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Exploring the Archive: On Scandinavian Art

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In an ongoing research project, von Bartha examines over five decades of its rich gallery history, weaving lines and linking milestones of a lifelong passion for art and collecting. Presenting a treasure trove of insights with photographs, bibliophilic objects, letters, documents, and historical publications, accompanied by a small selection of artworks, offer surprising, exciting, and sometimes amusing insights into some of the most significant artistic positions and art movements of the 20th century.

Exploring the Archive: On Scandinavian Art, focuses on three Swedish artists, namely Olle Baertling, Lars Erik Falk, and Eric H. Olson. Besides a shared friendship, they were collectively true to constructivist art while playing a significant role in the gallery's history. Olle Baertling studied in Paris while Eric H. Olson visited the city several times in the late 30ies to 50ies. Both were influenced by the environment of the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles. Even the youngest of the three, Lars Erik Falk, could not escape the influence of such an important association at the time with critics and artists like Jean Arp, Marcel Duchamp, Auguste Herbin, Fernand Léger, and Kasimir Malewitsch. During their frequent visits to Basel, a long-lasting collaboration with Margareta and Miklos von Bartha emerged, resulting in exhibitions, catalogs, and a lively professional exchange. Still today, Baertling, Falk, and Olson are characterized as the most outstanding positions of constructivism in Scandinavia, a movement that hasn't lost its appeal in a century since it was first proclaimed in 1924 by Theo van Doesburg, another important figure of the Réalités Nouvelles group.

Constantly experimenting as a kind of laboratory with the aim to sharpen our view into the past and onto the now, *Exploring the Archive* is showcased in a custom-made display by Basel-based artist Boris Rebetez (b. 1970 in Lajoux, Switzerland). With its hexagonal form, the modular system is inspired by nature's vault to keep its "gold": the honeycombs of bees. The geometric abstraction adds a contemporary element to the presentation, fostering the dialog of the archival material and the selected works by the three artists.

The exhibition runs from August 22 to November 4, 2023, and marks the second edition of the series *Exploring the Archive*, inaugurated and well-received by the public in 2022 with a focus on Surrealism.

Olle Baertling (1911, Halmstad, Sweden – 1981, Stockholm) is known for his colorful constructivist paintings and large-scale sculptures. He has been a convinced cosmopolitan, always confident that everything that has to do with art should give pleasure. Baertling invented the so-called "Open-Form," a system of sharp open angles that triggers a vision of dynamic movement in infinite space, freed from any sense of materiality and dimension. For his paintings, he used a specific palette of "Baertling colors." Black was an expression of lightness and joy. White was too powerless and therefore mixed with a cold shade of green. Earthy tones did not appear in his works.

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During his stay in Paris, the center of the avant-garde at the time, Baertling was influenced by the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles. His encounters—with Fernand Léger, and most importantly, with Auguste Herbin, with whom a close friendship and a mutual appreciation for each others work consisted—left a lasting impression on him.

Baertling regularly exhibited at Samlaren Gallery (Stockholm), Galerie Denise René-Rive Gauche (Paris), at Rose Fried Gallery (New York), and at von Bartha (Basel) (1978, 1980, 1982, and 2016). In addition to numerous museum exhibitions during his career, Moderna Museet (Stockholm) paid a posthumous homage to him with a big retrospective in 1981. Baertling's paintings can be found in several international Museum collections such as the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington), Guggenheim Museum (New York), MoMA (New York), Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), Kunstmuseum Basel, Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Nationalgalerie (Berlin), and Tate Modern (London).

Lars Erik Falk (1922, Uppsala, Sweden – 2018, Sigunta, Sweden) began to work on paintings and sculptures in a concrete style in the late 1940s. Later he turned to constructivist reliefs and sculptures, frequently for public spaces such as the Kista underground station, the Huddinge hospital, and parks in Stockholm. His signature materials were steel and aluminum. The motif of choice was the 73-degree angle. His lacquer-painted sculptures were made to visualize the change of color with the changing incidence of light. He consciously remained faithful to the constructive art form, and it seems that the orderly expression of his work suited him. But Lars Erik Falk was not categorical, on the contrary: “He had a very winning and humorous manner, and it was easy and fun to work with him!” as Margareta von Bartha remembers. He had several exhibitions in Galleri Samlaren and Aronowitch Galleri (Stockholm) and a one-person show in Galerie von Bartha in 1979. His work is represented in Moderna Museet (Stockholm) and Göteborgs Konstmuseum (Gothenburg), to name a few.

Eric H. Olson (1907 – 1995, Malmö, Sweden) visited Paris several times, where he got to know the Salon des Réalités Nouvelles. Soon after he began to paint in a plano-geometric style and created geometric, strictly constructivist paintings. Following this, he pioneered working with glass and polaroid filters for his „Optochromes“: sculptures that glow in color depending on the incidence of light. The artist was a true innovator in using this technique. Olson created several public works like wall paintings, reliefs, mosaics and design objects. Towards the end of his career, his interest turned to photography. In addition to being an artist, he considered himself a scientist. He actually spread the rumor that he once had been a spy, but further details were concealed, and everything remained a mystery well beyond his death in 1995. Eric H. Olson is represented in MoMA (New York), Moderna Museet (Stockholm), Imperial College (London), Optics Section (London) and Atheneum Helsingfors (Helsinki), amongst others.

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