

MeLa

ISSUE
#02

news

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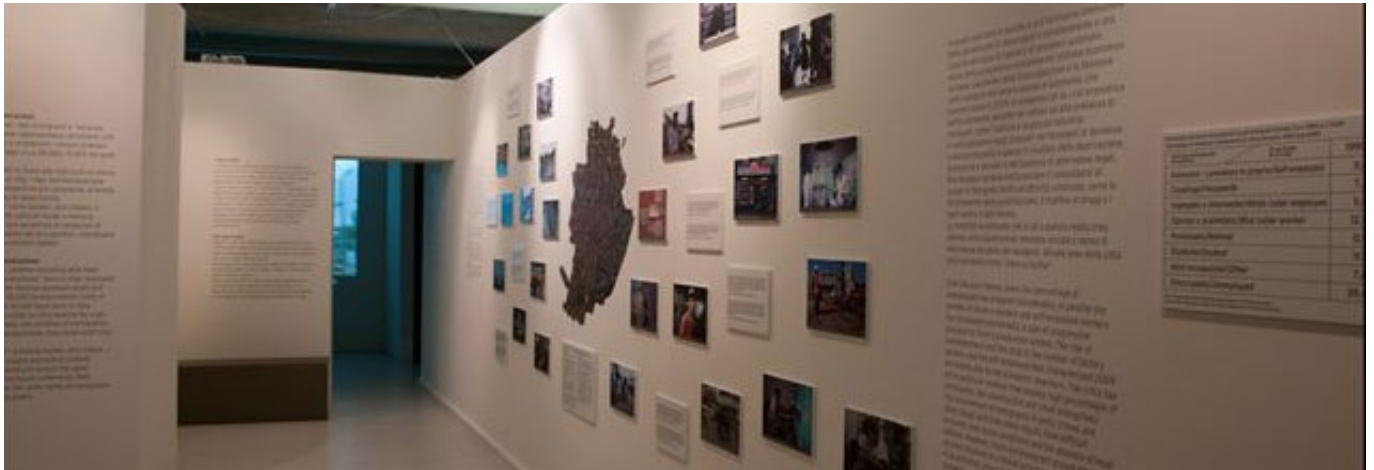


Photo: the exhibition 'Turin Earth', Museo Diffuso, Turin.

→ EDITORIAL

The ceremony for the assignment of the ICOM Italia prize for '2011 Museum of the Year' was anticipated by an International Conference investigating the strategies that museums should develop to afford the current crisis, which is menacing the activities (and the survival) of cultural Institutions; this fact can be read as the umpteenth signal reporting the growing relevance and widespread consequences of this critical historical moment, characterized by significant economic, political, social, and cultural changes.

The European cultural framework is reflecting and reacting to this complex situation; the particular context, within the general evolution connoting contemporaneity, imposes the reassessment of the museum Institution, enhanced by the rising debate about its role and mission. One of the most significant issues influencing this process is the strategic contribution museums can make in the creation and promotion of the idea of European citizenship, fostering the diffusion of a common shared identity. Migration, mobility, identity, citizenship, the relationship between history and memory: these issues and their representation today are the crucial questions that museums cannot avoid facing, as the analysis of the current trends in ongoing projects, research programmes, and overall cultural agendas demonstrate. By focusing on this particular aspect of the transformation of the museum Institutions,

the MeLa Project aims to contribute to the core topics of the current debate on contemporary museums with theoretical, critical, and operative results.

The first months after the beginning of the research activities were characterized by ongoing news and challenging commitments. As illustrated in the 'MeLa related events' section of our website, the frequent and diffused participation of MeLa Partners to various conferences and seminars offered the opportunity to disseminate the Project contents and objectives, to confront with scholars, experts, and Institutional representatives, to cultivate a more and more rich cultural network, and to collect different stimuli. These incentives and feedback which were furthermore enhanced by the discussion with the new EC Officer, represented an occasion to better focus the research programmes.

Hence the MeLa Project is currently redefining its workplan, by making museums the core topic of the research: the official meeting of all MeLa Partners in Barcelona was a crucial opportunity to discuss this evolution, to share the first findings, and to confront research advancements.

