The Last Starfighter

One Object, Three Lives – Inside and Outside the Norsk Luftfarts-museum

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Abstract: Museum objects have the potential to act as powerful symbols of national identity and modernity. This article examines the three lives of Starfighter 637, a Norwegian military aircraft that flew in the Arctic during the Cold War before becoming an exhibit at the Norsk Luftfarts-museum and finally being restored to fly again by a group of aviation enthusiasts. The case study of the Starfighter considers the role of socialisation in generating a military object’s meanings and value as cultural heritage, but also how museums can convey the kinetic experience of flying.

Keywords: Cold War, Norway, national identity, Arctic, aviation museums, military objects, restoration.

Museums are pivotal institutions in the formation of national identity and the transition to modernity. In the nation-building process, museums act as “strategic markers” as both repositories of the national past and cultural instruments for projecting state power (Prior 2002:44; Elgenius 2015:145). In the Scandinavian present, museums and heritage sites are crucibles for interpreting, and in some cases revising national histories of the Cold War (see, for example, Farbøl 2015). The Norsk Luftfarts-museum in Bodo is situated in a region of huge significance in Norwegian twentieth century history as a strategic military centre from the 1950s. Norway’s border with the Soviet Union made the country invaluable to NATO for obtaining military intelligence, but also for resisting incursion or full-scale invasion from the High North. Bodø is associated with intelligence gathering and particularly the infamous U-2 spy plane incident in 1960 (Berdahl 1997:ch.2; Riste 2001:217–220; Kleve, in press). The Bodø Air Station adjacent to the Luftfarts-museum therefore became a key node in defending Arctic waters and airspace, along with other bases at Bardufoss, Andøya and Evenes.

The decision of the Norwegian Storting (Parliament) to establish the national aviation museum in Bodø was a political calculation, favouring a northern regional city over the capital, but also recognising its historic cen-
...trality within the Cold War. Since opening in 1994, the Luftfartsmuseum has acted as a hub for analysing and evaluating Cold War history in the Nordic countries and the Arctic. In facilitating these discussions, the Luftfartsmuseum has advocated for Cold War heritage preservation against the grain of the wider Norwegian heritage sector, which has hitherto prioritised the Second World War. The permanent exhibition at the Luftfartsmuseum is divided into military and civil aviation galleries, displaying artefacts from the Norwegian Armed Forces Aircraft Collection and the Avinor Museum. At the time of writing, the Luftfartsmuseum is in a process of transition to a fully civilian institution under the auspices of Norway’s Ministry of Culture and Equality. It is in this shifting institutional context that I will position my principal object of enquiry – the CF-104 Starfighter ‘637’ – displayed in the museum until 2002 when it was handed over to a voluntary group to be restored to airworthiness at Bodø Air Station. An advanced supersonic aircraft supplied by the United States to counter the Soviet threat in the High North, the Starfighter is a symbol of Norwegian national identity and modernity. It is also highly unusual as an aircraft that has lived three lives: a military aeroplane converted into a museum artefact, before a rarer existence as an object of restoration after musealisation.

At the Luftfartsmuseum the role of aviation in Norway’s modernisation is foregrounded, along with the country’s Arctic identity. In 2008 the Norwegian government moved the armed forces’ joint headquarters to Reitan, near Bodø, and made substantial investment in northern military infrastructure. The following year Norway’s foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre described the Arctic as a “strategic balcony” for the national interest (quoted in Flikke 2011:73). Military-industrial activity has changed our perception of the Arctic from a pure terra nullius (Steinberg, Tasch & Gerhardt 2015) to a landscape of strategic competition for territory and resources. In the Luftfartsmuseum the Arctic oceans are framed as theatres of superpower rivalry and Norway’s maritime sovereignty is clearly delineated, including over Svalbard – a source of past diplomatic friction with the Soviet Union. Starfighter 637 is an Arctic object with meanings determined by the geopolitical terrain. I will thus consider the aircraft as a symbol of the Cold War in the High North and Norway’s uneven development between north and south in that period. Starfighter 637 must also be treated as a symbol of continuity and change in Norway’s relations with the United States and Russia as Arctic states (see Flikke 2011; Hilde 2014; Humrich 2020).

