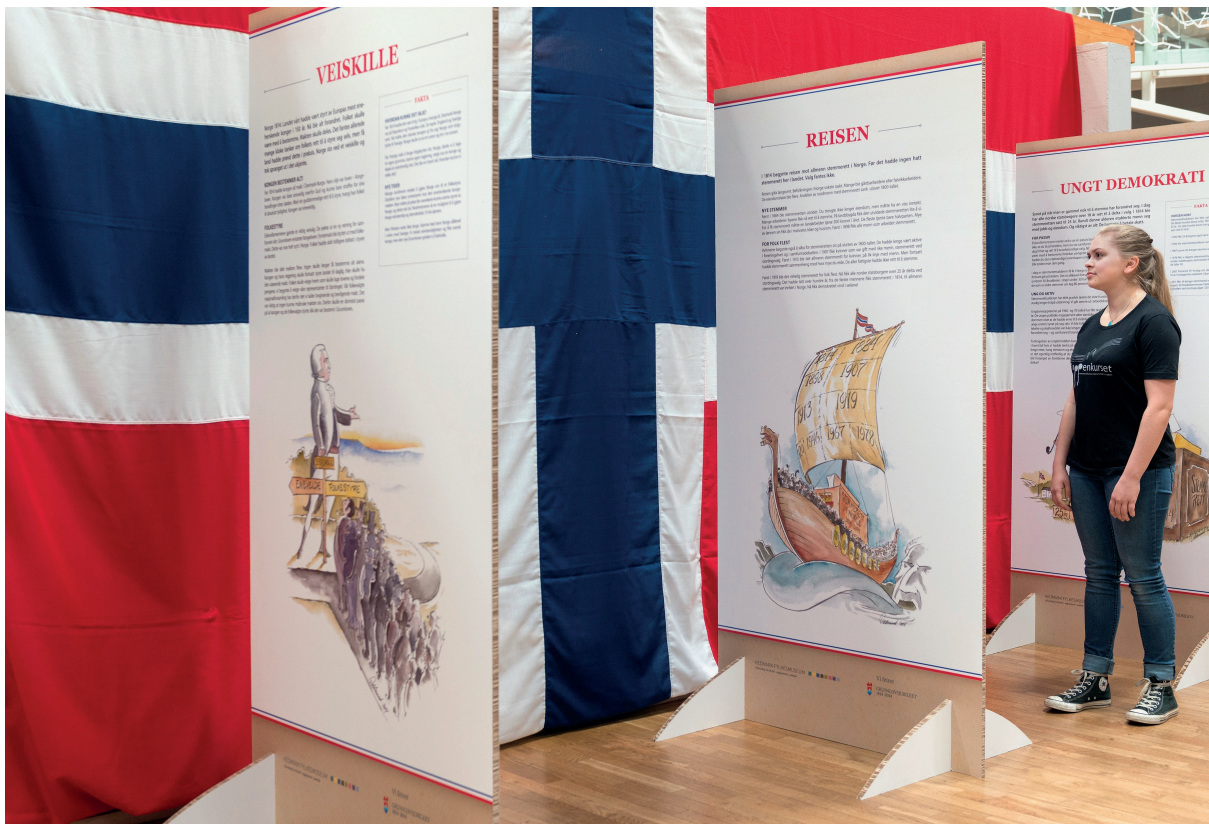


Fig. 1. Young girl looking for her history in an exhibition about Norwegian democracy. © Bård Løken, Anno museum

A new museum network and project

Although the Women's Museum was initially closely linked to the Kongsvinger museum, it soon gained a particular and independent role within the Norwegian museum landscape. Two years after opening, it was given the status of a National Museum, joining a list of 13 national Norwegian museums in total. In 2001, new reforms for all Norwegian museums were implemented. Their main goal was to forge stronger and more professional institutions by consolidating numerous smaller museums with few resources into bigger entities (Fossetstøl *et al.* 2013, pp. 7–9, 38). Together with all the other museums in the Hedmark county, the Women's Museum was consolidated into a single administrative unit, eventually called Anno Museum. Through these reforms, new ways of networking emerged. Several museums with national status became administrators of new, thematically organised networks. The Women's Museum took an active role in convincing the authorities of the importance of a network for museums focused specifically on women's history (Fig. 1). The Museum Network for Women's History was established in 2004, with the Women's Museum serving as administrator (Jacobsen and Aastebøl 2015, p. 9).

