

II. Exposed and unseen: Management of public immovable art

Karin Hermerén, Henrik Orrje

The paper “Exposed and unseen: Management of public immovable art” was presented at the International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (IIC) 24th Biennial Congress, *The Decorative. Conservation and the Applied Arts*, Vienna, Austria, 10–14 September 2012.

Published in *Studies in Conservation*. Vol. 57, no. S1, pp. 157–164.

© The International Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works 2012

DOI 10.1179/2047058412Y.0000000026

Erratum

Page 162 (77). “...and so, after her *attempts*, did her son.” Hertha Hillfon (1921–2013).

II. Exposed and unseen: Management of public immovable art

Karin Hermerén, Henrik Orrje
National Public Art Council, Sweden, Stockholm

Abstract

The preservation of twentieth-century public art is an urgent management problem and of expanding interest for conservation. The National Public Art Council in Sweden has initiated a research project, *Management of Public Building-Related Art in Public and Private Ownership*. The project is being carried out in collaboration with the Swedish National Heritage Board, the Museum of Public Art and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. The aim of the research project is to analyse and to estimate the expertise and financial resources needed for the long-term management and preservation of twentieth-century public art commissioned for government buildings, county councils, and municipalities. Another purpose of the project is to discover how national, regional, and local heritage conservation authorities cooperate in order to support the owners of public art financially or with conservation guidance. As case studies, carried out during 2011, 24 works of art were chosen. The findings showed an absence of overview, cooperation, and legal safeguard for public art. The result will help to improve future supervision and facilitate access to different kinds of resources, thus furthering the preservation of an important part of Sweden's cultural heritage.

Keywords: Building-related, Cultural heritage, Legal, Management, Preservation, Public art, Risk, Site-specific

Introduction

In 1937, the Swedish Parliament enacted a resolution of principle to the effect that the cost of artistic decoration of state-owned buildings should not fall short of 1% of the total construction cost. The National Public Art Council was set up to administer this activity and has been responsible for commissioning more than 1500 works of art.

The 1937 resolution made commitment to art for public buildings part of cultural policy. Public art became an important feature in public baths, sports facilities, libraries, housing estates, government departments and embassies, police stations and prisons, post offices and telegraph stations, hospitals, schools and universities – activities representing the development of the public sector and the emergence of modern Sweden.

Initially, this policy resolution only applied to government buildings, but soon both county councils and municipalities followed suit. The artistic work embraced by the resolution could be movable or immovable. In the latter case, both ownership and responsibility for management and conservation devolve on the owner of the building. Given continuous changes of ownership, with new owners perhaps desiring new solutions that might affect the artworks, together with the fact that art may deteriorate, several works of art by Sweden's foremost artists are at risk.

The 2006–2008 inventory

Between 2006 and 2008 an inventory was carried out of all the 1525 building-related works of art commissioned by the National Public Art Council between 1937 and 2005 (Wahlström, *et al.*, 2008). The purpose of the inventory was to survey the condition of the works of art and to generate knowledge among property owners concerning the ownership and management requirements to be met by the owners of properties holding these works of art.

The inventory revealed new problems relating to ownership, management, and the condition of these works of art. The public works commissioned by the National Public Art Council, in

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN

collaboration with a few governmental property owners, now belong to more than 160 different owners. Many of them are private agents with varying experience and competence regarding the care and preservation of public art as cultural heritage. Fifty of the works inventoried had been dismantled, while some 300 needed restoration. Indeed, the maintenance of twentieth-century public art is a growing problem in the community.

*The project *Management of Public Building-Related Art in Public and Private Ownership**

Public art: a heritage to cherish

The inventory triggered a new project, *Management of Public Building-Related Art in Public and Private Ownership*, carried out during 2011, funded by the National Heritage Board, and conducted in collaboration with the Museum of Public Art and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions.

Today both private and public owners of historic buildings can apply for government grants for the care and preservation of historic cultural assets in their possession, but twentieth-century public art is excluded from this heritage conservation funding. This project, therefore, seeks to assess and identify the expertise and financial resources needed for the long-term care and preservation of public art commissioned by the state, county councils, and municipalities and today owned by different parties, including private property companies. The overarching topics of enquiry are as follows:

- What knowledge and what resources do the different legal owners need to be able to preserve contemporary public art as cultural heritage?
- How does cooperation function between national, regional, and local heritage conservation authorities for the supervision

and evaluation of public art? Does it support its legal owners financially or with preservation guidance?

