UiT The Arctic University of Norway

The Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education

The Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum 2014–2020

Decolonisation in Practice

Sarah Annemarie Caufield

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Thesis supervisor: Trude Fonneland
Professor in Cultural Studies
UiT The Arctic University Museum

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Abstract

National art museums are integral to a nation's cultural landscape, acting as both a witness to the past, and a source of inspiration going forward. Yet the boundaries of Indigenous cultural regions don't necessarily coincide with officially recognised national borders. Northern Norway is both a part of Norway, as well as a part of Sápmi, yet Sámi representation in national Norwegian cultural institutions has been demonstrably poor. In 2017, however, the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (Northern Norwegian Art Museum; NNKM) addressed this issue, reinventing itself as the Sámi Dáiddamusea[x] to point at what was lacking, but also as a first step in its own process towards decolonisation, deinstitutionalisation, and indigenisation. Using the Dáiddamusea[x] project as a turning point, this thesis takes a cultural analysis approach grounded in an Indigenous methodologies framework to reflect upon the NNKM's development up to early 2020 to demonstrate how the museum used its position and resources to address its own colonial status as a museum while striving to become a better ally to the Sámi. Using case studies and interviews, this research looks at programming choices and considerations in how it presented itself, as well as at the relationships it fostered over this period, to show that the NNKM's interest in decolonisation were more than superficial. Rather, the organisation was not only committed to changing itself, but also to inspire a decolonial shift in both the local Tromsø and broader Norwegian cultural communities. This thesis ends by considering the fragility and difficulty of the process of decolonisation, however, particularly for an organisation that operates within the confines of a much larger institutional framework – in this case, national government bodies. However, while every decolonial process is different and contextual, the NNKM's progress nonetheless highlights ways in which other cultural institutions could consider when attempting their own process of decolonisation and indigenisation.

Keywords: *Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum; There Is No; Sámi Dáiddamusea; indigenisation; decolonisation; deinstitutionalisation; Rose-Marie Huuva; HOS NNKM*

A note on language and name choices

Writing a thesis in English about a subject in Sápmi and Northern Norway around the topic of decolonisation by, among other details, making Indigenous language visible means I've been very conscious of which languages I use in this thesis. However, jumping between three languages quickly becomes confusing, particularly while trying to keep my thesis accessible to readers who might not be familiar with the region or the languages.

In Tromsø, the colonising culture and language is Norwegian. North Sámi is the most spoken Sámi language in the region, but its visibility is still limited. English, while not official in any way, is widely spoken, understood, and visible throughout the whole of Norway and Sápmi, and while English does come with colonising baggage, that is outside the Sápmi-Norway relationship.

Therefore, I have prioritised my language choices as: North Sámi > English > Norwegian.

With the exception of the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (as it's the focus of my research), I have used English names of Norwegian organisations or government departments to minimise the in-text translations.

To hold space for Sámi language, however, when referring to the Sámi organisations, I use their own name, with an English translation accompanying the first instance of their use.

For places, however, I have primarily used the Norwegian names due to reader familiarity.

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1 Introduction

1.1 The museum as a site of disruption

Art has long been used as a medium for activism. But what of the institutions in which art is displayed? In Norway, there has been on-going discussion about how to decolonise the arts (Falkenås, 2017) to shift cultural and institutional practices away from the traditional, "Western" academic ways of presenting the arts and culture. Tromsø's Nordnorsk Kunstmusem (NNKM; Northern Norwegian Art Museum) has been a Northern Norwegian cultural anchor and one of Norway's top tier national art museums since it opened in 1985, and for many years it would present art and exhibits that followed so-called "classical" ways of presenting art, often highlighting artworks by internationally-known, historically- and canonically-recognised Norwegian "masters" – Edvard Munch, Peder Balke, and so on.

In 2017, however, this began to change. The use of one particular exhibit, *There Is No*, and its performance as the Sámi Dáiddamusea[x] (SDMX) was the NNKM's bold, brazen attempt to kickstart a move to decolonise and indigenise as an institution. *There Is No* turned the NNKM into the SDMX overnight, rebranding the institution both inside and out, from the building to the museum's online presence. In transforming into the SDMX, the NNKM was making a statement on the need to decolonise art institutions in Norway, pointing to the absence of an actual, physical high profile, Sámi-focused art museum in Sápmi and Norway, as well as the lack of Sámi artists being represented in the nation's largest publicly funded cultural institutions. The 2017 exhibit was recognised nationally for its effectiveness and daring style, and is still spoken of proudly to this day, not only by museum staff but also by the Tromsø community. But the SDMX performance project was only a first step towards trying to create sustainable shifts in terms of who exactly the NNKM was for and how it should be going about meeting its mandate of representing "Northern Norway". Still, it is one thing to endeavour to change, but another to create lasting change.

Recognising that the SDMX was a turning point in the museum's exhibit history in terms of Sámi representation, inclusion, and influence, this thesis begins by looking at the NNKM in the years leading up to the 2017 exhibit to then be able to compare the organisation to what it had become by 2020. Were there sustainable shifts away from a colonial mindset? What sort of impact has the NNKM since had on the local cultural milieu? How has the NNKM's involvement with the Sámi creative community changed, who is guiding these shifts in relationships, and who are these shifts serving? Most importantly, what can this all lead to?

1.2 Project scope and research questions

When my research began in 2019, my intention was to explore the NNKM and its efforts to decolonise, identifying the *There Is No* SDMX project as a starting point in the museum's trajectory. At that point, two years after that exhibit, the NNKM did seem to have successfully built connection to the Sámi arts community, winning great respect and support from across Sápmi as a museum that was a true ally, eager not only to decolonise but also to indigenise. That the NNKM had made progress in decolonising did not seem to be in question. It had become expected to see the regular inclusion of Sámi artists in exhibits and programming, to see gákti at openings, and not uncommon to have Sámi representatives speak at openings when it seemed relevant. The NNKM had normalised the inclusion and presence of the Sámi community on as well as inside its walls. As such, my research plan was to look at the details of when and where these shifts were taking place particularly in programming and presentation choices, considering how and why they had an impact as well as to consider the sustainability of these changes. However, after having collected the majority of my data and already in the writing stage, internal politics began to unfold at the NNKM in late-spring 2020 which quickly had impacts outwards, and as of May 2021 had affected the NNKM's status substantially with the Sámi community (as well as the wider Tromsø community). As such, I will refer to these events and current situation as it stands in Chapter 6, but am unable to include them in my overall thesis analysis. Instead, this research project specifically covers the period of 2014 to 2020, ending with the *HOS NNKM* exhibit.

My research questions are as follows:

- Using 2017's *There Is No* SDMX performative exhibit as a key before-and-after moment in its programming history, how has decolonisation and indigenisation taken place within the NNKM? How has the NNKM reflected upon and used its position as a national cultural institution to dismantle colonial ways of thinking and being?
- How has it adapted itself and its practices to become more inclusive and better-representative of both Northern Norway and Sápmi, and shown itself to be an ally to the Sámi in the Norwegian story of decolonisation, and what have been the ongoing ripple effects?
- Finally, at which point can decolonial change be attributed to the organisation as a whole rather than simply the actions of an individual?

I will be using two perspectives to assess these shifts:

- *Internal*, in terms of the choices and decisions the NNKM has made in its exhibition and programming development as well as how it has chosen to present itself publicly;
- *External*, with regards to the experiences, reciprocation, or responses of the Sámi community towards the NNKM, with a focus on the experiences of Sámi artist Rose Marie Huuva as a case study for the reasons mentioned below.

To address the internal perspective while limiting the scope of my research, I focus predominantly on the museum's choices curatorially and in how it has presented itself, rather than the organisation's daily business operations. Brenna (2018) has noted that "[t]he museum should be a meeting place and a repository for societal memory". Kuokkanen (2000), however, notes that educational institutions have long been central to colonising practices. As holders and disseminators of knowledge, as well as sources of entertainment and events, museums therefore have strong potential to impact their communities. As such, it seems appropriate to focus on their choices surrounding their public presentation – programming, presentation, and community-building. I do acknowledge that an analysis of an organisation's internal day-to-day operations is also vitally important when assessing an institution's understandings of privilege or oppression. However, an organisational analysis of the NNKM's operational structure

would have been a master's thesis on its own. Therefore, I will simply note here that there remains an opportunity for interdisciplinary research into Norwegian museum operational structures and their decolonial practices.

Another choice I made was to not focus on the NNKM Board as a part of my research and data gathering. I come from a North American background where boards generally hold a great deal of power in determining the course of an organisation, both legally and financially (Ferrer, 2018; Weil, 1999), and initially thought to include the NNKM board in my research. I raised this idea with various colleagues, particularly those working in Norwegian museums, and was told that that wouldn't add much to my research, as the board in the Norwegian organisational structure is largely hands-off (personal correspondence, 2018-2019). Even NNKM staff told me that while the four-year strategic plans are a collaborative affair, which are ultimately approved by the board, it's the director who develops year-long programming plans, using staff input to do so. The board approves the programming, but generally does not involve itself in the details, trusting the director and staff to determine how larger strategic goals will be realised (McGowan interview, 2019; Saus interview, 2020). If I were to rewrite this thesis to include mid-2020 to today, the board would have most certainly been included in my data gathering. However, given the positive relationship the board had with NNKM staff during the period that this research has focused upon, it didn't seem relevant to include the voice of the board in this thesis.

This leads to the last detail I must clarify. Throughout this thesis, I often refer to "the NNKM" and its actions or choices. By late-2020, reading new updates of yet another board or staff member resigning in protest to the NNKM Board's decisions and conduct, as well as seeing the local community's upset responses to the whole affair, I realised the importance of defining who I mean by "the NNKM". Again, this thesis examines the period before this schism in the NNKM's identity, and while disagreements in vision may well have occurred before 2020, the overall trend was one of support and approval, as indicated by the board continuously approving without raising concerns at each new year's proposed programming plans. Furthermore, pre-2020, the fact that the board took part in collaborative strategic planning with the NNKM staff and their ongoing annual approval of programming (Saus interview, 2020) also suggests the board's support for the direction in which the Director and NNKM staff were taking the museum.

I therefore define my use of "the NNKM" in this thesis to refer to the combination of both museum staff and the board pre-2020, unless otherwise indicated.

1.3 Method and theoretical framework

As an interdisciplinary research project, this thesis draws on numerous academic fields of knowledge, including decolonial theory, Indigenous studies, Sámi studies, European history, art history, and museology. Kuokkanen (2000) has noted that an Indigenous paradigm offers researchers "a new set of tools for analyzing" which move beyond Eurocentric duality and challenge "biased privileging of Western systems of knowledge" (pp. 414–415). Nakata et al. (2007) have similarly highlighted colonial binaries as problematic, and has instead proposed the value of the concept of a cultural interface to define the meeting space of multiple knowledge systems that can cover everything from politics, social discourse, history, all the different perspectives we use to make sense of the world. My methodological research analysis has been greatly informed by Indigenous methodologies and the values inherent to them, particularly with respect to prioritising my interviewees' experiences, and the consideration of a multitude of co-existing contexts and truths. Starting from an Indigenous framework, I am conscious of the fact that academia is merely one of many types of knowledge, and that academic disciplines including museology and art history have historically prioritised very Western Eurocentric perspectives, often to the detriment of other ways of knowing (Akena, 2012; Denzin et al., 2008). Indigenous studies creates space in academia to question, challenge, explore, and analyse knowledge from a wide variety of sources – academic, traditional, and other – to reveal previously missed connections. As Nakata et al. (2012) note, "the production of counter-narratives is the work of decoloniality" (p. 129).

Indigenous methodologies, as interpretive research practices, "turn the world into a series of performances and representations [...which] create the space for critical, collaborative, dialogical work" (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 6). To take a decolonising perspective in research is to question and challenge the power dynamics in the colonial dynamic (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012). My job as researcher has been to understand and attempt to compile the various truths and realities experienced by others, and to try to

reflect this in all its nuance as best as I can. I have taken a cultural analysis approach in my current research, drawing from these numerous fields and finding inspiration in the pluralistic nature of reality. I have approached my research through interviews, as well as case studies which have been further informed by said interviews. My practice has been not only to use the direct answers I was told, but also to examine *how* these responses were given – the word or framing choices used when telling the story – and what this might suggest in terms of deeper motivations or personal experiences.

1.4 Data collection

This research was conducted with approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data. Data was gathered using interviews, visits to the relevant institutions, attending the 2019 Sámi Dáiddafestivála, and through use of the NNKM's own materials including its online presence, past exhibit catalogues, and other promotional materials. Research interviews were semi-structured, adapted to suit the informant's role and my reason for interviewing them. They were done in three waves which was largely coincidental, though this did in fact ultimately benefit my research. In autumn 2019 I met with Jérémie McGowan, then-NNKM Director, and Anne May Olli, director of the RiddoDuottarMuseat. I was also able to visit the RiddoDuottarMuseat for myself, to use it as a potential comparison when considering the possible contrasts between a Sámi and a western-European museum. Then, in November 2019, I attended the Dáiddafestivála in Alta where I was able to get insight into current discussions surround the Sámi art sector, which was also an ideal context to meet with Rose-Marie Huuva and Máret Ánne Sara, two Sámi artists. My interest in speaking with Huuva was due to her numerous experiences being part of NNKM exhibits, beginning in 2014 and continuing until today. Sara, while not connected to the NNKM, is an artist and a Sámi activist who has been a strong, outspoken voice politically regarding Sámi visibility and rights in general, but also with regards to Sámi presence in the national art institutions. Finally, in November 2020, I met with Marianne Saus, Special Project Coordinator at the NNKM, to discuss *HOS NNKM* and the project's development. While unplanned, the timing of this final interview was fortuitous in that it also gave me insight into how things were operating at the museum after McGowan's departure from the NNKM, both in terms of what was said, but also how things were spoken about.

In addition to these data-gathering meetings, I was also a regular visitor to the NNKM from April 2016 onwards. Before 2019, my visits were merely as someone with an interest in the arts sector or as a tour guide, and I would learn about the exhibit topics in detail enough to inspire and educate my guests. Once I had chosen this thesis topic, however, my visits to the NNKM were also done while wearing my critical academic Indigenous Studies hat, particularly if the exhibit was potentially pertinent to my research (i.e., *Kunstner: Rose-Marie Huuva*, *Like Betzy*, *HOS NNKM*). As such, I have been able to supplement my analysis of these later exhibits with my own recollections, notes, or photos. Even so, while the impression one takes away with them after a museum visit is as vital as what they experience at the time (Dubin, 1999; Tøndborg, 2013), in the writing of this thesis I endeavoured to hold my own experiences as only supplementary to the other forms of data gathered, with more weight given to what I have been able to assess based on interviewee descriptions, exhibit catalogues, public response based on reviews or other published media (primarily Norwegian and local media, including *Nordlys*, *iTromsø*, NRK, *Aftenposten*, *Ságat*, *Ávvir*), and the NNKM's own publicity material, including its website.

1.5 Ethics and positioning

Kovach (2009) has written that "research is imbued with a power hierarchy, with the researcher having final control over the research design, data collection, and interpretation" (p. 125). Placing my research in an Indigenous framework has therefore made me conscious of the fact that my choices in the way I gather, analyse, and present my findings has an impact on decolonisation within academia, and that these moments shared during my research are ultimately moments where "the work of resistance, critique, and empowerment can occur" (Denzin et al., 2008, p. 6). As the researcher, my own experiences, knowledge, and privilege influence my perspectives and interpretation of the world, and therefore my methodological and interpretive approach. Therefore, self-reflexivity and an awareness of what I write, how I phrase it, and what isn't included has been ever-present throughout this project.

Identity is multifaceted, and privilege is not binary, as both Chilisa (2012) and Olsen (2018a, 2018b) have discussed. I am Caucasian, born Canadian, naturalised Australian,

with Western European (particularly German) heritage and influences. I grew up on unceded Coast Salish Kwikwetlem land, although that wasn't as acknowledged when I was young as it is today. Growing up in the greater Vancouver region, I was exposed to and taught to respect Pacific Northwest Coastal Indigenous culture and introduced to the idea that my experience of a place is not the only one. I was introduced to the concepts and impacts of de-/colonisation during my bachelor's studies both practically (through activism and extracurricular involvement) and academically (through my studies), particularly in the context of arts and culture. In Australia, my postal address was in Greater Melbourne, but the traditional owners of the land are the Wurundjeri people. The development of my understanding of my position in Australia was very much informed by Indigenous and colonial history due to the fact that my first job there focused on educating Australian audiences about the First Nations and Torres Strait Islander experiences through song and performance. Through living, travelling, and working in multiple cultural contexts, I have learned both to compartmentalise or adapt my own beliefs or understandings of the world – a constant work in progress – as I have realised that most "absolutes" are in fact contextual or even false. With the influences of these experiences, my experience of living in Tromsø/Romsa/Tromssa[1] in Northern Norway has been one of building a nuanced, layered understanding of a place that is simultaneously many things: Norwegian, Northern Norwegian, Sámi, and Sea Sámi.

I hold onto these different realities and experiences all at once, among other identities, but even if there are ways and times that I am also a part of minority groups, ultimately, as someone who is white, educated, multilingual, and grew up comfortably, the majority of my world experience has been as a part of a dominant culture; this is also the position in which I exist as a researcher. With this particular topic, however, I am also positioned as an outsider, albeit with some connection and investment to the NNKM as a semi-local. This has granted me the opportunity to observe and reflect upon the NNKM in a way that I otherwise could not have, had I grown up in this cultural setting. But I have tried to do so with all that I have learned to this point in my life, being either a part of a place and a culture, or an invited guest observing and learning.

[1] The Norwegian, North Sámi, and Kvääni names for this city, respectively.

1.6 Some definitions

This thesis refers to both decolonisation and deinstitutionalisation. There is overlap in the meaning of these terms, but also distinction. Ultimately, they both refer to the dismantling of a power dynamic that has existed through the erasure or subjugation of alternative realities and truths while privileging those of the oppressor. When speaking of colonisation, these alternative realities are rooted in culture and worldview, and we refer primarily to the erasure of Indigenous and non-coloniser ways of being. When speaking of institutionalisation, the focus is on structure, hierarchy, and operations, all of which have strong impacts on alternative or minority groups defined by gender, heteronormativity, religion, race, and, again, indigeneity.

Ahmed (2012), writing about museums in particular, makes the point that "when things become institutional they recede from consciousness," describing the act of institutionalisation as when ways of operating and being "become routine or ordinary" (p. 12). Jilani (2018) has noted that decolonisation "demands fundamental change rather than mere representation. It is about how museums can facilitate historical accuracy by engaging their majority white audiences with how cultures, societies and national identities today remain deeply shaped by the era of colonialism". Ziherl (2015) has commented that, "as a political project, decolonisation has never been separated from questions of organisation and the materiality of justice" (p.172), thus creating strong crossover between the processes of decolonisation and deinstitutionalisation.

The act of decolonisation is in many ways connected to deinstitutionalisation in that both require self-reflection and self-awareness to consider that which has been taken for granted, as well as who has been included or excluded in the defining of what is "ordinary". Both concepts challenge and problematize ideas of privilege, knowledge, status, structure, value, and more, and refer to the process of reflecting upon how these are ingrained in both tangible operations as well as abstract concepts of understood realities. Importantly, both decolonisation and deinstitutionalisation are words of action, defining a process not an end point. They describe a proactive dismantling of systems which have been constructed, integrated, and reinforced in such a way that we have perhaps often forgotten that they are, indeed, merely constructs, not truths.

