



*Some of the staff at the Nobel Museum in their new offices at Kungl. Myntkabinettet discussing various design proposals for the Centennial Exhibition. From left to right: Dr. Olov Amelin, Senior Curator; Kersti Johnson, Chief Administrator; Fredrik Skog, Curator; Marika Hedén, Curator; Dr. Ulf Larsson, Senior Curator. (Photo Lars Falck)*

## A Mission Statement for the Nobel Museum

Editorial note: Professor Roald Hoffmann, who shared the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1981 with Kenichi Fukui, has most kindly put down his thoughts on a mission statement for the emerging Nobel Museum. The editors are grateful for Professor Hoffmann's permission to publish this in the Newsletter of the Nobel Museum.

»A museum is a veritable time machine. It is an arrow pointing back in time, turning itself, pointing into the future. A museum preserves the past and interprets it for its visitors. In that action it shapes the lives of those, especially young people, who will create the future.

But a Nobel Museum is special. Let me try to explain. Human beings are capable of great cruelty and destruction. And of acts of sublime creation, and of caring service to others. The century of the Nobel Prizes, the century just ended, gives us ample evidence of both the terror and the beauty of human action.

It is much harder to acclaim than to condemn (witness not only the press, but the subject matter of poetry!). But, as Rilke and Ecclesiastes wrote, there is a time to praise. And the institution of the Nobel Prizes, uniquely in the 20th century, has praised. Yes, individuals, from countries. But much more importantly it has praised beauty, understanding, good for others, knowledge of the beautiful (and terrible) world within us and around us.

The Nobel Prizes recognize artistic and scientific ideas, knowledge and understanding. Artifacts too – accelerators, therapeutic techniques, molecules that heal or may hurt, books and poems. But the ideas more than the objects are what the Nobel Institution celebrates.

Most museums preserve and interpret objects. A Nobel Museum's mission is unique: its 'acquisitions' are just those ideas that have served human beings and given them understanding and spiritual, yes, spiritual satisfaction. It is not at all evident how one might transmit to the future the intangible, the stuff of the mind. The way of preserving and passing on ideas – stronger than any can-