Working method

Ownership and management issues relating to public art have not previously been methodically researched in Sweden. In order to address the overarching issues, 24 building-related works of art were studied. The sample reflects building-related works of art which today belong to both public and private property owners.

The term ‘building-related art’ means that the work in question is site-specific, i.e. it was created for its intended setting. Most often the work is installed in or on the building, but it can also be free-standing, as in the case of a sculpture or a textile.

‘Public art’ means works of art intended for and often directly executed in settings to which the general public, or part of it, has access. Public art is often specific to a particular place and has often – though not always – been paid for out of public funds. There are also rooms which can be counted as public or in public service, even though the general public do not have regular access to them, such as schools, prisons, or the system of tunnels in the basements beneath the Government Offices of Sweden.

Legal and economic preconditions

Legal safeguards for public art

The Heritage Conservation Act contains provisions applying to listed buildings, listed church buildings, and historic cultural objects. In the case of properties having the status of listed buildings, the implications and scope of protection are set forth as regards care and maintenance in partnership between the regional heritage conservation authorities and the property owner. The Act also stipulates that church buildings and grounds are to be conserved and maintained in such a way that their heritage value is not reduced

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN

and that their appearance and character are not altered. Church furnishings are also protected.

The Copyright Act, addressing intellectual property rights in works of literature and art, gives the artist the sole right of permitting or forbidding certain measures (distortion, mutilation, modification, or derogatory action), affecting the work during his/her lifetime and for 70 years afterwards (Olsson, 2009). Derogatory action is an elusive term which can apply to anything from the alteration of a room, to partial or complete over-painting. The Copyright Act does not protect the work of art from total destruction (Hermerén, 2008).

Financial needs

Big property or real estate companies have ample resources for managing their own buildings and the works of art in them. However, several of those consulted said that financial support for the maintenance of public works of art had contributed to preservation when the property was scheduled for rebuilding or demolition.

From a national government perspective, an overview is lacking of the works of art found in different places and an understanding of which of them can be considered worthy of preservation for posterity. Basic principles of valuation and selection are also lacking.

Existing support systems

In Sweden, the state provides heritage environment grants to support property owners whose maintenance costs are increased by their managing a building or environment which is also an important heritage site. This funding most frequently takes the form of a lump sum paid to the county administrative boards, which are then left to decide how it is to be allotted. Financial support for the management of public art in buildings is rarely requested.

The Church of Sweden was severed from the state in 2000, thereby incurring responsibility for the greatest coherent share of

Sweden's cultural heritage. In return for assuming this responsibility, the Church receives a measure of compensation from the state for additional expenditure prompted by heritage considerations connected with the care and maintenance of church heritage sites under the Heritage Conservation Act. This compensation is distributed at the national level of the Church, which decides on compensatory grants at the diocesan level. The heritage compensation payments are then allocated on the basis of parochial applications.

Case studies

Selection criteria

One consideration in the selection of case studies has been that they must reflect settings which were important for the twentieth-century and for the emergence of modern times. The building is significant when, together with the work of art, it constitutes historical source material and a designed space. Each work selected must qualify as part of the national cultural heritage, worth preserving for posterity.

The period has been limited to the twentieth-century in order to put changes of ownership, management, and valuation in terms of art and cultural history into perspective. The earliest work is *John Blund (The Sandman)*, executed by Nils Dardel in 1928 for the Stockholm City Library, and the most recent is an installation of bronze sculptures by Sivert Lindblom in 1994, also in Stockholm.

The artworks are done in a variety of materials and techniques. Two of them have technical installations, namely neon lighting and water. Works have been chosen from all over Sweden, ranging from the sculpture *L'un des nôtres* by Alexander Calder in Lund to the colour-scheme for a housing development by Pierre Olofsson in Kiruna. Nine works are outdoors and 12 indoors. Three are below ground, namely the comprehensive design in 1989 of the tunnel system beneath the government offices in Stockholm, *En helt vanlig dag (Quite an ordinary day)* by Hans Peterson and Torgny Larsson, the Östermalmstorg metro station by Siri Derkert (1965), and

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN

Kungsträdgården by Ulrik Samuelson (1977), also included in the Stockholm metro, which, with its total length of 110 km, is sometimes called the world's longest art exhibition.

