

## TALKING to MARIKA WACHTMEISTER

(Email Interview, November – January, 2023)

January, 2024 “Here Zuzana are my answers – interesting questions. GOOD LUCK and WELCOME TO WANÅS – Opening May 4<sup>th</sup> 2024. Warmly, Marika”

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You are a lawyer, Marika, is it right? You have built this beautiful art center WANÅS KONST in Sweden (<https://wanaskonst.se>), which I haven't visited yet and I know only very basic information, having read them on the webpages. I can see a great way of communication with your audience and visitors, a rich structure of the educational programs, an approach to interact with various art disciplines, and very importantly, high level of environmental awareness and its communication outwards.

Please tell me shortly, was becoming a lawyer your original plan and how is this useful to you in your activities in the art world? I mean it obviously is useful in building up the foundation, but still, tell me more delicate connection between your skills and characteristic tendencies being a lawyer and doing what are you doing.

*Becoming a lawyer was my original plan even if I was very interested in contemporary art. In my maiden family Bauer everyone is a doctor or a lawyer. I also wanted a profession which neither a husband nor a child could interfere with. My knowledge in law has greatly helped me in the project I started in 1987 – inviting artists to show in the Park where we lived. Both in my relationship with artists, economy, applying for grants and funds and writing contracts. Then, in 1995, when the Wanås Foundation was created, it was very helpful in dealing with the board. Both board meetings and a contact with the board members. It gave them more confidence in me.*

In which professions or areas are you active at this moment? Is it the art consultancy?

*I do not work as a lawyer at all since 1990 and nowadays I am mostly a senior advisor in different projects. After 23 years as the director of the Wanås Foundation I made the decision to step down. I am not involved in choosing artists or in any other way with a position in the Wanås Foundation. My successor Elisabeth Millqvist and I had a regular contact with formal meetings once a week, then two or one time a month, and I helped a lot the first eight years and did many guided tours. I left the board when my son (pozn. Baltzar Wachtmeister), also a lawyer, became member of the board. The new director Danish lady Milena Hoegsberg is very independent. It is very important that the present director makes all decisions concerning the artists. I have done exhibitions after 2011 at other places like Paris and Washington, and collaborated in various international projects.*

Are you working on the concept of all activities of the foundation and the art center together in a team, or is there a person creating it for the center? How long in advance you prepare and announce programs and which of them are stable – long term, and which pop up as temporary?

*When I was the director, and my successor director too, would choose the artists of the year long term. Then draw in the team and discuss how the exhibition should be realized. The more temporary or even pop up events were decided on together. Somebody had a good idea ...*

*The director would hand over the responsibility to others in the team.*

When you started to create your art place, did you have a clear vision what you want to build and how are you going to finance it, or did it develop step by step leading from one fulfilled part to another?

*Definitely step by step – it was an ad hoc impulsive idea to start a Sculpture Park at Wanås. There was no real vision as I was only going to do one exhibition and then return to my real vocation as a lawyer. Of once I had started it was impossible to stop – it was so much fun. There was no clear idea about the financing – I was very good in getting help from local firms and companies. One even sponsored the art by sending a lot of food so the artists and the assistants could eat at Wanås, where there was no restaurant or café.*

How many people are employed and how many approximately work as externals to cover all needs of the art center?

*Permanently approx. 8 – 10 people are employed since the last 15 yrs. Then it depends on the artists – Ann Hamilton needed 50 assistants in 2002. Someone else needs only 3 so it really varies from year to year. Also a lot of young people work in the Park, the café, the shop and as guards in the summer.*

How important is for you to include international cooperation with other organizations and artists? Which type of cooperation have shown as most functional?

*When I was the director of the Wanås, networks and platforms did not exist, but my successor Elisabeth Millqvist joined a few, like Landart and an ecological destination network as well as others. Some were good, others just gave us more work. I did an EC Project with Italy and Spain, which was interesting and added some funds, but also enormously more work. The purpose was to get more funding really. I worked mostly with artists, who had gallery connections. Sometimes a lot of contact with the gallery, sometimes totally independent directly with the artists. The artists were generous about their fees Wanås being a non-profit foundation.*

You have been in the art world in Europe since many years. Tell me, what are the major differences in this field between the 20th century and what is coming up and emerging as significant now in 21st century?

*The real difference is the focus on digital and AI world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, while the 20<sup>th</sup> first painting and then sculpture and installations were the major artforms.*

What does Europe mean to you – geographically, culturally, historically ... and how do you feel now about the fact, that there is a war back in Europe?

