

ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Transcultural Modernism: Artistic Interchange between Denmark and Japan, 1945-1970 (TraM)

April 2022: Associate Professor Gunhild Borggreen, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen, was awarded the Novo Nordisk Investigator Grant of 4.000.000 DKK for a 4-year research project from June 1, 2022, to May 31, 2026.

Research team: Associate Professor Gunhild Borggreen, Postdoc Mette Højsgaard, and Research Assistant Kristine Sandal Hansen. All employed at Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen.

Website: <https://artsandculturalstudies.ku.dk/research/tram/>

Activities in 2022:

Kick-off workshop

University of Copenhagen, Southern Campus, June 17-18, 2022

A full day of workshop with participants from the Advisory Board: Monica Juneja (Heidelberg Universität) (on zoom); Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer (Sainsbury Institute) (on zoom); Ming Tiampo (Carleton University); Asato Ikeda (Fordham University); Dorthe Aagesen (National Gallery SMK); Tania Ørum (University of Copenhagen); and Jens Tang Kristensen (Museum Sønderjylland).

After a presentation by Gunhild and Mette about the project and the research plan, participants presented their research focusing on transculturality and global art history. The workshop was a first step to getting to know each other and exchange research across the broad range of approaches to art and cultural studies. Advisory Board members' different ways in which to engage with concepts of transculturality provides a solid platform for the research team from which to develop and consolidating the concept of transculturality within art history and visual culture. The workshop included space and time for social interaction and informal conversations. Due to the COVID-19 situation, several Advisory Board members could not attend in person, but joined online. We hope to be able to invite all Advisory Board members to Copenhagen during the project period and continue the conversations.

Archival work

First part of the research program includes visits to a number of museums and art collections in order to establish documentation for various transcultural networks between artists, artist groups and movements, collectors, critics, museums, galleries, and other individuals and institutions. We begin with archives related to Danish artists that are known to have interest in Japanese art and aesthetics, including:

- Richard Mortensen Private Archive, Ejby
- Richard Mortensen Archives at the National Gallery SMK
- Asger Jorn Archive at Museum Jorn, Silkeborg
- Else Alfelt Archive at Carl-Henning Pedersen & Else Alfelt Museum, Herning



Gunhild, Mette and Kristine at Else Alfelt's collection, Aug 25, 2022

- Exhibition history of Japanese and Chinese art and craft displayed in Denmark, Design Museum Denmark



Museum Jorn, Silkeborg



Carl-Henning Pedersen & Else Alfelt Museum, Herning

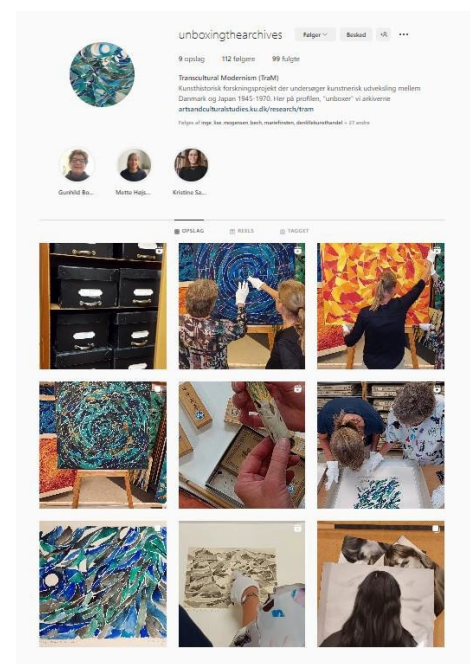
The archival work of the research team includes a construction of an internal database with photos of various documents and other archival material photographed during our visits to archives. This involves discussions concerning the ways in which to categorize and register different types of material, and considerations regarding how the information and material are going to be applied in the project.

We have also been fortunate to engage with memories of people, who knew some of the artists personally. This included conversations with Nanna Hartmann, a close family member of Richard Mortensen; with Susanne Jorn, daughter of Asger Jorn; as well as with Peter Bramsen, who ran the printing workshop Imprimerie Clot, Bramsen et Georges in Paris, a center for artistic interaction in the 1960s and 1970s.

Social media

In line with policies of a more outgoing exposure of research beyond academia, the TraM project has engaged in social media, more specifically Instagram. With the profile [unboxingthearchives](https://www.instagram.com/unboxingthearchives), our goal is to create short videos and post series of photos that can communicate some of the fascination of archival work to broader audiences. The profile so far contains three individual introduction videos from each of the team members, and a series of nine posts documenting and commenting on our visit to the Else Alfelt archive and collection at Carl-Henning Pedersen & Else Alfelt Museum in August 2022.