In this Newsletter Issue we report on these activities; in other articles and columns we provide a brief overview of ongoing projects, debates, and events that can contribute to depict the cultural context in which the MeLa Project is developing.

Post note to a thought-provoking exhibition

In Italy most of the cultural events that took place in 2011 have been dedicated to the celebration of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of Italian Unity. Amongst these, the Museo Diffuso in Turin has promoted a biennial research programme, 'Turin Hearth', a series of events aimed at fostering a reflection on the social and cultural changes of the city produced by the recent migrations. Migrations are explored in all their aspects: from immigration to emigration, including internal mobility, investigating their impact on the city and its inhabitants, in relation with the complex issues such as human rights and citizenship consciousness that represent core topics in the mission of museums.

The research programme is now closing with a very interesting exhibition, *Turin Earth: cities and new migrations*, trying to represent the core topics of the research, moving from the general presentation of the city as a whole and gradually focusing on the individual ways of living the city. It is a sort of virtual walk through districts and streets, crossing new public spaces such as squares, cultural, commercial, as well as working places, which enhance new social identities and hybrid cultures. The selection of the exhibited materials includes interviews, statistical data, videos, and objects collected and displayed with an ethnographical approach.

Different kinds of maps - including an interactive instrument based on Google Earth, and mind maps produced by immigrants - are used to represent new geographies, borders, and proximity values by exploring the maps' capacity to represent the complexity of contemporary reality. Moreover, several cultural activities have been organized in connection with the programme, such as film festivals, conferences, theatrical events, and other initiatives, fostering the active participation of people, especially immigrants (for example as promoters of city tours, or special guides to the exhibition).

The aim of this experience is not simply to represent a specific city, but to propose several narrations from different perspectives. By displaying the plurality of points of view produced by different actors, the exhibition generates a plural glimpse of the city, as if they were different cities, which sometimes manage to communicate, some others don't. Though in the exhibition design it is possible to read the effects of the economic crisis and the resulting cut in cultural funding, we recognize the relevance of this programme which dares to afford difficult themes and messages, and in addition indicates possible frictions, by trying to experiment new meth-

in 2012 and 2013 there will be further cuts to the culture funding

ods to enhance the dialogue, to represent multiple cultures, and to stimulate a reflection on the new identity ensuing from their encounter. The exhibition itself is not meant

The use of ICT in the communication of Cultural Heritage

On October 27 the Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design organized a Seminar about the use of ICT in the communication of Cultural Heritage, within the framework of the MeLa Project.

The Seminar was attended by the representatives of various Danish Institutions, such as The Royal Library, The Music Museum under the National Museum, The National Museum, The Copenhagen Museum, Newcomers under the State and University Library, The State and University Library, Odense Library, Heritage Agency of Denmark, The Danish Agency for Library and Media. The agenda and the invitation for the Seminar were created in collaboration with Jakob Heide Petersen, the Director of the Department of Libraries at the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media.

The meeting was an opportunity to introduce the MeLa Project to the Danish museum and library sector, and to initiate the establishment of a local network that can foster the research and contribute to the

as a definitive repository of cultural objects, but as a real "contact zone" crossed by different objects and persons.

That of 'Turin Hearth' is not an isolated case. In Italy as in other European Countries, similar experiences have been carried on successfully in different local museums. These expe-

the challenge of the construction, communication and representation of contemporary multiple identities can be efficiently exploited at a local level

periences seem to suggest that the challenge of the construction, communication, and representation of contemporary multiple identities from a transcultural and transnational perspective can be efficiently exploited at a local level, where museums are not constrained by the binding commitments of representing an official message, and where a closer relation with the communities can be enhanced day by day.

Anyway it is necessary to remember that the current Italian situation is critical; according to the ICOM's previsions, in 2012 and 2013 there will be further cuts to the funding of culture both from public and private sources. In 2011 in Milano two major cultural Institutions, such as Fondazione Pomodoro and Fondazione Mazzotta, were obliged to interrupt their activities, causing an impoverishment of the city's cultural offer. The Museo Diffuso of Turin is facing a similar condition, because of the serious difficulties in affording the consequences of the economic crisis. Fostering a spirit of collaboration, we consider it important to focus the attention on

upcoming events. The participants demonstrated great interest in the overall topic of the MeLa Research.

