



MELA\*Books

# EUROPEAN MUSEUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

*Volume 1*

edited by  
Luca Basso Peressut  
Francesca Lanz  
and Gennaro Postiglione

*European Museums in the 21st Century: Setting the Framework*  
Vol. 1

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edited by Luca Basso Peressut, Francesca Lanz  
and Gennaro Postiglione

**MELA BOOK 07 – EUROPEAN MUSEUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: SETTING THE FRAMEWORK (VOL. 1)**

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These books grew out of the work of the Research Field 6, “Envisioning 21st Century Museums,” led by Luca Basso Peressut and Gennaro Postiglione, Politecnico di Milano, within the European project MeLa—*European Museums in an age of migrations*. MeLa is a four-year interdisciplinary research project funded in 2011 by the European Commission under the Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities Programme (Seventh Framework Programme). Adopting the notion of “migration” as a paradigm of the contemporary global and multicultural world, MeLa reflects on the role of museums and heritage in the twenty-first century. The main objective of the MeLa project is to define innovative museum practices that reflect the challenges of the contemporary processes of globalization, mobility and migration. As people, objects, knowledge and information move at increasingly high rates, a sharper awareness of an inclusive European identity is needed to facilitate mutual understanding and social cohesion. MeLa aims at empowering museums spaces, practices and policies with the task of building this identity. MeLa involves nine European partners—universities, museums, research institutes and a company—who will lead six Research Fields (RF) with a collaborative approach; this book is meant to report about the preliminary findings of the first research phases.

The editors would like to thank all the scholars who enriched this book with their suggestions and contributions, as well as all the museums and their staff, curators, directors, designers and architects who kindly provided information, images and drawings in support of our investigations. A mention goes to the English editors and translators, and to Elena Montanari, Cristina Colombo and the staff from Politecnico di Milano, who significantly contributed with their help to the editing of this book.

## Introduction

### European Museums: Mapping an Ongoing Change

The MeLa Project, funded in march 2011 by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Programme (Social Science and Humanities) is a four years long reserch project, which aims to investigate the effects of contemporary phenomena such as globalisation, demographic movement, transformation of migration patterns, increased mobility of people, as well as of objects, ideas and knowledge on the form, organisation, mission and status of museums, and to explore the likely potential role of museums in the construction of an inclusive European identity by facilitating mutual understanding and social cohesion.

Adopting the notion of “migration” as a paradigm of the contemporary global and multicultural world, MeLa reflects on the role of museums and heritage in Europe in the 21st century. The project aims to investigate how, and to what extent, changes in population flows and demography, the impact of new media, the consequent layerisation, complexification and fragmentation of societies and identities and, perhaps more importantly, the recognition of the central focus of such changes to the human experience of life and society in modernity, do, could and should, affect European museums. Focusing on the transformation of museums, seen as cultural spaces and processes as well as physical places, the main objective of the MeLa project is to identify innovative museum practices that reflect the challenges posed by what the project defines as “an age of migrations”—an age characterised by intensive migration flows; accelerated mobility and fluid circulation of information, cultures, ideas and goods; the political, economic and cultural process of creation and consolidation of the European Union, and the consequent high degree of cultural encounters and cross-fertilisation.

The project’s Research Field 6, *Envisioning 21st Century Museums*—which is developed in parallel to and in consultation with the other five project research areas—is aimed at pinpointing innovative models, practices and tools to further the role of European museums in promoting new democratic and inclusive forms of citizenship, contributing to foster dialogue between the different ethnic, religious, social and generational groups which characterise our societies, and furthering awareness and education among new citizens and young generations.

While the investigation and the consideration of the role of contemporary museums and heritage has nowadays become a relevant component of the European agenda and lively debate on the subject is gaining prominence, nurtured also by several research projects and academic studies, museums themselves are questioning their *raison d’être* and roles, and undergoing a process of deep transformation of their missions, strategies, practices, spaces and exhibitions.

The present books collect the work of MeLa Research Field 6, *Envisioning 21st Century Museums*, and are meant to illustrate the preliminary results of its earlier investigations aimed at mapping and exploring such a transformation process and its features, particularly in terms of architecture renewal, museography and exhibition settings. The first phase of this research field thus focused on the possibility of mapping current trends in contemporary European museums in order to set up an overall picture of the state of the art of museum development in relation with the above-mentioned issues and questions. Its activity has been aimed at defining a general framework for the development of subsequent research phases, that are the identification of strategies and practices to support a renewed and increased role for museums, and the revision of their contribution in building a democratic inclusive European citizenship through practicable and effective intervention by EU policy-makers and the institutions working in cultural and educational fields. This research has been investigating different categories of museums, individuated as those which better represent the current status of European museums, including: national history museums, ethnographic museums and museums of cultures, migration museums, city museums, local museums, and war museums. Because of the relevance of some museographical practices in the representation of the evolution of contemporary museums, the research activity has been extended to the transversal topic of temporary exhibition design.

Due to the large quantity of gathered materials, the publication has been divided into three volumes, each of which is organised into sections curated by a MeLa reseracher including a piece by the MeLa researchers involved in the investigation, contributions from scholars and museum practitioners, interviews and the presentation of significant examples of museums which are new, have been renewed or are under renovation. Particular attention has been paid to their architectural and exhibition design, which is intended as concretisation of innovative and sometimes highly experimental ideas of what we define as “new museography,” new models of representation and communication of knowledge.

The first volume opens with an overview on the evolution of contemporary national history museums, analysing how globalisation, migration phenomena and their effects have challenged these places of stabilisation, where identities are formed and displayed, and their transformation fostered into inclusive arenas of multiculturalism. By considering the representation of national identity as a political act in the sense outlined by political theorist Chantal Mouffe—acknowledging the aim of democracy in a pluralistic condition as the possibility of transforming antagonism into agonism, and creating unity in a context of conflict and diversity, as explained in the complementary text—Clelia Pozzi assumes the so-called “agonistic pluralism model,” which Mouffe had previously coupled with art museums, and applies it to national history museums. Her investigation of these institutions as “Agonistic Spaces” explores and exemplifies the museological, museographical and architectural translation of this model, illustrating the modalities in which migration and its agonistic effects may enter the rationale of these museums, a category which, more than others, seems to have been subjugated by coercive interpretations of states and regimes and, moreover, she redefines their role, strategies and spaces from within.

The review of the role of museums as places for the presentation, stabilisation and construction of identities is also crucial in ethnographic museums, which have been profoundly challenged by the mutation of the contemporary political, social and cultural context. The beginning of the 21st century represents a turning point for the role, objective and strategies associated with these institutions, reacting to the evolution of the colonial “west and the rest” model, as well as the effects of globalisation increasing cultural diversity and cosmopolitanism. Challenged by the claim for identity recognition and, at the same time, the demand for an egalitarian representation of cultural differences, the transformation of these institutions, aimed at displaying cultural pluralism, seems to aim at erasing colonial roots by turning the ethnographic approach into an aesthetic one, or by giving voice to minorities in the representation process. Through the comparative analysis of the different progress of new, re-established or refurbished institutions, Camilla Pagani and Mariella Brenna investigate the reasons, the nature and the extent of the current process of renovation, from institutional redefinitions to museological approaches, and categorisation of museums of world culture(s). The interpretation is also bolstered by interviews with some museum workers who are directly involved in this process. These include Maria Camilla de Palma, director of the Museo delle Culture del Mondo di Castello D’Albertis in Genoa, Klas Grinell, curator at the Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, and Vito Lattanzi, Director of the Educational Department at the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico “Luigi Pigorini”, in Rome, and by the theory contribution of Nélia Dias, Associate Professor at the Department of Anthropology at ISCTE-IUL, in Lisbon.

The evolving socio-cultural context also poses a challenge to museums of natural history. These museums have radically changed over recent decades in their relationship with what is at stake in society. Laurence Isnard,

Sarah Gamaire and Fabienne Galangau illustrate the transformations of these institutions, triggered by a powerful increase in the awareness of environmental issues along with their social consequences, the biodiversity crisis, and the development of new interdisciplinary research approaches. The piece explores how these phenomena have questioned the role of natural history museums and exhibitions as sources of knowledge and players in the conservation and validation of scientific and natural heritage, and investigates its evolution, benefiting from technological progress and communication techniques, as well as from growing knowledge on visitor expectations. By reporting the results of a recent survey developed by the authors, the text sheds light on the dynamism of these institutions and their commitment to renovation projects, especially those aimed at including diversity in cultural representations of nature. These considerations are supported by Giovanni Pinna, who questions the role of bureaucracy in the evolution of natural history museums, and of Judith Pargamin, director of the Musée d’Histoire Naturelle de Lille, who offers a highly citizen-oriented reflection on the renovation project of the museum.

In the second volume, the investigation begins by focusing on more local facts, bonded and rooted in specific communities, their stories and identities. Anna Chiara Cimoli attempts to map out and analyse the rise of a huge constellation of migration museums and temporary exhibitions that focus on the relationship between migration and identity. By investigating museological strategies, museographic tools and exhibition design trends that characterise this museum typology, the piece investigates the specificities, implications, difficulties and risks of displaying present and past mobility. By investigating how museology and museography choices can reveal, explain or, in some cases, gloss over the cultural policies and the more general local, national or international political attitudes towards migration, the piece aims to verify whether these institutions act as history museums, or whether they are evolving into vehicles to orient, educate, and participate in political debate. This exploration is complemented by the positions of Joachim Baur, highlighting the ability of migration museums in building a master narrative as a choral epic and a socially unifying experience, promoting a sense of community, representing the diversification of cultural identities, and fostering societal integration.

The rise of migration flows discloses a profound transformation of the current socio-cultural context which museums purport to represent, cooperating with other phenomena to enhance the role of certain locations, especially cities. While updated demographic forecasts envision that in the next 30 years the growth of the world’s population will mostly be concentrated in urban areas, the new economic and cultural opportunities offered by globalisation, the fluid mobility occurring at the European and world-wide level, together with the ongoing political, economic and cultural processes of creation of the European Union, are deeply influencing the development of contemporary cities posing both new changes and challenges. It is widely believed that, within this complex scenario,

city museums, as institutions historically responsible for representing the city, recording its transformations and conserving its memory and history, could and should, contribute to these transformations in several ways. Francesca Lanz investigates how city museums are reacting to these stimuli, questioning themselves, rethinking their mission, acquiring new roles and experimenting with new tools and strategies. The piece aims to outline this transformation process in order to interpret it, define its features, identify commonalities, challenges and possible criticalities, and analyse the museographical aspects related to such changes. These considerations are endorsed by the contribution of Jack Lohman who, as former director of the Museum of London, argues for the role of city museums as the endogenous development of communities in their diversity and shaping of the global community. The interview with historian Marie-Paule Jungblut, former deputy-director of the Musée d'histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg, adds reflections on the crucial role of international networking projects and the web for the advanced role of contemporary city museums, while different examples of a “new generation” of city museums presented by curators and directors, supports the reflections outlined in the opening piece.

City museums focus their mission on the past and present history of the described urban environments. Nevertheless, a large number of other museums drawing on the distinctive nature of specific locations are likely to play a significant role in the contemporary context.

The third volume focuses, on the one hand on very local museums and, on the other hand, on war museums and temporary exhibitions in national museums and it somehow comes full circle in this publication. As explained by Elena Montanari, the different institutions who aim to conserve, validate and “maternalise” the memory, heritage and culture related to specific places, are characterised by the employment of specific tools and strategies, which may turn out as particularly effective means to foster the role of museums as inclusive social agents in this “age of migrations.” Allowing for their status, forms and means, and variation according to their diverse backgrounds, management structures and conceptions of heritage and identity across different countries and cultures, local museums seem to share a common mission in preserving, interpreting, celebrating and presenting the visible symbols produced by human history in a specific environment. In addition, they also perpetuate the origins and sources of cultural heritage, opposing resistance to the effects of globalisation and the increased migrations of people, objects and knowledge, which include impoverishment and distortion of habitats and cultures, standardisation of space, homogenisation of material culture, dispersion of collective memory, etc. as well as assert continuity and stability through secure and rooted values, contrasting the disorientation of self-awareness and enabling societies to define and anchor their identity. The potential, challenges and risks currently pertaining to these institutions are further depicted through the words of Hugues De Varine, who outlines their

specificities, raises pivotal questions and proposes paradigmatic models and practices for their future.

Among the most significant national and local museums, the institutions ensuing from war memories and places are becoming crucial elements in heritage discourse. Luca Basso Peressut considers the many European museums that focus on war and its various representations, identifying two distinct situations. On the one hand, there are still in existence representative models typical of museums of weapons, of armies, and of military history, which were set up between the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. On the other hand, he observes that in recent decades there has been an increase in museums that are committed to emphasising how Europe needs to critically reinterpret its past and the conflicts that have marked it, both in a tangible and an intangible way, overcoming the “divided memories” that have dramatically marked the populations of the European continent as an essential requirement to build the political and cultural identity of Europe. With their tools and representation devices, museums dedicated to the history of European wars are committed to the raising of such awareness through a “policy of memory” that, with no sacralisation or vulgarisation, must involve all cultural institutions, including those devoted to the education of younger generations. Thus, Basso Peressut suggests the role of war museums is crucial in the process of building and consolidating a shared European memory and identity. Moreover, war museums convey the transnational value of those events that are part of a common history that transcends any geographical border, contributing to a better understanding of the importance (and fragility) of peace and freedom, and of the establishment of the European Union based on mutual respect and on the rejection of war as a solution to controversies.

The final chapter by Marco Borsotti analyses the role of temporary exhibitions in the dynamics of approaches of museums to innovative topics. Temporary exhibitions can be identified as significant strategies in the promotion of new approaches to the portrayal of museums, as well as in the search for public interest in media, and in the possibility of generating income, image and prestige. Today, temporary exhibitions are also visible manifestations of an educational, informative or celebratory discourse, which is characteristic of the rapid changeover in the communication rhetoric of contemporary society. Furthermore, temporary exhibition models can also be expressed in dazzling experiences of cultural innovation, leaving permanent displays with the more accustomed role of keeping continuity with historical portrayals and settings. This can be considered a strategy for the renewal of the representational assets of museums.

The overall aim of this investigation was to detect how, and whether, European museums in their diverse range of interests are reacting to the topics and issues of our “age of migrations” and to the changing conditions of production and fruition of culture, memory and identity. As Appadurai already noted almost twenty years ago, it is increasingly evident

that globalisation is not the story of cultural homogenisation, and that contemporaneity is more and more characterised by a high degree of cultural encounters and cross-fertilisations. We are in agreement with the philosopher Wolfgang Iser that the traditional description of cultures based on the ideas of “inner homogenisation” and “outer separation” is nowadays both descriptively and, in terms of legislation, inappropriate. Our analysis of new exhibition spaces and arrangements in museums of national and local relevance (a distinction which currently proves to be very blurred and perhaps to be overlooked), seems to suggest that the rise and the inclusion of new stances and approaches toward the role of museums and the narratives it puts on display are starting to foster not only a revision of the curatorial practices of museums and approaches but also of those consolidated exhibition design practices and museum organisation that reflected a premise of objectivity and reality and a traditional conception of identity as unique, homogeneous, and geo-politically defined, that is today brought into question by the shifting nature of contemporary cultural conditions in our contemporary “age of migrations.”

LBP, FL, GP

# Volume 1



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# National History Museums



### Fully Native

Who is an Indian? A Native American? An indigenous person? American Indian, First Nation, or Aboriginal? All these labels are used, but none is entirely correct. Who decides?

Are you a full blood? Half blood? Quarter blood?

The question of how much "Indian blood" you have—also called "blood quantum"—began with European contact. This colonial way of thinking continues when we keep defining ourselves by blood.

What part of you is Native? Is it your head? Your heart? Maybe it's your thoughts. But it is not just your blood.

We are the sum of all our parts. All human. One hundred percent. And fully Native.

Jolene Rickard, guest curator, and Gabrielle Tayac, NMAI, 2004

## Museums as Agonistic Spaces

→ CLELIA POZZI

An inquiry into the role of national museums in the contemporary age of migration is inherently controversial. Museums are per se places of stabilisation, places where identities are formed and displayed that comply with the beliefs of a dominant group. National museums are exalted types of museums, inasmuch as, historically, the worldview they have offered to the public was encoded in the political and institutional principles of the state's ruling authority. To put it in Marxist terms with Louis Althusser, national museums have served as "Ideological State Apparatuses," props of class domination that have reiterated the ruling ideology and have imposed a biased view of history (Althusser 1971). While this state of affairs is deeply ingrained in the history of civilisation, one is left to wonder how globalisation and its effects could be factored into the ideological construction that takes place in national museums. To be sure, the recent phenomena of migration and mobility have started to destabilise museums, encouraging their transformation into inclusive arenas of multiculturalism. Yet, if one such pluralistic and democratic turn in policy is largely agreed upon, what remains unknown is how to enact it.

One way of dealing with this rerouting would be to start by clarifying the meaning of the term "national," for one such definition has crucial implications for the social and political functions of museums as institutions. Indeed, how is the nation to be defined? Notably addressing this question in 1974, Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* offers a Marxist interpretation that still dwells on the conjunction between nation and state—an inextricable articulation of territorial framework, administrative-organisational hierarchies, and mental constructs aimed at exercising consensus in service of the state (Lefebvre 2012, 111). One such explana-

PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 1.01 — National Museum of the American Indians, Washington, 2004. The Museums does not seek to dissolve the plural identities of the Native American population into an all-encompassing narrative, but rather lets frictions emerge to depict a variegated and realistic image of society. Photo by Lubo Ivana.



IMG. 1.02 — “The Mixing Room,” (2010) at the Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand, Wellington. Within the permanent exhibition of the museum, a community gallery features regularly changing exhibitions that highlight the contributions made to New Zealand by migrating populations. © Kate Whitley.



tion certainly runs contrary to any attempt at promoting a pluralistic and fluid understanding of the nation. Nevertheless, a more suitable scenario may arise as a reaction to this very logic. In fact, if we undermine the basis of Lefebvre's argument by disengaging the “nation” from the “state,” we regain the independence of the nation from the geographic and administrative configuration of the state. What is more, one corollary follows that is fundamental for the purpose of our research. This is the distinction between state and national museum, where the former substantiates a juridical structure, while the latter embodies a social structure. It is a qualification of no little consequence, for it allows us to move past the logic of the museum as Ideological State Apparatus, and recast it as a democratic instrument addressing phenomena that belong to a diversified society. The same logic also seems to have been recently acknowledged by the European research project EuNaMus—*European National Museums*, when it claimed that a museum need not to be labelled “national” in order to function as one. Rather, any institution can be rightfully considered national if it articulates and represents values, myths and histories that substantiate a national society (Aronsson and Elgenius 2011).

To substitute a social designation for a political one, however, does not mean to relinquish the political nature of national museums. On the contrary, if we want the national museum to perform as a democratic apparatus, a reflection on the model of democratic politics that we want to express through the museum is crucial, especially within the heterogeneous and evolving panorama that MeLa adopts as its framework. Hence, when it comes to define museums with respect to migration and nationality, one of the first challenges that needs to be tackled exceeds the limits of museography proper, and calls into question issues of political theory.

When talking about multicultural societies and democratic paradigms that represent them, two fundamental models of reference which have emerged in the last decades must be taken into account: the model of deliberative democracy, developed, among the others, by the German so-

ciologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas, and the model of agonistic pluralism, developed by political theorists like Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau. A structural divide lies between the two paradigms that proceeds from their different ways of regarding plurality and conflicts within society. At its very core, the deliberative democracy model holds that the legitimacy of democratic institutions is grounded in deliberative processes aimed at achieving the rational consensus of all the parties involved. One such total consensus builds on nothing less than the abstract optimistic faith in harmonious and peaceful social cooperation. Hence, the deliberative model of democracy describes an ideal condition that can be attained only through the obliteration of all friction within society. And more, it implies the overcoming of the distinction “us–other” on which the construction of national identity on one hand, and the construction of plural identities within the nation on the other, resides. What we are offered is a rather closed and static representation of the whole of society that shows no traces of exclusion. It is an all-encompassing narrative where all tensions have been assuaged—or to put it in Hegelian terms, a resolved dialectic.

The agonistic pluralism model, for its part, proceeds from the assumption that the total consensus postulated by deliberative democracy is conceptually impossible. This is so not because of a pessimistic perception of community, but because there are antagonistic positions in society that are simply and objectively irreconcilable. Most importantly, these disagreements should not be obliterated, for they are necessary for the very functioning of the community. Here is Chantal Mouffe criticising the deliberative model of democracy with Wittgenstein:

To take this responsibility [for our decisions] seriously requires that we give up the dream of a rational consensus as well as the fantasy that we could escape from our human form of life. In our desire for a total grasp, says Wittgenstein, “we have got on the slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground.” (Mouffe 1999, 750)

Just as friction is a *conditio sine qua non* for walking, conflicts and difference of opinions are equally necessary for the sustenance of a truly democratic life, or else “no communication, no deliberation could ever take place” (Mouffe 1999, 751). In this condition, the purpose of democratic institutions is that of transforming antagonism into agonism—that is, accommodating the differences between “us” and “the others” without overcoming them, and creating a contingent, provisional agreement in a context of conflict and diversity. Instead of a resolved dialectic, this model proposes an ongoing conversation that only temporarily crystallises an image of society's heterogeneity, while leaving room for forms of dissidence and contestation.

The theoretical complexity of the evoked models exceeds the space that can be devoted to it here. Nevertheless, this schematisation seems to indicate that, for its attempt at exposing rather than erasing controversies

in society, the agonistic pluralism model better resonates with the way that MeLa sees the construction of the nation in the contemporary context. As migratory movements and societal transformations increase, a reductionist approach to histories and identities is no longer truthful, nor sufficient, demanding instead the elaboration of issues that have been long simplified in the service of the state and of power. Following on from these propositions I suggest reframing national museums as arenas of agonistic pluralism. However, a set of questions immediately arises. How can the theory of agonistic pluralism inform the representation of the nation that takes place in the museum? And how does it translate spatially? Is it possible to posit the museum—and even more so, the national museum—as an agonistic space?

The search for one such agonistic space is an endeavour undertaken by Chantal Mouffe herself. In her 2010 article “Museums as Agonistic Spaces” (republished in this book), a first instantiation of this coupling is found in art museums that present themselves as sites of contestation against the “dictatorship of the global media market” (Mouffe 2010, 3). MeLa’s very own MACBA, for example, is identified as one of the most successful instances of this strategy because of its endeavour in providing a space for debate, conflict and societal confrontation through a series of exhibitions displayed between 2000 and 2008.<sup>1</sup> However, if it is true—as Mouffe claims—that this tendency is easily recognisable in art museums, as many of them are now stripped of their normative role, the same cannot be as easily claimed for all kinds of museums. For example, could we apply the agonistic model to national history museums? Could we envision them as sites for counterhegemonic histories? And if we could, should we obliterate hegemonic histories altogether? To be sure, the history of a nation—more directly so than its art—is so deeply ingrained in political and social dynamics that it does not seem plausible, nor historically accurate, to eradicate normative narratives altogether. For better or worse, they constitute one of the many sides of historical writing. Rather, what we should look for are practices that portray the nation’s hegemonic narratives at the same time that they destabilise their monolithic nature through counter-narratives. One such pluralistic and multi-layered representation would certainly work as a corrective to the homogenising effects of much museum discourse, which frequently seeks to alleviate and regiment societal polarities into a unitary portrait. Yet, a set of museographical perils and concerns also arises from envisioning national museums as agonistic spaces.

To begin with, the enactment of the agonistic dialogue may risk being implemented as the result of a top-down decision and process, where the primary agency rests with the national museum as marshal of dissonant voices. A similar danger had already been predicted by Michel Foucault in his 1983 commentary on Kant’s *What is Enlightenment?* Whereas the German philosopher assessed men’s inability to autonomously escape from the tutelage of external authorities, Foucault sees

<sup>1</sup> See the essay by Chantal Mouffe included in this chapter.



IMG. 1.03 — Students involved in exercises of deliberative democracy at the exhibition of the German Parliament’s 1950s seating arrangement. Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, 2010. © Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.

the inability of leaders to guide other individuals to autonomy without, paradoxically, binding them into a new form of tutelage (Foucault 2010, 26). One such practice of guided freedom, in fact, conceals nothing less than a control mechanism. In the museum field, this principle seems to correspond to what the curator Sarat Maharaj has defined as “multicultural managerialism”—that is, the hegemonic containment of multiculturalism, the exhibition of a cultural difference that ultimately re-instates the power disequilibrium that generated it in the first place (Fisher 2009, 5). Whether agonistic pluralism was enforced in the guise of guided freedom or multicultural managerialism, the agonism permitted would no longer be agonism in the proper sense of the term, for it would be vetted and policed by the museum itself. We already know, however, that this would reverse the national museum back to its condition of Ideological State Apparatus. Rather, borrowing a formula coined by Tony Bennett after Theodor Adorno, agonistic museum practice should “aim to produce free, critical and self-reflexive forms of individuality which ‘stand free of any guardian’” (Bennett 2011, 1). In other words, excessive reliance on the museum’s institutional authority should be avoided, or else dissonant voices would be “tamed” rather than “domesticated” (Whitehead 2012).

Another danger implied in our argument lies in the facility with which agonism may slip, on one hand, into antagonism—protest, disorderly dissensus, etc.—or, on the other hand, into a static acknowledgment of conflicting positions. While the latter case represents nothing more than a missed chance of portraying the complexity of society, the former manifests the degeneration that ensues from withholding any form of control of dissenting voices. To be sure, if counter-voices are not mobilised in the museum, they find other outlets, as grass-roots action or fundamentalist movements. And yet, if the orchestration of their musealisation is not carefully calibrated, these counter-voices can affect the museum in ways



that are just as negative and disruptive—or non-disruptive at all, for that matter. How can national museums avoid such slippages? To understand the proper mechanics of this complex representation, we shall turn once again to Chantal Mouffe. Consider the following long extract from *The Democratic Paradox*, where Mouffe tries to envisage the articulation of the tension between democracy and liberalism in such a way as to avoid contradiction between the two:

This tension (...) should not be conceived as one existing between two narratives entirely external to each other and establishing between themselves simple relations of negotiation. Were the tension conceived this way, a very simplistic dualism would have been instituted. The tension should be envisaged instead as creating a relation not of negotiation but of contamination, in the sense that once the articulation of the two principles has been effectuated—even in a precarious way—each of them changes the identity of the other. The regimes of collective identities resulting from this process are ensembles whose configurations are always something more than the addition of their internal elements. (Mouffe 2000, 10)

If we want to envision national museums as agonistic spaces for migrating societies, then the relation between hegemonic and counterhegemonic histories and voices should do just that—perform a contamination. This does not mean that a homogenisation should be put in place, relinquishing the peculiarity of each position for the sake of the dialogue. Rather, it means accepting the possibility of a paradoxical configuration where a relation of inclusion–exclusion among dissenting voices is continuously posited and challenged to produce ever-changing images of contemporary social life (Mouffe 2000, 10).

While this formulation is certainly alluring, what still remains to be determined is a proper architectural and museographical translation of it. In this regard, one needs to stress that, if the task of theorising the role of national museums within contemporary migratory processes presents considerable

IMG. 1.04 — The British Museum's historical role in supporting the British monarchy and its political agenda qualifies it as an example of ideological state apparatus. British Museum, London. Photo by Halicki, source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org>



methodological difficulties, even greater difficulties arise in the moment of the physical realisation of museums and exhibitions. Not least among these is that we currently lack an appropriate exhibitionary grammar for representing the processual, dynamic and politically contested character of the national scale. Existing exhibition practices, in fact, seem to be poorly equipped to grasp the complex, perpetually changing historical interconnections and interdependencies among the national, the European, and the global scales. Nevertheless, the first promising attempts at materialising national museums as agonistic spaces are in place in the institutions hereafter analysed. And, if we were to chart an outline of the strategies that so far seem to better serve toward this purpose, recurring patterns would emerge that certainly deserve attention. Two of them are particularly worth mentioning here for their richness with respect to our argument.

If we agree that an agonistic reading of national museums should attempt to break with the static physical apparatus and conventions of exhibitions and displays, one viable alternative would certainly lie in reconsidering the temporal, conceptual and geographical horizon of the museum's exhibitions. Or more precisely, in favouring temporary and thematic exhibitions over permanent and chronologically organised ones. Indeed, being provisional rather than definitive, and focusing on the diversity of human experiences rather than on the chronology of historical events, temporary and thematic exhibitions crystallise images of the nation's heterogeneity that are always contingent, and that only contingently exclude or favour certain social groups from the deployment of the national narrative. It is a precarious negotiation that does not preclude the agonistic dimension. In actual fact, quite the opposite could be claimed. Were these temporary-thematic exhibitions related among themselves, or set against permanent exhibitions to problematise their overarching narratives, they could provide a kind of agonistic contamination that would occur over time within the same museum institution. In this sense, a rethinking of the conceptual and spatial interplay of permanent and temporary exhibitions seems



IMG. 1.05 — In “The Mixing Room,” (2010) at the Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand, Wellington., screens on the walls define the historical background of the narrative, while interactive tables allow visitors to select and learn about individual stories of migrants. © Kate Whitley.

a promising line of inquiry. However, successful contamination could also occur between domains that are geographically distant from each other. Hence the importance of travelling exhibitions: they rearticulate the space of the nation on scales that crosscut and partially bypass the territorial borders and the regulatory frameworks of the states.

With respect to museum displays, conversely, a more consistent use of ICT—Information and Communication Technologies—may open up many interesting possibilities. The adoption of fast, dynamic and interactive exhibition strategies would allow a more fluid practice of dissensus on different levels. Not only complex and multi-layered representations of the same artefact or history could be visualised on the same device, visitors could also be directly involved in the construction of the museum's narratives. By enabling the manipulation of established histories as well as intersubjective exchanges of opinions, ICT could then fruitfully accommodate conflicting voices in the institutional construction of identities. Yet, if practices of participation and sharing make it possible to express the full richness of a migrating and diverse society, they must be carefully calibrated to avoid trivialising the nature of the museum institution and the historical role of museum documents. In this respect, it will be the role of architects and curators to intervene on a case-by-case basis to give enough representational and institutional weight to dissensus and to established histories, both at the same time.

As there is no reason to doubt the necessity of agonistic conflict, there is no reason to doubt the possibility of national museums as sites of ongoing contestation. The radicalism of this proposal constitutes its very strength in a society where diversity is constantly on the agenda. To be sure, the age of grand narratives is over. Long past is the possibility of prescribing normality for the nation in terms of history, identity, and representation. Rather, we must now see the conflicts and discontents of an entity—the nation—that, in order to have a place at all in the global world, must refuse to conform to cultural expectations and ruling paradigms. The challenge is still wide open, and the present analysis will be useful in tracing an inception—the moment in which the interplay of conflicting positions and the morphologies of the struggle begin to form. Only future reflections on engaged museum endeavours will be able to think through the entanglement of nationality, migration and agonism and see it in perspective. The possibility of new histories, identities and perceptions still has to be fully realised.

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## The Museum and Radical Democracy

### → CHANTAL MOUFFE

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**PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 1.06** — “Inside Out,” a large-scale participatory art project developed in the context of “The Influencers” 2012 in Barcelona. “The Influencers” is a festival of non-conventional art and guerrilla communication. The festival, organized in the streets and in the piazza adjacent to MACBA, pursues practices of radical engagement with the museum that are analogous to those proposed by Chantal Mouffe. © Dpr-Barcelona.

It is by putting the museum in the context of radical democratic politics that I wish to address the question of its role today, considering in particular ways in which art institutions could foment new subjectivities critical of neoliberal consensus. More generally, I want to take issue with the negative way public institutions are perceived by the mode of radical critique fashionable today: celebrating “desertion” and “exodus,” to use



the terminology of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri—whose writing recently appeared in these pages—such critique asserts that political action should withdraw from existing institutions so that we might free ourselves from all forms of belonging. Institutional attachments are presented here as obstacles to new, nonrepresentative forms of “absolute democracy” suitable for the self-organization of the multitude. Yet such an approach forecloses any immanent critique of institutions—critique with the objective of transforming institutions into a terrain of contestation of the hegemonic order. Instead, all institutions are perceived as monolithic representatives of forces to be destroyed, every attempt to transform them dismissed as reformist illusion. The very possibility of disarticulating their constitutive elements, with the aim of establishing a different power configuration, is precisely what is rejected by the exodus approach.

In the artistic and cultural domain, this perspective suggests that critical artistic practices can have efficacy only if they take place outside cultural institutions. To imagine that museums, for instance, could provide sites for critical political intervention today is, according to such a view, to be blind to the manifold of forces—economic and political—that make their very existence possible. The strategy, here again, is to ignore them and occupy other spaces, outside the institutional field. But endorsing this course of action is, in my view, profoundly mistaken and clearly disempowering, because it impedes us from recognizing the multiplicity of avenues that would otherwise be open for political engagement. Indeed, it is to ignore the tensions that always exist within a given configuration of forces and the possibility of subverting their form of articulation. By contrast, I am convinced that fostering a strategy of “engagement with institutions” is absolutely crucial for envisioning democratic politics today. We must acknowledge that what is called “the social” is the realm of sedimented political practices—practices that conceal the originary acts of their con-

IMG. 1.07 — “Inside Out” transforms messages of personal identity into pieces of artistic work. Everyone is challenged to use black and white photographic portraits to discover, reveal and share the untold stories and images of people around the world. “Inside Out,” “The Influencers” 2012, Barcelona. Photo by Eva Mattes.



tingent political institution—but recognize as well that such moments of political institution can always be reactivated. Every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities, but as the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices, each order is always the expression of a particular structure of power relations. Things could have been otherwise. And so every hegemonic order is susceptible to being challenged.

The success of counterhegemonic practices depends on an adequate understanding of the relations of forces structuring the key institutions in which the political antagonist is going to intervene. With respect to artistic and cultural practices, then, counterhegemonic interventions must first and foremost recognize the role of the culture industry in capitalism’s transition to post-Fordism. To mention just a few familiar yet central features of the current dispensation: the blurring of the lines between art and advertising, the exponential development of “creative industries” dominated by the media and entertainment corporations, and the reduction of cultural institutions into entertainment centers—all these can only be understood in the context of the post-Fordist stage of capitalism. Today’s capitalism relies increasingly on semiotic techniques to create the modes of subjectification necessary for its reproduction, and cultural production plays a central role in the process of valorizing capital. The old forms of exploitation, characteristic of the times when manual labor was dominant, have been replaced by new ones that call for the incessant creation of needs and insatiable desires for the acquisition of goods. They rely on the joint forces of advertising and the “creative industries” for producing fantasy worlds through which the identity of the consumer is constructed. To buy something today is to gain entrance into a specific world, to identify with a certain culture, to become part of an imagined community. To maintain its hegemony, the neo-liberal system needs to permanently mobilize people’s desires and shape their identities, and the



IMG. 1.08 — Radical activism during the 2012 edition of “The Influencers” in Barcelona. © Dpr-barcelona.

cultural terrain, with its various institutions, occupies a strategic place in this absolutely vital process of commodification and subjectification. To challenge this system, a counterhegemonic politics must engage this terrain and target the forms of identification that are the conditions for the reproduction of post-Fordist capitalism. Thus, the museum—far from being an institution to be deserted posthaste—becomes a crucial site of political contestation.

How to visualize the future of the museum within such a framework? Could the institution contribute to undermining the imaginary environment of the consumer society? To be sure, the history of the museum has been linked since its beginning to the construction of bourgeois hegemony, but in my view this function can be altered. As Wittgenstein has taught us, signification is always dependent on context, and use determines meaning. This is also true for institutions, and we should discard the essentialist idea that some institutions are destined to fulfill one immutable function. In fact, we have already witnessed how, following the neoliberal trend, many museums have abandoned their original purpose of educating citizens into the dominant culture and have instead transformed themselves into sites of entertainment for a public of consumers. The main objective of those “postmodern” museums is to make money through blockbuster exhibitions and the sale of merchandise to tourists. The type of “participation” they promote is based on consumerism, and they actively contribute to the commercialization and depoliticization of the cultural field.

