

RELIGION AND MUSEUMS

Immaterial and Material Heritage

EDITED BY
VALERIA MINUCCIANI



Allemandi & C.

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On cover:

Kolumba. View of one of the rooms of the exhibition

“Art is Liturgy. Paul Thek and the Others” (2012-2013).

On the walls: “Without Title”, 28 etchings by Paul Thek,

1975-1992. Hanging from the ceiling: “Madonna on the Crescent”,

a Southern-German wooden sculpture of the early sixteenth century

(© Kolumba, Köln / photo Lothar Schnepf).

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Foreword

VALERIA MINUCCIANI

Finally my long standing objective that caught my attention and interest becomes a reality through the publication of this book / in connection to the PRIN Research which has just been finalised, at the Department of Architecture and Design of Politecnico of Turin, on archaeological musealization.

Thanks to some professional experiences and researches, I had several opportunities to observe the influence of religion (the influence of its presence and its absence) on fields that closely intersect it: with respect to art, architecture, museums.

Especially the relationship with the museums is particularly fertile and needs an organic, courageous and interdisciplinary reflection. So I got in touch with scholars who shared, albeit with very different accents, this same interest: some of them are highly reputed reference experts for those wishing to address these issues. More than a year ago, we developed a proposal for an international workshop, where we could have the opportunity to exchange our experiences, as well as investigate the conditions of a true “religion museology”, for those museums (which we like so much / in theory / to define as “contact zones”) which can really act as places of mutual understanding and participant interpretation.

An established tradition of a religion museology / let alone a religion museography / does not exist as yet, as well as a project coordinated at European level able to coagulate very different disciplinary skills, or to lay the foundations for a museums’ Atlas related to this theme.

Our intention was to investigate the reasons as well as the ways in which religion is addressed (or alternatively avoided) in museums. Considerable experiences have been conducted in several countries and we need to share them.

As yet we have not been able to realize this meeting, but in the meantime I have asked my colleagues if they were willing to provide their written contribution, to enable us to meet, at least, through our writings.

Some, while reiterating their interest for a conference and to participate in the debate, had to decline this invitation, since they were already very busy with books, lectures, teaching and professional commitments. Among them there are eminent scholars who possess a recognized and established expertise, in this field, who I thank for their interest and kind availability: Crispin Paine, Mark O'Neill (their contributions to the discussion have been incorporated in this book), Patrick Michel, Jérôme Cottin...

Others have agreed to be involved and I thank them very much for the time they have provided to us. Many others have joined along the way: the result is this publication that gives evidence of the vastness of the field as well as the in-depth expertise about the subject that can already be found in Europe.

The interventions of the Authors / who come from different professional fields / cover a wide range of subjects: there are some interesting reflections on the specificity of religious heritage and of a museology of religion (Roque), on the cross of cultures in the contemporary museum (Gustafsson, Kamel, Vackimes), on emerging issues in relation to the different characters of religious cultural heritage (still Vackimes, Kamel, Gustafsson / also with regard to projects and experiments / and then Tosini), reflections of museographic and semantic nature (still Roque and then Galizzi, Gualdrini) and finally specific cases of museums (still Vackimes, Galizzi and Gualdrini, and then Polajnar Frelih, Margaria).

For my part, I would like to recall once more / perhaps very obviously / that the medium "is" the message: that is the way to give, to pull over and comment objects which is never neutral and requires particular care for objects having a religious nature.

This collection of essays shows a complex, multifaceted frame that offers suggestions and ideas for further research. I hope we can continue this path, that is challenging and not yet clearly defined: the museum collections, as visible signs of spiritual contents, can really contribute to encourage intercultural dialogue.

For the moment, thanks to all.

I. EXHIBITING RELIGION

Considerations in Relation to the Museography for Objects of a Religious Nature

VALERIA MINUCCIANI, Politecnico di Torino

The modern museum is a creation of the Enlightenment, closely related to the illusion of dominating and creating order in the world as well as closely linked to secularisation: therefore it is not by chance even its architectural typology recalls, from its very origins, a *non-religious temple*.¹

From time immemorial, the eradication of objects from their original context (in our case: churches, tombs, altars...) will alter its characteristics: thus becoming aesthetic, historical, artistic and ethnographic proof, which are utilised by researchers as transformed objects. Afterwards, these objects have been continuously utilised, within the museum context, to celebrate nations or social classes, for education or indoctrination, to promote behaviour or opinions and to exercise a social control.

The modern museum is aimed towards that part of the public that should have already overcome the “irrational” aspects: however, notwithstanding the enlightened predictions which prophesized a future without religion, thanks to the definitive supremacy of reason and science, we have to recognise that nowadays these still have a very strong influence on our history. They create social sharing; giving an identity to individuals and groups, but also creating formidable barriers: with an implicit recognition of the “normative” character for the dominant culture which was amply disseminated, during these last years, in relation to *multiculturalism* and *restraint* which have also now been included in the museum’s educational objectives. A new role for the museums is also taking shape in relation to this, and it can vary if included in a culture more or less secularised.

In addition, the research and discussion on the cultural heritage has been enriched by new nuances: the distinction between tangible and intangible heritage is an acquired concept, and we know that the cultural assets always convey values and meanings that in part go beyond them, in reference to wider concepts.

The intangible content is extremely *volatile* and can be easily lost. However, whilst we have developed highly sophisticated theories and techniques, in respect of the object’s physical conservation, we can say that we have still not managed to conserve its significance (and its meaning) and we still do not *restore the intangible*.

The heritage of a religious nature² seems to represent these issues to the highest degree: for example the lack of liturgical or ritual usage reference could lead to total mutism

some objects. If the rite now belongs to the past, then the problem is more pronounced. The conservation in the museum guarantees only the visible part of an invisible heritage moreover the exhibition context always modifies the objects. In addition, as we know very well, notwithstanding the best intentions, the museum is never completely *neutral*: not only in relation (obviously) to its didactics and all the elements of the explicit communication, but also (and this is mostly interesting under the museographic aspect) for the *manner* of presentation, in relation to the space and its attributes. The exhibition set-up is not neutral, as well as the museum is not, when it is using distances, proportions, walk-through, lights, colours (which is frequently not taken into adequate consideration by the curators).

Coming back to the objects having a religious nature and their relation to the museums, it is very clear that the museum typology, in which it is conserved and exhibited, has a strong influence on the manner with which it is explained: what is highlighted, what is left out or obscured. These are objects that can be conserved in historical museums as well as in artistic, ethno-anthropologic, diocesan and archaeological; in eco-museum, and in museums dedicated to local culture, like those for culture which are geographically very far away. The only exception is for the natural scientific museums. It is important to highlight that for some time there have been in-depth contributions and reflections on the theme of *conservation* of the religious heritage, but the same cannot be said about the set-up context and exhibition. The Forum ICCROM 2003 “Living Religious Heritage: conserving the sacred”³ started with an implicit assertion about the “diversity” of the religious heritage in respect of other cultural assets, in defining it as being “alive” and devoted to its auto-conservation.

However its protection is frequently threatened, when society opts for other social and political priorities: strongly secularised societies, who look at religion as an obstacle, are not interested in this conservation activity and they have gone as far as physically destroying – on the contrary – the places and the testimonies (or, more subtly, conserving only the form without passing on the substance). Even the dialogue between religious communities and secular authorities can boost this conservation.

However internal contradictions are also present: generally, a living heritage should still be in use; and it must also be taken into consideration that the religious “live” practices evolve and adapt themselves. All this does not seem to be very compatible with the conservation, which however cannot “freeze” the objects in relation to forms and traditions.

Even other aspects can end up in contrast with the conservation activity, due to the religious characteristics of the collections: some cleaning or restoration practices cannot be carried out on specific objects, for example, due to the use of materials or substances extracted from animals which are considered “impure” by some religions. Therefore ethical and professional views related to the conservation of objects, can sometimes be

superimposed / and can sometimes end up in contrast.

But it is much more difficult to conserve the intangible reality of the artefacts' (and all the religions') origin:⁴ this is about a vision of the world having divine roots, in which the objects and artefacts are an extension of the unseen. It penetrates the entire life of the individual, giving a sense and place within the universe and the time. It is therefore obvious that the religious heritage of a race cannot be fully understood unless the entire culture is understood, things are seen from their point of view, and the symbols, language, convictions, rituals, myths and ideologies are known.

As we were saying, since the year 2000 the European Community has dedicated substantial attention to the intercultural dialogue, by inviting European citizens to rediscover their own common heritage. The Holy See had immediately indicated the ecclesiastical and religious cultural assets as being strategic towards this objective, but we have to clarify that new changes were implemented in recent times:

- / the need to promote an inter-religious dialogue has generated a new demand for museums;
- / religious and academic studies have pushed the museums into facing this aspect more professionally;
- / the museum has also started to be perceived by some confessions as a means to present their mission. The cathedrals have started to look more like museums and the distinction between a museum and a sanctuary has diminished;
- / the religion is recognised as a typical phenomena of human society, with an extremely important role, even within a contemporary world.

This was also evident in the professional and academic debate. Paine (2000) was surely one of the first books to have explored how different religions have been presented in world museums. Other (few) general studies have followed, amongst them Sullivan, Edwards (2004), Claussen (2009), Beier-de-Haan, Jungblut (2010), Roque (2011) together with a wider study on single museums or homogenous groups of museums, like for example Michel (1999), Kamel (2004), Minucciani (2005), Wilke, Guggenmos (2008), Hughes, Wood (2010) and Lüpken (2011). There is also a volume of writings in the periodicals field, including *Material Religion: the Journal of Objects, Art and Belief*, founded in 2005 and purposely aimed, with specific interest, to the religion in museums.

Finally, during these last years, a new awareness has been experimented (especially in humanistic disciplines and social sciences) in many fields within the academic world. For example, the participants in the sixth international conference on cultural policies (Jyväskylä 2010) were surprised by how much the religions were active within the cultural field and above all by the lack of research that surrounds this issue.

By now, from a study which was not exhaustive but quite systematic, it results that mu-

seums having a specific reference to religion are amply disseminated across Europe. Nevertheless, their communicative strategies demonstrate that the focus is still not centred on the specific characteristic of the objects which they exhibit.

There is also a much higher need to insist on the museums' task, in line with the recognition of an increased "illiteracy", towards the religious practices and concepts: therefore there is an exceptional potential in the museum/religion tandem.

In a society which over time has globalised many different cultures and beliefs, the comparison within the European context is interesting for various reasons. In fact, within the different countries we find different approaches, as amply demonstrated by this collection of essays, but above all there is the need to reorder the scenario in line with the first general criteria: essentially museum and religion can come into contact in three possible contexts

- ✓ within "laical" museums with varied typologies, which also conserve and exhibit objects and artefacts having a religious nature;
- ✓ within "laical" museums specifically dedicated to religion (or, more frequently, to religions);
- ✓ within museums having an "ecclesiastical" nature or in some way linked to the faithful community, which display a determined religious context through its artefacts and artistic works. Many times both the curators and the reference public have the same religious orientation.

In these cases the differences are defined at museological level, but not as much at museographic level. It is useless to state that the large majority of museums are encompassed within the first instance, since a consistent portion of the human artistic historical heritage is in any case linked, in some way, to religion. The theme, in these museums, is tangentially crossed, as one of the many annotations at the edge of the exhibited heritage; even when the didactic tool proves to be sufficiently informative, it is limited to information of a descriptive nature defined as an "observant view", that is an external view (at least within the aims, "objective").

In the same museological literature, the reference to the specificity of the religious theme in the museum is rare and in any case very recent (Patrick O'Neill *et al.* 1996, 2004, Paine 2000, Sullivan, Edwards 2004) and simultaneously the museum as a neutral, apolitical and objective institution has finally been called into question. Therefore the large museums of history and art simply brush over the religious issue, which deals with the sense of existence, with life and death, and with issues which are crucial: however the series of references and knowledge (that in any case are considered as "simple" tools for iconographic interpretation) are taken for granted and the said reference background finally seems to be deemed as secondary.

In the second case a descriptive and panoramic intent is evident, which necessarily implicates a comparative view and not simply an “observant” view.

Definitely, the theme is extremely delicate and requires a remarkable equilibrium. Very few cases are known in the whole world, but these are very significant: we can define these museums *anthologic*, aimed at showing the thousand faces of the ancestral need for God, the thousand forms with which mortal man has looked and favoured eternity. Every human being is fascinated by the origin and end; every human being brings inside him “the sense of eternity” and refuses the end for himself and for his loved ones: and this blurred need for transcendence gives origin to different beliefs. Museums which highlight a will so much disproportionate, through different forms which it has undertaken over time and in the places around the world can therefore be extremely poetic and educational locations.

Their approach, at least apparently, can be assimilated to that of the ethnographic historical museums: which aim to display, through the objects, the different faiths.

It results that the first *public* museum, about religion, in the world was the Museum of Religions (*Religionskundliche Sammlung*) established, within the Philipps University in Marburg, Germany, in 1927 by Rudolf Otto.⁵ His successors followed his idea of a museum as a tool for the comparative study of religions, whose diversity in the world is represented by objects, images and reproductions.

The university context and the descriptive intent are the most favourable for an objective view of the collection, even though the same groupings with which the materials are displayed already indicate communicative and interpretative choices: for example where the different burial practices are compared or where the monotheistic religions, which represent the different evolutions of historically interconnected groups, are grouped together (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). The fact of being displayed as a whole, independent, the religions of the southern eastern Asiatic, with the central role of Buddhism and its different teachings and to which a large space is dedicated, demonstrates the personal inclinations of the founder and his particular interests for the mysticism of those regions.⁶

However if we examine the display’s specific museographic choices, we note that the setting is based on “groupings” and that the objects groups are isolated in showcases whose spatial connection does not form part of a specific communicative project, like the colours, lights and all the other devices which are so important for the contemporary and modern museography. It has at its disposal several tools, which are now very articulated and refined, but the display manner, set-up and curator choices of a university institution give prominence to other aspects: amongst which the didactic presentation of scientific evidence and elements identified and studied.

It is also doubtful that such a museum has acquired over time a more inherent and ac-

tual value in relation to the contemporary political debate. Since it is exclusively concentrated on religions and it does not propose to display the cultures from ethnographic aspect or the arts from stylistic aspect, or a specific religion, its primary educational intent could really entail an education for tolerance and multicultural understanding.⁷ However the doubt remains that true tolerance – which does not coincide with indifference – could maybe also give rise thanks to a less “observant” view, that is “closer”: a higher identification in the impulse that has generated so much beauty (and sometimes even very worrying practices and objects) could empirically indicate the way for a profound understanding which always includes participation.

However it must be highlighted that the presence of this museum (unique in Germany) within the university institution has evident repercussions on the currently proposed educational curriculum, which in fact dedicates particular attention to the disciplinary themes like “Visual representation of religion/s” and “Material religion”.

Another case among the few existing museums dedicated to all religions is the Saint Petersburg’s Museum of the History of Religion, which also dates back to the first half of the twentieth century: its origins are very different from the Marburg museum since it was founded as an anti-religious institution in 1932, a connotation which was lost with the collapse of the USSR, to initially become the Museum of the History of Religion and Atheism (1954), and later the Museum of the History of Religion (MHR, 1990). Different successive researchers employed at the museum have always tried, even during the initial years, to concentrate the attention on the conservation and historical study rather than on the political and propagandist aspects and in fact the collection clearly portrays a “scientific” characteristic. The museum’s marked research vocation is evidenced by annual publications and conferences as well as through promotion of archaeological expeditions (for example on the Bosforo) aimed at exploring the formation of the archaic faiths.

The museum currently exhibits the different religious confessions, not only in Russia, but in the whole world, as eloquently evidenced by the collection groups: “History of Orthodoxy”, “Western Christianity,” “Religions of the East” – but also more specific sections like for example “Chinese folk pictures” or “Primitive Beliefs”.

The museum takes care, as much as possible, of the display update, also by technological and interactive exhibits – whilst always maintaining a high scientific level thanks to the integration of a good graphic system.⁸ In addition the feedback from visitors confirms the “neutrality” of the presentation – which is a constant concern for the curators. Due importance is also given to the emotional and/or evocative setting (a new section on the Inquisition is being planned in the short term, which will be located in the basement area), utilised in various cases with undoubtedly effective solutions, like in the Buddhism Hall which reproduces a nirvana type scenario. The continuous updating

of its exhibition is a very recent constant of the museum. Here, in contrast with other museums, atheism is also taken into consideration as a religious orientation and a specific space is dedicated to it, modernizing and putting it within the social political context (e.g. how it is seen in Russia, due to its recent past related to anti-religious propaganda).

The museum's employees, which are very well versed in many aspects including those related to museological and museographic field, have also looked into the tools and methods for the museum presentation of the religious phenomena: on one side it is deemed that the presentation should be a sort of "scientific publication", detailing the origin context and lacking apologetic intents while on the other side it is deemed to be fully aware that the objects in the museum emerge from their sacred belief, becoming available for everybody but losing that emotional feel (their value lead back to material and aesthetic standards). To recover this aspect / which is so important from a religious perspective / the museum tries to involve, on a case by case basis, the representatives of the different churches: who are interested to intervene to control their image and at the same time their presence is able to give back to the objects a sort of "sacred aura". Here there is the perception of the number of religious replies to the same number of questions man has made over the millennia which have been provided over time and space and how none of them seems to be definitive.⁹

Paradoxically, a cultural context like to one at the Saint Petersburg's museum / where religion does not have a dominant role / has favoured the characteristic accepted by many as being "neutral", historical, scientific and anthological. In fact a museum opened many years after within a different context, the Saint Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow (1994), was immediately deemed very controversial.¹⁰ It also aims at educating awareness and reciprocal respect, but there is a feeling towards it of having a higher involvement and greater debate.

The curators have always monitored in detail the reactions / sometimes very strong / of the visitors, who demonstrated the effect that religion has on the individual's life.

Many complaints were somewhat expected: some groups felt underestimated, other did not want to be physically associated with religions which they rejected, or criticised the narrative texts requesting that they should be rewritten. Many requested to take a position "against" specific religions and there were even cases of vandalism and physical "attacks" towards the exhibits.

Instead, other reactions were unexpected, showing how easy it is to demolish the museum's boundaries between *inside* and *out*, between object and subject: the case of the Muslim visitor who protested against the sale of alcohol in the museum's coffee shop was rather enlightening.

The museum is divided in three parts, respectively dedicated to a sacred art collection coming from different cultural backgrounds, to the human life cycle as interpreted and

celebrated by different religious traditions and to the religious history in Scotland. It represents more than 120 religious faiths, spanning over 5,000 years of human history. Still maintaining a scientific and anthological characteristic, the museum runs in parallel with the “observant” view an additional “participative” view, since it seems to wonder as well as the public. The explanatory texts try to give the “external” view of the curator as well as the “internal” view of the believer. The curators immediately came up with a series of queries of a historical and scientific nature: how to conserve a “living” heritage within the museum environment; how to contrast the sense of past which the objects acquire in the museum; how to reconcile the required selection (which is almost always based on aesthetic criteria) with the respect for the different opinions and sensibility; how to avoid any “judgement value” but at the same time retain the museum’s typical educational role. In particular, with reference to this last point, the curators are convinced that it is their duty to take a position in respect of religious beliefs which have justified (if not originated) devastations, slavery and genocides. Not all aspects deserve to be documented in the same manner, as if the Declaration for Human Rights was never enacted.

They are convinced that the museum should also have the courage to highlight contradictions and conflicts:¹¹ it cannot be a place without contrasts, since it reflects different convictions and above all, it portrays diversity and also celebrates it as a value. Mark O’Neill reflects on the collections’ religious content – as opposed to the occurrences in other cases – which can be explained much better by those who experienced it rather than by those who studied it.

The curators have always been very careful to public reactions taking into consideration and clearly informing them about the objectives and intentions, which is fundamental: the note at the entrance states “Our aim is to promote mutual understanding and mutual respect amongst people of all faiths and none”. They always explain their choices, explicitly declaring where and how they intend to establish the boundaries between religion, spiritual and secular and where they intend to relegate these aspects to a secondary level so that the objects’ aesthetic potential or other type of values can emerge. This particular approach, which still follows a “neutrality” trait, is confirmed by the visitors’ reactions. It was noted that they feel personally involved and also pushed to reflect on their personal faith. Others interact with the objects or show a reply which is typically devotional – or maybe, in this case, the set-up choices are not as yet very courageous or innovative as they should be: paraphrasing Mark O’Neill’s question, “is religion a museum object?”, we can say “can religion be enclosed in a series of showcases with subtitles”? Certainly the recent exhibition comparing the positions taken by the different religions in respect of crucial questions is much more fascinating, confirming that the objects bend towards the power of the narrative.

Logically speaking, also the “museum without location” belongs to this second typ-

ology of museums: the first virtual museum of religion is accessible online www.VirtualMuseumofReligion.com. However this introduces a new area for reflection which we cannot delve into at this point – even if we reserve the right to do so shortly in another place.¹²

The third type of museum is the one where the attention for museology and museography of religion should be more elevated. It is also the most popular (in some countries it has been widespread) and there are many comparative and coordination initiatives. A good basis for research are those sites which gather and present these museums,¹³ whilst the real and proper debate and comparison is animated within associations similar to AMEI (www.amei.biz) in Italy or Die Deutschsprachige Arbeitsgemeinschaft kirchlicher Museen und Schatzkammern in Germany (which is a kind of Association of Museum and Church Treasures). A new inter-disciplinary mediation is being studied and promoted by Europae Thesauri, European Association of Treasures and Churches museums, that also wants to increase the involvement of the public in the awareness and understanding of the museum institutions. Finally, the interest to safeguard the minorities has already inspired large European projects like for example “RELIGARE”, which wants to incentive the inter-disciplinary cooperation related to religious pluralism in Europe (<http://www.religareproject.eu>). Other networks have been organised on analogue thematic (e.g. religious sociology and religious mediatisation) but they do not provide a specific significance to museums. Naturally there are other local coordination entities at various levels.

First of all the identity of these museums is not defined once and for all and in reality it is not univocal. How can these be classified? To what typology do they belong? They cannot be strictly defined as historical museums, if some of the objects, at least in their potential function, are currently being used and especially if the conserved images are the object of an existing faith and of a practised devotion. However the memory theme – embedded in the same origin of the museum and in its reason for existence – is also founded in the majority of the religions (the catholic faith is perpetuated with the commemoration of the Last Supper and the continuity of the rituals is the basis of almost all the religions).

This type of museum, in contrast with the previous cases, does not have the concern of positioning itself as neutral, however it always resolves for scientific type objectivity. Among the museums dedicated to the religious heritage there will be monasteries, cathedrals and other religious centres where there is access to masterpieces, but also to Treasury museums and missionary museums. Those museums earmarked for the conservation of the identity of a precise minority will be included within this same category, like the Jewish museums and the *Waldesian* museums. Different typologies can also coexist within the same museum and the museological and museographic approaches can be very different.

However the most consistent group is the one of the diocesan museums, which relates to the territorial communities. It is about a very diffused typology especially in Italy, France, Germany and Spain. I would like to take this opportunity to summarily look at a few museographic characteristics of the diocesan museums within the Italian context.

They present the most diverse heritage, from a usage aspect, quality and period. There we find major artefacts but also popular objects of devotion, liturgical objects, very old testimonials and recent documents but many times have a lack of a real theme structure. Part of the research could branch out to deal with the organisation, systemisation, set-up and narrative adopted by these museums, since the *manner* in which the museum communicates, heavily influences the message and interpretation by the visitors. But above all, since *you can not abstain from communicating*, it is fundamental to master as much as possible the contents which will inevitably be carried also by the spatial set-up.

I believe that the lack of a specific museology will also have strong repercussions on the lack of a specific religious museography. This is confirmed by the fact that these museums, depending on the closest type of museum they resemble, from time to time, assume the form of a museum of archaeology, ancient art, history or interpretation.

The mostly used ordering choices are basically two. The first one follows a criteria which is possibly objective and scientific, with an approach which is very similar to the artistic historical museums: the criteria by excellence, which overrides the others, is the chronological one, which gives the opportunity to underline the evolution over time. The second one is related to thematic groupings that can be declined in various different ways: for example, a recurrent choice is articulated around the sacraments, or by key figures of the local religious history, or in relation to the specific devotion felt on the territory.

In the first group the exceptionality of the product will be documented, whilst in the second group additional space will also be provided to the series sequence (the repetition) of *normal* objects, therefore the most popular ones.

Inevitably, the first group will have observations aimed more at the exterior, stylistic and formal aspects of the artefacts, with particular attention to the art history and other emergencies; in the second group the faith content will override the aesthetic beauty carrying them.

In other words, notwithstanding that these are institutions which are not neutral, the first group will have the observant view whilst the second group will have the participative view.

A good example of the first group can be the diocesan museum in Turin, whilst the diocesan museum in Bergamo could be in the second group. It is interesting to see how much these museological choices will have repercussions on the museographic ones.

The diocesan museum of Turin¹⁴ is housed in the Cathedral's large crypt: the striking

and accurately restored spaces are an invitation for silence; the objects are in front of each other within a symmetric display and unmoving balance; monumental showcases protect the precious objects whilst the texts, in an exemplary scientific and distinguished manner, provide the required information. There are no touch screen or projections. Here this space, the materials and the distribution will invite visitors to *observe* and the message being received / involuntarily / will narrate about a story which was already closed.

The diocesan museum in Bergamo is housed in the Palazzo Bernareggi, a former high-class residence, which does not show off any monumentalities within its ample and articulated spaces and does not rely on “atmospheric” devices. Simple showcases, basic but evocative settings, panels with projections and moderate light play / as well as the succession of various thematic groups / are an invitation to *participate*. The message being received is that everything is still alive.

From a museographic aspect, in Turin, the materials and especially the colours have an *architectural* significance; in Bergamo they also have a *symbolic* and *expositive* significance.

The first one is a “nice” museum of art and history; the second one seems more modest, but is really related to faith.

I would like to conclude by renewing the invitation for a higher consideration of the communicative capacity of the museographic choices: the distances between the objects, the reciprocal positions, the backgrounds and heights are signals thus communicating hierarchies and roles; colours, forms and materials can explain what and how to connect / highlighting differences and analogies. The light emphasises the objects and at the same time inviting the eyes to gaze on them, the setting defines an emotional space which has an enormous influence on the interpretation. Even the repetition has an interesting communicative value: if almost all the objects can narrate different stories (and all, in some way, legitimate), the manner to display them many times needs to be found to invite different interpretations.

The diocesan museums are / or should be / places for contemplation and reflection. As always when dealing with intangible heritage, made of values and significations, the *viewing primacy* should be reshaped in favour of other receptors: even though, in the museum, this still seems to be a very difficult objective.

¹ As evidently shown in the design of the Museum of Etienne Boullée, and in the same museum proposed by Jean Louis Nicolas Durand at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

² In addition to the generic definition of the “heritage of a religious nature” we find a large variety of collections, objects and situations. A systematic and rigorous terminological examination within this small universe was, a few years ago, aptly summarised by G. Varaldo, *Sull'arte sacra e i beni culturali religiosi*, in Minucciani 2005.

³ Held at the *Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* in Palazzo Corsini in Roma and published by Stovel, Stanley-Price, Killick 2005.

⁴ Refer for example to the UNESCO international convention to Safeguard the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

⁵ Theologian and philosopher of religions, who in 1917 with the book *The idea of the Holy* marked the modern study of religions by trying to elaborate a “methodology of the religious sentiment”. During his numerous journeys and with the support of appropriate funding he managed to gather a considerable number of iconographic materials and artefacts coming from religions all over the world, valorising and differences and identities. He planned for a long time a museum in which to display this material and finally found the funding thanks to the celebrations of the four hundred years of the University. The museum, which continued to grow over time, is currently housed in the “New Chancellery” building. It is directly administered, to this very day, by the University under the supervision of the President of

the Department for the Study of Religions within the Faculty of Social Sciences and Philosophy, thus guaranteeing a continuous enrichment of the research.