Moreover, the Seminar represented an important moment for discussion, through which it was possible to highlight the challenges and opportunities that these cultural institutions face in their everyday work, especially concerning the use of ICT as a means of narration and dissemination of Cultural Heritage. The CIID MeLa team presented a set of research findings and fruitful directions developed through their sector research and case study collection. These findings were centred on ICT applications in museums which allow for dynamic identity presentation, crowd sourcing and user-invitation based initiatives, as well as context reframing applications that challenge the operational footprint of the library and museum. The main issues highlighted by the participants were focused on the challenges connected to the digitalization of collections, archives without user in-

this situation.

The core funding of the Museo Diffuso in Turin comes from the fees of its public founding partners, who guarantee the functioning of the museum in compliance with minimum standards. Today the Institution must afford negative financial conditions, largely

due to the non-payment of precedent fees by the founding partners. What is more, since these partners could not give any assurance as to the 2012 fee, at the moment the prosecution of its activities for next year remain uncertain. The reaction of the Museo Diffuso in Turin to this situation is focused on the enhancement of a direct dialogue between cultural institutions and society at large: only through this kind of collaboration it will be possible to find effective solutions, thus to guarantee the survival of the activities within the field of conservation, diffusion, and memory of the values related to the Resistance, the war, and the Constitution of the Republic.

Francesca Lanz, post-doc research fellow, Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI)



terfaces, as well as to the question of providing an experience vs. information: what are the differences and similarities between the two? How to transform the communication of information into an experience? Also the challenges connected to the use of new technology were discussed, and the fact that new technology quickly turns into old technology. The participants recognized great potentialities in the future cooperation that may grow in this research area.

Kirsti Reitan Andersen, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design (CIID)



MeLa in Barcelona: advancing answers, entering new questions

The MeLa Project was conceived as the opportunity to investigate the effects of the migration of cultures, identities, knowledge and values, whose movement relevantly increased in the passage from 20th to 21st Century, and the way they are triggering a profound transformation of the Museum Institution. In order to understand and to foster this necessary renovation, interpreting the evolution of the European cultural framework, the research focus is set on the interrogation of shifting identities and the encounter of different ideas.

At a different scale, the critical encounter of diverse ideas, interacting and sparking new contents and meanings, depicts an adequate image to represent the second general meeting of the MeLa Consortium; the reunion of all the Partners, sharing and debating their opinions, findings and skills, allowed to provide preliminary answers and, above all, to enter further challenging questions.

As set by the first assembly in Rome - the kick-off meeting at Musei Capitolini - the location for these events is selected amongst particularly significant and inspiring places; this workshop was held at Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, from 21st to 23rd November.

The dense program of discussions, presentations, general and specific operative assemblies allowed to widen and enrich the cultural context to which the research activities relate - for example highlighting the relevance of the migration theme on several types of museum, as explained by Professor Luca Basso Peressut from Politecnico di Mi-

lano - on the other to better focus the aims of the Project, both concerning the theoretic frame - as illustrated by University of Newcastle and Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale - and the operative objectives, that include the setting of international conferences, the promotion of the programmed exhibitions - through the effort of Royal College of Art - the development of the analytical tools necessary to share knowledge and foster the collaboration between the Partners - as promoted by the Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design - the enhancement of a growing network of scholars and Institutions - to which the work of the University of Glasgow is contributing.

The meeting also benefited from the presence of the European Commission Delegate, Denis Besnainou (DG Research & Innovation in Social Sciences and Humanities), who pointed out the general interest and the expectations about the Project, and remembered the potential relevance of its results in defying and disseminating best practices, promoting cultural enhancement and excellence in education and skills development, as well as driving cultural affairs policies for the transmission of European values.

After the kick-off in Rome, the MeLa meeting in Barcelona turned out as a fundamental throw-in, an opportunity to verify the direction of the research, and to display a thorough knowledge of the goal and the steps necessary to reach it.