Choi and Krauss (2017) define deinstitutionalisation as an ongoing act of unlearning which "denotes an active critical investigation of normative structures and practices in order to become aware, and getting rid of taken-for-granted 'truths' of theory and practice, [...which] never exist[ed] in the past tense, but in the ongoing present and for the future" (pp. 68–75), though this definition also lends itself well to the concept of decolonisation. Specific to cultural institutions, the processes of decolonisation and deinstitutionalisation occur both internally, in the way in which the organisation operates on a daily level (e.g., in hierarchies and existing power dynamics or in values that inform decision-making) as well as externally (e.g., how the organisation interacts and integrates with outside communities and which groups it supports or shows kinship towards). Change in one of these facets doesn't automatically guarantee change in the other, though it would be difficult to argue that an organisation intentionally striving to either decolonise or deinstitutionalise if both internal and external aspects are not being considered simultaneously. Afterall, as Ziherl (2015) notes, "as a political project, decolonisation has never been separated from questions of organisation and the materiality of justice" (pp. 172–173).

There is criticism of the term and concept of decolonisation, however. Finbog (2020) notes that "to decolonize is the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies and the privilege of Western thinking [making it] a process centered within the colonial structures that perpetuate the existing conditions of academia" (p. 52). This further points to the importance of not simply decolonising, but also deinstitutionalising to break down the hierarchies of knowledge and status as well. Moreover, it points to the importance of indigenisation as a part of the process – to not simply undo beliefs and structures based on Western colonial ways of thinking, but to adapt and integrate other ways of thought or action, to become something new. Indigenisation is similar to decolonisation in that it is also the process of recognising and dismantling power constructs that have dis-included Indigenous thought and knowledge (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kovach, 2010; Kurtz, 2013). However, unlike decolonisation which frames the action and focus on what to draw back from (i.e., colonialist ways, thought, priorities), indigenisation centres the focus on Indigenous culture and ways of being, not only as a means of inclusion but also as a starting point, a place to build from (Kreps, 2015).

Decolonisation seeks to reverse and amend. Indigenisation seeks to build and create.

1.7 Structure

This thesis has six chapters. Chapter 2 outlines the wider contexts relevant to this topic: Norway and its colonial history, the Sámi situation in Norway from the 20th Century onwards, and the museum context, both specifically in Norway as well as within the greater conversation surrounding the decolonising of museology.

Chapter 3 focuses specifically on the NNKM, first positioning it geographically, historically, and socio-politically, and then looking at its programming focus with a particular focus on the period from 2014 until 2017.

Chapter 4 continues the NNKM's development with a close examination of the 2017 *There Is No* SDMX performance and exhibit as a case study, both its development and the final product, as facilitated by Jérémie McGowan and Anne May Olli, the co-developers of the project.

Chapter 5 then looks at the ripple effects of 2017's SDMX project, using two exhibits as further case studies: *Kunstner: Rose-Marie Huuva* in 2019 and *HOS NNKM* in 2020, to show that the SDMX was more than simply a passing show of solidarity with the Sámi community, and rather a commitment to decolonisation.

Finally, Chapter 6 acts as a summary of the NNKM's efforts until 2020. It also reflects upon the course of its decolonisation process, with acknowledgement of the bureaucratic events that took place in 2020 which both complicated the NNKM's decolonial trajectory, but which also, through these complications, reveal the strength of the changes the NNKM had made from 2017 until 2020. They also reveal the fragility of the process of decolonisation, particularly as a public institution which can be at the whim of national political change.

2 Placing the NNKM in context

2.1 A starting point

To decolonise as an organisation is a complicated process. It's a journey with a general direction, but it's impossible to begin with a certain, defined goal of where things are headed. A cultural institution in the process of dismantling the oppressive systems under which it operates can look to other cases for inspiration, or to recognise its own blind spots, but there is no tried-and-true roadmap towards decolonisation. Each process is different, due to historical, social, and cultural differences – both of the coloniser and those who were colonised (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Therefore, it is necessary to consider the where, why, and how of the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (NNKM) as it existed in 2017 to make sense of where the museum was starting from, and to better understand the choices it made going forward. In the case of the NNKM, major key contexts are geographical, historical, and socio-political, but even these are multi-faceted. This chapter will background the details relevant to my research, guided using the knowledge of those I interviewed because, as in all things, there are many versions of reality, particularly when it comes to breaking down circumstances and processes as complex as decolonisation. First, let's begin with geography.

2.2 Tromsø / Romsa / Tromssa

The NNKM is located in Tromsø, the eighth most populous town in Norway with just over 77,000 in 2021 (Statistisk sentralbyrå, 2021), located 350km above the Arctic Circle. Its name translates to the "Northern Norwegian Art Museum", which would seem to suggest a relatively straightforward explanation of what its mandate should be.

However, "Northern Norway" is actually a complicated concept.

There's another way we can frame the NNKM's location. The NNKM is located in Romsa, the largest[2] city geographically in the Norwegian region of Sápmi and a city with a high number of Sámi-language-speaking inhabitants. Despite this fact, the NNKM was built upon a very Norwegian understanding of its name and its mandate. Considering its location, this might seem like a surprising omission of inclusion, and so we must also place the NNKM, Northern Norway, and Sápmi historically.

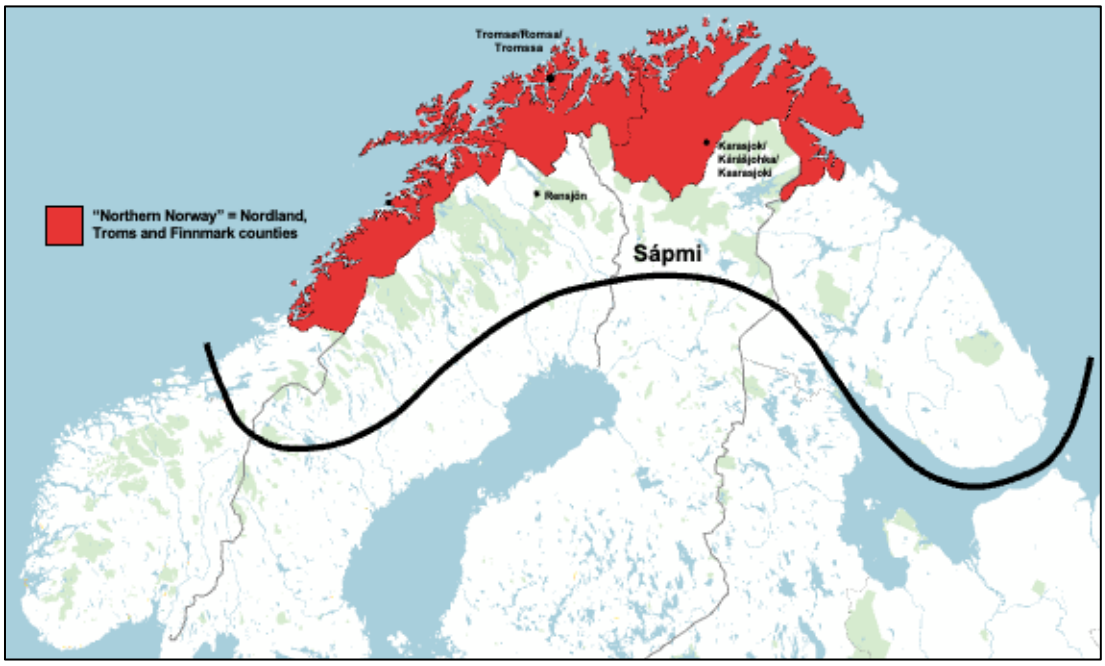

Figure I: The NNKM's mandated area of representation, as per its by-laws – "Northern Norway" – in red, and Sápmi, located above the line. As Sápmi has no officially recognised borders, the boundary depicted is approximate. The NNKM is located in Tromsø; the RiddoDuottarMuseat is located in Karasjok; Rose-Marie Huuva (see Ch. 5) comes from Rensjön. Adapted from map created using mapcreator.io.

2.3 Norway's colonial history, past and present

The Sámi are "one people in four nations" (J. B. Henriksen, 1999, p. 16), spread across the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and across the Kola Peninsula in Russia. It's uncertain exactly how long the Sámi have lived in this area, but we know that they were already well-established during the Viking ages (L. I. Hansen & Olsen, 2004, 2014; Storli, 1994) and there are theories that they were here as far back as the first century C.E. (Tacitus, cited in Finbog, 2020). And yet, for a people whose presence

[2] Most maps of Sápmi exclude Tråante/Trondheim, but some do which would then make Romsa the second largest geographical city in the Norwegian part of Sápmi. As an unrecognised nation-state there are no officially set borders, and the specifics vary depending what time period or which aspect of Sámi culture the map is depicting.

extends so far back, their history is poorly represented in academic research, and there is limited certainty regarding many details of their past (Kortekangas, 2017). Part of this can be attributed to colonialism embedded in academia, but it is also due to the fact that historically, Sámi culture has been an oral culture, meaning that stories existed, but in ways that academia has traditionally neglected or ignored (Knopf, 2015; Kuokkanen, 2008). Oral histories also depend on new generations to hear, learn, and pass along the stories into the future, a trend which colonial practices often disrupt.

As a culture that has existed for centuries across a wide geographical region, Sámi culture is not homogenous. And yet, popular depictions today would suggest that reindeer herding is integral to Sámi culture. In fact, only about 10% of Sámi practice reindeer herding today; meanwhile the Coastal Sámi fought for many years to have their culture recognised as similarly "authentically Sámi" (Andresen et al., 2021; Baglo, 2019; Lätsch, 2012). There are root similarities between the different Sámi regional groups, but practices, lifestyles, and languages vary across Sápmi, reflecting differences in geography, climate, and seasonal changes (Axelsson & Sköld, 2006). Furthermore, the strengthening of borders and national identities have also led to regional differences in history, politics, and culture, which have also impacted Sámi lifestyle and culture differently, depending on which borders surround them. Today, despite being "one people", all Sámi do not enjoy the same rights or representation across all four nation states due to these different national and cultural influences (Josefsen & Skogerbø, 2021; Lilleslåtten, 2021). For the purposes of this thesis, I will be speaking specifically to the Sámi experience in the Norwegian context, unless otherwise specified.

In 1850, the introduction of the Norwegianisation Policy ("Fornorskningspolitikk") marked the start of the most destructive and damaging assimilation policies towards Sámi culture in Norway (Axelsson & Sköld, 2006; Minde, 2003a). Instituted after Norway declared its independence from the Kingdom of Denmark in 1814, the policy was framed as part of a national drive to identify and reinforce a distinct Norwegian culture in the face of the threat of "difference" – particularly from within the nation, as well as racist attitudes towards the Sámi that considered their culture to be backwards and less civilised (Finbog, 2015; Jernsletten, 1998; Kortekangas, 2017). The result of the Norwegianisation Policy, however, was that the Sámi were forcibly made to abandon their languages and cultural practices in favour of "Norwegianness" – part through legal

ramifications or punishment for expressing their Sámi identity through language, clothing or culture, and part through seeding guilt and disgust in one's culture, driving people to disown it and/or their language, taking up the Norwegian mask instead.

An oft-used tactic of controlling the narrative in colonial settings is to distance people from their culture metaphorically, and the long-lasting impacts of this have been well-documented (Axelsson & Mienna, 2019; Eikeland, 2019; Nicolai & Saus, 2013). Although the Norwegianisation Policy formally ended soon after the end of World War Two, its impact continued on Sámi culture and language as both continued to be devalued in unofficial but nonetheless damaging ways. This included not only stereotypes and lingering negative attitudes towards Sámi culture propagated through negative depictions in art and popular culture, but also in school settings where until 1959, children were still not allowed to speak Sámi (Andresen et al., 2021; Minde, 2003a; Todal, 1998).

Despite these strong political attempts to suppress Sámi culture and language, organising to re-/claim culture and language still took place within the Sámi community even in the early 1900s, marked particularly by the first Sámi Congress which took place in Tråånte (Trondheim) on 6 February 1917, the date which today is celebrated as Sámi National Day. Meanwhile, the modern movement for Sámi political activism has its roots in the late-1970s and early-1980s (Andresen et al., 2021; Paine, 1987) and driven by the events of the Alta Conflict, a protest that was sparked by land and resource rights, and opposition to the government's plans to flood the Alta River region to build a hydro plant despite the importance of that area as a salmon fishing and reindeer herding area to the local Sámi community. The peaceful protest escalated in both intensity – to the point of a hunger strike by the Sámi outside the parliament building in Oslo in protest to the government not speaking with the Sámi community about the issue – and visibility, as Indigenous people internationally expressed solidarity with the Sámi people as the protest wore on (Andresen et al., 2021; Minde, 2003b). Although the dam was ultimately built, the Alta Conflict also resulted in a national reconsideration of the Sámi and their position within Norway, and in 1987 the Norwegian state formally recognised the Sámi as an actual Indigenous culture in its constitution, noting the government's duty to protect and encourage Sámi culture and language as part of its mandate (Sameloven [Sámi Act], 1987). This also led to the opening of the Sámi Parliament in Karasjok in

1989, as well as a formal apology from King Harald V for the Kingdom of Norway's historical wrongdoings towards the Sámi people in 1997 (Finbog, 2015; Minde, 2003a). Even so, multiple generations had now grown up learning to be ashamed of their culture and language, and the ongoing presence of racist stereotypes framing Sámi people as simple, backwards, or drunks continued to impact both attitudes towards the Sámi, as well as Sámi attitudes towards their own culture. Even today, people are discovering their Sámi heritage after a generation or few before them decided that it was better to hide that lineage, rather than pass on the shame or abuse they associated with being Sámi (Bjørklund, 2000; Finbog, 2020). As is the case in many Indigenous cultures recovering from colonisation, intergenerational trauma runs deep, and damage of this sort cannot be erased overnight. There has been progress made over recent decades in terms of repositioning and elevating Sámi culture and language across Sápmi, particularly within the Norwegian part of Sápmi. However, there is still ample room for improvement in a wide variety of areas – for example, with regards to how Sámi culture fits into the Norwegian cultural sector.

2.4 Decolonising the cultural institution

We must also locate the NNKM in the context of the wider conversation about institutional decolonisation. There is a very deep influence of colonialism ingrained in cultural institutions such as the museum (Brulon Soares & Leshchenko, 2018; Eriksen, 2009; Muñiz-Reed, 2017) – in Western Europe in particular – simply due to them being a product of the time during which they developed, and the attitudes and understandings which were the norm at this time. Today, however, there is a growing understanding of the effects of such racist or colonial attitudes and beliefs inherent in many institutions of knowledge. What isn't so certain, however, is how to change things for the better at this point in time – or even what the end goal of "decolonisation" might look like.

The institution of the museum in the European context began in the 16th and 17th centuries as simply collections of curiosities (Sauvage, 2010; Simmons, 2010). But it was in the 18th Century, during the so-called Age of Enlightenment, that these collections evolved into institutions of knowledge which focused on ethnography and natural

history, particularly as colonial exploration expanded the Western European concept of the globe (Clavir, 2002; Sauvage, 2010). In fact, many museums or similar felt not only entitled, but duty-bound as educational institutions to collect artifacts and display them as examples of other cultures (Clavir, 2002; Coombes, 1988), generally done without the consent of the people from whom the objects were taken. Museums may have been intended as a means of sharing information and knowledge, a window that showed what the wider world had to offer, but they did so through a colonial mindset, showcasing other cultures in a way that stripped them of their complexity and demeaned their value, relegating them to stereotypes, exoticism, and caption-length explanations.

Beginning in the 1970s and into today, there has been a concerted shift from Eurocentric museological mindset towards what's been termed "appropriate museology" (C. Kreps, 2015, p. 5). Museology, at its most basic, is "the philosophy of the museal field" (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2010, pp. 53–56). Hein (2007) has noted that "what distinguishes the museum [from other institutions that contain things of value] is its agency, what it does with its resources, and for whom" (p. 38). Soares and Leshchenko (2018) highlight the fact that "museology is understood within the frames of a political domain of knowledge that have shaped philosophical thinking in the West" (p. 68), asserting that to decolonise museology or strive for a postcolonial approach, the power structures and concepts which created museums and museology must be revealed, "identifying its own forms of coloniality" (p. 64). In recent decades, the development of post-colonial theory has led to a shift in dialogue around the idea of what museology and its ethics should be (Ahmed, 2012; C. Kreps, 2008; Marstine, 2011). Kreps (2015) notes that contemporary museology ethics begin with a sense of moral agency to not simply put a culture on display, but to "participate in creating a more just and equitable society" (p. 7), which involves not only consideration but integration of minority, local, and Indigenous museological traditions "where suitable" (p. 6). The development of the museum as public rather than private has also driven institutions operationally towards transparency in funding, of course, but in practicing appropriate museology, institutions strive to disclose the whys and hows of their decision-making process (Marstine, 2011). This, however, is a generalised statement, as there is no prescribed, formal, regulated practice of appropriate museology.

Marstine (2011) has noted that "museum ethics is not a universal set of values to be applied indiscriminately" (p. 6). Similarly, the act of appropriate decolonisation is culturally specific, in all senses of the word "culture" – from traditions and heritage to the work environment or social setting. The way in which a cultural institution operates depends both on the attitudes, beliefs, and understandings of those working within it, as well as on the specific cultural history and on-going mandates of the particular institution. Each conversation of decolonising museology begins in a different place, depending on the institution's specific context, location, and history, each one dismantling vastly different defences against change, and what is appropriate for one organisation may be vastly inappropriate in another. As such, while we can refer to research, studies, and past experience to develop and advocate recommendations of "best practices" in decolonisation, the concept that there could be such a prescribed way forward "not only runs counter to appropriate museology, but also to the cultural diversity it is intended to respect" (C. Kreps, 2008, p. 15). This means that even the beginning point of conversation around the decolonisation of an art museum differs greatly between, for example, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway. There may be debate – unfortunately – in the United States or United Kingdom around whether colonialism is a problem that still needs to be solved, but both nations hold a solid understanding that colonialism took place, and still goes on, meaning that there are more explicit conversations already taking place around how and why institutions should address their institutional histories and systems (Coombes, 1988; Shoenberger, 2019; Wintle, 2013). In contrast, in Norway, while many Norwegians might agree that there was unfortunate history in how Sámi people were treated by the nation in the past, just as many are adamant that Norway was and is not a colonising nation, or that the Sámi shouldn't have Indigenous status (Wiggen, 2019). But when faced with such attitudes, that Norway doesn't have a colonial history, how do we even start a conversation about its need to decolonise?

2.5 Sámi cultural representation in Norway

So how does Sámi representation play out in a Norwegian museological context? Well, first let's talk about the Sámi museums. In 2017 the Norwegian Culture Department (KUD) had 72 museums as part of its national network across the nation (Kulturrådet,

2017a). Specific museums will vary in their breakdown but overall, in 2017, these museums received 67% of their funding via KUD and 33% from their particular region (Norendal, 2019, p. 8). Of these, about a third of them are art museums, the largest of which is the National Gallery in Oslo. And, of these art museums, zero of them across the whole of Norway focused specifically on Sámi art. While Sámi representation does exist in some of the museums in the KUD national network, Sámi culture, if shown, is done so in a sociological, historical, and archeological context, such as in the Norwegian Museum of Cultural History's Sámi collection. When it comes to the museums in Norway which focus specifically on Sámi culture, responsibility for these[3] was given to the Sámediggi in 2002 during a national museum reform. The Sámediggi funding, however, is a part of the whole of what the Sámediggi receive from the Stortinget to cover *all* of its responsibilities.