The social lives or cultural biographies of objects have received much attention from scholars since Appadurai’s and Kopytoff’s influential essays nearly forty years ago (in Appadurai et al. 1986; see also Hoskin 1998; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Joy 2009; Bauer 2019). Certain military objects can lead double social lives divided between a private and public existence. Military weapons, vehicles and other equipment are manufactured by state-run or private corporations to enter the world of commodities but remain in closed circulation to keep their technologies secret. Occasionally military objects, such as aircraft and tanks, are presented to the public in ritual guise as a spectacle wherein civilians can encounter them up close. These rituals take the form of parades, air shows, exhibitions or other public events designed to encourage recruitment to the armed forces or as public relations exercises. In this type of ritual, the object becomes a symbol – of the armed forces, of martial heroism and of the nation itself. The socialisation of
objects in this way can endow them with what Turner termed “multi-vocality” whereby they are transformed into symbols with multiple meanings. Turner described a process of ritual symbolization “revealing the unknown, invisible, or hidden” and “making public what is private or making social what is personal” (Turner 1970/1967:49–50). Crucially in relation to military material culture, when the process of ritual symbolization takes place in public the object’s multi-vocality passes beyond the control of the state. The military object retains this multi-vocality in its transformation from commodity to heritage artefact when integrated within the public ritual of museum visiting.

Since the late 1980s the “material turn” in the social sciences has also stimulated intellectual debate by proposing that objects themselves may have social agency, overturning traditional Durkheimian thinking (see, for example, Strathern 1988; Latour 1993; Knorr Cetina 1997; Gell 1998; Knappett 2005; Olsen 2010; Pétursdóttir 2020; Olsen & Pétursdóttir 2021; in the museum context, see also Gell 2012). Here I do not posit that objects possess social agency, but rather agree with Appadurai’s earlier argument that an object’s status and meanings are determined by context (Appadurai 1986:15). What I call the third life of Starfighter 637 began when it became a civilian object of restoration, no longer owned by the Norwegian armed forces. The object’s past social life as a commodity nevertheless continued to have implications for its status in the museum and afterwards.

Museology as a discipline has typically confined its enquiries to what happens inside the museum and concerned itself less with what happens outside. In my research, I aimed to consider both spheres from the interrelated perspectives of social relations and museum practice. I conducted fieldwork at both the Luftfartsmuseum and Bodø Air Station. Through interviews, museum display analysis, physical examination of objects in situ and subsequent research using social media and the Luftfartsmuseum’s digital resources, I have documented the three lives of Starfighter 637. I have also recorded the life histories of the people who flew and maintained the aircraft at Bodø, as Royal Norwegian Air Force (RNAF) personnel and latterly as museum volunteers and members of the Foreningen Starfighter-ens Venner (Friends of the Starfighter Association). By this methodology, I propose that Starfighter 637 remains valuable Norwegian cultural heritage as the product of a social matrix in which the museum is one constituent among many, over time – and thus only one context for determining its meanings.

Aircraft present an interpretative challenge for museums in advanced multimedia societies. Today museum visitors typically expect multisensory stimuli beyond a purely intellectual reading of material culture. Flight is a kinetic phenomenon, in which physical power, movement and sound are central to the real-life experience. Recent scholarship suggests that, generally speaking, visitors expect museums to preserve the functionality of scientific and technological objects, but also tend to view these objects generically (see Rossi Rognoni 2019:409–410). This article will consider therefore how museums can capture the kinesis of flight in relation to the functionality of aircraft and specific historic objects.

**Starfighter 637**: 
**One object, three lives**

Norway’s consistent “base policy”, which has forbidden foreign troops from being stationed on Norwegian soil in peacetime (Berdahl
1997:7), initially deprived the RNAF of advanced jets capable of monitoring, and if necessary, challenging Soviet aircraft and ships. After Britain’s wartime influence waned in the late 1940s, the United States became the dominant great power in Scandinavia, offering matériel through the Mutual Defence Assistance Program (Lundestad 1980; Tamnes 1991; Pharo 2012; Riste 2012). Norway could not afford to purchase American military technology and so had to negotiate carefully in the national interest. With the onset of nuclear stalemate between the superpowers in the early 1960s, the possibility of Soviet conventional forces invading Finnmark became of greater concern to the United States. As the Soviets developed new Arctic military bases, the United States prioritised defending NATO’s “northern flank” to protect the Atlantic’s sea channels and ultimately Western Europe (Osherenko and