However, this neoliberal turn is not the only possible form of evolution open to the museum; another path can be envisaged, leading in a progressive direction. There may have been a time when it would have made sense to abandon the museum in order to nurture the development of novel artistic practices. But under present conditions, with the art world almost totally colonized by the market, the museum could become—indeed is uniquely positioned to become—a sanctuary from commercial interests. As several theorists have pointed out, the museum, which has been stripped of its normative role, might now be seen as a privileged place for artworks to be presented in a context that allows them to be distinguished from commodities. Visualized in such a way, the museum would offer spaces for resisting the effects of the growing commercialization of art.<sup>1</sup>

To rethink the function of the museum along those lines would be a first step toward envisaging the institution as a possible site for countering the dictatorship of the global media market. It is interesting to note that such a move dovetails with other attempts to reclaim public institutions targeted by neoliberalism in recent years. Think, for instance, of the change of attitude of a part of the European Left with respect to the institutions of the welfare state, whose bureaucratic nature they used to criticize. This was no doubt a justified critique, but in the wake of the dismantling of these institutions by neoliberal governments, many people have begun to realize that they also constituted important forms of protection against

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Groys, Boris. 2008. “The Logic of Equal Aesthetic Rights.” In *Art Power*, 13–22. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

market forces, and that their privatization has not represented a democratic advance. Similar considerations could be made with respect to the role of the state, which, after years of being demonized, has recently been reevaluated. The conclusion to draw from this new perception of the nature of public institutions is that, instead of celebrating the destruction of all institutions as a move toward liberation, the task for radical politics is to engage with them, developing their progressive potential and converting them into sites of opposition to the neoliberal market hegemony.

As far as museums are concerned, already one can point to several successful examples of this strategy of “engagement with” that I am proposing. One of the best known is the Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona, which, under the direction of Manuel Borja-Villel (who now heads the Reina Sofia in Madrid), succeeded in creating a new model of museum.<sup>2</sup> Between 2000 and 2008, MACBA launched various projects informed by critical pedagogy to recover the educational role of the museum and to reestablish the institution as a constituent part of the public sphere. With the aim of proposing an alternative reading of modern art, MACBA began developing a collection and organizing exhibitions privileging artists and art scenes typically neglected by the dominant discourse on artistic modernity. Among the many notable shows the museum mounted during this period were “Philippe Thomas: Readymades Belong to Everyone” (2000); “Art and Utopia: Restricted Action” (2004); “A Theatre Without Theatre” (2007); and “Be-Bomb: The Transatlantic War of Images and All That Jazz: 1946-1956” (2007-2008). Another of MACBA’s objectives was to establish a vibrant relationship between the museum and the city and to provide a space for debate and conflict. Looking for ways in which art could make a significant contribution to the multiplication of public spheres, MACBA encouraged contact between different social movements. For example, “Of Direct Action Considered as One of the Fine Arts,” a series of workshops organized in 2000 (and coordinated by Jordi Claramonte), brought together artists’ collectives and social movements to explore possibilities for connecting local political struggles with artistic practices. Workshops were organized around topics such as precarious labor, borders and migrations, gentrification, new media, and emancipatory strategies. A further example of collaboration with the new social movements was the “How Do We Want to Be Governed?” project, which was conceived as a counter-model to the Universal Forum of Cultures launched by the city council of Barcelona in 2004. While taking culture as an alibi, the real objective of the government forum, critics argued, was to promote a major urban renewal project planned for the city’s sea-front—to pave the way, in other words, for a massive real estate deal. Organized by Roger M. Buergerl (then a curator at MACBA), “How Do We Want to Be Governed?” presented a series of exhibitions and public programs—talks, colloquia, screenings, performances, and debates—in venues within the industrial zones and working-class neighborhoods

<sup>2</sup> An excellent overview of the activities of MACBA during those years is found in Ribalta, Jorge. 2010. “Experiments in a New Institutionalism.” In *Relational Objects: Macba Collection 2002-2007*, edited by Jorge Ribalta, Manuel Borja-Villel, and Kaira Marie Cabanas, 225–265. Barcelona: MACBA Publications.



scheduled for demolition or radical reconfiguration. It was an exhibition in process, combining artistic work and social dynamics and providing a platform for various neighborhood movements.

The program at MACBA since the turn of the millennium represents a radical alternative to both the modern and the postmodern museum, but many other types of initiatives are worth mentioning. Of particular interest in this regard is the recently established consortium *L'Internationale*, a long-term collaboration among five progressive European art institutions—the Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana, Slovenia; the Julius Koller Society in Bratislava, Slovakia; MACBA; the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands; and the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (MUHKA) in Belgium—seeking to collectively use their collections and archives to challenge art-historical master narratives and to construct multiple alternative, transnational narratives. *L'Internationale's* proposed network is only now in its first stages, and needs to be enriched by partners outside Europe, but it suggests a promising way for art institutions to join together in the ongoing struggle against the hegemonic discourse.

What is really at stake in this debate about ways to deal with institutions such as the museum is the political and its relation with artistic practices. The modernist view, which postulates a structural affinity between the political and the artistic avant-garde, needs to be relinquished. Its claim that the radical move consists in destruction and radical negation of tradition and that it requires exit from all institutions, political as well as artistic, is not suitable for the task facing radical politics today. As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello persuasively demonstrated in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999–2005), the managerial class successfully co-opted the various demands for autonomy of social movements that arose in the 1960s, harnessing them only to secure the conditions required by the new, postindustrial mode of capitalist regulation. Capital was able, they showed, to neutralize the subversive potential of the aesthetic strategies and ethos of the counterculture—the search for authenticity, the ideal of self-management, and the antihierarchical imperative—transforming them from instruments of liberation into new forms of control that would ultimately replace the disciplinary framework of the Fordist period. To this hegemonic move by capital, it is urgent to oppose a counter-hegemonic one, which opposes the program of total social mobilization of capitalism. Instead of deserting public institutions, we must find ways to use them to foster political forms of identification and make existing conflicts productive. By staging a confrontation between conflicting positions, museums and art institutions could make a decisive contribution to the proliferation of new public spaces open to agonistic forms of participation where radical democratic alternatives to neoliberalism could, once again, be imagined and cultivated.

Source: Mouffe, Chantal. 2010. "Museum as Agonistic Spaces." *Artforum* 48 (10): 326–330 (art. no. 15).

## Case Studies



IMG. 1.09 — Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, Germany. The original seating arrangement of the German Parliament. © Holger Ellgaard.

## Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik

House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany, Bonn, Germany

The Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland—House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany—is a national museum of contemporary history established at the behest of Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1989. The museum became part of Kohl's political agenda as early as 1982, when, in the government policy statement at the beginning of his mandate, the Chancellor manifested the desire to institute museums dedicated to Germany's post-war history and divided nation. With the unification of Germany in 1989, the Haus der Geschichte became an institutional reality and, being devoted to the reflection on the nation's plural and complex history, it rapidly became a privileged site for the state's larger process of historical normalisation.

The museum building was designed by the architects Ingeborg and Hartmut Rüdiger as the result of an architectural competition launched in 1986. The architectural idea revolves around a full-height foyer that articulates five large halls for the permanent exhibition (4,000 square metres), medium-size halls for temporary exhibitions (650 square metres), and a system of seminar rooms, conference rooms, offices and a café that support the museum activities. Large windows, openings in the partition walls and an enfilade of passages and staircases generate visual continuity within the building, allowing the visitors to grasp the complex yet clear unfolding of history in space.

The building was inaugurated in 1994 and it featured Würth & Winderoll's design for the permanent exhibition. Since the opening of the museum, the permanent exhibition has been renovated twice, again by Würth & Winderoll. The process of historical revision that followed German unification prompted the first renovation in 2001, bringing the focus of the exhibition narrative on the national reunification. The second renovation from October 2010 to May

2011, instead, centred on issues of globalisation and social integration, resulting in more space allocated to the Cold War, the Berlin Wall and the immediate present.

With a collection of more than 450,000 items and an extensive program of temporary and travelling exhibitions, the Haus der Geschichte today presents itself as a museum dedicated to a vivid experience of history, where special attention is paid to the promotion of intercultural and intergenerational dialogue and the exploration of political, scientific and social freedom.

This particular task is implemented not only through high-tech interactive exhibition technologies, but also through the involvement in the museum's activities of many social forces—including major religious communities, employers' and workers' organisations, representatives of the federations of displaced persons, gender and ethnic minorities, and municipal associations. Resting on such a variegated group of interested parties, the Haus der Geschichte is a place where the articulation of Germany's national identity can truly be said to be open and pluralistic.

→ TRANSNATIONAL EXHIBITIONS FOR A MOBILE POPULATION

That Germany is a land of immigration is a familiar story. Without having to trace the phenomenon back to its historical roots, it will suffice to remember the large influx of peoples that swept across Germany in the Twentieth century. The immigration that came with the 1989 opening of the borders to Eastern Europe and the 1960s–1970s phenomenon of the Gastarbeiter, (immigrant workers) who flooded into West Germany from Italy, Greece, Turkey, Morocco, and many more countries to work in the industrial sector, are only the freshest of memories. But immigration in Germany is certainly not just a “memory.”



IMG. 1.10 — The new wing with the entrance of the museum. Project by Ingeborg and Hartmut Rüdiger, 1994. © Cynthia Rühmekorf.



IMG. 1.11 — The Entrance Hall. Photo by Hans Weingartz, source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org>



IMG. 1.12 — View of the permanent exhibition "Our History. Germany since 1945." © Holger Ellgaard.



IMG. 1.13 — "Spuren – Sledy. Deutsche und Russen in der Geschichte / Traces: German and Russian in History," 2004. A cartoon about the settlement of Russian migrants on German territory recites: "The good Hägele alphabet-soup! now in Cyrillic. Eastward Expansion: Deutschland is prepared." © Achim Greser & Heribert Lenz.



In view of the 15 million migrants that are part of the German population, and of the many more that still enter the country today, on January 1st 2005, Germany put into effect a new immigration law that updated the previous regulations for legal immigration. While these modifications applied mostly to high-end immigration of professionals and academics, the singularity of the new law saw that for the first time Germany was legally acknowledged as an “immigration country.” Concomitantly with the new immigration law, the political fervour in matters of social integration and cultural acceptance dramatically increased, culminating in 2007 with the ratification of a national policy of social integration under the name of “National Integration Plan: New Routes—New Chances.” The plan, in preparation since 2003, contains a detailed outline of 400 initiatives to be undertaken in order to improve integration. It concentrates on ten thematic areas of society, one of which addresses cultural institutions and specifically museums. Building on practices already in place in virtuous museums—one of which is identified in the Haus der Geschichte—, the measures designed for on museums sponsor the creation of joint exhibitions and the enhancement of communicative dynamics among different segments of the population.

To be sure, the Haus der Geschichte was at the forefront in the field of migration-focused joint exhibitions as early as 1995, when it launched the project “Germany and its Neighbours.” This was a series of temporary exhibitions on the political, economic, social and cultural relations between Germany and neighbouring countries, with particular respect to postwar and present developments. The project entailed joint planning and research with partner institutions in each country, and it resulted in five exhibitions developed over the course of ten years: “Prisoners of War,” in cooperation with the Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow (1995); “Approache—Germany and Poland 1945–1995,” in collaboration with the Independence Museum of Warsaw (1996); “Vis-à-vis: Germany–France,” in collaboration with the Maison de Radio France in Paris (1998); “Partly sunny:

Germany–Netherlands,” in collaboration with the Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (2001); and “Traces: German and Russian in History,” in collaboration with the State Historical Museum in Moscow (2004). The purpose of these exhibitions was not only that of giving an account of historical relationships. More than anything, the project aimed at exposing old prejudices, overcoming misunderstandings, and promoting interest in neighbouring countries whose populations so often mixed, lived in each other’s states, and grew together. And more, it aimed at revealing the inconsistency of any national separatism.

On a museological level these goals were approached through bi-narrative, bilingual stories where “dominant” images were juxtaposed with counter-images, thus enabling a comparative reading mode that forced a reassessment of each parts established historical take. The exhibition “Traces: Germans and Russians in History,” for example, was articulated in six thematic chapters—Projections, Homeland, War, Contradictions, Fascination and Perspectives—tackling issues of mutual perception, territorial access, tensions between expectations and reality, and positive cultural influence. Among the documents regarding “foreign” enclaves in “national” territories, images of the 1826 Russian settlement Alexandrowka in Potsdam testified to Prusso-Russian friendly relationships and to the successful transposition of traditional Russian urban models, while the juxtaposed images of Eisenhüttenstadt suggested a story of deep social tensions connected to the intrusion of Soviet urbanism in German territories. The appeasement of visual dissonances of this kind was favoured by the display of cartoons and caricatures, often deployed throughout the exhibition to provide occasions for ironic reconciliation after in-depth involvement with historical controversies. Travelling between the Haus der Geschichte and partner museums, the “Germany and its Neighbours” exhibitions thus rapidly became a reference point for integration-oriented cultural practices in Germany and the involved countries.

If we now return to the National Integration Plan, it will not surprise us that—on the

strength of such consolidated experience—the Haus der Geschichte could only but immediately adopt the directives of the new policy. Indeed in 2003, when the policy was still in its initial stage, the Haus der Geschichte organised the travelling exhibition, “Everybody is a Stranger Somewhere” as a joint effort between eight national and city museums—the Arbejdermuseet in Copenhagen, the Bijbelmuseum in Amsterdam, the German Historical Museum in Berlin, the Helsinki City Museum, the National Historical Museum in Athens, the Swiss National Museum in Zurich and the Musée d’histoire de la Ville de Luxembourg. The exhibition investigated the experience of alienation prompted by migrations of different kinds, pointing out that, in ancient times as in the 20th century, the phenomenon of migration per se is multifaceted and predicated on the context. Each of the eight participating institutions, in point of fact, contributed to the exhibition with topics that voiced internal issues of migration, revealing how analogous yet different they were from topics explored by the other museums. But beyond all sorts of differences, here was portrayed the human side of the migration-experience, which unites people all over Europe and throughout history. In some sense, then, it could be maintained that “Everybody is a Stranger Somewhere” pursued the representation of unity in a context of diversity, which is one of the proper aspects of virtuous forms of pluralism.

In museographical terms, the exhibition design tried to recapture the “humanistic” focus of the research by proposing a set of human-scale display stands in the shape of open boxes that remind us of open trunks—one of the most frequent visual metaphors in the representation of migration. Adopting various media and different languages, each half of the trunks portrayed different aspects of the same story, thus presenting the elements of a multilayered narrative that was left to the visitor to reconcile. But the communication does not only happen one way, as the exhibition includes devices for recording and broadcasting the visitors’ reflections that construct a digital archive of shared experiences.

Furthermore, with respect to the setup of the exhibition within the Haus der Geschichte, the chosen location for the show seems to reiterate the message implied in the exhibition title. Rather than being confined in a secluded space, the display-trunks take over the spacious foyer of the museum, becoming an obligatory point of passage for all the visitors that enter the building. In passing through the exhibition, we are reminded that, indeed, we all are “strangers” somewhere, and that what used to be “foreign” in the past is now often taken for granted. To propose this idea in the context of a museum of national history is all the more effective, as it compels us to ponder the critical and provisional meaning that the “nation” holds for us today.

When read against the broad aims of the National Integration Plan, “Everybody is a Stranger Somewhere” does capture some of the questions that the policy later addressed. To begin with, it is a joint exhibition, and it supports national integration by appealing to the universal nature of human experiences. But what is more, it is pluralistic in its modes and contents, it unveils the precariousness of every social order, and it does not pursue any form of univocal consensus, as all representations are deployed through ideological divides. To be sure, these features also constitute the basics for the envisioning of a zero-degree agonistic space in the sense proposed by political theorist Chantal Mouffe, but at a closer look the architectural transposition of this seems to fall short in materialising because of shortcomings in the exhibition mechanics. The stations for experience-sharing, in fact, are limited with respect to the spatial and conceptual extent of the exhibition, and being conceived as separate elements from the body of the exhibition, they do not allow controversies arising on part of the public to be fed back directly into the narrative. Despite its multivocality, the exhibition thus results didactic in character instead of participatory, as the agonistic model would rather suggest. In consideration of this, “Everybody is a Stranger Somewhere” does not quite seem to establish an “arena” for engaging with opposing voices as much as a “spectacle” of different posi-

**IMG. 1.14** — The travelling exhibition “Everybody is a Stranger Somewhere,” 2007 at the Stadtmuseum Erlangen, Germany. One of the trunk-like exhibition displays presents contrasting views about an illustrious migrant: Prince Claus of the Netherlands. Former member of the Nazi Youth Organisation and soldier in the Nazi army, in the 1960s Claus van Amsberg immigrated to the Netherlands, where he became the prince consort of Queen Beatrix. © Stadtmuseum Erlangen.



**IMG. 1.15** — One of the stations for experience-sharing in the exhibition “Everybody is a Stranger Somewhere,” (Stadtmuseum Erlangen, Germany, 2007). The installation comprises a mirror, a camera and a TV screen for immediate reproduction. © Stadtmuseum Erlangen.



tions, although a stronger effort on the part of the design or a more consistent use of ICT may have likely answered the problem.

What is lacking in interactive engagement, however, is compensated for in terms of reached audience, as the exhibition circulated even outside of the eight institutions that contributed to its realisation, and well after the proposed closing date of 2005. Appealing to emotions and raising awareness about the human experience of migration, “Everybody is a Stranger Somewhere” was able to reach different segments of the population—families, schoolchildren, established sectors of society, minorities, the young and the elderly—becoming one of the most successful projects supervised by the Haus der Geschichte. This is certainly a quality that MeLa cannot overlook, for today more than ever emotions seem to be one of the few keys to settle disputes on migration and diversity.

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IMG. 1.16 — Nationalmuseet, Copenhagen, Denmark. The permanent exhibition in the Prince Palace. © Nationalmuseet.

## Nationalmuseet

### National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen

The Nationalmuseet is Denmark's main national historical and cultural museum. It was first established in 1807 as a royal collection of handicrafts, paintings, ethnographic objects, weapons and antiquities, whose conservation was supervised by a special commission, the "The Royal Commission for Ancient Collections Preservation." In 1819, the collection was transformed into a permanent museum open to the public—the Oldnordisk Museum or Nordic Ancient Museum—which was housed in the Trinitatis Church in Copenhagen. In 1832, the museum was relocated to the larger premises of Christiansborg Castle in Copenhagen, and, in 1849, with the signing of the new Constitution and the transfer of the king's collection to the State, the museum was finally relocated to the Prince's Palace. Since then, the museum has been housed in the 18th century rococo Prince's Palace, whose original configuration has been altered over the years by several extensions and the acquisition of a large number of buildings. Among these are the Museum of Danish Resistance, the Open Air Museum, the Little Mill in Christianshavn and a small number of properties outside the metropolitan area.

Today the Nationalmuseet's collections cover a range of different disciplines: Danish Prehistory and Science, Danish Middle Ages and Renaissance, Danish Modern History, the Royal coins and medals collection, Classical and Near Eastern antiquities, and ethnography. The artifacts in each of these collections belong to both Danish and world history, in line with the museum's mission to ensure access to and knowledge of national and international historical, cultural and natural heritage for everyone. The education of the audience about the interdependence of national and world history, and the portrayal of plural histories as opposed to one mono-directional, mono-vocal history, also figure among the main goals of the museum. The exhibition programme clearly reflects these

intentions, beginning with the title of the museum's permanent history exhibition—"Stories of Denmark 1660–2000," as opposed to a single "history" of Denmark. Such commitment to inclusive plural modes of museology qualifies the Nationalmuseet as an institution aligned with the best museum practices and approaches that the European Union seeks to promote through the MeLa research.

#### → DENMARK, EUROPE AND THE WORLD

In December 2006, the Danish government passed a law which came to be known as the "Museum Act," a collection of regulations for state museums aimed at promoting their activities, safeguarding national heritage and ensuring international interactions. The second chapter of the Museum Act identifies the National Museum of Denmark as the principal cultural heritage museum in the country, and sees it as the museum's responsibility to "illuminate" Danish cultures, the world, and their interdependence. In line with this accreditation, and on the occasion of Denmark's six-month presidency of the European Union, in January 2012, the National Museum of Denmark presented the eight-month exhibition "Europe Meets the World." And so began the exploration of the relationship that connects the Danish nation, Europe and the world over time.

The exhibition "Europe Meets the World" recounts 2500 years of European history—from Greek antiquity to the present—through a double perspective, where an internal view of the historical development within continental Europe is juxtaposed with an account of the external encounters of Europe with the rest of the world. Beyond this highly ambitious museographical aim, the most astonishing aspect of the exhibition is that the narrative is constructed solely with exhibits drawn from the museum's



IMG. 1.17 — The Museum in 1925. © Nationalmuseet.



IMG. 1.18 — The glass-covered courtyard of the museum. Photo by Elena Montanari.



IMG. 1.19 — Exhibition “Europe Meets the World,” National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, 07 February 2012–03 June 2012. The tent-walls of the elliptical rooms are covered with projections of images and text that familiarise the visitor with the themes explored in each room. Photo by Elena Montanari.



IMG. 1.20 — Among the objects exhibited in the “Fluid Borders” room of the exhibition “Europe Meets the World,” the clothes worn by Greenpeace activists that stormed into the Queen’s dinner gala at the Christiansborg Castle during the world meeting “Politicians Talk, Leaders Act.” This exhibit testifies to the inconsistency of boundaries and limits when matters of global importance, such as the environment, are concerned. Photo by Francesca Lanz.



IMG. 1.21 — The panels suspended in each elliptical room of the exhibition “Europe Meets the World” are divided into two thematic areas: the Europe-related informations are identified by the colour orange, the World-related by the colour green. Photo by Elena Montanari.



national collection. The significance of this museological stance is exceptional. To begin with, as EU President Barroso highlighted at the exhibition's inaugural ceremony, the museum's very ownership of these items is a demonstration of the traditional openness of Denmark, not only to Europe, but to the entire world. Secondly, questions arise about the curatorial legitimacy and the ideological implications of the exhibition: can the product of a national museum truly represent and include all of European history? If so, what does an operation of this calibre mean? Finally, and more broadly, what part does the nation play in the construction of the European/supranational identity? All of these are issues that an attentive analysis of the exhibition's architecture can help elucidate.

“Europe Meets the world” consists of nine chronologically-organised thematic enquiries centring on different aspects of European/world history—democracy, power, belief, communication and conflict, discovery, enlightenment, industrialisation, war, and fluid borders. The exhibition is installed in eight elliptical rooms, followed by a ninth space in the shape of a globe. Each of these rooms is divided in two, one half representing the Europe-area, and the other half representing the world-area. One such dichotomy immediately emerges as particularly effective in the construction of a critical European identity as, proceeding via comparisons and contrasts between Europe's internal-external vicissitudes, the exhibition empowers the viewer with comprehensive perspectives and the freedom to distill his own historical message. Furthermore, being encoded in the aesthetic register of the exhibition through a colour scheme—orange for the European section, green for the world section—this dichotomy always makes the viewer aware of his position with respect to the overall narrative, thus enabling him to reconstruct his ideological stance as he moves through the exhibition.

The deployment of the narrative content exploits different media. The tent walls of the rooms are illuminated on both sides by projections of images and texts that contribute to familiarising the visitor with the theme explored in each sec-

tion. Within the elliptical rooms, physical objects are displayed along with descriptive labels and interpretative texts written in English and Danish. With respect to the arrangement of the objects, it is worth mentioning that they are displayed, alone or in groups, to compose systems of signification that are preordained by the thematic focus of the room. In other words, the artifacts mostly serve as props for the narrative, and rarely do they speak in and of themselves—let alone speak of Denmark. This should already hint at the role that the national plays in the construction of the supranational: in order for the latter to emerge, the national needs to be silenced as such, and redeployed as a vehicle to the representation of Europe.

Continuing with media channels, sound too is an element of the exhibition, for example in the form of the air siren that plays in the “War” room. And even bodily interaction with the artifacts becomes a vehicle of communication—this is still the case of the “War” room, where the viewer is asked to try and lift the crawler of a Russian tank. The last aspect introduces the notion of interactivity. Beyond traditional forms of sensorial and physical interaction with the artifacts, virtual interaction also figures prominently in the exhibition. The virtual domain is made available to the visitors through the QR codes disseminated throughout the rooms, which unlock further information on certain objects when scanned with a smartphone or tablet. The additional content provided by the QR codes comes in the form of short YouTube videos, where the curators either elucidate the origin or the meaning of an object, or complicate the exhibition narrative by drawing comparisons between history and the present day. But the kind of interactivity built into the QR codes does not only consist of this disclosure of information and stories. Throughout the space, in fact, five large QR codes marked in blue ask the visitor to participate in the societal debate around the exhibition through pools, opinions and ideas. To mention a few examples, in the “Democracy” room the visitors are asked to decide who should have the right to vote in the European elections; in the “Belief” room the question concerns the

identification of the primary religion in the EU; and in the “Industrialisation” room seven prejudices against a number of nationalities are submitted to the viewers to solicit their reactions. A synchronous relationship is established between the exhibition and the visitor's response, as the latter is instantaneously fed back into the exhibition's database and displayed on the users' smartphones and on the screens at the end of the exhibition path. By comparing his own response to those of other people, the visitor is once again able to situate himself within the exhibition, but also—and more importantly—to measure his level of belonging to the portrayed community of European citizens.

In terms of content, the final section of the exhibition is undoubtedly of specific interest to MeLa, where contemporary issues of migration, globalisation and European identity construction are explored under the rubric of “Fluid Borders.” Here the self-representation of Europe and the representation of Europe's relations with the rest of the world largely agree on the impossibility of establishing clear-cut distinctions between a country, its surroundings, and the extended network to which it belongs. It is significant, after all, that the attempt of the board game “Europa Spillet” to secure a definite geography of European borders results in a map that is almost never historically and geographically accurate. And more, the flawedness of this attempt is emphasised by the surrounding discourse on boundless cities and globalisation—portrayed here, among other things, via a container that speaks of free global trade, and a collection of Euro banknotes, whose “anonymous bridges” speak of collaboration and connectivity.

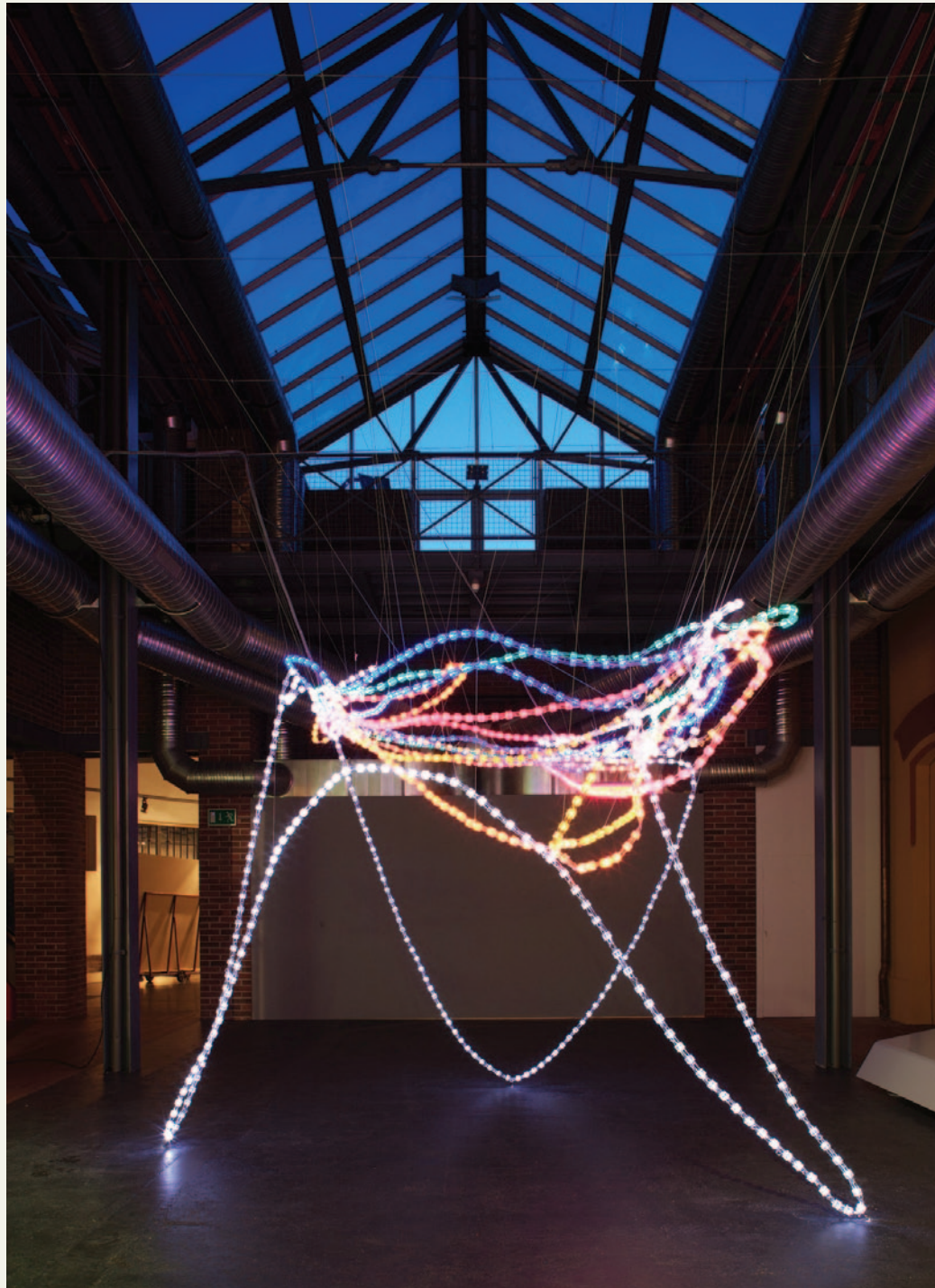
A conclusive remark on the exhibition arises through reflecting on the nature of these latter artifacts. To present goods containers and Euro banknotes as “Danish” means to unveil the ambiguity of the concept of “nation.” What qualifies these exhibits as national? As the takeaway message of the exhibition seems to suggest, all the artifacts on display are “national” just as much as they are European. As has become apparent, in fact, today the nation has reached the point where it is too insufficient an epistemo-

logical category to capture the complex dynamics of our world. But while unfit as an end point, the nation can still operate as a vector. Therefore, rather than asking where the nation starts and where it ends, the question would be better reframed in terms of where the nation can take us. The National Museum of Denmark seems to have a clear idea in this respect. By representing Europe through its own collection, it is as if the museum were showing us that Europe is neither a distant nor an abstract concept, for we already have Europe within ourselves—it is engraved in our history, our geography, our society. More than just a catchphrase worthy of a politician's speech, this thought has a veritable subtext. And “Europe Meets the World” shows us just that.

Clelia Pozzi

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IMG. 1.22 — Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr, Austria. The section “The Stock market: Rumors, Profits and Dangers” in the permanent exhibition “Working\_world.net” (2006). General Planning and Design Mag. Arno Grünberger, Spurwien. © Walter Luttenberger. >>

## Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr

Museum of the Working World, Steyr, Austria

The Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr is a history museum of national relevance situated in the federal state of Upper Austria. The museum was established in 1987 when the Upper Austrian regional exhibition “Work/Man/Machine: The Road to the Industrial Society” was transformed into a continuously operating national museum in the manner of the late 1970s, English industrial museums. The stimulus to this initiative came from the great popular success of the exhibition, but most importantly from the Upper Austrian workers’ organisations’ demands and negotiations with the state to devote a museum to their world—the industrial world. The Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr thus came into being as the first Austrian “museum of work”.

The crystallisation of the exhibition into a permanent museum was accompanied by a qualification of the institution’s focus, which resulted in the rerouting from exclusively labour-related topics to a socially relevant history of contemporary times. In the 1990s the museum collection thus gradually shifted from water mills, handicrafts and functioning industrial machines, to visual and cinematic reproductions, sound installations, artworks and objects donated by visitors and partner institutions. Along with this shift, the museum’s target audience evolved, expanding to include young people, minority groups and European citizens for educational and community building purposes.

The architecture of the museum too followed the transformation of the institution’s identity. Housed in two 19th century factory buildings along the Steyr River in the historical district

>> The section “The Stock market: Rumors, Profits and Dangers” features “Plastic Trade-off,” a transparent illuminated sculpture by Gerald Nestler and Sylvia Eckermann representing the network of the global stock markets as a three-dimensional structure. An essential component of the installation is the computer animation that supplies texts and real-time graphics about the stock market, its players, and contemporary socio-political discourses revolving around the events.

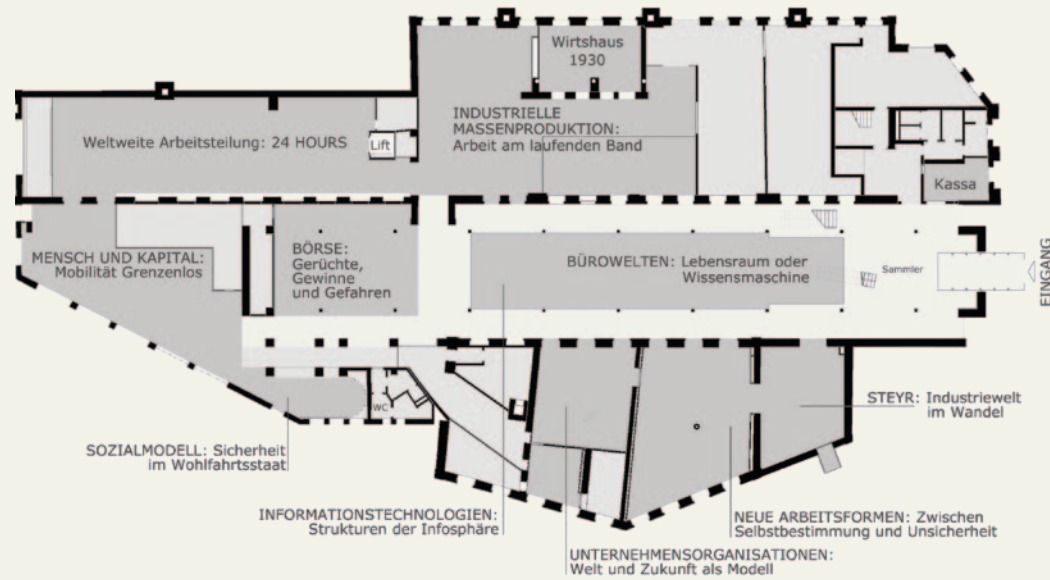
of the city, the museum has undergone two major renovations. The first one in 1999 consisted in an ambitious modification of the museum’s upperfloor, where 800 square metres of meeting rooms, a terrace and a café were added to host conventions and turn the museum into a comprehensive cultural centre. This structural expansion corresponded to the beginning of an intense phase of institutional networking, which saw the museum participating in several European research projects on the topic of migration—notably “Mimex” and “Migration, Work and Identity”—and establishing collaborative partnerships with national and work museums throughout Europe. The 2006 architectural renovation, instead, was prompted by the destruction of the entire exhibition area by the flood disaster of 2002, and it resulted in the reconceptualisation of the museum’s permanent exhibition in today’s “working\_world.net” show. Both the 1999 and the 2006 renovations were designed by Arno Grünberger’s architectural firm Spurwien.

Today the museum is a renowned cultural centre, where national history is portrayed by way of its inextricable connections with the local and the European domains.

### → THE MANY SCALES OF THE NATION

The Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr stands out as a peculiar case in MeLa’s investigation on national museums because its features seem to corroborate the tenet that a museum need not to be labelled as “national” in order to function as one. As a matter of fact, the name and the statute of the museum reveal no state regimentation of the institution’s activities, and yet the museum de facto operates and is recognised as a platform for mirroring histories, identities and aspirations of the Austrian nation. One look at the exhibition titles and synopses re-





IMG. 1.23 — Ground floor plan with identification of the functional layout. © Spurwien, 2006.

IMG. 1.24 — View of the entrance façade. © Walter Luttenberger.



veals the desire to capture the character of the nation: there are exhibitions dedicated to Austria's technological advancement ("Inventors. Patents. Austria"), politics ("The Land of the Reds"), education ("100 years of Catholic Social Teaching"), religions ("Our Jewish Families" and "Faces of Islam"), and even sports ("Austrian Football and Migration"). While indicating a clear interest in the definition of what is Austrian, however, these exhibitions also suggest that the national community they portray is inherently multifaceted and heterogeneous. And, just as this community is received as diversified, so is the territorial scope of the museum, which resists clear-cut classifications and exact geographical jurisdictions.