The Sámediggi's purpose is to "[deal] with all matters concerning the Sámi people" (Sámediggi, n.d.). Funding from the Norwegian state may be flagged as coming from particular budgets when sent to the Sámediggi, but the Sámediggi retains its autonomy over how to divide its resources across the broad umbrella of all things Sámi, including cultural and creative development, Sámi language revitalisation, heritage site protection, managing reindeer husbandry, and more. In 2017, the Norwegian National Opera alone received 784 million kroner in operations funding from the state (Kulturrådet, 2017a, p. 87); the Sámediggi, meanwhile, received 458 million kroner in total (Sámediggi, 2017, p. 14) to cover all of its operations and responsibilities, including supporting all of the Sámi museums. According to Norendal's (2019) analysis, to consider in further comparison to the KUD museum network numbers, the report on the 2017 funding that Sámi museums received showed that 9% came from regional governments, while the other 91% came from the Sámediggi (p. 8). This of course has limited the scope of what the Sámi museums have been able to do in terms of programming as well as to maintain collections and infrastructure. Most importantly, there has been limited potential for these organisations to expand to better represent the arts on top of their current

[3] Specifically, the Tana and Varanger Museumssiida (Tana, Finnmark), RiddoDuottarMuseat (Karasjok, Finnmark), Senter for Nordlige Folk/Samtidsmuseet (Kåfjord, Troms), Várdobáiki Museum (Evenskjer, Nordland), Árran Julevsáme Guovdásj (Drag, Nordland), and Saemien Sijte (Snåsa, Nord-Trøndelag).

mandates and operations. While heralded as a positive situation, the "autonomy" of the Sámediggi and its overseeing of the Sámi museums and culture has led to a gap in responsibility while complicating the question of who exactly is responsible for funding and creating a Sámi dáiddamusea in Norway: the Sámediggi, or the Norwegian Ministry of Culture?

2.6 The missing dáiddamusea

The call for a Sámi art institution is not new. Conversation has existed for years of the need to be able to highlight, develop, and inspire Sámi creativity, and to share the Sámi story through the language of creativity (Grini, 2019a; H. H. Hansen, 2020). Already in the 1970s, the term "dáidda" had been coined within Sámi creative communities to define and distinguish aesthetic expression that did not fit under the category of "duodji". At its most simplistic, duodji is often translated to the English term "handicraft", while dáidda was created to mean "art", adapted from the Finnish word "taide". Still today, duodji is often used to describe objects of beauty that have been made with skill for practical reasons, while dáidda is then something aesthetic that has been created for the aesthetics itself. Debate around the definitions, delineations, and distinctions of these two terms is on-going and often contentious in the Sámi creative community (Grini, 2019b; H. H. Hansen, 2020; Lorentzen, 2014), however the details of the debate are less relevant to this current thesis topic. What *is* important of this debate is that, contrary to a traditional Sámi way of thinking, this distinction between art and craft does exist in the Western European mindset, and that even with the term dáidda now in use by many in the Sámi creative community, there still is no exact, precise way to translate the concept of aesthetic creation between Sámi and Norwegian ways of thought. This, then, has repercussions on how Sámi creativity has been and is included, integrated, and perceived in the museum institutional context.

Despite decades-long interest in the creation of a publicly-funded dáiddamusea from Sámi artists, artist unions, the Sámediggi, and even occasional indications of support from the Norwegian government, and numerous moments where it seemed like it could finally happen, either structural shifts – the Sámediggi taking on responsibility for the Sámi museums in 2002, or various Norwegian-wide museum reforms – or a lack of

resources and funding have kept the idea from going further (H. H. Hansen, 2020; Olli interview, 2019). Sámi art has, however, been purchased and collected during the 1970s and 1980s by Sámi organisations, and held and further expanded by the Sámediggi since its establishment as the Sámi Dáiddamagasiidna, currently boasting over 1,300 works of art cared for by the RiddoDuottarMuseat in Karasjok (RiddoDuottarMuseat, n.d.). Artworks have been exhibited inside the Sámi parliament building or other publicly owned buildings in Norwegian Sápmi. They have also been loaned out for travelling exhibits both within Norway and internationally. But if they haven't been on tour, they've been stored with the RDM, without a physical dáiddamusea where they could be seen on a permanent basis.

The lack of a dáiddamusea is a problem. Art tells a story differently than artifacts do, and lends to different conversations and realisations. As such, in the case of a dáiddamusea in particular, its lack points to more than just logistical details. As Olli put it:

> Art connects with feelings, and that can be quite strong. And a lot of the things that Sámi society has experienced, from the government, is shown through the art. […] So one of the questions I ask is, is Sámi art a threat? If the Norwegian government does not fund the dáiddamusea, then it's a way of making the Sámi people invisible, for one thing, but it also stops us from being able to connect all the stories [of colonisation and of resistance]. (Olli interview, 2019)

2.7 Dáidda, duodji, and their place in Norwegian institutions

Although the body of research pertaining to Sámi art in a museology context is relatively small, it is growing. The research of Brenna, Finbog, and Grini in particular stand out in this, both in the research they have published as well as in their styles of analysis and writing. Sámi culture has had representation in folk or cultural historical museums such as the UiT The Arctic University Museum (UiT Museum) or the RiddoDuottarMuseat, but the presentation and contextualisation of artifacts in such a cultural historical setting is very different to that of an art museum or gallery, at the very least in terms of presentation and lighting, which has a huge impact on the way that visitors are encouraged or even able to interact with the pieces or consider their meanings (Grini, 2019b). Moreover, an artifact presented in a sociological museum is framed by a

particular story. For much of the past, that has meant through the framing of the coloniser telling the viewer how to find it interesting while also restricting the object's status as a living piece of culture. For example, a skilfully carved knife handle presented in a folk museum is seen as merely a tool (albeit a beautiful one). But its aesthetics and beauty become secondary to its usefulness, due to how it is presented (e.g., as part of a greater display), its lighting (i.e., generally dimmer in museums, to protect against object deterioration) and so on. We see the knife as a tool and see it only how it was used – "was", past tense, because now it sits in a museum. Its active role in the world is over. On the other hand, the same knife in an art museum would likely be in a much brighter setting, with lights that highlight the details of the craftsmanship and aesthetics – though perhaps at the expense of seeing the object as something that can be used or even touched.

Breaking down these delineations between sociology, history, and art in a cultural institution, however, is not as easy as simply deciding to exist as a new entity. Being an understood, recognised institution such as an art museum is, for better or worse, important when it comes to being recognised by the public or, more critically, by government and funding bodies. Grants and other financial support from external bodies are dependent on meeting specific criteria, so it is essential to be able to identify one's organisation in a way that fits into particular definitions, even though these definitions can be limiting, dictating styles of governance, structure, and operations. As Olli pointed out in our conversation, this also impacts conservation methods. As mentioned earlier, museology has had a very western-European, colonial perspective, and "acceptable" conservation methods have been largely developed in a continental Western Europe context (Olli interview, 2019). As such, even though geography and climate impacted the materials and techniques used to create Norwegian art and cultural artifacts, studying museology and conservation in Norway still prioritises learning techniques developed and perfected in Italy and France – helpful when working on pieces that come from these regions, possibly not for Norwegian items. For Sámi institutions and collections, where a history of academic research into Sámi craft and techniques is even more lacking, these criteria of what constitutes approved, institutionalised techniques and knowledge can act as a form of persistent subtle institutional colonisation, limiting their ability to operate within and convey a Sámi way

of thought and being (Olli interview, 2019). Sámi techniques might be used – where that knowledge exists – but as Olli (2019) puts it, "we need to have academic and traditional knowledge seen as equals, even though we don't have the stamp [of academic approval] on traditional knowledge".

During her time as director of the RiddoDuottarMuseat, Olli has negotiated between existing as a Sámi institution while still meeting Norwegian standards and expectations, where even the methods of object preservation and presentation become dictated by European museum conventions which may differ greatly from longstanding traditional Sámi knowledge surrounding how to care for these objects. As she put it,

> As a Sámi museum, we try to treat academic and traditional knowledge as being equal, even though the traditional knowledge isn't academically approved. But we need to use it because we're a Sámi institution. But the institution itself has to be a Norwegian institution according to the [Norwegian] rules, because otherwise you aren't understood from outside, and if you aren't a museum as the government understands a museum to be, you don't get funding as a museum. (Olli interview, 2019)

Under the guise of respecting Sámi museums and cultural autonomy, the Norwegian government had thus far absolved itself of any responsibility in offering Sámi museums the same access to support that non-Sámi cultural institutions are entitled to. But, the Sámi are also a part of Norway, and a part of its history. As such, it is just as important to push for better representation of Sámi art in the national Norwegian museums. As Máret Anne Sara, a Sámi artist and activist, put it:

> It's so important that [Sámi] art is present as a witness, so that you always have a starting point for understanding the full picture. It should never just be stored away. It has to breathe. Our society is so fragile to begin with, being under colonial domination and a small minority, so these witnesses of time, they have to at least be able to speak, and not just locked away in a collection. (Sara interview, 2019)

A Sámi dáiddamusea is needed, but so is creative representation in the national Norwegian museums. Although there is a need for better support of Sámi culture in

numerous aspects (e.g., better representation of non-reindeer lifestyles, better representation in the cultural historical museums, a Sámi dáiddamusea, Sámi artwork in the national museum network), it is misleading to suggest that support for one cultural project is or should be an either-or choice. But in 2017, when the Sámediggi, Dáiddárráđđi, and other Sámi artist organisations had been pointing to the absence of and need for a dáiddamusea for over three decades, the ongoing lack of budgetary consideration from the Ministry of Culture spoke loudly. The lack of support for a solid, physical Sámi visual arts museum, where histories, ideas, and – most importantly – opinions can be conveyed without words, without needing to speak the same language – was particularly pointed:

> Art speaks in a way that nothing else can. To make others aware of our story, not only in Norway but internationally, we need a museum. And that was the reason for [the SDMX] with the NNKM, to give a glimpse of what we're actually missing out on when we don't have the Sámi art museum, whether 'we' is the Norwegian society, the Sámi society, the Scandinavian society, or the world society. Because at the moment, we don't have it. (Olli interview, 2019)

3 The Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum 1985 to 2017

3.1 Setting the scene

The Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (NNKM) was established in Tromsø as a foundation in 1985 and opened its doors to the public in 1988, first in rented space above the Tromsø Kunstforening in Muségata, and then from 2001 in its own building – the old Post Office building – at the heart of Tromsø city, at Sjøgata 1 (NNKM, n.d.). Founded jointly by the UiT The Arctic University of Norway, the Northern Norwegian Culture Council, and the National Gallery, the mandate of the NNKM was (and still is as of 2021) to "create interest in and knowledge around visual arts and crafts in the region of Northern Norway" (NNKM stifelse, n.d.).

As a museum organised under the Ministry of Culture (KUD), the NNKM receives the large majority of its funding as a government grant. On occasion certain projects access grant opportunities, such as the outreach portion of *HOS NNKM* in 2020 (Saus interview, 2020), and from 2019 to mid-2021 the museum began to charge an admission fee for adult non-students, but by and large its funding comes through its position as one of Norway's national art museums. The NNKM operates of its own initiative (NNKM stifelse, n.d.; McGowan interview, 2019). The board is a combination of members appointed by the Ministry of Culture, who appoints the board Chair, a representative from the NNKM staff, and representatives appointed by artist organisations – SKINN (See Art in Northern Norway), the NKNN (Norwegian Artists of Northern Norway), and NNBK (Northern Norwegian Visual Artists; NNKM stifelse, n.d.). Nothing in the by-laws states that any members should or must be Sámi, though the artist organisations in particular have more recently intentionally chosen artists who are also a part of the Sámi community. This omission of officially needing to include Sámi representatives on the board, however, was one of the details McGowan mentioned in the interview that he and others wanted to see changed, perhaps by including the Sámi Dáiddačehpiid Searvi (Sámi Artists Union) in the organisations who appoint members, for example (McGowan interview, 2019).

The impetus for the NNKM emerged in the 1970s as one of numerous strategies intended to realise the goals of "district politics" (SDMX, 2017). District politics were a policy approach developed in Norway as a means to create more equality between regions, and to address perceptions of non-urban areas in Norway as being "backward and less developed" (Grønaas et al., 1948). Northern Norway specifically was considered a very "country", rural region at this time, generally perceived as underdeveloped in terms of lifestyle, education level, work opportunities, economy, and culture. The theories of Ottar Brox had particular influence on the development of district politics in consideration of Northern Norway, however, holding to the fact that one should have equal strength and capacity, regardless of whether they lived an urban or a rural life as, particularly along the Northern Norway coastline, a fulfilling life could still be had without having to move to the urban centres (Stein, 2019b). Thus, political, social, and economic development decisions were made with a focus to dismantle the country-urban divide with federal government policy decisions made to stimulate growth in the non-urban regions, particularly in the north, to give them more strength and capacity towards self-sustainability while increasing the attractiveness of these rural regions through economic and cultural stimulation, which in turn would also increase employment possibilities (Stein, 2019a).

As an extension of district politics, the creation of the NNKM was intended to connect and equalise the cultural power dynamic between the regional north and urban south. Ideally this should have resulted in a two-way relationship in terms of cultural development, with northern knowledge and abilities also being extended to and influencing the south of the nation, however, the details surrounding the NNKM's foundation suggest this wasn't the case culturally, at least. The creation of a national art museum in Northern Norway was still limited by colonial institutional beliefs that connected "high" culture with a Western continental European perspective and presentation of culture. This meant that, in creating its philosophical foundations both in by-laws and programming focus, the NNKM was constructed in a way that suggested – even if subconsciously – that it understood its job was to bring culture from the big city into regional Norway.

As outlined in the previous chapter, Norway has had a long history of excluded Sámi culture and language as a part of Norwegian society. However, the Norwegian

government's acknowledgement of its past mistakes and amending of the nation's Constitution to include the Sámi as a recognised Indigenous people occurred in 1988 (Sameloven [Sámi Act], 1987). As the NNKM was in the midst of developing itself into a practical reality, national conversations were taking place surrounding the Sámi and their status in the nation – at the very least, there was finally an understanding and recognition that the Sámi had been an important part of Northern Norway for a very long time. It seems surprising, then, that although the NNKM's by-laws define the organisation's purpose as being to create interest in, increase knowledge of and knowledge of visual arts and crafts in the Northern Norwegian region (NNKM stifelse, n.d.), that despite the presence of the Sámi in the national consciousness at the time, the NNKM includes no mention of "Sámi" or "Sápmi" anywhere in its mandate. Even if the argument could be made that its mandate and by-laws were established prior to the events of 1988, the Alta Crisis had placed the Sámi in the national spotlight years earlier – ignorance of their presence in Northern Norway doesn't seem to be a plausible explanation. Furthermore, the NNKM has operated continuously since it opened, with the by-laws adjusted several times to reflect changes such as national departments or organisations changing name or status. And yet, no amendments have been made to include the Indigenous people of the region in which the NNKM stands. Officially, the by-laws don't dis-include the Sámi, and the argument has certainly been made before that the majority of Sámi living in Northern Norway are also Norwegians (if they aren't Finns, Swedes, or Russians in addition to being Sámi), meaning that they are in fact represented by the NNKM. But this lack of direct reference to the Sámi in the NNKM's guiding documents also translates into the fact that the NNKM has no official responsibility to specifically focus on including Sámi art and artists in its planning or considerations, and past programming and media has unfortunately at times reflected this.

As of 2021 the NNKM has had four directors: Frode Haverkamp (1986–1994), Anne Aaserud (1994–2008), Knut Ljøgodt (2008–2016), and Jérémie Michael McGowan (2016–2020). The first three directors all grew up in or around Oslo and had studied art history at the University of Oslo. All four had held positions at the National Gallery in Oslo before taking on their role as director at the NNKM. It's a typical career trajectory within the small Norwegian arts sector during this time period, but one that then was

largely beholden to and influenced by the western-European-centric understanding of art canons, how museums and galleries should operate, what techniques and histories should be prioritised, and how stories should be told. To create a balance of time periods, then, the exhibition analysis in this chapter looks only at the period of 2014 until the end of 2016. This serves to create more of a fair consideration of exhibition focuses, if 2017 is to be used as a turning point, rather than comparing recent exhibits to those from decades ago which would have been developed in a different cultural and conscious context.

Knut Ljøgodt was the director during the majority of this 2014–2016 period, having started in the position in 2008, and leaving it in mid-2016. However, a change in directorship doesn't change museum programming overnight. NNKM programming is developed by the director and approved by the board on an annual basis (Saus interview, 2020), but more importantly, it takes time to plan, source, prepare, and approve everything needed for an exhibit – there needs to be programming already in place before a new director comes in and has a chance to develop their own plans. As such, Ljøgodt's programming choices did continue on past his departure. Ljøgodt was and is a respected art historian from outside Oslo with previous curatorial experience at the National Gallery and the Munch Museum, and co-founder of the Nordic Institution of Art, a "private research institution for the promotion of Nordic art history" with a vision "to place Nordic art within the canon of world art history" (Nordic Institute of Art, n.d.). When he joined the NNKM as director, Ljøgodt brought with him a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and art sector contacts to the NNKM, though from a framework that positioned Norway as a part of the western-European art context. The NNKM, under Ljøgodt's directorship and being connected to the National Gallery, made strong use of its relationship with Norway's national collection during Ljøgodt's tenure, but also on the collections of "important" art collectors from around Norway. As such, many of the exhibitions presented during the 2014–2016 period both emphasised and reinforced the perceived importance of the south of the nation's influence on the north in a relatively one-directional way. While a motivator for such a south-directed focus could have been to demonstrate that Tromsø was as deserving of having access to the same sorts of exhibits as one could find in the National Gallery in Oslo, this also implied that the south was a more prolific source of "high" culture than the north of Norway, and reinforced an

ideology of cultural Norwegianness in the NNKM, to the exclusion of the unique combination of northern cultures.

Through their choices of what to display and how to do it, museum exhibitions influence cultural understandings of identity and history – both intentionally and not – creating "a coherent representational universe" (Flaubert, as cited in Crimp, 1980, p. 49). An examination of the NNKM's exhibit history, then, is a way of seeing how the NNKM was building Northern Norway's sense of culture, identity, and self in its role as Northern Norway's art museum. Exhibition descriptions during this 2014–2016 period would often highlight Norwegian "masters", artists such as Peder Balke, Adelsteen Normann, Thorolf Holmboe, or Edvard Munch – culturally Norwegian, largely male, some of whom had visited or had ties to Northern Norway and popularised it through their art, but not all.

In 2015 the NNKM celebrated its 30-year anniversary by focusing its programming on the importance of the art collector in the cultural narrative, with the majority of exhibits being framed through the person who had collected the pieces on display – again, male, culturally Norwegian, generally from the south of the country. Røssaak (2018) writes of how the perceived "quality" of an exhibition is created through the act of curation, pointing to three specific areas: quality of presentation style and choices, quality of the works on their own, and the quality of the catalogue text. He specifically looks at the text, noting that "it is [here] that the curator most clearly sets out his or her view of quality – and at times, attacks and formulates what is going on in the discourse of quality" (pp. 130–131). While Røssaak speaks of the power of the text as an exciting tool, this also highlights the power that the wording of exhibition text can have in impacting the way audiences view and consider artworks, and the interpretations of the exhibit and works after leaving a museum. The NNKM texts used to promote the exhibits during this era make strong use of descriptive, flowery language to highlight the importance that these works, artists, and collectors have had on art and history – "most significant", "foremost", "largest collection in the region". Each exhibit would include names of the most celebrated painters that would be on display, who more often than not would be rather canonical Scandinavian painters (not always Norwegian), a strong percentage of them from the 1800s and 1900s in particular.

As Bilton and Soltero (2020) quote Geertz, culture can be defined as "an ensemble of stories we tell ourselves about ourselves" (p. 4). Although written from an anthropological context, this statement is just as relevant to national cultural institutions of all sorts and should be considered when developing exhibitions. An art museum is constantly creating new stories to tell its visitors through often visual means, and, being located in a particular place does mean that the organisation does have an impact on the cultural narrative of that region. If the NNKM was created to represent Northern Norway but excluded – or at least neglected to directly mention – the Sámi both in programming but also in its mandate, then what does this say about national and local narratives regarding the position of Sámi in the community?