Fig.1. F-104 Starfighter being unloaded from the USS Croatan at Bodø, 1963. Photo: Unknown, Archive Norskluftfartsmuseum.
A squadron of thirteen Lockheed F-104G Starfighters arrived at Bodø from America aboard the USS Croatan in the autumn of 1963. The new aircraft were paraded through the city on their way to the RNAF’s 331 Squadron at Bodø Air Station, an event dramatised in an aerial photograph displayed in the Norsk Luftfartsmuseum (Fig. 1). The magnetic pole of American science and technology became stronger in Norway from the late 1950s (see Bones 2013). Crowds lined Bodø’s streets as the futuristic supersonic jets were socialised, making their way in ritual procession toward the Air Station, escorted by RNAF personnel. During the parade, the aircraft achieved multi-vocality within the ritual symbolization as spectators constructed their own meanings of what they saw passing: objects expressing patriotism or militarism, western sodality or the price of forfeiting Norwegian neutrality in 1949.

Ten years later, the RNAF took the decision to replace its F-5 Freedom Fighter jets with 22 CF-104D Starfighters manufactured under licence by Canadair and retrofitted en route by Scottish Aviation in Glasgow. To deter possible incursions into the Barents Sea by Soviet warships, the aircraft were re-equipped as fighter-bombers. Starfighter 637, a two-seater version, was delivered to the RNAF’s 334 Squadron at Bodø in the summer of 1973. When the RNAF began transitioning to the F-16 Fighting
Falcon in 1982, the Starfighter was phased out and 637 made a last ceremonial flight on 22 April 1983, piloted by Colonel Olav Aamoth and General Eyvind Schibbye (Fig. 2). Schibbye was the first station commander when the F-104Gs arrived in 1963 and Aamoth was in command in 1983. After being withdrawn from service, 334 Squadron’s Starfighters were dispersed to other Norwegian air bases for storage; some were re-used for educational purposes, others sold to private buyers in Norway, Canada and the United States.

Upon retirement, Starfighter 637 became part of the Norwegian Armed Forces Aircraft Collection, and its second life began when it was displayed at the Luftfartsmuseum in 1994 (Fig. 3). Following high-level discussions in the RNAF, the aircraft was released for restoration at Bodø Air Station in a private hangar acquired for the purpose. A handover ceremony was held at the Luftfartsmuseum on 13 September 2002, attended by RNAF veterans who had worked on the aircraft during its time in service. General Aamoth was present for the occasion, having been closely involved in selecting the aircraft for restoration. Aamoth’s pivotal role in the agreement to restore Starfighter 637 was doubtless motivated by his own personal relationship with the aircraft and the memory of its last flight in 1983. It should be emphasised that decision-making was confined to military circles and curatorial staff at the Luftfartsmuseum were not involved in the process. From a curatorial point of view, the
last Starfighter to fly officially at Bodø has historic status and would not have been an obvious choice for permitting external restoration for flight. The project was green-lit owing to the influence of high-ranking RNAF officers who had a personal connection to the aircraft and its operational life at Bodø Air Station.

Restoration work began in 2003 but initially progress was slow with major technical and bureaucratic issues to be resolved. Changing the Starfighter’s status from a military aircraft of American design into a Norwegian civilian aeroplane was a complicated process, but eventually the Civil Aviation Authority registered the aircraft as ‘LN-STF’ in 2011. The restored Starfighter 637 finally flew again from Bodø Air Station on 28 September 2016, with top Norwegian pilot Eskil Amdal at the controls, socialised in a televised event that drew both national and international audiences.

During the test flight Starfighter 637 was accompanied by an F-16 from the RNAF for monitoring purposes. After a second test flight in 2017, the aircraft flew in several air shows in 2018 – at Sola in Norway and Aalborg in Denmark. Through air shows Starfighter 637 was socialised in an international ritual, acquiring new meaning as a kinetic object of restoration for aviation enthusiasts – an audience distinct from museum visitors, but frequently overlapping.

