THE POPULATION BOMB illustrated by Ewert Karlsson in 1966.

The population medal

Solveig Jülich

The Academy of Sciences' medals, in bronze and noble metals, are stored in an insignificant cupboard in the archive's basement. One of these medals was cast in 1994, after a design proposal from the Czech art student Jan Hásek; on the front it shows a foetus in the womb and the motto *Pro hominibus et terra* – for humankind and the Earth. On the reverse is a placenta sculpted as the tree of life, with a trunk and branching blood vessels. These motifs are in relief and are linked together by an umbilical cord that runs in a circular movement from the foetus along and over the edge of the medal to the placenta on the other side. This circular movement also creates the impression that the foetus and placenta are encapsulated in a seashell – a reminder of life's origins in the ocean. With its reduced, round shape, the medal is a congenial representation of the idea of Earth's vulnerability. The planet and its future life can be held in my hand.

The Academy of Sciences' casting and awarding of medals goes back to the early years of the organisation. Their issuance was part of a larger production of symbols that included the "digging man", which over time became something of a trademark for the Academy. There have been different kinds of medals: patronage medals have been established for royalty who supported the Academy's activities, and medals as prizes and rewards honour the recipients and allow them to feel as if they are part of a select company. The motif and artist are essential in memorial medals; medal makers must, in a minimal space and in two and a half dimensions (higher relief than a coin and less depth than a sculpture), depict and communicate a member's life, one full of research achievements. By appealing to our fascination for extreme

JAN HÁSEK'S WINNING ENTRY in the Academy of Sciences' international medal competition in 1994.

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miniaturisation and other sophisticated changes in scale, the medals can be regarded as a contribution to the long history of miniature art.

Hásek's work was a more unusual type of memorial medal, because it was not honouring a deceased member. Instead, it was produced after the Academy of Sciences had announced an international medal competition on the theme of "Population, natural resources and development". The stated aim was to highlight the long-term commitment of the organisation and its members to these issues: population and the environment were two sides of the same coin. Around fifty artists submitted proposals in the form of sketches. After winning, Hásek provided a plaster model which, after discussions with the Academy's head of information, Solgerd Björn-Rasmussen, about the inscription and choice of material, was produced in Sweden. The prize was awarded at the international medal organisation FIDEM's congress in Budapest in the spring of 1994, and there was an exhibition displaying some of the competition's sketches and models. The medal was distributed to the Academy of Sciences' staff and guests, and to various coin cabinets.

Population issues had been brought to light in the preparations for the first major UN environment conference in Stockholm in 1972. This is not surprising bearing in mind that Sweden and Swedish aid had, since the mid-1950s, sought to establish itself as an internationally influential actor in the debate surrounding population growth and family-planning. By emphasising its relative openness in its attitude towards sexual issues, relatively liberal abortion legislation and compulsory sex education, Sweden launched itself as a role model and was pioneering in providing aid for family-planning programmes in India and Pakistan. Concern about population increase grew during the 1960s, gaining media attention with books such as the American biologist Paul. R. Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* (published in 1968), and Georg Borgström's *Mat för miljarder* (1962) and *Gränser för vår tillvaro* (1964). At the same time, new contraceptives were introduced, the pill and the IUD, which were of vital importance in shaping aid. With Ernst Michanek, the first head of Sida, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, as a driving force, Swedish efforts and interests widened to around thirty countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Talk about the threat of a "population bomb", an expression that recurred in the media, brought societal relevance to the field of reproductive research that expanded during the 1960s and which, in Sweden, was particularly active at the Caroline Medico-Chirurgical Institute. A WHO centre was established there in around 1970; with the support of the Swedish Medical Research Council, Sida and the American Ford Foundation, it conducted multidisciplinary research and education, in which the primary aim was to develop new and improved contraception and abortion methods. Its director was Egon Diczfalusy, who led activities together with Ulf Borell, Sune

Bergström and Bengt Samuelsson. The latter two, both members of the Academy of Sciences, were awarded the Nobel Prize in 1982 for their research on prostaglandins – a discovery that was of great significance in the development of medical abortions.

But population issues were far from uncontroversial and, in the end, the Stockholm Conference in 1972 only dealt with "the human environment". However, the following year the UN organised an expert group meeting, also in Stockholm, on the subject of "Population, resources and environment". The Academy of Sciences contributed to the discussions via conferences and the founding of the *Ambio* journal, but did not feel that it received enough response to the need to link these complex issues.