Indeed, when the Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr first came into being in 1987, the circumstances of its establishment testified to a deep connection between the regional and the national scales. But as the museum redefined itself as a house of contemporary history, issues of migration, Europeanness, sense of belonging and multiculturalism began to figure prominently in its exhibitions—namely shows like "Migration: A Trip Through Time in Europe" (2003), "Crossing Borders" (2004), "The Enlargement of the EU" (2004), and "Together: Living and Working in Mühlviertel and South Bohemia" (2004). The design of these exhibitions is concomitant with the museum's involvement in several European research projects—notably "Migration, Work and Identity" (2000–2003), developed in the framework of the EU program "Culture 2000," and "Mimex. Mediation in Museums and Exhibitions: Migration and Work" (2002–2005), developed as part of the EU Socrates-Grundtvig program. And yet this opening to the European dimension should not be mistaken for a mere shift in focus from the national to the supranational arguably due to the process of European integration. Rather, and more interestingly, it becomes a way of capturing the nation precisely through the lens of those processes that have shaped its recent past and present. Particularly indicative of this approach is the museum's contribution to the "Migration, Work and Identity" transnational

project, where seven temporary exhibitions were organised to tackle different aspects of migration in Europe—one for each of the partner institutions: the Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr, the People's History Museum in Manchester, the Arbejdermuseet in Copenhagen, the Deutsches Technikmuseum and the Museum Europäischer Kulturen in Berlin, the Museum der Arbeit in Hamburg, the Arbetets Museum in Norrköping, and the Museu de la Ciència i de la Tècnica de Catalunya in Terrassa-Barcelona.

In the context of this project, the Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr chose not to limit its contribution to the registration of the European discussion on migratory phenomena, but tied that discussion to an inquiry into the mismatch between demographics and public opinion in the perception of Austria as an immigration country. Where Austria was generally received as a country of emigration, the exhibition brought attention to the possible counterargument that, according to statistics, Austria was a country of immigration too. The exhibition narrative and design proved instrumental in substantiating this thesis. As the visitor entered the museum lobby, he found himself surrounded by an immersive environment with large format pictures, sound installations, artworks and objects that tried to recapture the human experience of feeling like "strangers." The mode through which this intention was put into place set the tone for the whole exhibition. Universal representations of the concept were juxtaposed with context-specific ones, so that cliché and Europe-related images were combined with others that specifically referred to the Austrian and Steyr region: Benetton's fetishised photos of multiracial groups were paired with black and white pictures of people who lived in Austria as strangers; local and Turkish chanting overlaid the mechanical clatter of a train and the sound of footsteps; Robert Mittringer's stylised human sculptures in the act of roving were surrounded by pictures of migrants that settled in the Steyr region. Supported by immigration statistics, these images painted a portrait of the nation that renegotiated the consolidated identity of Austria at home and abroad.



**IMG. 1.25** — Robert Mitteringer's stylised human sculptures occupy the central hall of the museum for the temporary exhibition "Migration: A Trip Through Time in Europe" (2003). © Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr.



**IMG. 1.26, 1.27** — The section "Industrial Mass Production: Working Non-Stop" features a video installation by Valie Export, entitled "The Un-Ending/Similar Melody of the Strands." The installation, which consists of 25 monitors broadcasting close-ups of a sewing machine in operation and reproducing the noise level of a factory, symbolises the non-stop working cycle of labour in contemporary society. © Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr.



**NEXT PAGE, IMG. 1.28** — The section "Information Technologies: Structures of the Infosphere" features the globe installation "Worldprocessor" by Ingo Günther. Four illuminated globes raise awareness about geopolitical themes such as migration, globalisation, data flows and trade balances © Museum Arbeitswelt Steyr.



Moving on to other sections of the exhibition, this renegotiation and the juxtaposition between Europe and nation were even more blatant. In the "Postwar Migrations" section, for example, a deep rift gapped between the narratives of two groups of people: the famously "displaced" Jews headed towards Palestine and the United States, and the "Sudeten Germans" expelled from Czechoslovakia, to West Germany and Austria. The striking thing here was that the proposed juxtaposition touched upon a very delicate and hotly debated political matter in Austria, which saw Sudeten Germans assimilated to the Jewish people to support vindications of the rights to return to homelands and to be returned plundered properties. As the limited space of the exhibition could not exhaust the many tensions connected to the immigration of the exiled in postwar Austria, what the museum offered here was only a polemic visual snapshot of the subject. Further exploration and the interpretation of the matter was left to the visitor, who was provided a detailed account of the dispute's contrasting positions in the multilingual brochure that accompanied the exhibition.

If analysed with a critical eye, then, the "Migration: A Trip Through Time in Europe" exhibition does more than just focus attention onto the issue of migration: it adopts migration as a vehicle to unpack the complexity of the nation. To talk about Austria as a country of immigration means to construe its identity in terms of a nonself-referential historical experience, with "strangers" serving as vectors of different, yet conjoined narratives. It is an understanding of the national dynamics that cannot be abstracted from their European counterparts—just as it cannot dispense with the local dimension. The attempts at reaching out to the European scale should thereby be read in this light—an image of the nation emerges that transcends the state geographical boundaries to approximate a multiscalar construct, while the museum lends itself as a space of holistic renegotiation of the different scales involved in this process.

If we now move from the territorial to the chronological scope of the museum exhibitions, a clear predominance of present and future over

past also becomes apparent. This is especially true when it comes to issues of labour migration, which is not depicted as the product of long-term historical developments but rather analysed in its contemporary and problematic nature. It is an approach that in some respects seems much more effective than what we see in place in many "official" national museums, where the practice of examining the present in terms of long historical narratives is still predominant and cannot simply be dismissed altogether. Yet, if it is true that a nation is the mirror of its history, it is also true that here—in a museum that aims at portraying Austria as a nation "in the making"—the nation is a mirror of its present. In this respect, the permanent exhibition "Working\_world.net" can exemplify the value of the engagement with the present for a discussion of migration.

The exhibition is based on the premise that in today's global context there is no longer a solution of continuity between working and living. Hence, a synopsis of the mechanisms of global production can also illuminate questions about the processes of social integration. The conceptual design of the exhibition that ensues from this assumption revolves around the image of the network which is understood as a bundle of social, economic and political actors and meanings in continuous transformation. In spatial terms, this translates into a narrative path that is multithreaded rather than linear, and open rather than prescribed, thus leaving the visitor free to find his own meaning as he chooses his own way through the museum rooms. Furthermore, museographic conventions too are impacted by this transformation-based scenario, as traditional display cases lose their importance compared with representation devices that appeal to the senses and generate strong emotional responses—photo-cinematic sequences, light sculptures, sound environments, tactile installations and interactive artworks.

Within this free multi-semantic environment, abstract notions like global division of labour, migration of capital, and infosphere are captured in a way that readily registers today's societal changes. Thus the worldwide division of





labour is depicted through film sequences that follow the production of a mobile phone from Zambia to China, the United States and then Austria, showing how global logistics offer contradictory opportunities for “forgotten countries” to escape their state of poverty.

In the adjacent room, the fast and unconstrained mobility of capital is portrayed through an interactive installation where the visitors can

play with real-time data on stock market trends, while, in contrast, the slow and problematic mobility of people is represented through a photo-sound documentary of decline and outbound migration in Detroit and Ukraine. Or more, the free flow of information in the infosphere is called into question by Ingo Günther’s installation of luminous globes as they expose the unequal accessibility to knowledge and electronic networks in different parts of the world.

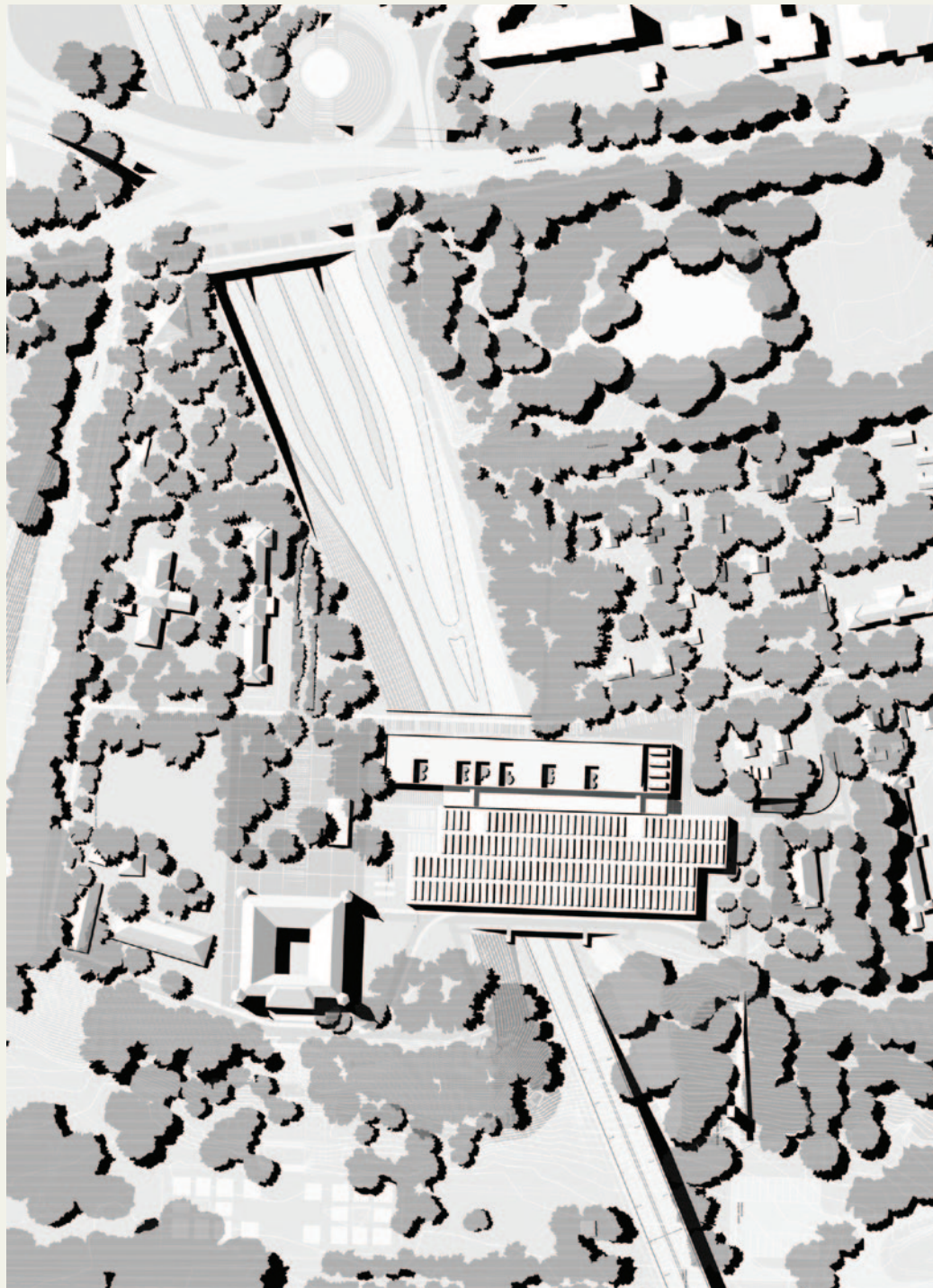
While the scientific content of “Working\_world.net” is highly relevant to MeLa, it is by moving past the exhibition content and reflecting on its “processness” that our analysis may prove most fruitful. In this respect, we conclude by noticing that emphasising the present over the past, “Working\_world.net” engages its visitors with questions that are closer to their lives, thereby blurring the distance between the learned and the lived. What is more, the modalities of this engagement—user-centred, sensory-based, open-ended, and highly interactive—foster the practice of taking a stance on controversial issues, as the absence of a scripted exhibition narrative forces the visitor to construct his own interpretation. A conscious, pedagogical impulse thus becomes apparent—we may call it a “pedagogy of activation”—that, through the exhibition, is capable of conditioning behaviours of active participation that are necessary for the development of a healthy, civil society. To be sure, one such approach proves to be exceptionally valuable to raise awareness on matters of multicultural diversity and social cohesion. And it is precisely on this kind of approach that MeLa should build to develop sustainable strategies for museum practices.

Clelia Pozzi

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IMG. 1.29 — Muzeum Historii Polski, Warsaw, Poland. Project by Paczowski et Fritsch Architectes, 2009: site plan. © Paczowski et Fritsch Architectes.

## Muzeum Historii Polski

### Museum of Polish History, Warsaw, Poland

The Museum of Polish History is a national museum established in 2006 under the auspices of Bogdan Zdrojewski, Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage. The museum, which aims to explore defining episodes of the country's past, was first established as a legal entity without a collection or a dedicated building. An international architectural competition for the design of a permanent seat was launched in 2009, and was won by the Luxembourg–Polish firm Paczowski et Fritsch Architectes. As the museum building is still under construction, short-term exhibitions have been temporarily displayed at partner institutions in Warsaw and abroad.

The museum presents itself as an educational hub for Polish and foreign visitors of various ages and cultural and social backgrounds. As students and young visitors are identified as the primary users of the facility, the museum's communication techniques are targeted to their perception and understanding of the process of history.

The exhibition program, including permanent as well as temporary exhibitions, will explore major themes in Polish history and culture, from the tenth century to the present day. The permanent exhibition will be chronologically organised and structured along five main historical periods: the Middle Ages, modern times, the 19th century, World War I, and the People's Republic. The presentations will be narrative, immersive and interactive in form, promoting intense participation by museum visitors. With the support of the latest multimedia technologies, the museum will work to identify new ways of experiencing history.

#### → A NEW MUSEUM FORMULA

The resurgence of a nationalistic spirit in contemporary Europe is a matter of concern for many a politician and historian. In the past few years, rising nationalism has often been de-

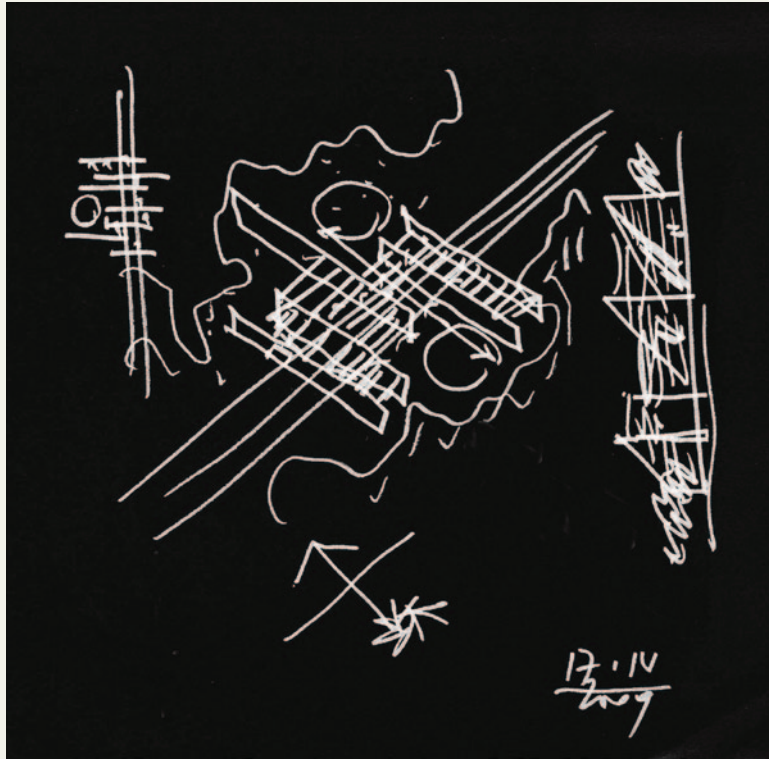
scribed as a threat to immigrants and an obstacle to the acceptance of diversities, generating apprehension as to whether such a trend may undermine the very ideological foundation of the European Union. The phenomenon seems to be particularly acute in a country like Poland, where the latest cultural policies have registered a turn toward the “patriotic” that may seem suspicious when viewed against the 2004 entrance of the country into the European Union. And yet, an inquiry into the parallel establishment of the *Muzeum Historii Polski*—Museum of Polish History—may unveil a much more complex interaction between the “national” and the “foreign” that suggests a new mode of building intercultural dialogue in Europe.

Subject as it was to repeated moments of historical rupture, Poland has come to be known as a country characterised by unstable geographical and identitarian boundaries. The partition of territory between Russia, Prussia and Austria at the end of the 18th century, the split of the reconstituted state between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939, and the subsequent Communist occupation have long hindered the construction of a codified image of the nation, thus turning it into an ideological priority at the time of Poland's regained freedom after the fall of the Berlin wall. It is no surprise, then, that when Poland entered the European Union in 2004, its main concern was not the enforcement of cultural policies oriented toward the acceptance of a foreign “other,” as much as toward the enhancement of the nation's own historical continuity. One might say that a preservation mechanism was in place that spurred a retreat into the national self as a reaction in the face of globalisation and European integration processes. It is in this light that we must understand the

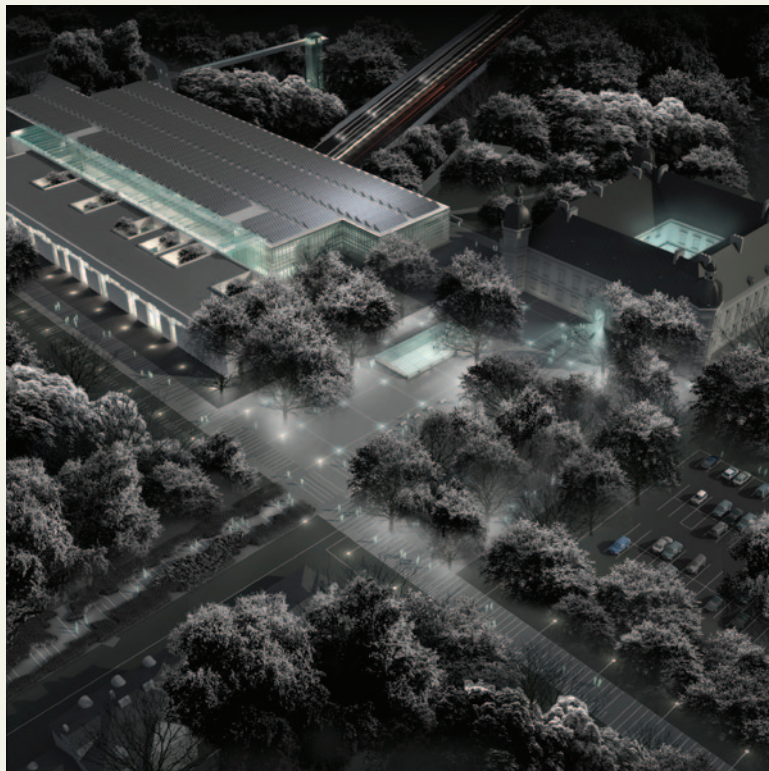
<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the evolution in Poland's cultural policies in last 15 years, see: Compendium. 2011. “Country Profile: Poland.” Accessed November 19, 2012. [http://www.culturalpolicies.net/download/poland\\_122011.pdf](http://www.culturalpolicies.net/download/poland_122011.pdf).



IMG. 1.30 — First sketch of the museum as bridge.  
© Paczowski et Fritsch Architectes.



IMG. 1.31 — Rendering of the museum building with its square and the adjacent Ujazdowski Castle.  
© Paczowski et Fritsch Architectes.



policy shift in emphasis from the strengthening of the civil society to the protection of national cultural heritage—beginning with a change in the nomenclature of the Polish Ministry of Culture, which in 2005 was renamed “Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.”

On the wave of this patriotic approach to national culture, actions were undertaken to establish new museums for the promotion of Polish history. Along with the construction of the Warsaw Uprising Museum, came the Museum of Polish History, founded in May 2006 with the purpose of exploring defining episodes of the country’s past from the tenth century to the present day. The museum was initially established as a legal entity without a collection and a dedicated building, while a search for an adequate museum formula was launched and tested at once through online and short-term exhibitions temporarily hosted at other institutions. This search for a museum formula testifies to the perceived conviction that the identity of a nation with a past and a society as complex as Poland’s could not be properly portrayed through old museographic conventions. And what is interesting to the MeLa discussion is that such a quest for the representation of Poland’s identity did not entail a foreclosure of the issue of multiculturalism. Rather, contrary to the dictum of the state’s most recent cultural policies, the Museum of Polish History implied from the outset an understanding of national history that is deeply enmeshed with the history of other countries and of national, ethnic and religious minorities.

What lies behind this seemingly open contrast between the mission of the new museum and the cultural policies recently enforced? What appears to have intervened in this gap is the logic of museography itself, for, as we continue to probe the boundaries of the discipline and seek new approaches to the complex legacy of past and present, a reassessment of the body of practice produced thus far becomes necessary that makes us aware of our engagement with history and society. The 2009 architectural competition for the Museum of Polish History building had just that effect. To begin with, the letter of the

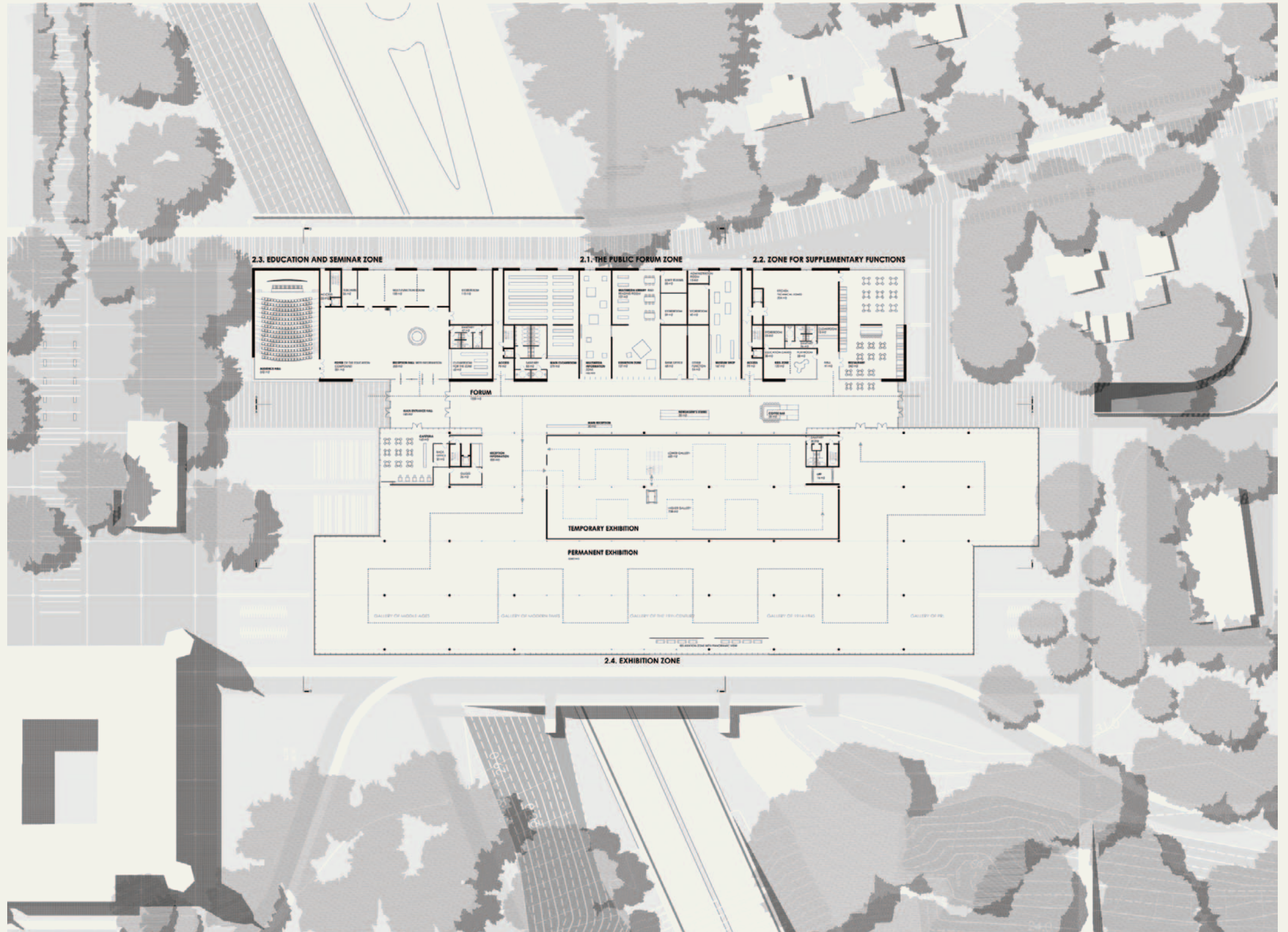
Minister for Culture and National Heritage that accompanied the competition guidelines immediately identified the challenge of creating a museum of national history in modern times, posing the problem of celebrating one’s own identity in a system where a Pole is also a European and a citizen of the world. Furthermore, the claim that “the history of any nation is not owned by that nation alone” (Zdrojewski 2009) situated the quest for Polish identity in a transcultural scenario, and decidedly invoked a specific formula for shared modes of historiography and museography. Hence, a close analysis of the “ingredients” of one such formula is all the more relevant to MeLa, as it might shed light on sustainable museum practices for Europe-oriented scenarios.

When presenting the ideological rationale of the Museum of Polish History, its director Robert Kostro repeatedly asserted that the task of the museum does not lie in the creation of a canonical interpretation of history. Rather, it lies in the creation of a “common point of dispute” (Museum of Polish History 2011), that is, a space that makes the historical dialogue continue, a space that presents conflicting interpretations of the same event without creating spheres of conflict. In a nutshell, a museum space that is agonistic rather than antagonistic, as many scholars have recently suggested.

The identified museum task calls for three main constituents of the museographical formula, carefully charted in the competition guidelines (Museum of Polish History 2009). First, said task cannot be achieved without the active engagement of the museum visitors, whose voices are fundamental to supply the exhibition narrative with diversified perspectives. In this sense it is also significant that the Museum of Polish History was established without a collection, thus involving its users not only in the task of commenting on curated histories, but also in the very construction of the museum’s collection. Second, in terms of form, the museum task implies a diversification of the exhibition tracks in a “fast route” and a “slow route.” The former, designed for quick consumption, is meant to offer a chronological overview of Poland’s history



IMG. 1.32 — Ground floor plan with identification of the functional layout. The temporary exhibition area serves as a filter between the public forum and the permanent exhibition area. © Paczowski et Fritsch Architectes.





proceeding from the artefacts of the permanent collection. The latter, envisioned for in-depth explorations, offers a space of reflection that complicates and challenges the larger picture of the fast route through temporary exhibitions that are thematic and comparative in nature. One such spatial juxtaposition is of no little consequences, for it allows to recuperate the double significance of the contemporary national history museum: charting long-term historical structures while delving into debated topics about that very historical development. Last, in terms of content, the Polish museum formula implies a multiplicity of foci that does not simply amount to a multi-plot historical narration, but also accounts for different scales of territorial reach. Hence the plan for future exhibitions is to summon institutional, national and community dimensions together to represent Poland's relation with neighbouring countries and national minority groups, as well as the nation's multicultural character and religious pluralism.

In the translation from competition brief to winning design entry and exhibitions program it is noteworthy that the various ingredients of the proposed museographic formula seem to be actively in place. The building by Paczowski et Fritsch Architectes is characterised by a clear and functional layout that revolves around the spatial juxtaposition between permanent and temporary exhibitions. The permanent exhibition area is conceived as an elongated open space that runs parallel to, and serves as an extension for, the so called forum—a public covered path that crosses the building from north to south, and reconnects the Centre for Contemporary Art in the Ujazdowski Castle with the secular park on the opposite side of the express road. Allowing for great flexibility of display arrangements, the open space lends itself to meandering exhibition paths, which become visible from the outside of the building thanks to the transparent quality of the pavilion's shell. The temporary exhibition area, instead, is conceived as an enclosed piazza nested at the core of the museum, between the forum and the permanent exhibition—as if this place for agonistic controversy was to become the mediator between the people and the writ-

ing of their history. “Fast” and “Slow” routes are thus clearly identified that comply with different modes of historical narration.

Furthermore, the competition jury's reasoning for selecting Paczowski and Fritsch's design suggests that the anti-symbolic character of their proposal is well suited to allow diverse interpretations of a national history that is fairly complex by itself. Hence the praise for the neutral transparent features of the building. And yet, if we were to speculate on this, a reading of the museum may be advanced that is not entirely neutral, nor anti-symbolic. We could propose, in fact, that by straddling a six-lane expressway built in the Communist era, and thus reconnecting the royal neighbourhood to the city, the building does more than just repair what has been perceived as an urban wound inflicted by foreign oppressors. This transparent, bridge-like structure metaphorically brings together different ends of history and society, while suspending the historical judgment on them and referring it to the museum visitors. Free citizens, oppressed and oppressors; local identities and foreign ideologies—all these elements are reconnected as equal parts of the multifaceted reality that constitutes Poland. This is not a neutral choice, but an active step towards inclusive forms of nationalism.

And what is all the more interesting in this agonistic thinking are its implications on the scope of the museum's exhibitions. Take for example the exhibition “Separated by War,” temporarily displayed at the Warsaw University Library in 2009 while the competition for the museum building was being held. The exhibition stemmed from an online project at the Museum of Polish History, aimed at documenting and archiving oral histories of Polish families that were separated due to war-induced migrations and resettlements in the period 1939–1989. The key issue for the exhibition lay in which families were to be considered “Polish.” The commendable choice of the curators was to identify seven families whose provenance ques-

2 Families Separated by History. 2012. Accessed November 19, 2012. <http://rodziny.muzhp.pl/?jezyk=eng>.

tioned the historical and contemporary understanding of the term—hence the inclusion of households that fell under the Third Reich, the Soviet occupation and the General Government; Jewish as well as Catholic families; literate and uneducated people; families immigrated from neighbouring countries and mixed families of Poles and Germans. By musealising emotions and lived experiences of these diverse families more than precise dates and data, the exhibition succeeds in tracing a portrait of the nation's history that is also a portrait of European inclusiveness. And more, such a portrait can never be mistaken as peremptory or conclusive, as the sometimes conflicting stories that compose it denounce its provisional nature and allow for a space of individual renegotiation of the narrative.

As the Museum of Polish History is yet to be constructed, we are only left to imagine how the spatial arrangement of the building might have added to the multicultural and inclusive spirit of this exhibition endeavour. What is sure is that the museum's mission and its ever-increasing involvement in the mutual perception of “selves” and “others” bode well for the role of this institution in establishing a successful intercultural dialogue. In the final analysis, it all comes down to finding the right museum formula—which does not need to be groundbreakingly innovative as much as well tailored. And in this case, the ingredients seem to be just right to modernise the national museum into a place where patriotic edification occurs through the unfolding of the controversial potential that the nation holds in itself.

Clelia Pozzi

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IMG. 1.33 — Museu d'Història de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain. Section "Retrat de la Catalunya contemporània (1980-2007)." Panel text: "El català, cosa de tots?" (Is Catalan everyone's business?). © Museu d'Història de Catalunya. Photo by Pep Parer.

## Museu d'Història de Catalunya–MHC

Museum of the history of Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain

### → THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NATIONAL MASTER NARRATIVE

The Museum of History of Catalonia was officially created in July 1993 by the Catalan regional government (*Generalitat*) and it was inaugurated in February 1996. The permanent exhibition covers from prehistory to the 20th century, and it aims to establish a master narrative on the history of Catalonia. At the time of its opening, it was hailed as representing an innovative museological concept, which combined traditional museum presentation, based on the display of materials, with immersive atmosphere, multimedia technologies and interactive devices, in order to pursue its teaching goals; as the foundational decree affirmed, the aim was "to reinforce the identification of citizens with national history".

The museum's premises are an example of rehabilitated industrial heritage: Barcelona's Palace of the Sea (*Palau de Mar*), is the former General Depots of Barcelona's old port, constructed between 1885 and 1900 and rehabilitated in the 1990s. Since its opening, the museum has stirred the debate on the historical relationship between Catalonia and the rest of Spain, and particularly on the traumatic memories of the twentieth century, particularly though its policy of temporary exhibitions. In the last years, a new section has been added to the museum: "Portrait of Contemporary Catalonia: 1981–2007" (*Retrat de la Catalunya contemporània: 1980–2007*), which addresses Catalonia's economic, political and demographic evolution within Democratic Spain, and pays particular attention to the role of immigrants and minorities in Catalan society.

The death of General Franco in 1975 inaugurated a process of political reform in Spain, which culminated with the passing of the 1978 Democratic Constitution. Although the Constitution declared "the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common, indivisible land of all the Spanish people", the democratic state inherited unresolved issues such as the nationalist question in Catalonia and the Basque Country. As a means to resolve it, the Constitution promoted the creation of a quasi-federalist system (or better federalising, given the progressive nature of the decentralisation process); since then, the autonomous regions (in Spanish: *comunidades autónomas*) have developed their own structures of executive and legislative power, and have assumed an increasing level of self-government. In particular, the management of cultural institutions has been transferred to the regional governments, which have developed their own cultural agendas and have fostered the creation of museum pertaining their own heritage (Roigé, and Arrieta 2010).

In the case of Catalonia, the autonomous government (*Generalitat*) promoted since its creation in 1981 the renovation of Catalonia's main museums, such as in particular the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. Moreover, in 1993, the *Generalitat* decided the creation of a new institution devoted "to preserve, to expose and to divulgate the history of Catalonia as a collective heritage and to reinforce the identification of citizens with national history,"<sup>1</sup> as the foundational decree puts it. "Memory" was from the onset one of the keywords of the project, as the museum's motto evinces: "The memory of a country" (*La memòria d'un país*). In the words of its first director, Josep Maria Solé i Sabaté,

1 "Conservar, exposar i difondre la història de Catalunya com a patrimoni col·lectiu i enfortir la identificació dels ciutadans amb la història nacional." (Decree 47/1996, of February 6th).





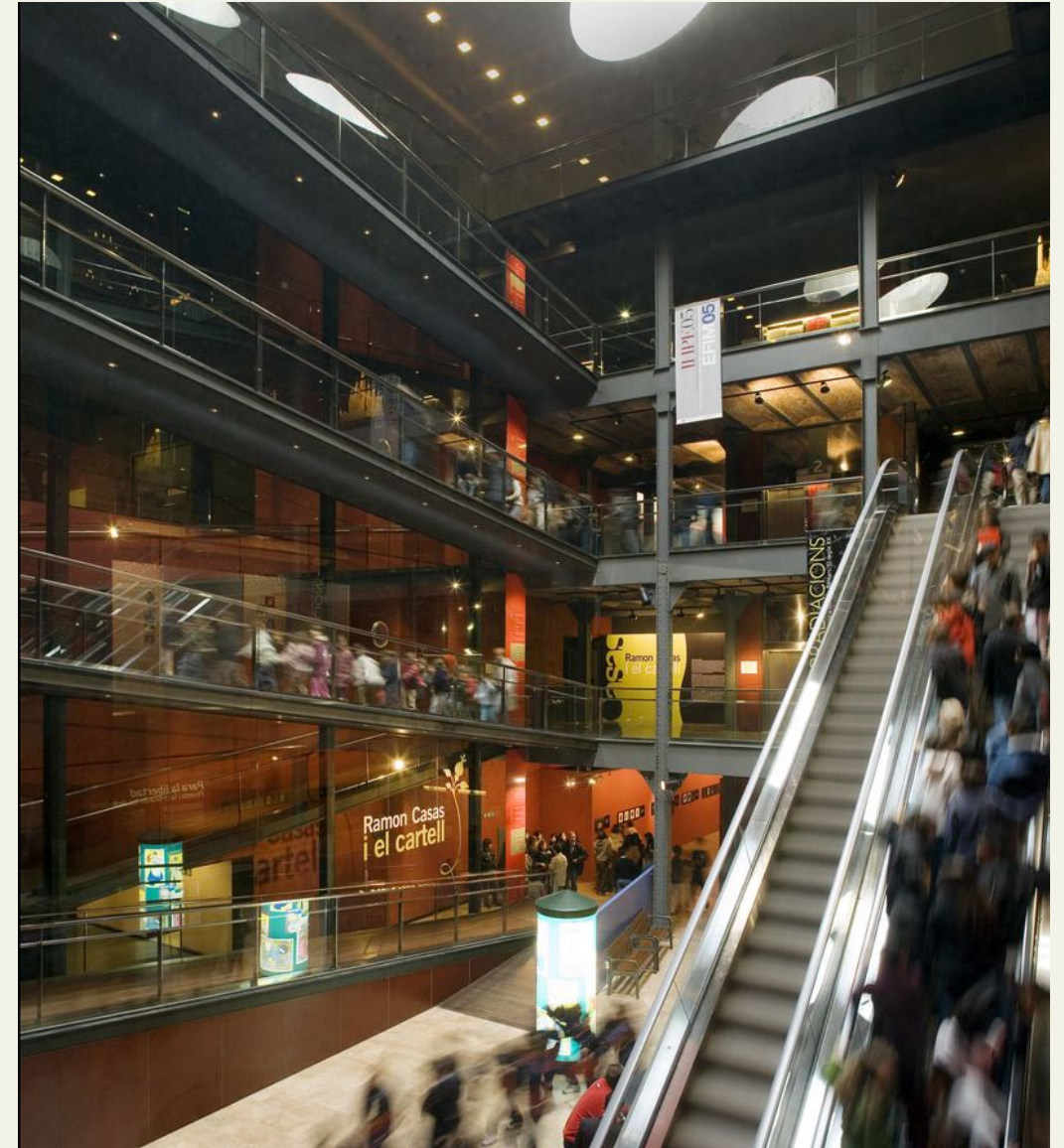
an academic historian specialised in the Spanish Civil War: “history is not just an object of academic study, but its knowledge is indispensable for the formation of qualified citizens: the most precious asset of a country”. For him, the aim to recover Catalan history was justified as a reaction to the silence imposed for almost four decades of Francoist dictatorship (Solé 1997; 2000).