The case studies have been chosen to reflect different clients, property owners, and managers. The works chosen also represent a variety of management problems – from well preserved to moved or even lost.

Topics of enquiry

A questionnaire together with a letter of explanation and information on the project was circulated to the owner of each property, with copies for the information of others concerned, such as property management staff, heritage authorities, museums, or county administrative boards (see the Appendix). Several of these parties were interviewed.

In addition, each work of art was visually inspected in order to assess its condition, any need for conservation measures, and the cost they would entail. The works of art were also appraised for value, to impart a further dimension to discussions concerning preservation and management.

Case studies: some examples

Listed building, preservation assistance?

The Stockholm City Library

The Stockholm City Library is a good example of early public art, a storytelling room for children painted by Nils Dardel in 1928 (Fig. 1). The painting, which represents John Blund (the Sandman), is executed in *stucco lustro* in an apse-like appendage of the room. The storyteller sits with his or her back to the work and the children gather round the storyteller, facing it. The painting was presented by Oscar Hegert, the builder of the library, and at the time of its donation cost SEK 5000 (about €540). It has belonged to the City of Stockholm ever since and has been conserved regularly, the most

recent conservation treatments having been in 2009 and at the beginning of the 1980s. The sketches for the work are stored in the Museum of Public Art, Lund.

This work is well looked after. But the City of Stockholm has expanded considerably since the City Library was built and the demands on the library have changed. Plans for an enlargement were drawn up, but they were recently cancelled. The City Library is not a listed building, even though it deserves to be on both its architectural and historic merit. It is a landmark in the Stockholm townscape and was created by Gunnar Asplund, one of Sweden's most renowned architects, at the time when Classicism was giving way to Modernism. The library is a work of art in itself. Even so, as shown in the survey, there is no surveillance from a national heritage point of view and all the cultural heritage decisions are dealt with locally.

Even if legal protection would help to preserve both building and painting, the value of the work of art is not only linked to the particular building for which it was created, but also to its context in the children's section. This would be lost if the children's section were to be relocated.

It can be added that one of Nils Dardel's most famous paintings, *The Dying Dandy*, was sold in 1987 for SEK 13 million (about €1.4 million), at the time the highest price paid for any painting by a Swedish artist.

The building passes, but art endures: the old Östersund post office

In 1948 Lennart Rodhe entered a competition for decorating the Östersund post office, and won it with an entry entitled *Paket i långa banor* (*Long lines of parcels*), for a wall measuring 6 x 4 metres (Fig. 2). The work, done in glazed brick, was unveiled in 1952. But its surroundings have been altered several times. First a wall was built in front of the work, obscuring it from view. Then the entire building was demolished, except for the decorated wall.

Property owners, managers, and tenants have come and gone with the passing years. In this case artists, heritage conservation

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN

authorities, and art historians have taken great interest in the work ever since it was unveiled. Whenever the property and/or the work has been threatened with change, these heritage representatives have been up in arms at both regional and national government levels and, together with spokespersons from the Royal Academy of Arts, have declared it a monumental work of art of inestimable value to Swedish art history.

When the property changed hands again in 1989, a point in the contract of sale stipulated that the work of art was not to be blocked out or obscured by any future change or use of the premises. This case shows the value of cooperation. Without active efforts from different parties, this work of art would have been lost for ever. Today's tenants are accustomed to visitors arriving to look at the work, which now forms the end wall of the building's communal dining room. With the passing of time, this work of art can be said to have progressed from a structural problem to a real estate asset.

Management and heritage support: Gudlav Bilderskolan, Sollefteå

Atti Johansson executed her *Hyllning till Ivar Lo-Johansson (Tribute to Ivar Lo-Johansson)*, commissioned by the Municipality of Sollefteå, between 1969 and 1971 (Fig. 3). The work consists of five huge pencils of reinforced, painted concrete. It is owned by the Municipality of Sollefteå and administered by Solatum Hus & Hem, a municipal company, owned by the town.

The schoolyard has been altered since the work was installed. The pencils formerly rose straight out of the ground, which has now been paved with cobbles and asphalted except for the place where they stand. The former deeply orange end wall of the school building behind the pencils has faded considerably, with the result that the pencils no longer stand out as they were originally meant to do. There are sketches in the Museum of Public Art showing how the pencils are meant to interact with the colour of the school wall on one side and with the trees of the forest on the other.