In the context of the NNKM, exhibits before 2017 would of course include Sámi-made artworks on occasion, and the museum collections did include pieces made by Sámi artists.[4] When reading through previous exhibition media, there is no sign of outwardly, directly negative attitudes towards Sámi creators – so in that way, they weren't directly being excluded or uninvited. However, if a Sámi artist was included in the text, it was never mentioned directly that they're Sámi – with the exclusion of *Sámi Stories*. If the reader knew that Iver Jåks, John Savio, Inger Blix Kvammen, or Aslaug Juliussen, for example, are Sámi, or that someone who is also being exhibited at the Centre of Northern Peoples in Kåfjord would therefore have strong ties to the Sámi, then yes, we can say that Sámi culture were mentioned. But many, especially not people from outside Northern Norway, would not know these details. By leaving out anything that would identify artists or exhibit pieces as anything other than Norwegian erased that part of the discussion in the one format in which these exhibits persist after they close, excluding Sámi culture by and large from the overarching narrative of the NNKM's history. Even if Norway's constitution had changed to acknowledge Sámi as Indigenous,

[4] It's difficult to determine exact numbers of Sámi artists included in the NNKM collections as the NNKM, like the National Gallery and other institutions (Grini, 2019a), has never included identity or ethnicity beyond nationality in its database, nor are there plans to begin now, particularly due to the 2018 implementation of the EU General Data Protection Regulation. However, even before 2018 such information is rarely collected in an official manner in Norway due to both privacy and historical reasons. While it's simple to say that, as Olli (2019) put it, "a Sámi artist is an artist who is Sámi," the tracking of identity details for statistical purposes can still be very political, complicated, and contentious, and is therefore something the NNKM has chosen not to do (K. Skytte & S. A. Caufield, personal communication, May 20, 2021).

the way in which Sámi were included or represented as a part of the NNKM was still primarily as Scandinavians, generally Norwegians. They weren't un-included for being Sámi, but this cultural detail wasn't deemed to be important or relevant enough to mention. The only exception when artists' Sámi heritage was specifically referred to as part of the exhibit description and catalogue was in 2013/2014's *Sámi Stories*.

3.2 *Sámi Stories*

In 2014, the NNKM collaborated with UiT The Arctic University Museum (UiT Museum) in Tromsø to present *Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People*. The exhibit pieces were first curated and presented at the NNKM under the title *Sámi Stories* in late-2013, with a note that the exhibit would travel to the United States the following year. In 2014 the exhibit was combined with historical artifacts from the UiT Museum and opened at Scandinavia House in New York City and then at the Anchorage Museum in Alaska (Gullickson & Din, 2015) before returning to Tromsø to be shown in the UiT Museum. The first exhibit description was minimal, framed as showing how the included artists "[drew] inspiration from historical narratives of Sámi culture" (NNKM, 2014b). While there is the assumption that the artists are likely Sámi, the description skirts around naming them as such, and the words used create a distancing of Sámi culture from current, modern culture. When the exhibition went to the United States, however, the description is far more verbose, using strong, proud language in the exhibition description and book published to accompany it, framing the exhibition as "a landmark exhibition examining the history, identity, politics, and visual culture of the Sámi" (Lorentzen & Gullickson, 2014; NNKM, 2014b). Now the description included a taste of what the exhibition included: "a selection of contemporary artworks and traditional duodji (handicraft) – including a reindeer milk scoop, shaman's [sic] drum, cradle, and a selection of hats and dolls" (NNKM, 2014b). It also mentioned that the "contemporary" artists came from across Sápmi, "all of Sámi descent, with the exception of [Arvid] Sveen" whose "fascination" with landscapes and Sámi sacred places led to the inclusion of a series of his photographs of such "Sámi sacred places" (Lorentzen, 2014).

Although the exhibit coincided with the 25th anniversary of the first Sámi Parliament, this detail was only referenced in the English language information on the NNKM and

Scandinavian House websites (NNKM, 2014b; Scandinavia House, 2014). In contrast, the NNKM's Norwegian text highlighted that the exhibit coincided with the 200th anniversary of the Norwegian constitution, with reference to the "uniqueness" of the Norwegian constitution in that it had been changed in 1988 to recognise the Sámi people to allow for "a double society" (NNKM, 2014a). The English version mentions how the amendment allowed "unprecedented formal recognition of the Sámi people, language, and culture" (NNKM, 2014b).

The book that was published in tandem with the exhibit opening, edited by the NNKM's curator for this exhibit, can also be used as a measure of how Sámi art was being approached by the NNKM at this time (Lorentzen & Gullickson, 2014). It does a good job of outlining the development of the Sámi artist community, but when discussing Sámi culture and art, at times it reads as very othering, mythologising and idealising the Sámi past and present and turning the Sámi into a homogenous reindeer-focused, shamanistic culture, even as it also states that Sámi culture isn't as simple as this. But unfortunately creating accessibility sometimes leads to over-simplification, trading away detail and nuance, or making comparisons that wind up drawing focus away from the actual topic, such as one essay connecting Aslaug Juliussen's creative process to a slaughter-focused performance piece by Marina Abramović (Gullickson, 2014).

Of course, details of the nuance and current-ness of Sámi culture, the importance of the Sámidiggi, and so on, were likely mentioned and further explained at the New York City opening. But the descriptions, the book, and reviews, these to point the NNKM's mindset at the time, how the organisation chose to frame the exhibition and what was chosen as being the important details that deserved mention, this is how the exhibition has lived to today, and it is this framing that we can use as an indication of the NNKM's relationship with the Sámi community and Sámi art in 2014. As McFadzean et al. (2019) point out, a decolonising approach to curating is to respect and work with Indigenous knowledge systems. The NNKM's involvement in *Sámi Stories*, instead, was to curate an art exhibit and write a publication, which was done by non-Sámi individuals couched in the western-European cultural perspective, telling others about Sámi culture. An exhibit intended to focus on Sámi art that, firstly, included non-Sámi artists – as though there wasn't enough Sámi creativity to draw upon to complete an entire exhibit – and secondly, use the topic of Sámi art to prop up Norway's image as a democratic and

inclusive nation instead of giving the full spotlight to Sámi artists – many of which weren't even Norwegian – is not an exhibit that was working with the Sámi culture. Whatever its good intentions, *Sámi Stories* still treated Sámi creativity as an outsider culture, something to show off but still, separate from "us" in Northern Norway. And while reviews or news stories will always cherry-pick details that work well for their story, one has the sense that the framing of the exhibit in press releases and at the opening failed to present Sámi culture as an equally valid, modern, living culture when quotes or clips of guest reactions used terms such as "mystical", "spiritual and magical", showing people gleefully trying on "funny" Sámi hats (*NRK – 11 May 2014 – Søndagsrevyen*, 2014), or, even while including many Sámi-focused details, still use the Norwegian constitution as an entry point into the review, rather than simply focusing on the artists ("Sami Stories to See," n.d.).

To read the NNKM's exhibit history, one could think that this was a highlight of its programming at the time. In fact, the exhibit is listed as four separate exhibits that year, one to mark each opening in a new location (i.e., NNKM, Scandinavia House, Anchorage Museum, UiT Museum). With each new exhibit description posted, less language was used to celebrate it, and less information was included, until finally, when the exhibit returned to Tromsø to be exhibited at the UiT Museum – not at the NNKM – the description is scarcely more than a list of the works that were included in the exhibit, and a brief mention that the 2015 John Savio Prize would be awarded at the opening (NNKM, 2015b). The John Savio Prize was newly created to be awarded biannually to recognise the creative accomplishments of a Sámi visual artist practicing primarily in Norway, though not necessarily Norwegian (Bildende Kunstneres Hjelpefond, 2021). Previously awarded as the John Savio Stipend as administered by the The Relief Fund for Visual Artists (Bildende Kunstneres Hjelpefond; BKH), a new partnership began in 2015 between the Bildende Kunstneres Hjelpefond, the Sámi Dáiddačehpiid Searvi, and the NNKM, turning the stipend into a prize of 150,000 kroner plus a presentation of the winner's work through the NNKM "på en egnet måte" [in a suitable manner] (Bildende Kunstneres Hjelpefond, 2021). In 2015, this was done as a talk, though the announcement of Geir Tore Holm as the winner. The announcement of Holm as the winner was included as a news item on the NNKM website, noting that he won "for sitt samlede kunstnerskap" [for his overall artistry], and that a conversation with him would

soon be hosted. More words were devoted to briefly describing the prize itself than to Holm and his work (NNKM, 2015c).

Sámi Stories: Art and Identity of an Arctic People was developed and exhibited eight years ago. The exhibit did expand the audience for Sámi creativity, and the accompanying book did make a concerted effort to describe Sámi creative culture to readers hearing about the Sámi for the first time. NNKM's claim that the Sámi Stories was a "landmark" exhibit is fair in the sense that the NNKM hadn't curated a Sámi-focused exhibit like this one before – curating Sámi art as a primary focus of an internationally travelling exhibit, collaborating with the UiT Museum to present art and duodji together.[5] For the NNKM at the time, this was a landmark exhibit. But only in comparison to what was the norm for the NNKM in 2014. It was an exciting project, certainly, but only a minor detail alongside the NNKM's regular programming of "high" art, masters of the Western European canon, and art histories as curated by the collectors.

3.3 Ljøgodt's legacy

Ljøgodt's farewell exhibit as director, *Treasures – Skatter*, ran from February until May 2016. Following the widely accepted norms of cultural colonial institutions, the description highlighted the importance of museums and the "important role in society in preserving our common cultural heritage" (NNKM, 2016). The exhibition description is lengthy, florid, and points out that the majority on display were added to the collection during Ljøgodt's time, centering the exhibit on Ljøgodt's value in the larger art context, but also to the NNKM and, by extension, to Tromsø and Northern Norway. "The North has always been at the heart of the museum's profile, and so too has Sámi culture," Ljøgodt (2016, p. 14) writes, referencing *Sámi Stories* in the next sentence. But three sentences plus an image of Iver Jåks' *No. 1* (1989, as included in Ljøgodt, 2016, p. 66),

[5] Two separate categories to the curatorial way of thinking in this exhibit, as demonstrated by the exhibit description's distinction.

are the only references to Sámi art and artists included in the *Treasures – Skatter* publication celebrating the collections built during Ljøgodt's time as director.

My intention here has not been to personally connect individuals to the way in which the NNKM was at the time. Directors, boards, and curators are of course the ones who have a role in steering an institution, but they also are a part of the institution as a larger whole. What I do want to demonstrate is the way that the NNKM was positioned at the time as a Norwegian cultural institution, and its placement in the topic of deinstitutionalisation and colonialism. This is to say, then, that the NNKM was very much following the norms of the Norwegian culture sector as a whole at the time. It wasn't interested in clarifying how Northern Norway might differ from other parts of Norway, culturally. It certainly wasn't questioning its own structure and operations, nor was it aspiring to be anything beyond how it was defined in its 1985 by-laws. The NNKM was a product of its own sector's framework and took pride in being a national Norwegian institution. The problem was that it didn't notice what was being excluded.

3.4 2016 shifts

In 2016, Jérémie McGowan began his position as NNKM director. Like his predecessors, McGowan had also worked at the National Museum in Oslo, as a curator, prior to taking on the directorship. Unlike any of them, McGowan didn't grow up in Norway.[6] Born and raised in North Carolina, United States, he completed his higher education in Scotland, and time spent both as a student and a researcher in northern Finland – part of which was spent connected to Giellagas Institute for research into Saami language and culture (McGowan interview, 2019; SDMX | NNKM, 2017c). This meant he had been exposed to very different conversations regarding Norway, colonialism, and how national stories and histories are told. His exposure to Sámi culture, duodji, and histories also had an impact on his understanding of Northern Fennoscandia. As such, McGowan came to the NNKM with an outsider's perspective, and for him to take on a role in Tromsø, then, was

[6] Also unlike the previous directors, he was already living in Tromsø before taking on the role, rather than moving north specifically to take the job.

also taking on a role in Sápmi – something that had a large influence on his decisions as NNKM director.

After starting at the NNKM, he was quickly struck by how an organisation which should have been representing its local society – the whole of Northern Norway which overlaps with Sápmi – could have been operating for over 30 years while, as he put it, "more or less been systematically ignoring Sámi issues in a place that is actually very Sámi" (McGowan interview, 2019).

As previously mentioned, while McGowan began as director in March 2016, the NNKM exhibits that continued until the end of that year had been mapped out during Ljøgodt's tenure, and McGowan's directorial impact didn't begin immediately (McGowan interview, 2019). From the start, however, McGowan was very interested in challenging and reflecting upon the NNKM's position in Tromsø, in Northern Norway, and in Sápmi. When I met with McGowan in 2019, he spoke about his 2017 programming as if it were yesterday, needing no prompting to dig deep into the topic of institutional decolonisation and connecting it very easily with discussion about what was being planned for 2020. Discussing the NNKM was to discuss the process and practicalities of decolonisation, and not in the past tense. For McGowan, decolonisation was and is something ongoing, still unfinished, still something to aspire to, and it was something he clearly had in mind when entering his role and looking at every aspect of the museum's operations. His efforts to push a decolonisation agenda were done most markedly through programming, as Chapter 4 and 5 will explore, but he was also conscious of changes that could be made operationally (i.e., wording job openings to encourage potential Sámi applicants, flattening the internal work hierarchy, etc.; McGowan interview, 2019) and structurally. When we spoke in 2019 he quickly mentioned that he felt it was imperative that the NNKM's by-laws, mandate, and board makeup needed to be changed to formally include the terms "Sámi" and "Sápmi" – "though these things take time" (McGowan, 2018), a point he would also make regularly in talks and presentations he would give at conferences across Norway as well as internationally about the NNKM and decolonisation (Kulturrådet, 2017b; McGowan, 2018).

> For me, "NNKM" is an extremely geographic-, political-, and cultural-specific name and the fact that it's missing the words Sámi or Sápmi [has also been] the

> blind spot of the museum. That's when the words 'North Norwegian' become very loaded, because they don't simply refer to art. But then that means that there's this specificity that many people were never maybe reflecting over, or capable of reflecting about. (McGowan interview, 2019)

McGowan came to the NNKM as director with a drive to make it a better institution internally, for Tromsø, for Northern Norway, and in particular for Sápmi, and wasted no time taking steps to do this, as we'll see in the next chapter. But for all McGowan's impact as director, it's important to remember that him leading the NNKM was something that he was invited to do, which points to the fact that on some level, by 2016, there was an organisational interest for change at the NNKM. Those representing the NNKM in the hiring committee were the ones to choose who would take the reins as Ljøgodt moved on. They spoke with McGowan, saw that his CV included a wealth of knowledge and experience in art and design, but also highlighted his interest in both challenging the museum as an institution, and saw and heard about his past experience and interest in working with Sámi culture. Even if they didn't know the direction McGowan would ultimately take the organisation, they chose someone who brought a fresh non-Norwegian perspective to the NNKM, and who had an interest in the Sámi part of northern Scandinavia. It wasn't only McGowan who was eager to see the NNKM change, the organisation itself was looking for someone with the vision, veracity, and skill to start the ball rolling.

4 *There Is No* – what it was, what it wasn't, and what it left behind

There is no set of rules for Sámi art.

There is no fixed definition of Sámi art.

There is no limitation on Sámi artists.

There is no.

(wall text from *There Is No*, SDMX, 2017)

4.1 Farewell Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, hello Sámi Dáiddamusea[x]

On Friday 15 February 2017, the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (NNKM) suddenly disappeared. In its place stood the Sámi Dáiddamusea[x] (SDMX). Both the outdoor and indoor signage had changed, with a new logo – a bold **X** contrasting against another colour of the Sámi flag – adorning the building inside and out, the NNKM website redirected to the SDMX page, though the explanation that this was a performative exhibition by the RiddoDuottarMuseat (RDM) and NNKM was easily found. Even on social media the NNKM Facebook page had gone silent while the SDMX page sprang to life. Everything signalled that the NNKM was gone, but also that the SDMX had always existed. To further emphasise Sámi ownership of the art and imaginary SDMX, it even had its own Sámi director and curator: Marita Isobel Solberg. Solberg is a Sámi performance and installation artist, already known across Sápmi and Northern Norway, but was approached already in October 2016, early in the project's development about acting as SDMX director for the performance project (SDMX | NNKM, 2017b). Having Solberg step into this role was another way to reinforce the reality of the SDMX, intended to distance it even further away from McGowan and the NNKM in a non-

confrontational yet pointed act of decolonisation. Furthermore, it was yet another detail that symbolically enforced Sámi ownership of the art, the exhibit, and the SDMX.

There Is No, the museum's "latest" exhibit, was opening that evening at the newly-always-there SDMX. Press releases went to media that day – not before – and no early notice of the event was posted on Facebook.[7] Even so, news spread quickly that something was happening that evening, that the NNKM had been replaced by the SDMX, and that evening, giving the welcome speech in both Norwegian and North Sámi[8], Solberg hosted a full house.

Figure II. Images of the Sámi Dáiddamuseax in Tromsø, 2017. Left: entrance to *There Is No*; painting in background by Lena Stenberg, *Anne Marja, Vad ser du? / Ánne Márjaá maid donoainnát?* (1991); Photo by Morten Fiskum. Right: Sámi Dáiddamusea exterior. Photographer: Tomasz A. Wacko, used with permission from NNKM.

4.2 *There Is No* SDMX, and why it matters

If one were to point to a particular moment where you could say that now, here, this is the moment where the NNKM started to make a conscious effort to begin to decolonise, it would be with the decision to create *There is No* and the SDMX. Not because of the content and its Sámi focus, nor even simply because it highlighted the

[7] Then, as it still is today, Facebook was the most effective way to broadcast events taking place in Tromsø.

[8] Solberg didn't actually know much North Sámi language, having not had much opportunity to learn it when young. It wasn't perfect, but trying despite limitations was entirely in line with the whole SDMX project. "I got feedback from Sámi people understanding it all, others not understanding anything I said. But people said the speech was like a work of sound art. It's a matter of trying and daring" (SDMX | NNKM, 2017b).

ongoing lack of a dáiddamusea. A museum presenting an exhibit focused on an Indigenous culture or creativity doesn't mean that the museum itself is opening itself up to indigenisation, nor does it automatically imply that the organisation is even conscious of its place in a colonial system. A thought-provoking but one-off event that afterwards is dismantled and packaged away into the archives would have merely been tapping into hot current trends and a topical highlight of the year, but wouldn't have contributed meaningfully to a conversation around decolonisation.

Shoenburger (2019) makes an important distinction regarding the act of institutional decolonisation:

> It's not just about inviting Indigenous and other marginalised people into the museum to help the institution improve its exhibitions; it's an overhauling [of] the entire system. Otherwise, museums are merely replicating systems of colonialism, exploiting people of color for their emotional and intellectual labor within their institutions without a corollary in respect and power. (para. 7)

It isn't only the intentions that motivated the development and presentation of the SDMX, but also what was left in its stead as well as the NNKM's actions continuing forward that must be considered in evaluating the institution's interest, commitment, and success in its path towards decolonisation. Sara Wajid points to the responsibility of museum staff, noting that it is those working on the inside of cultural institutions who are "better equipped to start dismantling the class privilege, inequality and colonial narratives of those institutions." (Wajid, as cited in Heal, 2019, p. 212). When the decolonisation of an organisation has neither a prescribed route nor an end point, it's the actions, words, and considerations that become key indicators, in addition to the outcomes.

So, what was the SDMX? And what was it not? As McGowan has framed it, the exhibit was "a solidarity and advocacy project supporting the RDM and the claims to realise the Sámi dáiddamusea" (McGowan interview, 2019). The exhibit was also a part of the art museum's programming that year, the organisation's highlight for a certain period of time, but was certainly not an overhaul of the entire institution in and of itself. Despite the costume it put on for some months, the NNKM was still the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum, housed in Tromsø, funded and supported by the Norwegian government,

with a mandate to represent Northern Norway, with the same staff running operations on a daily basis. But the SDMX, for the NNKM, provided a moment whereby the organisation could pivot on some details within the organisation, going forwards, and could be a conversation starter even within the organisation itself. It was also a sum of the choices that were made in its creation, not just in what it chose to do, but also in what it chose not to do. The SDMX was still a product that stemmed out of an institute limited by its colonialist foundations, and organisation can only change itself so much within the confines of its own structure. Indeed, Kasmani (2018) has pointed to the fact that efforts by institutions to decolonise can and may fail, and even unintentionally fall back on and reinforce colonial attitudes and structures. Ultimately, it's difficult if not impossible for an institution to escape the framework and groundings on which it was developed, but this is no reason to dismiss the efforts made with the SDMX.