⁶ Objects and testimonials coming from India, China and Japan are displayed one near the other in a manner to favour the comparison between Induism, Confucian Taoism, Shintoism, Tenrikyo.

⁷ Cf. Bräunlein 2005.

⁸ However the availability of the texts in other languages is currently not complete and without any doubt this constitutes a handicap.

⁹ Cf. Stanislav Koutchinsky, Director of State Museum of the History of Religion, Saint Petersburg, Russia.

¹⁰ Initially the building should have housed a visitors' centre for the Cathedral, but the project failed due to financial difficulties. The Municipal Council took responsibility for the works to be able to open, with the already existing resources in the collections of the Museums in Glasgow, a centre specialised in the religious theme. See O'Neill 2011.

¹¹ In line with the typical relationship between religion and contemporary art: a very tormented relationship which the museum has however chosen to document.

¹² Virtual museums are a great, new field that we're facing following V. Minucciani, *Il museo fuori dal museo*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 2005.

¹³ Refer to the site www.kirchliche-museen.org; or, at one single country level, like the Spanish example at www.museosdelaisglesia.es.

¹⁴ See Cervellin, Maffioli 2011.

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Exposer croyances et cultes: les singularités de la muséologie de religion

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Abstract

This article is about the sacred references in the museum: how it exhibits the liturgical or devotional objects and how it refers to the immaterial concepts related to them.

Once the sacred is protected by the ban, we must observe how the religious object can be transferred to a secular context and be musealised. In order to delineate the subject and because the religious heritage in Western museums are mostly of Christian matrix, we analyze the circumstances of this transfer, based on the sacred concept in the New Testament.

At the museum, the objects are out of context, since they are away from their original environment. In the specific case of the religious objects, this means the obliteration of their functional and symbolic contents on the sacred domain, because they are generally chosen and presented as artistic heritage and integrates a new ritualized space that keeps the ban by reasons of conservation and preservation.

However, new museological trends concern the presentation of intangible issues and the recontextualisation of the object's original environment. Museums consider the context, function and meanings as well as the material, formal and historical aspects. The religious object tends to be chosen according to their competence as an available document about the reality it evokes, even devoid of heritage value, which allows an exhibition model more fluid and conceptual.

The museographic device is the first museum strategy to communicate the object, but it is the textual information that makes it intelligible. Even without a religious position, this information may contain religious concepts, rigorously and precisely presented. The decode of the object in its multiple meanings is committed to all museums, regardless of their type or ownership.

Le patrimoine religieux et le sens particulier du patrimoine chrétien

Parler de muséologie de l'objet religieux semble un paradoxe: le musée est le lieu où les objets sont exposés et dévoilés à notre observation, pendant que le sacré est une réalité absolue et interdite qui est au-delà de l'homme et lui transcende. L'évidence du sacré or du divin est un phénomène archaïque, ubiquitaire et transcendant, transversal à toutes les religions. «Whatever the historical context in which he is placed, *homo religious* always believes that there is an absolute reality, *the sacred*, which transcends this world

but manifests itself in this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real» (Eliade 1959, p. 202). Face au monde ou face à l'univers, l'homme vit l'impuissance et la peur face à l'inconnu, l'incompris et le mystérieux. Et tout ça lui semble un système de forces extraordinaires. «The sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different order from “natural” realities» (Eliade 1959, p. 10). Le sacré est, cependant, une expérience religieuse qui saisit ces forces transcendantes dans une dimension spirituelle. Rudolfo Otto décrit le sacré comme *mysterium tremendum* et *fascinans* (Otto, Harvey 2005, *passim*), un pouvoir effroyable et fascinant. Il souligne encore: «The “tremendum” may then be rendered more adequately “tremenda majestas” ou “aweful majesty”» (Otto, Harvey 2005, p. 20). Le sacré a, donc, un caractère ambivalent et paradoxal configuré à travers des démonstrations d'attraction, de fascination, mais aussi, de vénération et de crainte.

Dans l'Ancien Testament, Dieu confirme l'existence d'une séparation invincible entre le sacré et le profane, car tout ce qui a reçu l'onction devient interdit. Au précis moment où Dieu établit l'alliance avec son peuple, maintient l'interdiction à tout ce qui participe au rituel de communication avec le divin.

«Le Seigneur parla encore à Moïse, et lui dit: [...] Tu en oindras la tente d'assignation et l'arche du témoignage, la table et tous ses ustensiles, le chandelier et ses ustensiles, l'autel des parfums, l'autel des holocaustes et tous ses ustensiles, la cuve avec sa base. Tu sanctifieras ces choses, et elles seront très saintes, tout ce qui les touchera sera sanctifié» (Exode 30, 22-30).

La dichotomie opposant le sacré au profane pourrait être intolérable sans les mécanismes de régulation du phénomène religieux. Le mot «religion» vient du latin *religio*, formé par le préfixe de répétition *re-* et, selon l'interprétation de Cicero, *legere* (cueillir, rassembler) ou, selon Lactance et Tertulian, *ligare* (lier) (Derrida 1998, pp. 36-37). Dans le Christianisme, la valeur qui prédomine est celle de la liaison. La religion chrétienne se présente comme un lien entre le sacré et le profane.

Dans le Nouveau Testament, le thème de l'alliance entre Dieu et son peuple prend une nouvelle perspective fondée sur le mystère salvifique de l'Eucharistie.

«Pendant qu'ils mangeaient, Jésus prit du pain; et, après avoir rendu grâces, il le rompit, et le donna aux disciples, en disant: Prenez, mangez, ceci est mon corps. Il prit ensuite une coupe; et, après avoir rendu grâces, il la leur donna, en disant: Buvez-en tous; car ceci est mon sang, le sang de l'alliance, qui est répandu pour plusieurs, pour la rémission des péchés» (Matthieu 26, 26-28).

Dans le contexte du christianisme, le sacré n'est pas préfiguré par l'interdiction absolue. Le *sacrum* chrétien est consubstantié. C'est à dire, la vraie sacralité n'est pas «séparation», mais «communioin». Cela signifie qu'il n'établit pas une réalité distincte et, à son tour, crée une relation extensive à tout et à tous. Dans le christianisme, seulement Dieu est saint dans un sens absolu.

Cependant, les édifices et les parements, y compris les ustensiles, les textiles, les vêtements et les ornements, sont soumis à des rituels de consécration spécifiques. Le calice et la patène, par sa condition de récipients en contact direct avec le pain et le vin de la transsubstantiation, sont objet de consécration avec l'huile du saint chrême. Les autres parements sont bénis. La profanation des objets consacrés et dédiés au culte prend la gravité du sacrilège.

«Le *sacrilège* consiste à profaner ou à traiter indignement les sacrements et les autres actions liturgiques, ainsi que les personnes, les choses et les lieux consacrés à Dieu. Le sacrilège est un péché grave surtout quand il est commis contre l'Eucharistie puisque, dans ce sacrement, le Corps même du Christ nous est rendu présent substantiellement» (Église catholique 2003, can. 2120).

Seulement, la profanation au sens le plus strict implique le sacrilège; les autres circonstances de la perte du contenu sacré configurent l'exécration ou la profanation. À fin d'éviter l'utilisation abusive des objets liturgiques, l'Église détermine l'exécration lorsqu'ils soient expropriés ou endommagés. Les objets désaffectés du culte sont libérés pour prendre d'autres fonctions au domaine profane. Il y a ici une ouverture parmi le sacré et le profane, à travers laquelle l'objet religieux peut se transférer dans un espace limitrophe, comme le musée, où leur fonctionnalité liturgique ou dévotionnel seulement pourra être évoquée.

Ainsi, l'objet sacré, liturgique ou dévotionnel, peut être muséalisé, nous permettant de distinguer trois typologies dans la muséologie d'art religieuse: des musées et trésors d'initiative et tutelle ecclésiastique; musées d'art avec des collections d'art religieuse; musées de religion de tutelle laïque. Et, en plus, la muséologie est envisagée comme une des plus efficaces solutions pour la sauvegarde de ces objets désaffectés au culte par des raisons politiques ou culturelles, par l'évolution de l'histoire des mentalités et du goût, ou par la rénovation de la pratique liturgique. Cependant, jusqu'à la reconnaissance de l'importance de la muséologie pour la préservation de tout ce patrimoine, il y a eu un très long processus d'évolution concernant l'exposition des objets religieux.

Processus muséologiques autour du patrimoine religieux. L'effet d'éloignement de l'objet au musée

Les premiers musées sont apparus en Europe au XVIII^e siècle, dans le contexte du rationalisme des Lumières, de la prise de conscience nationale, des mouvements déclenchés à partir de la Révolution française de 1789 et de la révolution industrielle qui débutait en Angleterre. «Dans un esprit encyclopédique, les premiers musées nationaux furent créés afin de rassembler les trésors hérités de formes politiques caduques [...]» (Dubé, Lapointe 1997, p. 151); parmi ces trésors, il y avait beaucoup des objets provenant des églises ou des collections ecclésiastiques. Le sens fonctionnel de ces objets, la sémantique de leur fonction d'usage, est remplacé par une nouvelle signification au

domaine du patrimoine, de l'histoire ou de la culture matérielle. Lorsqu'il entre au musée, l'objet religieux devient un objet d'art. Et ça arrive quel que soit la tutelle du musée, laïc ou ecclésiastique.

Il y a une inévitable rupture entre le contexte d'origine et le contexte expositif, artificiel et fictif, au même temps que le discours du musée, avec une nouvelle rhétorique et des autres références, oblitère le sens archaïque de l'objet.

En évoquant des circonstances et des fonctionnalités préalables, l'objet muséal est le reflet d'une réalité projetée dans un autre environnement étrange et artificiel. Donc, l'objet est décontextualisé, par l'absence du référent: il a été éradiqué de leur contexte original pour rentrer dans un autre, le musée.

Le concept qui se dégage de l'objet en raison de leur présentation dans un entourage qui le rehausse comme un symbole de leur propre réalité culturel, mais qui est, à la fois, une reprise et une mutilation.

La décontextualisation a été un paradigme de la pratique muséologique, impliquant des phénomènes de gains et de pertes qui sont particulièrement importants dans le transfert du contexte sacré au contexte muséal. La perspective qui encadre l'objet religieux y est délibérément désacralisée. Le musée où il s'intègre, presque toujours un musée d'art, est une institution réglée par des principes assurant l'excellence et la préciosité de ses collections. Cependant la valeur matérielle et artistique impose la sauvegarde et réserve pour empêcher le contact direct et le maniement, ce qui se traduit, enfin, par un facteur de séparation et de distance face au quotidien très pareil à ce de la sacralisation. À la fois que le musée apporte un nouveau modèle de fruition des objets, il en est aussi repéré par des contraintes de comportement, presque des obligations rituels, et des obstacles qui déterminent l'espace attribué à l'observateur, en l'éloignant physiquement des objets exposés, au sens que «[...] a museum central meanings, its meanings as a museum, are structured through its ritual» (Duncan 2002, p. 2). La définition du parcours, l'introduction des vitrines et des dispositifs de sécurité, l'imposition d'une attitude respectueuse, respectueuse et silencieuse, augmentent l'éloignement du public et accentuent la décontextualisation de l'objet. «Clearly, the more "aesthetic" the installations / the fewer the objects and the emptier the surrounding walls / the more sacralized the museum space» (Duncan 2002, p. 17). En outre, l'élaboration du projet muséologique et la définition de leur modèle communicationnel sont, aussi, des facteurs supplémentaires qui contribuent à bloquer la lecture et l'interprétation des objets.

Il ne s'agit pas seulement de décontextualisation, mais des procédés complexes qu'intègrent l'observateur dans un espace structuré en nouveaux rituels et lectures alternatifs, pendant qu'effacent le contenu connotatif de l'objet et annulent les rapports avec les environnements antérieures.

«Il più grave è la "decontestualizzazione" o "sradicamento" della singola opera d'arte dal suo contesto originario. L'opera d'arte viene isolata dal suo ambiente, perde il suoi

rapporti con le architetture e le opere minori in cui era inserita. Si cancella così il senso delle sue funzione socio-culturali» (Strassoldo 1998, p. 208).

Dans le processus de décontextualisation par rapport à la fonction initiale de l'objet, le musée non seulement isole, comme l'écart. Le sens et la valeur de l'objet sont aperçus seulement à travers de la lecture transmise par le musée.

En outre, la tendance minimaliste appliquée aux musées d'art détermine que tous les éléments accessoires soient supprimés du parcours expositif. L'objet vaut par soi-même. Dans le périmètre plus proche seulement sont admis des cartels, «les étiquettes qui accompagnent et document chaque objet» (Gob, Drouguet 2004, p. 93), car «certains [muséologues] affirment que les textes sont inutiles, encombrants, dirigistes, offensants et que le mieux est d'en épargner la lecture aux visiteurs» (Rivière 1989, p. 281). Autre information plus complète (textes informatifs) est reléguée à des espaces périphériques. Considérant le texte comme le complément plus efficace à la compréhension de l'objet, essentiellement visuel, leur lecture et l'interprétation des relations cognitives possibles d'établir entre les divers objets exposés se fait intuitivement; la confirmation des idées conçus par la seule observation sensoriel se fera dans un autre espace et dans un autre moment. Cette absence d'information est une barrière qui, avec les instruments muséographiques, augmentent l'éloignement de l'objet.

L'introduction de l'objet dans le musée et, en particulier, de l'objet religieux dont les références sont oubliées, suppose une perte d'information car les données relatives à la fonctionnalité, notamment à la liturgie ou à la dévotion et aux croyances associées, ne sont pas explicites ou même devient annulées.

L'étude de l'objet

En ce qui concerne les objets liturgiques ou dévotionnels, les principaux critères de sélection sont de caractère patrimonial et artistique, reléguant à un plan secondaire les sens et les interactions fonctionnelles et symboliques qui leurs étaient intrinsèques. Les critères qui encadrent l'entrée des pièces au musée obéissent aux règles de la méthode de la critique historique afin de vérifier leur valeur documentaire. «L'art de discerner dans les récits le vrai, le faux et le vraisemblable, s'appelle la critique historique» (Bloch 1950, p. 2). La critique externe se concentre sur l'authenticité de l'œuvre et comprend la vérification de la source et de la légitimité de chaque objet, ce qui élimine le faux et les apocryphes. La critique interne de chaque pièce met l'accent sur la crédibilité, la compétence et l'interprétation, analyse le contenu de l'information et les capacités de son auteur (qu'il soit connu ou pas) comme l'émission du message et témoin de la réalité évoqué par l'objet.

Dans les musées avec collections d'art religieux, la présentation des objets poursuit cette méthodologie et obéit, en règle, à des critères historiques et stylistiques: les premiers permettent la définition d'une logique du discours; les seconds fondent l'expectative de

jouissance du beau, remplissant une des principales attributions du musée d'art. Cette approche est, cependant, très serrée surtout en ce qui concerne au patrimoine religieux. La participation de l'objet au musée a pour but, au-delà de l'ostentation en soi, de participer au discours et de s'intégrer à une logique de représentation plus vaste, en établissant un jeu de relations sémantiques avec les autres pièces et tous les éléments complémentaires à l'exposition. L'évaluation qui lui est faite lors de l'entrée au musée et encore dans la phase de sélection ou de préparation du discours, présume l'identification de son potentiel en tant que document ou témoignage. «Tout ce que l'homme dit ou écrit, tout ce qu'il fabrique, tout ce qu'il touche peut et doit renseigner sur lui» (Bloch 1952, p. 27). Par conséquent, tout l'objet peut devenir un document historique et peut être muséalisé. Quelque chose est, potentiellement, une pièce de musée, de sorte que le choix ou la sélection suit un procès critique qui, au cas des objets religieux, correspond souvent à la méthodologie d'investigation au domaine de l'histoire de l'art.

Les critères de sélection qui ont permis l'admission de l'objet religieux au musée sont, surtout, des paramètres d'évaluation matérielle, esthétique ou artistique, en attendant à des critères de la critique positiviste ou formaliste. Si, d'une part, l'objet perd sa signification originelle et les références à son contexte fonctionnel, par contre, l'identification de l'artiste, le déchiffrement des coordonnées de temps et de lieux et le niveau de correspondance à un style ont été surévalués pour justifier leur muséalisation.

Dès la seconde moitié du siècle XX, le courant historique-sociologique commence à inverser la tendance de l'histoire monographique, en appelant à la nature collective et contextuelle de la production artistique. La sociologie de l'art met l'accent sur l'appréhension de l'art par la communauté, tandis que propose l'analyse de l'œuvre à travers de la reconstruction des divers facteurs qui ont composé l'environnement de sa création ou de la vie social de son auteur.

«Par conséquent l'œuvre d'art est le produit unique d'une activité qui se situe à la fois sur le plan des activités matérielles et des activités imaginaires d'un groupe social donné. Dans les deux cas, au surplus, elle possède un double caractère sociologique et individuel au même titre que la personnalité de l'homme qui l'a produite» (Francastel 1988, p. 110).

Il y a ici un complexe système de relations, qui entraîne des interactions entre les impératifs matériels de la production et les attentes de la société. La société concourt à la composition de l'œuvre, alors que, soit-elle religieuse ou profane, exprime un idéal artistique, le sens du beau, de son contexte socioculturel d'origine.

Par ailleurs, aussi la critique des traditionnels courants muséologiques, déjà énoncée par Henri Rivière (1989), met l'accent sur la qualité insuffisante et réduite de l'information versant essentiellement les données formels et stylistiques.

«The solid "real" character of objects is open to question. Materiality, physicality, is not constant; changes may be made many times in many ways for many reasons. To accept

objects as evidence is fraught with difficulty. Questions must be raised about the materiality itself. When the physicality of the object is identified, its meaning will depend on the narrative framework into which it is placed” (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, p. 114). Comme Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, aussi Tony Bennett (1998) et, plus récemment, Jérôme Glicenstein (2009) ont proposé de nouveaux modèles de communication entre les musées et ses publics et des discours autour de la fonction et de la signification originelles de l’objet. Ces orientations, si appliquées à toutes les typologies de collections, s’adaptent particulièrement à l’ensemble des objets religieux.

L’investigation suit des méthodologies complémentaires recueillies dans la praxis historiographique et littéraire: l’analepse, qui récupère, à travers de la documentation, l’histoire de l’objet à fin de établir leur contexte originel; l’exégèse, qui réalise une dissertation, approfondie et critique, de ce qui est la réalité intrinsèque de l’objet et de sa relation avec l’ensemble des concepts religieux qui lui sont intrinsèques. Le musée envisage aller au-delà du sens premier, ou formel, de l’objet pour attendre les autres sens cachés, les symboles ou les analogies et métaphores qu’il apporte. L’étude comprend également l’analyse des compétences dénotatives (donnés matériels et objectifs) connotatives (contenu émotionnel) de l’objet.

L’analyse préalable qui détermine l’introduction de chaque pièce dans le parcours expositif, ou dans le discours muséologique, inclut une approche sémiotique de leur capacité représentative qui complète la traditionnelle évaluation formelle et stylistique. L’inventaire et l’étude des objets religieux portent une description iconographique et symbolique, ouvrant des champs d’information spécifiques au registre des données relatifs au patrimoine immatériel, y compris les données relatives au culte ou à la dévotion. Ainsi, l’appréhension de l’objet ne s’accomplit que par l’éclaircissement de sa fonctionnalité liturgique ou dévotionnel.

Au cours du rituel ou de la dévotion, l’objet atteint la transcendance d’intermédiation entre les niveaux humain et divin. Par conséquent, leur étude dépasse la question «comme on l’a fait?» pour se demander «à quoi est-il fait?». On assume que, au moment de sa production et dans les successifs moments du rituel et les différentes formes d’usage, l’objet a souffert des contraintes et des accumulations qui enrichissent leur contenu sémantique. L’objet acquiert des multiples lectures dès le contexte de production et de la fonction rituel jusqu’à la présentation muséologique. On peut appliquer ici ce que Barthes dit à propos du texte: «The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture. [...] His [l’auteur] only power is to mix writing, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them» (Barthes 1977, p. 146). Une fois que l’information est intrinsèque à l’objet, au cas de l’objet religieux, il intègre une multitude d’informations et des concepts matériels, symboliques ou théologiques.

Dans l’évaluation de l’objet pour l’intégrer au discours expositif, s’impose que le mu-

sée, au-delà de la préservation du patrimoine, assure désormais la sauvegarde de sa vitalité culturelle. Dans ce but, le musée doit assurer les conditions de conservation et de sécurité, mais aussi la visibilité de toutes lectures, c'est-à-dire, de toutes les perspectives et voies interprétatives concernant l'objet. Au cas de la muséologie de l'objet religieux, ça suppose une référence à la religion, à la dévotion ou à la liturgie.

On ne peut parler de muséologie de la religion qu'à la fin du XXe siècle lorsque que, après le Concile Vatican II, l'Église et, notamment, la Commission Pontificale pour les Biens Culturels de l'Église (CPBE) assument la muséalisation comme une voie possible et appropriée vers le patrimoine liturgique désaffecté. «Le patrimoine historique et artistique, qui n'est plus habituellement utilisé ou qui est tombé en désuétude et qui ne peut pas être conservé, trouvera dans les musées ecclésiastiques une protection adéquate et une opportune disponibilité» (Église catholique, CPBCE 2006, préambule). En plus, la muséalisation peut être un outil pour l'évangélisation et la catéchèse. «[Le musée ecclésiastique] se présente comme un moyen d'évangélisation chrétienne, d'élévation spirituelle, de dialogue avec ceux qui sont éloignés de la foi, de formation culturelle, de jouissance artistique et de connaissance historique» (Église catholique, CPBCE 2006, 2.1.1).

L'Église prétend jouer un rôle de premier plan dans la préservation des objets désaffectés du rituel liturgique. Les changements qui, au fil des siècles, ont eu lieu dans la pratique religieuse et, en particulier de date récente, dans la suite du Concile Vatican II, ont précipité de certains typologies d'objets religieux dans une précaire situation de l'abandon, dont seules quelques-unes ont échappées par la reconnaissance de leur valeur historique et artistique.

«La conservation matérielle et la préservation d'interventions illicites nécessitent parfois des solutions drastiques, vu l'accroissement des risques de dispersion, même de façon indirecte. Dans ce cas, il est alors urgent d'instituer des musées ecclésiastiques en vue de recueillir en des locaux adéquats les témoignages de l'histoire du christianisme et de ses expressions artistiques et culturelles, afin de pouvoir les montrer au public après les avoir dûment classés selon des critères spécifiques» (Église catholique, CPBCE 2006, 2.1.1).

Car l'Église s'affirme aussi comme l'institution qui connaît le mieux le sens du patrimoine religieux, le musée ecclésiastique devient un moyen privilégié pour exprimer le sens du sacré inhérent aux objets liturgiques ou dévotionnels, leurs modalités d'usage, significations symboliques ou croyances associés. Au musée ecclésiastique, l'accent sur l'objet est mis dans le domaine du sacré, bien que sans effacer l'appréciation esthétique. «Ces ouvrages, toutefois ne perdent pas leur valeur historique, artistique et spirituelle. Ils continuent à présenter un intérêt historique, par le fait qu'ils sont, à leur manière, des témoins d'une période déterminée de la vie de l'Église et des communautés chrétiennes qui les ont produits» (Piacenza 2007, s.p.).

Soit au musée d'art, soit au musée de religion, l'objet est toujours, intrinsèquement, le même. C'est la façon de le présenter, les relations sémantiques opérées dans le discours muséologique, qui change les perspectives: comme œuvre d'art; comme document historique ; ou comme objet religieux. La prévalence de la valeur artistique ou religieuse de l'objet dans la conceptualisation du programme muséographique se révèle, plutôt, dans l'organisation des collections : au musée d'art, les parements s'organisent en fonction des matériaux (orfèvrerie, textiles, mobilier) ; au musée de religion, ces objets s'organisent par des ensembles en fonction de leur fonctionnalité liturgique. Cependant, quelque soit la perspective dominante, cela n'invalide pas la possibilité du musée proposer les autres comme une information alternative et complémentaire.

L'exposition de l'objet

L'exposition de l'objet religieux au musée implique la présentation de tous les sens qui se rapportent au sacré. L'objet, lorsqu'il parvient une unité du discours, il évoque ou il représente une seule perspective en fonction de l'ensemble et de l'intention de l'émission, mais il y a des stratégies complémentaires d'information, analogiques ou numériques, qui peuvent véhiculer tous les sens secondaires ou périphériques. Quelle que soit la typologie du musée, qu'elle soit de l'art ou de religion, et quelle que soit l'identité de leur tutelle, qu'elle soit laïque ou religieuse, il doit présenter les différentes significations qui constituent l'objet sacré.

Le *Code de déontologie de l'ICOM pour les musées*, approuvé par le Conseil International des Musées (ICOM), détermine le caractère obligatoire de mentionner et d'expliquer correctement la dimension religieuse de leur patrimoine et, au même temps, de maintenir la neutralité et la rigueur du discours pour ne pas heurter les sensibilités religieuses ou les croyances du public.

«Les collections composées de restes humains ou d'objets sacrés ne seront acquises qu'à condition de pouvoir être conservées en sécurité et traitées avec respect. Cela doit être fait en accord avec les normes professionnelles et, lorsqu'ils sont connus, les intérêts et croyances de la communauté ou des groupes ethniques ou religieux d'origine» (ICOM 2006, 2.5).

Les préoccupations de l'ICOM proviennent de la prise de conscience d'une croissante méconnaissance des manifestations et des pratiques religieuses. Dans l'espace de deux ou trois générations, on a perdu des connaissances, concernant des concepts et du lexique, qui auparavant étaient du domaine public. La sécularisation progressive de la société et la prolifération des nouvelles occurrences religieuses ont vidé le sens des objets et rendu obscures les croyances et les pratiques dévotionnelles qui faisaient partie du quotidien de presque tout le monde. Il est, donc, impératif de fournir les clés de lecture pour les rendre accessible à tous ceux qui veulent connaître leurs fonctionnalités et usages ou appréhender leur sens implicite. Donc, l'impartialité dont les professionnels de

musée sont obligés ne signifie pas qu'on évite la référence au contexte religieux, mais qu'on veille à une attitude de rigueur dans le décodage et l'exposition de ce type de patrimoine.

D'ailleurs, la même intention est expressément partagée par la CPBE: «On se conformera aux dispositions civiles de caractère international et surtout national ou régional comme celles prises, par exemple, par des organismes tels que ICCROM, ICOM, ICOMOS, Conseil de l'Europe, etc.» (Église catholique, CPBCE 2006, 3.5). La CPBE reconnaît deux objectifs au musée ecclésiastique: la sauvegarde du patrimoine et la préservation de la mémoire au-delà des réformes liturgiques et pastorales. Les deux synthétisent une intention centrale d'utiliser la mémoire pour transmettre son discours religieux. Au contraire des musées de tutelle laïque, la CPBE met l'accent sur la dimension religieuse du patrimoine et permet leur utilisation à des buts de catéchèse.

La rigueur et la correction qu'on exige à tous les professionnels du musée, qu'ils soient ecclésiastiques ou laïcs, en ne signifiant pas l'absence des références au domaine religieux, entraîne que l'information soit irréprochable sur le plan de sa précision et de son exactitude. Et tout ça ne demande quelque attitude confessionnelle. Qu'il s'agisse d'un musée d'art ou de religion, il doit fournir un ensemble d'informations supplémentaires qui permettent d'interpréter l'objet à travers ses multiples significations ou les facettes qui constituent leur spécificité formelle, stylistique, iconographique, symbolique ou fonctionnelle.