A few years ago, the work was repainted by a local firm of painters and decorators, without the involvement of conservation authorities or conservators. However, the artist's instructions existed. Unfortunately, the paint began to flake before long, due perhaps to the dual influence of the type of paint chosen and the moisture present in the concrete of the pencils. At points where the paint has flaked off, the underlying original paint is exposed and can be seen to differ drastically in colour from the new paint layer (Fig. 4).

The ownership and management in this case is stable and there is great local interest in the artist. Even so, something went wrong when the work of art was to be preserved. Although good contacts exist between the local museum and the county museum, paths of contact are lacking for the procurement of heritage conservation counselling and management support.

Managing an environment in transition: Högsbo Torg, Göteborg

Högsbo Torg (civic centre and piazza), Göteborg, is the setting for an untitled work by Endre Nemes executed in 1955, using more than 60 different kinds of marble (Fig. 5). Both the ownership and management companies have changed over time, but they have all been municipal. Since they own many of Göteborg's historic buildings, the property owners of Högsbo Torg have shown that they appreciate heritage value, which is also reflected in how Högsbo Torg has been handled. Premises have been left untenanted for a while, pending the arrival of a tenant who will fit in and help to keep the piazza alive. This has resulted in a well-preserved and living 1950s piazza – in fact one of the few extant in Sweden, and therefore frequently in demand for film sets requiring a period atmosphere.

The municipally owned art is amply documented, and there is also a person at the heritage authority responsible for public art who can arrange heritage conservation contacts when needed. The work was conserved in 2009. The property owner's responsibility extends 10 m from the building, but beyond that point, ownership and

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN

management of the piazza pass to another municipal company. This triggers occasional confrontations, for example when a bench was placed in front of the work as part of a public seating project, even though the place as a whole is owned and administered by the Municipality of Göteborg.

Sale of official buildings: Karolinen, Karlstad

In 1976 Hertha Hillfon created a terracotta sculptural group for Karolinen, a Karlstad property with 50 000 m² of floor space housing a variety of national authorities (Stensman, 1987). The building has changed hands several times, most recently in the summer of 2011, when a company registered in Romania sold it to another real estate company. Both managers and local landlords have come and gone, making it difficult to tell who is responsible for the art.

The work consists of 13 parts which the artist envisaged as lined up through the dining hall where they are stationed. But with that configuration they now stand in the way of the salad buffet and dining queue. Because of this change in the arrangement of the room, it has been relegated to the big picture window at the end of the room, with the result that the 13 pieces cannot be seen properly against new backlighting that dazzles the viewer (Fig. 6). In addition, the sculptural group is dangerously close to the food, as shown by grease stains in the porous surface. As it consists of several parts that are occasionally relocated, the work is not easily kept together: some parts may be positioned close by while other parts are to be found hidden behind the kitchen.

The artist paid several visits in an attempt to solve the problems concerning the positioning of the work, and so, after her death, did her son. The work has been well received and parts of it have been lent for exhibition at Waldemarsudde in Stockholm, 2006. Following the municipality's new commitment to an officer responsible for public art, interest in both acquisition and management has grown. Even so, with an increasing speed of change in ownership, management, and tenants, there is an evident risk of dislocation and lack of interest in the work of art. The property owner is keen to

find a solution accommodating his own desire for more efficient use of the floor space and provision for users' needs, while at the same time deferring to copyright considerations.

Findings

Heritage conservation needs

Property owners present very different levels of experience and competence in the care and preservation of public art. There are great differences between individual property owners, both private and public, in terms of their willingness – and ability – to administer public art, irrespective of who once commissioned it and who is currently managing it. Several property owners lack heritage conservation resources or do not know where to turn for advice and support concerning matters of management of the works of art in their possession. The property owner is not always even aware of the presence of a public work of art in the building. It is not uncommon for knowledge of the work of art and its genesis to be possessed by one person, and not uncommon for that person to have retired.

Frequently, the work done is more of the nature of make and mend than of long-term preventive conservation. Contacts with museums are rare, unless a museum has conservators available for consultation or they have appropriate heritage expertise. There is widespread ignorance of what needs to be done and how. Guidelines are lacking and the situation is aggravated by an unclear allocation of responsibilities between the parties owning, managing, and supervising the site-specific works of art.