Museum meanings

To take 637’s place in the Norsk Luftfartsmuseum, a single seater Starfighter CF-104D with the tail number ‘801’ was transferred from the Air Force Museum at Gardermoen in October 2006. Starfighter 801 was last flown by Major Rolf Noel from Bodø Air Station; his name and Viking emblem are stencilled on the fuselage. The substitution of Starfighter 637 for 801 exemplifies the tendency of military authorities to view their heritage in terms of typology rather than provenance. Herein lies an internal logic of commodification as opposed to socialisation. Just as military stores must be fully stocked with current issue matériel, armed forces museums have traditionally been “equipped” with examples of uniform et cetera from different time periods.

Today Starfighter 801 is displayed in the Luftfartsmuseum’s Cold War exhibition, illustrating the technical evolution of “Quick Reaction Alert” aircraft (Fig. 4). The cycle begins with the F-84 Thunderjet – the first fighter supplied by the United States to Norway under the Mutual Defence Assistance Program – and ends with the F-35 Lightning II currently in service with the RNAF. Moving into the present, the exhibition points to a continuity in contemporary geopolitics with Russia once again seen as a possible threat, having made more frequent incursions since 2007. The presence of the F-16 and F-35 aircraft suggests the potential for multi-vocality with different meanings for visitors engaged in the museum’s public ritual. Anders Utgård, formerly the RNAF commander at the Luftfartsmuseum and now its civilian Head of Collections, acknowledges a change in the Norwegian public’s perception of the armed forces:

[I]n the Cold War the armed forces was all about defending ourselves, defending Norway in case the big bad guy came along. The operations abroad in Afghanistan and the other countries it’s not about defending Norway, it’s about other things. […] So, there is now a different debate in Norway, different opinions about the military because for a period of time it has not been about defending us. It’s been going out in Africa, the Middle East, and doing other people’s wars maybe. (Utgård, interview)
The Luftfartsmuseum expresses Norwegian foreign policy during the Cold War, focusing on intelligence gathering and frontier defence roles as a small state sandwiched between two competing superpowers. Emphasis is placed, however, on the RNAF’s continued defensive function, and whilst illustrating contemporary interception of Russian aircraft, the narrative follows the longstanding Norwegian policy of “High North – low tension” (see Tamnes 2011:58). Although the aircraft’s increasingly sophisticated weaponry bristles, their primary reconnaissance role is underlined as fighters “armed with a camera” for identifying aircraft and ships from Russia, a task they continue to perform in the present. The Starfighter is celebrated as a symbol of Norwegian technological modernisation as the RNAF’s “fastest ever aircraft”. Norway’s acquisition of its successor the F-16 is proclaimed as the “aircraft purchase of the century”. By 1982, new oil and gas wealth meant that Norway was able to buy state-of-the-art aircraft without foreign help. Despite the Norwegian energy boom, northern regions were still heavily reliant on the fishing industry. Although the southern-based oil and gas industry helped to offset structural changes in the northern fisheries that saw land-based jobs decline, Norway’s uneven development remained pronounced (Humlich 2020:60). Norway’s strategic importance within NATO therefore brought welcome infrastructure and employment to the Arctic counties of Nordland, Troms and Finnmark. The exhibition reflects on the Cold War’s ambivalence for Norway as a time when the danger of nuclear war was ever-present, but also describes it as “a period of modernization, prosperity gains,
and a strong belief in the future." In a gallery teeming with aircraft, above and below, the Starfighter is positioned axiomatically within the Cold War narrative beneath the iconic U-2 spy plane, a symbol of Norway’s past and present as NATO’s øyne I nord ("eyes in the north").

**Veteran-volunteers**

Aviation museums have traditionally relied on the skills of retired technical professionals as a voluntary cohort in lieu of, or on top of heritage conservation expertise. This may be in relation to preventive conservation, object restoration or maintenance of working exhibits. Voluntary work provides a continuity of occupation and sense of purpose for retired aviation professionals but can also contribute highly prized technical knowledge and skills that museums lack in-house. The contribution of volunteers in this area can catalyse tensions between the attitudes of those who have built and maintained aircraft during their working lives, and the museum conservation ethos. Volunteers often hold differing views about authenticity, seeing the priority as returning aircraft to how they would have looked in service by restoring original paint colours and markings and reinstating lost parts. Conversely, conservators typically adhere to preserving objects as found upon entering the museum, only intervening to clean them or to remedy integral damage and/or active deterioration. The Norsk Luftfartsmuseum has certainly benefited from its situation next to an air base, which has attracted highly skilled veteran-volunteers and aviation enthusiasts to bolster its conservation work. In the restoration of Starfighter 637, the complex interplay of enthusiasm for aviation heritage inside and outside the museum’s walls is apparent.