In the following years, awareness around Norway's gender equality achievements steadily grew. Since the World Economic Forum published the first Global Gender Gap Report in 2006, Norway has been among the top five countries with the highest gender parity score (Global Gender Gap Report 2006–2018). The country is often referred to as 'the land of gender equality'. Abroad, the Norwegian government has been promoting the country as an expert in gender parity since the 1990s (Danielsen *et al.* 2013, p. 30). But has this development led to an increased focus on women's history in museums? Research has shown that from structural and cultural standpoints, Norway does not have the sort of gender parity that many would like to believe it does. Moreover, very little research to date has examined museums and gender in Norway (Brenna and Hauan 2018). Museologist Brita Brenna has argued that more research on museums within a Nordic context is needed, since museums and their practices differ widely among various geographical and cultural contexts (2009, p. 74). To better understand how museums in Norway focus on gender perspectives and women's history, further studies are necessary.

From the Women's Museum's standpoint, it became necessary to consider such questions scientifically. Mona Holm, the museum's academic director and co-author of this article, analysed how three contemporary Norwegian museum exhibitions focused on gender; this resulted in a peer-reviewed article published in 2018. Her findings were quite sobering. Despite women's and gender studies being present both within the discipline of history and in interdisciplinary fields for over 40 years in Norwegian universities, 'men were still presented as the naturalised representatives of the human being, and women were given much less value and space' (2018, p. 133) (Fig. 2). Her findings indicated that other Norwegian museum practices might show a similar level of disparity.



Fig. 2. Male chefs play the main role in the kitchen area in the exhibition ‘Tråkk’ at the Norwegian Forest Museum.
© Bård Løken, Anno museum

With Holm’s research serving as a background, this issue was raised at the 2018 meeting of the National Museum Network for Women’s History—the first meeting after the consciousness raising #MeToo movement had become a worldwide phenomenon. The network saw an opportunity to mobilise because patriarchal power structures were again on the agenda. At the meeting, members were asked to share their experiences with attempting to achieve greater gender parity within their own institutions. Their answers were not uplifting. Network members observed that gender-conscious approaches are rarely found in museum institutions, whether it comes to curatorial priorities and selection processes, exhibition planning or museum pedagogy. When gender-conscious perspectives are present, these are generally arbitrary and dependent on initiatives by individual staff members. While good intentions are

occasionally present, these are often diluted over time and through the working process. Museum professionals who bring up the issue of women’s perspectives and gender-conscious perspectives are frequently met with indifference and comments like ‘there she goes again’, the phrase adapted as the title for the present project.

Reflections from network members served as the starting point for this project. In addition to the Women’s Museum, six institutions within the network participate: the Norwegian Museum of Science and Technology, the Stiklestad National Culture Centre, the Museum of Oslo, the Norwegian Labour Movement Archives and Library, the Maihaugen Open-Air Museum, and Kilden, a national knowledge centre for gender perspectives in research. The new network project’s aim was to devise a methodology to help Norwegian

museums become more gender-democratic, both in terms of curatorial work within their collections and their exhibitions. The project was accepted by the Arts Council Norway’s programme ‘Museums and Their Societal Role 2018–2020’ and was granted economic support of NOK 2.8 million (EUR 260,000).



Fig. 3. Members from the Museum Network for Women's History studying *The public I*, an exhibition about women in public space at the Norwegian Women's Museum. © Thea Aarbakke, Kvinnemuseet

Methodology development: four key phases

The project *There She Goes Again* consists of two parts. The main goal is to develop the aforementioned methodology to help museums achieve greater gender balance within their collections and exhibitions. The Women's Museum is responsible for its development, with the Museum Network for Women's History forming pilot groups to test and evaluate the new methodology (Fig. 3). The second part consists of eight smaller women's history visibility projects. In this article, the development of the methodology is the focus, and it has been divided into four phases.