Knowledge is lacking about the property owner's legal responsibility under the Copyright Act to secure the artist's approval for changes in a work of art, or relocation of it. The law stipulates that the work of art is protected for 70 years after the death of the artist. Nevertheless, it can happen that a change is made without the artist, conservator, or heritage authority being contacted.

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN

On the other hand, the present survey has made clear that owners of the works of art existing under municipal or regional auspices are frequently in touch with the heritage authorities and museums. However, on local or municipal level, there is not always a particular person whose responsibilities include public art, and if there is, then that person usually has many other duties as well and does not have time to exercise supervision or to ensure that management is effectuated.

There are, with few exceptions, not established channels of communication or networks between property owners and the heritage conservation sector. There are also big differences at both regional and local government levels as to how the management of public art is perceived. Even if the regional or local heritage authorities have the competence, legal instruments are not sufficient to supply the owners with preservation guidance, legal advice, or economic support. Together with the fact that there is an increasing change in the number of owners of the buildings, the site-specific public art is at serious risk.

At governmental level, attention is now paid to the problem, this project being a result. In addition, the National Public Art Council has been assigned to collaborate with several relevant authorities along with local municipalities and property owners, to distribute funding and implement projects for the artistic embellishment of public spaces not owned by the government.

Conclusion

This project and its case studies have brought to light several shortcomings in the administration of building-related public art in public and private ownership. For example, heritage conservation authorities could play an important role in the long-term preservation of twentieth-century public art by meeting the need for heritage conservation advice and support existing among private and public owners of public art. Opportunities of financial support, similarly, could help to preserve public art with the same degree of consideration as for historic art, and particularly in buildings which

are threatened with demolition or which are subject to changes of ownership or function.

The existing policy instruments, both statutory provisions such as the Heritage Conservation Act and systems of funding support, could be developed in order to meet actual needs. A national overview of the works of art owned by public and private parties is lacking at present as well as an in-depth discussion about which heritage-related and artistic qualities it is important to preserve. A survey is needed in order to be able to prioritize what can be counted as a common heritage deserving of preservation and to avoid excessive differences between individual regions or property owners. Better cooperation among cultural heritage authorities would diminish regional and ownership differences as well as call attention to management and conservation efforts.

New funding has been granted for another project on legal instruments applied to site-specific public art, as well as on its supervision and management. The project will be conducted in partnership with university departments of law, conservation, and art history.

Research into existing policy instruments and ways in which they can be developed will help to facilitate the long-term administration of public art and a national survey of the cultural qualities which public art represents, and will make it possible for a significant heritage to be preserved for posterity.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the National Heritage Board and the National Public Art Council for making this research project possible. Thanks must also go to the Museum of Public Art and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions for close cooperation, and to the Helsingborg Museum. The authors are grateful to all the property owners, managers, tenants, conservators, municipal, regional and national government heritage conservation representatives, and private persons who assisted with the case studies.

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN

Appendix

Questionnaire sent to the owner of each case study, together with a letter of explanation and information on the project.

Placement/legal owner & management

1. Who is the present legal owner of the building?
2. Which other owners have there been since the building was constructed?
3. Who is responsible for the management of the building, and thereby the work of art?
4. Who were the previous managers of the building?
5. Who was the architect of the building?
6. Who commissioned the work of art?
7. Is the work of art registered in the documents of the building (in the same way as other permanent installations)?

Condition of the work of art

8. What materials and which technique have been used to create the work of art?
9. Has the work of art been moved or dismantled?
If yes, where is it stored or placed today?
10. Has the work of art been changed without the consent of the artist?
If yes, in what way?
11. Has the work of art been damaged? If yes, in what way?
 - a) Changes in appearance (buckling, cockling, dirt, scratches, wear, etc.)?
 - b) Missing parts?
 - c) Material change (color change, loose parts, cracks)?
 - d) Vandalism (graffiti, broken parts)?
 - e) Is the work of art not functioning as intended (water, electricity, light, audio-visual techniques, etc.)?

Care and conservation

12. Has the work of art been inventoried and documented?

If yes, when did this last happen and does it happen on a regular basis?

13. Is there a maintenance plan for the work of art?
14. Has the work of art been conserved/restored?
 - a) If yes, when?
 - b) Who executed the conservation/restoration (artist, conservator, other professional)?

Contacts with conservators, artist(s) and cultural heritage authorities

15. Has the legal owner had contacts with conservators over time?
16. Has the legal owner had contacts with cultural heritage authorities over time?
17. Has the legal owner had contacts with the artist(s) over time?