Si, d'une part, le processus de muséalisation éloigne l'objet de leur contexte religieux, d'autre part, le musée, même en utilisant des barrières muséographiques plus ou moins imposantes, crée un effet d'approximation physique entre l'objet et le public observateur. Le musée pose l'objet au niveau des yeux, permettant une observation plus directe de ce qui était possible dans l'environnement sacré d'origine. En outre, le musée favorise des relations sémantiques avec d'autres objets ou des thèmes et fournit des informations qui contribuent à une plus large compréhension.

Un des principaux facteurs pour la reconstitution du contexte liturgique ou dévotionnel des objets religieux est le dispositif muséographique. La muséographie la plus traditionnelle opte par l'exposition en vitrines alors qu'en réalité, et dans la plupart des cas, elle est obligatoire par des raisons de conservation et de sécurité. Dans ce cas-ci, le niveau de décontextualisation est renforcé car l'ensemble expositif, y compris les vitrines, panneaux, ou plinthes, agissent comme une toile de fond pour mettre en évidence les aspects matériels et formels des objets.

Pour compenser cet effet, le projet muséologique conçoit des éléments textuels et graphiques qui présentent et illustrent le contexte fonctionnel et symbolique de l'objet muséalisé, en établissant une conceptualisation et une relation visuelle avec l'univers onirique où il avait été produit ou où il a resté actif. L'inclusion des données additionnelles et complémentaires correspond à l'intention d'éclaircissement inhérent au discours

muséologique. Il fonctionne comme une didascalie, c'est-à-dire, une intention de donner des informations et de proposer des interprétations.

Cependant, ce qui distingue les musées de religion d'autres typologies de musées intégrant des objets liturgiques ou de dévotionnels, c'est réglé par d'autres critères de représentation du contexte fonctionnel et non seulement par l'évaluation patrimonial et artistique. Le musée de religion s'intègre dans les typologies de «musée de la civilisation», proposé par Georges-Henri Rivière et décrit par André Desvallées (Rivière 1989, p. 137), ou de «musée de société» (Gob, Drouget 2004, p. 31), dont les stratégies se conforment à des dissertations sur les croyances ou les cultures. Les objets ne sont pas sélectionnés seulement par leurs qualités artistiques, mais par les implications théologiques, liturgiques ou dévotionnelles qu'ils puissent apporter au discours.

Si, comme on a dit *supra*, l'objet est le même, quelque soit la typologie du musée où il est présenté, il en est de même que l'objet ne vaut pas seulement en lui-même, mais selon les relations qu'il établisse avec l'ensemble où il s'intègre. Cela permet de choisir des objets communs, avec peu de valeur matérielle, par leur importance comme document. Étant donné que certains de ces objets n'ont pas les mêmes exigences de conservation et de sécurité, cela signifie qu'il est possible de dispenser les habituels dispositifs muséographiques et, littéralement, les faire sortir des vitrines. On conçoit ici une méthodologie scénique, ou analogique, selon le concept de Raymond Montpetit (1996), très efficace au domaine de la muséologie de la religion.

«La muséographie analogique est un procédé de mise en exposition qui offre, à la vue des visiteurs, des objets originaux ou reproduits, en les disposant dans un espace précis de manière à ce que leur articulation en un tout forme une image, c'est-à-dire fasse référence, par ressemblance, à un certain lieu et état du réel hors musée, situation que le visiteur est susceptible de reconnaître et qu'il perçoit comme étant à l'origine de ce qu'il voit» (Montpetit 1996, p. 58).

L'objet n'est pas seulement exposé, mais il participe dans une scénographie laquelle, bien qu'artificielle, recrée un contexte et construit une représentation de la réalité. L'objet participe à la recreation de son propre environnement liturgique ou dévotionnel et rétabli les conditions d'usage et les positions relatives avec chacun des autres objets et avec tout l'ensemble. L'exposition transmet un message intuitif sur l'importance fonctionnelle de l'objet et sur les concepts religieux subjacents à la liturgie, aux cultes ou aux croyances pour lesquelles il a été créé.

Cependant, l'architecture et les dispositifs muséographiques sont des éléments visuels et graphiques, dont la perception est essentiellement sensorielle. Pour attendre un niveau plus efficace de la recontextualisation de l'objet au musée, il faut intégrer des compléments textuels.

Le procès plus régulier, commun aux musées d'art, d'histoire ou de la religion, est la étiquette posé près de chaque objet et où s'insèrent les respectifs donnés d'identification

(titre ou dénomination, auteur, lieu et date de production, matériel, provenance) et, parfois, dans les musées d'histoire ou d'ethnographie, une brève note descriptive. Aux musées de la religion, on vient à utiliser plus fréquemment un modèle de fiche conceptuel avec l'indication de l'usage et l'interprétation iconographique ou symbolique.

À fin d'assurer la prévalence de l'objet, l'environnement muséographique se présente neutre. L'information, en étant synthétique et subtile dans le parcours expositif, en s'éloignant, elle devient de plus en plus abondante et complète. À ce point de vue, les nouvelles technologies permettent de connecter les différents domaines du savoir. Dans l'espace virtuel, sur son site électronique ou dans les réseaux sociaux, le musée peut fournir les diverses significations de l'objet et établir des connexions avec le lieu d'origine ou avec des objets similaires ou connexes. Ça représente un avantage pour l'étude de l'objet religieux, en permettant leur appropriation et manipulation virtuel sans le risque de profanation.

Aux musées de religion on utilise un ensemble de stratégies spécifiques pour l'interprétation des objets. Le projet muséographique et le discours du musée deviennent plus actifs dans leurs programmes, en offrant au public des éléments qui leur permettent d'identifier la fonction liturgique ou dévotionnel et le concept théologique de ces objets.

Les modèles énoncés pour la muséologie de la religion apparaît surtout dans des espaces ou institutions de tutelle ecclésiastique, on est prévu la maintenance d'une attitude confessionnelle et pastorale. Mais, même dans les musées d'art, d'histoire ou d'ethnographie avec collections religieuses, on vient à adopter les stratégies de recontextualisation testés aux musées de religion. L'objet religieux s'assume comme une œuvre ouverte, polysémique, à élucider dans ses multiples perspectives, dénotations et connotations. Le musée restitue à la connaissance de son public, observateur et récepteur du message, des données formelles et matérielles, des informations sur leur fonction et sens. Par fin, le musée rend propice un conjoint de relations sémantiques qui récupèrent les mémoires perdus sur le patrimoine religieux.

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Sacred Matter and (Post)secular Frames in a Swedish Museum

LOTTEN GUSTAFSSON REINIUS, Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm

One day in June 2004, a mass meditation was arranged at Gärdet, opposite the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm. Suddenly it began to pour with rain, and the numerous, mostly young, participants had to take shelter in the auditorium of the museum. During that time the artiste and meditation leader Thomas Di Leva spoke about everything that was particularly promising that day. First of all the planet Venus was passing across the sun, and secondly the group, albeit mostly by chance, had ended up in the Museum of Ethnography. Because there were so many artifacts charged with power here, ritual objects brought together from different parts of the world, this had become a node that Di Leva found to be charged with exceptional spiritual force.

Working at an ethnographical museum, or a museum of world culture as it is now commonly termed, is rarely boring.¹ For anyone interested in matters of globalization and cultural heritage, it is almost like being in an intensive fieldwork situation, where one is confronted with alternative perceptions of the world and one has to face various dilemmas. This particularly concerns the handling of the many collections and objects which have their origin in different religious contexts.² The ethical and practical questions that have been raised in recent years include how one can exhibit and preserve human remains in a way that is respectful, also in the light of the great many different burial customs that their placing in the museum makes impossible or replaces, depending on how you look at it (see Hallgren 2010, published in connection with the exhibition “(In)human”).³ In the work on a new permanent exhibition about the Indians of North America (opened in 2008), solutions were sought to yet another paradox: How can one make charged objects accessible to the interested public while simultaneously taking a conscious stance on demands that they should be protected from other contexts than closed and ritual ones (Brunius 2011, p. 24)? It is not just opinion moulders among indigenous people and their support groups in different parts of the world who contact us on matters like this. A strikingly large share of the museum’s local audience also seem to nourish similar thoughts. Whether the museums of world culture want it or not, they sometimes find themselves in a kind of crossfire of conflicting considerations and demands concerning the religious aspects of the museum’s artefact collections. These gain further topical relevance by virtue of the changed and often politicized role that religion has acquired in today’s globalised and postcolonial society. The project “Sacred Things in the Post-secular Society” ran at the Museum of Ethnography during 2010 and 2011, with funding from the Swedish Arts Council, with the

aim of reflecting on the practical and scholarly challenges posed by the situation described above.⁴ As part of the project, two studies were conducted, one by Ylva Habel, Ph.D., assistant professor in media and communication studies at Södertörn University College, the other by Erik Ottoson Trovalla, Ph.D., an ethnologist who has worked, among other things, with exhibitions and research projects at the Nordic Museum. Based on their respective empirical fields, they elucidated the project's common question of *how objects are charged and recharged at the intersections between politics, religion, cultural heritage, and the creation of differences*. In view of the task of museums of world culture, the focus was on how notions of identities, alienness, and alterity are linked to religiously charged materiality originating outside what can be called, in somewhat simplified terms, the Euro-American cultural sphere. The two analyses exemplify how religiously charged pictures and objects are recharged and transformed today by iconoclasm and popular culture, affected by both creativity and conflicts. The project was related to a growing scholarly discussion of the social, religious, and political meanings of materiality in different globalization processes. A more general aim was to problematize how the museums of world culture today handle, exhibit, and teach about "sacred things" (or to use less Christocentric language, power-charged objects) from different parts of the world.

The two studies are only indirectly related to the museum theme, and they use different empirical approaches to the discussion of charged objects, the making of difference, media, and materiality. In his text "Iconoclasm and Border Maintenance: Nigeria in the Wake of the Muhammad Cartoons" Erik Ottoson Trovalla (2013) examines the effect of the Danish cartoons of Muhammad that were published in *Jyllandsposten* in 2005, causing a global protest movement, above all in the spring of 2006. He discusses how politics and religion were interwoven and given materiality in a global positional conflict about how to handle what is sacred to oneself and others. In *The Domesticated Uncanny: Voodoo Dolls, Swedish-brand Pseudo-magic* Ylva Habel (2013) is interested in how popular culture depicts the use of materiality in African animism. She is particularly concerned with how the "vodou" of everyday religiosity has been transformed into the terrifying "voodoo" of film, which she sees as an example of how the fear and fascination shown by the Western world about cultural difference is localized in "the Other's" religiosity.

The changed role of museums in the post-secular Sweden

As is evident from the title of the project, the theoretical inspiration comes from Jürgen Habermas's (2008) ideas of the post-secular. With that concept he seeks to capture the changed social state in European societies whose public spheres, in his opinion, are still stumbling to find their balance in a new awareness of the survival and growth of religious positions in societies which used to be generally perceived as secularized. As a



Fig. 1. Many of the Swedish ethnographic collections were acquired in the context of Protestant mission. Elin and Carl Börjesson, both of the Swedish Missionary Society, take a break in the village of Nganda, lower Congo (photo: Anders Teofil Ceder 1897).

part of the globalized and postcolonial society, the Swedish public sphere is likewise searching for new attitudes in a time that is characterized in different ways by the growing presence of and interaction with different religious congregations and practices. The increased articulation of religious positions is expressed here in a cultural context which has seen a relatively long period of well-established secularization in frictionless coexistence with Protestant Christianity. Sweden is or has at least been described for a long time as one of the world's most secularized countries. At the same time, church and state were not separated until as recently as the year 2000. A secular variant of Christianity lives on in the public space and in the official public holidays.

Part of the picture is that many of the religiously charged collections have come to the museums through Christian missionary projects. In certain contexts the struggle against "paganism" was an obvious part of the acquisition context: the museum functioned as one of several alternative ways to take charge of cultural risk items and render them harmless; missionaries hoped and demanded that converts would either hand them over or destroy them (Gustafsson Reinius 2005, in English 2011a). During the project seminars, one question that arose was about the Museum of Ethnography's own religious status; was it perhaps naive to regard itself as a wholly secular institution when the collecting (and also the early exhibitions) had taken place in a kind of symbiosis with globally oriented evangelizing (fig. 1)?

Diversity and the growing politicization of religious matters in Sweden today has created a growing demand, not least from schools, for a knowledge and understanding of the world's religions. At the same time, these processes have shaken the Swedish majority culture's ideas of a secular public sphere. For an ethnographical museum in its different roles as public educator, exhibitor, and social arena, this involves several paradoxical challenges. The large collections of power-charged objects seem like an obvious resource for meeting the new educational needs. There is a treasury to draw on here, with concrete examples of how people in different times and places have made the spiritual aspects of life present and possible to communicate with. A well thought-out selection could be used, for example, to illustrate a fact that is paradoxical from a Protestant perspective, that people's relation to the immaterial is so dependent on materiality and finds expression through material things (Miller 2005, p. 28; Engelke 2005, p. 42). In a future exhibition it would be possible to show recurrent features of people's everyday religious practices. The collections of the Museum of Ethnography contain many objects with associations and traditions that have been given the epithet world religions, but also objects with their origin in religious contexts which, through historical processes of colonial subordination and Christian missionary activity have instead been perceived as "heathen" or downright demonic (Masuzawa 2005, especially chapter 7). Educators and exhibitors at the museum may assume that many of the young visitors, who are the most important target group here, experience religious expressions – and perhaps especially the kind that are not recognized as Protestant and Christian – through a filter of images of the exotic, alien, and magical spread by popular culture. For young people who are themselves religious, it can be a challenge to encounter a presentation of religion as something relative or historically changeable. This applies in particular to the relationship to the religiosity of indigenous peoples, which has been injected with new meanings in recent decades. In a time of postcolonial awakening and new-age spirituality, the museum's attempts to establish a framework of rationalism, objectivity, and public enlightenment about other groups' religiosity can be perceived as spiritually and politically provocative.

Research contexts

In the study of how concrete things and practices act in religiously and politically sensitive recharging processes, the project "Sacred Things in the Post-secular Society" is part of a growing discourse about the social meanings of materiality (e.g. Miller 2005; Henare *et al.* 2007). It is also a continuation of the research by cultural historians and museologists about the museums' own collections that has developed at Swedish museums in the last decade (e.g. Silvé, Björklund 2006; Svanberg 2009). At the Museum of Ethnography alone, a number of scholarly and popular texts, exhibition projects, seminars, and new national and international collaborative ventures have been

produced in projects enabled by finance chiefly from the Swedish Arts Council and the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, illuminating and problematizing the acquisition contexts of the collected objects and their new roles in the present day. This field is reflected in titles from the museum's publications, such as *Med världen i kappsäcken* (*With the World in the Suitcase*, Östberg 2002), *Förfärliga och begärliga föremål* (*Dreadful and Desirable Objects*, Gustafsson Reinius 2005, for an English version cf. 2011a), *Mänskliga kvarlevor* (*Human Remains*, Hallgren 2010), and *Vem tillhör föremålen?* (*Who Owns the Objects?*, Östberg 2010).

Also belonging to this context is my own project, financed by the Swedish Research Council, "Rituals of Reconciliation in the Post-secular Museum" which deals with restoration matters from a ritual perspective. This in turn is part of the research programme "The Socio-material Dynamics of Museum Collections" (Gustafsson Reinius, Silvé, Svanberg 2012), which also includes ongoing studies of shifts and watersheds in the handling of remains (Fredrik Svanberg) and Sami collections (Eva Silvé) at the Nordic Museum, the Historical Museum and the Museum of Ethnography.⁵ The discussion of difficult objects and acquisition contexts, and of the meaning-making roles of museum practice, is linked to the growing international research field of new museology (Vergo 1989; Karp, Lavine 1991; Lavine 2006) and not least to the critique of representation expressed there about museums of ethnography (e.g. Ames 1992; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Edwards, Gosden, Phillips 2006).

A methodological gain from the research project is its model for integrating external research perspectives in the museum's internal discussion. Ongoing studies and exhibition projects were able to derive examples and energy from each other's thinking and problem-solving. The way this happened in concrete terms was that a group consisting of all the museum's curators, educators, exhibition staff, and the librarian, together with the two external researchers, took part in a year-long series of seminars and excursions, conducted by the undersigned project leader. To link up with an international discussion, a multidisciplinary workshop was held at the Museum of Ethnography on 5-6 May 2011: "Secular Frames and Sacred Matter in the Post-secular Society". Besides the invited speakers Christopher Wingfield, John Cussans, Annette Rein, and Christian Schicklgruber, twenty or so specially invited research and museum people took part. Last but not least, "Sacred Things in the Post-secular Society" has provided ideas for two exhibitions: the travelling exhibition "Vodou" (pl. 1), in the version shown at the Museum of Ethnography in the spring of 2011, and a forthcoming permanent exhibition with the working title "World Religions?" preliminarily planned for 2015.

¹ Through its oldest collections, the Museum of Ethnography has roots going back to the early eighteenth century and the Royal Academy of Sciences. Today the museum is part of a state authority, the National Museums of World Culture, along with the Mediterranean Museum and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities in Stockholm, and the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg.

² Since the project was located in the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, I mainly cite examples that arose in the work there. Yet it is obvious that our sister museums face similar challenges and dilemmas. The Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, for example, has found itself in trouble in the media owing to art exhibitions whose content was provocative / or was judged to be potentially provocative / to religious groups in Sweden. See Klas Grinell's (2011) article about the museum's balancing act between valid but irreconcilable demands from groups that are subordinate in different ways in society, brought about in the context of

Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin's exhibition "Jerusalem" in 2010.

³ Theoretically, conservation can also involve religious and ethical problems, for example when charged artefacts which originally had the character of mediating between worlds, or were objects intended as part of processes of change, are transformed into more clearly demarcated and durable matter (Gustafsson Reinius 2009).

⁴ A version of this project description as well as the two studies it mentions, Habel (2013) and Ottoson Trovala (2013), is available to the public in both Swedish and English, on the website of the Museums of World Culture: <http://www.varldskulturmuseerna.se/en/research/collections/research/published/research/sacred-things>. The project has also been presented in the edited volume *Forskning vid museer (Research at Museums)*, Brunius, Gustafsson Reinius, Habel 2011b, p. 20-47).

⁵ An English version of this program description can be found at <http://www.nordiskmuseologi.org/English%20articles.html>.

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Exhibiting Jewishness?

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*History is the subject of a structure
whose site is not homogenous, empty time,
but time filled by the presence of the now.*
Walter Benjamin

Jewish museums appear to be ubiquitous in major American and European cities; over the last decades they have definitively placed themselves in the midst of public consciousness. However, although apparently the main identifier of all Jewish museums is religion – a non-ethnic category – lay museums struggle in finding how to present themselves when their mission goes beyond that particular category. Although it might seem paradoxical to some visitors, Jewish museums share much by definition but are not all about religion. While the majority strive to present a particular set of customs and traditions, which are distinct from the main cultural group where they appear, many strive to strengthen their relationships with their neighbours while honouring their own community's heritage. Dealing simultaneously with many cultural layers – while straddling a balance in maintaining a differentiation, which can be ethnic, religious and/or political – is no doubt difficult.

Jewish museums have existed, as a category, much longer than any other subset of museums of the ethnic or cultural category, and obviously work with the representation of a great variety of local cultural nuances. Their variegated history begins at the end of the nineteenth century: the first museum was founded in Vienna in 1895, while the museum in Berlin was established towards 1933. For example the latter one, sought to complement the cultural activities of a developing progressive community, and even though it was housed in the same building with the Oranienburgerstrasse synagogue its purpose was not to dwell on religious topics but rather to strengthen an active social agenda.

If housing a museum in a historical building is a complicated matter, setting a museum in a space related to religious observances all the more so, and synagogues housing Jewish museums can result in radically different – or confusing – modes of representation and perception to the visitor. Those institutions trying to deal with specific and historical events, even if they are quite explicit about what they do, have to go through enormous hurdles to get their work done properly because they run the risk of being regarded as sacred spaces, and such mixed messages create confusion and even resistance in many visitors (Jewish or gentile) expecting something different. At the same time, a particular type of cultural framing can turn out to be so strong that although some vis-

itors will be able solve cultural hurdles others will find the experience culturally tasking.

As mentioned above, early Jewish museums appeared in the urban landscape to fulfil communal needs. But their current purposes, together with their history and reason for existence, are multiple as well as their exhibition strategies. The distinct overall unifying identity these institutions have is affected by the thrust of larger institutions pursuing agendas that sometimes underscore and at times undermine the work of institutions with alternative outlooks. The politics involved the contemporary Jewishness' point of reference the Holocaust and the force now managing it in one way or another, Zionism, which sets clear institutional goals and missions for many institutions, make the work of sites with new curatorial directions very complicated.

So, what is a Jewish Museum?

A succinct categorization comprises three modalities: a) a site that strengthens Jewish identity and continuity; b) a site that celebrates cultural expression; and c) a Holocaust museum (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2011, p. 23) which is to some critics to all effects a backward lens of the Shoah (Gruber 2002, p. 155) that predominates over most Jewish museographical discourses. But while these categories describe the majority of exhibition practices used today, what is not considered in such a definition is the site-specific lay historic museum: the historical museum that explains Jewish culture and history by non-Jews to Jews and gentiles. These institutions perform important work that is not about strengthening identity, celebrating Jewish life, remembering victims or celebrating the State of Israel; they are about the illustration of local histories while communicating interactions between gentiles and Jews at some point in history. 'While they do not dwell on territorial expulsions, ghettoization, or victimization of specific communities, they do consider those events when concentrating appropriately on larger historical subjects and cultural contexts. They deal with historical events that represent commonalities and differences amongst the Jewish and other communities portraying links between both, even if they fluctuated in degree and interests (Planas Marcé 2010-2011, p. 56).

The main thrust for the appearance of *contemporary* Jewish museums has definitively been the Holocaust; it has decidedly marked the manner in which the majority of them conform their presentation and are therefore publicly perceived. Overall, they determine how that particular point in history is illustrated and discussed and how Jewishness is framed. But while it is absolutely true that discussing such events is a grave matter, when taking into consideration other aspects of Jewishness, these events are frequently presented within boundaries in which historical nuance is not allowed. Lamentably, such stricture makes it extremely difficult for many other museums to exhibit culture, beyond or before that event, for the lachrymose conception of Jewish history

that began in the late nineteenth century linking the tragedy back to the destruction of the Second Temple (Myers 1995, p. 120) / and that now also includes the Holocaust / makes it extremely difficult to exhibit Jewish culture in another manner. Creating alternate / or even critical discourses / can be extremely difficult to undertake. In fact, Jewish identity and culture have almost become *de facto* linked to the Shoah and are therefore constrained to the point that *it* has become the sole point of reference for many a curatorial direction. This affects museums trying to present “Jewish” as a living culture, or institutions trying to exhibit particular artistic periods / such as post-modern art / (as occurs with The Jewish Museum in New York) as if they were subjectively tied to that precise point in history, negating the visibility of thriving communities with rich living legacies.

The Holocaust model has decidedly run against major objectors in research and exhibit institutions, within and without the Jewish community, who try to illustrate various other aspects and histories that make up Jewish culture / something akin to impossible where a “midrash” (Myers 1995, p. 120) historiography prevails. Even the Jewish Museum in Berlin, a Holocaust museum by definition / located right in the centre of the city, which was responsible for horrid historical decisions and crimes, designed with a structure that emulates a broken star of David, containing and emphasizing quite forcefully the amazing degree of human and cultural loss caused by German actions / has tried to distance itself in some measure from the fundamentalism most Holocaust museums posit. This space / a German led museum carrying tremendous responsibility for representing those historical events / has in recent years sought to give its visitors a respite from Holocaust discourse with a museography promoted through a vigorous advertising campaign announced with the slogan: “Jüdisches Museum Berlin: not what you expect”, announcing an effort that was part of a broader strategic project on the part of the museum’s administration to dispel the notion that visitors’ experiences would centre on Holocaust remembrance (Chametzky 2008, p. 218).

Another example of moving away from this “framing Jewish history in terms of Exile and later on the Holocaust” (Myers 1995, p. 119) is the conceptualization for the creation of the “Museum of the History of Polish Jews” in Warsaw, which will seek to illustrate one thousand years of life in Poland. One of its lead contributors declared:

I have always insisted that we’re not a “Jewish museum” though I often hear us referred to / by taxi drivers, by colleagues / as “the Jewish museum in Warsaw” or “the Holocaust Museum in Warsaw”, which makes my hair stand on end... My answer is no! We are a history museum, we are an international museum, we are a site-specific museum, we are a museum in the nation’s capital, on a world stage (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2011, p. 1).

What is a History Museum?

Strictly speaking, Jewish history museums are usually not involved in linking their activities to living populations, do not “celebrate” Jewishness and even further, do not follow a pro-Israeli discourse. They are institutions that have the specific goal of giving their local populations and visitors from afar a quite distinct understanding of local or national historical processes. In the case of a small historical museum in Spain, the *Museu de Historia dels Jueus*, (Museum of Jewish History), the director explains:

The fact of being centred on a historic explanation, of deeds that were buried and forgotten, and [of undertaking] a chronicle of peoples that were forced to submission, of marginalized communities, of men and women persecuted because of their beliefs and traditions, could have turned the MHJ in a place of nostalgic vindication of a lost past, where victimization would give place to a mourning feeling. And from the beginning we tried to make sure it was not so. The objective was to recount a story, to study it rigorously and in depth in order to teach it as an essential part of the city and the country (Planas Marcé 2010-2011, p. 56).

In addition, the director of the MHJ clarifies that this site is not a medieval Holocaust museum and it also does not seek historical expiation. The museum forms part of the city’s museum network and complements the historical accounts of the region given as a whole through various institutions in the area. But despite the clear mission undertaken by the museum staff – to provide a glimpse of Jewish everyday life during Medieval times – she nevertheless finds it difficult to work within the homogenizing constraints placed by other apparently similar institutions which overwhelmingly promote an ideological discourse that goes beyond mere group identity or even the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm, Ranger 1983), which is such an important aspect of the construction of contemporary memory.

Intensive research was carried out on the life of Jews and their interactions with gentiles in the city of Girona, Spain during medieval times, which was the focal point in the creation of the institution in Girona. The museum’s staff conducted meticulous research and documentation in the autonomous region of Catalonia, other regions of Spain, and particularly the walled medieval city of Girona. The museum was housed in a complex made up of various structures once belonging to the old medieval city’s Jewish quarters or *call*. During the early stages of its creation the conclusion was drawn that the property where it was to be housed might have been the site of one of the city’s three medieval synagogues. Dedicated to Jewish history, the staff has always remained conscious that even if located in the specific area where Jews lived in or were segregated to, the property has nevertheless – as is the case in many other historical spaces – changed hands numerous times in over a two thousand year urban history that has not been solely Jewish.

The designation of the site was sought to be neither arbitrary nor “symbolic”, but prac-

tical; its modern history has resulted from and includes a series of actions that led to the utilization of the present space as a composite physically made up of passageways, patios, storied buildings, cut-off streets, terraces, old city streets, and even a possible synagogue as well as human actions of different sorts, tendencies and desires but without disguising such architectural, historical, religious or even commercial breaks and changes. Today – echoing whatever might have previously existed – the site comprises university apartments for scholars, a bookstore, private houses, flats, gardens, patios, the museum and the research centre which gives a mix of work, needs, and property rights of many actors.