The Academy therefore continued working with the Coordinating Committee for Swedish Research Councils (now the Swedish Research Council) to put population issues on the agenda. In the autumn of 1991, forty or so researchers from numerous research fields gathered with a group of administrators and fieldworkers from Sida and the UN. Their task was to develop interdisciplinary perspectives on the area and to present an analysis of the complicated circumstances linking the issues of population, natural resources, development and the environment. The conference resulted in a collection of recommendations for the future to the politicians who were to enter negotiations at the UN's second environment conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

In 1994, two years after the major conference in Brazil, the Academy of Sciences, along with the Royal Society in London, the National Academy of Sciences in the USA and the Indian Academy of Sciences, initiated a meeting about population issues and sexual and reproductive health for the world's academies in New Delhi. As a result of the conference, a joint panel of researchers was formed and was able to function as an advisory party for UN bodies, in the same way that individual national academies did for their governments. For Swedish players that were active in the area, the action plan – adopted at the UN's population conference in Cairo in 1994 – was regarded as a great success for the approach driven by Sweden for many years.

The medal competition that was announced in 1993 should be seen against this background. It was a way of memorialising previous initiatives and efforts in the area, but was equally part of the work involved in advancing Sweden's position ahead of the Cairo conference. Documents in the archive testify that important issues were believed to be at stake. In a letter from zoophysiologist and member Kerstin Lindahl-Kiessling to the Academy's head of information Solgerd Björn-Rasmussen, she expressed concern that a competition would be too "gimmicky", which would be particularly unfortunate as the subject was so sensitive: "Simply the use of the word 'Population' rouses aggression among many groups in the Third World." She wanted

a more "*positive* signal to entrants" than that conveyed by the title "Population, natural resources":

> Only one earth was the old collective phrase. Now it is sustainability; Our common future. The connotation being that it is we in the West who must change if we are to have a joint future for all peoples.

The worry expressed by Lindahl-Kiessling corresponded to a more general swing in opinion at this time. In light of the massive criticism being presented, the Swedish approach would no longer be on the basis of aid for family planning as a population measure, but instead the focus would be on women's individual sexual and reproductive health and rights. Perhaps it was Lindahl-Kiessling's hesitation that contributed to the word "development" being added to the invitation to the international medal competition, even if it had other connotations than "sustainability".

Nor was Hásek's proposal the obvious choice as the winning entry. At the time of the competition, the human foetus and the blue planet had been established as powerful and politically charged symbols in visual culture. Both were portrayed as beautiful and vulnerable objects in need of protection. From the 1960s onwards, these icons were quite frequently linked: the foetus in Lennart Nilsson's famous photo essay in the American magazine *Life* in 1965 was likened to an astronaut floating weightlessly in the starry skies. But, as feminist critics stated, there was something missing in these photographs: the pregnant female body. It was no coincidence, they maintained, that Nilsson's enlarged images of embryos and foetuses were utilised by anti-abortion movements in the USA and Great Britain to set the rights of women against that of the foetus. There are no traces of this critical discussion in the archive material about the jury's work on selecting the winning proposal. In any event, the new focus on strengthening women's reproductive rights did not make an impression on Hásek's memorial medal.

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Hásek's medal and the abovementioned unpublished material are found in the Academy of Sciences' main archive: Handlingarna rörande akademiens medaljer, vol. "Medaljtävling 1993"; and Miljösekretariatet, vol. "Handlingar rörande befolkningskonferensen 1991". For a summary of the Academy of Sciences' medals and a history of the medal as medium and art, see Cecilia Bergström (ed.), *För efterkommande: Kungl. Vetenskapsakademiens medaljer 1747–2007* (Stockholm, 2010). For miniatures in other forms and cultural contexts, see Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, 1993). In his thesis, Björn-Ola Linnér has depicted plant physiologist Georg Borgström's work to arouse debate on the "population explosion", see *The World Household: Georg Borgström and the Postwar Population–Resource Crisis* (Linköping, 1998). The

WHO centre at the Caroline Medico-Chirurgical Institute/Karolinska Institutet and the reproductive research conducted there is described in Sune Bergström, "The Prostaglandins: From the laboratory to the clinic", Tore Frängsmyr & Jan Lindsten (eds.), *Nobel Lectures, Including Presentation Speeches and Laureates' Biographies: 1981–1990* (Singapore, 1993). The perspective of historical actors is also provided in a text published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Sarah Thomsen & Thomas Schiöler (eds.), *Från befolkningsfrågor till SRHR: Sverige globala engagemang i sexuell och reproduktiv hälsa och rättigheter* (Stockholm, 2013). For a longer historical and more problematising perspective, see Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York, 2013). A valuable analysis of "global icons", including the foetus and the blue planet, is in Sarah Franklin, Celia Lury & Jackie Stacey, *Global Nature, Global Culture* (London, 2000).