References

- Hermerén, K. 2008. Conservation of art in public places. In: J. Bridgland, ed. *ICOM Committee for Conservation 15th Triennial Meeting Preprints New Delhi*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers Pvt Ltd, vol. I, pp. 469-474.
- Olsson, H. 2009. *Copyright. Svensk och internationell upphovsrätt*. Mölnlycke: Norstedts Juridik.
- Stensman, M., ed. 1987. *Konsten är på väg att bliva allas. Statens konstråd 1937–1987*. Stockholm: The National Public Art Council.
- Wahlström, K., Orrje, H. & Nilsson, J. 2008. *Beställd konst. Fastighetsägarnas vård och underhåll av byggnadsanknuten konst*. Stockholm: The National Public Art Council.

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN



Figure 1. *John Blund (the Sandman)*, Nils Dardel, Stockholm, 1928. Photo: Karin Hermerén.



Figure 2. *Paket i långa banor (Long lines of parcels)*, Lennart Rodhe, Östersund, 1948. Photo: Karin Hermerén.

DEN UTSATTA KONSTEN



Figure 3. *Hyllning till Ivar Lo-Johansson (Tribute to Ivar Lo-Johansson)*, Atte Johansson, Sollefteå, 1969–1971. Photo: Karin Hermerén.

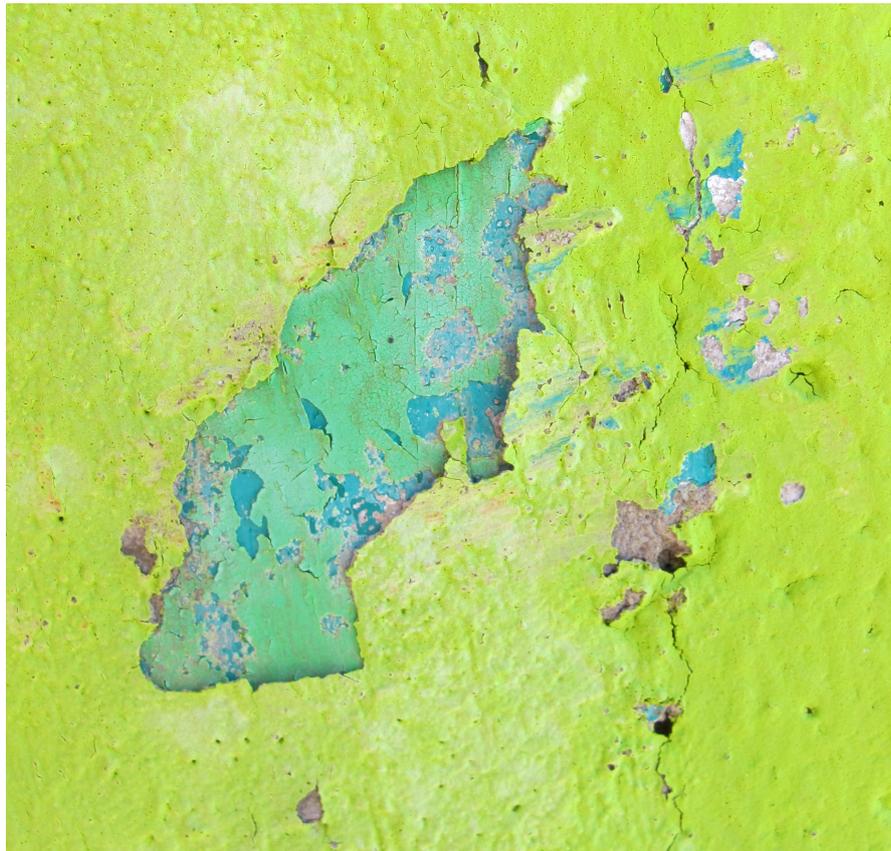


Figure 4. Detail of *Hyllning till Ivar Lo-Johansson*. Flaking paint with the original paint layer clearly visible. Photo: Karin Hermerén.

II. EXPOSED AND UNSEEN



Figure 5. Wall of marbles by Endre Nemes, Göteborg, 1955. Photo: Karin Hermerén.



Figure 6. Sculptures made of terracotta by Hertha Hillfon, Karlstad, 1976. Photo: Karin Hermerén.