Set in what has been generally identified as the location of one of the three synagogues, which existed at one point or another in medieval Girona, the museum is a lay institution dedicated to the understanding of history related to a particular segment of the local community while considering local history as its main topic. Its research centre is dedicated to documenting the life of a particular group that existed within its midst and does not seek to make the museum the destination for the explanation of a particular type of religion, ethnic identification or political affiliation, even though other city players might use the Jewish appeal of this area as a powerful destination magnet and tourist attraction. The history of Girona together with an important segment of the culture of Catalonia during the past is illustrated “through the magnificent intellectual and scientific contributions of Jews” (Planas Marcé 2010-2011, p. 56), which is meticulously documented and shown through case studies which illustrate such interactions. As the museum does not have a collection of material objects – or archaeologically salvaged material on public display (except for a collection of gravestones coming from a nearby historical Jewish cemetery) the research undertaken required precise documentary work. In fact, the research undertaken was quite painstaking; for example, instead of merely citing the commercial activity of Jews in the area, the museum specifically identifies individual merchants by name and by their specialties: butchers (Isaac Aligo and Susonet); tailors (Abraham Lleó); book menders (Samsó, Mayr, Maimó, David Jusef, Vidal Roven); money lenders (Astruga – Bellshom Falcós wife – Bellaire, Salomó Bonafés wife), etc. This also applied for references to Jewish science, Jacob Corsino, astronomer, Profiat Duràn, doctor, Jacob Ben David Bonjorn, astronomer, Cresques Abrahan and Jaafudà Cresques, cartographers, etc. The lack of obvious material artefacts is offset by illustrations belonging to medical, mathematical, astronomical and cartographic as well as medical treatises created in Catalonia. Grand gestures or generic narratives are not exercised by the director or the small curatorial staff who manage to maintain a permanent exhibition space and two – even three – temporary exhibitions a year.

In addition, the institution hosts the Nahmanides research centre in honour of Rabbi Moses ben Nahman Girondi Bonastruc ça Porta – a leading medieval Jewish scholar, rabbi, philosopher, physician, cabbalist and biblical commentator, a personage who

was raised, studied and lived for most of his life in Girona / but even this does not entail that religion or its mystical aspect are exploited in order to give the institution an “esoteric” “exotic” or religious feeling. The research centre named after him is as modern as any, and holds a library dedicated to understanding Jewish culture and history in the medieval Catalan context and is a valuable reference point to many other subjects, including a modest collection of books on museums and exhibitions. However, despite the clear position taken by the museum on the manner of dealing with historical events, the perception of Jewishness as religion prevails.

It's a Synagogue...

The ways in which synagogues are restored or reconstructed to house Jewish museums or as exhibits in themselves can give physical shape to radically different modes of memory as well as to the historical and other messages that are conveyed (Gruber 2002, p. 165).

Barcelona is situated just a stone's throw away from Girona with its Gothic neighbourhood and has its own Jewish quarter or *call*, and boasts a “synagogue” which initially appears to have a lot in common with the one in Girona. The site is cared for and run by the *Associació del Call de Barcelona*, a modern Jewish organization founded in 1997. But, in contrast to the previous example, no extant synagogue per se is found there even if the brochure distributed *explicitly* announces it is. In fact, paradoxically, the very same booklet illustrates how the site is composed of: a) roman architectural remains; b) medieval city walls viewable through glass enclosures; c) more roman walls; d) late roman structures of a dying and tincture facility (located underground); e) a fragment of a wall “facing Jerusalem”, to which a wall has been added later, and which has also been recently decorated with stained glass windows of the Torah Ark; f) more walls (XIII to XVII centuries); g) a twentieth century vaulted ceiling, and h) another wall “probably belonging to the synagogue”, which is “inclined towards Jerusalem” (Barcelona, ND).

Access to the “synagogue” is gained after meandering through Barcelona's spectacular medieval city; entry is gained by stepping down into the smallish and darkened site and going through its small door. To many it is a moment of discovery and intense feelings. However, how much of the old synagogue truly remains is quite uncertain, but physically, it appears genuine enough as it has been recently conformed to appear as a whole, through a reconstruction that blended walls, stripped layers of old plaster and erased areas of modern flooring. However, the *museographic* discourse ignores all these facts and emphatically points to its rescue and rehabilitation as a perennial Jewish site. The mystery of the encounter with such a poignant “historical site” and the dramatic quality of the recreation set the visitor up for an experience that unequivocally emphasizes an ancient quality evoked by various heterogeneous elements given architectural

uniformity through conservation / and consolidation / efforts that emphatically blurred the various quite distinct and clearly anachronistic features. The “synagogue” actively structures the visitor’s memories and sensations, particularly creating a religious texture. But, the setting is problematic. Whatever existed at this site, if it was actually a synagogue or not was a matter of great dispute between the modern owner and local professionals who contested there was no synagogue at that particular site. The pressure to conduct and complete hasty archaeological work, and declare the building a religious location was met with a very high degree of resistance by local archaeologists to such degree that one of the archaeologists involved with the project was presented with professional honours for refusing to designate it so in accordance with the owners’ request. Nevertheless, its unofficial but modern “identity” has stuck, and as the site’s informational brochure claims those “stones bury deep into these lands the roots of historical memory” (Barcelona, ND).

The “synagogue reborn” (Barcelona, ND) is decorated with Mezuzahs, striking in their obviousness, that are set in both rooms conforming the site. A large modern wrought iron menorah and newly installed stained glass windows decorated with Jewish motifs give the space the aura of a religious space. The Torah (the first books of the Jewish Bible) in the smaller room crowns the religious ambiance embodying its liturgical nature, marking the space as one that “continues tradition” (Barcelona, ND) and which is tended to be managed by a modern Jewish community, in Barcelona.

A kosher Torah is kept behind a screen and (some visitors place themselves with difficulty behind a strangely looking Christian altar, rather than a tabernacle or even a cantor’s podium, to kiss it and pray) gentiles wrestle with a feeling of unease because they are not clear whether the space is sacred or profane, whether they are supposed to be there or not, or whether they are not being respectful enough, etc. The effect of authenticity is so strong that a resulting conversation overheard in the exterior emphasizes the message conveyed by the space: “they did not all leave”... “there is a thriving living community in Barcelona” “the information I got [elsewhere] was wrong” (Anonymous 2012). The people in charge of the space are friendly and soft-spoken, the short tour given emphasizes the revitalization of the space as a religious relic and the hosts readily explain the space’s use for weddings, Brit Mullahs, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs. In fact, your stay will be undoubtedly be more comfortable if you arrive wearing a skull cap or Yarmulke, (or putting one on provided by the staff) rather than arriving as the curious gentile: Shabbat Shalom would welcome you generates intimate conversation while also bidding you a pleasant farewell.

Clearly, this space has been made to function more than as a “memorial” site as a site of constructed memory, contributing to ethnic and religious identification, pilgrimage, cultural reassurance, while strongly mixing historical facts, fiction, customs and traditions, that while satisfying some add up to a great deal of public confusion as “sites of

memory sometimes become sacralised and are turned into sites of “topolatry” (Traverso 2006, p. 162).

It's Not Religious

By contrast / and derived from experiences at places such as the site in Barcelona / the expectations of visitors at more restrained historical sites such as the *Museu d'Història dels Jueus* in Girona, are that lay museums be more religious, and not as pointed out by the latter's director, sites that strive to present:

[...] commonalities and differences, the dichotomy and the common ground, between Jewish and Christian communities... in different degrees and intensity, of Catalanian medieval history (Planas Marcé 2010-2011, p. 56).

Because of preconceived notions that fly in the face of this clear mission, things sometimes get rather messy. Calls for correction to what some visitors consider inappropriate historical representation are made continuously and have at times escalated to demands that the staff to atone for what “they have done to the Jewish people”. The director notes visitors reprimanding her loudly for being at work on Friday afternoons have often thrust her office door open. The perception of what the few Jewish artefacts on display mean or what other decorative elements conforming the museum convey / whether in the patio or interior rooms / is at times also quite difficult to manage. For example, a small modern plaque placed in the patio, in homage to Bonastruc çà Porta, gives many an excuse for touching, contemplation and even prayer.

While the majority of visitors to the MHJ are satisfied with the manner in which the history of the Jews who lived in Girona / something one can witness from the numerous notes left in the visitors book / many want more on the story of the expulsion from Spain and are “disappointed” at the way the events that occurred more than five hundred years ago are portrayed. Considering the last room in the museum / the one describing the exodus of 1492 / many find the portrayal done by the museum to be an inaccurate / and even an offensive / minimization of the events, though it is stated quite clearly that most Jews in Catalonia left: a) during the expulsion of 1391; b) those that remained converted (a large list of the converts' names appear on the walls); and c) those that indeed left in 1492 were but a few remaining families.

Other visitors tend to misread images surmising that the museum perpetuates dangerous anti-Semitic stereotypes; for example, an image from a medical text of a male human body shown with outwardly extended arms and legs, is from time to time perceived to be a figure of Christ crucified and the museum has been asked to remove it, while an image of the wedding of Joachim and Anna (Jesus' Jewish grandparents) has been mis-

takenly taken to be an illustration of the infamous blood libel (ritual murder). Unchecked assumptions, misinformation and ignorance come into full play when a mind-set fully tuned to “righteousness” and “political correctness” exacerbates errors in judgement. The Jewish museum in Girona is not without its own very precise and real historical and political constraints and difficulties. The first person, in modern times, to acquire property in the *call* with the purpose not only of protecting its historical quarters / but to start a business / went on to transform an interior patio into a bar within the property identified as the synagogue endowing it with an enormous Star of David as its flooring / an item which is still found today in a central courtyard of the museum’s building. This feature, presently gives the false impression that at least religion might be involved or that the museum holds a Zionist position. This item / a symbol not associated with Sephardic Jews / has become a bone of contention with neighbours living in properties adjacent to the courtyard that from time to time hang Palestinian flags or anti-Israel banners from their balconies. One can only guess the furore that would be created by its removal, in the museum world and in other circles.

Conclusion

Creating novel manners with which to consider Jewish history / seeking a distance from the traditional Jewish responses to historical catastrophe, exile, destruction and martyrdom / is definitely difficult (Myers 1995, p. 120), but a distance between responsible and scholarly museum work that tries to gain distance from contemporary identity issues which are politically charged are difficult to manoeuvre:

[...] positive as aims might basically be, an imminent danger becomes evident: the construction of identity can, and will be manipulated through the manner in which the respective historical phenomenon is adapted and represented (Heimann-Jelinek 1996, p. 112).

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Representing Objects from Islamicate Countries in Museums

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Museums and Social Inclusion

My research draws on the results of a museum movement that has been very influential in France, Spain, North America and Scandinavian countries, but whose effect on German museums is still comparatively small: The “New Museologies” emphasise the responsibility of museums to address social or political problems – that is, museums are seen as agents of social change (MacDonald 2011). This movement encompasses various facets, among them “community museology”, “appropriate museology”, “bottom up museology” or “postcolonial museology”. Their major assumption is that museums are not simply displaying reality, but that they are shaping reality by constructing specific kinds of knowledge and disciplines and they all ask how museums can change in order to be engaged actively in society. Within a broader development of the “representational critique” this new movement resulted in the demand for inclusive museum work that tries to empower all marginalised social groups – irrespective of their sex, gender, education, sexual orientation, health or social background – by including them into all areas of museum work. They ask for inclusion of the marginalised into the canon of the collections, to address them not merely as visitors but to include them in the exhibition development as experts in the interpretation of their own culture. The long tradition of these approaches in respect to the demand for representation and participation is due to the beginnings of the movement, when indigenous groups, Native Americans in the US and Canada for instance, articulated their demand for representation and participation in museums. The result from this research was that the critique of the “New Museologies” affected all areas of museum work: that is collecting, conserving, research, and communication and interpretation – and even museum management (see Kamel 2013).

Coming from the “New Museology”, exhibitions and displays should bear up to the following questions that were raised by a representative of a constructivist museum, George Hein: “What is done to acknowledge that knowledge is constructed in the mind of the learner? [...] What is done to engage the visitor? How is the situation designed to make it accessible – physically, socially and intellectually to the visitor?” (Hein 1998, p. 156). To sum up, one important aim of the “New Museology” is the accessibility of museums – in terms of physical, social and intellectual access.

The new museology gained great input from the postcolonial studies, critical whiteness studies, queer studies, subaltern studies, critical Occidentalism studies and transnational studies (Mörsch 2009). It questions any form of essentialising and Eurocentric discourse. Essentialistic categories like the “West and The Rest” (Hall 1992; 2007) are deconstructed and investigated by research that wants to illuminate the process of othering in academic and cultural practices.

The paradigm shift due to critical theories such as the new museology also occurred in the art museum and its academic discipline art history. The notion of the masterpiece as universal and ubiquitous was put into context (see also Troelenberg 2011). While William Rubin still argued that aesthetic qualities can transcend their articulation (Rubin 1984) because “masterpieces” directly address universal emotions in mankind, others stress the constructedness of this direct encounter. If the concept of the masterpiece which directly affects the feeling would hold true, then it would not be necessary to have educational programs in museums at all; every visitor would have an innate ability to perceive the aesthetic qualities of an object. The most popular presentation style utilised in art museums is the “white cube” or formal aesthetic way of presentation (O’Doherty 1996; Mörsch 2009, p. 372). The “white cube” or “aesthetic church” (“Kultraum der Ästhetik”) (O’Doherty 1996, p. 9) situates objects in front of a white wall, in limited number and under uniform light (Joachimides 2001, p. 255). In my studies I have shown similarities between the discourses about the aesthetic and the religious experience insofar as both discourses assume the autonomy of the respective experience (“Unmittelbarkeitsemphase”). The *homo religiosus* seems as gifted as the connoisseur – the former for the religious, the latter for the aesthetic experience (Kamel 2009: 59). In his book “Aesthetics as Education”, the philosopher Bazon Brock attacked this notion of a seemingly autonomous aesthetic as “forced directness” (“erzwungene Unmittelbarkeit”; Brock 1977). Brock asserted that aesthetics are dependent upon mediation as education (“Vermittlung”) because our ways of perception, cognition and experience are constructed. Therefore, it is important for us to acknowledge that the aesthetic enjoyment of an object is not a mystical gift, but instead can be learned (Kubach-Reuter 1985). It was Bazon Brock who initiated the first “Besucherschule” (visitor’s school) at Germany’s most important art show, the documenta in Kassel in 1968. It was also for the art education of Kassel’s documenta 2007 that Carmen Mörsch published a two volume book about different art education strategies, stating that art education must be critical and well aware of its exclusive history. Today, both the autonomy of art as well as purely aesthetic presentation seem obsolete; they have given way to increasingly diverse social and political contexts of art production. Art is produced by human beings (as social actors) for human beings. Concepts of an autonomy of art, of the “essence of art” or the reduction of art history to the history of style or iconography as well as the expression of “art genius” all contradict the new developments of this approach (Ham-

mer/Tugendhat 2002, p. 314). New art histories are no longer restricted to the study of style and iconography but are more concerned with self-reflective critical methodologies. Art education, therefore, is an open process that acknowledges the construction of knowledge and (aesthetic) experiences and also overcomes the divide between producer and consumer of art production. The institutional setting of art production and consumption is in the focus of this *ethnographic turn* in art history.

The transformative art museum should be a critical cultural institution that not only deconstructs socially or culturally produced myths but is also a self-reflective third space (Bhabha 2000), i.e. a subversive and controversial actor (Mörsch 2009, p. 12-14). Third spaces are trying to offer forms of communication to irritate the process of “othering” (Varela, Dhawan 2009, p. 346). Museums as third spaces use this drive to be a critical “contact zone” (Clifford 1997, p. 192) or communication centre. Nevertheless, museums as social agents cannot replace political and economic empowerment.

Canonizing Islamicate Objects in Berlin

Museums are a Western invention: The history of museums as institutions representing the elite or alternatively serving marginalised communities can be well understood when looking at museums as “orientalising tools” and producers of the notion of “high art” in Berlin.

When I began working for the research project “From Imperial Museum to Communication Centre?”, I was able to follow up my prior research on identifying communication strategies of Islamic art and history in three museums, two of them belonging to the National Museums of Berlin (Museum of Islamic Art; Museum for European Cultures), the third one a museum dedicated exclusively to religious artefacts (Saint Munro Museum of Religious Life and Art in Glasgow; Kamel 2004).

My point of departure to study Egypt’s museums therefore is a Western perspective. To include a reflection on representation in Berlin into this paper also means to highlight the “blind spot” which was imminent in my panoramic gaze onto the museum landscape in Egypt.

Islamic artefacts were collected in Berlin – like in many other European cities – first in the curiosity cabinets of monarchs or other private or ecclesiastical collections of the XVI and XVII century (Kroeger 2012). It was at the close of the XIX century that museums of European high art, high art museums of non-European cultures and ethnological museums were formed around the emergence of so-called masterpieces of high art from ethnographic collections. James Clifford, in his article “Collecting Ourselves”, states that “since the turn of the century (i.e. from the XIX to the XX century) objects collected from non-western sources have been classified in two major categories: as (scientific) cultural artefacts or as (aesthetic) works of art” (Clifford 1990, p. 94).

The history of museums in Berlin, including the formation of non-Western art muse-

ums such as the Museum of Islamic Art, exemplifies this distinction between scientific cultural artefacts and aesthetic works of art (Westphal-Hellbusch 1973, p. 295; Parzinger *et al.* 2009, p. 32). The Berlin art historian Karl Scheffler followed this development in his book on the so called “Berlin Museum War” (Scheffler 1921). He described the articulation of art and ethnology which had been separate domains since the end of the XIX century. It is the museum, Scheffler argued, that defines its subject matter by showing either art or ethnographic objects. According to Scheffler, ethnology demonstrates the ways in which mankind differs; art demonstrates the ways in which mankind is linked together. Scheffler wanted all art pieces to be removed from ethnographic collections: “Works of art do not belong in the Museum of Ethnology, regardless of whatever time and people they belong to, they must be removed and placed together with their like. And vice versa, ethnological objects do not belong in an art museum” (Scheffler 1921, p. 16). He argued that ethnology should limit itself to objects from cultures that have no history – like Africa. He saw a clear distinction between high art and low art, the latter comprising ethnological objects and folklore (Scheffler 1921, p. 17). But for Karl Scheffler the salvation lay in art alone: “And people will come all the more closer with the help of art, the less fuss is made over that which distinguishes it ethnically. Here lies the only possibility for a true understanding between peoples” (Scheffler 1921, p. 18).

Scheffler wrote that art “whether it emerged yesterday, three hundred or three thousand years ago immediately affects the feelings” (Scheffler 1921, p. 15). Adolf Bastian, the founder of the ethnological museum in Berlin, on the contrary, asserted that it was not art but ethnology that was capable of bringing about an understanding among peoples. He believed in the universal foundation of human existence in elementary thoughts (“Elementargedanken”) and a cultural interpretation of these that he called folk ideas (“Völkergedanken”). Ethnology was there to save the documents of vanishing primitive cultures: “It is burning all around us [...] and nobody moves a hand [...] Treasures of documentation of the sacred temples of mankind’s history irrevocably lost – lost forever” (Bastian 1881, p. 180; cit. Köpping 2007, p. 24). Bastian had a clear concept of the social mission of ethnology: on the one hand, ethnology can and must contribute to resolving the social questions; on the other hand, the question of colonialism, imminent at that time in Germany, played a certain role in his deliberations. Bastian used the colonial system as an instrument to the advantage of ethnology. He postulated the collecting of an “inventory of ethnical elementary ideas” according to “geographical provinces” as the major aim of ethnology.

Yet Bastian and Scheffler agreed upon two points. First, both scholars stressed the unity of mankind, for they were convinced that differences had to be overcome. Second, both constructed a hierarchy: For Bastian ethnology was superior to art while for Scheffler art had ascendancy over ethnology.

The countless world fairs, which were held in Europe and the USA from 1851 onwards, also increased the popularity of Oriental artefacts in Germany. At the end of the XIX century a synthesis of Islamic art history and trade resulted in many commercial exhibitions across Europe.

At the beginning, Islamicate objects were collected and displayed due to their rich décor in the Museum for Applied Arts (Heiden 2004; Kroeger 2012).¹ Early displays resembled images from the “Arabian Nights”, depicting an orient with a lively bazaar atmosphere (Raby 1985).

Many objects were chosen either to illustrate this fantasy of oriental life or to resemble private oriental houses. Friedrich Sarre, the future director of the museum, in 1899 curated an exhibition in the Berlin Museum for Arts and Crafts, now the Martin-Gropius Bau, drawing on his private collection. The objects were arranged like in Sarre’s private apartments. The decorative aspects of Islamic art, its patterns and forms, were to be admired and exhibited (fig. 1).

The founding stone for an independent museum was the gift of the Jordanian castle Mshatta, made by the ottoman sultan Abdulhamid II to Friedrich Wilhelm II in 1904. According to Donald Malcolm Reid, there was always a strong tie between politics and Islamic art history (Reid 2002, p. 2). Orientalism, academic, epistemological or political, always had a great impact on the study, collecting and exhibiting of Islamic art (Necipoglu 2012; Marchand 2009; Mitchell 2004).

After the first attempt to present Islamic art to a wider public had been made with Friedrich Sarre’s exhibition in the Museum for Arts and Craft in 1899, three different forms of presentation shaped the history of its display in Berlin.

First, in 1904, Wilhem von Bode (1845-1929), the founding director of the Department of Persian and Arab Art in Berlin, presented the objects in a formal aesthetic way: symmetry, the matching of colours and forms was crucial for the arrangement of the objects. Berlin’s first museums wanted to be a “school of good taste” (Hochreiter 1994, p. 19; translation mine). Here, the bourgeoisie could acquire its “distinctive taste” (Bourdieu, Darbel 2006) which distinguished it from the nobility and the clergy. The Berlin museums were deeply influenced by Hegel’s philosophy of history as a linear development and Wilhelm von Humboldt’s ideas about art. The latter thought that mankind should be “aesthetically educated” by art (Joachimides 1995).

Second, Friedrich Sarre (1865-1945), who was appointed director in 1921, showed a

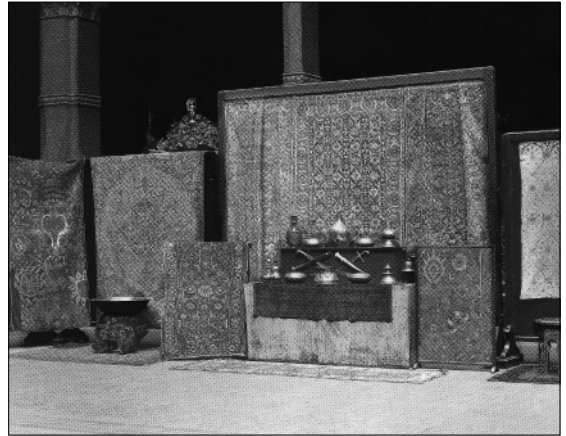


Fig. 1. Islamic Art in the Kunstgewerbemuseum 1899 (photo SMB).



Fig. 2. Islamic Art in the Pergamon Museum 1932 (photo SMB).

more scientific approach, arranging the objects according to geographical areas and chronology. Together with Ernst Kühnel (1882-1964), who became director of the museum in 1931, Sarre was responsible for the famous exhibition “Meisterwerke Mohammedanischer Kunst” in Munich in 1910. This was the first time that each region had its own room and that sobriety and objectivity gained ascendancy over bazaar like presentations. Friedrich Sarre and Ernst Kühnel aimed at endowing Islamic art a place equal to that of other cultural periods. It is general-

ly accepted that this exhibition gave a new impulse to the reception of Islamic art in the West and was therefore a turning point in the up till then “orientalist” view of and romantic passion for Muslim art and culture. It is also argued that the Munich exhibition of 1910 gave birth to the concept of an Islamic masterpiece (Treolenberg 2012) (fig. 2). The Museum of Islamic Art was closed in 1939, with the beginning of World War II. The objects were brought into different places in and outside Berlin. After the end of the war, some objects, which were stored in West Germany, were brought back to West Berlin, some to East Berlin, so that two museums opened in 1954 in the divided Germany: One in the Pergamon Museum and the other in the new museum complex in Berlin Dahlem. The idea of a chronological and geographical order, with only a small number of objects from the same material displayed in one showcase, can still be seen in 1961 in the Pergamon Museum.

The third form of display was made prominent by Klaus Brisch (1923-2001). In 1971 the director of the West German Museum of Islamic Art in Dahlem, Klaus Brisch, chose a synthesis of scientific and aesthetic arrangement and managed to open a completely new presentation of Islamic art to West Berlin’s public: “It was a black-box exhibition of a chronologically arranged systematic display of Islamic art in a single large room.” (Kroeger 2012). His museum presented the objects in a big open room, which allowed grasping the cultural historical development of Islamic art and at the same time opened a view on all Islamic dynasties and regions. Interesting to us now is also the fact that Brisch insisted in the rise of Islamic Art not only from Classical Antiquity but also from local art production, including the Arts from the Arabian Peninsula (Kroeger 2012) (fig. 3).

Since 1992, the two museums are reunited again. In 2001, the new Museum of Islamic Art opened in the old rooms of the Pergamon Museum, following a circuit once

more defined by Islamic dynasties. The new exhibition is meant to be an interim-exhibition before the museum finally moves to the north wing of the Pergamon Museum with a new concept for its display (Weber 2012). Today, many museums in Berlin undergo an enormous change: two new master plans were developed to present the Western and non-Western collections in Berlin in a new light: One for the Museum Island (Lepik 2000) and one for the Humboldt-Forum (Flierl, Parzinger 2009). The question though, why Berlin still adheres to the process of othering (“West and the rest” and “high and low art”) remains. During the XX century, art succeeded in gaining a wider audience than ethnography. Today, art as well as art museums continue to command more attention than ethnographic collections and ethnological museums. The Ethnological Museum with its Oriental Department will be confronted with the question if it wants to transform into an art museum of non-Western cultures in the Humboldt-Forum and, like the famous Musée du Quai Branly, show “world culture” as art (Lepénies 2009; Price 2007). The Museum of Islamic Art, on the contrary, is challenged by a political and social responsibility in times of growing Islamophobia. The Museum of Islamic Art will remain on the Museum Island as the “intermediate civilization” (Necipoglu 2012). It will not move to the Humboldt-Forum where arts and cultures of non-Western societies like the Asian Art Museum (Kroeger 2012) are presented. Yet the question why Berlin still adheres to the “West and the rest” and “high vs. low art” paradigm remains; it does not develop an integrated approach to the arts and histories of countries influenced by Islam into world history. A group of critical scholars, called the Anti-Humboldt Initiative, is protesting against the Humboldt Forum, which they consider to be a neo-colonial enterprise (fig. 4).² However, the collections of objects from Islamicate countries provide a unique challenge as they will be framed within the two contexts of art and culture. The future will show whether museum professionals



Fig. 3. Islamic Art in the Museum Dahlem (photo SMB).



Fig. 4. Islamic Art in the recent exhibition from 2001 in the Pergamon Museum (photo Susan Kamel).

from both disciplines will seize this chance to overcome (neo-)oriental ideas and old fashioned constructions of high art vs. low culture (Kamel 2012).

The new museology is a democratic endeavour that was initiated by non-Western demands for representation in museums. It was therefore an enterprise against Western forms of collecting, researching and exhibiting which put into question Western forms of canonizing the world.

Squatting “Islamic Art”

In the preceding parts it has been pointed out that in XIX century Europe Islamic Art, along with Greek and Roman classical antiquity and East Asian antiquity, was described as the cradle of European civilisation and that so-called “Islamic art” was included in the canon of European art history as an intermediate civilization (Necipoğlu 2012). This becomes evident in the fact that the Museum of Islamic Art and the Museum of Egyptian Art are both situated on the Museum Island, the place where “Western high art” is defined.

The term “Islamic art” was long a point of controversy both in Western museology (Yousuf 2006; Kamel 2013) and in the study of Islamic art (Volait 2006; Grabar 1988; Shalem 2012) and, ultimately, had even partly been dismissed. This was due, in the first place, to the misleading term “Islamic”: it does not relate to religious artefacts, but only designates the objects’ origin which, again misleadingly, is described as “Islamic world”. Today, the description “from Islamic influenced countries”³ seems to be a much better (if still orientalisng) alternative. Moreover, the term “art” is similarly problematic as it suggests a canonisation and elevation to the rank of “high art” as opposed to popular art or folk art, which marginalises the context of the objects’ production (see chapter three).⁴ Stefan Weber, Berlin’s new director of the Museum of Islamic Art, however, wants to adhere to the term: “The notion “Islamic art” stems from the academic tradition and the museum’s collections of the XIX and XX century” (Weber 2009, p. 16). Weber, who is well aware of the problem, uses the term Islamic art as a “label” and not as a “manual” to handle and understand the objects (Weber 2009, p. 19). He admits that it would be a better option to name the museum “Museum for fine and applied art and archaeology of the Near and Middle East in classical Islamic times” (see Weber 2012).