Hansen (2020) has written about whether the SDMX "succeeded" or "failed" as a Sámi dáiddamusea. This is an important discussion to be had, but to measure the performance and exhibit in a binary form such as this does also miss the point that *There Is No* was an experiment and an attempt to stimulate thought and discussion. As the SDMX puts it, "This is not *the* Sámi Dáiddamusea, but rather a *possible* Sámi Dáiddamusea" (SDMX | NNKM, 2017a). My analysis is interested in considering the exhibit's choices and effectiveness as a starting point for change and a first step in a broader institutional process of decolonisation. The exhibit itself matters, but so do the conversations and considerations that led to the choices that were made – the ones to do things differently, as well as the choices to do what was expected.

This chapter will not be a detailed critique of the exhibit in terms of its art, or an assessment of the project's success or failure. Rather, it will simply highlight and reflect upon some of the considerations or conversations that informed the project, and the impacts they had.

4.3 SDMX development

The idea and development of *There Is No* and the SDMX was in fact a collaboration between McGowan as NNKM director and Anne May Olli as RDM director. Olli recalled

meeting McGowan for the first time in September 2016, at which point he expressed an interest in developing opportunities for the NNKM which would highlight Sámi art.

> [McGowan] felt that the NNKM had a responsibility for Northern Norway, and that the Sámi are a part of that. And that was quite nice for me to hear, because that had not been happening before! *(laughs)* So that was a really good starting point. (Olli interview, 2019)

Olli had been one of many already actively pushing for a Sámi dáiddamusea, and immediately jumped on the moment to raise the issue in her conversation with McGowan. "I told Jérémie, well, we have a problem. [...] We need to lift the issue that we don't have the Sámi art museum. We have tried for many years, and yet nothing happens" (Olli interview, 2019).

The ongoing but unfulfilled demand for a dáiddamusea became the concrete detail that sparked the idea of the SDMX. This was one way in which the NNKM could consciously and proactively start the process of decolonisation while also contributing more broadly to the practice of decolonising the art museums of Norway.

> We [were/are] getting more [operational] money than the Sámi institutions do. So how could we use our money, our budget, our position of privilege and power to make real change, and to help make things happen in other places? [...] So for me, [in involving the NNKM this way], it was a decolonising project, or an attempt to begin that processes of decolonisation. (McGowan interview, 2019)

The idea for the SDMX grew quickly, and five months later the SDMX opened its doors in Tromsø. Creating a dáiddamusea out of the NNKM involved much more than simply a change in the name and signage. Both McGowan and Olli came to the project with museum experience, and with understandings of both the potential and the limitations of such an institution. McGowan also brought with him a background in art and design, while Olli had Sámi cultural knowledge as a Sámi herself, as well as through her roles at the RDM – first since 2004 as a curator and then as director since 2015, exploring how to present exhibits and collections, and even operate the cultural museum "in a Sámi way". Together, McGowan and Olli wanted to present a space to imagine what a Sámi dáiddamusea could be – "but in a way that was recognisable," Olli clarified, so as to

connect with audiences quicker by limiting the cognitive barriers. “It’s easier to produce something that is expected rather than something unexpected,” she explained (Olli interview, 2019).

Rather than focus on the *what* that made up *There Is No* in the SDMX performance, I will focus on a few key aspects of the *how*, as this speaks much more to how the NNKM decided to approach decolonisation and indigenisation with the SDMX project. Specifically, the project’s name, the wording, the presentation style, the framing of the SDMX, and then finally how the NNKM decided to close the exhibit. This is by no means a thorough examination, and much more can be written at every level of examination. My intent here is to simply highlight and reflect upon key aspects of where and how the NNKM decided at this point in time, in 2017, to institute shifts within its presentation style for decolonial purposes.

4.4 Calling things as they are

The first thing a visitor to the museum would come across – physically or online – was the name – Sámi Dáiddamusea[x] – and its acronym, SDMX. Or, they would have seen it in the project branding, a strong, bold **X** splashed brightly on a contrasting colour – the red, yellow, green, and blue of the Sámi flag. The signage and flags outside the museum building and overtop the entrance, on the website, everything was branded with the **X**, with pins for visitors to take with them (with an additional black and white version for the stylish sorts). The **X** was an important detail that serving multiple purposes, as McGowan explained on the SDMX website: as a footnote to the details of the lack of a dáiddamusea, as well as to a disclaimer that the SDMX was “at least partly a fiction, a performance”. But the intent of the design was also to suggest a crossroads, “a place where something is, where something happens, or might be found” (SDMX | NNKM, 2017c).

McGowan also stated in the same statement the **X** was also meant as an erasure, the replacement of the NNKM with the new SDMX (SDMX | NNKM, 2017c). But to go as far as to claim to have “erased” and “replaced” the institution begins to tread into complicated, presumptuous territory, when spoken by the director of a colonial institution. Hansen (2020), in her excellent analysis of the SDMX as an exhibit, notes a few examples of how,

despite positioning itself as having been replaced, the NNKM's European art museum traditions remained. As she writes, a common misstep made by Western institutions when displaying Indigenous art is "their use of traditional art-historical models as interpretive lenses" (H. H. Hansen, 2020, p. 223). For example, one of these stumbling points is the way in which *There Is No* attempted to canonise and highlight one defined path in the story of Sámi art, particularly in devoting one of the exhibit's four main topics on Iver Jåks, alone, as a pioneer (H. H. Hansen, 2020, p. 236). Hansen does not dispute his importance historically or influentially – Jåks was a key figure in the bridging of duodji and dáidda, as well as between Norwegian and Sámi cultures. But Hansen's right to point to this as a trap of Western cultural institutions and tradition, the exhibit's need to anchor the story it tells to a particular individual and focus on a single linear timeline that created a sense of importance through a simplistic hierarchy rather than allowing for a weaving many threads of influence towards today's creative environment.

4.5 The white cube system

Part of the development of the SDMX project was playing with the balance between challenging and conforming to audience expectations of what an art museum should be. One specific but integral example of this is the use of the white cube style of presentation. This simple, dynamic aesthetic of large blank white walls and spaces has been used to draw attention to the art look of art museums since the 1930s, a style which stemmed first out of Bauhaus aesthetics but was popularised and institutionalised in the gallery setting in large part by the Museum of Modern Art director Alfred H. Barr, Jr. in New York City (Cain, 2017). Though revolutionary at the time, this presentation format is standard practice today, and few can imagine visiting an art museum without this presentation style. In the case of the SDMX performance project, the choice to maintain it was nonetheless a conscious one, as highlighted by the fact that both Olli and McGowan raised the issue in our interviews.

The impact of a display style occurs in terms of what it is, but also in what it isn't, wherein positioning, framing, and lighting of an object or artwork affects how we perceive and interact with it. Historically, Sámi artists and artisans have been poorly

represented in the Norwegian art collections, in part due to the imprecise connections between the Sámi concept of duodji and the overly rigid concepts of art and handicraft in Norwegian culture and language (as well as in English; Grini, 2019b). McGowan was very conscious of this. "When we display duodji in a white cube style, it then becomes very much an art object, and you can heighten that even more by how you light it, how you label it, all sorts of things" (McGowan interview, 2019). Understanding this, he wanted to position Sámi dáidda and duodji in the same place, as "high" art. But he was aware, also, that duodji isn't simply in the concrete final product, it's the journey the materials take to get there. Perhaps presenting duodji on a stark, blank, neutral background would separate it from this heritage.

> The other extreme, which also gets criticised sometimes, is to display duodji in a very ethnographic frame – on reindeer skin or hide with rocks around them, these sorts of things. And that speaks to a whole other lineage of display. It's not that one is right and one is wrong, [...but it makes] you experience that object as a very different thing." (McGowan interview, 2019)

The risk then is that the object stops being noticed for its craftsmanship and creativity – as fine art – and instead becomes a tool used to describe a culture in shorthand. Doing this, however, steals away the unique creative identity of both the object and the duojár who made it. Understanding the impact that display can have on audience interpretation means that the choice of how to display an object that exists as both a process and a final product must necessarily be a complicated conversation about what's respectful, what contributes, and what detracts from the object's story and value.

In her thorough exploration of the history of the format, Birkett describes the white cube's effect as "elevat[ing] art above its earthly origins, alienating uninitiated visitors and supporting traditional power relationships" (Birkett, n.d., p. 75). On the surface this format appears to remove art from distracting surrounds, allowing it to speak for itself, but having become an ingrained element of the art museum, it also reinforces a colonial hierarchical dynamic that creates a sense of exclusion to those who might already feel out of place or not knowledgeable enough to be welcome in such a space – an issue later revisited by Marianne Saus when developing the *HOS NNKM* project in 2019.

For Olli, this was a shortcoming in a sense, and "issue" as she termed it:

> *There Is No* was meant to give a taste of what a Sámi art museum might be. But it [had to be] in a way that was recognisable to everybody. The white cube system, white walls, was quite boring in a way. If the curators were only Sámi people, probably not every wall will be white, because the colours are quite important for the Sámi people. (Olli interview, 2019)

However, given that the NNKM already planned to upend expectations with a rewriting of the present reality (creating an ever-existing SDMX) and renaming itself to become something else, choices were made to limit how far the performance would push its audiences. As McGowan clarified, the consideration for him did not necessarily have to do with the display alone – "It wasn't necessarily just a Sámi, non-Sámi question" (McGowan interview, 2019) – but does also point to where the NNKM, as well as McGowan and Olli individually, felt like they could push or bend the colonial institutional construct of the art museum while still maintaining the NNKM as well as the SDMX's credibility as an "art museum" in the contexts of both Tromsø and the wider culture sector; also, where it would be risky to challenge expectations.

4.6 Writing to welcome

One physical presentation detail that the NNKM did decide to change, however, was in how information about the artworks was presented linguistically. Since 1990, Sámi language has been recognised in Norway as an official national language, as mentioned in Chapter 2, and official information and government assistance at all levels should be made available in Sámi language, as well as Bokmål and Nynorsk. However, outside of towns with high incidences[9] of Sámi inhabitants it was rare to see Sámi language used in common public settings in 2017. Perhaps, in addition to historic cultural intolerance, some of the more recent rationale in not bothering to add Sámi language for most businesses had been that, unlike in other multilingual nations such as Belgium or Canada, the vast majority of Sámi-Norwegians also speak fluent Norwegian, so meaning could be conveyed to the public through the use of Norwegian alone, so why bother adding a second language if on organisation wasn't required to, officially? Thus,

[9] Meaning, a high percentage of total residents who identify as Sámi.

in the majority of museums around Norway, museum information was, and still is, largely written in Norwegian and English as the norm – Norwegian for the Norwegian and Scandinavian visitors, and English for the rest of the world's tourists. After those two languages, if a museum in most parts of Norway would have another language on the wall, it would most likely be German, as Norway's next most common tourist language after English (Innovasjon Norge, 2018, p. 15). Until 2017, the NNKM had been no different, with no Sámi language readily visible to visitors, either in person or online.

When imagining what the SDMX project could or should be, however, that lack of visible Sámi language in the NNKM stood out. And so it was with the opening of the SDMX project that visitors to the building were greeted with exhibit information on the walls, in the pamphlets, on the SDMX website, or even simply on the signage outside, written in Northern Sámi language – not only existing as an option, but in an equally large font, not as an addition to the Norwegian-written words, but as an equal, side by side. And, when the SDMX disappeared and the building reverted back to being the NNKM, that information in Northern Sámi remained.

Museums can be disseminators of knowledge, or gatekeepers. Signage and art labels are important ways for museums to inform guests about what they're looking at, provide background or context, or even just indicate where the toilets are. When information is written in one's language, that person knows they've been considered and it imbues them with a sense of inclusion and belonging (Kuoljok, 2015). McGowan raised this in our conversation, how seeing one's own language present and visible effectively communicates to that community that "Yes, you're welcome here, this language is welcome here" (McGowan interview, 2019). Beyond simply reinforcing that the language is welcome, however, it also validates and promotes it, to numerous audiences in numerous ways. In our chat, McGowan pointed out how language visibility in the NNKM contributes to language revitalisation and preservation, a particularly important theme in the Sámi community still today, after generations during which Sámi languages fell out of use due to the impacts of the Norwegianisation Policy and anti-Sámi sentiment across Scandinavia. For McGowan, this was a way for the SDMX but also the NNKM to do a better job representing its demographics of "people living in the North of Norway" – particularly as a public institution.

There is also another demographic that can be indirectly impacted by the choice of languages on display in cultural institutions: tourists. As a visitor, every detail that a tourist sees conveys to them a bit more of an idea what the values are of a place, what's normal, what's important, and it creates the story of the place that they take with them onwards. The truth is that many of Northern Norway's international visitors – and indeed many Norwegians from the south – generally know very little about the Sámi before they arrive. Sámi culture has been largely underrepresented in Norwegian tourism and cultural exports – trolls and vikings are far more known. Those travelling to the north of Norway might have heard mention of the Sámi as the Indigenous people of the north, but Sámi representation and diversity has been poor or tokenistic, even in terms of what Norwegians are exposed to with domestic tourism (Carina & Keskitalo, 2017). International tourists in particular, if they had heard about the Sámi before arriving in Tromsø, would largely know them as reindeer herders through "Sámi experience" tourism visits or from historical-cultural museum exhibits which would generally present a static, "traditional" representation of Sámi culture, not a vibrant, multi-faceted, living culture. For these visitors, coming to an art museum to see art, not to be looking to learn about the Sámi, then seeing Northern Sámi having an equal presence with the Norwegian language throughout the building becomes a signal of normalcy, of presence, of equality in that space, and in Tromsø.

Representation matters, as is so often said when discussing equality and social justice, and the NNKM recognised its importance during the SDMX, but also once it left, shifting the "normal" in the museum space to include Sámi language as a default throughout, from exhibits to bathroom signage, indicating to Sámi visitors that they're welcome, and to everyone else that the NNKM's "Northern Norway" includes the Sámi – not merely as a highlight, but as a normal part of the everyday.

4.7 Crediting the contributors

Another key linguistic detail of the SDMX presentation was how pieces were attributed. Many of the artworks and duodji included in the exhibit came largely from the Sámi Dáiddamagasiidna (Sámi Art Collection; RiddoDuottarMuseat, n.d.), though some came from the NNKM collections (SDMX | NNKM, 2017a). Within the fictive world of the

performance itself, however, the Dáiddamagasiidna was now in the care of the imaginary SDMX and, while the SDMX stood in the heart of Tromsø, the exhibit attributions referred to pieces having come from the SDMX's permanent collection. Once the SDMX left and the NNKM returned with *There Is No* as its primary exhibit, these were updated to state the pieces were on loan from the SDMX collection, not the Sámi Dáiddamagasiidna, continuing to maintain the idea of the SDMX.

This choice to consciously lift up the Sámi Dáiddamagasiidna seems particularly apt given the NNKM's trend in previous years to herald the collections from which its programming stemmed from. While any exhibit is more than the summary written in its promotional materials, the particular framing through which an exhibit is presented does prime audiences, telling them what they should be impressed and excited by. Research into museum wall text and art labels has shown the importance of wording and framing in terms of creating accessibility, impacting how audiences experience, understand, and interact with the exhibit (Kjeldsen & Jensen, 2015; Pierroux & Qvale, 2019). Barthes (1977), as a core theorist within the school of semiotics, identified how the combination of words and images can clarify what is seen, or what it is, by "anchoring" one's perception, and nudging the viewer towards a particular "code" through which to interpret what they're looking at (pp. 38–40). While such analysis of symbols, imagery, and wording is very much a part of art academia, everyday audiences might be somewhat conscious of the signs and symbols they see within the art itself. But the impact of an art label simply telling them what they're looking at is more subtle and would likely be overlooked in its mundanity, even by those who consider themselves to be experienced art museum visitors. This makes its influence all the more important as it has a surreptitious impact on audience perception.

In 2015 in particular, the NNKM was focusing on the importance of the collector and collections to the art world, and media releases surrounding exhibits would specifically highlight this as being a very important detail. For example, in the write-up regarding the *Fra Dahl til Munch* exhibit in 2015, four outside collections or collectors and one art historian are mentioned, with reference made to their importance in the Norwegian art world, to impress upon readers and visitors the value of the exhibit (NNKM, 2015a). With *There Is No*, the decision to attribute pieces to the SDMX was an act that reinforced the fact that yes, this collection *was* important and integral within the art world's

context, elevating that collection by making it seem more exclusive. And, further down the road, creating the space to question why a collection of such importance didn't have an ongoing viewing place.

4.8 Political apoliticality and loss

The core of any performance or exhibit is, of course, the content. The SDMX performance was absolutely political. From its inception and development, to its presentation, and its ongoing effects. The entire concept was an attempt to confront the issue of the lack of a dáiddamusea, and to challenge this fact. Of course, the argument can be made, and rightly so, that all art is political. As Orwell (1946) famously wrote, "The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude". However, there was an awareness that, to achieve the impact they were looking for, perhaps *There Is No* needed to be wary of being too confrontational. Even if every piece in There Is No presented its own politics, an effort was made to avoid reinforcing the stereotype that all Sámi art is angry, or that it's all just about being Sámi.

> Actually, the SDMX exhibition was a nice one. We could have included art that was much more critical towards the Norwegian government, but we chose to show art that [conveyed] what people are missing, [...] of what a Sámi Art Museum could have been. That was the focus. (Olli interview, 2019)

When speaking about the SDMX project, both McGowan and Olli made it clear that the performance itself was the strongest and most important political action: replacing an entire Norwegian cultural institution with another to raise the question of why that other hasn't already existed.

> The intention was also to show that [a dáiddamusea wasn't] something to be afraid of, something that would be dangerous in a way. But, that it could actually be quite good and interesting. That Sámi society doesn't just protest – it's a lot of other things, too. (Olli interview, 2019)

It was important to McGowan and Olli, however, that the project didn't try to fill the void it was pointing to. As McGowan explained, "also delivering the solution [to the problem we're raising] would cancel out self-determination, and then it's colonialism all over

again!" (McGowan interview, 2019). The decision was to give the SDMX its time in the spotlight, but then to take it away before too long, to make it clear what Sápmi was still missing. Rather than removing the SDMX all in one go, however, the NNKM found a way to take it away gradually in a way to create a shift in the conversation.

From 21 April 2017, *There is No* was now a "touring" exhibit from the SDMX, on display at the NNKM until 29 August, presenting artwork from the "SDMX collection" as well as pieces from the NNKM's own collection (NNKM, 2017b).[10] And, as mentioned previously, the details such as the art plaques or the visibility of the North Sámi language positioned equally beside the Norwegian and English languages remained. *There Is No* ran for six months in total (across both SDMX and NNKM iterations), making it the primary exhibit on display that year, and the only one to be shown for that length of time. In fact, from 2015 to 2018, the average exhibition length was just under three months. But eventually *There Is No* did end, which was also an important part of the exhibit. McGowan explained:

> One of the very big words that [Olli] wiggled into the project was to create a feeling of loss. So that society – not just Sámi, but also broader – would become aware of this thing that was missing, that they maybe weren't aware of. And [it worked], people were getting a bit sad when the Sámi Dáiddamusea[x] was going to close. Nobody was sad when NNKM disappeared overnight. *(laughs)* But there's been a sense of loss about the Sámi Dáiddamusea[x]. (McGowan interview, 2019)

Positioning Sámi creativity in the heart of Tromsø and in the major cultural institution in Northern Norway for such a long period of time created a situation where the Tromsø community could almost begin to take its presence for granted. It also meant that throughout the summer high tourism season, visitors to the museum took home with them a more multifaceted perspective of Tromsø's cultural makeup, something more than just a Norwegian-flavoured European town.