John Martin Skogøy was born in Bodø in 1936 and grew up close to the Luftwaffe air base that was converted for use by the RNAS after the Second World War. As a young boy he was interested by the German aeroplanes and joined the RNAS at seventeen to train as a technician. Skogøy recalls the arrival of the Starfighters in 1963 as “a sensation”, broadcast to the public via the relatively new medium of television. He was sent by the RNAS to Amarillo, Texas, to train on the new aircraft having previously worked on the F-84 and F-86. Echoing the Luftfartsmuseum’s narrative of technical innovation, Skogøy explains that for the RNAS, the Starfighter was a kvantespring ("quantum leap"): They came up here and the best pilots started to fly them. [...] It was full of new technology, and it was a supersonic aircraft and a very, very powerful engine, and all the electronic equipment. The aircraft we had were full of radio kit but they had tubes in it, but the Starfighter had just a small printed boards, so it was a new age. (Skogøy, interview)

At the Luftfartsmuseum, Skogøy has worked on the restoration of numerous aircraft for display including the F-84, the first aircraft he encountered at Bodø. Nonetheless, for him the Starfighter is the most important object representing the Cold War. The Starfighter’s technical superiority in being able to climb high enough to match Soviet aircraft, is paramount in his thinking. He is also involved in the Foreningen Starfighterens Venner, working on both the aircraft in the Luftfartsmusum’s store at Bodø Air Station and Starfighter 637 in its nearby hangar.

Born in 1953, Bjørn Ivar Lia originates in the southern town of Notodden but, unlike Skogøy, was not initially inspired by the aircraft he saw on childhood trips to Oslo’s Forne-
The perspectives of veteran-volunteers highlight a core issue for aviation museums: how to convey the kinesis of flying. Aviation museums commonly invite visitors inside their aircraft, often allowing access to the cockpit as the principal human mechanism in the experience of flying. Physical objects are often accompanied by audio-visual material as a sensory complement to the information provided in labels. Some aviation museums feature flight simulators as interactive exhibits, and/or host air shows, often in collaboration with independent preservation groups.11 Ingold (2021:68) has commented that flying should be seen as an existential rather than a mechanical process, and one only fully comprehen-
sible through experience. From a pedagogic standpoint, however, to communicate the historical and cultural importance of flight, museums must explain it as an existential *and* a mechanical phenomenon. Helge Andreasson, a retired military and civil aviation pilot, has led the project to restore Starfighter 637 from the beginning in 2003. In many ways, he is archetypical in the social relations underpinning the Starfighter’s symbolic significance. Born into a fishing family in Hammerfest in 1950, Andreasson joined the RNAF to train as a fighter pilot, spending a year at Williams Air Force Base in Arizona. He was stationed at Bodo with 334 Squadron in the summer of 1972 and experienced the changeover from the F-5 to the new CF-104 aircraft from Canada. He flew a Starfighter until he left the RNAF to work for the Scandinavian Airline System in 1979. His recollections of flying in the High North capture not only the kinesis of flying, but its existential quality:

I was scrambled out of Bodo, I was alone, single ship, […] which from Bodo up to the position where I went, where I intercepted that ship, I think is about 250 miles or something, nautical miles. And I came up there, descended, it was the old Sverdlov cruiser, kind of battleship size, big one. […] The search radar on the ship came up quite early, and I found it, it must have been some 30, 40 miles north of North Cape. Middle of the winter, descended down there,
finally saw the shadow of that ship. And you didn’t see much, I couldn’t take any pictures, I could just see what it was. Because you have some thoughts when you’re sitting up there in pretty bad weather, low visibility, no light and you’re all alone. Well, you hope that nothing will go wrong with the airplane because you don’t want to be jumping out of the airplane up there. You’ll probably get picked up by the Russians and never return home. (Andreasson, interview)