From the museographic point of view, the MHC aimed to be innovative and unconventional. As opposed to traditional museums, its core is not a collection of artefacts (indeed, most of the objects and documents are on loan from other institutions) and the exhibition of materials is not its main goal. Instead, the museum uses a wide range of museological devices, whether traditional (reconstruction of historical settings, dioramas, architectural models) or contemporary (multimedia, dramatic effects of illumination) in order to create an immersive display in which the visitors is called to be part of history. As the chief of the museographic project affirmed, the museum attempts to construct a “museography of the sentiment, the intelligence and the sensibility,” for which the project developers “took into account the innovations offered by museums of science and technology, archaeological parks, and eomuseums” (Hernández Cardona 1997).

The permanent display is structured chronologically along seven historical periods: “The

Roots” (*Les arrels*), the “Birth of a Nation” (*El naixement d’una nació*), “Our Sea” (*La mar nostra*), “On the Edge of the Empire” (*A la perifèria de l’imperi*), “A Steam-powered Nation” (*Vapor i nació*), “The Electric Years” (*Els anys elèctrics*), “Defeat and Recovery” (*Desfeta i represa*). Thus, the permanent rooms invite the visitor to take a journey from prehistory to the twenty-first century, in which Catalonia is defined as an essential reality. For instance, in the first room the fossil remains of *Homo erectus* from Tautavel (Languedoc-Rousillon, France) are presented as the “first Catalan.”

As professor R. Vinyes (2000) pointed out, the focus of the museological discourse concentrates on two historical periods particularly cherished by Catalan nationalism: on the one hand the Middle Ages, and on the other the age of industrialisation. If the first period is characterized as the moment of formation of Catalan identity, the second is presented as the deployment of its economic and entrepreneurial leadership within Spain. This author also contests the claim of plurality that the first director had expressed in his presentation of the museum, and describes the intellectual influence of the Catalan conservative ideology on the museographic discourse; in the MHC the bourgeoisie is presented as leading agent of the national history, linking the medieval city elites of Barcelona with the industrialists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.



This vision of history harks back to the second half of the nineteenth century, when the Catalan culture revival movement (*Reinaxença*) constructed the medieval period as the Golden Age of Catalan language and arts. Barcelona was then at the centre of a larger political entity, the Crown of Aragon, which included not only the peninsular territories (Catalonia plus the Kingdoms of Aragon and Valencia) but also the Balearic Islands, Sardinia, Sicily and the South of the Italian Peninsula. For this rea-

son, the museum describes medieval Barcelona as the capital of a Mediterranean empire open to external influences, drawing on the stereotypes of open-mindedness and entrepreneurial spirit usually associated with mercantile peoples. As opposed to the periods of splendour, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are presented as a period of decadence, and Catalonia is described as the “periphery” of the Hispanic monarchy. After those “dark ages,” nineteenth-century industrialisation is portrayed



as generator of a new economic revival, which allows the renaissance of culture and national re-awakening. Finally, the twentieth century is largely displayed as a time of both the rise (Second Republic), fall (Francoism) and resurrection (Democracy) of the Catalan nation. In the MHC, Spain is referred to as the “Spanish state” (*estado español*) an impersonal expression that denotes the artificiality of such a construct according to Catalan nationalism. Whereas in the museum “Catalonia” is charged with sentimental rhetoric, the “Spanish state” is portrayed a mere bureaucratic entity and a repressive state superstructure.

Cartography features very prominently in the museum, particularly in mapping exchanges between Catalonia and other territories, or when reminding the visitor what the Catalan irredentist project calls “Catalan Countries” (*Països Catalans*): the reunion of all territories in which varieties of Catalan are spoken, including the Valencian region and the Balearic Islands, but also Andorra, Roussillon and Cerdagne in Southern France, a strip of land in the East of Aragon, and the city of Alghero in Sardinia. Moreover, the museum makes good use of reconstructions of historical settings to allure the visitor (a medieval war tent, a Republican school class as opposed to a Francoist one). Particularly striking is the reproduction of the *Generalitat* palace balcony from which Francesc Macià (1859–1933) proclaimed the Catalan Republic in 1931: the visitor enters the balcony to find the Catalan flag, a picture of the crowds in the foreground and a life-size mannequin of Macià, while a recording repeats his 1931 declaration. The re-enactment concludes with the roaring of the people and the playing of *Els segadors*, the Catalan anthem.

In the same way, the venue of the museum, in “one of Catalonia’s most important examples of industrial heritage” as the official website states, confirms the very strong role that industrialisation plays for Catalan history. The General Depots, projected in 1881 and completed around 1900, represented the effort of the city

to promote long distant trade in the context of *fin-de-siècle* European colonialism. However, the museum makes very little reference to the Spanish colonial enterprise, or the participation of Catalan industrial sector to it.

The rehabilitation of the building was directed in 1992 by the architects Josep Benedito and Agustí Mateos, as part of the policies of to regenerate the old port of Barcelona in the run-up to the Olympics Games of 1992. Half of the building was adapted for administrative purposes, to host the Welfare and Social Department of the *Generalitat*, whereas the other half was allocated to the MHC, and renamed *Palau de Mar*. Although the interiors had been distorted by successive reforms of the building, it preserved part of its original architecture, which was preserved. The most important intervention consisted in the creation of a big internal courtyard that facilitates the mobility between different floors, as well as the construction of a new floor on the roof, where the museum’s restaurant is located with views over Barcelona’s port (Benedicto, and Mateos 1997).

The museum has also attempted to provoke the debate on the traumatic history and memory of the twentieth century in Spain, in particular related to the Civil War and Francoism, notably by means of its temporary exhibitions. This was the aim of those devoted, for instance, to “Franco’s prisons” (*Les presons de Franco*) in 2003–04, or “1939/1945: The Republican Exile” (*1939 / 1945: L’exili republicà*) in 2012, to name just two of them. Both the permanent display and the main exhibitions are organised with the collaboration of academic scholars. In order to pursue its research goals the museum is the venue to the Centre of the Contemporary History of Catalonia (*Centre d’Història Contemporània de Catalunya*) and publishes several collections, such as the periodical *Mnemósine*, specialised on Catalan museology and targeted to the *Catalan Association of Museology* (*Associació de Museòlegs de Catalunya*). Since 2004 the museum is at the head of a network of archaeological sites and monuments in the Catalan territory that are under the management of the *Generalitat*.

## PREVIOUS PAGE

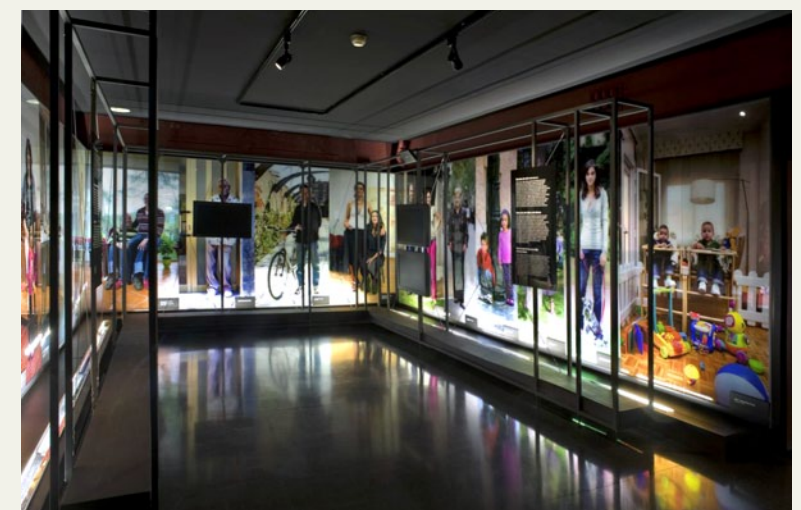
IMG. 1.34 — Main façade. © Museu d’Història de Catalunya. Photo by Pepo Segura.

IMG. 1.35 — Internal staircase. © Museu d’Història de Catalunya. Photo by Pepo Segura.

IMG. 1.36 — Section “Our sea” (*La mar nostra*): The territorial expansion of the Crown of Aragon in the Mediterranean. © Museu d’Història de Catalunya. Photo by Pep Parer.

IMG. 1.37 — Section “Defeat and Recovery” (*Desfeta i represa*): Seat 600, the symbol of the economic recovery in the 1960s in Spain, produced in Barcelona’s industrial area. © Museu d’Història de Catalunya. Photo by Pep Parer.

IMG. 1.38 — Section “Portrait of Contemporary Catalonia: 1980–2007” (*Retrat de la Catalunya contemporània: 1980–2007*). © Museu d’Història de Catalunya. Photo by Pep Parer.



When the museum was built, its permanent exhibition covered the period until the first democratic elections held in Catalonia in 1981, which brought to power the conservative Catalan nationalist party, *Convergència i Unió*, the same one that promoted the museum in the 1990s. In recent years, a new section has been added. Entitled “Portrait of Contemporary Catalonia: 1980–2007” (*Retrat de la Catalunya contemporània: 1980–2007*), this section highlights Catalonia’s leading economic and cultural role in democratic Spain. Structured in different subsections, the first of them highlights the transformation of Catalonia into a multicultural society, and it describes demographic change with these terms: “We are more, we are older and we are more diverse” (*Som més, més vells i més diversos*). The insertion of immigrants in Catalan society is addressed by posing the question about the relationship of the new comers to Catalan language: “Is Catalan everyone’s business?” (*El català, cosa de tots?*); which is subsequently answered in positive terms<sup>2</sup>.

In the first room of this section, large pictures show those “new Catalans”, such as for instance an immigrant from Eastern Europe; she is stereotypically characterised with a scarf on her blonde hair and posing on a background of religious icons. This section also includes members of minorities, such as a Roma teenager, in this case holding a guitar. Finally, social modernity is represented by several artists and professionals (such as a film director or a prestigious cook) or the picture of a gay couple; Catalonia was one of the first comunidades autónomas to grant civil partnership to homosexual couples in 1998, several years before the passing of the Spanish law on same-sex marriage in 2005.

José María Lanzarote Guiral

#### → ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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2 See also: Van Geert (2010) and Bounia et al. (2012).



# Natural History Museums



## Museums of Natural History in Europe

### Documented Mirror of Social and Environmental Preoccupations?

→ FABIENNE GALANGAU-QUÉRAT, SARAH GAMAIRE AND LAURENCE ISNARD

It is now commonly said that museums, in general, have radically changed over the past 40 years, in particular, in their relationship with what is at stake in society. This is especially true with regard to natural history museums and more particularly as from the 1960s when environmental issues started to come into play in social realities. However, what might appear to be, at first sight, a breakaway in fact is really just an extension of these museums' historical background. In retracing their history, and on basing our findings on a study which was carried out to become more familiar with the present day situation of natural history museums in Europe, we will see not only how these Museums have accompanied the discourses of natural scientists, but also the place they occupy today in this great discussion being debated in the scientific community and society in general. Many of the European environmental issues spring from the way Europe exploits its territories, from its economic structure, and the way of life of its inhabitants. For more than 70 per cent of Europeans, the opinion is that politicians in decision-making positions should attach as much importance to environment issues as they do to social and economic issues (EEA 2005).

In a Europe of cultural diversity where, nowadays, the idea of taking action is less of a problem in the area of environmental issues than sometimes antagonistic visions of the world, natural history museums are hence a media tool occupying a privileged position which come both from their status symbol and from the objects on which they base their discourse. Not only do they base their thinking on natural artefacts taken to be the archives of nature, which the museums have documented and catalogued, but also on a vast array of cultural items.

**PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 2.01**  
— View of the Gallery of Comparative Anatomy on the first floor of Galerie de Paléontologie et d'Anatomie Comparée, Jardin des Plantes, Paris, France. Architect Frederic Dutert, 1898. Photo by Luca Basso Peressut.



## → BECOMING ENVIRONMENTALLY AWARE

Fundamentally, the issue is to reconcile Man with Nature. To persuade Man to sign a new pact with Nature inasmuch as Man will be the principal beneficiary of such a pact. The problems involved have to be resolved in one block. (Dorst 1965, 347)

Awareness of environmental issues is currently just another way of reaffirming ideas that came to maturity from the 19th century and from the destructive character of human activity *vis-à-vis* the natural environment along with the need to embark on the preservation of natural environments and habitats (Bergandi and Galangau-Quérat 2008). In both Europe and North America the issue of species extinction and natural habitat transformation due to human activity very precociously and, in a very natural fashion, became a subject of preoccupation for natural scientists. Later, associations and foundations in defence of nature began to be founded everywhere thus contributing to the setting up of the first conferences and seminars to be held on the protection of nature.<sup>1</sup> Thus at the time of the first international congress on the protection of nature held at the MNHN in Paris in 1923, all those participating were in agreement on the problematic double issue of both natural resource management and the preservation thereof. Except for issues linked with pollution, the major themes presently being discussed on the protection of nature were already being debated since the first half of the 20th century. In fact, after the Second World War, what later became to be known as sustainable development could be foreseen in the preamble in the *Convention of the International Union for Nature Conservation* (UICN) drawn up in Fontainebleau (France) under the auspices of UNESCO and therein nature was very much envisaged to be at the service of mankind.

In the 1960s, the most immediate sources of social awareness of the impact of human activity on natural environment equilibrium and on the different forms of living beings, are to be found in the works of the American, Rachel Carson in her publication *Silent Spring* (1962) and in those of the Frenchman, Jean Dorst, in his publication *Avant que nature ne meure* (1965). Then with the era of protest movements, the ecology movement could in fact be said to have found its origins in romantic literature, philosophy, and regional activist movements, to develop into a true social and political movement. Thus emerges a new nature-oriented cult movement, giving rise to a new representation of nature, i.e. a natural world composed of territories where man harbours a more harmonious relationship with the natural environment (Bergandi, and Galangau-Quérat 2008). Unbounded post-war urban development played a part in this change. However, it was in particular, enormous industrial catastrophes that brutally brought about environmental awareness among the people of the Western world. To this may be added such events like the oil crises, under-development and famine affecting a part of human-

1 London in 1900 (*Conference on the protection of African Fauna*), Paris in 1902 (*Conference on the protection of Birdlife*), Berne in 1913 (*Conference on the International Protection of Nature*).



IMG. 2.02, 2.03 — The Zoology Gallery of the Muséum-Aquarium de Nancy (France) before and after renovation. This museum was founded in 1935, closed in 2003 and reopened to the public two years later. Renovation enabled above all the updating of exhibition content and improvement of conservation conditions. Photo by Arno Paul, courtesy of Muséum-Aquarium de Nancy.



ity, which in turn would raise questions about the development model in place. During the 1970s, more political awareness comes into play and, with this, a notable change in the perception of the relationship between man and nature, giving rise to the organisation of conferences, conventions and international and European programmes in this area.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the very important research programme put in place under the auspices of UNESCO called MAB illustrates the passage from a strictly ecosystem based ecology towards research programmes devoting more attention to the interactions between human societies and the

2 Among the most significant: the *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* (Stockholm, 1972); the *1973 Washington Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species* (CITES), the *Bonn Convention on Migratory Species* (1979), The *1987 Brundtland Commission*.

IMG. 2.04 — Main Building, Le Havre Natural History Museum, established in 1847. Photo by Sarah Gamaire.



environment. Since the 1990s, and especially since the United Nations conference on the Environment and Sustainable Development entitled *Earth Summit* in 1992, the concept of biodiversity denoting the wealth and variety of forms of life on the planet, including environments conducive to their existence, have given rise to new expectations from society at large *vis-à-vis* scientific action.

Therefore, we have witnessed, right through the 20th century, a powerful increase in the awareness of environmental issues along with their social consequences. This awareness, which was initially the domain of naturalists and scientists, thereafter rediscovered and amplified by citizen grass roots movements, became an inescapable political issue at the end of the last century and continues to be so today. Hence in this attitude change of the place and importance of nature, the position of scientists when questioned as experts, is not a comfortable one in that they are entangled in environmental issues with no certainty in their responses regarding issues of mounting complexity. Added to this is the heated debate on whether ecology is a scientific study area or not (Drouin 1993). Moreover, in the context of a discourse questioning the role of science in its submission to the rules of the economy, many scientists have embarked upon interdisciplinary research aiming at the construction of new reference models. Such is the explanation for the entry on the environmental scene of social sciences. The humanities, follow that of natural sciences inasmuch as social sciences study biodiversity from the point of view of uses, and related perceptions and public policies. It could be said that there has been a lifelong companionship with regard to environmental issues between natural science and the later social sciences, which started long before the first *Earth Summit* in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

#### → NATURAL HISTORY EXHIBITIONS: THEIR PLACE IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL DEBATE

European natural history museums witnessed not only national construction but also the growing relationships between scientists at a European level ever since the Age of Enlightenment. In their role as sources of knowledge, these museums have become, inside the biodiversity crisis, inescapable actors for the conservation and validation of both the scientific and natural heritage.

In the 18th century, natural history museums the heirs to what used to be called “old curiosity shops,” accompanied the emergence of a new scientific subject area. They became systematic, and the presentation of collection items used the application of principles governing the classification of species. In the 19th century the number of museums of natural history exploded, hence illustrating a real growing interest in nature. The end of the 19th century brings about a second mutation of museum presentations with the emergence of such scientific concepts as evolution and/or ecology (Van Praët 1993). In the 1960s, the change in the relationship of western society *vis-à-vis* nature and the oncoming of an awareness of the fragility of Planet Earth, as previously described, will however, come into conflict later on with the rather conservative and old-fashioned image being carried by the museums of natural history per se inasmuch as they were unable to be modernised due mainly to lack of funds. In Europe, therefore, few are those museums able to illustrate in their exhibitions the societal and scientific preoccupations in vogue at that time. For example, the Stockholm Museum of Natural History, probably a pioneer in 1965 in Europe, thanks to its exhibition aimed at creating awareness towards environment protection. Nevertheless, most of the natural history museums at that time continued to display a more or less “romantic” vision of a classified nature, thus continuing implicitly to further a distanced and aesthetic representation of it (Godwin 1953).

Then in 1971, at an international conference of the ICOM (International Council of Museums), John Kinard, at that time director of the Anacostia Neighbourhood Museum of Washington, reaffirms the responsibility museums have in similar terms to those expressed some time beforehand by the Director of the American Museum of Natural History, A. E. Parr:

If we want museums to truly respond to the needs of contemporary man, it is of paramount importance that they become involved in all areas connected with human existence, thus challenging them to put into use all the creative resources they dispose of. Nonetheless they could be deemed guilty of not responding to the expectations of us all or of not linking knowledge acquired from the past to the serious problems facing us today. (Kinard 1971)

The following year, during an international convention of the ICOM on the theme of “Museums and Environment” a policy on the principal pedagogical actions to be taken was presented, aimed at responding to the reality of the needs of the public at large (*Colloque* 1973). Thus, at the Paris Museum of Natural History, the analysis of narratives and articles published by researchers and directors leads us to believe that the afore-



said prestigious institution would be embarking upon a more precocious and committed exhibition policy. In 1953, Roger Heim, the then director of the museum, communicated his vision of the social role of natural history museums in the area of the Protection of the Natural Environment:

The museum could discover in this area a means to regenerate and its public, school goes, find therein a very good means to arrive at an understanding, which knowledge acquired would then be spread further afield (...) but the dreadful track record of the fast reduction in resources is evidenced by statistics, statements, graphs. (Heim 1953)

Mr. Heim advocated the introduction of new subject matters such as ecology, biogeography, genetics and ethology while criticising the predominating gallery presentations following along the lines of taxonomy procedures. Even if it can be said that during the 1960s and 1970s the activity of the museum continued in favour of the protection of the natural environment, emanating from its research work, expert advice, scientists' position, at the same time lack of official communication on the subject through its inclusion in exhibitions was not in place, as was likewise the case in other French museums of natural history.<sup>3</sup> The explanation, of course, lies in their crucial lack of funding along with official institutional choices more in favour of research work than in the area of exhibitions.

Finally, since the 1980s, we observe that state politics in the area of museums are connected with environmental concerns. To this effect, the closure since 1965 for renovation of the Gallery of Zoology of the Museum of Natural History, is an interesting case in that it occurs at a turning point in the decision making process, thus also engaging officially the scientific community of the museum, and more widely, at a national level, to define a renovation project (as described in detail in the case study). Thus, in 1986, the Museum, represented by its then director, submitted to its governing body a scenario for the Gallery where an important area is to be devoted to the theme of relationships between man and nature presented in the dramatic way of thinking of naturalists. Hence, the new Gallery of Evolution will be among the first museums choosing to devote a part of their permanent exhibition to themes dealing with environmental concerns. During the period leading up to its opening, a succession of scientific, museological and museographic refocusing were in operation. In this way the environmental issues were extracted from the simple division man/nature and developed into a more cross-disciplinary approach. At the time, the biodiversity concept was still rarely in the news but started to become more and more so with the oncoming of the 1992 Rio *Earth Summit*, which would find a very strong expression in the overall scenographic presentations of the New Gallery of Evolution.

In 1991, a seminar organised by the Council of Europe on Museums and Nature<sup>4</sup> supported the evidence of there being a deficit in exhibi-

tions regarding environmental issues and invited European governments to give more support to museums in their educational programmes on such issues. The report written by the French anthropologist, Françoise Héritier Augé, confirms this in that it draws up a severely critical analysis of the French museums under the control of the Ministry of Education declaring: contemporary man and environmental issues notoriously lacking (Héritier-Augé 1991). Therefore, this new awareness springing from the 1980s and 1990s enabled three of Europe's best-known natural history museums, i.e. The British Museum of Natural History in London, Deutsches Museum in Berlin and The Museum of Natural History in Paris, to start to include in their permanent exhibitions themes creating an awareness of environmental issues. When the Gallery of Evolution at the Paris Natural History Museum opened up in 1994, the environmental crisis had in the meantime become a multiform reality in the community at large (Blandin, and Galangau-Quérat 1991). Since then, natural history museums have become more social-minded in that they now also afford a large place to the most significant of scientific findings as will be seen hereafter, opening up also to society issues.

#### → 20TH CENTURY: A TURNING POINT FOR NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS

Very few audits on the state of European museums of natural history have been carried out. Some work at a national level has been undertaken such as that recently done in France by OCIM (Museum Information Cooperation Agency). This agency embarked on a huge enquiry of most of the museums of natural history by means of a questionnaire, thus aiming to show their dynamics (see hereafter article by Florence Bellaën). Notwithstanding such initiatives at national level, no enquiry at European level had ever been undertaken to question the dynamics of such institutions and, above all, their commitments to renovation projects.

Within the context of a Europe still in the process of construction, our aim was to grasp those dynamics present in these museums. To this effect, a research project was initiated in February 2012 within the framework of the European MeLa programme. First of all, the idea was to procure an overall vision by collecting quantitative data by means of a questionnaire in both English and French accessible on the Internet as from the spring of 2012. This questionnaire was addressed to 130 natural history museums spread over the territory of the European Union, each member state including at least two museums.<sup>5</sup> The questionnaire pivoted around two main concepts: the first was aimed at collecting factual data on the actual status of European museums, i.e. their collections, their visitors' space, their staff, their administrative organisation and the profiles of their visitors. The second focused more on the renovation projects for permanent exhibitions.<sup>6</sup>

3 Agency for General Inspection of Provincial Museums of Natural History, Liaison Bulletin of Museums of Natural History (Paris: MNHN. Bibliothèque Centrale du MNHN, 1970–1988).

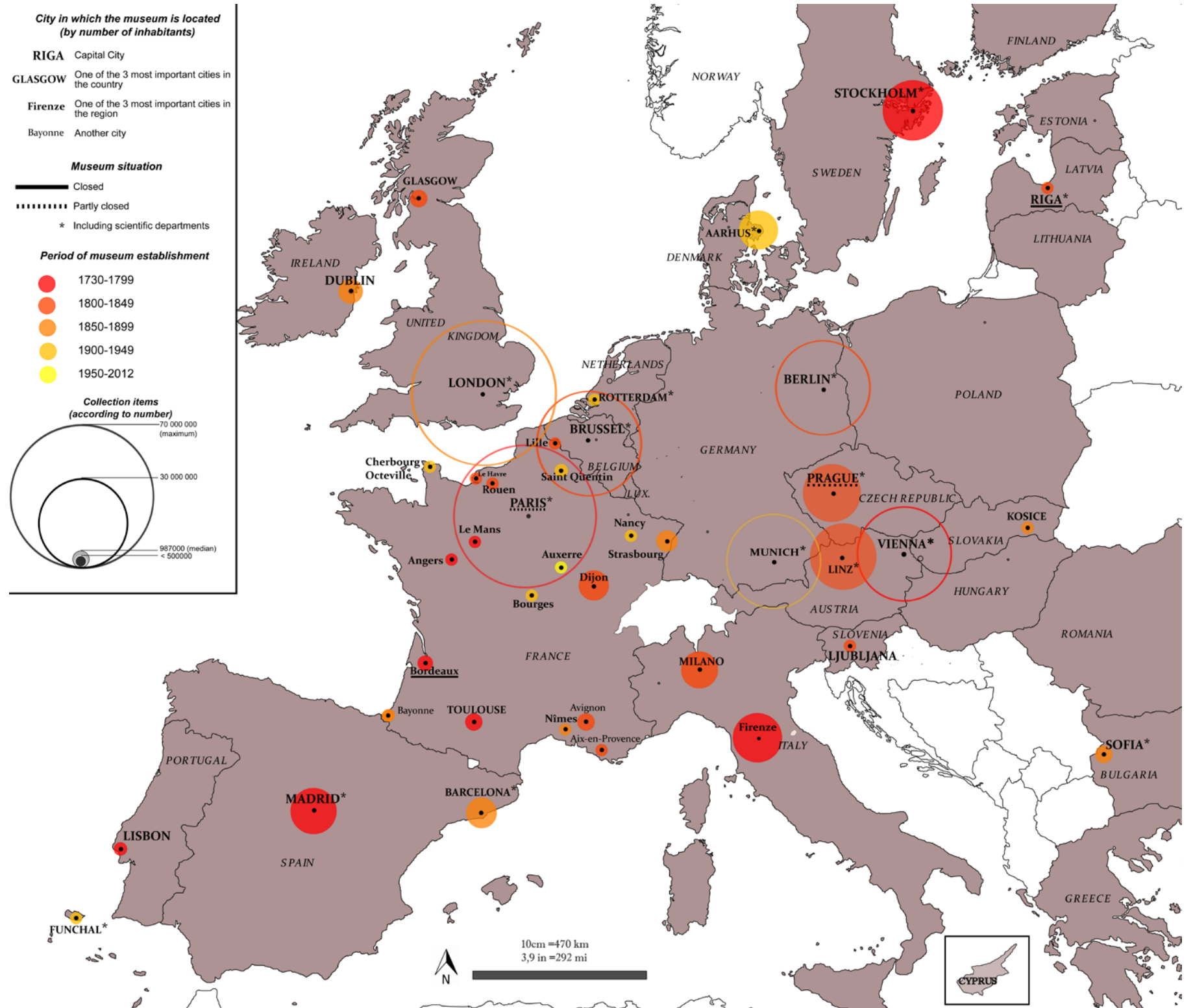
4 "Museums and Nature: Tools for knowledge, development and conservation of European Natural

Heritage," Council of Europe 1990.

5 Only museums with chiefly natural history collections and galleries were considered for the study.

6 In order to reduce a methodology bias connected with the interpretation of the terminology, it is

IMG. 2.05 — The diversity of profiles of natural history museums in Europe is illustrated in results of enquiry to which forty-one European museums responded. Survey by Fabienne Galangau-Quérat, Sarah Gamaire and Laurence Isnard, MeLa Project, February 2012.





### → MUSEUMS OF DIVERSE CONFIGURATIONS

Among the 130 natural history museums contacted mainly through their directors, 41 responded to the full enquiry. Responses came from all around Europe, not only from those countries considered to be the founders such as Germany, Belgium, France and Italy, but also from those new member countries such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, The Czech Republic and even Slovakia. Thus, 17 out of the 27 member states of the EU are represented in this research study. The results enable us to come up with a preliminary audit for those museums who responded regarding their location, age, collection size and the place of research work, as illustrated in the annexed map.

Those museums that responded are more particularly located in big cities and/or towns. One third are national museums located in the capital city of their country (13/41). The others are either located in any one of the three biggest towns in their country (10/41) or in the main regional town (15/41). However, it is to be noted that smaller towns also have their museum of natural history, such as the three French museums located in Aix en Provence, in Avignon and in Bayonne. More than half of the museums who responded are structures dependent on local authorities (21/41). Five are connected to a university and two with a foundation. The majority, however, are state institutions. For several, some tasks have been outsourced to the private sector. Three quarters of the museums were founded either in the 18th or in the 19th centuries, the majority between 1750 and 1850. Among the nine museums founded in the 20th century, just one was founded post 1950. Overall, the museums, participating in the enquiry, have very diverse profiles with regard to visitor numbers, staff numbers, size, place/role granted to researchers. With regard to the size of their collections, there is a huge gap—from 1500 collection items in Ljubljana, Slovenia to 70 million collection items in London, Great Britain. However, in between these two ends of the spectrum, half of the museums have a little less than one million collection items.

The “sampling” resulting from this enquiry is per se incomplete. However, it does highlight a diversity of European natural history museum configurations, all dependent on rules and regulations connected with territory, administration and structural differences. Despite the diversity of profiles emanating from the enquiry, it could however be said that several common problems came to the forefront.

### → RENOVATIONS WITH COMMON ISSUE AREAS

The second area around which the enquiry pivoted was that of renovations to permanent exhibitions. Overall, the responses showed that for the past twenty years, many of these museums (35) have been undertaking the transformation of their permanent exhibitions. Only six of them have neither experienced nor programmed a process of renovation, which

they purport to be caused by lack of funding. Among the 35 museums having undergone renovation, which is either in process or still a project, 34 responded in detail thus showing a total of 68 permanent exhibition areas analysed thoroughly. This also means that any one museum can be involved in several successive or simultaneous renovation operations. In fact two museums are presently completely closed for renovation (Bordeaux in France and Riga in Lithuania). For more than half those museums, the renovation project concerns the whole or almost whole area dedicated to their permanent exhibition. Hence renovation projects tend to be more often vast projects.

#### *Renovation Projects: Causes and Configuration.*

The obsolescence of the content of the exhibitions is the main reason for the renovation of about one third of the permanent exhibition areas renovated or in the course thereof (35/38). Then come successively, change in cultural policy politics in city, town, region or country, after that, building renovation for security issues. Finally, changeover of museum management has not been identified as a cause for undertaking renovation projects. The age of the galleries closed for renovation work varies from one museum to another. For example, one of the galleries in the Jardin des Sciences Museum in Dijon, France, closed 176 years after its opening to the public, whereas one of the exhibition areas in the Museum of Natural History in Le Mans, France closed just 11 years after its opening to the public. Hence, it looks as if the age of the galleries is not a real criterion to embark on a renovation project. Closure to the public for renovation of permanent exhibition galleries can either be for a short period of time (one year) or might be spread over many years, up to as much as 61 (as in Bayonne, France). In between these two ends of the spectrum, half of the renovated exhibition halls were closed for less than five years. Even if it can be said that the average period of closure is rather short given the age of the museums, one must not omit the fact that closure for renovation is just the final phase in the long process for renovation. Several years, sometimes many more, are given over to reflection, to the creation of and to amendments to the planned renovation project. Added to this is the often necessary action of calling for and the granting of funding. As an example, see attached interview with Judith Pargamin, Director of the Lille Museum of Natural History in France, which is still open to the public but for which a complete renovation project has been in the pipeline for more than 20 years.

#### *Themes of New Exhibitions.*

The scientific themes for renovation projects have been explained in detail by 33 museums. Three quarters of them (27/33) actually put to the forefront the “biodiversity” theme, or plan to do so. “Diversity in Cultural Representations of Nature” is equally a preponderant theme inasmuch as practically half of the museums (15/33) have chosen it, thus ranking it in third position after “The Theory of Evolution.” “Cultural diversity” is also to be found as a theme in permanent exhibitions, but to a lesser extent (8/33).

emphasised that the term “renovation” should be taken as follows: “By renovations, we mean the realisation of work which necessitates the closure and subsequent re-opening of the public galleries.”

IMG. 2.06, 2.07 — The Regional Zoology and Paleontology collections of this Exhibition Hall in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle of Bordeaux (France) moved in summer of 2011 along with all other collection items to new Center for Conservation of Museum Collections. This move is just one of the stages in the renovation process of this museum, founded in 1791, occupying the present premises since 1862. Closed to the public since 2007, reopening planned for 2015. © Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle, Bordeaux.



Natural species classification as well as the theme of evolution, both central themes in the area of Life Sciences are manifest in the exhibitions in half of those renovated museums of natural history (16/33). Species extinction, crucial in the biodiversity concept is one of the themes exploited by more than one third of the museums (13/33). Finally, one of the themes most mentioned in other forms of media such as television (De Cheveigné 2006) but hard to show in a museum, i.e. climate change, is however dealt with in about one quarter of the museums (9/33). The theme dealing with contemporary human migration is nevertheless only treated in two museums leaving one to think that this theme could only be contemplated in what could be called “society” museums.



IMG. 2.08 — Exhibition following renovation of La Rochelle (France) Museum of Natural History reconstructing the Lafaille Chambers, he having donated his collection items to this town in 1770 these being the origin of the founding of this museum. Photo by Sarah Gamaire.

#### *Museum Collections Faced with Renovation Projects.*

Those museums who responded to the questionnaire/enquiry are all in possession of collection items emanating from at least three different areas of study. The most emblematic in the area of life and earth sciences are the most displayed: zoology (40/41), palaeontology (39/41) and geology (37/41). It should be noted also that more than half of the museums in the study have ethnographic collections put together in parallel with their natural history collections, in particular around the period of the great naturalist expeditions (Drouin 2003). Besides possessing ethnographic collections, some museums also have pre-history (20/41) and archaeology (14/41) collections. Indeed, the nature of the natural history museum collections would explain partially the themes chosen in their renovation projects. However, very unexpectedly, among those 15 museums who claim to present to their visitors the diversity of representations in nature, half actually declare not to have any ethnographic collection and among the eight museums allegedly dealing with the subject of “cultural diversity,” most of them do not have any ethnography collection either (6/8). In addition, of the ten museums that present “The History of Humanity” three of them do not have any prehistory or archaeology collections.