In the first phase, which was completed in autumn 2019, a survey was conducted on the status of gender parity in the Norwegian museum field. Phase one yielded important findings around the representation of gender in museums' collections and exhibition practices. This information was crucial to the rest of the phases of the research: the development, testing and implementation of methods designed to ensure stronger gender balance in museum practices.

This project takes a hands-on approach to museums' daily work practices, but internal structural factors are also vital to implementing the proposed methodology. For museum professionals to succeed in integrating more diverse gender perspectives within their workplaces, they need support from both museum directors and general management. This observation accords with earlier experiences from research on Swedish museums (Grahm 2007; 2018), and from the Sweden-based JÄMUS-project, presented later in this article (Hauptmann 2014).

Theoretical sources

Wera Grahm, a leading contemporary scholar specialised in gender and museums, has analysed several Swedish museums' exhibitions, researching their representations of gender and diversity. She has developed strategic advice for promoting change in museums' perspectives and practices around gender issues (2007; 2018). In her chapter 'The Politics of Heritage: How to Achieve Change' (2018), she lists three key conditions necessary for achieving such a shift, namely: 1. the support of upper management, 2. advanced knowledge of gender studies among museum staff and 3. a general research-based focus at museums. Grahm highlights the complexity of gender studies and the necessity of academic study when she observes, 'you must most likely have been studying the subject in order to grasp the area and to be able to see the possibilities of different perspectives and to make appropriate choices' (2018, p. 259). In this project it has become clear that Grahm's first key condition, to have the support of upper management teams, is necessary

to implement a long-term strategy for improving museums' gender perspectives. In accordance with Grahm, feminist theory and gender studies also inspired the development of this project, however, working closely with museum practitioners has demonstrated the importance of developing a set of tools that can be useful for the majority of museum staff, including those who do not have advanced knowledge of gender studies.

In correspondence with Grahm's vision, it would be ideal to have all museum professionals formally educated in gender studies. But day-to-day conditions at museums reveal a different reality. As historian Randolph Starn argues:

Outsiders do not need to worry about such mundane matters as budgets, security, staffing, storage, or plumbing. They are free to treat museums as subjects and objects of higher criticism, political agendas, narratives about the past, and visions of the future (2005, p. 70).

Bringing insights from academic studies—including feminist theory and gender studies—together with more empirically informed approaches would be valuable. Theoretical approaches within the field of museology have notably been helpful to the project, allowing it to apply insights from academic studies to the practical, everyday work of museums (Macdonald 2011).

Museology is known for its interdisciplinarity of more conventional disciplines such as art history, cultural history and anthropology, as well as more recently postcolonial and feminist theory. In the past two decades, several textbooks, written by both practitioners and theorists, have been published in which museum theory and museum practice are intertwined. Several of these favour a processual knowledge perspective (Macdonald 2002; Maurstad and Hauan 2012; Dewdney *et al.* 2013) adopted from science and technology studies, amongst others (Law 1999; Latour 2005).

Museological practices such as collection management and exhibition production are understood as ones that affect the narratives museums produce. These aforementioned studies offer meta-perspectives on museum practices while reflecting on how changes in practices meaningfully affect how museums produce knowledge.

Ideas and writings from both practitioners and theorists offer inspiring examples of how museum professionals can articulate the challenges they encounter on a daily basis in their workplaces, as well as offering them possible ways to reflect critically on their own practices. These are keys to implementing change within museums; they are also keys to the development of this project's methodology. To achieve such change, museum practices, artefacts and technologies, in addition to an overall focus on gender perspectives must be considered.

Similar projects

Over the last decade, a handful of inspiring projects and networks focusing on women's history, museums and gender, and feministic strategies in museums have been initiated by museums and universities, sometimes in collaboration with one another. Three of them have been of particular interest for this project. They all approach their research questions by investigating specific collections and exhibitions within a Nordic context in order to give hands-on examples for museum practitioners and enable them to work with women's and gender perspectives in their day-to-day museum practices.