At the beginning of 2010, Stefan Weber organized a workshop “Layers of Islamic art and the museum context” to start a discussion about the ways and methods to display Islamic art. It was at the beginning of this conference that Oleg Grabar acknowledged that the term Islamic art is finally obsolete and should be replaced by the – sometimes even older – notions Turkish art, or Persian art or Arab art. Gülrü Necipoğlu criticizes the essentialism in these notions in terms of nationalism (Necipoğlu 2012). Currently, many museums or galleries showing Islamic art try to find new labels: The Jameel

Gallery, for example, dropped the name “Islamic Art” in favour of the title “Jameel Gallery of Islamic Middle East”, honouring the donator of the Gallery’s refurbishment. The Metropolitan Museum in New York invites the audience to visit the “New Galleries for the Arts of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia” in 2011.

To sum up the discourses on the label Islamic art, it seems generally agreed upon that future displays should explain the term as misleading and a result of Western Orientalism / whether they adhere to the label or not.

Similar to European exhibitions on Islamic art, the Museum for Islamic Art in Cairo initially carried the name “Gallery of Arab Antiquities” and was renamed “Museum for Islamic Art” only as late as 1952 under the directorship of Zaki Hassan.⁵ This was done “in order to recognise the role of the non-Arab Muslims in the achievements of Islamic Civilization” (Asker 2006). The achievements of non-Muslim Egyptians will not be addressed even after a long period of renovation in 2010/11. According to my conversations with representatives of the SCA, it will display not only religious art but also that which was considered “Islamic” already in XIX century Europe and which is still presented as “Islamic”: floral and abstract motives and objects bearing Arabic script (O’Kane 2006, p. 9-13).⁶ However, not surprisingly art from Islamic-influenced countries will be displayed in Cairo, where Muslims represent the majority in society, in a manner resembling exhibitions in Western museums. It is the Louvre and its team of museum professionals that is responsible for the new concept.

To conclude: if the term “Islamic art” is used, it must be made clear that “Islamic lands [were, S.K.] ruled by multiethnic, multilinguistic, and multiconfessional polities prior to the advent of modern nations” (Necipoglu 2012).

“Exhibition Experiment Museum”⁷

Having the ideas of critical, postcolonial museologies (see also Kazeem, Martinz-Turek, Sternfeld 2009) in mind, what has to be done to implement the visions of the second wave of the new museology into museum realities? Has the museum revolution already happened? If yes / why has it not happened here in Berlin? Or will the two major construction sites in the museum landscape of Berlin follow this new path? Is it possible for hegemonic museums like the National Museums of Berlin not only to reflect critically on colonial discourses and questions of representation but also to implement new theoretical approaches into their museum work? Or are “minorised museums” (Kazeem *et al.* 2009, p. 173) the only alternative for a postcolonial critical museum practice?

To feed back my research results, i.e. the deconstruction of high vs. low art and the West vs. the rest, into contemporary discussions about the new role of museums in Berlin I, together with my colleagues Christine Gerbich, conducted research within

the project *Exhibition Experiment Museology. On Curating Islamic Art and History*, which was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation from November 2009 to January 2013.⁸ We cooperated with two museums, the Museum of Islamic (high) Art and the Kreuzberg Museum, a community museum in Berlin's district Kreuzberg, where the highest number of Arab and Turkish migrants lives. The project was divided into two parts: a survey about already existing museums that have objects from islamicate countries on display and an experimental phase in which we were able to set up and test exhibition elements. One major finding of this research project is that new museums of Islamic Art and Cultural History shall be developed in collaboration with communities. They shall also show a multiperspectivity.

With this project, we wanted to plead for including not only museum visitors (Hooper-Greenhill 2006) but also critical museum studies in the exhibition planning process. Sharon Macdonald stresses the importance of both knowing the visitors and taking up a critical perspective:

Pioneering directors and curators want to know what some of the exciting critical disciplinary and trans-disciplinary ideas can say to help them create innovative exhibitions. [...] While understanding what might be wanted by visitors – and those who do not visit – is crucial to the successful museum enterprise, simply playing back what visitors might think that they already wish to see tends to produce uninspired and quickly dated exhibitions. Thought-provoking, moving, unsettling, uplifting, challenging, or memorable exhibitions, by contrast, are more likely to be informed by extensive knowledge of diverse examples, questions of representations, perception, museological syntax and the findings from nuanced and probing visitor research (MacDonald 2006, p. 9).

During the first year of the project around 36 museums worldwide were visited to study museums displaying Islamic art and cultural histories and to search for the best practices in displaying and communicating the content. To sum up the survey, three important observations helped in developing the experiments: first, it became clear that the paradigm shift of studying objects has finally also reached the museum. Museums nowadays try to show the connected or entangled histories of cultures and their products – for example the new Ashmolean Museum (Oxford) with its motto “Crossing Cultures – Crossing times”. The second point is concerned with the question how content might be communicated to diversify audiences. The Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow might serve as a very good example here, since they managed to define target audiences for themes and galleries – and thereby trying to treat all visitors equally. For example, some pictures are hung so that even young children can easily approach them; other galleries are designed like a traditional white cube to please the connoisseur (Falk 2009): Not everything for all... but something for everyone! (Sumner forthcoming).

Third, the study revealed that the institution museum is undergoing a promising change: new hierarchies are applied in the organizational structures of some museums so that the position of curators of education is regarded as equally important to those of designers and experts on the topic in question. This results in exhibitions that are meaningful for various audiences. It shows that an inreach, a reorganization of organizational structures, can be considered to be a first necessary step to increase the accessibility of the institution as a whole (Kamel in print).

For our future exhibition experiments we then conducted a visitor survey in the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin (Gerbich 2012) to find out who the future visitor is. The findings of the survey influenced the discussions on the future concept.

We then compiled an advisory board of visitors and non-visitors – my colleague Christine Gerbich therefore invented the term – the Museum Diwan (Gerbich forthcoming). For us it was important not to identify Muslims as an entity but to look for an integrated approach, defining different identities that intersect (Kamel 2013).

The findings will be published 2013 entitled “Experimentierfeld Museums” (Kamel; Gerbich forthcoming) and will hopefully contribute to an ongoing debate on how to represent islamicate objects in museums today (www.experimentierfeld-museologie.org).

¹ When studying the collection and presentation of Islamic artefacts in Berlin, one has to investigate different places. The catalogue *100 Years of Islamic Art in Berlin* (2004) lists the following places: The Egyptian Museum; The Ethnological Museum; The Library of Art (Kunstbibliothek) with its large collection of manuscripts; The Museum for Indian Art, now Museum of Asian Art; The Numismatic Collection in the Bode Museum; The Old National Gallery which owns orientalist paintings (by Osman Hamdi Bey); The Department for Oriental Books in the State Library of Berlin; The Historic Museum (Zeughaus); The Museum of the City of Berlin (Stiftung Stadtmuseum). For the following analysis of the presentations in Berlin see also Heiden 2004; Kröger forthcoming.

² See <http://johannespaulraether.net/humboldtforum> [Accessed April 2010].

³ See <http://universes-in-universe.org/deu/nafas> [Accessed 5 May 2009].

⁴ Also the genderedness of the bourgeois canon of Art is questioned. See Pollock 2006.

⁵ An introduction to *The Rise of Islamic Archaeology* by way of the “Fine Arts” terminology, taking as an example particularly the Museum for Islamic Art in Cairo, is given by Vernot 1997.

⁶ A very rare endeavour to deconstruct the label “Islamic art” was presented in 2006 in the Museum of Modern Art in New York: the exhibition “Without Boundary” can be considered as an attempt to question essentialist ascriptions of Islamic art: the curator Fereshteh Daftari writes in her preface to the catalogue under the heading *Islamic or Not*: “The study of ‘Islamic Art’ is an occidental invention, originating in Europe in the 1860s”. Daftari 2008, p. 10.

⁷ Part of the following chapter has been published in Gerbich, Kamel, Lanwerd 2012 and Gerbich, Kamel 2013.

⁸ See www.volkswagenstiftung.de/service/presse.html?datum=20090402 [Accessed 20 April 2009].

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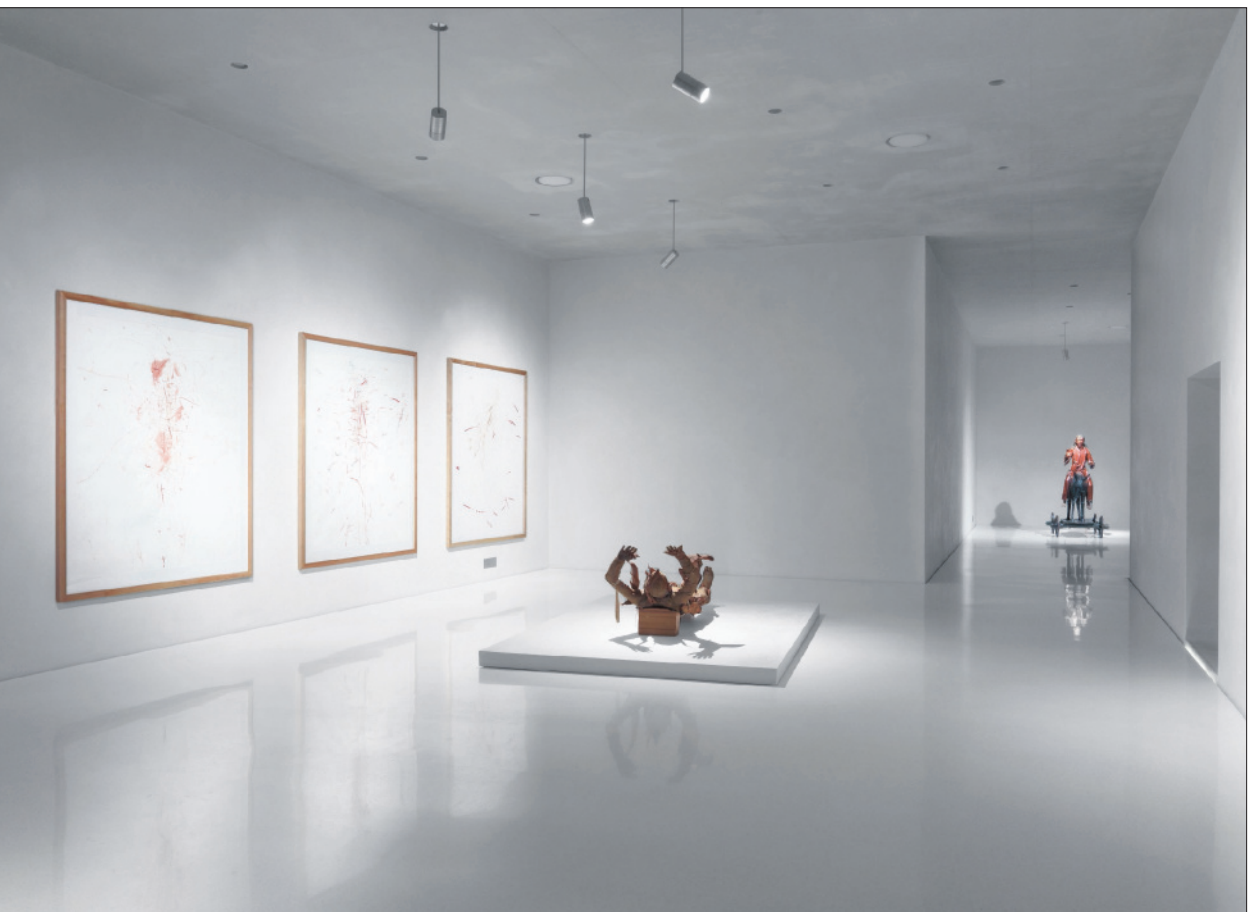
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PL. 1. ALTERS OF THE ROYALTIES OF BIZANGO, FROM A HAITIAN COLLECTION, ON DISPLAY ONLY AFTER BEING RITUALLY CHILLED DOWN AND PROTECTED FROM FULL VISUAL ACCESS BY WOODEN BARS. THE TRAVELLING EXHIBITION "VODOU", FIRST SHOWN AT MUSÉE D'ETHNOGRAPHIE DE GENÈVE (MEG), VERSION AT MUSEUM OF ETHNOGRAPHY, STOCKHOLM (PHOTO TONY SANDIN, 2011).



PL. 2. KOLUMBA. VIEW OF ONE OF THE ROOMS OF THE EXHIBITION “ART IS LITURGY. PAUL THEK AND THE OTHERS” (2012-2013). IN THE FOREGROUND: THREE WORKS ON PAPER BY REBECCA HORN, 2005-2011, AND THE LATEX-SCULPTURE “FISHMAN” BY PAUL THEK, 1969. IN THE BACKGROUND: THE SO-CALLED “PALMESEL VON ST. KOLUMBA”, A SIXTEENTH-CENTURY WOODEN SCULPTURE OF CHRIST RIDING A DONKEY, MOUNTED ON WHEELS, WHICH USED TO BE CARRIED AROUND DURING THE PALM SUNDAY PROCESSION, ON PERMANENT LOAN FROM THE SCHNÜTGEN MUSEUM OF COLOGNE (© KOLUMBA, KÖLN / PHOTO LOTHAR SCHNEPF).



PL. 3. THE “MADONNA DELLA CELLETTA” ICON (13TH CENTURY), IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FRESCOES’ HALL IN THE NEW DIOCESAN MUSEUM HOUSED IN THE EPISCOPAL PALACE IN FAENZA. THE RECENT RESTORATIONS UNCOVERED SOME IMPORTANT TRACES OF THE ROMANESQUE LOGGETTA, WHICH USED TO FRAME THE MAIN ROOM OF THE PALACE, UNTIL THE RADICAL 16TH CENTURY RENOVATION. THE MARIAN ICON FROM THE CIMABUE SCHOOL, HAILING FROM A NO LONGER EXISTING ORATORY, IS NOW DISPLAYED SIDE BY SIDE WITH ONE OF THESE TRACES.



PL. 4. LITURGICAL VESSELS AT THE SLOVENE MUSEUM OF CHRISTIANITY (PHOTO TADEJ TRNOVŠEK).

Diachronic Connections in Diocesan Backgrounds. Understanding Archaeological Findings, Finding Spiritual Values

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The present contribution tries to merge two relevant fields of investigation about Cultural Heritage in diocesan context, in order to identify actual themes for discussion.

The (re)discovery of missing spiritual values meets the necessity of communicating the meaning of archaeological remains. In most cases, the mere emerging of architectural findings brings along the problem of diachronic interpretation. This is the operation by which the specialist (e.g. the archaeologist) gets to a scientifically documented explanation of a sequence of archaeological layers in their mutual relationship. The presentation of the results to the public is a difficult task, since complex historical relations are involved. Still nowadays, in many contexts, the standard solution consists in the use of didactic panels. Nevertheless, interesting results in the field of communication have been achieved globally, in various experiences related to archaeological parks and sites.¹ The diocesan context is particularly tricky, since all the structures – both existing and ruined – recall the religious heritage of the cathedral.² In other words, even the archaeological ruins are charged with spiritual values which haven't gone amiss. Although modified, these values still have the power to involve and influence a wide part of contemporary society, in such a way that it could hardly be thought of a roman *villa* or of a medieval castle. In fact, the religious heritage still keeps a considerable power of evangelization.

There's even more about it. The meaning of religious architectural ruins deeply involves the relationship between the Church and the city.

In a diocesan museum – and generally in any museum – the exhibition works if it is able to allow the perception of the web of connections existing among exposed objects; and among these objects and their historical, geographical, social and urban context, both past and present. It is clear that the presence of archaeological findings of religious buildings in diocesan contexts is a very intricate – yet stimulating – phenomenon.

A huge immaterial historical, social and religious heritage coexists with a parallel fragmented material heritage of art, architecture and archaeology. Spiritual values are enhanced and renewed through the direct experience of places and objects to which they are intimately connected. The absence or the missed perception of the material witness

es of the Past may determine a loss of significance of present values, while their historical background is no longer perceivable.

It's all about expressing the meaning which may be conferred to the findings. This is not a scientific nor an immediate operation, since every presentation of an object in its historical dimension is "part of the dialectical process... a rhetorical act of persuasion."³

It determines the difference between the mere presentation and the active valorization of the museum's collection. Of course the visitors must be assisted in the perception of the complex series of historical events related to the context: the didactic proposal has to prefer a moto-sensorial educational approach, instead of a symbolic-reconstructive approach.

The quick presentation of a case-study is in order, so that the aforementioned statements are clarified. One of the most fascinating European archaeological/architectural contexts, in a religious background, is the Great Mosque of Cordova. Inside the magnificent building, at a certain point, the visitor meets a wide hole, surrounded by a parapet. At its bottom - some three meters below the floor of the building - a narrow surface emerges; this surface is covered in mosaics, which are positioned in geometrical patterns. This is the only visible remnant of the previous church of San Vicente, former cathedral of the Visigoth Age. The sight of the pit and its related layers in the Great Mosque may suggest to any visitor the presence of a diachronic connection. Besides, the height difference between the former church and the mosque represents the distance between the scientific knowledge of the context and the possibility for the visitor to enjoy it as it could be. Neither didactic panels, nor the availability of short historical accounts will help the visitor to imagine effectively the complex series of transformations which the building underwent throughout the ages, namely:

- ✓ the conversion of the former church of San Vicente into the cathedral mosque of the capital city of the emirate of al-Andalus (786-787 AD): vivid accounts of the negotiation are available in English editions of Arabian sources;⁴
- ✓ the building of the first minaret under the emir Hisham (at the end of 8th century);
- ✓ the first enlargement of the prayer hall under Abd al-Rahman II (about 848 AD);
- ✓ the enlargement of the courtyard, with the construction of three porticoes and of the new minaret under Abd al-Rahman III, the first caliph of al-Andalus (during the fourth and fifth decades of the 9th century);
- ✓ the second enlargement of the prayer hall under his successor al-Hakam II, with the creation of the existing *mihrab* and *maqsura* as a magnificent place of power for the sovereign (by the year 966 AD);
- ✓ the third enlargement under the powerful minister al-Mansur (987-988 AD), which *de facto* doubled the total surface area of the prayer hall;
- ✓ The gradual conversion to Christian church after the *reconquista*.⁵

For the general public, understanding and visualizing this historical process in its various phases could be out of reach. Users could wonder about the nature of that strange pit; or even admire / or blame / the dyscrasia between the white and high volumes of the chapel-choir central core and the reassuring shadows of the “forest of columns”. Of course, this would be a superficial consideration, totally unable to convey the interesting ensemble of intercultural phenomena which are hidden in stone and wood. The various aspects of the context confer meanings to the architectural/archaeological object and allow it to work as a symbol.⁶ Like all symbols, even this one has to be interpreted, in order to be understood. The task of interpretation can’t be left to the average visitor: his/her experience of the museum relies on mere perception, not on interpretation. Then the difficulty for the curators of the exhibition consists mainly in clarifying, for the public, the complex succession of historical events, in a way that they’ll find interesting. An effective valorization of such sites should blend the diachronic reading together with the transmission of the ceremonial and spiritual heritage of the religious core in its historical phases. The continuous development of the exhibition, through enhanced solutions regarding simple, visual and sensorial communication of complex information, will allow an increasing part of the public to feel sincerely interested in the museum.⁷ This is not just a consideration about touristic growth. Optimization of the religious museum brings great advantages and opportunities for the cultural background of the context where it exists.⁸ Three main types of public would be involved in this operation of educational development:

- ✓ Catholic believers would have a great opportunity to get in touch with glimpses of the historical origin of their actual faith. In this way, the museum would truly become a powerful means of evangelization.
- ✓ Citizens would be invited to discover peculiar aspects of the town history where they live and to look at places they are used to with different eyes: the museum becomes a new occasion of living and re-thinking the 21st century town.⁹
- ✓ Visitors and tourists would be invited to stimulating confrontation with what they’ve left home: a “user-friendly” sensorial approach could allow the quick evocation of an imagery, in which everyone may find something familiar and interesting.

Even dealing with a religious museum, the highest attention to the public’s needs is a key aspect, which the strategy of any effective scientific agenda can no longer ignore.¹⁰ Despite some difficulties on this side / due to well-known institutional flaws, e.g. in the Italian context / the lesson is being learnt quite well. With the words of James Gardner: “An exhibition does not in fact exist until it is crowded with people, and what really matters is how these people react to what they see.”¹¹ Nowadays, the full and active involvement of a wide public is the only way by which a museum can play its scientific role, at its best. This goal can be reached through intensive cooperation among rep-

representatives of the involved disciplines, from liturgy to history of architecture, from archaeology to museography. This dialogue is absolutely vital, as the demand for rapid visualization of contents in exhibitions increases continuously.

¹ E.g. see the contributions in M. C. Ruggieri Tricoli, *Musei sulle rovine. Architetture nel contesto archeologico*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 2007, which grants an interesting focus on European experiences related to archaeological musealisation. Besides, many recent publications try to examine the most recent expressions in the field of communication in museums, both through multimedia solutions and spectacularisation of contents; e.g. see U. J. Reinhardt, P. Teufel, *New exhibition design. Neue ausstellungen gestaltung*, A V edition, Ludwigsburg 2009, esp. p. 176-231 and p. 326-359.

² On related problems and themes, see V. Minucciani, *Per un approccio museografico*, in V. Minucciani (edited by), *Musei tra immanenza e trascendenza. Esposizioni e raccolte di arte sacra e beni culturali religiosi in Piemonte e in Valle d'Aosta*, Lybra Immagine, Milan 2005, p. 23-36.

³ S. Pearce, "Object as meaning; or narrating the past", in *New research in Museum studies. An international series*, 1 (1990), p. 125-140, esp. p. 138.

⁴ E.g. see G. S. Colin, E. Lévi-Provençal (edited by), Ibn'Idhari, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord et de l'Espagne musulmane: intitulée Kitāb al-bayān al-mughrib, et fragments de la chronique de 'Arib*, Brill, Leiden 1951, II, and in the English translation by Assia Lamzah, II, 229-230, also reported in D. Fairchild Ruggles, *Islamic Art and Visual Culture: an Anthology of Source*, Wiley-Blackwell 2011, p. 112-114.

⁵ For the historical development of the building, see A. Naser Eslami, *Architettura del mondo islamico. Dalla Spagna all'India (VII-XV secolo)*, Pearson Italia, Milan 2010, p. 143-150.

⁶ P. Vergo, *The Rethoric of Display*, in R. Miles, L. Zavala (edited by), *Towards the Museum of the Future. New European Perspectives*, Routledge, London-New York 1994, p. 149-159.

⁷ The importance of the updating of the exhibition and the related choices in a museum is well underlined in A. Mottola Molino, *L'etica dei musei*, Umberto Allemandi & C., Torino 2004, p. 121-122.

⁸ This is a particularly relevant topic, especially in Italy; a first balance for what regards this aspect can be found in A. Piva (edited by), *I musei assenti*, CittàStudi, Milan 1992, p. 18-23.

⁹ About the "civil" role of the museum in our times, see the recent N. Oulebsir, *Musée et architecture en France: neutralité ou décor, collection ou concept?*, in *Rencontres du Léman. Architecture et quotidien du musée*, Conference proceedings (Genève, 19-21 juin 2008), ICOM Suisse 2011, p. 14-31, esp. 14.

¹⁰ Following John Cotton Dana, "The museum can help people only if they use it; they will use it only if they know about it and only if attention is given to interpretation of its possession in terms they, the people, will understand"; the statement is cited in E. Alexander, *Museum Masters*, Nashville 1983, and in G. Edson, D. Dean, *The Handbook for museums*, London-New York 1994, p. 145-157.

¹¹ From J. Gardner, C. Heller, *Exhibition and display*, London 1960 mentioned in M. Belcher, *Exhibitions in museums*, Washington 1991, p. 40.

II. MUSEUMS

“The Museum of Contemplation” or Kolumba. The Art Museum of the Archbishopric of Cologne

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Inaugurated as recently as 2007, the new Art Museum of the Archbishopric of Cologne (*Kunstmuseum des Erzbistums Köln*), better known as Kolumba, has already established itself as a rather exceptional entity among the diocesan museums in Europe since its “mission” goes way beyond the conservation and presentation of sacred art and liturgical objects related to its diocesan territory. In this essay, I will present the history of Kolumba and its challenging museological concept, an issue which will also involve a brief discussion of the museum’s splendid new building by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor. Indeed, Kolumba is a genuine *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a modern shrine in which the beauty of the container mirrors the preciousness of its content, a tangible metaphor reminding us of the numerous reliquaries of its collection, as well as of the more famous shrine which is kept in the Cologne cathedral, and which embodies the core of the city’s devotion: the relics of the Magi, enthusiastically venerated since the twelfth century.

The origin of the museum of the Archdiocese of Cologne, the largest center of Catholicism in German-speaking countries, as well as one of the oldest, goes back to the middle of the nineteenth century. At this time, the first diocesan museums were founded in this part of Europe as a remedy against the dispersion of the artistic and cultural goods which had always decorated churches and monasteries. The valuable legacy was increasingly subject to neglect or at risk of being stolen.¹

In 1853 the brothers Johann and Friedrich Baudri, respectively the titular bishop of Cologne and a painter, founded the *Christliche Kunstverein für das Erzbistum Köln*, a “Christian Art Association.” The organization was devoted to collecting Medieval art, not only for the sake of preserving the historical objects, but also as means of promoting the diffusion of both spiritual and aesthetic values.² These being the years in which the decision for the completion of Cologne’s monumental cathedral had just been made and construction was resumed (1841-1842), it is no wonder that the association of the Baudri brothers favored works of art precisely in the Gothic style, recommending the latter as “the right taste”³ for any other form of modern artistic production as well. In 1854, when the association organized its very first exhibition in the Gürzenich, a late-Gothic festival hall in the heart of the city, one of the highlights of the collection was, not surprisingly, a panel painting in that very same style, namely the

“Madonna of the Violet” by Stefan Lochner (ca. 1450), a masterpiece which is still considered the most representative work of today’s Kolumba. Finally in 1860, when the Archbishop’s Diocesan Museum was officially inaugurated on a site 100 meters south of the cathedral, its new building was based on a pre-existing structure, the exterior of which had been remodeled into neo-Gothic forms.⁴ Here the museum was hosted until the World War II, during which the city of Cologne was repeatedly bombed (from June 1940 to March 1945) and, in the end, almost entirely destroyed. The building of the Diocesan Museum was destroyed in 1943, yet the collection had been previously evacuated, so that only a small part of it was lost.

From 1954 to 1971 the works of art were exhibited in a former school near the church of Sankt Gereon, on the west side of downtown Cologne; in 1972 they were brought back to the museum’s original site facing the square south of the cathedral, now called “Roncalli Platz.” In the new building, which was soberly functional but hosted a few other offices, the museum was given only 380 square meters of exhibition space: not much, considering that the collection had been constantly increasing thanks to a number of loans, purchases, legacies, and donations particularly during the twentieth century. In fact, it is precisely one of those donations – 13 works by Ewald Mataré (1979) – which marked the museum’s opening up to contemporary art. Undoubtedly, the acquisition was a turning point for a collection which had always been quite heterogeneous (many textiles and other liturgical objects, numerous sculptures, and some paintings), and yet had distinguished itself mainly in the fields of Medieval and neo-Medieval art, with holdings ranging from works of the early Christian era to those of the local Nazarenes.