Elena Montanari, post-doc research fellow, Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI)

→ MELA RELATED: ONE BOOK

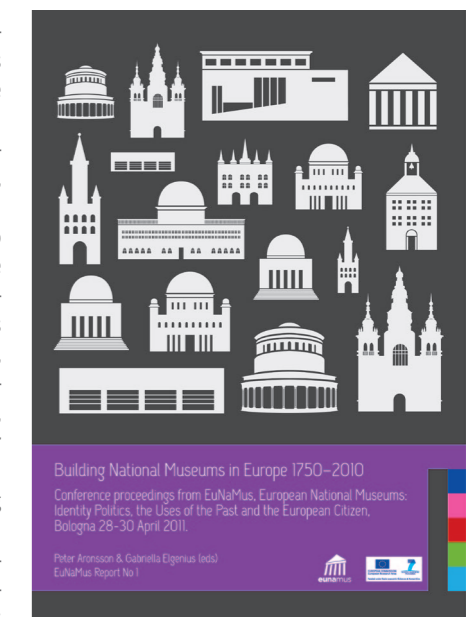
Aronsson, Peter and Gabriella Elgenius. 2011. *Building National Museums in Europe 1750-2010. Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Bologna 28-30 April, 2011.* Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press.

The publication is the latest output of the EU-funded triennial research EuNaMus: European National Museums - a multidisciplinary project that sees the collaboration of eight leading educational institutions across Europe. Resulting from the conference held in Bologna in 2011, the text provides a comparative overview of national museums in Europe and sets forth questions as to their role in articulating and representing national values, identities, and citizenship-formation processes.

On the strength of a comprehensive mapping of national museums in their historical development, the editors make a claim that the institutions at issue constitute negotiation platforms where the shaping of social-political communities takes place. Different strategies to the substantiation of nationhood are then identified, and analyzed in structured in-depth case studies, which range from stabilizing practices, to diversity-including narratives, to ambiguous multi-layered trajectories.

Clelia Pozzi, research fellow, Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI)

The report, released as an Open Access publication, can be downloaded from the MeLa website in the Publication Area.



Cover of the book Building National Museums in Europe 1750-2010. Conference Proceedings from EuNaMus, European National Museums: Identity Politics, the Uses of the Past and the European Citizen, Bologna 28-30 April, 2011.



Photo: children workshop at Museo del Novecento (Milan) presented by A. Cimoli during her speech.

The history of migration in museums

Is there room for discussing the subject of immigration in 21st century Italian museums?

A survey on the Italian contemporary situation, developed by the MeLa research group from Politecnico di Milano, shows a dramatic conflict between the well-rooted presence of migrants in our society and the silence of the museums, which reflects wider governmental choices and policies.

Despite the discrete number of Italian museums dedicated to the migration theme – mainly narrating the story of emigration from Italy – most of the questioning and investigating doesn't seem to take place in these institutions but in other venues, such as in contemporary art museums, and in their educational departments, or in the demo-ethno-anthropological museums, even on a very local scale. In these institutions the research starts from the enhancement of migrants' participation into the proposed activities, aimed at arousing discussion, stimulating reflection on cultural differences and orientations, leaving 'permanent' traces in form of works of art (videos), exhibitions, books, so as to shape the permanent museums philosophy starting from apparently 'ephemeral' occasions.

This is the core issue of the contribution presented by Anna Chiara Cimoli on behalf of the MeLa Consortium during the interna-

tional conference promoted by Blaise Pascal University, 'The History of Migration in Museums: Between Memory and Politics', held in Clermont-Ferrand from 17 to 19 November. Investigating the issues related to negotiating memory and identity, balancing the material and immaterial aspects of heritage, narrating the present and its historical and political challenges, the conference explored the strategies through which different museums handle the history of migration theme. Some contributions were dedicated to the specific case of the migration museums, dealing with peculiar preservation efforts, with the correlation between exhibition content, academic findings, and political integration strategies, and with the problematic sharing of the idea of 'nation', connected with the potential role of museums in consolidating or modifying the mainstream narration. The debate also highlighted the crucial role of temporary exhibitions, offering new viewpoints on neglected aspects, or proposing unconventional interdisciplinary approaches.