[10] The Norwegian version exhibit page on the NNKM website was written in a way that implies the longstanding and ongoing existence of the SDMX, while the English version clarifies that the SDMX is 'non-existing', and more directly references some of the decolonial framing of the exhibition to minimize confusion for non-Norwegian visitors.

4.9 What the SDMX wasn't

To briefly return to the core definitions of the SDMX and *There Is No*, the SDMX was *not* the long-awaited Sámi dáiddamusea in neither intention nor presentation, despite some muddled details surrounding its discussion. It was an exhibit, a performance, an attempt to be a catalyst (or at the very least, fuel to feed the push) for change on a broader level. It was certainly used as an initiator from an internal institutional level. Efforts were clearly made to make shifts within the NNKM to indigenise the institution publicly, but one cannot build an entirely new organism off the skeleton of a completely different beast, though McGowan and Olli were also conscious of this fact, and worked to find a balance between what a dáiddamusea could be within the confines of what the NNKM already was.

Olli summed up the current situation of the Norwegian cultural sector well when she said that, even after presenting the SDMX, that "we've been able to see the Sámi way of showing art through a Western frame. But, now, how can we communicate the art in a Sámi way?" (Olli interview, 2019). With the SDMX, the NNKM did make some efforts to strip down some of its colonial ways of presenting and of framing, but it could only do so much with the time, budget, and energy the project could muster. So while the statement can be made that *There Is No* did fall victim to its own blindness of the limitations it put on what an art museum "should be", both McGowan and Olli conveyed to me an understanding that of course the SDMX project could never have been *the* Sámi dáiddamusea. That in fact, that should not have been a goal of the SDMX. That, to do things right, there did need to be an actual dáiddamusea, not just a place to house and present Sámi art, but to do it in the Sámi way, in terms of what is chosen to be on display, how it's done, and how the whole organisation is managed. In a perfect world, an actual dáiddamusea wouldn't simply be a Sámi-flavoured version of the Norwegian style of art museum, dictated by Norwegian expectations. Instead, it would stem out of Sámi ways of thinking and of being.

There Is No was a celebration of Sámi dáidda and duodji, it was a consciously political attempt to point a finger to the lack of space Sámi art held in Norwegian cultural institutions – including the NNKM. To the wider community, the performance project was a clear signal as to the NNKM's stance on the place of Sámi art within the NNKM and was a clear statement of solidarity, particularly regarding the need for a dáiddamusea.

The SDMX and *There Is No*, together, were an opportunity for the NNKM itself to reflect upon its own sense of "normal" and "representation", giving it the opportunity to make a shift. And so while the performative exhibit was a vital part of the NNKM's efforts to decolonise as an institution, it was just one first step along the way. It's the ongoing shifts that the museum has made since, both short- and long-term, that are even more important today in terms of the NNKM showing a real commitment to change.

Over the course of the following year, the NNKM was awarded four times over for its programming of the SDMX project – Museum of the Year from the Norwegian Museum Association in April 2017 (Sund, 2017), The Norwegian Audience Development's Next Practice award in November 2017 (NNKM, 2017d), Tromsø Municipality's Culture Prize in December 2017 (NNKM, 2017e), and The Norwegian Critics' Association 2017 Prize in April 2018 (Kritikerlaget, 2018) – giving the SDMX project an even larger platform from which to highlight what was still missing in Norway and in Sápmi. In its statement explaining why the NNKM was chosen that year, the Norwegian Museum Association highlighted the SDMX project, commending it for its sharp critique of the failure of Norwegian cultural policy to ensure "a special and permanent" space for Sámi art.

One detail in the Norwegian Museum Association statement stands out in particular: the concluding line. One would typically expect an awards statement to bring its glowing commendations back around to highlight the prizewinner. However the statement instead concluded with, The Sámi Dáiddamusea shows us what treasure chest we have in Sámi art; and that it deserves its own museum" (Sund, 2017). It's a subtle detail, but to end a statement about a prizewinner by calling for the creation of a completely separate organisation points to the true success of the SDMX: jarring audiences into realising what's missing.

5 The Nordnorsk Kunstmusem 2017 to 2020

5.1 A museum in transition

The SDMX and *There Is No* had been a point from which the NNKM was able to pivot in its focus, its practices, and its scope. But the act of change must be proactive and maintained for it to become habit and the new normal, particularly at the start. From 2018 onwards, the NNKM continued to wear its politics on its sleeve. As an organisation, it showed a commitment to acknowledging its position and creating influence in the cultural world and its community, using its resources to stimulate change and discussion. McGowan continued to actively petition the board about the by-law wording and raised questions around whether a board position currently appointed by the Ministry of Culture could instead be given to the Sámediggi (McGowan interview, 2019). Programming continued to cover a broad range of topics, but while the framing of exhibits pre-2017 had focused on classical canons and collections, a clear shift was visible in how exhibit descriptions were worded post-SDMX. When Sámi artists were part (or focus) of an exhibition, unlike pre-2017 when this fact would remain unspoken, now there would be reference to their Sámi identity, direct or indirect[11]. The John Savio Prizewinners – Britta Marakatt-Labba in 2017 (NNKM, 2017a) and Aage Gaup in 2019 (NNKM, 2019a) – were each given a focused exhibition on display for nearly a year. The longevity of the exhibitions imbued these artists with an importance in the Northern Norwegian cultural milieu, as well as heightening the profile and value of the John Savio Prize. Sámi creators were being presented as an integral part of Northern Norway, deserving of strong representation on the museum walls.

Museum programming began to show a trend of proactively reconsidering or challenging how stories were told, and who, due to colonial or institutional blindness, had been left out of the conversation. One example of this is the *Like Betzy* exhibit that

[11] For example, referencing that Aslaug Magdalena Juliussen came from a reindeer herding family (NNKM, 2018b) indicating her Sámi heritage, as only Sámi are allowed to own reindeer in Norway.

showed in 2019/2020 (NNKM, 2019b). Focusing on Betzy Akersloot-Berg's unique and plentiful contributions to the painted depictions of Northern Norway, the exhibit pointedly juxtaposed her work and life against male painters who have traditionally been celebrated for having shared this region artistically with the rest of the world, despite the fact that those painters generally spent much less time exploring a much smaller area of the north compared to Akersloot-Berg (Bell, 1997; NNKM, 2019b). Her works and story were complemented by other pieces by celebrated male artists while the information pointed to the role that women played in their lives that allowed these men to create or, in the case Gerhard Munthe's *Beilerne* tapestry, noting how it's believed that while he designed the imagery, it was Munthe's wife who likely did the handiwork to create the piece on display (NNKM art label, shown in Like Betzy exhibit, 2019). Making its politics even clearer, the exhibit was interspersed with facts stuck to the museum walls about female representation and support in the arts in Norway and worldwide, clearly demonstrating the inequities that still exist today. When the NNKM built a box around the Roald Amundsen statue outside the NNKM for him to stand in – a reference to Akersloot-Berg's painting box that she would use on the seaside – it was part publicity stunt, but it was also to position her as an equally important figure in Northern Norwegian cultural lore, and it created a debate around challenging these hero myths that carried on in the local newspapers for months.

The NNKM was embracing the potential it had in instigating creative activism, stimulating conversations, and doing it with glee, inviting people to join in on the journey to deinstitutionalise and decolonise. "Ideally, we're communicating a sort of underlying openness and inclusivity that people recognise and feel welcome by. Because there's all sorts of work to be done to catch up, and deal with to tell otherwise excluded groups that they're welcome here" (McGowan interview, 2019). The time after 2017 was defined by some large moments or decisions, particularly around the *HOS NNKM* exhibit, but moreover by many smaller actions which, when put together, was the NNKM's attempt to make sustainable change, and proactively signal to the local community – Tromsø, Sámi, and Kven especially, that there were and are welcome.

5.2 Case Study: *Kunstner: Rose-Marie Huuva*

Rose-Marie Huuva is a Sámi sculptural artist and wordsmith from Rensjön, a Sámi community outside Kiruna in Swedish Sápmi. Although she isn't Norwegian, Huuva has been a part of several NNKM exhibitions, including *Sámi Stories* in 2014/2015 and *There Is No* in 2017. Huuva's Sámi-ness is a strong influence in her work in terms of theme, approach, and materials, such as using reindeer skins, hair, and other natural elements. Her techniques are a personal secret, turning soft skins into solid shapes. Her life, her family, and her personal experiences are integral to her artwork, and even if a piece is no longer with her, her way of speaking about her art conveys a deep connection to and caring about its life and continued existence – her work continues to be an extension of her, even if she's now set it free and allowed it to be a part of others' realities. Huuva's work is highly political and sharply observational, yet soft and non-confrontational, an invitation rather than a lecture.

From October 2018 to September 2019 the NNKM presented an exhibit of specifically her work after she had gifted the museum with a collection of her own past artworks. The donation itself was a huge indicator as to Huuva's appreciation and trust of the NNKM. I was able to meet with Huuva in Alta during the 2019 Sámi Dáiddafestivála. Earlier that day I had attended the seminar around Sámi art and aesthetics, which included a discussion around the positioning of dáidda and duodji in the Sámi cultural milieu. Upon meeting, she asked how the seminar had been, and I mentioned the dáidda/duodji exploration and it seemed a natural question to begin with – where did she fall in the debates around these definitions?

"Oh, that discussion again. It's always that discussion!"

Her reply came so quickly and vehemently it made me laugh. She explained that the same conversation has happened since the 1970s and perhaps it's interesting to the younger artists, but for her it felt like a tired topic that she was glad to stay out of at this point.

> I'm not so concerned about the definition. As a Sámi who works with duodji, I am making art. You have to find the right materials, choose them carefully, you can't just use anything. I want everything to be as perfect, as good as it can be. And that

> I learned from my mother and father, who were very skilled duojárat. (Huuva interview, 2019)

Huuva's defiance of categories comes through in her artwork, and it reinforced my interest in speaking with her. Someone who invites connection and political debate in such a direct yet nonthreatening manner was someone whose perspectives I was curious to hear. To understand her choice to donate work to the NNKM, I needed to know about her past experiences with the NNKM. Afterall, not only did she choose to give ownership of her works to a non-Sámi organisation, but also, as a Sámi living in Swedish Sápmi, she chose a Norwegian art institute over a Swedish one. When I first asked about her relationship with the NNKM, Huuva spoke about how, in the past, the institute had been very much geared towards a Norwegian focus, particularly when it came to Sámi artists. Because she lived outside Norway, her creative contributions from a Sámi perspective seemed to be looked over. "[Earlier, the NNKM] was for Norwegians and the Sámi artists living in Norway, and not many of [those Sámi] were considered to be artists. So there were maybe five [Sámi] who were considered to be artists, according to the NNKM" (Huuva interview, 2019).

Even so, there was no Sámi art museum in all of Sápmi, neither in Finland nor Sweden. Both the Ájtte Museum in Jokkmokk, Sweden, and the Siida Museum in Inari, Finland, focus primarily on history and anthropology. In addition to this, due to colonial traditions and standards in museums (including their inclusion of Sámi craniums in the museum collections; Sametinget-SE, 2019), coupled with the state of the past and current position of the Sámi and their culture in Sweden, Huuva had long ago decided to never share her works with the Ájtte Museum.

Huuva's first involvement with the NNKM was being a part of the *Sámi Stories* travelling exhibit in 2014/2015, with a piece called *Áhkku 448 vuorkkát* ("Grandmother's 448 Treasures" in Northern Sámi). The focus of the piece is a photograph of her actual grandmother, framed by 448 "treasures", small, colourful fabric-bound packages. As the piece had already been sold to Sámi Dáiddamagasiidna, there was no direct negotiation between Huuva and the NNKM when the museum borrowed it for *Sámi Stories*, which in itself is common practice. Given how proudly the institution seemed to be of *Sámi Stories*, and its importance in representing Sámi culture in North America, did the NNKM

invite the artists it was highlighting to partake in this "landmark" experience? Had Huuva found it an honour to be included, particularly as a Sámi living in the Swedish region of Sápmi?

> Yes, I was happy to be included. But I was also very, very, very disappointed. That exhibition went to New York and Alaska, and I have tried to follow this *Áhkku* – my Áhkku! – because she has been exhibited in so many places. When she was living, yes, she migrated with the reindeers, but she didn't travel so much! *(laughs)* So I went to New York, but I had to pay everything myself. That's how I was treated by NNKM at that time, when the previous director was there. I was so disappointed. (Huuva interview, 2019)

While Huuva was invited to attend the American exhibits, she had to fund her own travels. She was able to attend the New York City exhibit but couldn't afford to visit it in Anchorage. Although budget limitations could explain why the NNKM didn't offer Huuva a travel stipend to attend the New York or Alaskan openings, there is a problematic dissonance between the NNKM heralding another's culture as important and under-recognised, while leaving the actual creators *of* the pieces in that exhibition with having to shoulder the cost and burden of getting there to be there present and act as cultural representatives. Within a colonial lens, this is a complication of the Western cultural sector, that once creative works leave the custody of the creator, the artist no longer has control over their stories and how they're told. But while the blinders of existing as a product of colonial institutionalism in the Western world explains such behaviour, it does not mean that an institution today must continue to follow this tradition – particularly if decolonising as an institution is prioritised. As Sara (2019) puts it, "a colonial institution must be very aware of owning statements and witnesses of the minority society. You can't use it as a piece of decoration." Having the legal right to present a piece of art is one thing. Doing right by the artist or their culture, particularly in a colonialist dynamic, requires more than simply satisfying legal or financial agreements.

Sámi Stories was a project curated by a colonial culture – Norwegian – and being presented in another place with a well-understood colonial history – the United States. While the NNKM was proclaiming the importance and value of the exhibit, both the

NNKM and Scandinavia House either ignored or were oblivious to the complexities and sensitivities that should have been considered when celebrating an Indigenous culture, particularly as the colonisers. At the very least, ensuring those involved in the exhibit felt included could have left the artists with a very different perception of the experience.

So, then, Huuva's first experience with the NNKM left her with a bitter aftertaste.

A few years later, however, Huuva's *Áhkku* was again borrowed by the NNKM, this time as one of three Huuva pieces included in *There Is No*. Being involved in this exhibit was, as she described it, a remarkably different experience. It didn't escape her notice that things had changed at the museum after the organisation's change in leadership. "With this new director, everything changed!" (Huuva interview, 2019). Her sense of who the museum was, what its values were, and particularly its attitude towards Sámi artists changed drastically.

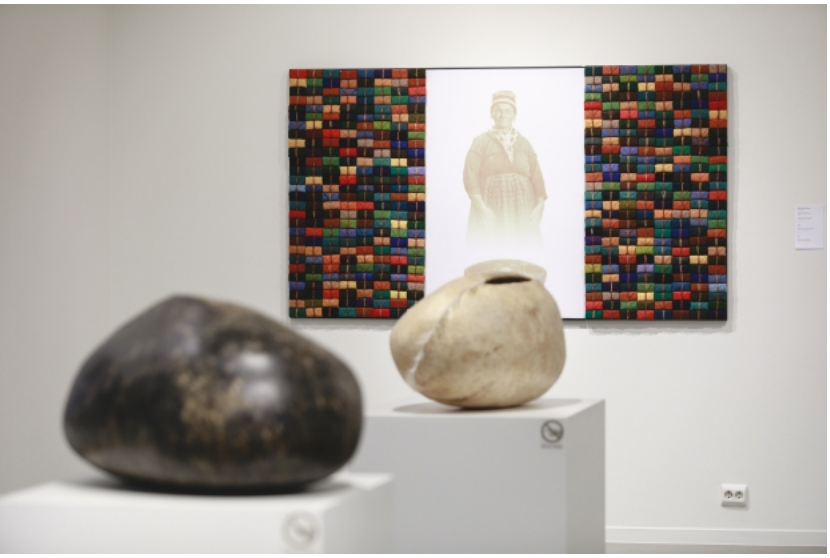

Figure III. Works by Rose-Marie Huuva, on display in *There Is No (2017)* at the SDMX/NNKM, *Áhkku 448 vuorkkát*, 2006 in the background. Photographer: Morten Fiskum, used with permission from NNKM.

Not long after the SDMX closed its doors, Huuva had to decide whether to donate some old works from her collection or simply throw them away. Initially, her first experience with *Sámi Stories* nearly stopped her from approaching the NNKM. "I'd been so disappointed, I'd [told myself I'd] never, never go to NNKM. But they had this new director now, so I wrote to him, and we had a very good connection" (Huuva interview, 2019). In June 2017, encouraged by the changes she saw in the NNKM, Huuva arranged to donate seven of her pieces to the NNKM. The remainder went to be be looked after by the Dáiddamagasiidna until they could be included as a part of an eventual dáiddamusea collection (Huuva interview, 2019; NNKM, 2017b).

A year later, the NNKM presented an exhibit of these donated pieces (NNKM, 2018a). The contrast in how Huuva spoke about her interactions with the NNKM during the installation of this later exhibit was pronounced, her voice and expression glowing while

describing her experience. Notably, for Huuva's exhibit, the NNKM avoided the white cube aesthetic, presenting the works in a room painted with earthy tones and simple but effectively moody, mysterious lighting. Between the natural elements of her work and the colour and tone of the space, the exhibit connected visitors to the natural environment, rather than a white-cube approach divorcing the works – and Huuva's creativity – from their founding elements.

For Huuva, this was a treat.

> When I came there I saw this room was dark brown – yes, they made the effort to paint the whole room dark brown! I had never seen my pieces in a dark room before. I was very glad with the whole experience of seeing those pieces in that room, and they worked very much with the lights to get it just right. So that was an experience. (Huuva interview, 2019)

Huuva had recognised a shift in the museum's focus and priorities in 2017 that managed to overcome her distaste after *Sámi Stories*, enough to trust that the NNKM was a place to entrust her works. On the NNKM website, the press release regarding Huuva's donation noted that part of Huuva's decision was due to "a recognition of [the NNKM and RDM's] work for Sámi art" (NNKM, 2017c). It is of course a press release and as such will paint the museum in a good light, but it reflects the same story I was told by Huuva regarding her experiences and feelings towards the NNKM before and after 2017. The SDMX project had been a stark sign to Huuva that the NNKM was trying to change and was beginning to take its responsibility towards the Sámi community seriously.

As our conversation wrapped up I asked Huuva whether she felt that the NNKM trying to represent Sápmi took away the urgency of creating a Sámi dáiddamusea.

"No, it doesn't. No. Why can't we have both?" (Huuva interview, 2019).

5.3 Case Study: *HOS NNKM*

In 2020, the NNKM was to host the Norwegian Association for Arts and Crafts Annual Exhibit. While it wouldn't open until later in the year, in October, the museum decided to devote the entirety of 2020 to craft and duodji, using *HOS NNKM* as a way to "warm up"

the museum to the annual exhibit (Saus interview, 2020). The NNKM used this opportunity to reflect on its purpose and the actual impact it wanted to have with its programming. While the NNKM by-laws specify that the museum should develop interest in craft as well as in art, exhibitions to this point had largely focused on art in a classical sense – a detail which had also impacted how, when, or if duodji featured in exhibitions.

HOS NNKM impressively gathered together the numerous threads and small changes the museum had been making since the SDMX, not only in its decolonising process, but also in indigenising. The project was an intentional continuation of the NNKM's activism, an attempt to recognise and reposition the museum within the community as it made a concerted attempt to distance itself from the perception of museums as ivory towers of high art and culture. Instead, the NNKM wanted to transition itself to becoming a community hub where people felt welcome and at home. The exhibit's description clearly outlined the museum's motives:

> Museums are not neutral. Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum will be a different museum, a museum that is present, easily accessible and a committed speaker for everyday creativity. We believe that art and cultural institutions need to do more to get involved in the very pressing issues of our time. Museums need to be proactive and able to create change and new opportunities. We need alternatives and new visions of what an art museum can and should be today. (NNKM, 2020a)

HOS NNKM, like the SDMX, was both an exhibit as well as a project. This time, part of it was a reconsideration and redesign of the museum space in consideration of how to make itself more welcoming and inclusive. *HOS NNKM* found its inspiration in craft, given the annual exhibit that would follow. But the exhibit was also rooted in the concept of activism as it endeavoured to redefine what constituted "high" art, lifting up craft and celebrating the soft, domestic undervalued forms of creative expression. Very quickly, the theme became one of craftivism or "håndverksaktivisme" as they translated it into Norwegian (Saus interview).