#### → SHARING WHAT IS AT STAKE

In parallel with what is at stake in renovation projects, natural history museums in Europe have to put up with constraints limiting or slowing down the emergence of new dynamics with regard to, for example, translation of exhibition panels, inputting inventory data online, and that of space available. These three parameters are part of the contribution of museums as defined by the ICOM that would promote better conservation means, study and exhibition of human heritage themes. Therefore, despite the diversity in their profiles of the museums who took part in the enquiry, it can be said that natural history museums are all governed by the same reasoning.



**IMG. 2.09** — Bayonne Natural History Museum (France) established in 1856. After a 60-year closure period, reopened in 2010 on renovated premises of an old farmhouse located in a protected natural environment. © DPNE – Town of Bayonne.



In the area of translation, one third of the museums in our study (14/41) do not propose any form of translation of their explanatory texts in their permanent exhibitions. Almost half of the study group translate the texts into English (18/41). Only four museums actually propose translations in three or four languages. Two of these were in fact founded in the first half of the 20th century (Funchal in Portugal and St. Quentin in France), and the other two are among the oldest in the study group (Stockholm in Sweden opening to the public in 1730, and Ljubljana in Slovenia, opened to the public in 1821). This effort undertaken to offer translations cannot therefore be explained by the founding date nor by the number of visitors inasmuch as, with the exception of Stockholm, their number of visitors is approximately less than 35,000 a year. As far as other translation support material is concerned, just seven out of the study group of 41 offer multilingual audio guides for their permanent exhibitions. Moreover, these are the museums that already offer translated texts in at least one other language other than the official language(s) of the country. Thus it could be said that efforts in translating are far from being general practice. However, it also has to be said that this translation practice is not only carried out by bigger museums.

It is to be noted that more than half of the museums under study are in the process of digitising their collections. This is a fundamental beginning to the making available of their museum catalogues online. To this effect for the moment only three museums have actually made their collections available for consultations on the Internet. In addition to offering a research service to internet browsers looking for knowledge on heritage and also sharing knowledge, such online distance consultations of collections will be an advantage for the setting up of scientific and museological partnerships, thus becoming a major advantage for inter-museum collaboration.

Finally we must also emphasise the complexity of the nature of the buildings harbouring the diverse museum functions, which makes the mod-

ernisation of the buildings and their day-to-day management so difficult. Even if three quarters of the museums (32/41) all have at least one hall for temporary exhibitions, more than half of the study group have their installations spread over several buildings located throughout the city/town and seven of them even occupy buildings outside the city/town limits. More often, these buildings are used to stock large collection items as is the case for the Lille Museum in France, and also for the contrary, as is the case for all the collections of the Museum of Bordeaux, France. In other cases some of these buildings are dedicated to other activities of the museum. Thus the renovation project of the Museum of Natural History in Le Havre, France, has provided for the installation, in one of its adjoining buildings, services up to now inexistent due to lack of space, such as a library, a conference centre, a permanent exhibition space for the young public, mediation workshops, etc.

In the end, all the museums agree that backing from their elected councillors is an absolute necessity to put in place their projects and to enable them to create new dynamics within their institutions.

The enquiry hence revealed that the majority of museums are all inspired by a willingness to change their narration so as to reposition the place/role of man therein. Taking into consideration their influence on each other along with the present political, social and economic context, it must be said that natural history museums are not really deemed to be inward looking. On the contrary, they are a mirror of the society where they are positioned, implicated in its questioning and debate. Such skills, which the museums possess, will only be long-lived and valid inasmuch as the museums are allowed to continue to be all at once a place for research and a privileged source of mediatizing knowledge resulting from contemporary research work. In other words, a venue with available technology, which aims to communicate scientific knowledge, while in parallel organises a connection with the public at large within an institutional framework (Davallon 1999).

#### → CONCLUSION

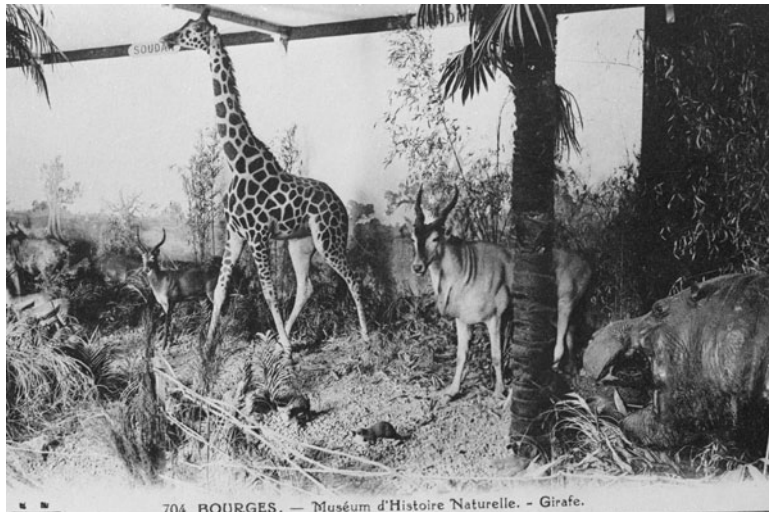
Since the 1990s, few museums have resisted the ‘environmental wave’. If we are to believe some authors, museums are said to have experienced a great cultural revolution and therein have found a way to escape certain death (Schiele 2001). The maturity of the museological projects of the 1980s and 1990s created a wave of hope that museums would take on a new moral responsibility as the sociologist, Jean Davallon, declared in 1992: “Museums must display scientist narratives less and more and more stage the debate” (Davallon, Grandmont, and Schiele 1992, 85). However, for some other authors the 2000s brought along a reduction in such theoretical ambitions. We ourselves do not share this opinion.

We consider that all the elements in play, on the one hand, the evolution of the different subject matters towards a multidisciplinary approach, the awareness of the heritage potential of the museum collections (archives,

IMG. 2.10 — The “Gallery of Diversity of the Living World” (1989) formerly named “Colonial Gallery” (1962) in the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle de Bourges (France). © Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle de Bourges.



IMG. 2.11 — A view of the old “Colonial Gallery” (1962) in the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle de Bourges (France), renamed in 1989 “Gallery of Diversity of the Living World.” © Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle de Bourges.



memory of humanity and nature), the setting up of a natural history museum network in France for example, and on the other hand, the new discourse of the principal natural history museum protagonists, the potential amendments to renovation narratives as seen in this study at a European level, all tend in the direction of what we would call a third mutation of museum presentations.

In the future all these parameters should enable museums to concentrate and be recognised in their founding role as vehicles for both the spreading and vulgarisation of scientific concepts and the understanding of the world we live in. In addition, the role of museums will be to respond to the demands of bridging science and culture, thus filling in the hole which museums had also contributed to the digging of (Pinna 1999). Nevertheless, all this will only occur on condition that museums will be granted the means necessary therefore and that they will not be contained in being simply part of an industry of culture.

Before going any further along this enchanting perspective involving both museums of natural history and societal issues, let us recall that it is thanks to our social and political history which supply an explanation, on the one hand for the mapping of the successive installations of museums of natural history and on the other hand, their collections, exhibition choices and orientation of commentaries. Literature on natural history museums enables us to give a good picture of the ever present and huge interest of society in nature. Thus, as shown by David Allen while in England, natural history was becoming a social phenomenon, while interest in rocks, plants and animal life was spreading beyond the intellectual spheres, natural history museums, as well as botanical gardens, were becoming the expression of such desires (Allen 1976). Nowadays, in what could be considered, since the 1970s, a loss of confidence in the inherent progressive characteristics of science, there is action to urge the museums to develop imagery strategies in order to justify their existence per se and also to rebuild a new identity. To this effect two of Europe’s most important museums of natural history, recently created specific programmes. The Darwin Centre at the London Museum of Natural History, and the Gläserne Forscherlabor in the Deutsches Museum in Berlin, which allow visitors to observe researchers at work and to dialogue with them.

Generally speaking, for the past 20 years, scientific exhibition content is dealt with in a more socially oriented fashion. The organisation of exhibitions is benefiting from technological progress and communication techniques as well as from growing knowledge on what visitors are expecting. In addition, new actors have entered the scene, these being young, appropriately trained professionals. Hence the natural history museums in our enquiry show the so-called third mutation thereof, in that they are developing a more global approach based on the on-going changes in scientific issues in the domain of biodiversity towards a multidisciplinary approach and so connecting the science of nature with the science of mankind.

It is true to say that this development is strengthening the position of these museums in their role as heritage institutions, but it is also enhancing their position as a “go-between” between science and society, as a place to find meaning, knowledge, vulgarisation and also democratisation of scientific knowledge and know-how. To end, we wish to compare two concepts: “museums are anchored in reality. Impregnated by social issues, they have developed a sort of osmosis with the pregnant profound issues at stake in their contemporary time frame” (Davallon 1998) and “museums taking on board environmental issues contribute to more intelligent voting in democratic systems.”<sup>7</sup>

On the one hand, natural history museums just like all other museums, are a reflection and a validation of the collective way of thinking and to this effect they have a normative function, on the other hand, these museums are citizen-based tools which are able to have an influence on society’s concerns. On the one hand, natural history museums like all other

7 A. E. Parr, quoted in Davis 1996.



museums are a reverberation of the cultural atmosphere of a society at a given time. From this point of view, museums have a normative function, in the sense that they validate the collective way of thinking and living of the society. On the other hand, these museums are democratic citizen based tools which are able to have an influence on society's concerns. From this point of view, to allow to a “managerial caste” to imprint their economical, financial and political agenda on the museum's life is the same as to lose the social dimension of the museums and to construct a new type of museums more strictly connected to specific, partial, non-collectively shared interests and aims.

#### → ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Text translated by Cathy Demanoff.

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## Museums in France

### Towards Renewal in Cultural Projects

#### → FLORENCE BELAËN

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In addition to the Paris Museum, there are no less than about 60 regional museums of natural history in France. Even if some of these museums have left their mark on heritage history via the wealth of their collections, the overall view of these regional museums is unequal and varies between those institutions who barely go beyond 5,000 visitors per year and others that are showcases for ambitious cultural politics given support by territorial authorities.

#### → A MULTIFACETED FAMILY

Museums are to be found practically throughout the whole of the French territory.<sup>1</sup> Between them their collections amount to about 18 million natural history collection items and count about 1.6 million visitors per

**PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 2.12 —** The lobby of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Toulouse. © Géraldine Millo, courtesy of Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Toulouse.

<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Brittany, Limousin, Guadeloupe and Corsica.



year. However, they struggle to gain recognition, notably from the central administration authorities. This is due to the fact that their management is shared between three government ministries: The Ministry for Cultural Affairs, The Ministry of Higher Education and Research, and The Ministry of the Environment. Moreover, these regional museums tend sometimes to be concealed behind the parent museum, The National Museum of Natural History, whose strong position allegedly supplants all the data of the others.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, the existence of all these other museums is a means to expand the cultural wealth of France. Very good examples of this are illustrated by renovation projects such as those carried out in Toulouse and the current project at the Musée des Confluences in Lyon. These renovated museums are now able to host exhibitions and are endowed with policies *vis-à-vis* their collections similar to Parisian institutions. In addition, given their strong regional anchorage, some of these museums have seized the opportunity to become reference institutions in the areas of environmental education and sustainable development at a local level (city, town, region, etc.). Hence, some of these museums, for instance, the Museum of Dijon and the Museum of Grenoble, have re-directed their scientific projects in order to allow their collection items, their narration and their skills to be involved in the areas of biodiversity conservation. They have even become leaders in local networks comprising of both amateurs and professionals in the area of nature Studies. It could be said therefore that a crossroads has been reached. Museums are no longer solely focussing on their heritage collections but also opening up to the outside world, their towns and cities, and also playing the part of spokesperson for local players in the area of nature conservation.

#### → AN OBSERVATORY FOR GREATER VISIBILITY

It can be seen that at an institutional level, museums are an incarnation of ambitious cultural and scientific projects. Nonetheless, they are also involved in their communities.

Since the year 2008, there has been a change in the type of governance in operation in the world of technical and scientific culture illustrated by the new discipline called “Universcience.” This has arisen from a merger between Le Palais de la Découverte and La Cité des Sciences entrusted with a project to coordinate all the participants in these entities. At the beginning, those museums, due to the fact that they had no official representative, did not participate in the initial negotiations to set up this new type of governance. However, the reorganisation project highlighted the need that the specificity of heritage institutions be defended in complementarity with those more scientific mediation institutions. This coincided with the setting up of an Observatory on Heritage and Scientific and Technical Cultural Affairs. The observatory was proposed by the Agency

for Museum Cooperation and Information. The purpose for the creation of the observatory is that it creates long-lasting and reliable tools for the observation of all players in the areas of heritage and technical and scientific cultural affairs. Both these two dynamics brought about the creation, on the one hand, of “The Permanent Conference of French Museums,” and on the other hand, a technical data processing tool called “OCIM Museum Platform.”

The aforementioned ambitious tool enables information and data to be regularly inputted into the database, both at local institution level (status, human resources, budget, etc.), and for collection items, activities, different types of visitors. The strength of this tool is that it was built on a cooperative basis, in which the institutions themselves played a part also in drafting the questionnaire framework and in the follow-up processing procedures. In this way, the institutions themselves were able to formalise their specificity and to fix a common framework (definition, statistics methodology, etc). This intellectual and community reflection resulted in the possibility of producing an image of regional museums and to give value to their activities and energy.

#### → ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Text translated by Cathy Demanoff.

<sup>2</sup> See abstract Museums report 2010.



## Escape from Bureaucracy

→ GIOVANNI PINNA

*Giovanni Pinna is Professor in Paleontology and museologist. For over thirty years (1964–1996) he was a member of the staff of the Natural History Museum in Milan, first as Curator in Paleontology then, from 1981 to 1996, as Director. Throughout these fifteen years, the Museum was completely renovated—research sections and didactic activities were reorganised, scientific and technical staff were increased, archives were re-ordered and improved, the permanent exhibition was renovated—and in the early 1990s it was numbered among the seven greatest European Natural History Museums.*

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PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 2.13  
— National Maritime  
Museum, Greenwich,  
United Kingdom. Photo by  
Giovanni Pinna.



In 1954, when the great debate on organic evolution took place in the wake of neo-Darwinian synthetic theory, the British biologist A.C. Hardy wrote an article entitled *Escape from Specialization*. In that article, Hardy demonstrated how certain organisms could avoid specialization— that would lead to an evolutionary *cul-de-sac* and extinction—thanks to the implementation of simplifying strategies, so as to make them once again non-specialized organisms and leading them to new evolutionary opportunities.

I used a very similar title for this article since I believe that many societies are in the same condition as those organisms, and I am convinced that a parallel can be drawn between a hyper-specialized organism—the excessive specialization of which prevents any further evolutionary adaptation, leading to extinction—and a society, where a normative inflation and excessive bureaucracy have the same negative impact. In social terms, excessive bureaucracy reduces the very limits of flexibility and prevents society from adapting to external factors. As a result, such a society is bound to decline on both economic and social planes. Moreover, this leads to the loss of the State based on law, freedom and well-being. If we consider bureaucracy as a natural phenomenon (which is true in a way, as bureaucracy is the manifestation of natural mental processes and social organization which are, in no way, unnatural or supernatural), avoiding excessive bureaucracy becomes fundamental for society's survival. Bureaucratic organization within societies and specialization in organisms follow the same progressive patterns. Both phenomena initially have many advantages and facilitate the survival of organisms and the running of society. Nevertheless, both bureaucratic organization of society and specialization of organisms have limitations and a breaking point beyond which they start producing both advantages and drawbacks. The more specialization and bureaucracy overstep this limit, the more both systems produce more drawbacks than advantages. This creates an unsteady situation, easily affected by external factors, which becomes more vulnerable when specialization and bureaucracy overstep the climax described above.

In such a context, both organisms and societies reach a dead end. They must try to simplify their very structure in order to survive. Yet this process is extremely difficult to implement. Just as organic specialization is hard to reach when it has gone beyond certain limits—obliging organisms to enact a series of complex reproduction stratagems that biologists refer to as

*heterochronic processes*—, societies find it extremely difficult to do away with excessive bureaucracy, especially if they have overused it. In recent decades, many governments have implemented and promoted strategies meant to reduce bureaucracy or, in other words, aimed at administrative deflation. For instance, the United States and Sweden launched processes of legislative simplification in 1976 and 1979 respectively, while Britain undertook such process as early as 1945, thus reducing by 38% the number of laws in force between 1945 and 1980. In 1991, the French Council of State mainly dealt with the issue of legislative simplification in its public report and highlighted the fact that such a process went hand in hand with increased legal security within society—the Court of Justice of European Communities dubbed legal security as a general concept of law. The Public Report of the French Council of State clearly illustrates the mechanisms and effects of excessive bureaucracy. These mechanisms annihilate the very principle of legal security and turn citizens and institutions into easy prey for a changing, capricious, unpredictable and punitive State. As a general rule, higher levels of bureaucracy in society come into being through a distorted vision of the enforcement of legislative power, that is to say:

- Through the proliferation of laws, i.e. through an excessive production of regulations which rarely replace previous ones and result in legislative plethora,
- Through the passing of increasingly complex and articulated laws that embrace all aspects on the one hand, aiming at validity in all areas of social life, whilst on the other hand, are based on extremely specific regulations which go into every single detail, thus preventing any kind of adaptation to changing local circumstances that society faces,
- Through the instability of laws, which implies ongoing and rapid changes in regulations,
- Through frequent resort to retroactive laws.

In most cases, the length and the complexity of laws, as well as their enforcement—legislative bodies often lose control on this aspect: mainly they are unaware of the volume of laws produced, of the real need for such laws and, above all, of the impact such laws have on everyday life—create a sense of legal insecurity on citizens and on society as a whole, as they make the law appear as a threat rather than a protection. In this regard, it might be useful to remember that the German Constitutional Court, dealing with tax-related matters, ruled that the State of law implies respect for legal security. Legal security depends on the stability of laws and situations defined by them.

In most cases, over-regulation is closely linked to high levels of political and administrative centralization, which is just as harmful as far as the legal security of citizens and institutions and the global production of society are concerned. It is all the more obvious as the ultimate aim of an extreme centralization is to control every action. Such control can be achieved through terror (in authoritarian societies) or through over-regulation as defined above (in democratic societies).

IMG. 2.14 — Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich, Germany. Photo by Giovanni Pinna.



Karl Popper asserted that “the problem of over-regulation pervades all theories concerning the democratic State as our bureaucratic systems are ‘not democratic’ (...) They count numerous ‘small dictators’ who are never accountable for their actions and omissions. A great philosopher, called Max Weber, argued that there was no solution to such problem and was very pessimistic in this regard. In my opinion, this problem is easy to solve in principle if we promote our democratic values and are eager to solve it honestly.” Just like Weber and Popper, I believe there are no substantial differences between a society which enacts global control through over-regulation and a State which does so through terroristic laws, i.e. between an over-regulated democratic State and an undemocratic one. These forms of power are different, but they share similar results; their very essence lies in deeming citizens, communities and parts of societies as being unable to manage themselves. From this mainstream conception, it follows that the State must provide its components with assistance, help and enact control over their actions. Both forms of power rest on a utopian vision of the State that is no longer considered to be an entity made up of individuals, communities and institutions, but becomes rather a single body represented by a centre (be it a person, in dictatorships, or a bureaucratic system in an over-regulated democratic State). This centre is unlimited, and for this very reason can only impose uniform regulations applying to all areas of society.

We can even take these considerations further when alluding to tolerance theory as discussed by Montaigne, Locke, Voltaire, Stuart Mill and Bertrand Russell. This theory derives from the doctrine sustaining the human frailty of Socrates and Erasmus. The doctrine of human frailty underlines that if man is fallible, it means that mistakes are part of his nature and, according to the doctrine of tolerance, should therefore be forgiven as it is part of man’s natural law. In his philosophical dictionary, Voltaire wrote that tolerance “is the consequence of humanity. We are all formed of frailty and error; let us pardon reciprocally each other’s folly. That is the first law of nature.” Now it cannot be denied that the need for total predictability of actions is the mainstay of the organization of an over-regulated and centralizing State. Indeed, in order to allow this organisation to maintain total control on its actions (this issue represents its objective), it is fundamental that the laws passed by such a State should be utterly predictable—because unpredictability annihilates all possibilities for total control. The total predictability required by an over-regulated and centralized State presupposes the rejection of human frailty, because tolerating mistakes would frustrate the total predictability and, therefore, the control on all actions. Thanks to these two principles—total predictability and rejection of human frailty—an over-regulated and centralizing State puts itself in sharp contrast with what Voltaire called the first law of nature. In 1960, this law was defined as a pillar of Hayek’s theory on political freedom. Once again, centralization and bureaucracy infringe on man’s basic rights and liberties.

Unlimited centralization and over-regulation have devastating effects on the management of public administration, especially in the case of pub-



IMG. 2.15 — Narodni Muzej, Belgrade, Serbia. Photo by Giovanni Pinna.

lic sectors specialized in the production of services. Indeed, in an over-regulated and over-centralized system, productive public sectors account for a very small portion of the whole system, whose mainstream consists of structures designed to preserve the system through the creation of new rules and the control of procedures (rather than objectives). Within the public system, such productive sectors are therefore untypical structures, since they do not work to enhance the system but rather to create real productions outside and beyond the system. It is clear that such structures, whose aim is to produce actions taking place outside the system and thus tend to overlook and transform the system itself, cannot act within the regulations the system creates for its own preservation. Such productive structures tend to overstep or contradict the public system in order to fulfil their institutional role.

In over regulated and over centralized public systems, there is an ongoing conflict between the conservative part, which manifests itself through further constraints imposed by bureaucracy and centralization, and the productive part of the system. The latter tends to bypass the system by coming up progressively with innovating features that become unlikely and difficult to enact as the conservative strain is strong.

The conservative part plays a role of paramount importance for productive structures. Through total control, this part tends to keep the production rate of productive structures low in order to prevent the dismantlement of the system, and also maintain the functionality that stops it from breaking up because of external factors. For example, this happens through the use of unlimited centralization which results in decisional centralization to arouse a sense of frustration in the staff of public productive sectors, thus stopping them from bypassing the limits of productivity imposed by the system and using administrative over-regulation as a tool to create—through the complexity of laws, their constant and unpredictable transformation and the use of retroactive rules—an atmosphere of legal insecurity intended to hinder the decision-making process. In economic



terms, this stops the over-regulated and over-centralized systems from making full use of their productive potential for the sake of the system's conservation, thus renouncing an important part of their resources.

Generally, museums and all public cultural institutions are potentially productive sectors of public administration and as such, high levels of centralization and bureaucracy have extremely harmful effects on their functioning. The museums which operate in the framework of such systems cannot therefore have the same production rate as museums operating in environments where levels of bureaucracy and centralization are low. In these systems, museums produce neither economic nor cultural results since, as mentioned above, the system keeps their production rate low. In this regard, we can quote many meaningful examples. Let us take the case of Italy, for instance. It is an over-regulated and over-centralized State which lays heavy stress on procedures at the expense of objectives. As a result, Italian museums are bound to be not so much productive. In the current system, museums can be used neither on the economic nor cultural plane since they are compelled to operate within the framework of financial laws established in order to regulate the action of public unproductive sectors, i.e. these laws do not abide by the principles of economic production; on the other hand, decisional centralization bars them from adapting their actions to their own cultural structure and to the characteristics of the territory in which they operate. In short, the principles ruling the Italian system as a whole make museums unproductive. In the last few years, individuals responsible for cultural policies have upheld the thesis that by using managerial entities (especially the economically-oriented one, as far as I could observe), a museum's economic and cultural productivity could be enhanced—though this thesis hasn't produced particular effects. In Italy, the problem of management, and therefore museum productivity, has nothing to do with the efficiency of any given directive body but rather lies in a problem linked to the lack of cultural policies meant to help museums do away with the unproductive vision inherent in the Italian system. Nowadays, it is impossible to enforce the managerial direction of museums since it would require laws which disregard the bureaucratic and centralized approach of the system. In fact, there would be no managers willing to work under such conditions or it would be impossible to work, just as happens currently to “scientific” directions.

The problem therefore is about how to implement a real cultural policy, which would not be mere control by the State on the actions of museums, as is the case today. An efficient cultural policy implies the definition of objectives requiring specific laws. If the objectives aim at major productivity of institutions, it is fundamental that there should be specific laws to ensure the good functioning of such institutions. These laws must be different from those which regulate the unproductive parts of the public system.

This long debate on bureaucracy has intended to stress one central aspect—the fact that in an over-regulated and over-centralized system, any

debate on the functionality of cultural institutions is useless if the analysis does not take into account the principle according to which over-regulation and centralization are diametrically opposed to the concept of free choice underlying any productive activity, especially in the field of culture, as well as the fact that museums can have high cultural, social and economic yield only if the laws regulating the activities of such institutions are consistent with their specific institutional role and not the other way round.

Last but not least, I would like to mention another aspect concerning the scientific staff working in museums, and more generally, in public research structures. The trend for over-regulation has had disastrous effects on such staff. Indeed, over-regulation along with the complication of laws, tends to transform scientific staff into administrative staff or to substitute scientific staff with administrative staff. In both cases, the social and cultural role of institutions is deeply undermined. In the first case, entrusting scientific staff with administrative tasks gradually calls for increased knowledge in other fields, especially because of the progress of the complication of laws; this situation has two main negative consequences. On the one hand, the scientific staff are put under pressure as they are aware of the fact they do not have the necessary competence for the job. On the other hand, the staff are encouraged to consider administrative tasks as more important than cultural functions. In the short term and in terms of results, administrative tasks are seen as more important than scientific activities and the staff start to believe that cultural work is useless.

In the second case, the decrease in the social and cultural role of institutions, and museums in particular, is even more obvious. The substitution of scientific staff into administrative personnel (or non-scientific staff) in the directional team of cultural institutions leads to management plans which focus on respecting procedures or immediate economic output at the expense of cultural production. The experiments which joined administrative and scientific directions proved unsuccessful and ended up with the administrative direction undermining the scientific one. This is an obvious result, since the administrative direction holds the economic power.

Regarding this specific problem, there is only one solution available: if all cultural institutions are to preserve their social and cultural potential, it will be necessary to create simple laws for museum management.

Source: Pinna, Giovanni. 1997. “Fuga dalla Burocrazia.” In *Fondamenti teorici per un museo di storia naturale*, 127-140. Milan: Jaca Book.

Text translated by Paule Yao.





## Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Lille: Constructing a Highly Citizen-Oriented Reflection

Interview with Judith Pargamin

### → JUDITH PARGAMIN

*Judith Pargamin studied Earth Sciences at the “Ecole Normale Supérieure” de Lyon. After graduation she pursued her studies in Nantes, obtaining a PhD in Planet Geophysics, in 2004. This was followed by a Master 2 Degree in Scientific Information and Communication, with work experience at the Outer Space Observatory in the National Institute for Space Studies (CNES), in a department in charge of the cultural aspects of this scientific agency. It was there that Judith developed her interest in Heritage enhancement activities. In 2006, she was successful to become a museum curator and so was trained over an eighteen month period at the National Heritage Institute. After graduation she was recruited as Head of Science and Technical Collections at the Natural History Museum of Lille. Since April 2010, Judith has been acting as its Museum Director, in interim. Here, she has, among other things, been involved in the creation of the exhibitions: “Curiosité Acoustique” (Acoustic curiosities) in 2009 and also “Anatomie de l’Etrange” (Anatomy Weirdness) in 2012. She is working in parallel on the scientific and cultural projects of this museum along with its renovation project.*

PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 2.16  
— Great Gallery, Natural  
History Museum of Lille,  
France. Photo by Pascal  
Debleeckere.



**We believe you are planning a complete renovation of the Lille Natural History Museum. How long have you been contemplating this renovation project?**

In fact I have been working at this Museum since 2008 and currently occupy the position of Direction since 2010. When I undertook the task of consulting the archives, I realised that the first renovation projects dated back to at least the 1980s. I discovered a project undertaken by an external consultant carried out in 1991. Thus I realised that the project had been in a think tank well before that date. Unfortunately, that renovation project never actually got any further off the ground but it was followed up as is testified by another document drafted at the beginning of the year 2000. Then, when in 2004 Lille was designated at the European Capital of Culture, the question of renovation was once again put on the table.

**Is this renovation project now at the heart of Urban Politics?**

In fact, the situation is rather paradoxical. Presently all and sundry are persuaded that it goes without saying that the Museum has to be renovated. This comes from the fact that so much reflection has been done over the last 20 years that “It has to be renovated” has become a leitmotif. More precisely, all the actors involved are convinced that this museum has a huge potential, which has not been given value to. On the other hand the fact that the project has been ongoing for so long, it is extremely difficult to influence its getting off the ground given the fact that this didn’t happen on the previous occasions. So what, at this point in time, could justify that it has now become an emergency or that renovation is now timely?

**Who are the people convinced that the renovation project is a necessity?**

It must be said that the Lille Natural History Museum is an institution that enjoys a large amount of support at both the level of the City of Lille and from its hinterland. For example, recently a man told me that the Museum of Natural History was for him one of the four emblematic places of Lille. He explained that it was a venue to go to with one’s fiancé, with one’s children and later on with one’s grandchildren. Also the elected Lille city councillors know all too well that it contains magnificent collections thanks to the enormous amount of work undertaken by my predecessor, Mr. Bertrand Radigois.

**So, would you like to explain how you are going about constructing a new renovation project?**

In the first place it was necessary to study all that had been done beforehand and to try and understand the reasons why the project aborted and also to conserve what could still be useful. If the promise made to exhibit extraordinary items was not enough, maybe the exhibit ideas should be reviewed. From my point of view what was missing in the previous projects was the idea associating the citizens with the project. Now we are endeavouring to modify our approach and base our reflection in a down up manner, from the point of view of the citizens. The team is now com-

posed of some young people who haven’t been working in the museum for a long time, and others for some fifteen years who haven’t had the opportunity of any other way of proceeding or who don’t have any other references. Mr. Bertrand Radigois retired in 2010 having spent 30 years of his professional life in the Museum. Hence, he had always carried and tried to impact this renovation project. As for me, my role is to propose another vision of the project and to construct with the team another way forward. Thus, for example, we have employed an outside consultant, Claire Lecomte for one year whose assignment is to accompany the revival of the project emanating from the propositions of the whole team. This outside consultant should be in a position to catalyse the project. Equally, we have formed a committee of Experts, not a scientific committee but a small group composed mostly of curators from other museums to carry out efficient work.<sup>1</sup> We hope to benefit from the experience of these members.

First of all, the team of curators reflected on a document which talked about the collections. It was interesting to see that their first reaction was to suggest that we free ourselves from the collections context. This helped us to think about the “policy role” of our institution, from an etymological viewpoint. That is to say what was the position of our cultural institution in the context of the City. We held meetings of our Experts every three months over a period of one year. Hence, we made a lot of progress on the elaboration of a pertinent document proposing a new project for submission to the elected municipal councillors.

**Besides the construction of a new museum narrative, are you also contemplating the renovation of the actual building?**

Right now the museum is located in one single building dating from the 19th century (with some large collection items located in another building in the city). The building used to be a university built as a result of the then very secular and republican-minded Mayor whose will was to create a state university alongside another catholic university. Since that time, the Museum has been installed in this secular university building. We have in fact been working with the Committee of Experts on a project of another location close to the present building in a former girls’ school. This move offers several advantages, not least the fact that this new location occupies a much bigger surface. Also this replacement building dates from the same architectural period as the present museum building

<sup>1</sup> Since December 2011, the project entitled “Working towards a New Museum of Natural History” conducted by the present team of museum employees, has been associated with a Committee of Experts: Michèle Antoine in charge of Exhibitions at the Belgian Royal Institute for Natural Sciences; Anne-Laure Carre, Head of Material Collections at the “Musée des Arts et Metiers” (Arts and Crafts Museum); Laurent Dreano, Assistant Director for Cultural Affairs, City of Lille; Laure Roland; Philippe Guillet, President of AMCSTI, Association of Museums and Scientific, Technical, and Industrial Cultural Development Centres/ Director of Museum of the town of Orléans; Muriel Lecouvez, in charge of Zoology Collections, City of Lille Natural History Museum; Martine Mathias, Museum Consultant, North Pas de Calais Regional Cultural Affairs Department; Vanessa Durock, Philosopher, Lecturer, Philosophy Department, University of Montpellier 3/researcher, Contemporary Philosophy Department, (Phi-Co) University of Paris 1/Panthéon Sorbonne; Thierry Oudoire, Head of Collections, Natural History Museum of Lille; Pierre Penicaud, Head of Galleries, National Natural History Museum.

which for me is an added value. The image of a 19th century location is very important in the minds of the people and this we would very much like to preserve. The people of Lille are attached to their museum. Thus the underlying idea would be to attract a new public while at the same time conserving our former public which if neglected, would be deemed to be counter-productive. The former girls' school building is presently not in use. Consequently, renovation work could be undertaken without delay. And lastly, it is so close to the present Museum building, just across the road. Moreover, it is better located in that its facade looks out on a busy main road with a public park where lots of people congregate. Thus, this location will facilitate better integration of the museum into the dynamics of the neighbourhood being put in place for some years now. As regards the old building, it will probably cease functioning as a museum of natural history, but thought is being given to it remaining a heritage center for visitors. However, things are on stand by for the time being, while waiting for a diagnosis to be carried out so as to determine whether or not it can continue functioning as a Museum.

#### **What kind of narrative would you like to see in the new museum?**

At the present time, the museum is very much compartmentalised. As you enter, to your right is the geology gallery; to your left, the zoology gallery, etc. And nowhere do we exhibit our non-european ethnography collections nor our science and technology collections. Currently, the visitors' route is very directive, inflexible and rather old fashioned. We would therefore be interested in proposing innovation and evolution with regard to content comparable to what has been done in the London Science Museum for example. In the first place we would like to exhibit items from our own four collection areas. The concept of transdisciplinarity would be high on our list by way of proposing exhibition themes assembling the different collections for example, in dealing with the question of gender. In any event inasmuch as the Human is the source of all our questioning, this would be paramount to our themes. After that, it is essential that we should take into account the visiting public, and for me, joins up with the question of what a Museum should be. There exists the definition "Musée de France:"<sup>2</sup> preserve the collection items, put them to the forefront, render them accessible to all. Beyond that definition, there is also the vision proposed by my team members: a museum is a means that enable each and everyone, all the citizens, to have another view of the environment. To give you an example, presently, there is an exhibition which is part of the Lille 3000 Fantasy Festival. The scenography was devised by recreating an old curiosity shop, something common. But we did this in collaboration with a philosopher studying the question of strangeness and reflecting also on what is actually "normal" or not. Hence our aim is to develop a way of thinking that would be citizen-based.

<sup>2</sup> The title "Musée de France" was formally put in place by means of an article of law enacted on 4 January 2002 in connection with French Museums.

#### **Can you explain to me what the next stages will be?**

Presently, we are evolving around two axis: on the one hand, building a pre-programme for the museum keeping in mind the big change, and on the other hand, building a scientific and cultural programme<sup>3</sup> fixing five year objectives in accordance with the present framework. These being quite different, I feel that having them progressing in parallel is sensible given our past renovation projects history. Theoretically, by the end of 2012 we will be submitting our project to the Town Council with the aim that it be included in the 2014 municipal plan and why not envisage a 2020 Opening.

#### **What is the most difficult aspect of this project in your opinion?**

It could be said that there is a sort of paradox in my following up on a vague project in existence already for 20 years. All and sundry now know that the museum is destined to be renovated some believing that this has already taken place in that it was closed for a short period for small maintenance works. Consequently, it's going to take a lot of convincing to persuade people that this time it's really going to happen!

#### **And as a conclusion, what for you is the most enthusiastic part of the project ?**

I'm very happy to be sharing this adventure with my team which is a real source of wealth. The more people there are who share in the project, the more it has every chance of being achieved.

Interview by Sarah Gamaire  
Text translated by Cathy Demanoff

<sup>3</sup> Drafting a scientific and cultural programme (PSC) is compulsory for all museums who come under the title "Musée de France". This PSC must identify choices and explain the orientation of the museum programme while at the same time defining the means required for the putting in place thereof.



# Case Studies



IMG. 2.17 — Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin, Germany. Established in 1810. New exhibition design ART+COM, 2007. The wet collections in new display since 2010, partly opened to public. Courtesy of Museum für Naturkunde.