Another crucial turning point in the history of the museum dates back to 1989: after decades of financial struggle, the old “Christian Art Association” gave up ownership of the museum and transferred it to the Archdiocese, which had already been covering most of the institution’s expenses since the 1970s. It is not by chance that 1989 is also the year in which Cardinal Joachim Meisner became Archbishop of Cologne, a position which he is still holding: a distinguished intellectual and an experienced art lover, Meisner has been deeply involved in the fate of the Diocesan Museum from the very beginning, promoting its radical reshaping thanks to a few enlightened decisions. First, the cardinal appointed art historian Joachim M. Plotzek as director, thus putting the institution into the hands of an experienced museum professional who had already been working on the relationship between art and religion.⁵ Secondly, Meisner was wise enough to give the new director a *carte blanche* for choosing a small but brilliant group of collaborators (Stefan Kraus, Katharina Winnekes and Ulrike Surmann), and in developing a bold new concept for the collection: this consisted of concentrating on the acquisition of outstanding contemporary art, a choice which would almost necessarily imply overcoming the limitations of categories such as “Christian religion”

and “history of the local diocese,” namely the guidelines which, by definition, characterize the collecting activity of any diocesan museum. Finally, the Cardinal understood, and immediately supported, the need to provide the museum with a building of its own, namely, a new construction which would provide the appropriate space for showing the collection in accordance with the philosophy which Plotzek had in mind.

There is no doubt that the last two decisions – starting a collection of contemporary art, and building an adequate new museum – implied a large investment of money on the part of the Archdiocese. This might appear to contradict, as at that time was occasionally pointed out, not only the traditional vocation of a diocesan museum, but also, and more importantly, the mission of the Church itself, since the purchase of expensive works of non-religious art, as well as the construction of spectacular new architectural masterpieces, are not the most obvious answers to the spiritual nor the material needs of today’s society. And yet, by acquiring significant works by artists such as Joseph Beuys, Antoni Tàpies, Jannis Kounellis, and Rebecca Horn, and by providing them with an appropriate space, the new Diocesan Museum believed that it was indeed remaining faithful to its pastoral mission. As both Joachim Plotzek and Cardinal Meisner explained on a number of occasions, contemporary art, just like any form of artistic expression from any period of time, offers an interpretation of reality which may help its viewers to understand the world, namely, to understand themselves, and others as well. Furthermore, even if most of today’s artistic production does not address religious themes in an explicit way, a large part of it is imbued with spiritual tension, an anxious search for answers, which is neither far removed from religious experience in general, nor unrelated to the Gospel’s urge for a radical renewal in particular.⁶ In its strivings, contemporary art may be in close harmony with the most established Christian tradition, according to which, as the Scholastics used to put it, “visible things” lead us to the perception of “those things which are invisible” and, by extension, to reflection upon “the invisible things related to God.”⁷

Indeed, “perception” and “reflection” (*Wahrnehmung, Nachdenklichkeit*) are keywords within the exhibition concept which Joachim Plotzek and his team developed for the new Diocesan Museum during the early 1990s, and which was destined to inspire the terms of the related architectural competition in 1996.⁸ According to this concept, a museum’s ultimate goal, its *raison d’être*, consists in leading the visitors to perceive the works of art in the best possible way, coaxing them along into a progressive closeness to the objects. This form of familiarity awakens the viewers’ personal memories and associations, and stimulates their creative intuition, so that they end up reflecting beyond the objects’ physical appearance. In this way, they are enabled to comprehend the message, which is both individual and universal, and to realize, among other things, that the importance of art has little to do with its material value.

The process just described is an intense aesthetic experience which is more emotional

than rational (Joachim Plotzek speaks of a “pre-intellectual perception”):⁹ therefore, such an experience is more likely to take place in spaces which have been orchestrated in such a way as to arouse the visitor’s level of awareness and concentration. According to Plotzek and his curators, this can be achieved by an arrangement of the collection that is conducive to a slow pace (*Langsamkeit* is another keyword of their museum concept), and by the employment of unexpected juxtapositions to animate the space. The element of surprise is obtained by placing next to each other objects dating from quite different ages, or originating from different contexts, as, for example, “religious” and “profane” art: the confrontation generates an exciting sequence of “dialogues,” which take place between the works themselves on an ideal level, but simultaneously involve the viewer in a much more concrete way. Surprise and curiosity awaken the viewers’ perception and induce them to concentrate and reflect upon what they are seeing, moving them onwards from the sphere of materiality to the higher realm of thoughts: because of this, the museum which allows this kind of experience has been called the *Museum der Nachdenklichkeit*, that is, “Museum of Reflection,” or “Museum of Contemplation,” by Joachim Plotzek and his team.

Moving from theory to practice, the staff of the Diocesan Museum started working on their “Museum of Contemplation” in concrete terms when they reorganized the permanent collection in early 1993, namely, at a time when the latter was still hosted in the building on Roncalli Platz. The new installation, inaugurated in May of the same year, consisted of one hundred objects of Medieval and contemporary art, all of which were arranged in juxtapositions, or “dialogues,” as described above. Works of very different ages and subjects were positioned next to each with the intention of creating suggestive situations; moreover, the presentation was essentially “non-verbal” – the museum space was free of any kind of labels or wall-texts. On the other hand, some basic information was provided by means of a booklet, distributed to the visitors at the museum entrance: in Plotzek’s words, this was (and still is, since Kolumba maintains this practice) “a fifty-page admission ticket in pocket-size format.”¹⁰ The choice to limit verbal communication in such a radical and unusual way was dictated by the conviction that any form of “intellectual” information relegates the visitor to a role which is both passive and distracted. As the curators cleverly observed, the moment in which the visitors read the label describing a work, often coincides with their decision to move on to the next work.¹¹ On the other hand, Plotzek and his team felt that the inevitable sense of disorientation which is generated in most visitors by the lack of verbal information may become, if cleverly directed, a chance for arousing their attention, so that they can approach the works in a more perceptive and individual way.¹²

The principle of “dialogue” has been at the base of another important initiative that the staff of the Diocesan Museum developed from June 1993 onwards, namely the series of small exhibitions (four trimestral shows per year) which Plotzek began to organize un-

der the title of *Wiederbegegnung mit Unbekanntem*, namely “Renewed Encounter With the Unknown.” The contradiction intrinsic to these words hints at the fact that each of the four shows provided the opportunity, both for the curators and for the public, to experiment with the infinite possibilities of aesthetic perception that the same object offers when presented under different circumstances. In other words, the exhibitions for the most part consisted of the selection of a few works from the permanent collection, shown in new relationships both to the museum space and to the other works placed in their vicinity. In this way, the aesthetic potential of the collection began to be investigated on a regular basis, a process which turned out to be as constructive and rewarding for the curators, as it was well received among visitors.

Both this particular exhibit concept and the broader philosophy of the “Museum of Contemplation” were the main criteria according to which the new building of the Diocesan Museum was conceived and designed, and based upon which the future presentation of its collection was planned. Although the architectural competition for the new museum was opened not until 1996, the appropriate site had been identified as early as 1990, the choice having fallen unanimously on the downtown area once occupied by the late-Gothic church of Sankt Kolumba.¹³ This area, which today hosts several layers of archaeological excavations and ruins dating from the Roman era to the sixteenth century, and which is surrounded by a tight sequence of commercial buildings, cannot be considered particularly beautiful. On the other hand, the site has an important historic and symbolic meaning for Catholic Cologne, since it represents not only the city’s dramatic destruction during World War II – when the population shrank from 800,000 to 104,000 inhabitants –, but also its physical and spiritual resurrection after 1945. At that time, when people realized that a sculpture of the Madonna and Child on its original pillar had wondrously survived among the ruins of Sankt Kolumba, while the rest of the church had been razed by the bombs of March 1945, this was interpreted as a sign of encouragement and hope. From that moment on, the statue of the so-called *Madonna in den Trümmern* (“Madonna among the Ruins”) began to be the object of local veneration, and in 1950 it was lovingly incorporated within a modern chapel by architect Gottfried Böhm which was built in its honor; in 1956–1957, a second chapel was annexed to it.¹⁴

A respectful approach to all the area’s preexisting structures, from the archeological excavations to the chapels of the 1950s, was one of the inevitable requirements of the architectural competition of 1996. The new museum building was supposed to create a “dialogue” with these preexisting structures, and yet to avoid the temptation of “aestheticizing” them, running the risk that they would interfere with the visitor’s experience of the “Museum of Contemplation.”¹⁵ The same concern was behind the suggestion that the new building should not be built with the kind of spectacular architecture which had characterized the international museum landscape during the previous



Fig. 1. Kolumba. View of the building's exterior walls incorporating the ruins of the late-Gothic church and the perforated structure of the so-called *Filtermauerwerk* (© Kolumba, Köln / photo Lothar Schnepf).

decades. On the other hand, the museum's team refused to take over the exhibition aesthetics of the "white cube" – a choice which is perfectly in keeping with their museum philosophy of seeking to appeal to the visitor on an emotional level.¹⁶ In short, the new museum was supposed to be respectful of the site as much as of the collection, and to develop a language which would be extremely sober but not anonymous; moreover, the building was not intended to host a large collection nor large masses of public, yet it had to serve a museum concept which required generous and flexible spaces where curators could install their exhibitions without any form of constrain, and visitors could move as freely as possible, feeling always at ease.

Looking back at these requirements, it is no wonder that the 1996 competition was won in the following year by Peter Zumthor, an architect who is known for his sensitive approach to the concept of memory, being always respectful of the *genius loci*, and extremely careful in the choice of forms and materials.¹⁷ The architecture he conceived for Cologne's Diocesan Museum – which was soon renamed "Kolumba" in order to stress the continuity with its new historic site – is monumental and "silent" at the same time, and provides the perfect spaces for the "Museum of Contemplation" that Plotzek and his team had so carefully conceived and developed. The building has an irregular plan because it encloses both the chapels of the *Madonna in den Trümmern* and the archaeological site, and follows the indented perimeter of the ancient church. Its outside walls have a strikingly sculptural quality: they are large and compact, with very few openings, and yet the warm tonality of their light, brownish-gray bricks (the so-called *Kolumbiasteinen*, or "Kolumba stones," made by hand especially for this building) inspires a pleasant impression of familiarity and blends wonderfully with the ancient ruins that they incorporate (fig. 1).¹⁸

The language of sober monumentality which Zumthor adopted for the museum's exterior, characterizes its interior spaces as well. As mentioned before, the museum was

never meant to host a large number of either works or visitors at one time. Therefore, the foyer is elegant but small, and the museum shop is reduced to the minimum space necessary for hosting Kolumba's own publications / no other products are sold here. There is no cafeteria, yet visitors are offered the opportunity of resting while flipping through the museum's catalogues, in the splendid / and splendidly quiet / "Reading Room" (*Lesezimmer*) on the second floor. As for the exhibition space, it is no more than 1600 square meters and is distributed over three floors and 16 galleries. The latter have different proportions and offer various lighting conditions: their floors (all seamless) and ceilings are made of elementary materials in various shades of grey (especially Jura limestone and mortar), their doors and window are frameless; furthermore, a narrow gap, running between the walls and all the corresponding floors and staircases, gives these spaces a peculiar "detached" quality: in Peter Zumthor's view, this is a way to stress the fact that the museum allows its visitors to experience a dimension which is quite different from their every-day life on both a sensory and an existential level.¹⁹

Undoubtedly, the ascetic beauty of Zumthor's architecture provides the ideal atmosphere for Plotzek's "Museum of Contemplation." As a matter of fact, the new museum, which was inaugurated in 2007 and has been directed by Stefan Kraus since 2008, has developed the original concept even further. Instead of showing its collection in a permanent installation, while simultaneously organizing a few temporary exhibits of limited dimensions, Kolumba today presents just one major exhibition per year and dedicates the museum's entire space to it. Such a yearly exhibition opens every September 14 (the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross), and closes on August 31 of the following year. Each of the six shows which have been organized so far have addressed a crucial existential theme (one title for all: "'Noli me tangere!' [Do not touch me / Do not hold me tight]. An Exhibition on the Sphere and the Integrity of the Individual"),²⁰ and have consisted of a selection of works of different mediums and ages, all taken solely from the museum's own collection (loans are not foreseen at Kolumba). Needless to say, each yearly exhibition presents different groups of objects, and each object is exhibited in the most careful, unique, and fascinating installation, which successfully manages to compensate for the lack of verbal information (pl. 2).

However, some works are chosen more frequently than others, as if the curators enjoy challenging their communicative power over and over again; furthermore, a few "icons" of the collection (for instance the "Madonna of the Violet" by Stefan Lochner, ca. 1450; the "Madonna and Child" by Jeremias Geisselbrunn, ca. 1650; Jannis Kounellis' "Civic Tragedy", 1975) never leave their galleries, although they may be juxtaposed to different works.

Thanks to such a peculiar exhibition concept, according to which the permanent collection is replaced by a major show every year, Kolumba presents itself as a "living museum," as an institution which refuses any form of dangerous *status quo*. As Stefan Kraus

puts it, since “each exhibition produces its own aesthetics,” the museum has become a sort of “laboratory of aesthetics.”²¹ On the other hand, since each show is destined to last one whole year, and is made up only of works belonging to the museum – namely by works which are quite familiar to the curators – the latter are able to orchestrate each installation in the most careful and competent way. In so doing, the Kolumba staff consciously refuses to follow the notorious block-buster trend which has been affecting the museum world in the last decades: as is well known, many museums invest a large amount of time, energy, and money in organizing temporary exhibitions which do not actually contribute to a better understanding of the museum’s own collection, and which appeal to the visitors’ most superficial fear of missing an ephemeral event. At Kolumba, the museum of “slowness” and “contemplation,” visitors are given the chance to experience and enjoy the museum’s collection, each time anew, for no less than twelve months. In this way, they can actually experience that which the museum’s team has been pursuing since 1993: that always amazing, and often moving, “Renewed Encounter With the Unknown.”

¹ The institution of diocesan museums originated in German-speaking countries during the second half of the nineteenth century, and spread to Italy and elsewhere only during the first half of the twentieth century. In Germany, the oldest diocesan museum is the one of Paderborn (inaugurated on March 22, 1853), followed by Cologne (also founded in 1853, yet actually inaugurated in 1860), Regensburg (1854), and Rottenburg (1862). See the list in “Museumsprofile”, in *Das Münster*, 3/2008, 61, p. 270-284 (this issue is completely dedicated to museum institutions belonging to the Church). See also Jürgen Lenssen, “Das Diözesanmuseum als Ort spiritueller Kommunikation, in *Der Schlern. Monatszeitschrift für Südtiroler Landeskunde. 100 Jahre Diözesanmuseum Hofburg Brixen*, 75/10 (October 2001), p. 710-714; G. Santi, *I musei diocesani*, in C. Paolucci (edited by), *I musei ecclesiastici in Italia dalle Opere del duomo, ai musei diocesani, alle raccolte*, Associazione dei Musei Ecclesiastici Italiani, Rome 1998, p. 51-69.

² U. Surmann, *About the History of the Diözesanmuseum in Cologne*, Diözesanmuseum Köln-Kolumba, Cologne 1995 (http://www.kolumba.de/?language=eng&cat_select=1&category=10&artikel=26&preview=). This essay is the main source of the historical information which will follow, unless otherwise indicated.

³ “...den richtigen Geschmack”: this expression, taken from the association’s statute, is quoted in S. Rauprich, *Der Kölner Museumsführer. Faszinierende, große und kleine, weltberühmte und versteckte Museen in Köln*, Herman-Josef Emons Verlag, Cologne 2010, p. 32-45, esp. 33.

⁴ M. Oehlen, *Museen in Köln*, DuMont Literatur und

Kunst Verlag, Cologne 2004, p. 44-53, esp. 47.

⁵ A medievalist, Joachim Plotzek (1943) had been curator of the important collection of sacred art at the Schnütgen Museum in Cologne from 1969 to 1990. See his biography in http://www.kolumba.de/?language=eng&cat_select=1&category=18&artikel=273&preview=

⁶ N. Schmidt, *Kirche als Kulturträgerin. Interview mit Joachim Kardinal Meisner (2006, 2010)*, in *Salve-Kolumba*, Verlag Krystal OP, Prag 2011, p. 13-27; J. M. Plotzek, *Das Museum als Heimat für die Kunst*, in *Kolumba. Ein Architekturwettbewerb in Köln 1997*, edited by Erzbischöfliches Diözesanmuseum Köln, Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, Cologne 1997, p. 11-15.

⁷ “Est autem modus connaturalis hominis, ut per visibilia ad invisibilia manuducatur, ut ex supradictis patet, et ideo invisibilia De oportuit homini per visibilia manifestari [Italics are mine]” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 43, 7). An analogous passage by Hugh of Saint Victor is quoted in the essay by S. Kraus, K. Winnekes, U. Surmann, M. Steinmann, *Das Museum als ästhetisches Labor*, in *Auswahl zweier Kolumba. Kustmuseum des Erzbistums Köln. Auswahlkatalog 2*, Kolumba und Autoren, Cologne 2010, p. 11-23, esp. 23.

⁸ Plotzek 1997 (see note 6); Kraus et al. 2010 (see note 7).

⁹ J. M. Plotzek, *Art for All - But Even More For the Individual. Reflections About A “Visitor-Oriented-Museum”*, Diözesanmuseum Köln-Kolumba, Cologne 1995. (http://www.kolumba.de/?language=eng&cat_select=1&category=10&artikel=28&preview=).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Oehlen 2004 (see note 4), p. 49.

¹² Plotzek 1995 (see note 9).

¹³ A virgin and a martyr, Sankt Kolumba was decapitated in Sens under Emperor Aurelian (third century AD). Her main attribute is the she-bear which, according to the legend, successfully defended her from being raped by a man who had been sent by the emperor. Kolumba is one of the patron saints of Cologne. G. M. Fusconi, "Colomba", in *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, IV, Istituto Giovanni XXIII della Pontificia Università Lateranense, Rome 1964, cols. 103-106.

¹⁴ Stefan Kraus, *Madonna in den Trümmern. Das Kolumbagelände nach 1945*, in *Kolumba. Ein Architekturwettbewerb*, 1997 (see note 6), p. 51-62.

¹⁵ *Auslobungstext*, in *Kolumba. Ein Architekturwettbewerb*, 1997 (see note 6), p. 90-112, esp. 110.

¹⁶ Kraus et al. 2010 (see note 7), p. 12-13.

¹⁷ S. Kraus, *Über (Um) Wege zum Wettbewerb*, in *Kolumba. Ein Architekturwettbewerb*, 1997 (see note 6), p. 17-27, esp. 26.

¹⁸ From the outside, the area corresponding to the archaeological site can be easily identified because the remains of the old cloister of Sankt Kolumba are masterfully incorporated within the new brick wall; furthermore, the exterior surfaces of this part of the building present a per-

forated structure (the so-called *Filtermauerwerk*) which lets the air in, so that the excavation area maintains the quality of an open-air archaeological site in spite of being enclosed within the protective "shrine" of the architecture by Peter Zumthor. P. Zumthor, *Der Neubau des Erzbischöflichen Diözesanmuseums. Gedanken zum Entwurf. Begleittext zum siegreichen Wettbewerbsentwurf aus dem Jahr 1997*, in *Salve-Kolumba*, 2011 (see note 6), p. 13-27.

¹⁹ P. Zumthor (with the collaboration of Rainer Weitschjes), *Architektur*, in *Auswahl zwei*, 2010 (see note 7), p. 25-71, esp. 60.

²⁰ The exhibition "'Noli me tangere!'" (Berühre mich nicht / Halte mich nicht fest). Eine Ausstellung über die Sphäre und die Unversehrtheit des Individuums" was held in 2010-2011. A list of the first five exhibitions is given in N. Schmidt, *Kolumba - Ein Zeitüberblick*, in *Salve-Kolumba* 2011 (see note 6), p. 189-195. While all those shows were inspired by broad existential themes, the current exhibition "Art is Liturgy. Paul Thek and the Others" (2012-2013) has a monographic character, although it maintains the principle of creating "dialogues" between works of different ages and nature.

²¹ N. Schmidt, *Kolumba - Ein Museum als ästhetisches Labor. Interview mit Stefan Kraus* (2010), in *Salve-Kolumba* 2011 (see note 6), p. 31-50 (p. 43: "Jede Ausstellung produziert ihre eigene Ästhetik").

The Diocesan Museum. Artworks and Places

GIORGIO GUALDRINI, architect, Italy

A Madonna in the Style of Cimabue

The wooden panel of the “Madonna della Celletta” was painted towards the end of the thirteenth century by an unknown painter of the Cimabue school: in the sixteenth century it was moved to a small oratory in the countryside near Faenza, now no longer standing. The panel is currently on display in the Hall of Frescoes of the Diocesan Museum in the Bishop’s Palace in Faenza. The panel has a long dark mark, a sort of earth-coloured “spindle”, running from the Child’s hand to his mother’s chin. The mark was left by the sooty flame of a candle which local devotees placed very close to the wood of the icon, almost touching it. After transferring the icon from the church to the museum, I wondered whether the glass case I used to protect it from being touched may not have become a metaphor for a new form of sacredness to safeguard its beauty, rather than the icon itself (pl. 3).

I often asked myself during the restoration and preparation of the museum in Faenza: is a museum the right place for an icon? What will an altarpiece look like in a space it never really belonged to? Very few people had asked that question before numerous sacred works of art were secularised in the west after Napoleon’s spoliation and prior to the rapid rise of the art market in modern society. Certainly not the Benedictine Fathers of Saint Sixtus in Piacenza who in 1754, after selling the “Sistine Madonna” by Rafael to the King and collector Augustus III of Saxony for sixty thousand florins, happily replaced it with a copy realized a few decades earlier by the painter Pier Antonio Avanzini.

The painting was transferred a year later to the “Old Masters Picture Gallery” in Dresden where it immediately caught the eye of Johan Joachim Winckelmann. In a mere one hundred years the “Sistine Madonna” became one of the most famous paintings in the world, admired by the eyes of neo-classical, romantic, mystic, existentialist, and nihilist members of the middle and lower classes, noblemen, churchmen, poets, philosophers, writers, and artists: from Goethe to Schelling, from Tolstoj to Solov’ev, from Dostoevsky to Sergej Bulgakov, from Schopenhauer to Nietzsche, from Freud to Heidegger, from Florenskij to Vasilij Grossman, from Salvator Dalí to Andy Warhol.¹ Very different eyes from those which had looked at it for over two hundred years in the church in Piacenza for which the great master from Urbino had painted it in 1513. It’s true! The culture and moods of the people who look at the artworks change our opinion of them; but so do the places and spaces where they are housed. Observing the “Sis-

tine Madonna” in the fake window with raised curtains at the end of the apse of Saint Sixtus in Piacenza is very different than looking at it hanging on a wall of the *Gemaldgalerie* in the *Zwinger* in Dresden.

Nevertheless, when this remarkable “Madonna and Child with Pope Sixtus II and Saint Barbara” was moved to the museum, it touched the people’s hearts and minds, probably like no other painting in history. Still, it is rather odd that in spite of so many pages were devoted by so many writers to this masterpiece by Rafael, only Heidegger, in the three short pages he wrote in 1955 (the same year the “Sistine” returned to the *Zwinger* after its temporary exile in Moscow), tried to understand the link between the artwork and its places: the place where it had originally been an altarpiece, and its final resting place in a museum. Heidegger commented: “Theodor Hetzer [...] has said such enlightening things about the Sistine Madonna that we should all be eternally grateful for his vision, so full of ideas. However I was very surprised by his comment that the Sistine Madonna ‘is not linked to a church and does not require a specific location’. Aesthetically speaking this is correct, and yet it disregards a fundamental truth. Wherever this image is ‘placed’ in the future, it will have lost its own place. It will no longer be able to originally (*anfänglich*) disclose its essence. Once its essence is transformed into a work of art, the image will wander in realities which are foreign to it. Although a museum design has its own special historical rationale and legitimacy, it ignores this estrangement. A museum presentation deadens everything in the homogeneity of exhibiting’. It involves only placing, but not the place.”²

Heidegger’s text, *On the Sistine Madonna*, was written almost twenty years after the publication of Walter Benjamin’s *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.³ In this very short essay, enclosed in 1936 in the magazine *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Benjamin recorded the change in “value” of artworks once they were moved to museums. It is above all in places like these that the *Ausstellungswert* (exhibition value) replaces the *Kultwert* (the cultural value). However, the “breeze of the spirit”, which Benjamin called an “aura”, did appear to remain also in the new context of the museum, because the “religious ritual” which unfolds in church had become a “secularised ritual” expressed in the pure cult of beauty. In fact, it is “art for art’s sake”, enhanced by the work’s uniqueness that establishes a new and completely secular theology of art. However, in the age of mechanics and consumption, this kind of substitute theology was not destined to last for long. According to Benjamin, this was not its destiny. In fact, he considered the new option of photographically reproduced works as the inevitable end of every “aura”, whether it be sacred or purely aesthetic.

Instead Heidegger rejected this disenchanted destiny (and had already written as much in his essays *The Origin of the Work of Art* and *What are poets for?* published in 1950⁴). Studying the relationship between art and truth, Heidegger had long searched for the lost sacredness of art, finally finding it also in the “Sistine Madonna”. In order to un-

veil its “authentic truth” he believed that the cultural value of Rafael’s painting had to be revived. Placing it in any old church somewhere in Europe simply wasn’t enough. In fact the painting “belongs to only one church in Piacenza, not in a historical or ancient sense, but according to its being an image. Thus, the image will always claim that place.”⁵ The philosopher from Freiberg was even able to see in the “Sistine Madonna” the figured implementation of the “metamorphosis that takes place on the altar as ‘transubstantiation’, the most characteristic element of the Eucharist.”⁶ Never have I felt this concentration of Christological essence in any other altarpiece: the art of the western Christian world is pedagogic rather than revealing, and I am immersed in it. When I visit museums, however, I ask myself whether altarpieces don’t demand to be placed on the altars and in the churches for which they were commissioned and painted. I know that often it’s impossible to access these sacred buildings, either because they’ve disappeared or have been replaced by others. I know that the *retabli* – which grew in number when chapels were added to church naves – no longer correspond to the liturgical requirements of the Second Vatican Council because the altar *versus populum* (now the only altar used to celebrate mass) has left the back of the apse, to move towards the centre of the liturgical space. Altars no longer need altarpieces or plastic settings to frame the table of the Eucharist. Only the *verbum abbreviatum* of the crucifix is still necessary.

The Diocesan Museum in the Bishop’s Palace in Faenza

When I was commissioned the project for the local church museum in Faenza, the first thing to be done was to draft a restoration project for a building seeped in layers of history, but a careful survey of the church was needed first, in order to find any ancient fragments which might have remained hidden under the timeworn plaster. And that’s just what happened. On several walls of the bishopric I found major traces of medieval architecture and paintings which for many long years had slumbered before being woken by the chipping sound of a chisel and have now been assigned a natural positioning within the museum itinerary. After assessing that the musealization of these sacred artworks was the *ultima ratio* to protect them, the itinerary now hosts a significant part of the Diocese’s artistic heritage. However, it still remains part of the ‘scattered museum’ complex of urban and country churches visited by a mindful community capable of preserving its own history. Since I could not recompose the original contexts in the museum design without faking them, the descriptive cartouches indicate the origins of each artwork, together with the author and date. The identification of the period and place where the works were realized helps to draw a map of the ecclesiastical memory, as well as to identify the theological and liturgical rationale and the symbolic meanings which inspired the iconography chosen to accompany the religious sensibilities rooted in the environment where the artworks were given shape.