The Västergötlands Museum in Sweden launched, in 2004, a project whose aim was to develop methods for making issues of gender visible in the museum's photo database: *Outline of Cultural Materials*, an international database developed in the US in the 1950s. For several years the museum's conservators and registrars had been struggling when it came to classifications of their photographs. Their questions were the following: *What* does the photo database show? *Whom* does it show? And *what* can the database tell us about Swedish society over the last 150 years (Sunnevang and Wahss 2005)? They found that *Outline* and its list of keywords for describing photos was insufficient, revealing outdated gender norms in their choice of words. For example, it contained keywords such as 'nuclear family', while under the keyword 'couple', only pictures of heterosexual couples were found. The Västergötlands Museum's project underlined how the tools used to register collections in turn influence how museums' collections are understood. According to the

Västergötlands Museum's registrars, the *Outline* database's list of keywords reflects a conservative, gender-normative and traditional view of women/girls and men/boys. In their project they worked with *Outline*'s list of keywords, added new ones and changed some of the old, all to make gender more visible in their photo collections. Their project shows examples from a photo database, but it is possible to adapt the same method to other parts of the collections when registering, such as objects and art works.

With the support of Sweden's government, the Swedish History Museum initiated the project JÄMUS in 2011; its objective was to develop methods toward representing gender more equitably in exhibitions and collections. The JÄMUS project had an intersectional perspective and a focus on equal representation in relation to identity, power structures and human rights. To evaluate the discrimination of specific groups, researchers considered questions of gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious beliefs, age and physical disabilities (Hauptman 2014). Their research on Swedish museums' focus on gender representation revealed inspiring projects within national institutions. However, their investigation demonstrated that very little of the museums' work on gender was visible, whether on their websites or in official strategic documents. One of the project's final products was a textbook targeted towards museum practitioners. In the book, they shared examples of how to implement gender-balanced perspectives in museum practices (Hauptman 2014). Reading and evaluating their research has helped to build a solid foundation for this project.

In Norway, Kunstmangfold (Art Diversity and Gender Equality Network) was initiated in 2016 by art historians Ulla Angkjær Jørgensen and Sigrun Åsebø. These scholars aimed to create a platform through which Nordic museums and art historians could discuss methods for incorporating more diverse perspectives on gender, specifically with respect to curating new exhibitions and existing collections (Art Diversity 2020). The network has since organised academic conferences, and the founders have published research in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, Jørgensen curated the exhibition *WOMEN FORWARD! A Meeting Between Two Generations of Voices in Art* (2015) in collaboration with the artist Birgitte Ejdrup Kristensen. The platform has proven quite valuable for exchanging experiences and thoughts on exhibition production in art museums. Since *There She Goes Again* aims at developing a method for all museums, including art museums, it has been important to look into other projects that have worked specifically with art museums, such as Kunstmangfold.

[Over the last decade, inspiring projects and networks] approach their research questions by investigating specific collections and exhibitions within a Nordic context in order to give hands-on examples for museum practitioners and enable them to work with women's and gender perspectives in their day-to-day museum practices.

Mapping gender in Norwegian museums

The first phase of the main project was to thoroughly study the status and presence of perspectives on gender in Norwegian museums. This was necessary to ascertain whether the experiences of the network's member institutions and the findings of the few recent research projects (Brenna and Hauan 2018; Holm 2018) were genuinely representative. Research was conducted in three different areas: 1. museums' strategic documents, 2. museums' practices, and 3. museums' self-reflections.

The first area consisted of a study of Norwegian museums' own collection management plans, allowing an evaluation of how and whether they incorporated gender. In total, 19 plans were analysed.

The second area, related to practices, was partly carried out by MA students in museology at the University of Oslo. Their object of study was the presence of gender and women in DigitaltMuseum, an Internet-based platform for the dissemination of museum collections in Norway and Sweden. DigitaltMuseum offers the public remote access to collections. To date, 274 museum collections are represented in this database, which includes a total of nearly two million objects, more than three million photographs and 70,000 artworks. The 'practices' component of the project also included a critical analysis of gender within a handful of museum exhibitions at institutions across different regions of Norway.

The third and last part of the mapping phase concerned the institutions' self-reflections. This was carried out through a digital questionnaire called a 'QuestBack' in which the respondents could opt to remain anonymous. The questionnaire was sent to the leadership of 62 museums; 23 of them submitted responses (Haugen and Pedersen 2019).