## Museum für Naturkunde

National History Museum, Berlin, Germany

The Berlin Museum für Naturkunde purports to be, above all, a major scientific institution. Its advantages are two-fold: it possesses priceless collections, comprising more than 30 million items that are witness to the history of Natural Science since the 18th century and even earlier, and it disposes of modern research laboratories where over a hundred scientists are involved in research on different subjects, with the aim of contributing to the prestige of the institution.

Since 2007, the Museum has offered to its approximately 500,000 annual visitors, a new permanent exhibition space, based on the theme: Evolution and Biodiversity. Although this presentation slant is shared with most other European Natural History Museums, in Berlin it takes on a unique colour, in that it relies, above all, on a successful balance between substance and form, content and support material, promotion, enhancement of the Museum's collections and the way multimedia is utilised and managed.

The Museum für Naturkunde relies on more than two centuries of scientific history. It was founded in 1810 at the University of Berlin thanks to the decisive influence of both the Philosopher, Friedrich Wilhems von Humboldt, and the famous geographer and naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt. During that period, they succeeded in bringing together the principal German natural history collections, until then dispersed among the Scientific Royal Academy, the German Natural History Society and (Curiosity Storage Places), such as the Copper Cabinet and the École des Mines. A significant growth in the number of collection items throughout the 19th century meant that the space dedicated to the museum needed to be increased. Consequently, a new building was designed by the architect, August Thiede (1834–1911), and inaugurated in 1889 by Emperor Wilhem II and Empress Augusta-Victoria.

This building is now the present-day Berlin Museum für Naturkunde.

The initial project had considered putting the complete collection of the Museum on show to the public. However, shortly after opening, the Director of the Institution, Mr. Karl Moebius, sensitive to the didactic element of science, and thus having a preference for drawings and texts rather than actual objects, made the decision to separate the Collections from the Exhibition Areas. It was therefore decided that the ground floors should be devoted to public exhibitions, with the upper floors being used for the conservation and study of the collections. This concept of museum organisation, an innovation at the time, would soon be common practice in all natural history museums.

### → A MUSEUM IN ACTION

The museum disposes of an immense public exhibition space, around 7,000 square metres. This is organised around a central atrium providing access to the different exhibition rooms, and leads to two monumental stairways accessing the upper floors. Since 1889, different museographic styles have succeeded each other, providing an exhibition platform for Biology, Paleontology and Earth Sciences. The visitor to the museum will still come across a room dedicated to mineralogy which is marked by the classification prevalences of the 19th century, and the dioramas of the 1930s, which show species in their natural settings.

Two thirds of the exhibition space were renovated in 2007, with the scenography being the responsibility of the Berlin Agency of ART+COM at a total cost of 18 million euros. This was financed jointly by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and by the Berlin State Lottery Foundation.

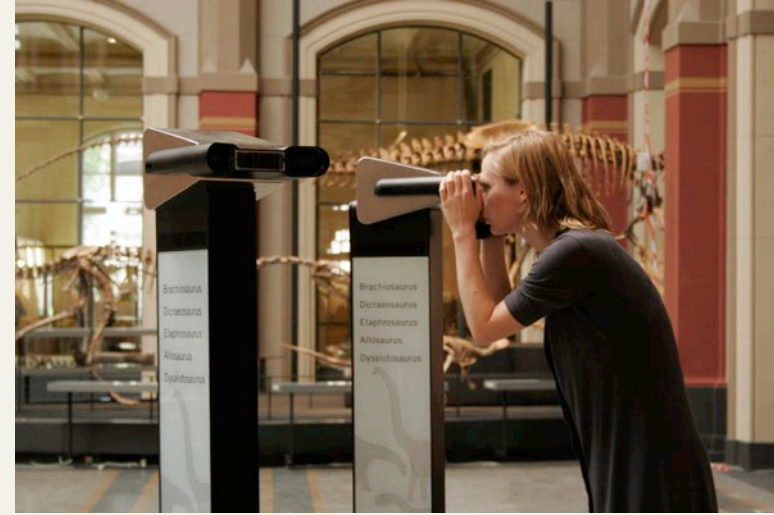
Reinhold Leinfelder, the Director in 2007,



IMG. 2.18 — General view of the Berlin Museum für Naturkunde. Courtesy of Museum für Naturkunde.



IMG. 2.19 — Biodiversity showcase. Courtesy of Museum für Naturkunde.



IMG. 2.20 — Jurascope system. Courtesy of Museum für Naturkunde.



IMG. 2.21 — The "Dinosaur life Hall." © Raimond Spekking / CC-BY-SA-3.0.



summarized the museology and museography objectives of the renovation project as follows: “The historic building style should be synergistically combined with timely natural history exhibitions, including sophisticated multimedia techniques. The exhibitions should focus particularly on the collections and research topics of the museum, and should thus be highly authentic and different from other natural history museums. The didactic concept should not be in the foreground. Large blocks of text, poster displays, visible computer screens or ‘information towers’, as well as a unidirectional, chapter-like presentation should be avoided.”

Even though it is no surprise that the overall paradigm of the museology programme is based on the Theory of Evolution, just as in the Great Gallery of the Museum of Natural History in Paris (renovated 13 years before in 1994), this visit to the Berlin Natural History Museum remains a unique experience. Each area illustrates the theory of evolution from a specific scientific angle using museographic support material, while at the same incorporating the magnificence of the architecture of the building. Without actually giving details of the full museum visit, some focus is provided in order for the visitor to better apprehend the position of the exhibition conceptors, in keeping with the museum’s principles. In the words of Reinhold Leinfelder: “The analogy is to explore the new exhibitions as a researcher would. This is achieved by creating fascination and interest through impressive original objects in an aesthetic setting, by subtly demonstrating how science works, by letting the visitors decide on which pathways they ‘cruise’ through the exhibitions, how deep they ‘dive’ into the scalable information provided, and how much interpretative help they draw from the interactive elements. The aim is for visitors to assemble their own ‘research results’, as derived from their museum visit, into a coherent picture of a better understanding of evolution and its consequences.”

*Brachiosaurus brancai*, a dinosaur more than 13 metres in height attracts one’s attention as one enters the Museum Entrance Hall. Located in the central atrium, this dinosaur is the flagship

attraction, inviting all and sundry to embark on a voyage of discovery in the Dinosaur Life Hall. The organisation of this museographic area is worth taking a closer look at. First of all, the visitor encounters the paleontological collections of the Jurassic Superior Period from African excavation sites (c. 150 million years ago). The most famous of these sites is Tendagurubi in Tanzania. The fossils are exceptionally well conserved and have been anatomically positioned in a dynamic fashion. At the four corners of the exhibition hall, “Jurascopes” (resembling telescopes) have been placed. They are named in such a way as to recall the age of the exhibit items and invite visitors, big and small, to view the dinosaur skeletons in a different way. For a few seconds, the skeletons are portrayed with muscle, skin and movement, within their original paleo-setting.

This presentation, which uses well-known augmented reality software, is a huge success and, above all, facilitates comprehension of the scientific message related to the biology of these extinct animals. By positioning the jurascopes within a museographic space, a simply juxtaposition of the real and the virtual has been avoided. Visitors are obliged to move around, and even sometimes stand back from the collections, in order to discover the animated images. In this way, the multimedia support material benefits the exhibition and is a real aid to the visitor without encroaching on the value of the exhibits *per se*.

Further on, but still in the same hall, an original fossil called *Archaeopteryx lithographica*, may be viewed through a protective glass case. This specimen was discovered in Blumenberg in Germany and is deemed to be incredibly rare; it is also extremely well preserved. Its morphology gives one a highly pedagogical insight into the Theory of Evolution. It is actually considered to be an intermediary species between dinosaurs and birds. These features are thus seen as strong first class museography and didactic support material, as well as remaining essential for scientific study. This museography has therefore managed to present a single specimen which is both for public viewing and

for scientists to continue their research. The showcase also incorporates a discreet, hidden viewing cabin which is big enough for an adult to be able to study the fossil in situ.

The theme of Biodiversity is presented in the “Evolution in Action” Hall, which portrays an accumulation of events. For example, a showcase four meters high, and 12 metres long presents several hundred animals all facing the viewing visitor. This showcase space brings to our attention shapes, colours, and the diversity of living species. For the more curious, there is an explanation cartridge equipped with a magnifying glass providing the name of each species in the showcase. Here again, we have multimedia working hand in hand with the collections without either encroaching on the other. and the scientific message is relayed without difficulty.

Other museographic areas were also renovated and revamped between 2007 and 2009 following the same principles. The exhibition areas also open up onto two further areas dedicated to pedagogy, thus forging a link between research and the transmission of knowledge. One of these pedagogic spaces is called the Humboldt Exploratorium, as a tribute to Alexander von Humboldt, and proposes workshops connected with the exhibitions for young visitors. The other pedagogic area affords the visitor an opportunity to see what goes on behind the scenes, by showing some of the techniques used to prepare the exhibit specimens.

The Berlin Museum für Naturkunde employs more than 200 people, half of whom are scientists. To the onlooker, the administrative organisation would appear to be both simple and efficient. There are three activity areas: Collections, Research and Exhibitions/Public Education, which allow the Institution the opportunity to carry out its primary role—making nature better known with the aim of better preserving it. The museum is a recognised Public Institutional actor, essential in the area of education and the promotion of awareness of the concepts of biodiversity and environment. To this end, more than 150,000 schoolchildren visit the Museum every year.

We can conclude by saying that the Museum represents an example of a good balance of museum functions; while continuing to carry out research, it has also succeeded in connecting with the General Public.

Laurence Isnard

Text translated by Cathy Demanoff

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IMG. 2.22 — Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Toulouse, France. Established in 1865, renovation and new exhibition design by Jean-Paul Viguier and Xavier Leroux-Cauché, 2008. The lobby. © Géraldine Millo, courtesy of MHN Toulouse.

## Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de Toulouse

Toulouse Natural History Museum, France

The second biggest museum of Natural History in France after Paris, the Toulouse Museum, reopened in January 2008 after a ten-year closure. Since reopening, its scientific and cultural programme has been offering to the public at large, opportunities to better understand the relationships operating between Man, Nature and the Environment.

Now, after four years of operation, we will endeavour to bring to the forefront how the Toulouse Museum could now be said to be part of a movement that we might call “a new generation of museums.” How was the renovation project, or more specifically, its “restructuring” (to use the terminology of the leaders of the project), conceived and planned in order to boost the expansion of this Museum? In other words, what approach was put into practice to transform it into a Museum of the 21st century

The definition the museum applies to itself today is that of a cultural platform, a means to share but also to criticise knowledge, “a museum at the crossroads between the worlds of science, culture, pedagogy, questioning society, dealing with what is at stake” (from the museum website). From the point of view of space, how does this concept fit into the renovated museum.

The question of Man's place of in nature, omnipresent in the discourse promulgated by renovated Museums of Natural History, takes on a specific dimension in the Toulouse Museum, and is connected with the history of the museum itself. At its opening, on 16th July 1865, the Museum exhibited caves made up of archaeological artefacts originating from digs in the South of France. And so the concept of Man's great age was, for the first time in history, brought to the attention of the public at large.

Such well-known pre-historians as Emile Cartailhac, Edouard and Louis Lartet contributed to the wealth of the collections and to the prestige of the Museum. In a spirit of continuation

in this scientific field, the Museum chose to devote its first important temporary exhibition to the area of prehistoric archaeology, with the title “Prehistory Investigation,” a pluri-discipline exhibition conceived as a kind of police Investigation. Ninety thousand visitors attended this exhibition in 2010 and it is still being shown on tour throughout France.

→ BETTER COMPREHENSION BETWEEN MAN,  
NATURE, ENVIRONMENT, INTERACTIONS

On arrival, the visitors to the Museum enter a vast lobby. They immediately discover the red brick walls of the original building, a Carmel Convent, around which the contemporary architecture of Jean-Paul Viguier has been created.<sup>1</sup> The “Platform” and “Crossroads” concepts are immediately felt. Indeed, visitors are presented with several options, several points of view. For example, the Elephant “Gipsy,” and the skeleton of *Pterosaurius Quetzalcoatlus* are a preview of the wealth of the museum exhibits and visitors are led on a voyage of discovery through the exhibition's dedicated areas, to contemplate the “vegetation” wall which gives a sense of nature inside the museum, to consult the large screen giving information on the activities of the museum, to take note of its dynamics, and on to the Museum shop.

The permanent exhibition occupies five dedicated theme-based areas covering 2,300 square metres. Here, the Key Themes of the Scientific and Cultural programme are explained: Science Consciousness of life on Earth. The perspective which prevails throughout the visit, supported by contemporary scenography, is one of contemplating man as only one element in the life cycle and questions his place in the environment. The themes are articulated as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Architect designated for Renovation Project (<http://www.viguier.com>).



IMG. 2.23 — Skeleton Wall.  
© Patrice Nin, courtesy of  
MHN Toulouse.



IMG. 2.24 — Detail of  
a showcase. © MHN  
Toulouse.



IMG. 2.25 — Overall View  
of the Museum. © MHN  
Toulouse.



NEXT PAGE, IMG. 2.26 —  
Mediator in the Permanent  
Exhibition. © MHN  
Toulouse.

Area 1 – *The Earth: Its Forces, Movement and Energy*. Here we discover how our planet works. There is a module simulating the seismic activity felt during an earthquake in a specific part of the South of France. Fossils, traces of past life, indicate the presence of life on Earth and thus introduce the follow-up.

Area 2 – *Living Species: Diversity, classification, organisation*. Here, the phylogeny of living species is dealt with, along with how sensitive they are to biodiversity. This is where the great wealth of the museum's naturalist collections is exhibited. The skeleton wall, a remarkably well-executed museographical installation, with its animated presentation giving movement to the exhibits, has given renewed value to the museum's bone/skull collection.

Area 3 – *Life over Time: Continuity, breaks, life forces*, shows how the history of life and that of the Earth are entwined. Different items attempt to illustrate time on a geological scale, in a physical way, by means of a ladder, a pile of books, etc.

Area 4 – *Man's needs, the functions of living matter*, a bifocal vision of human natural sciences

And the final phase of the exhibition: *What type of life is ahead of us? Awareness, Consciousness, Action* – This section, using multimedia support material, gives a projection into the future through a fixed photo of our planet Earth. Subjects include demographic pressure, natural resource management and impact from human activity.

The Toulouse Museum evokes Nature within the city, both visually and conceptually, through its multi-polar structures. Indeed, since its foundation at the end of the 18th century, the buildings have always lain adjacent to the gardens of the "Société des Sciences" of Toulouse (Toulouse Science Foundation). [The remarkable site of the Museum has therefore been able to associate its buildings, with these gardens within a city environment, a notable asset.]

Since its reopening, the Museum has been able to develop and benefit from this connection: museum/interior–exterior/gardens. Inasmuch

as it is positioned on various sites, it is thus able to function differently from inward-looking institutions.

This is due to the actual composition of the Museum itself, comprising, on the one hand, exhibition areas, workshops, a mediatheque, a gastronomic restaurant and a boutique, and on the other hand, three external spaces composed of gardens (Henri Gaussen botanical garden, the flower and shrub garden and a world vegetable garden). In addition, there is a protected environment area (the Maourine pond) located in a city centre district and, finally, a palaeontological excavation site.

The overall architecture of the renovated museum unifies the historic and modern parts, and the botanical gardens. The visual focus and the continuity of space between the Museum and the gardens introduce a new perception of Nature: reality, imagination, past and present are consequently reunited.

The Toulouse Municipal Museum boasts the label "Museum of France." It aims to be an actor in the life of the city. It has taken on the new responsibilities entrusted to it by the Public Administration, to go beyond the initial objectives of all museums, these being conservation, study and enhancement of their collections. Through its exhibitions and mediation actions, it is also pursuing the reflection of museums in the areas of ecological sensitivity and environmental perspectives.

The deputy mayor of Toulouse, Mr. Pierre Cohen acknowledged the important role of the Museum as part of the local authority when he said: "The metropolitan city of Toulouse covers territory that has its importance, at an international level, as a forceful actor in numerous areas of excellence, both scientific and technical. The Museum, inasmuch as it is a platform for encounters, exchange, a first-rate cultural actor, contributes to the wealth of the territory." The Museum of Toulouse, while playing an important role in the cultural context of Toulouse and its region, and thus claiming a strong local position, also has a national and international dimension. In its Annual Report for 2008/2011,





Mr. Francis Duranthon, Director of the Museum, states “that a contemporary museum cannot be isolated from its surrounding environment.” Therefore, the Museum has developed a new network of partners, scientific collaborations with local universities and cultural and political associations in order to spread its knowledge at different levels throughout Toulouse, the hinterland and even further afield.

The figures for the year of reopening in 2008 were 300,000 visitors. In 2012, the figure exceeded the one million mark. In this domain, the Museum of Toulouse is ranked second among French Museums, just behind the Grande Galerie de l'Évolution in the Paris Natural History Museum.

Its policy towards the general public is very proactive. The Museum has instigated a very much appreciated interactive methodology. For example, the function of mediators has been created; that is to say about 40 of the 140 agents of the Museum are entrusted with the task of welcoming the visitors and being available to help, as well as accompanying them during their visit. These members of staff may be found throughout the museum exhibition areas, greet-

ing the visitors, providing them with information and fulfilling a security duty. In this way, they engage in personal mediation. This original function represents quite an achievement, especially within the current context of budget restrictions, prevalent not only in France but also elsewhere in Europe.

The Museum website claims to be a “when I like, where I like and how I'd like it to be” Museum. The website purports to be more than just a showcase for the museum, but rather a part of the Museum in its own right. It should be noted that more than 500 people log on to the website every day, as many, if not more, than the number of actual physical visitors to the Museum. The website, updated at the beginning of 2012, deals with such practical questions as giving information concerning the cultural programme of the museum, as well as scientific content.

There are about 2,500,000 items in the rich collections of the Museum of Toulouse. The museum has, since the beginning of the renovation project, stressed its ambition to give value to its collections. While the renovation project was going on, an optimisation of the conservation conditions of the collections was undertaken

in order to promote their enhancement, carrying out studies and producing documentation to have a better vision of the collections' content and increase their value through research. This work is being pursued currently with the Museum showing its willingness to open up its collection to the public at large, and share with partner museums and professionals.

One hundred and forty people work in the museum, fulfilling more than 60 different functions. During its renovation project, the Museum also re-articulated the profiles of those positions which were standard within the institution. The intellectual project was based on a new organisation of the different work teams and a common culture was put in place. The functions of monitoring, programming, development and enhancement, management, conservation and animation of, exhibitions were re-articulated by professionals from Poland in order to achieve the fundamental objective of the Museum Vision and Understanding of the relationships: Man–Nature–Environment. It should also be noted that when putting together the scientific and cultural programme, those in charge of the project were inspired by other European renovation programmes, notably that of the British Natural History Museum of London.

The Toulouse Museum of Natural History rose to the challenge of successfully carrying out its renovation. The Museum is now deemed to fit perfectly into both a modern time-frame, and also its immediate and surrounding territory. Its ambitious policy of making scientific and technical culture available by means, in particular, of its highly proactive cultural programme, works very well, and attracts in the region of 200,000 visitors per year. It has put in place a method of transversality of subjects, thus affording an innovative and contemporary vision of both its heritage and science in the making.

Laurence Isnard

Text translated by Cathy Demanoff

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IMG. 2.27 — Musée des Confluences, Lyon, France. Project by Coop Himmelb(l)au. View of the construction site. © Hubert Canet, Balloide Photo.

## Musée des Confluences

Lyon, France 2014

From one museum to another, the extent of renovation work can vary. The stakes are different between updating a permanent exhibition and that of a complete overhaul. To this effect, the Guimet Natural History Museum in Lyon has had to take a final bow, fading into the background and so benefitting the Musée des Confluences due to open in 2014 just a few kilometres away. Therefore, being able to follow the set-up of the “Musée des Confluences” Project affords us the opportunity to follow the step-by-step actions involved in a full renovation process.

Given the size of its collections, the Natural History Museum of the City of Lyon, one of France’s biggest cities, was for a long time deemed to be one of the major Museums in France. The story of the Museum began in 1772 when a natural history private collector’s collections and premises were donated to the city of Lyon. Unfortunately, however they suffered like many others from damage during the French Revolution. Despite this misfortune, the collections would, however, take on a considerable degree of importance thereafter under the management of Claude Jourdan and Louis Lortel from the year 1830. Eight years later, the premises and the collections would be officially given the title of a Museum of Natural History. Parallel to this event, Emile Guimet, son of a Lyon captain of industry founded, using his own funds, a museum to exhibit artefacts collected during trips to the Far East, the purpose of which were to carry out a study of different religions. This study was commissioned by the then Ministry of Public Instruction. However, due to lack of public interest and political support for his project, Emile Guimet abandoned the building and, in 1889, went on to set up the Guimet Museum in Paris, named after him to this day. After his departure, a variety of different activities were then carried out in the building including even the installation of an ice rink called Le Palais des Glaces. In 1915, however,

collections from the Lyon Natural History Museum were transferred to the building as well as some artefacts from the Paris Musée Guimet sent back there to mark the occasion giving it a museum function once again. Unfortunately, in 1955, bad weather seriously damaged the roof of the building and it had to be closed, only to be reopened seven years later. Since then, the museum has housed collections from four different sources—those from the Natural History Museum and the Guimet Museum, to which have been added collections from the City of Lyon Colonial Museum established in 1927, and a collection from an institution called Propagation of the Faith (a Missionary Order) deposited there in 1979.

Repeated moves along with the association of naturalistic and ethnographic collections nevertheless gave this museum a special form of identity. The fact that the museum underwent several changes during the period between the two world wars was deemed to be proof of its prestige and dynamism. It could also be said though that there was no coherent global project within the institution (Baratay 2008, 16). So will this important renovation project currently being undertaken lead to such coherence?

### → BETWEEN RENOVATION AND CREATION

The museum, Le Musée des Confluences purports to be at the same time a renovation project of the Natural History Museum and a unique act of creation.

The restructuring project for the Natural History Museum was started at the beginning of the 1990s when the regional authority took over its responsibility. They became aware of the problems of a lack of security not only for the collections housed therein but also for the visitors, so the authority proceeded to validate a new project in July 2007, for the creation of a



new regional museum in a new location. Thus, the Natural History Museum was closed to the public as from July, 2007. So the museum personnel now have to concentrate on the state of the collections and to do an inventory while at the same time devise a new visitors' route on new premises taking shape in another part of the city. The architectural project conceived by the firm of Architects, Coop Himmelb(l)au bring to mind a crystal shape echoing "the infinite diversity of knowledge" and a cloud symbolising the "obscure uncertainty of tomorrow."<sup>1</sup>

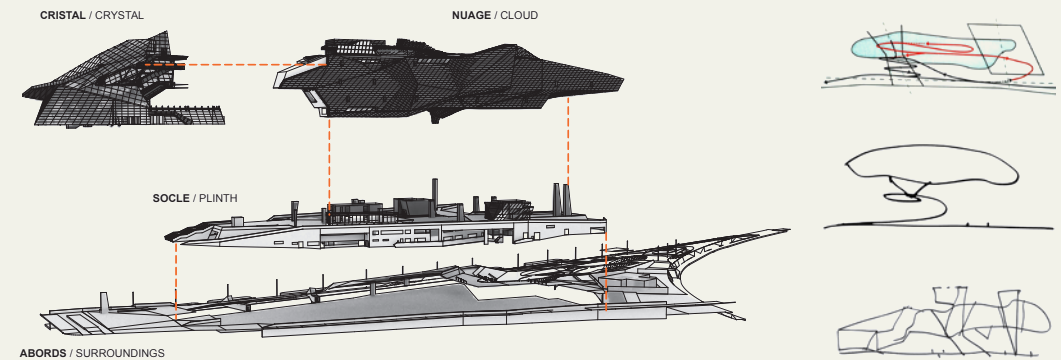
Besides the change in location, the monitoring committee desired from the outset to broaden "the naturalist orientation in the direction of the association of the more global interconnections between "science and society issues" (2005, 6) Starting from the viewpoint that alleges that "the world is complex," the principal objective of the museum is to be nothing less than proposing "an understanding of the world" and to "respond to humanity's great universal questions."<sup>2</sup> The basic train of thought to be found in the scientific and cultural programming was inspired by the ideas of Edgar Morin quoted in the project, providing "access to the fundamental questions regarding our world."<sup>3</sup> Thus Michel Cote, the then director from 1999–2000 and the current director of the Quebec Civilisation Museum, proposed the idea of a "Science and Society Museum" and not just one without the other, inasmuch as "both Science and Society are constantly mutually interrogating and responding to each other" (Lacour 2009, 23). The new director since 2000, Hélène Lafont-Couturier, has added another dimension to this idea, adding, "Science is an integral part of society."<sup>4</sup>

The heart of the preoccupations of the prefiguring team is to take into consideration the concept of reaching out to a diversity of people.

As from the year 2000, evaluation tools were set up and new professional practices were put in place. For example, the presence of mediators is to be encouraged and research on mediation to be developed. Exhibitions will tend to be theme-based and pluridisciplinary to jostle the traditional "wall" between Exact Sciences and Human Sciences (Côté 2008, 3). There will be a synthesis-style exhibition throughout the 3,000 square metres of floor space where such existentialist questions as "Where do we come from?"; "What are we doing here?"; and "Who are we?" will be asked. Exhibitions throughout another 3,400 square metres of floor space divided up into several exhibition rooms aim to be a complement to the reference and synthesis exhibition area, and to propose answers to questions that visitors could be asking themselves on social issues. Moreover, the exhibitions are capable of evolving to give up-to-date knowledge to the visitor taking into consideration "the multitude of ideas and discoveries, and the complexity of the world today, which could not withstand a static permanent exhibition." (Lacour 2009, 10)

Besides a change in discourse, the title "Natural History Museum" will not be upheld, this decision underlining the posture to clearly make a break with what this kind of institution represented. The new title bestowed on the new Museum, namely "Musée des Confluences" signifies confluent and also convergence. Consequently not only is it a reminder of the new location of the museum where the two rivers, The Rhône and The Saône meet, but it also invokes the encounter between knowledge and between the actors. Therefore the connection with another geographic location, a new cultural and scientific project and a new title: the mutation would seem to complete the objective looked for.

Despite a clear breakaway on several levels, the heritage stemming from the Lyon Natural History Museum cannot be denied, which would in fact be a betrayal of the project itself. Let us recall that most of the collections have come from this Museum to which were added some more collection items acquired over the past few years. In fact, even though the former mu-



seum has not been open to the public for many years, some of its personnel still work there on its premises and conferences open to the public still go on. In addition, even if the title "Museum of Science and Society" had an innovative connotation when it was suggested to the project committee, this concept had already been in existence without it actually been known. Indeed, before the seventies, the Natural History Museum had already dedicated a gallery exhibition around the theme of "Nature and its Protection" concluding the exhibition with the words, "midway between the pessimistic outlook for nature doomed to disappear and man's optimism in looking for and coming up with solutions to the problems he himself created" (AAML, 1971). It can be said that even at that time, a part of the themes of the exhibitions considered what was, and still is, at stake in the contemporary world.

No longer a Museum of the past, however, not completely newly emerging from the earth, lying between the concepts of a break-up and kinship, Le Musée des Confluences seems to be already showing its presence in the city of Lyon and in its periphery.

With regard to housing, the museum collections, items and premises were opened in 2002 in a location different from that of the future museum. While the new museum painfully emerges, the Centre for Conservation of Museum Artefacts and Collections Studies (Centre de Conservation et d'Etude des Collections) has already been in operation for 10 years, and is at the cutting edge of the latest know-how

in conservation methods. Not only is the centre a place to safely conserve the collections, but it is also encouraged to promote scientific research on the collection items themselves. Researchers, conservationists and taxidermists are already working there in partnership with other organisations for heritage promotion and enhancement. In 2008, as many as 284,500 collection items were listed by those in charge of the inventory. Also from the outset of this new museum project, a policy to acquire new items has been in progress to fill the gaps in certain areas such as that of Amerindian Ethnography or the contemporary creations of native peoples. The Collections have now been reduced to several domains: Life Science, Earth Science, Human Science, and finally the domain of Science and Technology, a new domain to satisfy the requirements which come from the specifications of the new Museum Project.

With regard to publications, the publishing house of the Musée des Confluences has made available a lot of material compiled on this scientific and cultural project in its collection called "Du Museum au Musée des Confluences" and also in the collection called "Cahiers des Confluences," the latter dealing with more contemporary issues. All these publications are consultable free of charge on the museum's website.

With regard to visitors, despite the closing of the Natural History Museum in 2007, it must be said that no less than 15 exhibitions have been organised not only in Lyon but also elsewhere in France showing artefacts from the Museum collections. This was made possible

1 [http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/musee/musee\\_presentation/construction.php](http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/musee/musee_presentation/construction.php), 5/11/2012.

2 "Le Musée des Confluences, une ambition partagée" Edition 2010. To download: [www.serl.fr/content/download/890/7331/file/000069.pdf](http://www.serl.fr/content/download/890/7331/file/000069.pdf).

3 Morin, Edgar, 1992, *Nécessité d'une réforme de pensée*, CDDP de la Haute Loire, Chaumont, quoted in Lacour (2009, 9).

4 [http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/musee/musee\\_presentation/projet.php](http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/musee/musee_presentation/projet.php), 5/11/2012.

PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 2.30 — The project elements and design sketches. © COOP HIMMELB(L)AU.

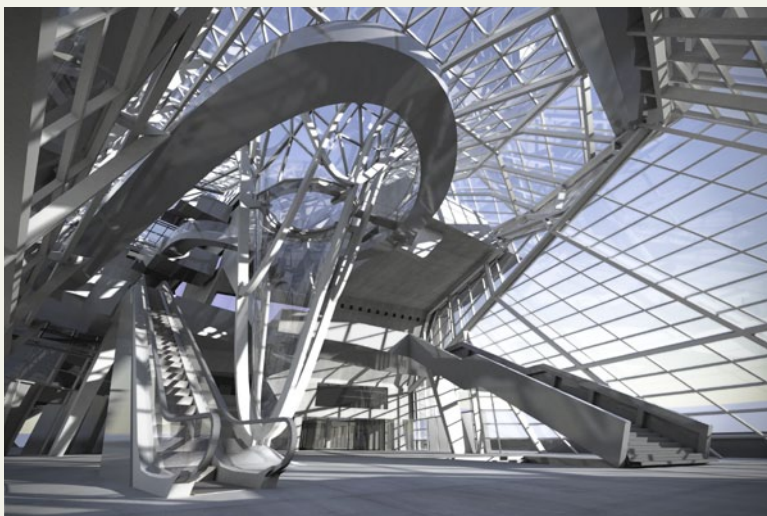
IMG. 2.29 — Tridimensional computer model, view of the museum entrance facing north. © COOP HIMMELB(L)AU.



IMG. 2.30 — Rendering of the ground floor and pool in the south side. © ISOCHROM.com, Vienna.



IMG. 2.31 — View of the foyer, tridimensional computer model. © COOP HIMMELB(L)AU.



through partnerships with other museums and also by organising exhibitions in cultural centres, hospitals, and even banks that were co-sponsors and agreed to make space available on their premises. There are even virtual presentations on the museum's website on some of these exhibitions.<sup>5</sup> For details of the project a visit should be made to the information kiosk next to the New Museum building where the information is posted. There is also a mediator who, several times a week, organises a guided discovery tour of the building.

With regard to the feedback from the City of Lyon, journalists regularly bring up the subject of the progress of the Museum project and also the delays incurred. Citizens deplore the high cost of the new museum. Almost every stage of the undertaking met with timetable constraints and 10 years have already been added onto the completion date of the project. The budget has also escalated, tripling from the original sum and now reaching more than 200 million euros.

Be it in the media or in its cultural and scientific project, the Musée des Confluences is always described in present time. More than just a project, the museum had already existed well before it opening for better or for worse. Taking into account its multiple activities, this institution is henceforth being very active in heritage actions connected with acquisition, conservation, study and arranging exhibitions. One gets the impression already that this museum is well on its way to fulfilling its obligations in accordance with the definition given in Icom (2007). The question that comes up is, will the Musée des Confluences be, despite itself, that famous "Wall-less Museum" which Malraux (1965) dreamed about? The relative success of its actions outside its walls leads one to wonder if the chemistry hoped for and the need for a feeling of permanence for a Museum (Icom 2007)<sup>6</sup> will meet the scheduled completion date when it will all be happening inside the museum building when it reopens.

5 [http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/musee/expositions/expositions\\_virtuelles/index.php](http://www.museedesconfluences.fr/musee/expositions/expositions_virtuelles/index.php), 5/11/2012.

6 ICOM statute, art.3 §.1.

Will the location of the reserve collections storerooms be functional in spite of the distance between its premises and the Museum building? Will the initial wish to grant space evolution for visits resist the constraints caused by human and material issues and, if so, will the temptation to go for an "All High-Tech Media" presence impact be avoided? Will the transdisciplinarity challenge be achieved? What balanced attitude will be found when presenting sensitive themes, which may often be political, in a fair way? And lastly, will the museum fulfil its objective in its wish to reach out to all the people, or will it suffer from wanting to do too much, from having too big a vision? Well, this will be seen at the crystal-like museum at the time of its expected opening in 2014 when the cloud of uncertainty disappears. Nevertheless, in spite of having gone through many storms, it must be said that the project has the merit of remaining ambitions both along the lines of form and substance. It still proposes a very inspiring program for the rest of the museum world. We wish it every success!