The researchers who organized the conference are also members of 'Citoyennetés, Empires, Identités, Politiques', a subbranch of the French research group 'Espaces Humains et Interactions'.

Anna Chiara Cimoli, Politecnico di Milano (POLIMI)

→ MELA PARTNERS: MUSEU D'ART CONTEMPORANI DE BARCELONA

One of the peculiarities of the MeLa Consortium, composed of nine European Partners, is the interdisciplinary approach enhanced through the interaction of various disciplines, as well as the thematic structure aimed at building a large and heterogeneous network of excellence. The participation of two Museums acting at an international level plays a fundamental role in the Project development, in order not only to foster academic research but also field experiences: this Newsletter issue intends to highlight the work of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona.

Through its collections, exhibitions, and activities, MACBA aims to construct a critical memory of Art of the latter half of the 20th Century, focusing on post-1945 Catalan and Spanish production, but also including foreign art, in order to enhance a permanent col-

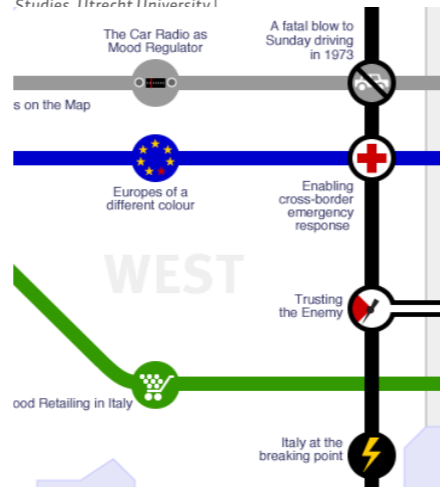
lection which represents the principal tendencies and the different ambiances of contemporary artistic creation. MACBA achieved international prestige through continuous research work and an energetic contribution in the expansion of international networks at different levels, by developing stable relations with other institutions that are flourishing in joint collaborative spaces, as well as by co-producing exhibitions and lending activities. As a museum and a study center, MACBA developed a leading role in the production of knowledge, enhancing its own style in the presentation of contemporary art, offering a high-quality, original exhibition program with an outstanding impact, producing and co-producing influential publications and significant conceptual contributions, providing educational services, such as conferences, courses, and seminars.

→ MELA RELATED: ONE PROJECT

'Inventing Europe' is a pioneering online collaboration between historians, cultural heritage institutions, and web developers, allowing users to explore how, where, and why technologies were fundamental to shaping modern Europe. The project is coordinated by the Foundation for the History of Technology and supported by the Technical University of Eindhoven. The project is based on the research developed in the forthcoming six-part book series 'Making Europe: Technology and Transformations 1850-2000'. This research is brought into dialogue with material from a consortium of cultural heritage institutions throughout Europe, including science and technology museums, media archives, and local and national history museums. Images, sounds, and videos from partners' collections are placed in an interactive environment along with related content from the rich and growing online collections of museums, archives, and libraries, including 'Europeana'. Users will be able to assemble their own paths through history, and a new range of voices will gather around the exhibited objects.

The project is due for release in the first half of 2012. A prototype exhibition, 'Europe, Interrupted' is currently online at www.inventingeurope.eu.

Dr. Alexander Badenoch, Department of Media and Culture Studies, Utrecht University



Mistaken Identity? A personal view of the conference 'the Museum 2011. Building identity: The Making of National Museums and Identity Politics'

Two narratives clashed at this event, as well as speakers from the cultural establishment (big museums, academic departments, and fashionable design companies) met with researchers and cultural activists exploring 'national identity' at the ground and street level. Did they find any common ground?

It is quite striking to remark that none of the keynote or main session speakers tried to define or debate what national identity actually means. Hard to avoid a sneaking impression that whoever's paying the bill gets to be the 'nation' and their appointed (or self-appointed) experts provide the identity. This couldn't be in sharper contrast to many of the fascinating papers presented at the smaller 'parallel sessions' by practitioners, students, and museum professionals from

national identity as a mosaic, not a masterwork

different backgrounds and countries. The message they conveyed was clear – national identity is varied, dynamic, contested, elusive, ever-changing, and narrated through many voices to many audiences. It should

be the subject of debate, discussion, and experimentation.

