



NATIONALMUSEETS ANSIGTER

(Faces of the National Museum)

INTRODUCTION

Mette Skougaard og Thomas Lyngby

The National Museum is Denmark's central cultural museum of history. It has its roots in The Royal Art Collection and its foundation accounts for since 1807, when The Royal Commission for the Preservation of Antiquities was set up. The Commission had three main tasks: to identify and protect ancient monuments, to raise awareness of the importance of protecting antiquities and to establish a museum for the benefit of the community where these could be stored and exhibited.

None the least, it was the university librarian and literary historian Rasmus Nyerup who had advised that better care should be taken of the nation's cultural heritage, therefore becoming the Antiquities Commission's first secretary. Nyerup had already started collecting antiquities before the commission was set up, and these were now placed together with new acquisitions in a room at the University Library above Trinity Church. In 1816, Nyerup was replaced as secretary by the commercially trained Christian Jürgensen Thomsen - and it was he who organized the collection so that three years later it could open to the public as an Old Nordic Museum.

Thomsen set up the ground-breaking three-period system in the form of a division into the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages. With him begins the series of distinguished researchers and museum men who have been at the head of the National Museum. The museum has built up a collection of portraits of the "line of director" - most of them in the form of busts, which are displayed in the National Museum's Festsal. Since Hanne Varming in 2000 created the portrait bust of the director and the National Antiquarian Olaf Olsen, however, no portraits of the museum's directors have been added. That will now be remedied. In the special year 2022, three new portraits of the museum directors Steen Hvass, Carsten Ulrick Larsen and Per Kristian

Madsen will be revealed. They are all painted by visual artist Lars Physant on special relief structures of canvases on wood created by Silvia Magrinyà-Costà.

This book presents Lars Physant's new works and sets the significance of those portrayed for the National Museum in relation to the special conditions that the directors were under and to the institution's history. Along the way, the authors have interviewed the three directors, and these conversations have served to the artist as a supplement to his impressions and sketches from the sittings. The interviews have of course also been an important source material for writing the book's texts about the directors.

Initially, the book will present the former director portraits, and through the history of these museum men, a personal introduction to the history of the National Museum will be given. Next follows a chapter on visual artist Lars Physant and the special method he has used to create the new works. Finally, the life and work of Steen Hvass, Carsten Ulrick Larsen and Per Kristian Madsen in the service of the National Museum is told, as is reflected in the new portraits.

The authors would like to extend a warm thank you to all those involved in the project. To the three former directors for allowing themselves to be interviewed and also to the current director Rane Willerslev, who also made himself available for interviews, it has helped to put the whole thing in a current perspective. A big thank you to Estrid Anker Olsen, who transcribed the interviews and helped with proofreading. Superintendent Poul Otto Nielsen made an important contribution with supplementary information regarding the early directors of the museum. A very special thank you goes to Silvia Magrinyà-Costà and Lars Physant for a unique and very inspiring collaboration.