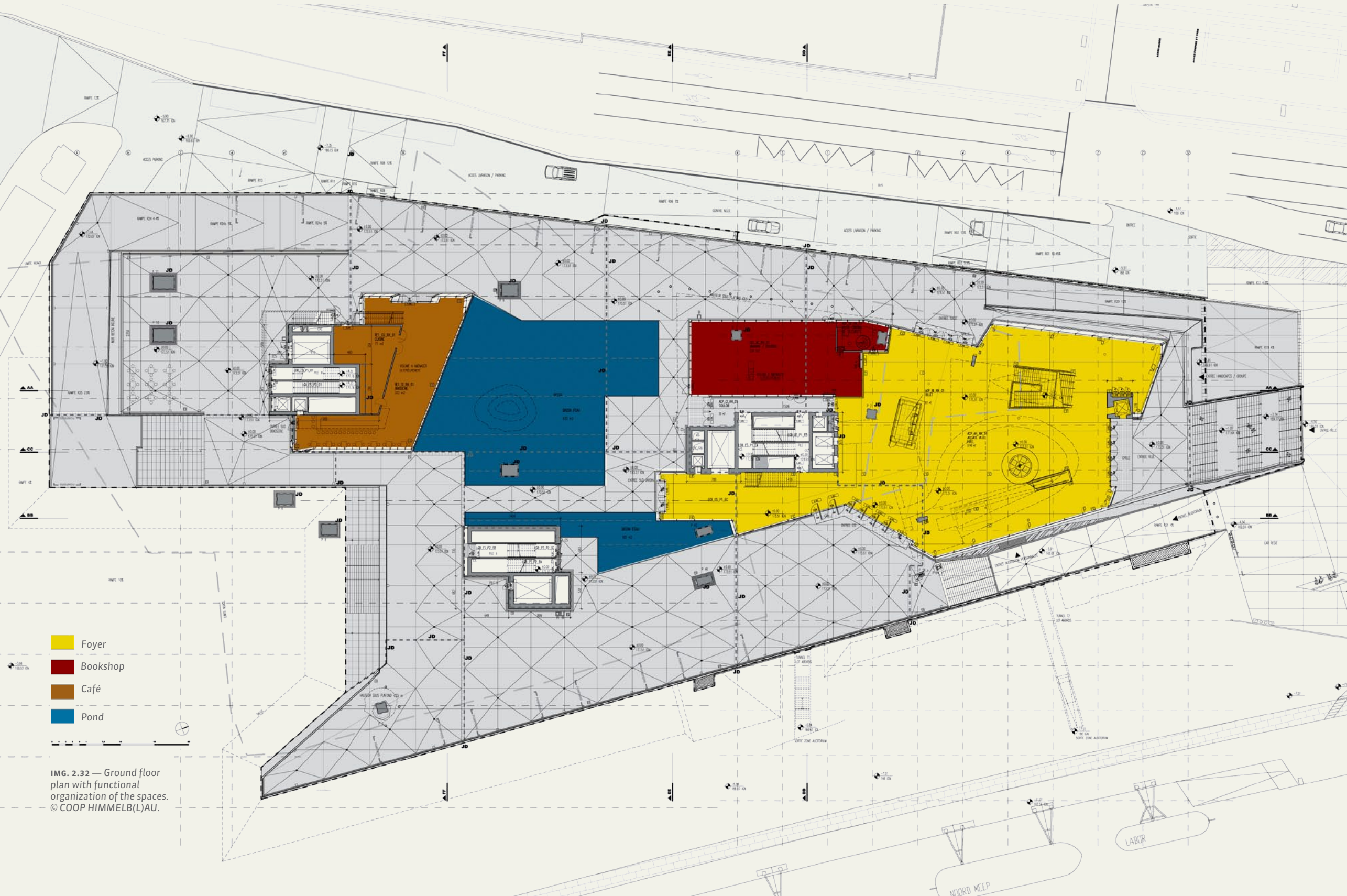
Sarah Gamaire

Text translated by Cathy Demanoff

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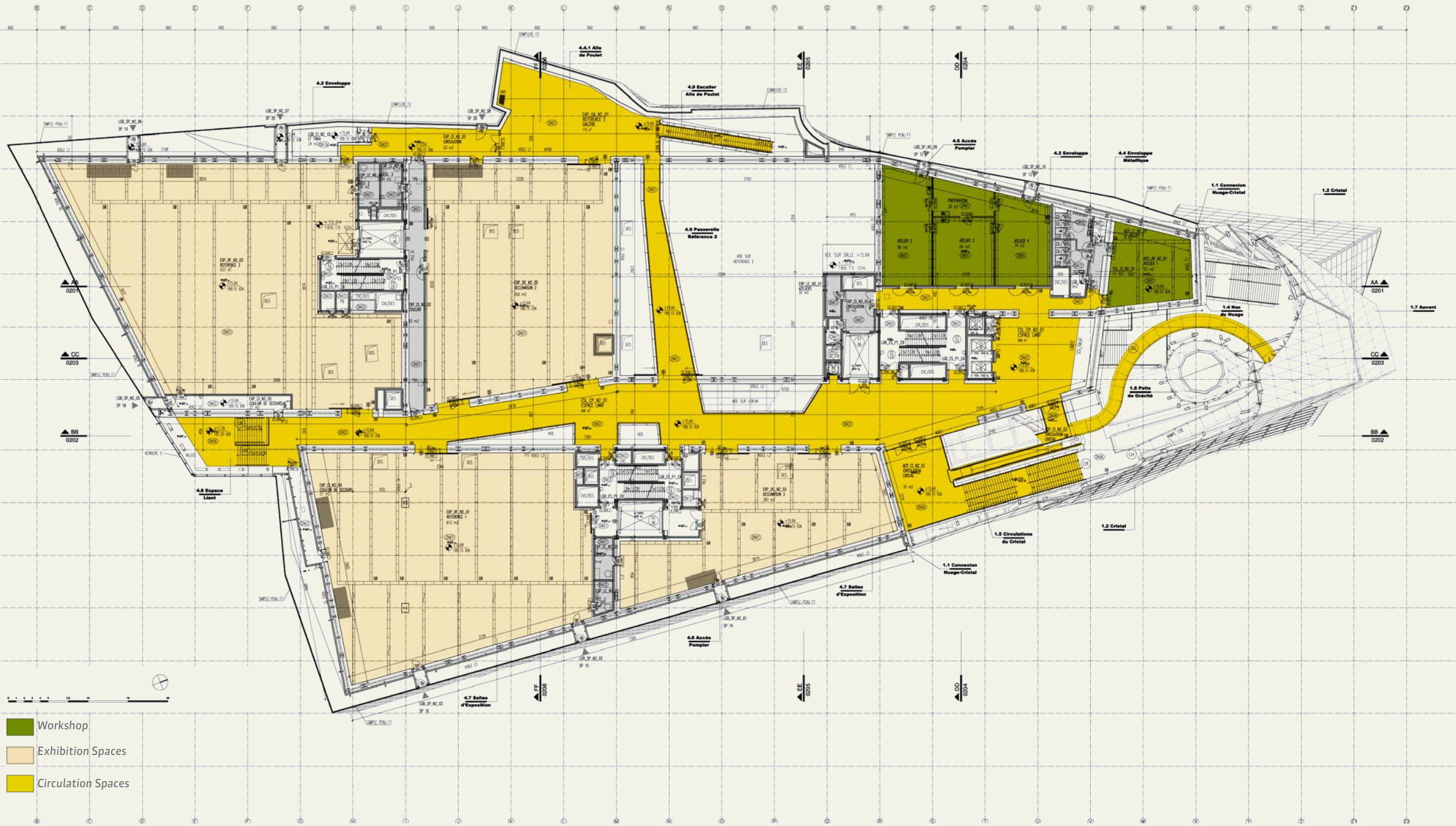
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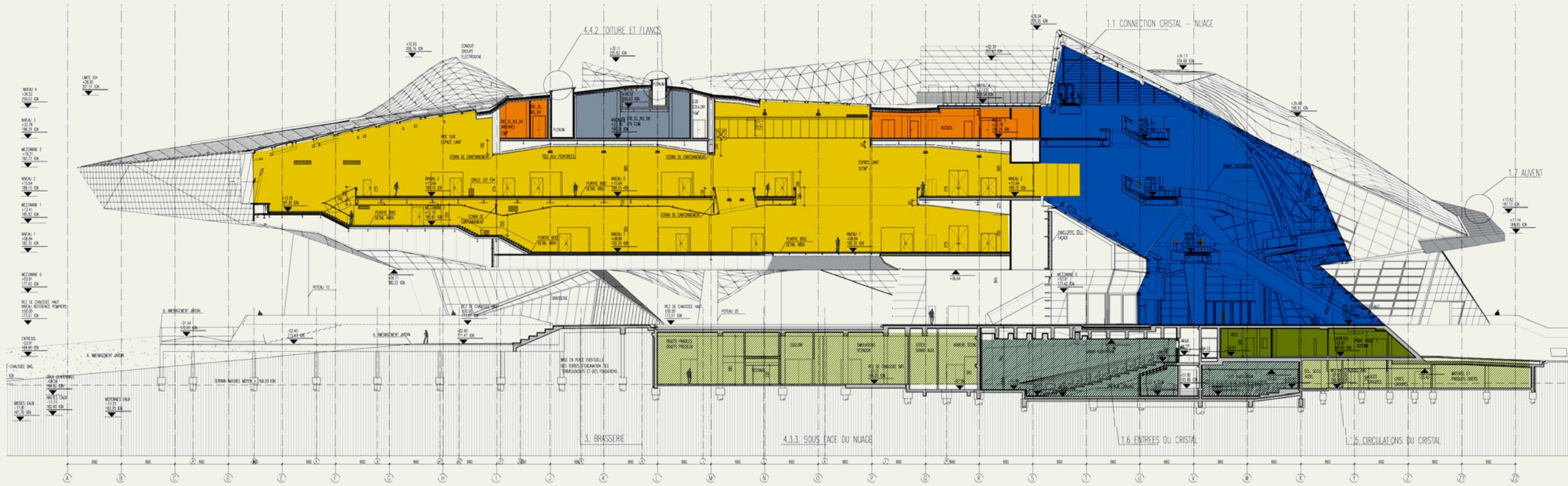
IMG. 2.32 — Ground floor plan with functional organization of the spaces.  
© COOP HIMMELB(L)AU.





IMG. 2.33 — Second floor plan with functional organization of the spaces.  
© COOP HIMMELB(L)AU.

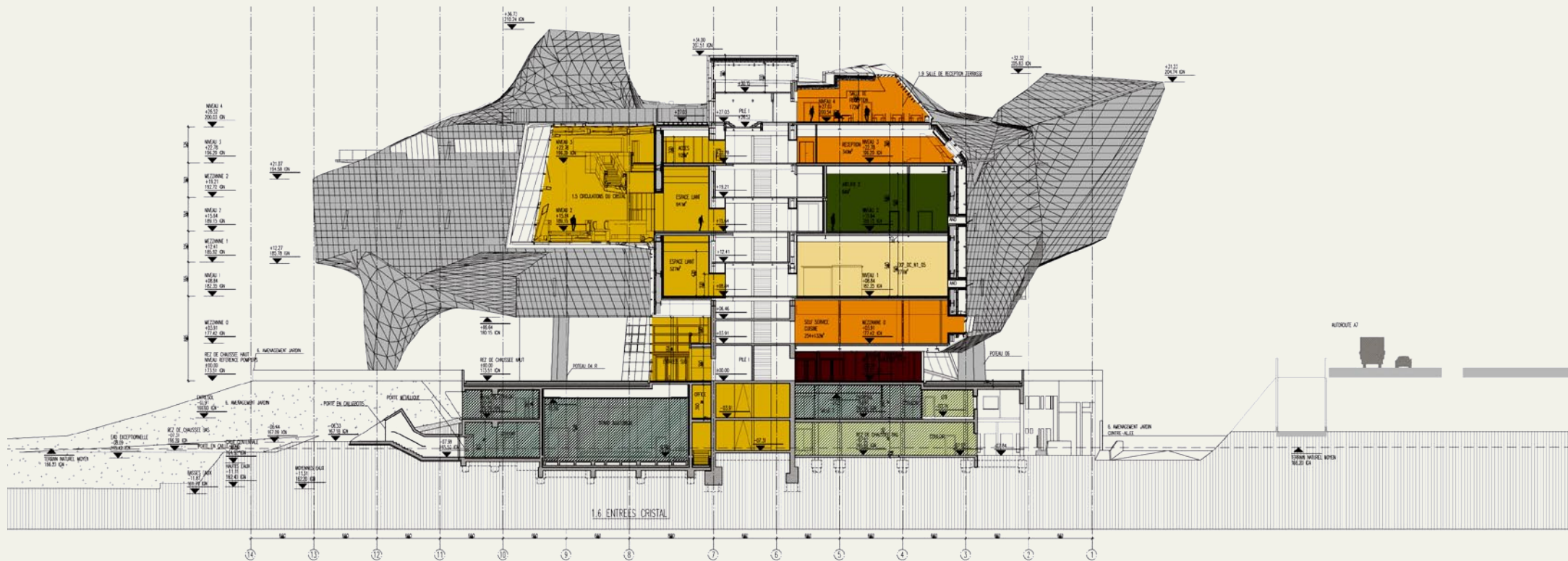




IMG. 2.34 — Longitudinal section with functional organization of the spaces. © COOP HIMMELB(L)AU.

IMG. 2.35 — Cross section with functional organization of the spaces. © COOP HIMMELB(L)AU.

- Glass
- Circulation Spaces
- Auditorium
- Workshop
- Storage
- Administration
- Technical-room
- Bookshop
- Exhibition Spaces
- Reception







IMG. 2.36 — Grande Galerie de l'Évolution, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle after its reopening in 1994. >>

## Grande Galerie de l'Évolution, Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle

Grand Gallery of Evolution, National Museum of Natural History, Paris, France

The idea of a “museum of evolution” was not really a new concept. It had already been under discussion in 1880 at the time when the Gallery of Zoology of the National Museum of Natural History in Paris (MNHN) was being built. A few years later, when the MNHN opened up the Palaeontology gallery, it was the theme of Evolution which determined how the fossils would be displayed. In 1965 the Zoology Gallery, which had not been modernised since its initial opening, had to be closed due to both technical reasons and lack of public interest. It took twenty more years for the scientific community of the museum to debate the project to elaborate a new scientific and museology programme around the theme of evolution. The state also had to be mobilised so as to obtain the necessary funding of paramount importance for the success of this project. Thus, this project became part of what came under the title of “Important Public Works Projects” as instigated under the presidency of François Mitterrand. Funding was thus allocated for its renovation.

For biologists all over the world, and in particular for those at the Museum, Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolution of species is taken for granted. Therefore, the national scientific community were not at all indifferent as regards the choice of this theme throughout the reorganisation process of the gallery. It was to this effect that François Jacob, Nobel Prize winner in Medicine, in a seminar organised by the Museum in January 1991 declared “for all biologists in this country, the opening up of a Gallery of Evolution is quite an event, 130 years after the publication of *The Origin of the Species!* This gallery is of the utmost importance as it will allow the French public, and notably young people, the opportunity to become familiar

with the various stages of Evolution.” The ambition therefore, of this theme of Evolution is aimed at allowing visitors the opportunity to appropriate knowledge, in the past triggered off by Lamarck, confirmed by Darwin, and since then, enriched by more than two centuries of investigation through the research of the scientific community. Thus, inside this theme, artefacts from the museum collections are displayed together, portraying a dynamic vision of life allowing the visitor to be situated in time and in space and in relation with other living species. It also allows society's questions to be brought to the surface stressing the role of the human species in the evolutionary process by notably exploring environmental preoccupations, which have emerged throughout Europe and the world at large towards the end of the 20th century.

→ A NATURAL HISTORY GALLERY STRUCTURE AROUND THE THEMES OF SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

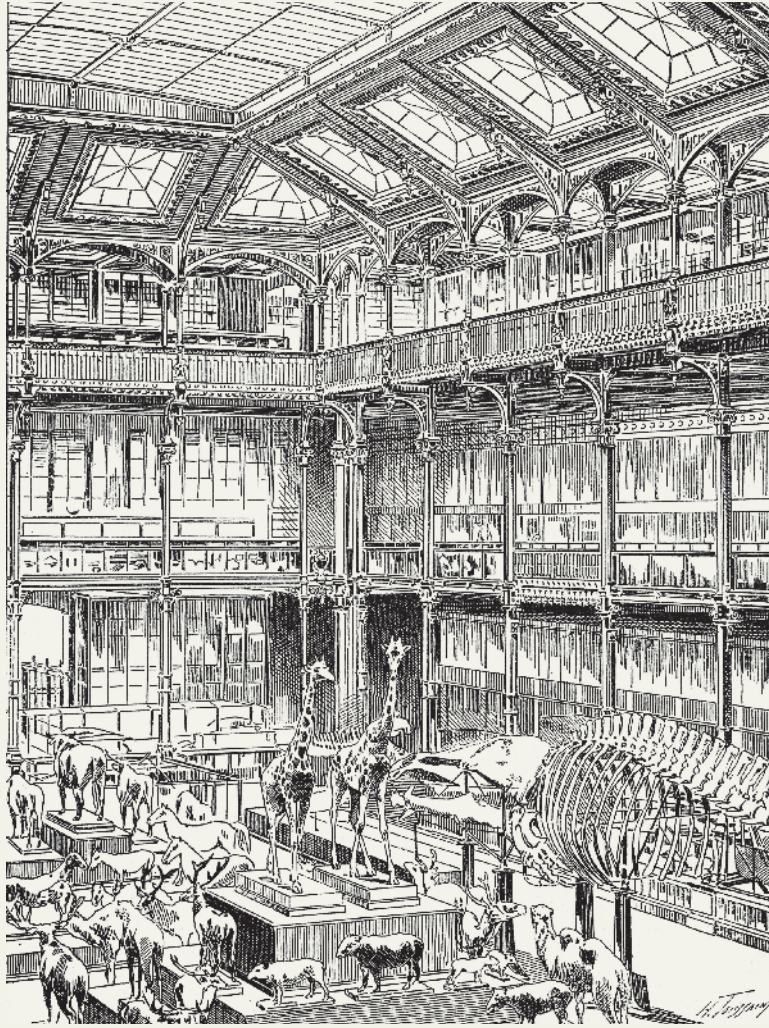
The Museum is in a very good position to discuss social issues. The first international congress on the protection of nature was held in 1923 at the MNHN. Moreover, in 1953 the then director of the Museum published an article entitled “Nature in a Museum” in which the subject of environmental education was dealt with. However, it was, more precisely since the 70s, that environmental issues emerged as an unavoidable component in politics. Politicians set about organising dozens of conferences and environmental protection programmes. Unfortunately, natural history museums who integrated such environmental issues in their exhibitions were rare.

The MNHN, however, engaged in its renovation programme on opening the Gallery of Zoology, became the first Museum since the 80s, to take this social role on board in its permanent exhibi-

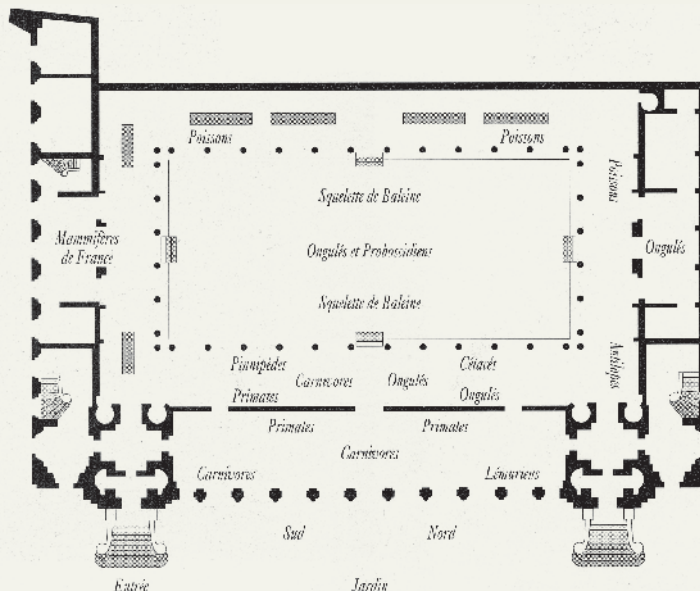
>> Formerly Galerie de Zoologie, Architect Jules André, 1889. Renovation and new exhibition design by Paul Chemetov, Borja Huidobro and René Allio, 1994. Photo by Luca Basso Peressut.



IMG. 2.37 — The Central Hall of the Gallery before the renovation. Source: Basso Peressut, Luca. 1985. "I luoghi del museo." Roma: Editori Riuniti, p. 247.



IMG. 2.38 — Ground floor plan before the renovation. Source: Bezombes, Dominique. 1994. "La Grande Galerie du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle: Conserver c'est Transformer." Paris: Editions Le Moniteur, p. 77.



tion. The purpose was to create a place of reflection and commitment while at the same time promoting democratic popularisation of knowledge as well as stimulating public awareness.

Specifications for an international architectural competition were drawn up. It was therein stipulated that the architectural quality of the building was principally linked with the way the interior space would be managed, and specified the necessity to adhere to the design principles of the building facade itself. The concept was to construct a museum composed of ideas and artefacts. The dimension of light was to be treated as an element of paramount importance for both the atmosphere and the displays, "rhythmic space, recreating and exalting the magic of the venue." The inclusion of large sized animals was deemed to be a major part of the overall scenography inasmuch as they are so spectacular but also because of the constraints arising from their volume. It was clearly stated that, "the gallery was not just to be a place of curiosity" and the aim was to create a museum where visitors would be invited to be fully involved in a museum experience beyond the simple viewing of the exhibition items, also involving their perception of space, light and sound, etc.

Up until then, no museum had yet attempted to put in place such a synthesis of the living world. They had rather chosen to show it in a divided fashion, classified according to subject matter. As the reflection on the renovation project deepened it became obvious that it was so likely to be enhanced also by the fact that this venue was where precursors of the original evolutionist theories, Buffon, Lamarck, G. St. Hilaire, had carried out their research. The project did not openly talk about the spirit of this special place but the museography specifications for the competition indirectly insinuated this. The visitor to the Museum must be drawn into a frame of mind of self-questioning, as he strolls from showcase to showcase, in the process of evolution and also the way in which human society in its transformation process imposed itself on Nature. From its conception, the renovation project had at stake the objective to offer several different levels of interpretation, for the visitor

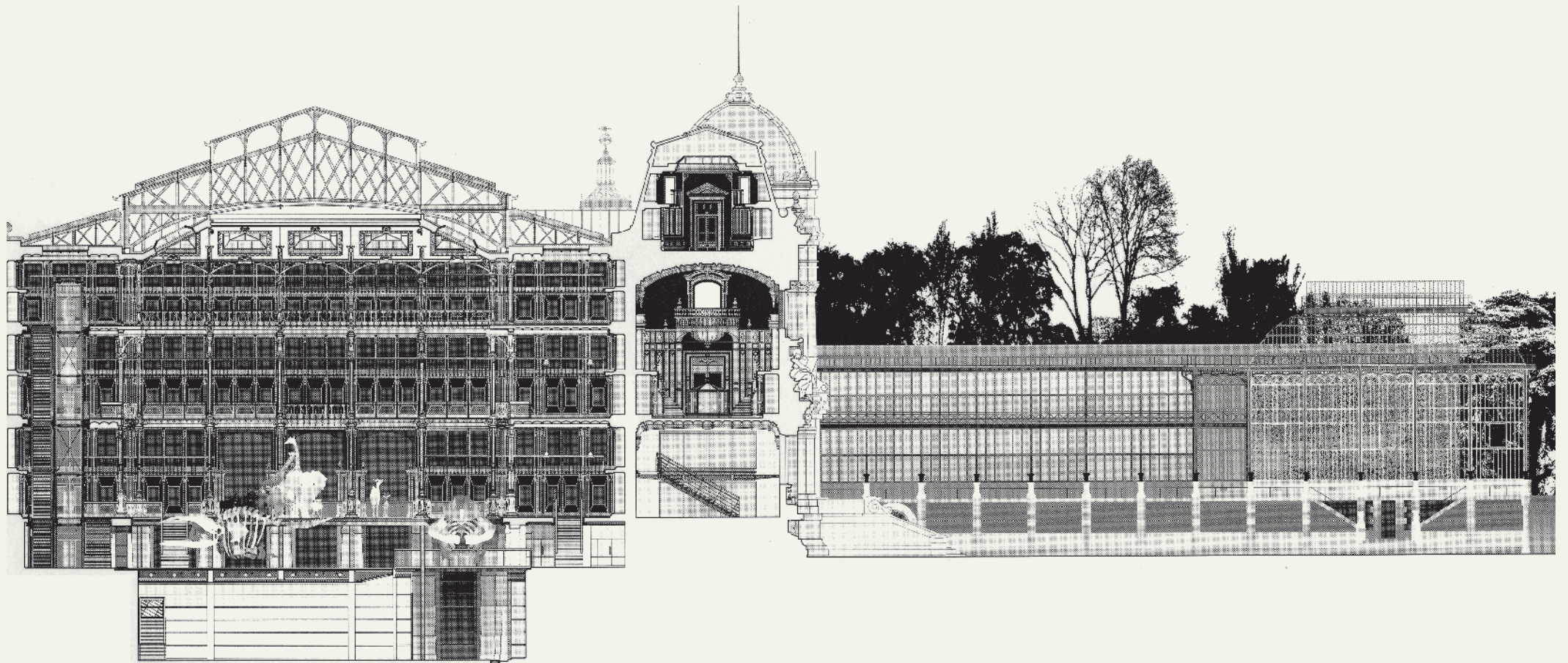
to be enthralled by what is to be seen, to acquire knowledge, to have food for thought on the understanding of the world, but also of his own existence. Therefore, by rediscovering the concept of unity in living species, modern science reminds us why there is need for solidarity with the universe as a whole. When it is shown how other cultures conceived their relationship with nature, the synopsis of the gallery of evolution aims at demonstrating the diversity of routes possible within nature and so invites us to think more about our own future on Planet Earth. The ambition of the Museum is thus two-fold: to bring together in one venue modern science on the one hand and societal issues on which it is to take a stand, on the other (Demography, Genetically Modified Crops, Global Warming, Species Extinction, Conservation, Protection, etc.).

The museology synopsis proposed in the specifications for the architectural competition revolved around a theatrical narrative made up of different acts and scenes. The jury quasi-unanimously selected the submission from the Associate Architects Paul Chemetov and Borja Huidobro, whose project put to the forefront ideas that were at the same time, strong statements, expressed in a simple fashion. The entrance hall located in the longitudinal axis of the building, vertical mechanised circulation accesses on the blind side of the building, thus turning this part of the building into an activity place; the creation, partly, in the central area of the building, of two floors comparable to a theatrical stage, and across the hidden glass roof, an imitation of a "living" sky.

The architects kept in mind the concepts of copying, imitating style, thus recognising the place imitation antique appearance deserves in architectural memory conservation, nourishing the concepts of ambiguity and memory freeze. Indeed it is impossible to perpetuate a piece of workmanship as it was originally made, the aging process being inevitable; thus "to preserve is to transform." The architects, therefore, in their intervention, and as defined by them, had to implement in the transformation process, the relationship between the old and the new so as to create a confrontation, a dialogue between them.



IMG. 2.39 — Transversal section of the Gallery according to the renovation project by the architects P. Chemetov and B. Huidobro with the scenographer R. Allio. The Gallery reopened in 1994. Source: Bezombes, Dominique. 1994. "La Grande Galerie du Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle: Conserver c'est Transformer." Paris: Editions Le Moniteur.



IMG. 2.40 — The African Savannah is the masterpiece of the biodiversity display. Photo by Fabienne Galangau-Querat.



IMG. 2.39 — The sea levels in the Grande Galerie. Photo by Fabienne Galangau-Querat.



René Allio, a theatre and cinema director, was entrusted with the huge set design task. In the central area of the gallery, the nave, this scenographer used lighting, and a sort of symphony of nature, as a support to set up the different scenes, including the various ecosystems on earth as in the first act, thus alluding rather than creating an illusion. For those who conceived these scenarios, their aim was not to recreate a natural environment per se but to stimulate the imagination in which so many souvenirs and images are embedded rather than propose a diaporama.

In fact, the Museum set up a temporary structure, entitled the “Prefiguration Committee,” to put this project into effect. This committee was composed of different project managers whose jobs were to coordinate the museological concept of this project. A Scientific Committee was also set up to advise on the content of each of the “acts” of the scenography in the gallery. Monitoring committees validated the scientific, museological, and museographic choices made for the future gallery. The scientific committee was strengthened by the support given to it through a committee of pedagogical and museological consultants. Moreover, recourse was made to other experts during the course of the renovation project (Museographic Council, Evaluation Consultant, Communication Consultant, ect.). The Renovation Project structure became extremely complex, with a heavy multiple validation procedure for each and every one of the elements of the project.

The various committees will focus most of their attention on the museological synopsis components of the project to the extent that one could think that what was at stake, above all, was in the content factor. Actually, this issue reflected partly the anxiety on the part of the scientific community that in the gallery displays in an overall context of unprecedented scientific uncertainties in the area of the environment, the content would be left out. To understand this, we need to step back in time to the beginning of the 90s when the position of scientific researchers had begun to change. Their skills and opinions were beginning to exercise an authoritative view thus conferring them many opportunities to express

their opinions in their own areas of expertise and also on various other socio-economic issues. The result of all this was that a solid discourse on museology began to come to the forefront based on emerging societal issues, and on up-to-date knowledge supported by many examples, linking to eventual questioning that would have the effect of making the maximum number of visitors sensitive to these issues. To give support to this endeavour, several socio-demographic studies on museum visitors were carried out during the renovation period. These studies on visitors’ knowledge and practices were a huge help in the elaboration of the museum project thus being able to identify the profile of the future public visiting the gallery but also associating them to the elaboration of the project.

It is to be noted that many amendments were made between the initial intentions stated in the various synopses and what in fact was revealed at the time of reopening. A succession of scientific, museological, and museographical corrections ended in extracting the environmental issue out of separation zone between Man and Nature, bringing it into a more pluridisciplinary focus. The biodiversity concept, although still not very much publicised, resounded perfectly well with the discourse of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Therefore, this Biodiversity factor finally finds itself strongly portrayed in the gallery displays. When the Great Gallery of Evolution opened up in 1994 the environmental crisis had in the meantime become a collective and multiform issue. It will be the first of the Galleries in natural history museums in both Europe and more than likely in the world, to explore the complexities of the processes at stake, using local domestic, European and extra-European examples. Thus the Gallery will trigger off, and/or be an influence on other renovation projects not only from the point of view of form but also in the area of content to such an extent that many museums today throughout the world claim kinship with the MNHN Grande Galerie de l’Evolution.

So, 20 years on, it should be recognised that the scientific ambition of this Gallery, that is to say, to be at the same time a science museum and

a museum connected with society issues, did not end up being overshadowed by the spectacular scenography therein which itself cannot but leave a mark on the mind. Despite the aging process of the gallery, the content and the form are deemed to still be in phase with the latest environmental updates and with the big issues of society that are continuing to be raised namely, biodiversity, species extinction, local and global demography, diversity of viewpoints and nature/nurture. Soon the Grande Galerie, the Great Gallery, will be celebrating its 20th anniversary. 20 long years during which there have been many changes at management level, in its public relations orientation strategy bringing along often regrettable consequences with regard to the thinking in the initial project for the Gallery. The ambition of those promoting the gallery initially were, let us remember, to articulate both the permanent and temporary exhibitions and the development of themes connecting “science and society issues.” But, little by little these were forgotten and the exhibitions favour the expertise of the new managing teams that have been succeeded without following a clearly oriented programmatic project. It could be said that the Gallery was penalised with the advent of the concept of “Event Creations” and the new profitability logic forced upon all cultural institutions. For example, the innovative technology installed in the set in the Nave is not there to accompany the global scientific content, and is in fact now completed with inadequate museographic add-ons. Nevertheless, the explanation of evolution still gives us the key to both the unity and the diversity of the species and all the questions still to be asked about the biosphere dynamics and the environmental problems transforming local problems into international issues, urge the visitor to the Great Gallery of Evolution to embark upon his own ethical questioning on all the important decisions and directions being taken in the area of development.

Fabienne Galangau-Quérat

Text translated by Cathy Demanoff

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IMG. 2.41 — Museo di Storia Naturale di Venezia, Venice, Italy. Established 1923. New exhibition design by Lorenzo Greppi, 2011. The museum entrance. Photo by Giovanni Pinna.

## Museo di Storia Naturale di Venezia

### Natural History Museum of Venice, Italy

The Natural History Museum of Venice is among the few Italian museums which have undergone a thorough restructuring process both in terms of form and content of the exhibitions and relationships with the public and the city. This represents an interesting example of a natural history museum which has been able to reconcile the entertainment and dramatic aspects, scientific accuracy of the learning materials as well as emphasis on the history of the natural sciences. In this regard, the museum has followed the great tradition of exploration and scientific studies held by the Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia (the Republic of Venice).

Although the Natural History Museum of Venice is not among the most ancient museums in Italy—as it was officially founded only in 1923—it still holds a leading position. Indeed, it is situated in the oldest seat among those which currently host all natural history museums in the peninsula, that is to say, the historical palace known as “Fondaco dei Turchi” which looks out onto the Grand Canal with its double loggia in the Venetian-Byzantine style. Built by the forefather of the Pesaro family in the first half of the 12th century, the Republic of Venice bought it in 1381 and used it as its headquarters. As a result, the palace hosted illustrious people such as the Emperor of Constantinople, Giovanni Paleologo, Alfonso d’Este. Even Lucrezia Borgia and Torquato Tasso are said to have visited the palace. The name which refers to the palace is due to the fact that in 1621, the Republic of Venice offered it to the Turks (the name by which all peoples in Venice were called under Ottoman rule) with whom Venice traditionally traded. The Fondaco was used as a warehouse—the Turkish mainly imported wax, wool, raw materials, oil, furs and later tobacco—and as a house. For this reason, there was a big room laid out as a mosque and another as a pool for rituals and there was a sharp division between the areas reserved for European Turks

(Bosnians and Albanians) and those reserved for Asian and Constantinople Turks (Persians and Armenians). Throughout the centuries, the Fondaco was transformed into a kind of ghetto separated from the city. The front part leading to the Grand Canal was closed by a huge wall, which only left a route for the passage of goods, and the side towers were pulled down as people thought the Turks could have used them to spy on the city.

The Turks kept the palace until 1838. Afterwards, the Fondaco gradually declined and as early as 1860, one year after the Austrian government ceded to the city of Venice, which caused it to be almost entirely rebuilt.

The Palace history as host of the museum started more or less twenty years after Italian Unification. In 1880, it became the seat of the Correr Museum, Venetian Art and History Museum which is currently located in the Napoleon wing of St Mark’s Square. In former times, the museums also had collections of natural history and ethnography. When the Correr Museum relocated in 1922, these collections were left there along with other private and public Venetian collections, among them, those of Veneto Institute of Science, Letters and Art, the core of the new Natural History Museum, which was officially founded in 1923. From that date onwards, the museum has remained in its original location on the Grand Canal.

Most of the collections, which make up its heritage, have been formed recently as a result of the museum’s recent creation. The most ancient collections left by the founder of the Correr Museum, the honourable Venetian Teodoro Correr, date back to the last decades of the 18th and 19th centuries while most of the historical collections date back to the 19th century. Such collections were given to the museum by Venetian naturalists who had gathered and studied



IMG. 2.42 — The so-called “Fondaco dei Turchi”, seat of the museum of Natural History of Venice. Photo by Giovanni Pinna.



IMG. 2.43 — View of the Gallery. Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



IMG. 2.44 — Section of the Gallery. Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



NEXT PAGE, IMG. 2.45 — First Floor Plan. Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



them, or through the Veneto Institute to which they had been entrusted in the first place. These collections along with other collections gathered successively thanks to research activities carried out by the museum scientific staff, account for substantial documentation on fauna and flora whose natural habitat is in the Venetian lagoon and Adriatic Sea.

Among these collections, there are scientific rarities such as the dry and liquid anatomical collection by Enrico Filippo Trois, which aroused great interest during the world exhibitions which took place in Vienna, Paris and Milan in 1873, 1878 and 1883 respectively. Nowadays, the museum's heritage is approximately thought to be made up of over two million items, among which are numerous collections, which are not merely naturalistic but have invaluable importance as far as documentation and history are concerned. The collection of nautical models of watercraft and fishing tools used in the Venetian

lagoon made in the late 19th century and the ethnographical collection by Giovanni Miani, which is worthy of discussion.

Giovanni Giacomo Miani belongs to the tradition of romantic explorers of the mid-nineteenth century, who travelled through Africa, which was still unknown for the most part and had not yet been exposed to European colonialism. On the one hand, his trips provided the western world with the first pieces of documentation on the so-called “Black Africa” under the form of diaries and drawings, and on the other hand, museums with the first ethnographical collections. Miani and other explorers and adventurers had the same dream which was to discover the source of the Nile so as to be able to account for the cyclical flooding of the Egyptian river which had allowed the development of one of the most prosperous ancient civilisations. The failure of the 1848 Venetian revolt against Austria, in which Miani played



**IMG. 2.46** — A showcase in the room dedicated to Miani's collection within the Section "Raccogliere per stupire, raccogliere per studiare" (collecting to amaze, collecting to study). On the floor, there are maps retracing the itinerary of the explorer's trips. Photo by Giovanni Pinna.



**IMG. 2.47** — Rendering of the room dedicated to Miani's collection. Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



**IMG. 2.48** — The room devoted to the research center Centro Studi e Ricerche Ligabue (CSRL) within the Section "Raccogliere per stupire, raccogliere per studiare" (collecting to amaze, collecting to study). Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



a major role, caused him to go into exile and to start exploring Africa. After the first exploratory mission along the Nile heading towards Sudan, which would earn him a place in the Paris Geographical Society, as well as support from the French government, Miani left for his first expedition at the end of which he did not reach the source of the Nile and stopped only 60 km from his goal. Nevertheless, he gathered a wide range of information on populations he met, and naturalistic and ethnographical items. In 1861, a new expedition was launched and once again proved unsuccessful. Miani's dream was shattered in 1863 when Speke and Grant made an official announcement, saying they had found the source of the Nile in Lake Victoria. Yet, Miani embarked on a new expedition in 1871 during which he gathered other naturalistic materials but died in 1872 on the way back. The naturalistic and ethnographical items gathered by Miani are kept in Paris and Vienna Natural History Museums as well as in Pigorini Museum in Rome, while Venice holds the signed diary, the most interesting item containing 1,800 items gathered during the 1859 and 1861 expeditions, which Miani gave to the city as early as 1862.