Starfighter 637 remains stored in its hangar at Bodø Air Station (Fig. 5) which also serves as a clubhouse for the Foreningen Starfighterens Venner. The aircraft has been grounded since 2018 because the ejector seats’ charges have expired so it cannot fly safely. The Lockheed originals were substituted during the restoration for Martin-Baker seats donated by the Italian Air Force. The new seats have consequently become part of the object’s history along with other modifications made during its social lives, such as the British Buccaneer aircraft stencilled onto the fuselage by groundcrew when 637 visited RAF Honington in England. Andreasson envisions a fourth life for Starfighter 637 in the Luftfartsmuseum if it is not possible to fly her again:

The shelter and the housing, the thing that you have here where we have the airplane will be part of a museum. [...] We’re on military territory now, but in the future this will be on the civilian side, then it opens up a new window, a new way for the museum to exhibit an airplane and for the public to see and listen. It’s a completely different story to see it in the open air on the ground, see the people working on it, starting it up, bring it to life, and even if it doesn’t fly it’s got to be an attraction. It is an attraction already just standing there with the engine running. (Andreasson, interview)

The Luftfartsmuseum is in a prime position to be a kinetic museum, wherein visitors can experience aircraft starting up, taxiing, and potentially taking off. Before the closure of Bodø Air Station in 2021, visitors could see aeroplanes on the runway from the old airport’s control tower which is now part of the museum and offers a panorama of the surrounding cityscape. In this it differs from many aviation museums opened on former military airfields and now wholly static sites. In July 2023, Starfighter 637 was demonstrated as a working object in a public event outside the Luftfartsmuseum. In future, whether operated in the air or on the ground, 637 has the potential to live a fourth life as the kinetic analogue to the static object – Rolf Nøel’s Starfighter 801 – and the Luftfartsmuseum’s flight simulator and other interactive exhibits. Starfighter 637 should moreover still be considered an authentic object worthy of static museum display. Modifications made during the aircraft’s third life represent a significant tertiary history of socialisation that enhances its value as cultural heritage.

Conclusion

As objects socialised through the medium of heritage, Starfighters symbolise the global military-industrial linkages of the Cold War but also the social relations between the Norwegian armed forces and Bodø’s populace. Public opinion of the Starfighters’ arrival in 1963, even counting opposition to NATO or American foreign policy, articulated popular support for defending Norway. In this sense, the Starfighter retains this meaning today as a symbol of Norway’s Cold War, in contrast to the multi-vocality of the F-16 and F-35 as aircraft deployed for “hot wars” in Afghanistan and Libya. Inside the Luftfartsmuseum Starfighter
801 is displayed as an axiom of the RNF’s defensive role, but also the technological advance coterminous with Norway’s socio-economic modernisation from the 1970s. Outside the museum, the perceptions of veteran-volunteers involved in Starfighter 637’s restoration reflect a pronounced nostalgia for the golden age of Bodø Air Station as an operational base. Restoring Starfighter 637 has therefore been a process of reifying memories of past martial prowess wherein it may live again through a symbolic object in flight.

The three lives of Starfighter 637 indicate a tension between how heritage is perceived by different social actors which at root revolves around contemporary museum practice. Flying aircraft are physically vulnerable in ways analogous to other operational vehicles and industrial machines, as well as objects that can be touched or handled in museums. Operating an aircraft will inevitably lead to its physical deterioration and the need to replace degraded parts. For museums with technological collections, the question of what constitutes an original object is therefore one of degree. An aircraft in flight also poses far greater risks to the object (not to mention the pilot) than is the case with other objects that may be operated in museums, such as trains, clocks and musical instruments. The question of the object’s status, as defined by curatorial rationale and associated conservation principles, must surely therefore be paramount. Regarding Starfighter 637, components substituted during restoration now constitute an authentic tertiary history of socialisation with Norwegian and international publics that has generated new meanings. Continued operation in a fourth life as a functional object at the Luftfartsmuseum would, however, require an institutional acknowledgment of the aircraft’s status outside the conservation practices applied to other objects in the collections.