*I feel first of all a great thankfulness to the closeness between so many countries and different cultures close together – it is easy to travel and get a lot of inspiration. I strongly feel respect for the varied cultures of Europe and that is also very exciting. At the same time I can feel annoyed that Europeans cannot work more closely together. The history is very rich, which also fetters (restrain) the artists – they are always compared with other historically well-known artists. It is difficult to do something really new. As I grew up in NYC in the 60s, I understand the American art better. I feel that many artists really manage to do something radically new. The artists dare to test new expressions. I have invited many American artists, both extremely well known, the ones like Jenny Holzer, Ann Hamilton and Bob Wilson or Maya Lin who did the Veteran Vietnam Memoria, and also the young and unknown. Some have started on a successful career after Wanås. I would actually say that the American artists work harder and are more problem solving than the Europeans. There are many permanent artworks in the Wanås Par by American artists. For them Wanås, a medieval castle in a forest, is an exciting new place to which they have responded with less respect than Europeans, especially Swedes.*

*The fact that a horrible war is again raging in Europe is scary and very very sad. It seems that WWII is back again. I think the mode in the art in the near future will reflect a very dystopic mood.*

Are there emerging regions or markets that are currently underrepresented but show a potential for high growth in the near future?

Are new/emerging galleries still able to survive after the pandemic?

What to expect of art market in the year of political turmoil?

*I do not have any good answers.*

Tell me, which are your most favorite art fairs, art festivals, biennales, galleries worth visiting nowadays?

After all experiences, which ones do you still wish to keep visiting?

*My favorite is the Venice Biennale – I have been there 17 times since the first biennale in 1988 and I still wish to visiting until I die! The Basel Art Fair is also good and the galleries in NYC both established and the new ones in Lower West side. London, since Brexit, is out even if I liked to visit a lot. Now Paris is the new art center.*

Was the collector interest/sales in Paris influenced by Brexit? E.g., Sotheby's moved the British/Irish art sale to Paris from London this year.

*Yes.*

What motivation binds collectors to their passion?

*Some a real knowledge and love for art, others purely for financial reasons – that art will rise in value, and others to be part of the art world, meet artists and feel accepted in a creative and fun group.*

Is the decrease of NFT prices a normal development after "overpricing" from old crypto-millionaires or are some structural problems for this only virtual works?

The recent reports of the collectors' behavior talk about self-focused motivation centered more around self-identity and personal pleasure – what do you think about this observation?

*It feels correct!*

How important do you find to include in the curatorial plans interactive installations involving new technologies such as AI, VR and AR and how do you see the near future for these?

*As the contemporary artists use these technologies they have to be shown and chosen by curators who have ambitions to reflect the world of today.*

As you identify collector trends, how does this data prepare you for the future? How does the Art market and Art Fairs adapt?

*The Artists decide and the Market and the Fairs have to follow, if they are to keep being interesting in the long run.*

Marika, it has been an honor having this contact with you. Thank you and may you have the best conditions for your further work and joyful life!

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*Marika Wachtmeister is the Founder of Open Art Museum at Wanås Slott, Sweden. Wachtmeister was a lawyer. However, as she lived at Wanås Slott (Castle) she had the idea of inviting contemporary artists to a place in the countryside in a part of Sweden lacking contemporary art. This was at a time when many artists found it difficult to place their sculptures and installations. Her purpose was to invigorate Wanås and broaden local interest in contemporary art.*

*The Foundation was established by Marika Wachtmeister in 1987. In 2011 the Wanås Foundation took a step into the future and introduced new leadership by Elisabeth Millqvist, Artistic Director, and Mattias Givell, Project Director. Together they share the management responsibilities and continue to strengthen the international profile of contemporary art at Wanås. The permanent collection of the Wanås Foundation consists of nearly 50 outdoor installations and sculptures.*

*Marika Wachtmeister & Co, founder of Wanås Konst – among 51 most influential art professionals in Sweden. It's not just Rafael Gomezbarro's giant ants that have set off on a pilgrimage to Wanås Castle. Those who make the pilgrimage to the Skåne beech forests and the impressive sculpture park are rewarded with an art experience of a lifetime. Marika Wachtmeister is responsible for all this artistic greatness!*



1 Marika Wachtmeister's daughter, Hedda Bauer.

2 With Marika Wachtmeister, Hedda Bauer, Charlotta Oberg and Jacob Asbaek in the CCA, November 2023.

3 Marika's husband, Carl-Gustaf Wachtmeister with his new hat I gifted to him as a gesture of big honor to have met him.