

a/nordi/c

Think Tank for Art and Policies (2021-2023)

ART CAN OPEN THE WORLD

A portrait of Eline Sigfusson, Former Director of a/nordi/c

By journalist Signe Wulff

Eline Sigfusson has experience in management, strategic consulting, international project management and communication. And most importantly, she has always had her legs firmly planted in the world of art and music.

Her intuitive sense of art had been finely tuned from childhood. Art was not just something she merely administered, or with which she had a theoretical relationship. Her heart beats warmly for art, and has been beating for it ever since she was born, because Eline Sigfusson comes from a home full of art, music and musicians.

It seemed likely that Eline would follow the musical path and become a singer herself, but instead she applied to study Musicology at the University of Copenhagen. This was followed by a position as Promotion Manager at the music publisher Edition Wilhelm Hansen. From there she moved to the Danish Agency for Culture, and then to the Nordic Culture Fund. First as senior advisor, and later as deputy director.

In the Nordic Culture Fund, Eline Sigfusson worked for the foundation to be value-creating and “not just an office where we processed applications”, says Eline about her visions, which she also incorporated into the strategy and first presented for the fund’s board in 2019.

Culture is boundless and must remain so as it was stated in the strategy. “It has been important for me right from the beginning that even though the foundation’s starting point is the Nordic region, it is the Nordic region in context with the rest of the world. Art is by its nature limitless. It is wrong to shut it out. We must not just only operate nationally. We must create the best conditions for international artist mobility and artistic freedom. It is an important signal to send from the Nordic countries: That we want to include the whole world.”

Sigfusson wants to expand art and break down not only international borders, but also the borders between the *insideness* and the *outsideness*- two concepts she has coined for the purpose. “There’s a lot of art that we don’t see, and which is not detected by the usual systems”. There are cultural entrepreneurs who work artistically, and artists who may operate in the social field or in the health system. They’re not part of the insideness, but those are the ones we must reach. I’ve worked a great deal to make the Fund more venturesome towards the arts. Not many people dare to support something that perhaps only exists as yet at the level of intention, but we decided in the Fund that we wanted to take the lead. Because if we did that, then

perhaps others would follow in the hope of getting more artists invited in,” she says.

“If art and creativity make our world bigger, why is the room for manoeuvre for artists and cultural institutions getting smaller and smaller?”

Art and artists must be given the best possible conditions, Sigfusson believes. Borders must be broken down. We must do away with habitual thinking, exclusive clubs and petty officialdom. Eline Sigfusson would like to see extreme openness, and aims to support the conditions in which art can flourish. “If art and creativity make our world bigger, why is the room for manoeuvre of artists and cultural institutions getting smaller and smaller?” she asks.

There is something about the role of art in society that needs to be rethought, she says: “Traditionally, art has played an important role in building up society, but now it’s more of a tool, a competitive parameter – something we use to attract tourists. We have a cultural policy that often ends up being all about efficiency and measurable parameters. We have created all kinds of cumbersome systems around art, and we try to measure it”.



© Jonas Pryner

One of Eline Sigfusson’s goals for Anordic was to invent new ways of talking about art, and different units to measure it with, and to bring the practice of art and the political reality closer together: “We shouldn’t just try to

document things with numbers. Numbers are retrospective – they deal with what *has already* happened. Numbers can't describe what's going to happen. We need to be unconventional, and to shake up cultural policy so that it becomes relevant to the art and the artists of our time." "We do this, for example, with The Living Catalog, which we develop together with artists, researchers and cultural actors. Or with our Curated Conversations, where we debate the most relevant topics with a number of hand-picked participants. The framework must be artistic – and the word must be free ”.

Passion is the first word that comes to mind when Eline Sigfusson is asked about her work and it's also the first word you think of when you hear her talk about it. She is known for her enthusiasm, and she is an ambassador for artists in a world that does not always function on their terms. She is aware of this, because she knows *their* world inside out, "All my life I have seen artists doggedly working on their creations: with infinite concentration for hours, days, weeks, years on end. We have an expectation that these artists should also be proactive and outwardly-directed. I think that's wrong. It's the systems that should be that way".

If anyone were to say that art and culture is boring, Eline would whirl through the room, removing any speck of dust. Art is living, essential and necessary for us human beings, she believes: "Art offers room for reflection. It can broaden our horizons and invite us into an unexpected community with people from the other side of the globe. It can show us something we didn't expect to see in contrast to Facebook, for example, where we are only presented with what we already know and like. Art can also point to the future, because it is constantly experimenting and questioning what is established. It can offer us a new way to venture out into the world, and show us different ways of doing things. Everyone should experience art. Art can open the world."