Historic aircraft should remain static after formally entering museum collections because their social context (thus cultural value) has changed. From their original military or civil purpose, such objects transition to public institutional preservation as a widely accepted social practice. As cultural heritage, Starfighter 637’s value is derived from the socialised contexts in which it has functioned a priori and, more unusually, a posteriori display in the Luftfartsmuseum. Hence museums do not need to operate historic aircraft to interpret meanings generated by external social forces. New meanings may be formed within museums by these same forces but are refracted through the institutional context, which in turn informs visitors’ expectations. Operational aircraft in the air or on the ground nonetheless enhance museum interpretation. Museums can convey the kinesis of flying in terms of power, movement and sound using generic aircraft of the same type – if necessary, amalgams of different airframes – operated as a kinetic analogue to a specific historic object. By doing so, museums may create an enhanced sensory experience for visitors that connects real-life outside the museum to the intellectual and environmentally limited sensory experience within. Functional aircraft (or sections thereof) also have pedagogic value as mechanisms for explaining the processes of flight. Volunteers from aviation or other technical backgrounds may likewise be interested in developing and maintaining such interpretation.

At this point in time, both Starfighters 637 and 801 are valuable cultural heritage for being authentically shaped by human experience. The social lives of the generation of American-trained pilots who flew Starfighters in the High North vividly evoke the existential nature of flying. Working aircraft in museums give material form to that experience, helping to
explain its connection to being modern. After all, it is in the public recognition of aeroplanes as markers of modernity, in a negative or positive sense, that their cultural heritage value lies, whether in a kinetic or static museum.

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NOTES

1 Between 1999 and 2003, the Norsk Luftfartsmuseum hosted a series of conferences, with participants from Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, the UK, the United States and Russia, and has published their proceedings as a series.

2 Avinor is the state-owned company responsible for Norway’s airports.


4 Karl Kleve, email to the author, 2 October 2023.

5 After a long career in the RNAF, Amdal joined the US Naval Test Pilot School in Maryland in 2007 and became the first Norwegian to fly the F-35. His flight suit, helmet, and other personal objects are displayed in the Drømmer om å fly (Dreams of flight) exhibition at the Luftfartsmuseum.

6 Footage of Starfighter 637’s test flight on 28 September 2016 and subsequent flights can be viewed on the Foreningen Starfighterens Venner website (www.starfighter.no) and Facebook page (www.facebook.com/starfighter.no).

7 The year is notable for Russia planting its national flag on the seabed beneath the North Pole, laying claim to oil and gas deposits.

8 The photographs taken by pilots are a remarkable collection, giving rare glimpses of Soviet technology up-close, and revealing the narrow margins of the Cold War in the Arctic. They also link objects, people and places in a unique way. Flying Starfighter 801, Rolf Noel photographed the Soviet factory fishing vessel Pionersk in 1980 (NL.07050663). In its post-Soviet life, the ship was wrecked off the coast of Shetland in 1994, and the Shetland Museum now holds salvaged artefacts. The objects recovered on the Shetland shoreline exemplify how coastal “drift matter” may signify valuable cultural heritage (see Pétursdóttir 2020:94-95).

9 The author has observed increasingly sophisticated strategies for restoring absent parts now obsolete or otherwise unobtainable. For example, at the San Diego Air and Space Museum the volunteer group, which includes many retired aerospace professionals, is using 3-D digital printing to reproduce missing aircraft parts.

10 The influence of fascist modernity is explored thoughtfully in the Luftfartsmuseum. After the German invasion of 1941, gliders built by young aviation enthusiasts were confiscated by the Nasjonal Samling to train its paramilitary movement Hirden.

11 For example, in the UK the Imperial War Museum at Duxford and the Royal Air Force
Museum at Cosford stage annual air shows.

At the time of writing, the Foreningen Starfighterens Venner are still trying to obtain replacement charges from Martin-Baker.

Presently, the Luftfartsmuseum’s plan to incorporate areas of the former air station is still under development and no decisions have been taken regarding Starfighter 637 and its hangar.


INTERVIEWS

Helge Andreason, Bodø Air Station, 26 January 2023

Bjorn Ivar Lia, Bodø Air Station, 26 January 2023

John Martin Skogøy, Norsk Luftfartsmuseum, 26 January 2023

Anders Utgård, Norsk Luftfartsmuseum, 24 January 2023

LITERATURE


Reproducing the Drama of Object Lives.”
*World Archaeology* 41:4, 540–556.


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