Marianne Saus was hired as *HOS NNKM* project manager specifically for her background in service design to look after the realisation of the project. Simply put, service design is "improving the way humans interact with the world" (Harris, 2013). It's a holistic,

interdisciplinary design approach intended to optimise user (visitor) experiences in a sustainable fashion by considering infrastructure, communication, and physical aspects of a service (Dervojeda et al., 2014) – in this case, the museum experience. While often associated with marketing and product design, the techniques and method of analysis are very broadly useful and have been of increasing interest in the museum sector. Saus described the NNKM's beginning steps into service design as "an upside-down bottle", where they worked to define a concept first, then figure out how to realise it in more tangible, specific ways. "We had a lot of ideas, but we had to sort through them to get something concrete" (Saus interview, 2020).

Service design takes a human-centered approach, focusing on the user – the museum's intended audience – as the starting point of its analysis to determine what their experience has currently been, and what they want or need to become more interested in the product or service. "We did a lot of audience development on how to interest more people in the museum. Not only the regular audience, but new groups – who is out there, and how can we reach out to them." (Saus interview, 2020). Research and idea-gathering for *HOS NNKM* included looking outwards at research findings and what other cultural institutions were doing, but it also looked within. Saus described staff workshops that involved everyone in the staff – curators, outreach, technical, front of house, all the departments – to capture what the organisation as a whole saw as important, as well as to brainstorm how the organisation could better connect with its intended community. The biggest detail that the NNKM wanted to address was inclusiveness. As Saus explained, "Research shows that a lot of people, especially young people, are intimidated by museums because they feel you need a certain level of knowledge to visit a museum, because they don't feel smart enough" (Saus interview, 2020). On top of that are expectations on how one should act and interact in museum settings.

HOS NNKM focused on the environment the NNKM wanted to create, not only as museum space itself, but in terms of what visitor demographics would contribute to the creation of even more inclusivity. Upstairs in the gallery, classic traditional art forms – paintings, photographs, film, etc. – were packed away at the end of 2019, and the NNKM took this moment to close for a few months do an even larger overhaul of the museum, renovating the first floor to add a café, a makerspace, and to expand the museum's shop.

In juxtaposition to the strongly worded manifesto that made up the exhibition description, the pieces that made up the *HOS NNKM* project focused on creating an environment that was warm, soft, and welcoming.

> We wanted to focus on families and children because there's recruiting in making the museum normal for children. But also, we didn't want to hush people [in the café or makerspace]; we're playing music, we want people to talk, it's okay for children to run around. You can have your pram with you in this space. (Saus interview, 2020)

When *HOS NNKM* opened, it was highlighting and re-valuing handicraft works in the NNKM collections while focusing on craftivism and community. The space was bright and friendly, and intentional choices were made in terms of presentation to signal in both obvious and subtle ways who the NNKM was, and who it was for.

5.3.1 Building a welcoming space

Most makerspaces focus on construction and technology-based craft, but the NNKM chose instead to focus on the "soft" materials – fabrics, skin, yarn, techniques which have often been gendered as being for women. On a practical level, it was in part to avoid dealing with dust and debris in a museum setting (Saus interview, 2020), but the choice was also a way to confer a higher value on everyday handicraft which is often feminised and undervalued. It's also the sort of craft that doesn't usually require large machinery, the operation of which can also be intimidating to some. So again, the focus was on breaking down barriers to encourage community and connection. Another result of the non-traditional makerspace was that it wound up being a place where soft-material duodji could be just as ordinary and visible on a daily basis as any other type of project, particularly when the NNKM hired a duojár as a makerspace host who would often be working on gákti when she wasn't helping out less experienced crafters. In short, there was strong consideration of accessibility, and a focus on how the NNKM could contribute to the local community by make new demographics feel not only welcome but encouraged to spend time at the museum.

Figure IV. *HOS NNKM*'s makerspace, with labelling in Norwegian, North Sámi, and English. Photo: Sarah Caufield.

The makerspace and café both normalised Sámi-ness through language. Kasmani (2018) has said that "all language is political and it shapes the power dynamics and the narratives, and tells about the knowledge and epistemologies at play" (12:46). As shared community spaces, both required written language, whether to communicate menu options or where to find craft supplies. Local community language was prioritised, and this local community included Sámi speakers, with every label, drink option, or activist motto written in Norwegian, English, and Northern Sámi – in fact, the decorative phrases on the walls often prioritised Sámi, writing it first or larger. This language diversity extended into the programming as well, with guided exhibit tours offered in Northern Sámi – again, a NNKM first (NNKM, 2020b).

The other major physical redesign was to the museum's gift shop, to expand its presence and visibility in order to do a better job being, as Saus put it, "a launchpad for young Sámi and Northern Norwegian designers" (Saus interview, 2020). The NNKM brought in a Sámi design advisor to help plan the changes. "We wanted to design a modern Sápmi shop, [which didn't mean] having a lavvu or a lot of reindeer antlers and the Sápmi flag colours. We wanted to make it modern" (Saus interview, 2020). The end result is a space with numerous subtle details which incorporate or reference Sámi culture without turning Sámi culture into a proof-of-diversity checkmark. Saus pointed

to some of the design details that were considered choices made with a Sámi way of thinking in mind. In the case of the shop, a Sámi way of designing meant choice of materials, consideration of colour, and quiet visual references to a recognised part of Sámi culture.

> We used the greens of the moss and lichen that the reindeer eat, and we only used birchwood, which is what grows most in Northern Norway. Also, when you take down the fitting room curtain, it looks like a lavvu hanging, but that's really subtle. *(laughs)* (Saus interview, 2020)

The NNKM also reached out to expand its vendors with a goal of presenting work from no less than 50% Sámi designers. According to Saus, when discussing the museum's plans with their design consultant, Sámi designers generally had a difficult time selling their goods, even in Tromsø.

> When Sámi designers ask shops if they're interested in selling their products, like pillows and blankets, modern products, the answer is often, "No, we don't have any Sámi customers." But what does that mean?? The products aren't just for Sámi customers! They're not cultural items, they're modern things anybody can use. So we wanted our shop to be a place where these designers could sell these products, and we lowered our fees to make it easier for the designers as well. (Saus interview, 2020)

Saus noted that the NNKM actually had a harder time finding non-Sámi Northern Norwegian designers, and that the current breakdown in the shop was about 70% Sámi and 30% Norwegian. But considering Sámi designers from the Norwegian part of Sápmi are also Norwegian designers, this was hardly a detail of concern.

That the makerspace, café, and shop were integrated into the main floor and foyer of the NNKM is also notable. Depending which way one enters the museum, a visitor will either walk all the way through the café and makerspace, or they will see them directly to their left as they approach the front desk. Either way, they're impossible to not take in as one enters or exits the building. The foyer is both a connection and transition point from outside to inside, from the everyday to observing and exploring creativity, setting the stage for how one should feel and interact with the exhibits housed within the museum

(Laursen et al., 2016). Building a warm café, playing inviting music, and being presented with a giant communal workspace – often being shared by a few – creates a space that not only invites but encourages engagement with objects, with craft, with people, and with community. It has an impact on how guests interact and whether they feel welcome. If for any reason guests were not naturally drawn towards the communal space, NNKM admission throughout 2020 also included a token for a free coffee. It was a welcoming gesture that further invited guests to feel as though they were visiting friends or family. It also had the effect of leading visitors to explore the space before leaving the museum, thereby influencing how visitors might integrate or later remember their museum experience.[12] Even if they chose not to stay, this brief passage through a multilingual space passing by Sámi-created, -inspired, or -influenced design would be a part of their experience and understanding of the NNKM, and who it included.

The NNKM understood that being inclusive towards the Sámi community was different from just using or spotlighting Sámi culture. To effectively move towards decolonisation and indigenisation is also to shift one's perspective away from centering colonising ways of thought and towards an Indigenous way of thinking and being. Furthermore, it was inviting the museum's visitors – Sámi or otherwise – to share in the process of decolonisation and indigenisation by inspiring them to take part and be involved. As Duncombe and Lambert (2018) write, "People don't share policy papers, they share things that move them" (p. 5). By building a space for community to grow while staying true to its activism, the NNKM was creating new ways that people from outside the museum, even, could further normalise a decolonised, indigenised frame of mind.

5.3.2 Curating craftivism in Kvääni

With *HOS NNKM* exhibit, the focus on handicraft and craftivism also created a space for duodji to also be included in the category of "high" art. To hearken back to the importance of the art labels, the font chosen for much of the exhibit information was one that looked like handwritten script, with some parts of the exhibit even handwritten by

[12] Drinks aren't allowed in the exhibition spaces, so guests had to enjoy their drink before or after exploring. While far from a scientific study, every time I did visit the NNKM or its makerspace, I always saw museum visitors come at the end to redeem their tokens. Afterall, free coffee is free coffee!

the curators themselves – another way to create a sense of approachability between the viewer and the art. I want to focus specifically on one subsection of the overall *HOS NNKM* exhibit, however, on *Huuttaa ilman sanoitta*, a project by artist Åsne Kummeneje Mellem which translates as "To Shout Without Words" from Kvääni, the Kven language.

The Kven are a minority culture in Norway, who were similarly affected by the Norwegianisation assimilation policies, resulting in loss of language, culture, and identity. Kvääni language and cultural revitalisation is in progress, but there is still a long way to go. Mellem's project told the story of her rediscovering her Kven roots, trying to relearn the traditional ways of Kven handicraft on her own. She had inherited an old loom but didn't know how to use it as that knowledge hadn't been passed down.

Figure V. *Huuttaa ilman sanoitta* by Åsne Kummeneje Mellem. Top left – the overall installation; top right – exhibit information in Kvääni, Norwegian, English, and North Sami (clockwise from left); Bottom – exhibit detail, showing old newspapers which had been wrapped around the loom in storage. Photographer: Tiina Portti; used with permission from NNKM.

Incorporated into the exhibit were pages from decades-old newspapers filled with articles referencing the Kven community at the time which had used to wrap the loom when it was put into storage. *Huuttaa ilman sanoitta* was about the process of rediscovering skills which had been lost – both what worked and what didn't, of learning by doing, working out how to use the loom, and trying to connect to her own heritage. Already the exhibit was impressive in the myriad of stories it was telling, and very much connected to themes of decolonisation and cultural reclamation. But a final detail of the installation was to present the exhibition text and artist information on the wall in Northern Sámi, Norwegian, and English, of course, but also, a first for the NNKM, in Kvääni. I was told how the curators[13] worked with the Kven Council to figure out how to translate "punk rock" into Kvääni, as Mellem doesn't speak the language fluently either – another repercussion of assimilation policies, still today – but that everyone they approached was extremely eager to help. Saus recalled one visitor in particular, a Kvääni teacher. "They were almost in tears, because they'd never seen their language up on the wall before like that" (Saus interview, November 2020). This one detail of *HOS NNKM* wove together the struggle of reconnecting to traditional roots, undoing cultural assimilation, and language revitalisation into one affecting piece.

5.3.3 Collaboration as activism

When Saus talked about the development and outcomes of the *HOS NNKM* project, I was struck by the way she didn't point to Sámi-related details as if to show them off. Rather, details such as hiring a Sámi designer, incorporating Sámi language, ensuring Sámi creatives were well-represented in the shop, all of these were mentioned as equally important as everything else brought up – where funding came from, audience demographics, entry fees, or the impact that the pandemic was having on the NNKM in 2020. For her, the project-oriented marketing person, Sámi language and cultural inclusion was just another equivalent detail regarding the *HOS NNKM* development process. It spoke volumes that someone in an organisation heavy with tradition and institutional expectation was essentially describing strong shifts in re-imagining the

[13] *Huuttaa ilman sanoitta* was actually their first experience curating (Koivulehto, 2020), as they learned by doing, making for even more layers of meaning to this part of the exhibit.

organisation without even needing to point directly at it. The NNKM was shifting internally, no longer making changes because "this is a problem" but rather because these were ways that would make the organisation better overall, because ultimately, the NNKM wanted to be this more inclusive, less colonial, less hierarchical space.

A theme that came up often when speaking not only with Saus and McGowan, but also in off-the-record conversations with NNKM staff, was that of collaboration and a movement away from strict hierarchies. In examining the role that museum staff play in activism, Hollows (2019) refers to systems thinking which, as she defines it, "is also based on trusting other people's knowledge, wherever it is located, so contribution is not restricted by job role or position" (p. 87), pointing to the model of Butcher et al. (2007, as cited in Hollows) of critical community practice as a particularly relevant approach: "a whole system, collective approach to addressing social justice" (p. 81). A part of critical community practice considers everyone in an organisation as equally critical in the creation of change, and able to contribute, regardless of their position. It can create an opportunity for everyone to feel empowerment and ownership in what the organisation is doing. While NNKM staff do still currently operate in specific roles with different decision-making abilities, the way operations were described to me made it clear that these lines have grown increasingly malleable, with numerous indirect examples of how conversations, planning, and cooperation take place outside the traditional hierarchical restrictions. Overall, the museum staff I spoke to recognise the benefit of this.

> With a flat structure, it's easy to raise questions. We have several meetings during the week, and a regular all-staff meeting once a week where issues can be raised. But if there's a question regarding a project, it can be raised at any time. (Saus interview, 2020).

There were systems in place whereby programming ideas could be suggested or concerns raised, regardless of one's position. And, as possibly one of the stranger team-building experiences, everyone on staff took part in the *HOS NNKM* renovations.

> We were all wearing worker pants holding a hammer or a saw [alongside the professional workers, of course], all the staff took a big part in the remodelling. We painted and demolished and did everything here! It was nice teamwork, to

> work beside everybody no matter what department they worked in, everybody working together for one "goal". (Saus interview, 2020)

The NNKM was in a transition towards a post-colonial way of being, but rather than it seeming like work, Saus and others I spoke with made it sound exciting, inspirational, collaborative, and community-building.

5.3.4 The impacts of *HOS NNKM*

HOS NNKM was about community, creativity, and craftivism, and was an attempt to interrupt the ordinary and proactively consider what it meant to be a museum in Northern Norway as well as in Sápmi, with regards to audience, offerings, and especially in terms of how it should feel to be with – "hos" – friends. In response to Saus' research, the NNKM was trying to break down barriers that might make people feel intimidated or unwelcome at the museum. This was done by creating reasons for them to be there: the café, the makerspace, and workshops. This was done by making sure visitors felt included through language choices or removing financial barriers by making the makerspace and workshops free and accessible. And of course, this was through the NNKM's curatorial and presentation choices.

HOS NNKM had the grand misfortune of opening unofficially on 9 March 2020, three days before what should have been its official public opening but what turned out to be the day that Norway shut down due to the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic. After months of development and reconstruction, and a great deal of consideration as to how to take a proactive role in building community and bringing people together, the rest of 2020 was impacted by a combination of lockdowns, working from home, social distancing, and anti-bac. The show nonetheless went on, and despite a very unusual year and an inability to use attendance as a way of determining the project's achievements, Saus felt that *HOS NNKM* was a success, citing the fact that people were there most days, many of them regular visitors that included young families, youth, and seniors, and overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the exhibit. Clearly a decolonising and indigenising shift was benefitting the NNKM.

> Activism doesn't necessarily mean conflict or protest […] It does not have to be conducted by someone who identifies themselves as 'an activist' […] Activism doesn't belong to 'other' people; we all have agency and therefore we all have the capacity to make change. Recognising and owning our agency is the first step towards making change; then it is about what we do and *how*, and equally what we don't do. (Hollows, 2019, p. 86)

6 Decolonisation: A Fragile Yet Resilient Process

> To decolonise is to remember. It is to say, we have met before, that we are here because you were there, and this is to recalibrate how we interact with each other with that earlier meeting in mind. (Kassim in *The Museum Will Not Be Decolonised*, 2018, 3:28)

6.1 The Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in 2020

Museums are created spaces that bring people together, build community, and contribute to a wider sense of culture and identity. Art museums in particular have great potential to inspire creativity and connection through displays and programming. As a tool that can help us imagine possible futures, a museum must consider the narratives it creates and reinforces, as well as the audience it builds both through inclusion and exclusion. The topics of decolonisation and deinstitutionalisation are not new in the museum sector, though both processes are extremely context specific as each institution is couched in a different historical, social, and cultural situation. To take on these goals requires a strong amount of interest, will, and commitment to the self-reflexivity and self-awareness demanded by the process.

This thesis strove to examine the case of the Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum (NNKM) and its path towards decolonisation and indigenisation. Guided by the voices of McGowan, Olli, Huuva, Saus, and Sara, I have used the SDMX performative exhibit as a key moment in time to outline the ways in which the NNKM had changed, with a specific focus on the NNKM's programming, public presentation, and its relationships with the Sámi community. The results of this research depict very different versions of the NNKM pre-2017 and in 2020. By early 2020 there were numerous indicators of how the NNKM had adopted and integrated patterns of critical self-evaluation as a way to proactively strive to decolonise, deinstitutionalise, and indigenise as a part of its standard practice. The organisation had come to be seen as an ally to the Sámi community, and a home to dáidda and duodji from across Sápmi. It was not the still-missing Sámi dáiddamusea, but

it also didn't want to be – that was still a different conversation and a different need. The NNKM's goal was to be a better representative of both Northern Norway and Sápmi and all the cultures that existed in this region. Although the words "Sámi"/"Sápmi" were (and are) still missing from the NNKM's by-laws, by the time that *HOS NNKM* opened in 2020, the museum's programming, language, operations, and community engagement reflected the fact that the NNKM's "Northern Norway" was a region of multiple nuanced identities, and that the Sámi in particular, as the region's Indigenous people, were integral to the NNKM's identity and considerations.

Decolonisation as a museum is complicated, requiring critical consideration of organisational practices, processes, and privilege. It's a process without a final destination, "because decolonisation is necessarily unreachable, necessarily indefinable" (Kassim, 2017, para. 14). Aoki (2007) defines institutions as "self-sustaining, salient patterns of social interactions" enacted through commonly-understood social rules that lead to mutual understandings of how things should be – "how the game is played and to be played" (p. 6). To decolonise or indigenise in an institutional context is to challenge those beliefs and attitudes that are taken as immutable truth, the givens that no one has thought to consider could be different. And yet, it is vital for a museum to do so. As Janes (2009) writes, "museums, as public institutions, are morally and intellectually obliged to question, challenge or ignore the status quo and officialdom, whenever necessary. With the exception of museums, there are few, if any, social institutions with the trust and credibility to fulfil this role" (p. 183).

It's impossible to say for certain, but I would argue that without the arrival of someone with an outsider's perspective, the NNKM could not have come so far by 2020 in its process. As a non-Norwegian, but one who came with an understanding and appreciation for the Norwegian way of being, McGowan brought with him that outsider's perspective, along with an idea of how to bridge that cultural gap. It opened up space for alternate ideas of "normal" and "possible" in terms of operations and programming: of considering a collaboration with the Sámi community, of having that first conversation with Olli, and of imagining a potential Sámi dáiddamusea. It was "doing the very necessary work of giving space and giving voice and sharing the space with the Sámi population" (McGowan interview, 2019). As his first major exhibition after joining the NNKM, the SDMX was also his concerted effort to address the blind spots he noticed

when joining the organisation. The exhibit didn't magically undo decolonisation inherent in the NNKM overnight. And despite efforts to distance the NNKM's ownership and involve others such as Olli – even "replacing" the NNKM with the Sámi Dáiddamusea[x] – media and even the NNKM's own publicity ultimately fell back to identifying McGowan as the notable figure in discussing the exhibit, defaulting to reinforcing familiar traditional colonial institutional structures.