Thanks to our research assistant Kristine, we try to capture some of the conversations and reflections that we exchange during our encounter with the archive. We use the Instagram profile as our own research archive as well as a tool for critical self-reflections in terms of bias and preconceived conclusions. It is a challenge to keep within the format of social media, but also functions as a means to sharpen the perspectives and goals of our project.



Screenshot from Instagram profile [unboxingthearchives](https://www.instagram.com/unboxingthearchives)

Conference participation

Mette and Gunhild both attended the annual conference of NORDIK Association for Art Historians, which took place online Oct 25-27, 2022. The theme this year was “Collections”, and we joined a panel with the focus on “Letters from the Archive: Collecting and Researching Artists’ Letters in Art History.”

Mette Højsgaard’s presentation was entitled “Engaging with artists’ letters and archives from other perspectives”, in which Mette took her point of departure in a single letter that can establish links between the Danish COBRA artist Asger Jorn, the Japanese avant-garde calligrapher Morita Shiryū, and the Danish art collector and patron Elise Johansen.

Gunhild Borggreen’s presentation was entitled “Tracing Else Alfelt’s travel to Japan through letters”, and discussed aspects of Jacques Derrida’s concept of the *anarchive* in terms of mapping the travel to Japan in 1967 by Danish artist Else Alfelt through letters and diaries.

Around 30 persons joined the panel, and we received many valuable comments for expanding and refining the analyses and discussions with the aim of publication.

Travel to Japan

As the COVID-19 related travel restrictions are being lifted in Japan, Gunhild was able to visit Japan for a 30 days BRIDGE fellowship awarded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). The travel had been granted in 2019, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was postponed several times. While the fellowship originally had been awarded in connection to a previous research project, Gunhild was never the less able to carry out some important tasks related to the TraM project. This included conversation with Professor Hiroko Ikegami, Kobe University, who is a member of the TraM Advisory Board, and an expert in US-Japan art exchange and globalization of modernism and contemporary art. Gunhild also met with Professor Kenji Kajiyama, Tokyo University, whose research on postwar Japanese and American art is highly relevant for the TraM project.

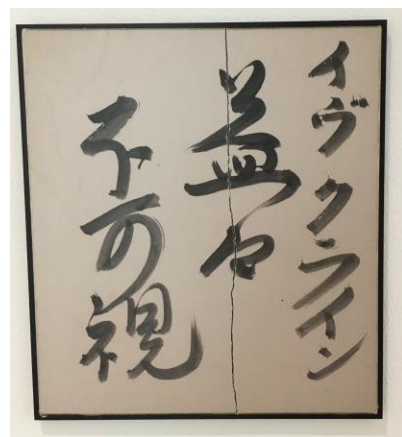
Some exhibitions were relevant for the transcultural approach of TraM: an exhibition of the Danish designer Finn Juhl at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum; a virtual reconstruction of a 1953 exhibition on Abstraction and Fantasy at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; and the exhibition The Timeless Imagination of Yves Klein at 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. Through visits to museums, libraries, and bookshops, Gunhild was able to collect research materials, books and exhibitions catalogues.



Finn Juhl exhibition, 2022



Exhibition catalogue from 1955



Calligraphy by Shinichi Segi, 1959

Advisory Board members in Copenhagen

The TraM project is part of the research cluster entitled Global Entanglements, one of the six new research clusters within the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies. Through the activities of Global Entanglement cluster, we were able to meet and exchange with two of the TraM Advisory Board members. In November, Professor Monica Juneja from Heidelberg University visited the department and gave a public lecture on the transcultural trajectories of modernist Primitivism, as well as a seminar presentation and discussion on global art exhibitions in the postwar period. In December, Professor Mårten Snickare visited the department and presented his recent publication on colonial objects in early modern Sweden and their relationship to the formation of museum collections. While organized in other contexts, both of these visits were highly relevant for the TraM project and we hope to continue these fruitful discussions in the future. We plan to invited other Advisory Board members to Copenhagen for inspiration and exchange.

Preparation of forthcoming activities

The research team has joined forces with key researchers at the National Gallery SMK, namely Chief Curator and Senior Researcher Dorthe Aagesen, Postdoc Yvette Brackman, and Postdoc Karen Westphal Eriksen, in order to organize a full day workshop on archives in the end of March, 2023 with a limited number of participants. We plan to organize a larger international event later in the spring, also focusing on archives. We have also started a dialogue with HEART Herning Museum of Contemporary Art concerning the concepts and formats for an international conference in May 2024.

Report by Gunhild Borggreen
January 2, 2023