The Diocesan Museum in Faenza, with its chiefly didactic design, occupies rather a large area of the *piano nobile* of the Bishop's palace. A tenth-century roadside cross and a glass case with works by twentieth-century artists from Faenza are located at the top of the small staircase at the entrance. Among these a bronze bust by Angelo Biancini entitled "Paul VI at the Second Ecumenical Vatican Council"; Biancini is the artist to whom Pope Montini wanted to dedicate a room in the Vatican Museums. The cross and case represent the beginning and end of a period of one thousand years which began in 313: the life span of the last bishopric in the Diocese.

A baptismal font and an aspersorium, both dating to the second half of the fifteenth century, greet the visitor at the entrance to the seventeenth-century *Loggia* attributed to Cardinal Giulio Monterenzi. A font and aspersorium are the first objects the faithful come across when entering a church. The exhibition design does not follow a chronological order. The *Loggia* has been divided into sections: from Marian devotion to devotion to the saints, from the liturgy to forms of popular religion. The wide corridor feature has been maintained and, the itinerary is never divided by transversal partition walls. The exhibited works are always on very simple supports positioned along the walls: minimal glass cases on the windowed wall, and wooden panels with thin steel frames set away from the medieval walls. The panels have been treated with large grain, slightly sandy-coloured whitewash. I preferred not to use multiple colours, in order to avoid 'firing up' the homogeneous space of the *Loggia*: the lively colours of the ceramic tiles, terracotta statues, post-Tridentine tabernacles, and baroque processional crosses are enough to avoid a monotonous and repetitive design. All I did to separate the sections was to tip some of the panels slightly forward. Removing the plaster and exposing the medieval fragments of the four-mullioned windows which emerged during restoration made it possible to create some openings between the *Loggia* and the *Sala Superior*, now known as the *Hall of Frescoes* (fig. 1).

Up until the sixteenth century this was the main room in the bishop's palace. In the thirteenth century two elegant six-mullioned windows created a small loggia with coupled columns made of pink marble from Verona, allowing the light to enter the recep-



Fig. 1. View of the Loggia Monterenzi, toward the Frescoes Room. Faenza, Diocesan Museum.



Fig. 2. Frescoes by Giotto-Rimini school. Faenza, Diocesan Museum.

tion hall. In the 1430s the *Sala Superior* was embellished with a remarkable decorative composition featuring paintings of religious topics by the Giotto-Rimini School. In the early sixteenth century Bishop Giacomo Pasi raised the floor by roughly one meter and split up the hall into several smaller spaces. To make room for new doors and windows he demolished most of the Romanesque six-mullioned windows and wide parts of the fourteenth-century paintings. This radical restoration led to the elimination of the old architectural and decorative design of the *Sala Superior*, and in fact its medieval layout has only been partially brought to light (fig. 2).

Some small medieval and renaissance sculptures have been placed in the centre of the sixteenth-century terracotta floor recreated in the shape of a raised peninsula

surrounded by a sunken area so that visitors can see the newly-discovered paintings underneath. Several appropriately spaced icons have been positioned along the bare walls together with some wedges form a late-gothic polyptych and a fifteenth-century grey sandstone tabernacle. Three works by Biagio d'Antonio, including the altarpiece from the church in Quartolo, completes the exhibition. This altarpiece is one of the last representative works of the Florentine culture imported this side of the Apennines by the Manfredi seignior, politically close to the Medici family. It now hangs on the north wall of the Hall of Frescoes where there is nothing indicating its original position above an altar.

The only altar present since its origins in the portion of the Bishop's Palace museum is the one from the Oratory of Saint Apollinaris, commissioned by Bishop Antonio Cantoni in 1754 and decorated by the painter Vittorio Maria Bigari, prince of the Clementine Academy. The altarpiece in this chapel is an anonymous copy of the work painted in 1737 by Ercole Graziani for the cathedral in Bologna. The painting "Miraculous Healing of Saint Pellegrino Laziosi", executed in 1739 for the Church of the Servants, and now hanging on the west wall of the *Throne Room*, is instead ascribed to the firm hand of the bolognese maestro. The decorations in this large room, built in 1714 by Cardinal Giulio Piazza, are based on the model of picture galleries which required paintings to be hung close together and without the distance which has now become a

characteristic of modern museums (but not here). The layout and design of the adjacent apartment, built in the early years of the eighteenth century by Cardinal Marcello Durazzo from Genoa, also features the same layout as the *Throne Room*. Without misrepresenting history (over the years there has been no radical restoration of these rooms), several works from bishop's collections and many altarpieces have been placed here so that visitors may observe them as they would in a church: from the floor upwards towards the ceiling. Even in these rooms, all the eye can do is imagine the original position of the altarpieces, but not their former religious and liturgical context. This part of the museum, still to be restored, looks like a bishop's apartment, arranged like a house in which "you realize it still has its old world air,"⁷ as per Mario Praz' description of his own house-museum in Rome.

The lighting in the *Monterenzi Loggia* and the Hall of Frescoes was solved by using optic fibres for the works protected by glass cases, and with spotlights for all the others: The ephemeral play of light and shadows is perfect for a medieval space. On the contrary, rows of frameless leds illuminate the sunken area around the *Sala Superior*. A different choice was made for the *Throne Room*. This large room would actually be quite bright thanks to three big windows which open onto the kitchen garden; the square skylights (above the top of the large cornice) add even more natural light during the day. However, sunlight is not kind to paintings. So every opening has been shaded. I decided not to use spotlights which would have produced rather unnatural effects in this eighteenth-century room, and instead opted to place all the invisible light sources behind the extrados of the cornice in order to let uniform light reflect off the white vault ceiling and filter down into the room. This kind of lighting undoubtedly enhances the visitor's perception of the architectural space and exhibited works, and improves the clarity of the presentation.

The context: a home for Rosso Fiorentino?

I have read Florenskij, Valéry, and Malraux and meditated on their criticism of museums which remove works from their original context.⁸ But I've also read Proust, and was quite fascinated by his eulogy of the exhibition space as the most spiritual of all places. For the author of the *Recherche*, a museum "symbolises far better with its bareness, by the absence of all irritating detail, those innermost spaces into which the artist withdrew to create."⁹

So I planned a journey to Volterra to visit once again the "Deposition" by Rosso Fiorentino in the Civic Museum, hosted in the Renaissance-style Palazzo Minucci Solaini. This altarpiece – an instant snapshot of a frantic scene – is characterised by asymmetries and the chromatic juxtaposition of yellows, blues, and especially reds, standing out against the uniform blue of the sky. It was painted in 1521 for the Chapel of the Daylight Cross annexed to the church of Saint Francis located at the westernmost

tip of the Volterra city walls. In this chapel, strong natural light still floods in from two openings in the wall to the right of the altar where the altarpiece used to hang. These tangible luminous sources inspired Giovanni Battista da Jacopo (known as Rosso Fiorentino) with the shaft of light which, from right to left, divides the angular volumes of the “Deposition”. However, light was not the only thing that guided the hand of the painter.

In 1410 the fourteenth-century chapel was frescoed by Cenni di Francesco di Ser Cenni. The pictorial cycle included a huge fresco depicting the “Massacre of the Innocents”. In this fresco Cenni di Francesco pushes drama to the limit: the red colour of the blood and clothes plastically dominate the yellows, greens, and whites. The drama and convulsed mass of figures and colours was certainly a source of inspiration for the volumes and colours of the altarpiece painted by Il Rosso in Volterra. That said, the current isolation of the painting inside the gallery completely dissolves the strong link between the work and the character of the room for which it was painted! My visit to Volterra further corroborated my belief that the museum isn’t responsible for the death of Rosso’s masterpiece, which remains very eloquent as a painting. However the museum space limits the perception of the theodramatics which only the original context would be able to fully reveal in all its intimate vitality.

When Salvatore Settis talks about “the paradox of the context” he also asks himself: “How many kilometres (or metres) can an artefact be removed from the place where it was found without it being a scandal? [...] The ‘paradox of the museum’ is equal but contrary to the ‘paradox of the context’, but less perceived. Every respectable museum is itself a new context: but what we are incapable of doing is to assume, with our heads held high, the intellectual and ethical responsibility of creating a new context.”¹⁰ Designing a new context is serious issue and cannot be trivialised by repeating a standard model that can apply universally. Every place has its own identity and every museum shapes its own, fully aware that no exhibition design will ever be able to revive the old relationship between the works and their original contexts. As far as religious art museums are concerned, will this feeling of a breakdown in the relationship between an artistic object and its original environment continue forever? I think so. Since it is impossible to recreate the original contexts of every sacred collection, are they destined to become a sort of *Anthology of Spoon River* devoted to works removed from their original life and now dead? I think not: no museum writes epitaphs next to the works on display. When the latter finally arrive at a museum, they’ve simply moved house. But can this new house turn into a “dwelling”? Once again it was Heidegger in his paper *Building Dwelling Thinking* who stated that the difference between a “dwelling” and a house is the care bestowed on things and places. The philosopher from Freiberg wrote that for care to be suitable, things should be “left in their nature as things.”¹¹

Repairing what is broken?

Given that the nature of an altarpiece depends on its being in a church, then how can that painting “dwell” in a museum? The museographic approach to sacred art is inevitably always complex! One example will suffice: the famous case of the “Marriage of the Virgin”, which Rafael finalized in 1504 for the Chapel of Saint Joseph in the Gothic Church of Saint Francis in Città di Castello. After standing for almost three hundred years in this sacred space, in 1798 the work was gifted by the town council of the citizens of Umbria to Napoleon’s general, Giuseppe Lechi. He immediately sold it to the rich Milanese merchant Giacomo Sannazzari della Ripa who upon his death bequeathed it to the Brera Art Gallery. Before being put on public display in 1809, the panel was “embellished” – the word used at that time – with a neo-classical frame. Over the years, a certain restlessness has plagued the painting’s attempt to “dwell” in this museum. When the gallery director, Corrado Ricci from Ravenna (responsible for the first meticulous layout of the Milanese art gallery), re-arranged the exhibition design in 1903, he placed Rafael’s altarpiece in a concave space draped with green curtains. In 1925, after the gallery was extensively renovated and enlarged, the architect Pietro Portaluppi placed the “Marriage of the Virgin” in an aedicule with tympanum located at the end of a fake neo-Renaissance apse: three sides were panelled in wood with pilaster-strips arranged – in multiples and submultiples – on three superimposed orders. Based on the historicist approach of a Late Romantic culture, still unable to cope with the first shockwaves of the modern movement, something reminiscent of its ecclesiastical origins definitely had to be added to the bareness of the work! The brilliant “Montefeltro Altarpiece” by Piero della Francesca, and a number of paintings by Luca Signorelli and Giovanni Santi, Rafael’s father, were placed just outside the wooden apse. After parts of the gallery were destroyed during the war, Pietro Portaluppi decided not to restore the improbable Renaissance-style *boiserie* environment. Instead he chose to place the “Marriage of the Virgin” and the “Montefeltro Altarpiece” in two separate rectangular rooms with pale plaster walls; the two rooms were created by dividing up the original room. However, the small rooms with vaulted ceilings and skylights were still meant to conjure up the image of a chapel. This idea was finally abandoned by Vittorio Gregotti when he submitted his new design in 1984. The partition walls created by Portaluppi to divide the two rooms hosting Piero della Francesca and Rafael’s works were removed, and Room XXIV of the Brera Gallery became a single rationalist exhibition room with a pale marble floor, steel wainscoting, and ivory coloured walls. Here the paintings, placed at a suitable distance from one another, were lit by a shed built above the false ceiling. The space is aseptic, a far cry from a setting or historicist minimalism. The simple style of the design, created by subtraction rather than addition, finally put paid to any cultural value the painting originally had, and instead revealed its purely aesthetic value. The impossibility to recompose what was broken

became explicit in such a harsh space. The altarpiece now hangs on a bare wall: representative of a beauty that “was sufficient in itself”¹² – the final words Proust has Bergotte pronounce before dying in front of the “View of Delft” by Jan Vermeer.

This reductionist museography, which I draw on, has recently come under fire. To try and revive the lost relationship between artworks and their original spatial location, several suggestions have been put forward by Timothy Verdon, director of the Museo dell’Opera (Museum of the Works) in Florence. During the exhibition “Jesus. His Body and Face in Art”, held in 2010 in Venaria Reale in Turin, the American-born art historian decided to display the wooden crucifix, sculpted by a young Michelangelo for the Florentine church of the Holy Spirit, above an exact replica of the white altar which may be found in the sacristy by Giuliano da Sangallo, normally hosting Buonarroti’s “Christus patiens”. I had my doubts about this exhibition design: a small room divided by panels for other works cannot conjure up the meditative and dilated space of Sangallo’s sacristy.

A much more challenging experiment is currently underway in Florence at the Museo dell’Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore. The important enlargement project, designed by the Natalini Studio based on Verdon’s suggestions, involves the construction of a large-scale model of the cathedral facade started by Arnolfo di Cambio in the late thirteenth century and removed between 1586 and 1587. This imposing, wooden, true-to-life model will be on display in the big hall of the old theatre which will become part of the new museum itinerary; it will “conjure up the unfinished fourteenth-century facade, the details of which are available thanks to a sixteenth-century drawing. The statues by Arnolfo, by some fourteenth-century masters, by young Donatello and Nanni di Banco, will be exhibited in front of this titanic ‘stage set’; based on the same logic, the newly-restored ‘Gates of Paradise’ by Lorenzo Ghiberti will once again be positioned in front of the old sculpted facade, recreating a visual and iconographic relationship which was lost roughly 424 years ago.”¹³ Here the designer did not deduct anything; he rather added... since he had a reliable documentary source with which to recreate a philologically accurate set-up, he decided that the museography of rationalist architects was far too arid.

Rational museography and lyrical museography

The first organic experience of “rational museography” was tested immediately after the war by Franco Albini. His first case study was the eighteenth-century Gallery in Palazzo Bianco in Genoa. Justified by the serious damage caused by the bombing of the city, the Milanese architect rejected any attempt to conjure up the fake contexts and crowded displays of artworks used in late nineteenth-century exhibits which did not distinguish between history and the falsification of history. His rarefied sober exhibition style caught on and flourished; thirty years later Gregotti’s design for the Brera Art

Gallery was inspired by the ideas of this school of thought. Rather than forms and figures, Franco Albini gave shape to a method. Rather than a museum model, he developed an “exhibition system”, simple in its design, and linear in the distribution of the works successfully lit by modern lighting technology: an open, flexible and, above all, reproducible model. So reproducible that after Albini’s experiment, many architects began to get involved with exhibitions design.

However, this begs the question: should an “exhibition system” work like a machine? Of course, even a machine needs attention. Even the *machine à habiter* by Le Corbusier needs attention! So how can this “museum machine” become a new “dwelling” for the works housed in a “house-museum”? After *Building Dwelling Thinking* Heidegger went back to a fragment of the poem by his beloved Hölderlin, *In lieblicher Bläue*, and wrote the essay “...poetically man dwells...”¹⁴ For Heidegger, writing poetry not only conjured up thoughts, but also the essence of building, and therefore the essence of dwelling: a poetising architecture corresponded to a poetising idea.

Is this true for museum designs as well? It’s not surprising that in the post-war scenario of museum architecture, Franco Albini’s “rational museography” was joined, quite suddenly, by what Marisa Dali Emiliani called the “lyrical museography” created by Carlo Scarpa¹⁵. Inspired by Croce’s concept of “knowing how to view” an artwork, the design approach of the Venetian architect became “knowing how to exhibit” an artwork. The visitor should be offered a space full of feelings and emotion, rather than a barren and aseptic one. Nothing in his museums is predictable. Each painting has its own piece of wall, never axial nor symmetrical to others. Each sculpture has its own support: never too invasive, never exaggerated. He rejected every repetitive aridity and assigned to each exhibited object its own lightening, capable of composing new spatial coordinates and new viewpoints: an *unicum*.

Colour suddenly appears in the Palazzo Abatellis Museum in Palermo: a small black-board behind the profile of a tiny sculpted head, the blue and green of some panels in the small room with sculptures by Francesco Laurana, and the wood in the space devoted to Antonello da Messina. In the Castelvecchio museum in Verona Carlo Scarpa wanted to consciously eliminate the “twenties-style” restoration. Here, after the entrance *sacellum* with its polychrome marble tiles, the visitor is greeted by a small Istrian stone Madonna in front of a red panel, and another Madonna emerging from a blue panel tipped slightly forward. Then comes the black monolith supporting “Saint Martin of Avesa”, the iron of the cross supporting the Romanesque crucifix known as the “Crucifix and the Weepers”, the big concrete stele for the equestrian statue of Cangrande, and finally a blue cobalt stuccoed ceiling chosen to enhance the faint light entering the Avena Room from the north. I don’t know whether Scarpa had read what Adorno wrote about Proust and Valéry, but undoubtedly the artworks he exhibited never became “dead visions aligned as if in a coffin.”¹⁶

Scarpa did not create “museum systems” to bring the works to life. Unlike the open and reproducible systems developed by Albini, his were closed systems: artworks unsuited to be moved elsewhere. Those who tried to imitate him or implement his systems elsewhere, often messed it up. Very few individuals have Scarpa’s elegance. In the end, it’s preferable to choose the severity of a somewhat insipid, but rational and lightweight presentation, rather than an exhibition design overly spiced with uncontrolled chromatics and forced gestures. Even if it does not inspire emotions and feelings, at least it is useful as a learning curve. I too prefer to use the sustainable lightness of exhibition design.

Didactics of colours, silence of forms

Without echoing Scarpa’s ideas, colours entered several ecclesiastical and secular museums. Even in the new Uffizi where some of the new rooms are already open to visitors. Since “all white” walls do not help differentiate between the various sections, the director Antonio Casali used colours as a code to distinguish between periods, artists, and styles. As a result, the rooms devoted to fifteenth-century Florentine art are green (Paolo Uccello’s green), the rooms hosting foreign painters are blue, and the ones with sixteenth-century artworks are red: the same red as the room of Hellenistic marbles which gave birth to the “modern style.”¹⁷ These are not panels that create a rhythm like the coloured partition walls in the Diocesan Museum in Milan designed by Antonio Piva, in fact they are whole walls painted and uniformly lit by reflected light: walls which indicate the museum route and help visitors learn and acquire knowledge. Didactic walls. Carlo Scarpa’s museum itineraries were nothing of the sort, instead. They were chiefly ‘itineraries of emotion’ pervaded more intensely by the enchantment of art. Peter Zumthor managed to achieve something similar (but with more dry originality) in the Diocesan Museum in Cologne, completed in 2007. Rejecting any gesture-based artistic hyperbole, the Swiss architect decided to merge late medieval virtuosity with the almost monastic simplicity of the “modern”. Calm and silence dominate here, free from formal dynamisms and chromatic suggestions. The *Kolumba Museum* was designed above the ruins of the Gothic church of Saint Columba, most of which was destroyed during the World War II. The result is a bare and ascetic architecture which merges history and modernity by making these two historic periods dialogue with each other. The same happens inside. Ancient and modern works stand side by side in the neat museum rooms. The steel sculpture, “The Drowned and the Saved” by Richard Serra, installed in the open-air between the ripped walls of the old sacristy, is followed by a Romanesque crucifix positioned next to the expressionist paintings by Antonio Saura, and to a sixteenth-century “Flagellation of Christ” in front of the “Red Cross on a Black Background” by Andy Warhol; finally, a chair by Stefan Wewerka is arranged below a seventeenth-century Madonna, now recomposed after having been

blasted to bits during the bombing. There are no descriptive labels for these artworks, so distant from each other in time. Teaching is not the goal here. The visitor is left to his own feelings which make him reflect... However, I ask myself: is it perhaps this feeling of the atemporality of art, reminiscent of Croce, that has created a museum which displays *objets à réaction poétique*, rather than just artworks?

Two faces

When I began to design the exhibition system of the Diocesan Museum, I hadn't thought or even asked myself about letting in poetry or emotions. I still didn't know that the Municipal Art Gallery was to give back the Diocese a fragment of the thirteenth-century "Madonna of Health" and another fragment of a mid-fifteenth century "Christus patiens". Carved in wood and then painted, the sculptures belonged to the church of the Servants of Mary. The two faces are the only objects which survived the wartime destruction: in November 1944 the Germans blew up the belfry and adjacent chapel, which were never rebuilt. The bombs left the face of the Madonna reasonably intact, while the face of Jesus, sculpted five centuries earlier by an anonymous sculpture from northern Europe, was not as fortunate. Once dug out of the rubble, a huge gash cut its forehead, the nose was broken, and the left eyelid and upper lip had been marred by two fragments of shrapnel. The additional punishment inflicted by the bomb had torn the face of the crucifix.

After the war, the expression on that face – already marked by the painful naturalism of the Nordic schools – took on an extraordinary intensity. The remains of the crucifix were never replaced in the devastated church, perhaps because devotion requires an unbroken image to which to address one's prayers. Placed on a second-rate concrete cube, it remained in the warehouse of the Civic Art Gallery, where almost no one saw it, for nearly seventy years. Today, after having it moved to the Hall of Frescoes in the Diocesan Museum, I decided to position it next to the head of the "Madonna of Health" who, meditative and pensive, originally carried the Child in her arms (fig. 3). The pale face – the old colours are barely visible – expresses a



Fig. 3. Remains of "Madonna col bambino" (XIII century) and "Crocifisso" (XV century). Faenza, Diocesan Museum.

Mother's welcoming to a Child who "grew in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2,52), died on the cross and, for believers, rose on the third day. It was mostly the eyes of the faithful which raised for centuries to the "Crocifisso dei Servi". Many eyes looked at it, undoubtedly all eyes of the praying faithful. The eyes of those who today look at the face of Jesus and his mother do not necessarily belong to the faithful.

I have noticed that even the most distracted and hurried visitors slow down and pause in front of here. Perhaps they find in these wooden-carved pieces something they don't find elsewhere: they find it there, at that very moment, in that precise spatial place. The sculptures were realized almost two centuries apart and yet they are both remarkably modern. They are our contemporaries, the offspring of a century marred by two world wars, extensive injustice and some glimmers of hope: they represent the unique way art overcomes the bonds of chronology. What do visitors feel when they stand in front of these two fragments which have long abandoned their sacred dwelling place? An emotional moment? A fleeting and dramatic beauty? A sense of compassion that lasts but a few seconds? It is true that "a momentary flame is not compassion; compassion has to be like life,"¹⁸ but it is also true that the whole can be hidden in a fragment, just like a moment can reveal eternity. Jesus of Nazareth said as much when he asked those gathered around him to look at the short and temporary beauty of the lilies of the field, saying "not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these" (Luke 12, 27).

¹ See M. Heidegger, *Denkerfahrten*, V. Klostermann GmbH, Frankfurt am Main 1983, translated in Italian by N. Curcio in M. Heidegger, *Dall'esperienza del pensiero. 1910-1976*, Il nuovo Melangolo, Genoa 2011, p. 103-105; P. C. Bori, *La Madonna di San Sisto di Raffaello. Studi sulla cultura russa*, Il Mulino, Bologna 1990, p. 11-51; E. Gazzola, F. Milana (edited by), *La gloria dell'assente. La Madonna per San Sisto di Piacenza*, Vicolo del Pavone, Piacenza 2004; V. Grossman, *La Madonna a Treblinka*, Medusa, Milan 2007; M. Cometa, *La scrittura delle immagini, Letteratura e cultura visuale*, Raffaello Cortina, Milan 2012, p. 239-262.

² M. Heidegger, *Dall'esperienza del pensiero. 1910-1976* (*Denkerfahrten*) cit., p. 103 (quotation translated by Erika Young).

³ W. Benjamin, "L'œuvre d'art à l'époque de sa reproduction mécanisée", in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, vol. 1, no. 5, 1936, p. 40-66. German edition: W. Benjamin, *Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1963, p. 7-63. For the last Italian edition see: W. Benjamin, *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*, Einaudi, Turin 2011 (Italian translation by E. Filippini, with a paper of M. Cacciari).

⁴ See M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* and *Wozu Dichter in Holzwege*, V. Klostermann GmbH, Frankfurt am Main 1950; Italian edition: M. Heidegger, *Sentieri interrotti (Holzwege)*, La Nuova Italia, Florence 1968 (Italian translation by P. Chiodi).

⁵ M. Heidegger, *Dall'esperienza del pensiero. 1910-1976* (*Denkerfahrten*) cit., p. 104 (quotation translated by Erika Young).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ M. Praz, *La casa della vita*, Adelphi, Milan 2010, p. 19 (quotation translated by Erika Young).

⁸ See: P. Florenskij, *Obratnaja perspektiva*, in *Trudy po znakovym sistemam*, Tartu 1967; Italian edition: P. Florenskij, *La prospettiva rovesciata e altri scritti*, Gangemi, Rome 1990 (Italian translation by C. Muschio and N. Misler). P. Valéry, *Pièces sur l'art*, Gallimard, Paris 1936; P. Valéry, *Scritti sull'arte*, Guanda, Milan 1984

(Italian translation by V. Lamarque); A. Malraux, *Le voix du silence*, Gallimard, Paris 1951.

⁹ M. Proust, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, 1919, in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927). For the Italian edition see: M. Proust, *All'ombra delle fanciulle in fiore*, in *Alla ricerca del tempo perduto*, II, Rizzoli, Milan 1988, p. 250 (Italian translation by M. T. Somaini).

¹⁰ S. Settis, "Perché i nostri musei meritano un progetto", in *La Repubblica*, 22 August 2011 (quotation translated by Erika Young).

¹¹ M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Verlag Günther Neske, Pfullingen 1957. For the Italian edition see: M. Heidegger, *Costruire abitare pensare*, in *Saggi e discorsi (Vorträge)*, Mursia, Milan 1976, p. 101 (Italian translation by G. Vattimo; quotation translated by Erika Young).

¹² M. Proust, *La prisonnière*, 1923, in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927). For the Italian edition see: M. Proust, *La prigioniera*, in *Alla ricerca del tempo perduto*, V, Rizzoli, Milan 1988, p. 226 (Italian translation by M. T. Somaini).

¹³ T. Verdon, "Teoria e prassi di un museo d'arte sacra", in *Arte Cristiana*, nos. 870-872, 2012, p. 346 (quotation translated by Erika Young).

¹⁴ M. Heidegger, "...Poeticamente abita l'uomo...", in *Saggi e discorsi (Vorträge)* cit., p. 125-138.

¹⁵ M. Dalai Emiliani, *Per una critica della museografia del Novecento in Italia. Il "saper mostrare" di Carlo Scarpa*, Marsilio, Venice 2008, p. 98.

¹⁶ T. W. Adorno, *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, Suhrkamp, Berlin 1955; Italian edition: T. W. Adorno, *Prismi: Saggi sulla critica della Cultura*, Einaudi, Turin 1972, p. 177 (Italian translation by C. Mainoldi and others).

¹⁷ See E. Capretti, N. Pons, *I colori dei Nuovi Uffizi: conversazioni su un "museo grande"*. Intervista ad Antonio Natali, direttore della Galleria, in *Gazzetta Antiquaria*, n.62, II, 2012, pp.30-35.

¹⁸ G. De Luca, *Introduzione alla storia della pietà*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome 1962, p. 7.

The Slovene Museum of Christianity

NATAŠA POLAJNAR FRELIH, Slovene Museum of Christianity

The Slovene Museum of Christianity¹ is a national museum. It is located at the oldest and the only remaining active Cistercian monastery in Slovenia, in Stična, thirty-five kilometers east of Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia. The location of the museum is very appropriate because the activity carried out within it is closely connected to the space itself. It is located in a working monastery, which provides a certain added value to what the museum provides – and more. In addition to the museum, which is responsible for movable religious heritage, visitors are also shown part of the monastery's areas which are accessible to the public: an exceptional Gothic cloister, a Baroque refectory, and the monastery church.²

The beginnings of our museum's operation go back to the 1980s. At that time, the Cistercian Abbey in Stična started renovating its vacated premises in what was known as the Old Prelature for museum activities; with the assistance of donors from Slovenia and abroad, it also started funding the museum. The year 1991, when financial responsibility for its operation was assumed by the Republic of Slovenia, was important for the museum's further development. The next important milestone in the history of the museum was in 2006, when it became a national museum. Today the museum has five employees: a historian, an art historian, a restoration expert, a document specialist and a secretary.

