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ABSTRACT

Nordstrand, Charlotta Hanner, Art life in Gothenburg: The Art Society, the Museum Collection and the Patron Bengt Erland Dahlgren

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The general subject matter of this dissertation concerns the activities promoting art life in early to mid 19th century Gothenburg. Gothenburg has long enjoyed a reputation of being the "city of donors." Located on the Swedish west coast, with waterway connections to the woodland interiors and the iron-producing works, Gothenburg served as a very efficient export harbour during the Industrial Revolution. During this time there was a considerable common interest in promoting Scandinavian solidarity - in political, economic and cultural terms.

The first Art and Handicrafts Society, active between 1842 and 1846 and initiated by the school principal and scientist, Carl Palmstedt, maintained a strong emphasis on practical artisan work. However, a mere four years later, in 1846, the art section was discontinued. In 1854, the Art Society of Gothenburg (*Göteborgs konstförening*) was founded by the leading liberal newspaper editor S. A. Hedlund and extremely wealthy art patrons like the merchants B. E. Dahlgren and J. J. (J:son) Dickson of Scottish origin. Artists and architects were also included in the Board, and their participation was equally important for the sustainability of the association. Influence from the Copenhagen Art Society became visible when the painter G. Saloman, of Danish origin, initiated the creation of the Gothenburg Art Society museum collection in 1856.

One of the goals set by the Art Society was to enable artists to exhibit and sell their art. Accordingly, the art exhibitions arranged by the Society represented the first recurrent opportunity for exhibiting art in Gothenburg. Nonetheless, the Society's most important mission was the establishment of a museum for industry and art in Gothenburg. One startling finding of the research documented here concerns the extensive number of women artists participation in the early art life of Gothenburg. The new market for art and the new public which sustained it required new art motifs. The resulting motifs mirrored the growing democracy and the central position of the burgers.

Of tremendous importance for the sustainability of the Göteborg Museum of Art were the donations of Bengt Erland and Anna Lisa Dahlgren. The Dahlgrens maintained a personal interest in art; and their collection included some of the most influential Düsseldorf painters, notably Carl H. Lützow d'Unker and Adolph Tidemand.

Keywords: Art collecting, Art societies, Gothenburg, 19th century art, B. E. Dahlgren

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