A conference on national museums and identity politics was always going to be controversial. What did we all learn from being there?

First, that the people who get to commission, build, design, and create national identity museums live a long, long way from the people those museums are supposed to be about. Second, that the single, top-down voice exercises an almost hypnotic attraction for cultural and museum professionals worldwide. Yet a hundred thousand other voices are there to be heard and many skilled, committed people can bring them to you. Through research, openness, dialogue, new technologies, and a willingness to listen, the dynamic diversity of national identity from below can become part of the mainstream narrative.

National identity as a mosaic, not a masterwork.

Tim Gardom, TGA Ltd
<http://www.timgardomassociates.co>



The conference 'the Museum 2011', which took place in Taipei from 16th to 18th November, was organized by the School of Museum Studies of Leicester University in collaboration with National Taipei University of Education, National Museum of History of Taipei and Victoria and Albert Museum of London. It was an opportunity for scholars, experts, and practitioners from different disciplines and countries to meet and discuss about the evolution of the contemporary museum. The MeLa Consortium was represented here by Francesca Lanz, who introduced a paper investigating 'The narratives of migration and the representation of national identity in Italian Migration Museum'.

Further information about the event is available on the MeLa website and blog.

→ MELA NETWORK

The Neukölln Museum is the most important segment for the teaching of history and everyday culture in Neukölln. It also represents a meeting place dedicated to the aggregation and integration of the various groups that compose the population living in Neukölln, by fostering the dialogue to share experiences and perspectives from different cultures and generations. The new location of the museum in Britz offers the opportunity to expand the concept of the institution and its so-called 'historical memory' setting. Thus, the archives and depot area were brought together for the first time in the same location. The goal is to narrate the story of the citizens of the Neukölln district on several levels.

<http://www.museum-neukoelln.de>

Museo Diffuso della Resistenza, della Deportazione, della Guerra, dei Diritti, della Libertà opened in 2003 as an initiative of the Municipality of Turin, in cooperation with other founding partners. Beyond hosting a permanent exhibition, over the past years the museum promoted thirty-five temporary exhibitions, all of which dealt with present and past themes connected to the memory from the 20th Century. The museum also organizes guided tours in the most relevant memory sites in the city, and on particular occasions it proposes special activities inside and outside of its premises.

<http://www.museodiffusotorino.it>

roots&routes - research on visual culture Independent quarterly Magazine of Visual Culture

The roots&routes Magazine investigates aesthetical and anthropological practices in order to propose and promote a discourse on identity and difference. Exploring the potential for critical openings and reconfigurations, the journal provides a platform for considering how contemporary art is interpellated by curatorial practices in a manner that leads to a significant investigation of the relationship between museums and contemporary art in the light of a new, radically self-reflexive, anthropology.

The roots&routes project stems from the need to create a space for reflection on the role that contemporary aesthetics play, or can play, in relation to anthropological themes and contexts, and in relation to a global scenario which discusses and problematizes the concept of colonial and post-colonial. The magazine aims to carry out a contextual and positioned re-reading of colonialism and post-colonialism as a process of planetary and transnational relevance that concerned, and still concerns, both the colonizing countries and the colonized.

Every issue of roots&routes has a theme through which some contributions are requested from several researchers, theoreticians and artists, but the magazine is also open to other contributions, which can be submitted to the Editorial Board via the call

for submission. Contributions may be in different formats: videos, images, audio, interviews and texts. Past themes have explored: Art and politics, Burning archives, Desire, Space is a doubt. The next one focuses on Censorship, Quotation, the In-visible, and Display. Seeking to present itself as an international platform, roots&routes has chosen to keep all contributions in their original language, without any translation.

The magazine is co-directed by Viviana Gravano, contemporary art historian, and Giulia Grechi, visual anthropologist (and research fellow at "L'Orientale", Naples, as a member of the EU Project "Mela – European Museums in the Age of Migrations"), along with an editorial team composed of three young curators of contemporary art: Paola Bommarito, Silvia Calvarese, Rossana Macaluso.