In December 2019 the Women's Museum published the findings in the report *'A Feeling of Focus. A Report on Norwegian Museums' Gender Perspectives in Dissemination and Collection Management'* (*En følelse av fokus. Rapport om norske museers arbeid med kjønnsperspektiver i formidling og samlingsforvaltning*). Although examples of museums working strategically to improve gender balance in their collections and exhibitions were found, this was not widely observed. All three research areas pointed in the same direction. The network members' own experiences and findings from previous research (Brenna and Hauan 2018; Holm 2018) were thus confirmed: there is a considerable gender gap in Norwegian museums. Men are still considered as the universal subject, while women are frequently understood in narrowly gendered terms, or put into the 'diversity' category.

Often women are left out entirely, misplaced or forgotten in museum exhibitions, the report notes (Haugen and Pedersen 2019, pp. 34–35). Meanwhile, results from the third, 'self-reflection' part of the mapping phase show that most museums are conscious of how their collections misrepresent women,

yet deal with the problem in varying ways. From research area one—museums' strategic documents—only four of the collection management plans mention gender or women explicitly. Even so, several museums responded that they 'felt they had a focus' on gender in all their practices and that this focus made up for a lack of more formal policies (2019, p. 32). Quite a few museums also said that they believed gender equality was ensured through a high number of women occupying staff positions within their institutions. This correlates with one of the key findings: there is a common belief within the museum sector that gender balance among staff means gender equality in institutional practices.

The results of this investigation primarily point towards a need to raise awareness related to gender representation in museums' practices. This can partly be attributed to Norway's status as 'the land of gender equality', because many assume that the work of parity has already been achieved. The findings further point to a need for a methodology that offers museums clear suggestions on how they can work to increase the visibility of women and gender-related questions, both with respect to the management and dissemination of their existing collections, and to the implementation of more deliberate policymaking around collections. Finally, museums need to work to formalise and implement concrete measures for gender parity in their strategic documents and among their own museum administrators/leaders.

Awareness as a first step

As of spring of 2020, phase two of the main project was entered and the methodology is currently being developed. The information gathered during phase one and published in the report *A Feeling of Focus* (Fig. 4) has been vital to the project's development. From the aforementioned report, it was learned that many museum professionals believe their museums have a focus on gender parity in their practices. However, the analysis demonstrates that their feeling of gender parity is not reflected in the actual exhibitions and museum collections. It was demonstrated that *awareness* has to be the first step in developing a methodology for improving gender

representation in museums, before beginning phases three and four, testing and implementation. Time, or rather the lack thereof, is a major issue within the museum sector, as Starn (2005) pointed out earlier. To reach those museum professionals who initially showed no interest in gender studies or those who wish to participate but do not have the time to fully engage in the complexity of gender issues, a set of working principles to raise awareness was proposed. These principles should be both accessible to all employees and easy to implement in museum workers' day-to-day work schedules. They are based around four points: 1. quantifying, 2. visualising,

3. asking questions and 4. employing structural strategies. These tools can help museum professionals to better see and understand how women's history and the representation of women have a tendency to disappear; recognising this is the first step towards change. The strategies described below are designed to allow participants to arrive themselves at an awareness of gender imbalances, through a process of investigation.

1. Numbers don't lie

Quantifying is a very efficient strategy that measures equality or inequality between two or more units. The linguist Helene Uri has studied the representation of gender in the Norwegian language. In her book *Who Said What? Women, Men and Language* (*Hvem sa hva? Kvinner, menn og språk*), Uri reveals that women are under-represented in Norwegian newspapers compared to men, by a common ratio of around 1:3. In one of Uri's experiments, she measured how much time male and female members of the Norwegian Authors' Union spent speaking in public at the union's annual meeting. Among the 150 members present, the gender balance was fifty-fifty. Uri's impression after the meeting was that women and men had been participating equally. However, after she added up the numbers, they showed that men had spoken 66% of the time, while women had only taken up about 33% of the total amount of speaking time (2008, p. 148). The most surprising finding in Uri's research was that the ratio 1:3 is frequently repeated in a variety of media and is often perceived as an equitable ratio by both women and men. Uri argues that because we are accustomed to inequality in the representation of men and women, we believe that they are equally represented, even when they are not (2018). By quantifying, it is possible to reveal gender biases that are shared by most people, independently of their gender.

