

## Preface

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Pontus Hultén's years at the Moderna Museet were formative. For most of the art world, it is probably his work at the Centre Pompidou in Paris that defines him. Swedes, however, will always remember Hultén, first and foremost, as the inventive director in Stockholm. He arrived at the fledgling institution in 1958 – having spent the previous seven years shuttling between his native city and Paris, curating gallery shows and forging connections with artists like Jean Tinguely and Robert Breer – and took the helm in 1960. In the ensuing decade, he made the museum famous. One of his greatest gifts was his sense of timing, his ability to be at the right place at the right moment and to home in on the most interesting things going on. It's a talent apparent in the list of groundbreaking shows he organised at Moderna Museet: *Movement in Art* (1961), one of the first exhibitions of kinetic art; two of Europe's first surveys of American Pop art (in 1962 and 1964) and its first Andy Warhol retrospective (1968); and experimental initiatives like *Poetry Must Be Made By All! Transform the World!* (1969), a show about radical politics that, in lieu of artworks, presented documentation and progressive activities, including visits from American draft dodgers and Black Panthers.

But he made perhaps the biggest impression with the startling collaborative installation *She – A Cathedral*, 1966 (conceived by Niki de Saint Phalle, Jean Tinguely, and Per Olov Ultvedt, with significant input from Hultén): a gigantic, lurid cathedral in the form of a supine woman that viewers could walk into, the entry being between her legs. Inside, visitors found a pond, full of goldfish, a love seat for couples, a bar, a small cinema showing a Greta Garbo movie, a playground with a slide and many other surprises. Green and red lights controlled the traffic through the vaginal entrance. It was sexual liberation for the entire family, something that, at the time, was probably conceivable only in Sweden, and it was an instant sensation. With such efforts throughout his career it was clear that Hultén was quite willing to privilege the creative side of his institutional role and that he, as Saint Phalle once claimed, had the soul of an artist.

Another of Hultén's talents was his ability to act as a social fulcrum, to surround himself with people who could work fruitfully with him and with each other. In 1960, for instance, he introduced Billy Klüver to Tinguely, instigating the visionary engineer's entrance into the art world. Hultén's circle in Stockholm included Peter Weiss, the polymath best known for authoring *Marat/Sade* (1964), and artist Öyvind Fahlström. On the museum's staff, he had Ulf Linde – writer, Duchamp expert and leading jazz musician – and Carlo Derkert, a quirky genius who turned the museum's educational programme into a kind of ongoing happening.

Compared to today's Moderna Museet, the institution that Hultén directed half a century ago was small and intimate, and even the most publicly successful exhibitions in those days had an audience that from today's perspective would be considered modest in size. And yet much of what Hultén realised and what he wanted his institution to represent remains valid today, and some of his fundamental beliefs continue to influence the museum's programmes and exhibitions to this day. What no doubt still animates the institution is the internationalism and a will toward experimentation as well as an awareness that art lives in a lively dialogue with other disciplines, such as film, dance, music and literature. The expansive geographies of today's art world of course make most European institutions in the 1960s appear limited in their outlook. Paris and New York were the dominating centres, and yet there were exceptions to the rule – occasionally works by artists from Latin America and Asia were included in the exhibitions of the 1960s. Today Moderna Museet famously exhibits more woman artists than any other comparable institution in the world. That was not the case during Hultén's years as director. But there were exceptions here too: a number of Scandinavian textile artists, Hannah Ryggen among them, were given important solo exhibitions during the museum's first decade.

At the very heart of today's Moderna Museet a curatorial laboratory has been created in which Hultén's spirit is very much alive. The machinery is quite loud, and that is something that the architect Renzo Piano, its designer, likes. In fact, as he explained during the premiere at Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 2008 – where his contraption makes walls of artworks descend from the ceiling along metal tracks – he would not have minded it being even noisier. However cool his architecture, Piano has a taste for extravagant machines, something he shared with his longtime friend Hultén, at

whose behest and in whose spirit the unique apparatus was created. In 2005, Hultén donated his roughly eight-hundred-piece art collection to the museum, but only on the condition that the works would still be available to the public in an open-storage warehouse designed by Renzo Piano (who had, of course, already been Hultén's partner in creating the Centre Pompidou in Paris). Curator Anna Tellgren, who directs the Moderna Museet's research programmes, has turned this experimental site into a constantly changing modernist *wunderkammer*, a key location for anyone interested in curatorial practices. The Pontus Hultén Study Gallery is perhaps the best testament – and a permanent one at that – to the playfulness and democratic ambition of the early years of this museum, as well as to the man who put it on the international map.