The SDMX project was nonetheless a splashy, positive, and colourful way for the NNKM to plant seeds of change internally – in its priorities and operations – while externally demonstrating its interest in developing a better relationship with the Sámi community. McFadzean (2019) writes on the importance of museums involving community participation in creating change, noting that:

> it is not just about creating community relationships but maintaining them [...] It means acknowledging that process can be as important as outcome and that co-creation and engagement methodologies inevitably lead to more powerful, transformative outcomes for both participants and the museum. (p. 266)

The SDMX project, as well as the exhibitions that followed, showed the Tromsø community what had been missing and invited everyone to take part in the process of institutional decolonisation by shifting their expectations of what the NNKM could and should be, for Sápmi, for Tromsø, and for Northern Norway.

6.1.1 Internal shifts

In contrast to the NNKM as it existed before 2017, the NNKM in 2020 had created an overt, ongoing space for Sámi presence within its walls. The museum was making a proactive effort to involve Sámi input and inclusion in its programming. An analysis of the language, content, and framing of the NNKM's exhibits in the three years before and after the SDMX project also shows marked changes in how many exhibits included Sámi artists (pre-SDMX 5 of 22 exhibits vs. post-SDMX 8 of 15)[14], how many of those exhibits

[14] Not including the SDMX performative exhibit.

included Sámi artists' identity in the description (1 of 22[15] vs. 8 of 15), and how many exhibits focused specifically on Sámi artists (2 of 22[16] vs. 5 of 15). Today, when the John Savio Prize was awarded, an in-house exhibition celebrated the winner's repertoire over the next months. Meanwhile, the overall tone of exhibits had shifted. Before 2017, the broad commonality in framing was to focus on how Northern Norway could be connected to the rest of the world – where "the rest of the world" meant "the largely Western Eurocentric classical sense of the art world". By 2020, a common theme was raising up and amplifying the creative output that originated from or was inspired by Northern Norway and Sápmi. Exhibitions were now used as opportunities to challenge accepted discourses, from Indigenous representation in *ANDRES LIV*[17] to the place of women in art history and canons with *Like Betzy*. Or, such as with *HOS NNKM*, jumping on an opportunity to highlight activism while equalising "high" art and craft. Here, particularly, was an example of the NNKM tapping into a Sámi way of thinking about creativity, but not overtly, hearkening back in a way to the decades-long duodji debate, choosing in this exhibit not to differentiate between art and craft. While striving to decolonise, the NNKM was making efforts to indigenise as well.

In terms of presentation, the inclusion of North Sámi language had become normalised in the museum's everyday, visible on walls, signage, and art labels, positioned as equally important alongside Norwegian Bokmål and English.[18] One might even hear it regularly while visiting the café or exhibits, with more Sámi-speakers on staff, able and interested in using their language. Sámi influence was also reflected in the museum's presentation, in the colours and materials adopted during café and shop space renovations as the museum intentionally sought Sámi design input. And, there was a regularity to seeing

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[15] The one pre-SDMX is *Samiske Historier* which, while important, was also problematic, as outlined in Chapter 3; the *Sámi Stories* exhibit upon its return to Tromsø was not counted in these numbers as it was not shown at the actual NNKM.

[16] Both *Sámi Stories*' return exhibit and 2013's *Alf Salo (1959–2013): Soltegn* retrospective are misleading on the NNKM website, allowed it to look as though these exhibits could be seen at the NNKM itself for longer, or at all, when in reality *Sámi Stories*' return to Tromsø was housed at the UiT Museum, and *Alf Salo* spent more time on display in Harstad and in Manndalen than it did in Tromsø.

[17] While the Paris version of this exhibit celebrates Biard's life and his painting abilities, the Tromsø version, *ANDRES LIV* ("*Others' Lives*), points a finger at Biard's portrayal of Indigenous people, and asks viewers to reflect upon what he showed, and what he didn't, but how his choices affected public understandings of these cultures.

[18] One shortcoming, still, is that the NNKM website does not have an overall Northern Sámi language version alongside the Norwegian and English information. This is known, and something they want to change, but have thus far been limited in resources.

the makerspace used to work on gákti or other soft duodji projects. On top of this, standards had been implemented to ensure a certain representation of Sámi design in the shop. All the while, McGowan was regularly speaking at conferences – including at the Ministry of Culture's annual conference in 2017 (Kulturrådet, 2017b) – about the NNKM's ongoing efforts to decolonise, highlighting *There Is No* and the SDMX as the NNKM's starting point. If, as Wajid (as cited in Heal, 2019) argues, museum staff have such a strong responsibility in the process of decolonisation, then conferences such as these are a key place for these conversations to take place for such ideas to disseminate further as museum staff return to their home organisations.

6.1.2 External changes

One of the true successes of the SDMX project was that it was a collaborative project, inspired by McGowan hearing what Olli said the Sámi community needed: a dáiddamusea. Institutional decolonisation is not achieved simply through diversity in representation. Including Sámi artists in exhibits is important, but without an inclusion of Sámi voices and input, it doesn't carry the actions anywhere beyond tokenism. By involving Olli, someone working in a Sámi museum context and familiar with the dáiddamusea discussion, the SDMX became a symbol of alliance and solidarity to the wider Sámi community. After years of feeling that the NNKM was for Norwegian artists only and seeming primarily interested in art as a western-European framework which generally excluded Sámi way of thought and creativity, Huuva began to trust the museum and McGowan enough to donate her works to them, feeling as though finally there was an art museum in Sápmi that would represent Sámi voices – even Sámi from outside the Norwegian borders.

Meanwhile, McGowan continued to be a strong proponent for change within the NNKM at all levels. As he saw it, a museum should never assume it's reached a neutral position. To do nothing to change would be to passively accept the status quo, that ongoing inequalities stemming from a history of colonialism is acceptable, "and suddenly [the museum] is on the side of anti-Sámi-ness" (McGowan interview, 2019). McGowan was pushing for change on all levels, calling for a board position currently appointed by the Ministry of Culture to be given to the Sámediggi to ensure an ongoing, guaranteed Sámi voice in a permanent position on the board to help guide the museum's way forward (McGowan interview, 2019). Between McGowan's programming, advocacy, openness to

collaboration, and outspoken politics, and how these all trickled down into the overall museum operations, the Sámi community had come to see the NNKM as a supporter and an ally. By 2021, even the Sámediggi referred to him as such, with Henrik Olsen, Sámediggi Councilmember for Culture (quoted in Giske, 2021), commented on McGowan's impact on the NNKM by saying,

> Sami art was lifted up under McGowan's leadership. The NNKM included Sami art in its programming, something which had not occurred before in the art museum's history. He raised the issue of the lack of Sami institutions that can look after Sami art, receiving national awards on behalf of the NNKM for this work.

6.2 A possible blind spot

Amidst all these examples of positive change, however, there was a pattern of attributing McGowan specifically with the NNKM's changes, time and again. Through my interviews and unofficial chats with staff, when decolonisation or Sámi issues came up there was a regular refrain of, "Oh, talk to Jérémie, that's his thing." These referrals to McGowan were always meant in a positive way, never dismissive or a way to avoid the subject. Perhaps it was meant only to give credit where credit seemed due. McGowan had told me how he encouraged innovation and wanted staff to suggest or try out new ideas, to feel an ownership of what they did together (McGowan interview, 2019). But particularly with the cultural differences that exist between Norwegian, Sámi, and American ways of being and communicating, these deferrals raised the question of whether it had been McGowan's personality that had been the true driver of the NNKM's efforts to decolonise, and whether the staff overall truly felt that they also had ownership and an impact in the process. If McGowan left the NNKM overnight, would the changes the NNKM had made be sustained?

Upon reflection, though, it seems unfair to credit McGowan at the expense of the rest of the organisation. Change does need an instigator. In the case of the NNKM, McGowan was that changemaker – but he was only able to be this because he was given the role as NNKM director, and that level of influence. The position allowed him to realise his ideas which prioritised the inclusivity of Sámi and Kven cultures as equals alongside

Norwegian culture. The board knew his background, they had seen his CV, they knew he had strong ideas about deinstitutionalisation and decolonisation within the museum sector before he even joined the NNKM. Furthermore, McGowan couldn't have made as many successful shifts without staff support behind him. Saus referred to McGowan as a "visionary", "the idea-maker of this place," and saw her role as "the practical person – I make things happen to turn his ideas into practice" (Saus interview, 2020). Big ideas create opportunities, but change takes a community. It may take time for everyone in an organisation to feel equally empowered to own their role in organisational change, even if they support it in principle. But, even if some deferred to McGowan, there was still a strong sense from everyone that they were proud that the NNKM was trying to change, to start conversations, and was making a concerted effort to decolonise. The SDMX project remains a particularly strong point of pride for everyone who was involved then.

However, in April 2020, we nonetheless were given the opportunity to see what would happen if McGowan left the NNKM overnight.

6.3 The politics of 2020

On 1 April 2020 McGowan's role as director was abruptly terminated by the board, by way of a hastily called, chaotic conference call meeting[19] (D. Choi, 2020; P. K. Olsen, 2020; Relling & Choi, 2020; Rudolfsen, 2020). It took everyone by surprise – the NNKM staff, the wider community, and of course, McGowan himself. News media and public debate quickly focused on Grete Ellingsen, the Chair who had only been appointed in February 2020 (NNKM, 2020c), as the primary instigator of the decision and who stubbornly refused to reconsider or explain the decision or communicate effectively. By May 2021, a total of ten people will have resigned from either the NNKM Board and/or staff – beginning with the Sámi artist board members days after that initial board meeting – many of them commenting publicly on their disapproval of the board's actions

[19] Tromsø at the time was in the middle of the first Covid-19 lockdown period and the museum closed to the public. Most people were working from home, so online/phone meetings weren't unusual, but the short notice, little advance information, and urgency that the meeting take place right then was.

(Lægland & Pedersen, 2020; Relling, 2020; Solstad, 2020). As a past Høyre[20] member of parliament with strong ties to Sortland and Nordland, questions were raised about Ellingsen's personal and professional interests, particularly when plans were unexpectedly announced regarding the development of a new branch of the NNKM in Bodø (Trellevik, 2021b). Legally, based on McGowan's contract, the reason for the dismissal didn't need to be made public – a detail contested in court. The NNKM Board won the case, but in the process testimonies from McGowan and ex-board member Joar Nango revealed intolerant or racist comments by Ellingsen (Feiring & Larsen, 2021). Ellingsen's appointment of Oddmund Enoksen as the NNKM's lawyer was further interpreted as an attack on the Sámi community due to his history of making public comments downplaying or dismissing discrimination experienced by the Sámi (REF-Bjørbæk, Landsverk). By spring 2021, it was generally understood that McGowan's dismissal in part, at least, motivated by anti-Sámi sentiment causing concern that his museum leadership was too radical and Sámi-focused (Larsen & Feiring, 2021). When the callout for a new director was posted in August 2020, there was no reference to Sámi culture, Sápmi, nor even a suggestion that an ability to speak a Sámi language would be welcome in an applicant, implying by omission that at least some on the board were not interested in expanding the NNKM mandate any further than what was defined in the by-laws: that the NNKM was for Norwegians (NNKM, 2020d).

Throughout this time, NNKM staff have continued presenting the programming that had been approved during McGowan's time as director (though those plans end in August 2021), but the NNKM's reputation in the eyes of the Sámi community has been eroded as a result of the actions and words of the board. Huuva, citing her disagreement with the board's conduct, withdrew her art from the *ANDRES LIV* exhibit (Otzko et al., 2021), and while writing about the damage done to the NNKM-Sámi relationship, Aili Keskitalo, Sámediggi president, and Henrik Olsen noted that the Sámi newspaper *Ávvir* reported that Huuva is considering asking for the return of the works she donated to the museum in 2017 (Keskitalo & Olsen, 2021). Furthermore, a planned autumn 2021 exhibit about

[20] The Norwegian Conservative party.

Áillohaš[21] has been put on hold. Officially, the NNKM statement leaves open the possibility it is currently just postponed (NNKM, 2021), but others say that the organisations which own Valkepää's pieces[22] are no longer interested in collaborating with the NNKM (Otzko et al., 2021). Finally, the Sámi Dáiddačehpiid Searvi announced that it no longer wants to work with the NNKM in awarding the John Savio Prize, saying that they would rather work with "an institution that enjoys the trust of both the artist community and the population of Sápmi" (Landsverk, 2021; Trellevik, 2021a).

The board's coercive actions and lack of transparency since 2020 have destabilised the solid relationships and mutual respect that the NNKM had built with the Sámi community. The NNKM had come so far in reconfiguring a "Northern Norwegian" identity that included and celebrated Sápmi as well, yet the government's appointment of one new person on the board was catalyst enough to undermine this. Currently, without anything in the by-laws to include Sámi and Sápmi and no a guaranteed Sámi representative on the board, there is no certainty the NNKM Board will be encouraging the same process towards decolonisation and indigenisation as the organisation as a whole has followed since 2017.

6.4 Success despite setbacks

Trust and confidence in an organisation are built slowly but can be easily shaken. It will take time for the NNKM to repair what may have been undone. However, this is when the distinction of who is meant by "the NNKM" matters. Throughout the debate and discussion in the last year, it has been made very clear that the board, and particular individuals on the board, are seen as the problem (Fjellheim, 2021; Trellevik, 2021a). In fact, the gravest disappointment for many stems from the fact that the NNKM aren't acting in line with the principles and ideals of the NNKM – the organisation – as understood and supported by its communities (Johansen, 2021; Løkken, 2020).

In 2019, McGowan had laughed about how, when the NNKM was replaced by the SDMX, "nobody was sad when NNKM disappeared overnight!" (McGowan interview, 2019). But

[21] Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, beloved Sámi joiker, musician, visual artist, and poet, considered an important nation-builder and cultural icon across Sápmi as an advocate for Sámi and Indigenous rights and traditions.

[22] The Lásságámmi Foundation, Sámi Dáiddamagasiidna, and Kautokeino and Karasjok municipalities.

today in 2021, there is a sense of loss for the NNKM as it was by early 2020: a national art museum that supported and actively included the Sámi as a part of what it was, and who it existed to represent. Not that everything has been undone. The fact that so many in both Sámi and Tromsø communities have condemned the board's actions so strongly is testament to the relationships that the NNKM had built, and public discussion has shown sympathy towards the museum staff for doing their best in a tremendously stressful work environment this past year. Both Tromsø and Sámi news outlets published an open letter from the NNKM staff to Abid Raja, the Norwegian Minister of Culture, calling for Ellingsen's resignation (Portti, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c) – a sign that the public understands that the NNKM staff are not the board, and that the board's actions do not fully define the NNKM.

And yet, the board does hold the power to affect all levels of the organisation, as they've now shown, making it difficult for many to trust the NNKM as a whole. This points to the fragile nature of decolonisation before such changes are reinforced in the colonial institutional structure – ironic, when the goal is to move away from these structures, and arguably a questionable step to take in the process of decolonisation. It raises the question of whether an institution created out of a colonial mindset can ever concretely, sustainably change while still a part of that infrastructure.

The events of the past year have also shown, however, that it wasn't only McGowan who was driving change within the NNKM. In fact, the understanding that his dismissal was due to his decolonial politics have perhaps made the NNKM staff even more resolute in continuing the process, despite a non-supportive board. As Anderson (2006) wrote, "museums, and the museumizing imagination, are both profoundly political" (p. 178). McGowan had understood that both inaction and action are political statements – either accepting things as they were, or striving to create something better.

> Either you stand for the things you say you stand for – so in this case, trying to decolonise or indigenise or make relevant change – and you do it, or you don't. But if you do nothing, then you're helping continue the problem. But if you do it and there's negative consequences, then that becomes part of the project and the conversation. (McGowan interview, 2019)

In the aftermath of McGowan's dismissal, this conversation has persisted, very often linked to talk of the position of Sámi culture in the NNKM.

The NNKM staff, meanwhile, have continued to realise exhibits that aren't afraid to challenge and question the historical colonial lens. Saus described McGowan as an organisational inspiration, despite his no longer being there: "For everything we do, I ask myself, 'What would Jérémie [McGowan] do?' Because this was his idea, his baby, I have to make sure that we do this the way he wanted it to be" (Saus interview, 2020).

An anonymous staff member framed it best, however, demonstrating that while the staff overall do credit McGowan as an instigator, this detail is not the reason that the decolonisation of the NNKM matters. "We're trying to keep [McGowan's] spirit here in that we still have to talk about the uncomfortable things. McGowan opened that floor for discussions, and they need to continue" (personal correspondence, April 2020). Change going forwards isn't about any one particular person; it's about making things better for everyone.

By 2020 the NNKM had learned that prioritising institutional decolonisation requires those in charge of the organisation to lead by example, while making space and empowering those at all levels of the organisation to follow suit. It needs the organisation to both take a step back and proactively seek input from Indigenous communities, listening to and hearing what they say they need and working *together* to realise it, to indigenise in an inclusive, respectful way. It's ensuring that your organisation is welcoming and inclusive, writing job postings in a way that encourage Sámi applicants and acknowledging that the organisation exists in and serves the Sámi context as well. As a museum, when developing programming, decolonisation in progress requires the normalisation of self-reflexivity in the process, using exhibits and events to challenge accepted norms and stimulate conversations in a way that involves and raises up Indigenous voices. All these details together, then, show the community how things can be, implicating those outside the organisation in the decolonisation process by teaching them to expect and hold the organisation to being something more. And, in doing so, also connects the museum closer to the Indigenous community as they notice and are more willing to trust and collaborate. Since 2017, the NNKM has shown that making the effort to decolonise and indigenise makes for a better museum overall.

Norway and Sápmi do still need a dáiddamusea, one that can trust the solidity of its foundations, and with guaranteed resources to lift up Sámi voices without being put at risk by changing politics. But it's equally important that national institutions such as the NNKM include and represent the Sámi experience. National museums have a duty to help disseminate Sámi culture as the Sámediggi has pointed out, naming the NNKM explicitly as one best-positioned to do so (Keskitalo & Olsen, 2021). To restrict Sámi art to only Sámi museums is to erase their presence in the national story, past and future. As Sara (2019) says,

> It's a very good thing if our voices and stories are represented in colonial power institutions, that they actually exist in a collective understanding of this land, this area's history. But then it does mean that that organisation owns it, and they can hide it away or erase it from a collective awareness. This is the power one has when they own something. But it's also a bad thing for us if our most critical pieces are not in the national or international consciousness. This is what represents the nation, not only in touring shows or for tourists, but for new generations. (Sara interview, 2019)

From 2017 to 2020, the NNKM was well on its way to figuring out how an art museum in Northern Norway and Sápmi could decolonise. Today, the staff and the NNKM's outside community continue to make up the spirit of the NNKM, in spite of the board's contrary actions. There is a recognition of the value of those uncomfortable, self-critical conversations. It's welcome to hear that NNKM staff and the general public, both now keeping the true spirit of the NNKM afloat, are unwilling to accept the board's efforts to shut down the difficult conversations.

The events of the last year point to how fragile decolonisation can be, and how quickly things can potentially be undone. They show how vital it is to share a vision and mindset across all levels of an organisation when trying to change as an institution. But while the drama of 2020 may have been a hiccup in the museum's progress, it does seem likely that the last year's events have succeeded in illuminating what had been gained by the NNKM so far, and what could potentially be lost, strengthening the NNKM's resolve to continue to persist in its efforts to decolonise, deinstitutionalise, and indigenise.

The difficult conversations that need to be had to do this are hard, by definition. But the spirit of the NNKM is not ready to let go of them. As one staff member adamantly put it, “We still need to start discussions, we can’t let them die out. It's the museum’s role to keep them going and make things better.”

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