<http://www.roots-routes.org>

Giulia Grechi, University of Naples "L'Orientale" (UNO)

roots & routes
research on visual cultures

MeLa Publication Widens its Contents

The MeLa Publication Section is growing by including a selection of essays, books, and articles related to the Project research domains, providing useful stimuli for their implementation.

The first two documents were developed by members of the MeLa Network with the direct involvement of some of the scholars of the network itself, such as the Conference proceedings from EuNaMus,

European National Museums edited by Peter Aronsson and Gabriella Elgeniu and, as well as a thematic section of the papers from the Conference 'Exhibiting Europe', published in the peer-reviewed journal Culture Unbound.

Find out more in the MeLa Publication Section.

→ MELA ONGOING

The MeLa Project currently is in the first phase of its research activity, which is devoted to a survey on the state-of-the-art in the project domains. The Consortium's efforts are now focused on having a clear and exhaustive pattern of the research in the field, gathering stimuli and indications also from other research actions and enhancing synergic influences in order to improve the exchange of ideas amongst the wider European research community. Here below a preliminary schedule of MeLa forthcoming events.

MeLa Think Tank:

March 2012, Naples, Italy.

The first MeLa Think Tank organized by the University of Naples (DSUS) will gather an interdisciplinary group in order to brainstorm about *Cultural Memory, Migrating Modernity and Museums Practices*.

MeLa Workshop:

April 2012, Copenhagen, Denmark.

The next research meeting of MeLa Partners to share the research advancement, discuss and develop further activities.

International Conference:

September 2012, Conference on Museums & Identity in History and Contemporaneity.

Organized by the University of Newcastle (ICCHS)

→ MELA RELATED FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Symposium:

Whose Participation? Spaces of Interaction in Contemporary Art and Architecture.

Promoted by the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich
16 – 17 December 2011
Zurich, Switzerland | Cabaret Voltaire

Conference:

European National Museums: Making Communities and Negotiating Conflicts.

Promoted by EuNaMus and the House of European History
25 January 2012
Brussels, Belgium | Royal Museums of Art and History

Conference:

Opening the Boundaries of Citizenship.

Promoted by the European Research Council funded project Oecumene
06 – 07 February 2012
Milton Keynes, UK | Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University

Symposium:

Everyday Belongings: Theorising the Self, Society and Change.

promoted by the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich
17 February 2012
Manchester, United Kingdom | Kanaris Theatre, Manchester Museum

→ MELA RELATED ACTIVE CALL FOR PAPERS

Call for paper:

Living Together 'in' Diversity: National Societies in the Multicultural Age.

Promoted by Central European University
Budapest, Hungary
DEADLINE: 21 December 2012

Call for paper:

The Transformative Museum.

Promoted by Roskilde University and University of Southern Denmark
Odense, Denmark
DEADLINE: 6 January 2012

Workshop:

Spotlight on Multiculturalism.

Promoted by the Dialogue Society, Birmingham Branch, with Keele University and Fatih University Manchester, UK
DEADLINE: 10 January 2012

Call for paper:

Digital Crossroads.

Promoted by Utrecht University
Utrecht, the Netherlands
DEADLINE: 10 January 2012

Call for paper:

Intersectionality and the Spaces of Belonging.

Promoted by Bangor University
Bangor, United Kingdom
DEADLINE: 22 January 2012

Call for Project:

Redefinition of the Lobby of MACBA Study Center.

Promoted by MACBA
Barcelona, Spain
DEADLINE: 25 January 2012

Find out more details about MeLa Related Events into the MeLa website



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NEWSLETTER EDITORS: Francesca Lanz and Elena Montanari
GRAPHIC DESIGN: Zetalab.com

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PROJECT DURATION: March 1, 2011 – February 28, 2015
COORDINATOR: Professor Luca Basso Peressut
COORDINATING ORGANISATION: Politecnico di Milano IT
PROJECT NO: EU FP Grant Agreement No 266757
RESEARCH AREA: SSH-2010-5.2-2
CONTRACT TYPE: collaborative project