The museum's holdings include movable religious heritage from all over Slovenia. This collection of art has gradually expanded thanks to the financial and practical help of the state, the monastery together with donors from Slovenia and abroad.

Two exhibitions are on display. The first floor contains a permanent exhibition called "Life behind the Monastery Walls", presenting the rich history of the Stična monastery. The Cistercian monastery in Stična was established in 1135, at a time when the great Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) was still alive. With its foundation, the ideas of the new Cistercian Order extended from Burgundy to Eastern Europe. Over the centuries, the Stična monastery has been an important cultural and economic center for a large part of what is now Slovenia. In the late twelfth century, the world-famous Stična manuscripts were written here (now kept in Ljubljana and Vienna). In the fifteenth century, one of the earliest written records in Slovene (the Stična manuscript, 1428) was written at the monastery. Due to the importance of the Stična manuscripts, one of the exhibition rooms contains a reconstruction of a medieval scriptorium. Visi-

tors are acquainted with the process of making parchment, they can hold a model of a medieval parchment codex in their hands, and they learn about the importance of monastery libraries for the development of knowledge, civilization, culture, and theology. Educational workshops about medieval manuscripts are also available (fig. 1).³

Older visitors have particularly expressed great interest in the monastic workshops. We have named the exhibition room after Saint Benedict's motto *Ora et labora* ("pray and work"). Visitors are especially interested in the monks' workday, the activities they engaged in or still engage in, and their tools – for example, for working in the fields and forests, for beekeeping and for cheese-making, Friar Simon Ašič pharmacy.

The second floor contains a large permanent exhibition entitled "The History of Christianity in Slovenia".⁴ The exhibition was opened 2002. It is chronologically arranged through twelve rooms and consists of over 200 exhibits. It provides visitors with the beginnings of Christianity (in the third century) on the territory of what is now Slovenia and takes them on a journey through history spanning over 1,700 years, ending in the jubilee year 2000. In 2003, the exhibition received the Valvasor Museum Award from the Slovene Museum Society⁵ and the Josip Jurčič Award from the local municipality. In 2004 we presented this exhibition at the international conference *The Best in Heritage*, held in Dubrovnik, and the same year we became members of *The Best in Heritage Excellence Club*.⁶ The entire project was financed by the Slovenia's Ministry of Culture (fig. 2). When we were setting up the exhibition, one of our main thoughts was how to make the dis-



Fig. 1. Permanent exhibition "Life behind the Monastery Walls": reconstruction of a medieval scriptorium (photo Tadej Trnovšek).



Fig. 2. Permanent exhibition "The History of Christianity in Slovenia": the room displaying folk piety (Calvary, the Holy Sepulcher, souvenirs from pilgrimages, certificates granting membership of church societies and brotherhoods, prayer books, rosaries, holy cards, etc.; photo Radivoj Zavadvla).

plays more accessible to visitors with different levels of knowledge about the topics and different levels of interest, for those coming from different cultural backgrounds having different spiritual outlooks, and at the same time to make the presentations impartial and appropriate. In our desire to present this extensive and often sensitive topic in the most suitable way, we opted for a relatively conventional approach. In addition to exhibits and reconstructions, we placed “information walls”, with basic texts, in each room. Our decision has proved correct. Visitors read these texts and, when they know what they are looking at, the story of the exhibition moves them more deeply. At the same time they experience the exhibition through the emotions that arise in them when they see the exhibits.

We have set up both permanent exhibitions in order to be adapted to both adults and schoolchildren, as well as guests from both Slovenia and abroad. All the tours are guided. The exhibitions can easily be included in the Slovene school program because they present substantial material which is part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools for lessons in Slovene, history, art, social studies, religion, and ethics.

The museum also has several collections on view. The collection of liturgical vessels and vestments acquaints visitors with the Christian rituals of sacrifice and veneration. The Leopold Kozlevčar collection of antiques and folk piety includes items that the pious Slovene people once brought home from various pilgrimages, kept as souvenirs of personal and religious celebrations, gave to one another as gifts, and gave in thanks (pl. 4). The collection of figurines is an exceptional collection of forty wax figurines.⁷ It is the largest collection of this kind in Slovenia and can be compared with similar collections in other European countries. Various depictions of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the angels were produced from wax. Jesus is portrayed as the Baby Jesus lying in a manger, standing as Jesus the Consoler (Germ. *Trösterlein*) and as the swaddled Infant Jesus (Germ. *Fatchenkind*). The museum also has three copies of the renowned Infant Jesus of Prague. The Pietà is especially moving: the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus. Most figurines, costumes, crowns and other accessories were entrusted to the museum by the Ursuline nuns of Škofja Loka. Today all the figurines, most of which were badly damaged, have been studied, restored, and put on display.

Another unique collection is the collection of reliquaries. By displaying this collection, the museum seeks to acquaint the public with the veneration of martyrs and saints in various historical periods. It must be pointed out that the preserved reliquaries are part of the rich spiritual heritage and tradition of the Slovene nation. For centuries, many believers have addressed their supplications and prayers to martyrs and saints, asking them for help in times of need, disease or severe trials. Our collection is one of the largest in Slovenia. It features over 100 reliquaries containing over 1,100 relics. The reliquaries date from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. The largest and oldest among them were donated and previously belonged to the Ursuline nuns of Škofja Loka and their

predecessors, the Poor Clares. With this exhibition, which was conceived as a study, the collection was evaluated and many reliquaries salvaged from decay through demanding conservation and restoration procedures. With the help of theology, history and art history experts, we have concisely presented a topic that is still relevant today and which visitors to our museum have always found interesting. The findings of interdisciplinary research carried out by various scholars are published in the exhibition catalogue.⁸

Visitors also find our collection of Church textiles very interesting. Individual precious examples of chasubles, copes and other Church textiles, from the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, are on display. Most of these were used at the Stična monastery, in the Convent of the Poor Clares and later in the Ursulines in Škofja Loka, and by the Jesuits in Ljubljana. Because of this interest, we are planning to thoroughly study this material and present the entire collection in a temporary exhibition, in the future.

The art history collection primarily contains artworks that, with a few exceptions, primarily date from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. By acquiring twentieth- and twenty-first-century material for the religious art collection, we are today following the development of religious visual art.

Researchers can use our unique archive on the missionary Frederic Baraga (1797-1868), who worked in North America in the nineteenth century, and our Slovene emigrant press collection.⁹ Our Baraga archive is the most complete and is unique in Europe second only to the archive maintained by the Baraga Association in Marquette, Michigan. It represents a good point of departure for systematic documentation of other Slovene missionaries in America and elsewhere throughout the world.

We also prepare four to five temporary exhibitions per year, connected with the presentation of religious cultural heritage or with important anniversaries of certain Church figures and historical events. We also respond to current events in the Slovene Church and to the role of Christianity in modern society.

¹ www.mks-sticna.si.

² Despite its Baroque remodeling, the monastery church essentially remains an exceptional Romanesque monument (built between 1132 and 1156).

³ T. Trnovšek, D. Stepančič (illustrations), *Zaklad pisarja Bernarda*, Stična 2011; T. Trnovšek, *Pedagoški programi: Muzej krščanstva na Slovenskem*, Stična 2012.

⁴ N. Polajnar Frelih, *Zgodovina krščanstva na Slovenskem: vodnik po stalni razstavi / History of Christianity in Slovenia: Guide to the Permanent Exhibition*, Stična 2003.

⁵ B. Ilich Klančnik, "Valvasorjeva nagrada in priznanja za leto 2002", in *ARGO: Časopis slovenskih muzejev / Journal of the Slovene Museums*, 46 (2), Ljubljana 2003, p. 112.

⁶ N. Polajnar Frelih, *The Permanent Exhibition "History of Christianity in Slovenia" at the Slovene Museum of Reli-*

gion, The Best in Heritage, Dubrovnik, Croatia, Zagreb 2004, p. 32-33.

⁷ N. Polajnar Frelih et al., *Jesulus Pragensis: praški Jezušček in druge voščene figure v Slovenskem verskem muzeju / Jesulus Pragensis: The Holy Infant of Prague and Other Wax Figurines at the Slovene Museum of Religion*, Stična 2005.

⁸ N. Polajnar Frelih (edited by), *Dotik svetnikov: vloga relikvij v krščanstvu na Slovenskem / In Touch with the Saints: The Role of Relics in Slovene Christianity*, Muzej krščanstva na Slovenskem, Stična 2008.

⁹ M. Frelih, *Spomin Velikih jezer: ob 180. obletnici prihoda misijonarja Friderika Ireneja Baraga v Ameriko / Memory of the Great Lakes: Upon the 180th Anniversary of the Arrival of Missionary Frederic Ireneus Baraga in America*, Stična 2010.

The Judenplatz Museum in Wien

MARIA MADDALENA MARGARIA, Politecnico di Torino

In 1995, during excavations in Judenplatz in Vienna, emerged the remains of the medieval synagogue Or-Sarua destroyed in 1421 during what, by the press, has been dubbed the “Wiener Geserah”.

Since the fall of 1420 Duke Albert V began a persecution of the Jews that culminated dramatically in 1421 with the murder of hundreds of Jews and the decision of Rabbi Johan to comply with a collective suicide by setting fire to the synagogue in Or-Sarua full of Jews who died as martyrs.

Next to the discovery of the synagogue remains the project of construction of a monument in memory of Holocaust victims was brought forward, being located just in the same square, the center of the old Jewish ghetto.

The design of the monument and the discovery of archaeological remains have not been, however, a contemporary fact. In fact, the idea of creating a monument in memory of the Jews exterminated by the Nazis began in 1988 thanks to the work of Simon Wiesenthal. It was formed a committee and organized a competition for the construction of the building that was won by the British artist Rachel Whiteread.

The memorial was supposed to be ready by the end of 1996, but after much controversy and works for the archaeological excavations, the inauguration took place only in 2000 with the contemporary museum display of a medieval synagogue by the architectural firm Jabornegg & Pálffy.¹

The result of these two works is a real place of remembrance highly symbolic and didactic. A few times, in my opinion, an artist and an architect have been able to develop a language so poetic and harmonious.

The Misrachi-Haus is the only access to the Museum and the excavations, and the building of the Holocaust monument, although built in the square just above the excavations, play exclusively the function of the monument. These complete complex gives rise to a great emotional impact, which led to some controversy.

In an interview with BBC radio Rachel Whiteread about the Holocaust memorial in Vienna says:²

The Holocaust Memorial is a concrete sculpture made from case books. So it's sort of like a library but it's kind of inside out not really, it, it has a kind of double reading to it. It has two doors on the front. It has a ceiling rose in the roof which acts as drainage, and it has this concrete plinth

around it with an inscription and names of all of the concentration camps in which people died in Austria. It was an idea that I, I'd lived in Berlin for a long time. When I lived there I thought a lot about what had happened during the War, and I think that if I hadn't had that experience I wouldn't have even approached or begun to approach such a subject. And when I was asked to put in a proposal, which I did, and I hadn't a clue that I would get it. I really didn't think that I would get it because it was against all sorts of other people that were much more experienced than I was, and it was a piece that was to be in a square called Judenplatz which is a, a sort of quite domestic scale square, and it was as if one of the rooms from the surrounding buildings had been taken and put in the centre of the square, and all of the books were completely blank. You had no idea what was supposedly in them, and the pages were facing outwards so you couldn't read the spines of the books, so that was essentially the idea, a sort of blank library. There's all sorts of interpretations...

And she adds

Exactly and various other things which I obviously thought about when I was making the piece or thinking about making the piece, but it's also quite like a bunker and it was something that I thought about and something that I was accused of. I remember at the jury when I went and stood in this very terrifying room and I said what do you mean it's like a bunker? I, I've no idea what you're talking about, and acted completely innocently, but it was something that I really felt quite strongly about. And I'd been to see a lot of the bunkers around the Atlantic wall and I didn't want to give the city of Vienna a beautiful object. I wanted to give them something that they had to think about and that wasn't ugly but that had a presence and quite a severe presence in the city, which I've done very successfully I'd say in terms of, you know, how people have to look at it and it's not an easy thing to look at and I would hope it makes people quite uncomfortable, but it's also quite poetic. You know it has all sorts of different ways and layerings to reading it. You know I'm finally very proud of it, but it took an awful lot of doing and you know it wasn't a pleasant thing to go through...

The idea of an artefact not ugly, but not beautiful, in the common sense, to shake out some of the minds of passers-by is, in my opinion, the winning idea of this project. Beyond the symbolic value of the books that also recalls the famous Kristallnacht, the most important aspect lies in being able to shake the mind of the passer-by who seeing the monument feels a sense of inadequacy and a need for exploration.

It is therefore shareable the choice of a symbolic use of architecture declined, for once more to its meaning to the function.

On the other hand also the exhibit choice of archaeological part has no less impact.

The museum Judenplatz, small and austere, is run by the Jewish Museum of Vienna and is totally focused on the medieval period and the "Wiener Geserah".

The concept of the bunker, which was attributed to the monument of Rachel Whiteread is taken by architects Jabornegg & Pálff. Both, apparently, having to tell the story of a living and painful past, have chosen the emphasis of the non place where time and place lost their connotations, leaving space for memory.



Fig. 1. Museum Judenplatz, view of the exhibition rooms (photo Maria Maddalena Margaria).

I do not mean this in the sense of non-place defined by Augé, but spaces without an actual geographical and temporal connotation, aseptic, where is the memory to speak. A sort of mortuary of the past. The museum, in fact, opts for a very minimalist style, but also very refined in its details enhanced by a choice of cold materials: concrete and steel (fig. 1).

Once you have crossed the doorway of the baroque palace that houses the museum you are catapulted into another place. The hall anticipates in all the sense of the museum. Cold, with no frills with a single

touch of warmth in the wooden counter. But here we are still in a limbo of life.

The ground floor houses the lobby and the rooms dedicated to the temporary exhibitions. During my visit in December 2012 it was taking place a photo exhibition on the daily life of Austrian Jews nowadays.

From the hall you go down to the lower floor permanent exhibition space and access to the synagogue. Each room has a deep sense of initiation starting from the stair: a bare structure in concrete, glass and steel, very symbolic in its apparent simplicity.

When you are at the underground level you feel the sensation of entering into a bunker with thick steel doors that mark the gap with the present and with life. The rooms follow one after the other without a specific order, telling the story of the synagogue of the past and of his faithful. All is silent, a deathly silence exacerbated from windows made of glass supported by light steel legs. In this context the multimedia reconstruction, al-

though very interesting, is out of tune with the environment and breaks the reverential silence. Perhaps it would be more suitable as a deepening on the upstairs floor. A long corridor, further marked by two steel portals, and a staircase, leading to the excavation room.

The walls of the excavation room are covered with galvanized brass, the floor is formed by a metal grid in which are inserted 60,000 blocks of clay, which absorb the light and attenuate it. In the room there are no “multimedia-games” or details, ex-



Fig. 2. Museum Judenplatz, excavation room (photo Maria Maddalena Margaria).

cept for some writing on the wall and here the remains of the synagogue talk. We are at the climax of the visit, we were prepared to silence and reflection. We are in one of the rare cases in which archaeology has been allowed to speak (fig. 2).

The whole complex, memorial and museum, is therefore a real interpretive center which do not just want to show and present, but ask to reflect and reason. The memorial is a library that can not be accessed, so it's books cannot be read and their story is lost because unknown. The short engravings on the basement are symbolic;³ remnants of the past who live of their silence, see what they were and find out what they are... The museum complex Judenplatz is, in my opinion, one of the best examples of the representation of the past in a symbolic way.

¹ Detail 2/2001.

² http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio3/johntusainterview/whiteread_transcript.shtml consulted in December 2012.

³ On the based of the memorial are engraved text, on the concrete floor a text in German, Hebrew and English, indicating the crime of the Holocaust and the estimated number of Austrian victims: Zum Gedenken an die mehr als 65.000 österreichischen / Juden, die in der Zeit von 1938 bis 1945 von den / Nationalsozialisten ermordet wurden // וחצרון/םיירטסוא סידוהי מ-65.000 מ-הלעמל רבד // In commemoration of more than 65,000 Austrian Jews / who were killed by the Nazis between / 1938 and 1945.

The second writing shows the name of the places where Jews were exterminated: Auschwitz, Bełże, Bergen-Belsen, Brčko, Buchenwald, Chełmno, Dachau, Flossenbürg, GroßRosen, Gurs, Hartheim, Izbica, Jasenovac, Jungfernhof, Kaiserwald, Kielce, Kowno, Łagów, Litzmannstadt, Lublin, Majdanek, Maly Trostinec, Mauthausen, Minsk, Mittelbau/Dora, Modliborzyce, Natzweiler, Neuengamme, Nisko, Opatów, Opole, Ravensbrück, Rejowiec, Riga, Šabac, Sachsenhausen, Salaspils, San Sabba, Sobibor, Stutthof, Theresienstadt, Trawniki, Treblinka, Włodawa, and Zamość.

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Since 2001 is Assistant Professor in Museography and Interior Architecture at the I Faculty of Architecture of Politecnico di Torino. She has been member of the “Liturgical Diocesan Commission” of Turin, Section “Art and Cultural Heritage” (2003-2007), member of Direction Board of the Society of the Engineers and the Architects in Turin (1995-1998), member of Teaching Staff of the course promoted by CEI (Italian Episcopal Conference) “Diocesan Museums: Guidelines” in Rome. Her research interests follow different paths: Contemporary Museography, Musealization of Religious Heritage and Musealization of Archaeological Sites; New Technologies for Communication of Cultural Heritage; Interiors Architecture and Architecture Documentation. Among her publications: *Il museo fuori dal museo* (2005); *Musei fra immanenza e trascendenza. Esposizioni e raccolte di arte sacra e beni culturali religiosi in Piemonte e Valle d'Aosta* (2005); *Belgio e Lussemburgo, musealizzazioni fra archeologia romana e medievale*, in *Musei sulle rovine. L'architettura contemporanea ed il contesto archeologico nell'esperienza nord-europea* (2007, with M. Lerma); *The Archaeological Musealization* (2012, with M. Vaudetti, S. Canepa).

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Is a Tenured Part-Time Professor of Art History at Università degli Studi di Trento, Italy, where she teaches Art Criticism and Museology. Her primary area of research is Italian painting of the Renaissance, and the politics of German museums after Reunification. She has published a number of essays which include, *La figura di Maria nell'arte di Botticelli*, in *Botticelli e Filippino. L'inquietudine e la grazia nella pittura fiorentina del Quattrocento* (2004);

Zwischen Tradition und Innovation: Zur Ikonographie von Passion und Heiligenviten, in *Geschichten auf Gold. Bilderzählungen in der Italienischen Malerei* (2005); “Il nuovo Albertinum: un’arca per le arti”, in *DOMUS* (2010); *Le restituzioni museali: un’introduzione al problema*, in *Una storia a ricamo. La ricomposizione di un raro ciclo boemo di tardo Trecento* (2011); *Messaggi cifrati: il museo di arte sacra come palestra di esegesi*, in *L’azione educativa per un museo in ascolto* (2012); “Looking away, looking at the way”, in *DOMUS online* (2012); *The Dispute over the Immaculate Conception by Guillaume de Marcillat at the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin*, in *Gifts in Return: Essays in Honour of Charles Dempsey* (2012).

GIORGIO GUALDRINI

After his High School studies, he graduated from Florence University. He has been working as an architect since 1979, mainly operating in the restoration and rehabilitation of historical city centres as well as residential and service building interventions. In 1990 he was awarded the first prize of the “Concorso Nazionale per il riassetto del presbiterio della Cattedrale di Faenza” (National contest for the rearrangement of the chancel of the Faenza Cathedral), a 15th century building by architect Giuliano da Maiano; the work has still not been executed yet.

As for museums, in the year 2000 he realized the restoration project and setup design for the Museo Diocesano nel Palazzo Episcopale di Faenza-Modigliana (Diocesan Museum housed in the Faenza-Modigliana Episcopal Palace), which only in 2011 was brought to a first, partial completion, followed by the publication of the volumes *Museo, arte sacra, città* (2011) and *Dalle Chiese al museo* (with A. Tambini, 2012). He has been singled out in

international architecture contests and has exhibited at the Triennale in Milan. His works and essays have been published in several specialized books and journals, including *C e A partners*, *Almanacco di Casabella*, *Parametro*, *La nuova città*, *Recuperare l'edilizia*, *I confini della città*, *Chiesa Oggi* and *Arte Cristiana*, the International art history and liturgical arts journal. His professional activity is accompanied by a deep personal theoretical research, very often expanding to sacred architecture, philosophy and religion. He published among others: *Spazio architettonico e spazio liturgico della Cattedrale di Faenza prima e dopo il Concilio Ecumenico Vaticano II* (1992), *Lo spazio dell'incontro con l'altro. Architettura e rito* (1995). Restoration in architecture represents the main topic of the volume *Ritornare ad Itaca?* (1999). He has also dealt with the themes of urban history and rural landscape and investigated the relationship between children and cities, published in *Appunti per una urbanistica raccontata ai ragazzi* (1990), with a preface by architect Giovanni Michelucci, written a few months before his death.

LOTTEN GUSTAFSSON REINIUS

Associate professor, born in Uppsala, Sweden 1965. Current position as curator (of globalization) at Museum of Ethnography, Stockholm. Board member of Advanced Cultural Studies Institute in Sweden (AC SIS) and member of editorials boards of *Respons*, *Ethnologia Europea* and *Culture Unbound*.

Research interests at the intersection of material and ritual culture, new museology and the social dynamics of mobility, memory and identity. In recent years, focusing mostly on ethnographic collections and exhibitions. She has published a number of articles, in Swedish, English and French, for instance in *Ethnologie Française* and *the Senses and Society* and anthologies such as *National Museums* (2011) and *Participatory Media in Historical Perspective* (2012).

2010-2014: Research project "Rites of Reconciliation in the Post-secular Museum", funded by the Swedish Research Council.

2010-2012: Head of research projects, "Sacred Things in the Post-secular Society" and "The State of Things", both funded by the Swedish Art Council.

Curating and co-curating exhibitions such as "Traces of the Congo, 'The Missionary Ethnographic Exhibition of 1907'", "The Store - an Ethnographic Treasure" and "Fetish Modernity".

2005-2009: Assistant professor in ethnology, Stockholm University.

2002-2004: Postdoc project on Swedish-Congolese collections at Museums of World culture, funded by Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation.

2002: Doctorate dissertation in Ethnology, Stockholm University.

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Is a curator and Research associate in Museum Studies at the Technical University Berlin. From November 2009 she was responsible for the research project "Exhibition Experiment Museology. On Curating Islamic Art and Culture". The findings of this will contribute to the refurbishment of the Museum of Islamic Art in Berlin. She is also working for the Marib Museum Project, a cooperative between the German Archaeological Institute, Branch Sanaa and the Yemeni Social Fund for Development. She has edited the book, together with Lidia Guzy and Rainer Hatoum, *From Imperial Museum to Communication Centre? On the new Role of Museums as Mediators between Science and Non-Western Societies* (2010) and written numerous articles on museums of Islamic Art and Cultures and museums in the Arab World.

MARIA MADDALENA MARGARIA

Has a five year degree in Architecture and a Master of science in Art History.

In 2012 she received PhD in Cultural Heritage with a thesis about cultural park in the metropolitan contest. She worked with Studio Baciocchi of Arezzo participating in many projects for the PRADA's group. Since 2011 she is research fel-

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NATAŠA POLAJNAR FRELIH

Born in 1966, holds a master's degree in Art History and a bachelor's degree in Ethnology. She started working at the Slovene Museum of Christianity as a curator in 1995. She has been a museum advisor since 2006. As a co-organizer of the exhibition "The History of Christianity in Slovenia", in 2003 she received the Valvasor Museum Award and the municipal Josip Jurčič Award. In 2004 she represented Slovenia with a paper at the international conference "The Best in Heritage", held in Dubrovnik. She publishes articles on Art History and Museology in scholarly and popular publications. She has written two independent publications and has coauthored eight museum publications. She has been the director of the Museum since 2003.

MARIA ISABEL ROQUE

Master of Arts (2000) and Doctor of Philosophy (2006) in History, specialization in Museology at the Lusíada University (Lisbon), with a thesis titled *Musealização do sagrado: práticas museológicas em torno de objetos do culto católico*. Invited Assistant Professor at the Catholic University of Portugal, Lisbon, since 2002 and at the Universidade Europeia / Laureate International Universities, since 2007. Curator at several religious art exhibitions, such as "Encontro de Culturas = Encounter of Cultures" (Lisbon, 1994; Vatican, 1996) and "Fons Vitae" (Pavilion of the Holy See at World Expo, Lisbon, 1998). Member of the research group on Portuguese version of the *Thesaurus: Religious Objects of the Catholic Faith* at the Catholic University of Portugal. Author of the books *Altar cristão. Evolução até à Reforma Católica* (Universidade Lusíada, 2004) and *O sagrado no museu: Musealização de objectos do culto católico em contexto português* (Universidade Católica, 2011) and of several articles on Religious Art, History of Museology and Communication on the museum.

ALESSANDRO TOSINI

Is an architect and a scholar in History of Architecture, Town and Territory; his favourite topics regard "disappeared" contexts. He gets the master degree in Architecture at 'Politecnico di Torino' in 2008 (110/110 *cum laude*); his thesis, entitled *De lignamine et petra constructum*, concerns the diachronic analysis of settlements and building techniques in north-western Italy during the Dark Ages. He graduates at the Scuola di Archivistica, Paleografia e Diplomatica at the Archivio di Stato di Torino on September 2011. He's received the PhD in Cultural Heritage at the Dipartimento Interateneo di Scienze, Progetto e Politiche del Territorio of Politecnico di Torino since January 2010. His research project regards the compared study of imperial palatial contexts, in the Mediterranean and Near-Eastern area during the Dark Ages. He's following other paths of research as well, concerning the urban and territorial configuration of the town of Alessandria (Piedmont) during the Middle Ages; the material features of makeshift fortifications in the second half of the 16th century, and the connection between communication and perception of archaeological findings inside the museum.

SOPHIA VACKIMES

Is in charge of the museum studies research area at the Institut Català de Recerca en Patrimoni Cultural in Girona, Catalunya. She has written extensively on topics ranging from science and medicine in museums to issues dealing with architectural spaces housing museums as sites of populism. She studies folklore and anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, Museum Studies at New York University and received her doctoral degree from The New School for Social Research. She spent three post-doctoral years doing research at the Max-Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin. Her curatorial and research work has been enhanced by experiences in New York, Mexico City, Oaxaca, Berlin and Barcelona.

The relation between religion and museum is particularly fertile and needs an organic, courageous and interdisciplinary reflection. An established tradition of a religion museology / let alone a religion museography / does not exist as yet, as well as a project coordinated at European level able to coagulate very different disciplinary skills, or to lay the foundations for a museums' Atlas related to this theme.

Our intention was to investigate the reasons as well as the ways in which religion is addressed (or alternatively avoided) in museums. Considerable experiences have been conducted in several countries and we need to share them: this collection of essays shows a complex, multifaceted frame that offers suggestions and ideas for further research.

The museum collections, as visible signs of spiritual contents, can really contribute to encourage intercultural dialogue.

On cover

Kolumba. View of one of the rooms of the exhibition

"Art is Liturgy. Paul Thek and the Others" (2012/2013).

On the walls: "Without Title", 28 etchings by Paul Thek, 1975-1992. Hanging from the ceiling: "Madonna on the Crescent", a Southern-German wooden sculpture of the early sixteenth century (© Kolumba, Köln / photo Lothar Schnepf).



€ 25,00