2. A visual intervention

At the Natural History Department of the Manchester Museum, the previously cited Machin conducted an intervention in the mammal gallery, where an antelope case was on display. She covered all the male specimens with a white sheet. This left one small female specimen for everyone to see (2008). Cloaking sections of the exhibition space to better visualise the biases that informed them proved an efficient way to demonstrate gender imbalances in representations of antelopes within the natural history galleries at the Manchester Museum. The gallery intervention model can also be applied to art museums and cultural history museums and might be presented as an internal workshop or as an exhibition concept designed to make visitors aware of curatorial blind spots.



Fig. 4. Facsimile from the report *A Feeling of Focus*, 2019, phase 1 of the project *There She Goes Again*. © Petra design/Kvinnemuseet

3. The power of questions

As Grahn has underlined, if questions about gender are not asked when relevant, no answers relevant to gender will be offered (2007, p. 17). For example, the Bechdel Test is an effective and easy one to apply to films. The test was developed from a phrase coined by US cartoonist Alison Bechdel and is used to analyse gender representation in the film industry. To pass the test, a given film must depict: 1. at least two female characters who 2. talk to each other about 3. something other than a man. In addition to being a tool that renders unconscious gender biases visible, the Bechdel Test is easy to remember. Will this project be able to develop a similar test or formulate questions to detect whether exhibitions make one gender subordinate to the other—a problem the Bechdel Test has illuminated so efficiently? It is still an exemplary model, but it remains to be seen whether it would be possible to implement a similar litmus test capable of measuring the more complex practices found at museums.

4. Structural strategies

To develop a methodology around gender representation in museums, consultations with skilled curators and collection managers who have years of experience with similar projects were made. These professionals made three important suggestions that will be applied to the research going forward. First, perspectives around gender need to be formalised in strategic documents, such as acquisition policies and collection strategies. Staff members at museums where themes around gender and women's history have been prioritised often highlight the importance of having a director who both supports such work and is personally engaged in it. However, this is rarely noted in strategic documents. It is thus important to formalise a focus on gender issues in these documents, especially since directors regularly change. Secondly, never underestimate a simple tool such as a checklist when you have a busy schedule. Even senior curators with years of experience curating exhibitions need to be reminded of equal gender representations. Finally, to have an impact, it is vital to work on several levels: national, regional and local, as well as international. When curators and other museum professionals lack support within their own museum management, help and support can be found elsewhere. In Norway the Museum Networks exists, of which both the Museum Network for Women's History and the Museum Network for Diversity are members. The Arts Council provides funding to projects that are relevant to museums' societal roles. At a global level, the International Association of Women's Museums can facilitate an exchange of ideas and practices between members.

To challenge museums' 'tyranny of the normal', as Wilson phrased it, it is likely necessary to include external perspectives. While external expertise is welcomed in challenging established norms at museums, for the purposes of this project the focus has been on change from an internal perspective. Although the authors work within the museum sector, the Women's Museum has often found itself at the margins in relation to conventional institutions. However, the Women's Museum is not content with remaining at the margins, and does not believe that women's history and gender belong outside of the category of 'normal'. Nevertheless, gender is still treated as a marginal topic in today's heritage sector and even in a 'land of gender equality' like Norway. Grahn's urgent call to incorporate problems of gender into museums' daily work through staff education in gender studies and extensive knowledge of related theoretical issues is an inspiration. However, to be able to implement change, the starting point has to be grounded within the realities of contemporary institutions. Working within the museum sector and using colleagues and the Museum Network of Women's History as test pilots serves as a constant reminder of current museum structures that must be operated within when developing a methodology.

Addressing awareness of gender parity at an early stage is required for success in broadly including museum professionals in the important work of striving for equality. Tools such as visual interventions and questions are an effective way of introducing staff to the problem of gender imbalance in collections and exhibitions, allowing them to explore such questions by themselves in their own ways. It is important that museum management be active and supportive, but if they are not, collaborators can also be found in other partners, such as professional networks and governmental cultural policy institutions. Although the main project is focused on museums' everyday practices, the research results to date suggest that strategic work at a national and regional level is necessary, in addition to developing a toolkit for hands-on museum work.

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