Miani's collection testifies to a strong desire for knowledge underlying all the expeditions, which took place in the first half of the 19th century. Another interesting collection available in the museum recalls the colonial policies and the culture they upheld, which thrived in the last decades of the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century in the wake of expeditions to Africa. This is a collection of hunting trophies along with photographic documentation of that time, which was gathered by a rich Venetian man, Giuseppe de Reali during 12 hunting expeditions in northern and central Africa between 1898 and 1929. He gave such items to the city around 1939.

Greater attention is placed on Miani's and de Reali's collections as their integration into the layout of the museum's new exhibition plan, along with historical naturalistic collections—and in particular that of Trois's anatomical preparations and this has allowed a happy me-

diuum between merely scientific communication on the one hand, and the history of the museums and its collections on the other. Moreover, it reminds us of the characters, whether scientists or simple collection holders, fond of the sciences, which have played an active role in the museum's history, thus linking it to the evolution of the museum's form as a scientific institution, a means of communication and knowledge. Although most naturalistic exhibitions laid out by Italian museums neglect the history of the museum's origins, it is fully part of the Italian historical and intellectual tradition.

The introduction of the history of the museum of Venice into the exhibitions, and in general in the museum's form, was one of the key objectives highlighted in the project for new exhibitions. This came into being through the section referred to as "raccogliere per stupire, raccogliere per studiare." In the section, the rooms dedicated to Miani's and de Reali's collections, representing two dimensions of collection-making, go hand in hand with a reproduction of the late 19th century exhibition and with the hypothetical reproduction of a wunderkammer with basilisks, unicorns, fish, crocodiles and other stuffed animals laid out in the side showcases and hung to the roof of a polygonal room in a way typical of cabinets of curiosities.

In order to recreate the atmosphere that pervaded such ancient museum displays, the showcases reserved for exhibitions were built in the style of that time with natural techniques and materials meant to protect the items from the lagoon's humid climate whilst the layout of the items was carried out according to former exhibition models, or the scientists' instructions when available. In this way, the exhibition of Miani's collection, which was preceded by a long and accurate restoration process of all items, has followed the instructions as regards to the organisation of the collection, in 12 different groups corresponding to various ethnic groups that the traveller had indicated in a signed drawing. He therefore alluded to the collection the museum deems as being "the greatest European testimony in terms of the museums' layout in the ethnographic



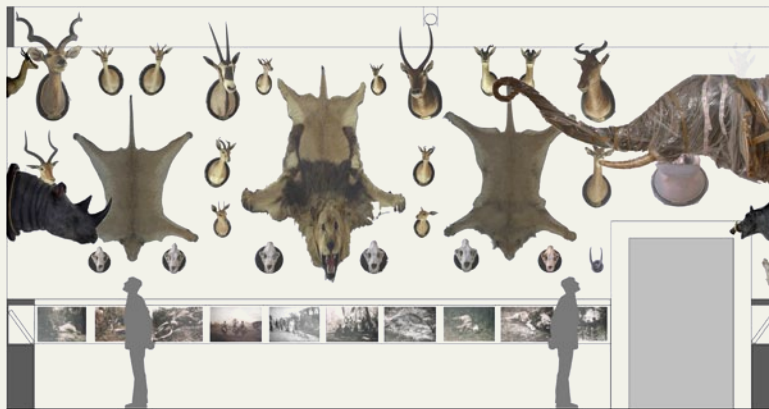
IMG. 2.49 — View of the assumed reconstruction of a Wunderkammer within the Section “Raccogliere per stupire, raccogliere per studiare” (collecting to amaze, collecting to study). Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



IMG. 2.50 — The room dedicated to the de Reali's collection within the Section “Raccogliere per stupire, raccogliere per studiare” (collecting to amaze, collecting to study). Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



IMG. 2.51 — Section of the the room dedicated to the de Reali's collection. Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



field.” In the same way, de Reali’s collection has been displayed in two rooms, thus respecting as much as possible the layout of the hunting trophies in the old family villa as evidenced in old photographs before they were relocated at the museum. Finally, the atmosphere of a typical museum with high showcases—built in the original style—containing zoological, botanical and geological collections along with scientific publications and tools of that time, has been recreated in the long room looking out onto the Grand Canal.

The connection between the history and the scientific communication realised in the Natural History Museum of Venice managed to overcome the yawning gap between two cultural styles, which were often separated in many museums. The gap was between the educational function of museums through exhibitions with sole learning purposes, almost school-oriented, as opposed to an entertaining vision, sometimes based on a game layout whose aim is to fulfil the museums’ educational function. The innovative aspect of the form taken by the museum of Venice lies in the reconciliation of both styles. It was presented to the public in 2010 after a long period of closure, involving not only the permanent exhibition but also the rooms reserved for study and storage, the library and the areas designed to welcome people. Through the reshaping of the spaces mentioned above, the museum opened itself to the city, thus allowing people to move freely on the premises and change from a closed institution into a meeting place and, in a sense, a place of conservation in the spirit of the Venetian tradition—all this thanks to the renovation of the palace garden and the restoration of the internal courtyard.

The educational potential of the museum and its capacity to illustrate subjects pertaining to natural sciences lie in the two sections known as “Sulle tracce della vita” and “Le strategie della vita,” where the systems of presentation of the items, the captions, the interactive means of communication enable visitors to interact with the exhibition and to make their own vision of

the natural world instead of observing passively. We can read in the guidebook to the museum that “the general principle of communication rests on two main levels which develop simultaneously throughout the exhibition. The first level consists of immediately making the most of the installation. The visitor walks through the exhibition and immediately gets the basic message conveyed. The second level aims at involving the visitors as much as possible. They are therefore expected to interact with all communicative means, which enable them to have access to more sophisticated contents from manageable collections, simple written contents, audio-visual materials to real interactive multimedia devices. The objective is to allow visitors to experience the museum as a suggestive and place for the senses. The museum therefore becomes a place where people feel emotions. It is able to convey reliable scientific information, its contents triggering various emotions from evocation to surprise and wonder. To put it in a nutshell, the museum boosts knowledge, fancy, critical thinking and curiosity so as to awaken people’s individual creativity and to stimulate each visitor’s imagination.”

Now, we should ask ourselves whether this communicative strategy has worked well, thus allowing the museum to reach the objectives defined when drafting the planning sheet. The overall answer to this question is positive even though the two sections mentioned above have had a different impact on visitors. As a matter of fact, the section “Le strategie della vita” has proved more successful in terms of communication whereas the section “Sulle tracce della vita” has left a lot to be desired in this regard.

This last section was developed around the evocative and “sound” exhibition, as Greenblat would put it, of the skeleton of the Saharan dinosaurs *Ouranosaurus nigeriensis*, which Giancarlo Ligabue gave to the museum along with the remains of a crocodile *Sarcosuchus imperator* and other numerous fossil collections. Giancarlo Ligabue was a businessman whose passion for sciences was consistent with the tradition of

**IMG. 2.52** — First room of the Section “Strategia della vita” (strategies for life) that illustrates the different living beings and their complex evolution for life. Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi



**IMG. 2.53** — Room devoted to the photosynthesis, part of the thematic area devoted to the feeding within the Section “Strategia della vita” (strategies for life). Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi



**IMG. 2.54** — Room titled “moving in the water”, part of the thematic area devoted to the movement within the Section “Strategia della vita” (strategies for life). Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi



Venetian explorers. A room next to those dedicated to other explorers has been dedicated to his research and expeditions. Nevertheless, in the small rooms following on from that of the dinosaurs, the architect resorted to an excessive stylised contextualisation and in chiaroscuro effects, which prevent people from seeing the collections properly and which divert the visitor’s attention from the notice boards. As a result, the informative display is not good enough to fully conjure up the biological past of the Earth.

Yet, it can definitely be said that the section entitled “Sulle tracce della vita” is outstanding as far as communication is concerned. Furthermore, many museums, which resort to excessive spectacular effects, should use it as a model just as museums which persist in making boring lists of systems and classifications. Throughout the exhibition, a careful balance can be seen between the use of audio-visual and multimedia devices, the captions made up of images (drawings and photographs) and interesting texts and the exhibition of original collections, which are always used as functional elements in illustrating themes, facts or strategies. The section starts with a small circular room, laid out perfectly in front of the “Wunderkammer” in which a multimedia device introduces visitors to the strategies of life, through the relationship between forms and functions characterising biological diversity. The devices allow visitors to see how the different organisms—whose images are projected onto the walls of the room—serve the

same function with different forms and structures. This introduction is followed by rooms dedicated respectively to illustrate motion—in air, water or on the ground—and to the strategies implemented by animal and vegetable life to find food. This section only deals with individual strategies of survival when illustrating strategies linked to motion and nutrition. It leaves aside the collective strategies of survival, those which guarantee the survival of the species, and not simply individuals. Indeed, there is no section dedicated to reproductive strategies in the museum.

The museum is far from being finished. There is no section dedicated to Venice’s lagoon yet, illustrating the origin and evolution of this peculiar and fragile ecosystem and highlighting the impact it has had and still has to this day on the lagoon’s population and economy.

Giovanni Pinna

Text translated by Paule Yao



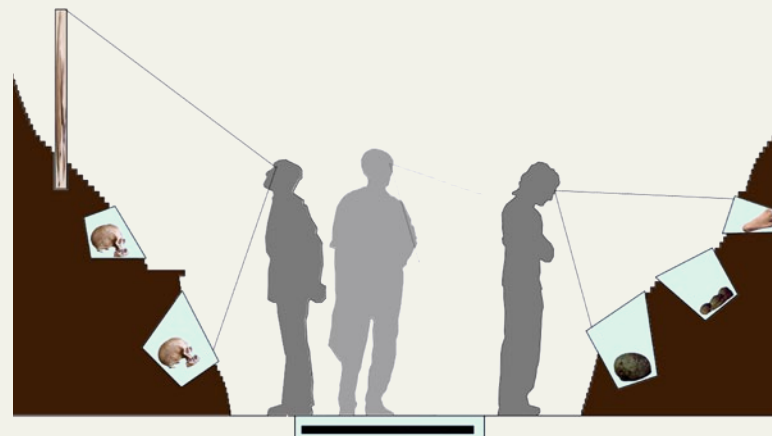
IMG. 2.55 — View of the room dedicated to the flight “moving in the air,” part of the thematic area devoted to the movement in the Section “Strategia della vita” (strategies for life). Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



IMG. 2.56 — The room dedicated to the sea life within the Section “Strategia della vita” (strategies for life). Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.



IMG. 2.57, 2.58 — View of the Section “Sulle tracce della vita” (on the traces of life) devoted to fossils and palaeontology. Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi



IMG. 2.59 — Section of the display cases in the room of the section “Sulle tracce della vita”. Courtesy of Lorenzo Greppi.

# **Museums of Ethnography and Museums of Culture(s)**



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## Ethnographic Museums: Towards a New Paradigm?

→ CAMILLA PAGANI

### → BEYOND ETHNOGRAPHY : “CANNIBAL” LEGACY AND SEARCH FOR NEW DEFINITIONS

The first issue to underline in any critical analysis of museums of ethnography and museums of cultures concerns the founding categorical definition of these kinds of institution. As numerous academic papers have stated since the 1980's and up to today, museums of ethnography have been the targets of a wide range of criticism, both with reference to their history, in particular their relationship with colonialism, and also for their purpose, which is considered to be distant and anachronistic in a post-colonial and globalised reality. French anthropologist Jean Jamin's famous question “should museums of ethnography be burned?” (Jamin 1998, 62–69), the renowned exhibition directed by the Museum of Neuchatel in 2002, “Le Musée Cannibale” (Gonseth, Hainard, and Kaer 2002) and the provocative symposium's title of RIME, a European network of ethnography museums, “Beyond Modernity. Do ethnographic museums need ethnography?”,<sup>1</sup> show well the *malaise* (Clair 2007) that the discipline of ethnography, in itself, and museums of ethnography have been experiencing.

Most European ethnographic museums have adopted new displays and new strategies to go beyond the ethnographic paradigm in order to at-

<sup>1</sup> RIME which is a European project, stands for International Network of Ethnography Museums and World Culture. It concerns 10 museums: Världskulturmuseet, Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde National Museum of Ethnology, Leiden; Musée du quai Branly, Paris; Museum der Volkerkunde, Vienna; Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford; Linden-Museum, Stuttgart; Museo de America, Madrid; Naprstek Museum of Asian, African and American Cultures, Prague; Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Pigorini, Rome; Musée royal d'Afrique central, Tervuren.

IMG. 3.02 — Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, Tervuren, Belgium. Permanent exhibition © HP.2012.17.27, collection RMCA Tervuren. Photo by J. Van de Vyver, courtesy of RMCA Tervuren.



tract more visitors. As it will be analysed in this research, new settings have led to the creation of interactive spaces and have opened up museums to a different public. From the paradigm of museum as a temple to that of museum as a forum (Cameron 1972), museums have truly become cultural centres and places for entertainment (Hein 2000).

With regard to these changes, as it can be seen in the attached table, the Quai Branly Museum in Paris represents a very interesting case study. The Museum of Mankind, its predecessor and symbol of traditional ethnographic museums, used to have a quite modest number of visitors. On the contrary, the brand new Quai Branly Museum which houses 80% of the Museum of Mankind's collections has become the fourth most visited museum in France with an average of 1.4 million visitors per year, thanks to a dynamic strategy of temporary exhibitions (more than fifty in seven years) and numerous cultural and entertainment events.

Before giving a comparative and detailed analysis of some case studies it is necessary to examine the common background that distinguishes this specific category of museums. With this purpose in mind, some theoretical and political reflections are unavoidable. Undeniably, the principal problem of ethnographic museums stems from their historical origins, in particular their direct or indirect links with colonialism (De L'Estoile 2008). Certainly this aspect illustrates that all institutions belong to different national narratives, so any generalization requires prudence. Being aware of the relativity of all histories and the heterogeneous nature of ethnography as an academic discipline according to different national contexts, what emerges as a common thread is the need for museums to liberate themselves from their colonial legacy and to recognize cultural minorities who have previously been exoticised and even despised. Some anthropologists, although in different situations, have suggested to use the concept of "cannibalism" (Ames 1992) in order to analyse the collecting of non-European objects that were made by Western museums, particularly ethnographic museums, during the colonial era. Museums might



IMG. 3.03 — Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford, United Kingdom. View of the internal permanent exhibition space and the refurbishment of the entrance area. Project by Pringle Richards Sharrat Architects 2009. © PRS\_PITT\_002. Photo by Edmund Sumner.

be considered *cannibalistic* because they collected objects during a period of great imbalance of power between Europe and other continents (De L'Estoile 2007). This was highlighted by Marc-Olivier Gonseth, Jacques Hainard and Roland Kaehr in the exhibition "Le Musée Cannibale."

Our cannibalism consists of symbolically eating the other within the larger context of rejecting otherness. Museums in general and ethnographic museums in particular are privileged places where we meet and resolve the paradox in question, because they offer a space where the other can be eaten and give the appearance of an opening which lets us believe that the other has become us and is finally assimilated.<sup>2</sup> (Gonseth, Hainard, and Kaehr 2002, 13)

The essential paradox in the history of collections lies in the fact that museums are designed to preserve the memory of cultures and societies, though being, as Nélia Dias states institutions that assimilate and absorb artifacts in order to forget the cultures and societies that produced them<sup>3</sup> (Dias 2002, 27). In this way, according to anthropologist, museum practice resembles cannibalism in so far as it promotes a "process of oblivion" (ibid.). A better understanding of the founding history of museums and their collections is a fundamental element for their critical analysis. Therefore, beyond the actual exhibiting of the collections, the key element is the narrative through which ethnographic museums confront history. As it will be shown in this research and through the selected case studies, the colonial legacy can itself become an object to be exhibited or an object of concealment, depending on the approach adopted by the various institutions.<sup>4</sup>

2 "Notre cannibalisme consiste à ingérer l'autre symboliquement dans un contexte plus global de refus de l'altérité et que les musées en general et les musées d'ethnographie en particulier sont un lieu privilégié où s'expose et se résout le paradoxe en question, puisqu'ils offrent un espace pour l'ingestion de l'autre et un simulacre d'ouverture à l'altérité en laissant penser que cet autre devenu même est enfin assimilable."

3 "Institutions qui assimilent et absorbent les artefacts pour mieux vouer à l'oubli les cultures et les sociétés productrices de ces artefacts."

4 It is worth noting the case study of the Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, in which the



IMG. 304 —The National Museum of the American Indian besides the Congress, Washington DC, USA. Photo by Camilla Pagani.



Now, changes in historical and political situation, theories on multiculturalism, post-colonial studies, and research on globalization, have deeply questioned the role of ethnographic museums, as Cajsja Lagerkvist (head of exhibitions at the National Museum of World Culture) has stated (2008, 90). Originally the relationship between institutions and the cultures that were on display was not equal, but today, in a post-colonial and globalized context, museums have become places of political debate in which redefining identities and negotiating authority. Along these lines anthropologist Anthony Shelton has called on ethnographic museums to take responsibility for their past:

Ethnographic museums and those with important non-western collections must, more than any others, chart their way through the complexities and ethical compromises that globalization is unleashing before they can truly understand and answer audiences that are increasingly made up of people they once considered part of their object. (Shelton 2001, 222)

As the discipline of ethnography has been criticized, so ethnographic museums have become places for debates over politics and identity (Clifford 1997). In fact, the cultures that were once objects of study or whose artifacts were put on display today claim for the return of collections and for the right to be the authors and interpreters of their own history and cultural heritage (Kaplan 1994). This scenario can be analysed in the light of theories on multiculturalism, as it is defined as a “policy of equal recognition of cultures” (Kelly 2002, 5). Similarly, when applying this policy

colonial history of the institution and its collections will form part of the exhibit display, according to the planned renovation project. Similarly, the Tropen Museum of Amsterdam, with the installation of the “Colonial Theatre,” objectivises and puts into perspective the colonial history of the museum. See <http://www.tropenmuseum.nl/-/MUS/5870/Tropenmuseum/Exhibitions-Events/Permanent-exhibitions/Eastward-Bound> (Accessed 6/1/2013)

to museums, according to museum historian Tony Bennett, “there should be parity of representation for all groups and cultures within the collecting, exhibition and conservation activities of museums” (1995, 9). Consequently, how should ethnographic museums face this challenge? Taking into consideration theories on globalization (Bhabha 1994; Appadurai 1996), the opposition that were created by ethnographic museums us/others (De L’Estoile 2007), *völkerkunde/volkskunde*, local/global, central/peripheral (Bennett 1995) no longer found validation in a hybridized and fluid context in which cultures are not fixed entities that can be identified according to systems or categories but are mobile and interconnected constructs. As a consequence museums tackle new problems. Tony Bennett points out that “the challenge now is to reinvent the museum as an institution that can orchestrate new relations and perceptions of difference” (Bennett 2006, 59). According to him, it is necessary to break with the tradition of the “exhibitionary complex”, a museological paradigm that used to create cultural hierarchies and to stigmatize otherness. On the contrary, in a multicultural context, Bennett defines contemporary museums as “differencing machines” which are “facilitators of cross-cultural exchange” and which accord “respect and recognition to previously marginalized or repressed histories and cultures.”<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, historian Herman Lebovics proves that since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century many museums have been taking different paths towards post-colonialism (Lebovics 2007) and are seeking to remove their colonial roots by transforming the ethnographic approach into an aesthetic one or by giving voice to minorities and involving them in the process of exhibiting heritage. Indeed many ethnographic museums in Europe are redefining themselves and looking self-critically at their practices. This has led to new foundations, significant renovation projects of pre-existing museums (via expansion and/or redesign of permanent exhibitions) and in some cases relocation and re-foundation of museums and/or existing collections with the creation of new museum models.

The current challenge is to find new definitions, messages, and stories to interpret a sensitive cultural heritage. Facing up to historical mistakes or recognizing cultures that were once stigmatized has led ethnographic museums to change their cultural policies, their aims, and at times even their names. In the new scenario it is commonly preferred to use definitions such as “culture,” “civilization,” “world culture” or to refer to the relevant geographical area rather than speak of ethnography.<sup>6</sup> With regard to the above, Cajsja Lagerkvist draws our attention to the varying responses of ethnographic museums to this critical environment: “some move towards interpreting and displaying their collections as universal ‘World

<sup>5</sup> Bennett refers to the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Te Papa Tongarewa National Museum of New Zealand and the National Museum of Australia.

<sup>6</sup> This is the case of the Musée du quai Branly in Paris, which takes its name from its location in order to distance itself from the Musée de l’Homme and to avoid disciplinary categorization, of the Galleries of Africa, Americas and Oceania of the British Museum, in which reference to geographic location is preferred instead of the previous name “Museum of Mankind” and of the new Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg where there is the desire to create a new institution not explicitly linked to ethnography. These are examples cited since they are the most paradigmatic.

Art' while others move towards a more cultural-historical context or an interdisciplinary approach" (Lagerkvist 2008, 90; see also Benkirane, and Deuber-Ziegler 2006).

Before examining the different kinds of approaches, which try to move on from the traditional ethnographic model, it is first necessary to explore the influences that indigenous political and identity-based movements have been exercising on ethnographic museums for over thirty years.

#### → FROM OBJECTS TO SUBJECTS: MUSEUMS AS PLACES FOR RECLAIMING IDENTITY?

Concerning the different museological strategies, it is interesting to note a great divide between countries in which indigenous peoples reside and countries in which cultural minorities are the result of migration. By the way, the distinction between the needs of indigenous peoples, national minorities and migration groups has been amply discussed by Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka, while he underlines the necessity to analyse separately the claims of indigenous peoples and the ones that are tied to "polyethnicity" (Kymlicka 2001, 24–44). In the museum world this separation has been defined by French anthropologists Marie Mauzé and Joelle Rostkowski as "a fairly clear fracture line between countries that have indigenous peoples in their territory and old European colonial powers" (Mauzé, and Rostkowski 2007, 81; see also De L'Estoile 2007, 33).<sup>7</sup> Certainly the United Nations Declaration on the Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UN 2007) has established the theoretical bases within an international framework that legitimize indigenous peoples' claims for the return of human remains and cultural objects and for rights in the interpretation of cultural heritage.<sup>8</sup>

Notwithstanding the historical and political differences, since the late 1980's traditional national ethnographic and natural history museums in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have been replaced by new buildings or institutions in order to recognize indigenous peoples and to repair historical wrongs. As Table 1 shows, the most important ones are the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, the National Museum of Australia and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian. In some cases these changes have led to the adop-

7 "Une ligne de fracture assez nette entre les musées des Etats qui ont des peuples autochtones sur leur territoire et ceux des anciennes puissances coloniales européennes."

8 See Article 11: "1. Indigenous peoples have the right to practise and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature. 2. States shall provide redress through effective mechanisms, which may include restitution, developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples, with respect to their cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property taken without their free, prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs". Article 12: "1. Indigenous peoples have the right to manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies; the right to maintain, protect, and have access in privacy to their religious and cultural sites; the right to the use and control of their ceremonial objects; and the right to the repatriation of their human remains. 2. States shall seek to enable the access and/or repatriation of ceremonial objects and human remains in their possession through fair, transparent and effective mechanisms developed in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned." (www.un.org Accessed 6/1/2013).

tion of a management that is officially bi-cultural, such as the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa<sup>9</sup>; a third of the management, as a minimum, that is constituted by native communities as at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian<sup>10</sup>; or policies of collaboration and consultation with native communities such as at the Canadian Museum of Civilization<sup>11</sup> and at the National Museum of Australia.<sup>12</sup>

TABLE 3.01 — Overview about major new national museums of civilizations, in Australia, Canada, United States and New Zealand. Camilla Pagani.

MUSEUM	TYPE OF CHANGE	OLD NAME	NEW NAME	DATE OF CHANGE
National Museum of Australia, (Canberra)	New building			1980-2001
Canadian Museum of Civilization, (Hull)	New building	National Museum of Man	Canadian Museum of Civilization	1989
National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, (Washington)	Relocation, 3 New Buildings	Museum of the American Indian (New York)	National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution (New York, Washington)	1989-2004
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, (Wellington)	New building	New Zealand Dominion Museum (Colonial Museum)	Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa	1992-1998

Jette Sandahal, former director of the National Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and of the National Museum of World Culture in Gothenburg, states that "Across the differences many museums of the 1980s and 1990s share the intent of giving voice to those whose points of view have been muted as part of the specific politics of power" (Sandahal 2005, 3). According to her, the foundation of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) was key to the adoption of some fundamental principles in modern museology. Among the most important ones she highlights:

the principles of people's rights of self- representation ; of consultations and shared authority between the museum and representatives of the (original) producers and owners of the collections as well as other potential stakeholders; and the visions of a cultural institution as a site of empowerment for subjugated groups and as a site of reconciliation between warring and opposing peoples. (Sandahal 2005, 3)

9 <http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/AboutUs/Pages/AboutTePapa.aspx> (Accessed 6/1/2013).

10 [www.nmai.si.edu](http://www.nmai.si.edu) (Accessed 6/1/2013).

11 <http://www.civilization.ca/home> (Accessed 6/1/2013).

12 <http://www.nma.gov.au/> (Accessed 6/1/2013).



IMG. 3.05 — Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum, Cologne, Germany. Foyer on a special event, 2012. © RJMKdW. Photo by Guido Schiefer.



The NMAI has opened the debate over the return of human remains and cultural objects which have influenced many museums all around the world (Lonetree, and Cobb, 2008). Above all, differently to traditional ethnographic museums, the museum gives priority to the present time. As former director Richard West Junior (of Cheyenne/Arapaho origins) has affirmed, NMAI plays the role of being a direct mediator between visitors and native communities, since it is defined as an “actual civic space” and a “living museum,” (West 2005, 10; 1992, 328). The objects of display are living people and future generations of native Americans, more so than the items that were collected at the beginning of the 20th Century by New Yorker collector George Gustav Heye. This point is fundamental in understanding the distinctive trait of the museum and its implicit political message (Pagani 2013). Indigenous peoples have symbolically re-appropriated their history and used the museum space as a place to build and display their identity, which is emblematically summarized in the slogan “We are always here” within the permanent exhibition “Our Lives”. As the museum’s official statement reminds, it is not a museum orientated towards the past, or a historical memorial; rather it is a place for connecting Native American identity with American national identity (NMAI 2005). In addition, thanks to the Native Americans Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), that was promulgated in 1990, the museum is committed to collaborate with native communities in order to realize policies of restitution of human remains and sacred objects or occasionally the loaning of objects for ceremonial and ritual use.

The chronological priority accorded to the present time, the need to interpret and explore the collections through multi-voice narratives, the policy of collaboration with native communities and the return of heritage, are key elements that form the NMAI and, more generally, identity-based museums. The fundamental idea, which nurtured the project, is that native communities, previously present merely as objects to be studied, or “museified”, today must play a role in the creative process, in



IMG. 3.06 — Musée du quai Branly, Paris, France. Permanent exhibition. © Atelier Jean Nouvel. Photo by Philippe Ruault.

management, and in the interpretation of collections (Berlo, and Jonaitis 2008, 209–210). Similarly in Australia, as analysed by museologist Flora Kaplan, a political and identity-based debate about the management of cultural heritage has appeared:

From being the objects of study and research by European anthropologists, Aboriginal people now occupy an increasingly strategic role in the research, collections development, and management of their cultural heritage. In the process anthropology has begun to be redefined, and Aboriginal history is emerging as a discipline in its own right, [...] it seems clear that museums cannot continue to appropriate Aboriginal history and culture or present an essentially European cultural agenda. (Kaplan 1994, 119)

With this regard, art historian Ruth Phillips talks of “a new post-colonial museology” (Phillips 2008, 406). It is now necessary to analyse the way in which this has influenced museum of ethnography in Europe, at times implicitly and at others explicitly.

#### → A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE 21 CENTURY?

The foundation of identity-based museums and of museums that are explicitly dedicated to indigenous peoples, empowered by collaborative policies and responding to demands for the return of cultural heritage, has also influenced ethnographic museums in Europe. To understand what might be defined “a paradigm shift in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” it is noteworthy to take into account the numerous projects of brand new foundations, renovations, relocations, and renaming that have been reshaping the European ethnographic museums field since the mid 90s and onwards up to the present. The following table, which is far from being either exhaustive or complete, intends to give an overview of this constantly changing scenario.

MUSEUM	TYPE OF CHANGE	OLD NAME	NEW NAME	DATE OF CHANGE
Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Genoa	New institution in historical building	Castello D'Albertis	Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo	1991 – 2004
Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam	Permanent exhibition renovation	Koloniaal Museum (until 1950)	Tropenmuseum	1995 – 2009
Louvre, Paris	New department		Pavillons des sessions des arts premiers (Non European art)	1996 – 2000
Musée du quai Branly, (MQB) Paris	New institution and new building from two different museums, new name	1. Musée de l'Homme 2. Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie	Musée du quai Branly. Arts et civilisations d'Afrique, Asie, Océanie et Amériques	1996 – 2006
Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Marseille (MuCEM)	New institution and new building from two different museums, new name	1. Musée de l'Homme (European collections) 2. Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires, Paris	Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée (MuCEM)	1996 – 2013
Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum Kulturen der Welt, Cologne	New museum in new building exposing an old collection		Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum- Kulturen der Welt	1996 – 2010
British Museum, London	Relocation and change of name's department	Museum of Mankind	Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas	1997 – 2001
Världskulturmuseet, Gothenburg	New institution and new building – correlated with the existing National Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm	Gothenburg Ethnographic Museum	National Museum of World Culture (Världskulturmuseet)	1999 – 2004
Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford	Structural renovation			2007 – 2009
Museum der Weltkulturen, Frankfurt	Building extension			2010 – ongoing
Musée Royale de l'Afrique Centrale (MRAC), Tervuren	Permanent exhibition renovation – Building extension	Musée du Congo (until 1960)	Musée Royale de l'Afrique Centrale	To be closed in 2013 – reopening in 2015
Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève (MEG)	Permanent exhibition renovation – Building extension			To be re-opened in 2014
WeltMuseum, Wien	Project of renovation – New name	Museum of Ethnography (Völkerkunde Museum)	World Museum (WeltMuseum)	2013 – 2016

In summarizing such a complex framework it is evident that in Europe since the mid 90s most of national ethnographic museums have experienced more or less radical reorganizations as the following:

**TABLE 3.02** — Overview about current projects of renovation in major European museums of ethnography and world culture(s). Camilla Pagani.

*New foundations and new buildings emerging from prior museum institutions or collections, and new definitions:*

- The Musée du quai Branly and the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, in France following the reorganization of the collections of the Musée de l'Homme, the Musée National des Arts Afrique et d'Océanie and the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires;
- The Världskulturmuseet in Sweden from the reorganization of the collections of the Civic Museum of Gothenburg and from the creation of the National Museums of World Culture agency, which includes a total of four museums, three of which are based in Stockholm, the Museum of Ethnography, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities;
- The Raustenstauch-Joest-Museum Kulturen der Welt, Cologne.

*New lay-outs and expansions, and new interpretations:*

- The Tropenmuseum of Amsterdam;
- The Pitt Rivers Museum of Oxford (interventions on the permanent collections and lay-out);
- The project of renovation at the Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale in Tervuren;
- The project of renovation at the Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève;
- The project of renovation at the Museum der Weltkulturen in Frankfurt;
- The project of renovation at the WeltMuseum in Wien (former Völkerkunde Museum).

*Relocations and new lay-outs, change of denomination*

- The Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas of the British Museum from the previous Museum of Mankind. (See Mack 2003).<sup>13</sup>

*Re-use of historical buildings with new lay-outs.*

- Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo in Genoa.

<sup>13</sup> In 1970 the ethnographic collections of the British Museum were transferred to a building in Burlington Gardens, Piccadilly and in 1972 the Museum of Mankind was founded. Between 1997 and 2001 the ethnographic collections were transferred back to the British Museum and into the Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas.



From a museographic point of view, in some cases the traditional ethnographic models were substituted by or integrated with different approaches, which, although maybe partial or combined, can be summarized as it follows:

- Aesthetic (Musée du quai Branly, Pavillon des Sessions des arts premier, Louvre);
- Integration with modern art (Gallery of Africa, British Museum);
- Contemporary topics such as globalization, migrations, and multiculturalism (Världskulturmuseet, Gothenburg ; Museum der Weltkulturen, Frankfurt ; Tropenmuseum ; MuCEM);
- Interdisciplinary and multi-voice approach (Musée d'Ethnographie of Neuchâtel ; renovation project at Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale; Raustenstrauch-Joest-Museum Kulturen der Welt, Cologne ; Museum der Weltkulturen, Frankfurt);
- Meta-historical approach: TropenMuseum, renovation project at Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale;
- Strategic use of temporary exhibitions (Musée du quai Branly, Världskulturmuseet, Gothenburg);
- Collaborative museum practices (Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, Museo Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini, Rome, Musée du quai Branly, and the WeltMuseum in Wien, within the framework of the European project READ-ME ; Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Genoa ; the Pitt Rivers Museum of Oxford ; Världskulturmuseet, Gothenburg.<sup>14</sup>

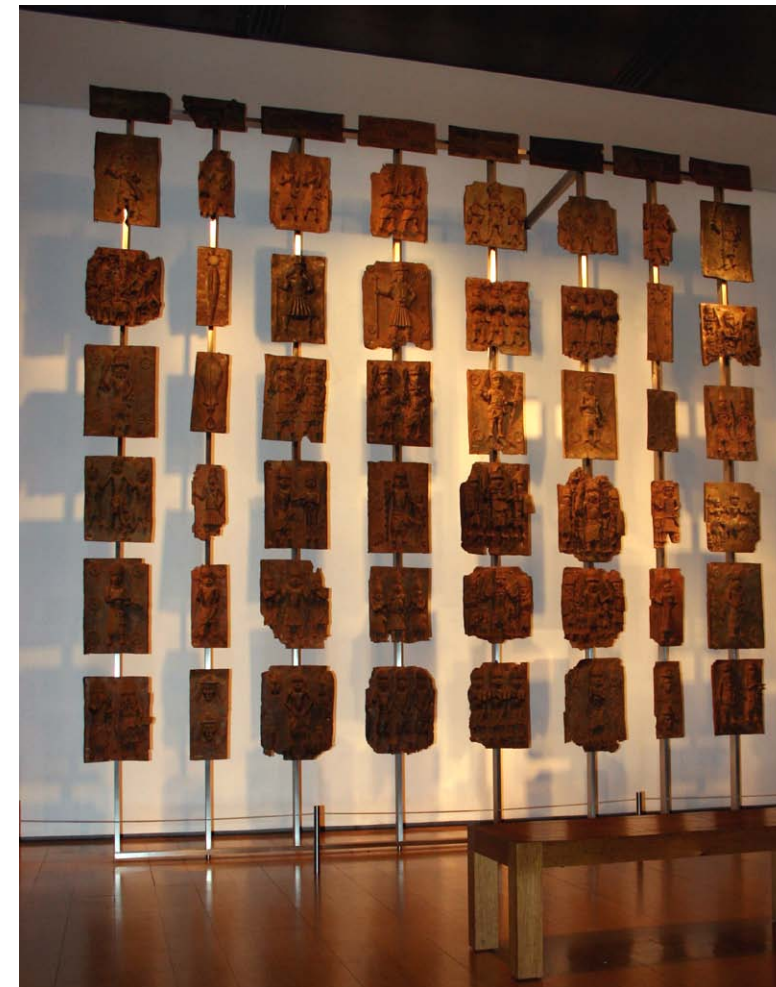
As we will see in selected case studies and interviews, many institutions, despite displaying collections that come from ethnographic museums, are no longer defined as or considered to be solely ethnographic museums. They are executing various strategies to re-invent themselves. Firstly, the use of temporary exhibitions enables the differentiation of topics and the integration of ethnography with modern art, history, and current affairs so as to attract new audiences.<sup>15</sup>

Secondly, the use of an interdisciplinary approach permits to overcome rigid scientific categories and the combination of current affairs elements with ethnographic collections that come from different historical periods, thus offering to visitors diverse viewpoints and multi-voice narratives.

Thirdly, it is noteworthy to highlight that in the museum narrative there

14 In particular see the European projects READ-ME and READ-ME II, (Réseau européen des Associations de Diasporas et Musées d'Ethnographie) that involved the collaboration of museum professionals with migrant associations and representatives of the diasporas : For further information please see the interview with Vito Lattanzi, curator of the exhibition "(S)oggetti migrant" at the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini in Rome. <http://www.soggettimmigranti.beniculturali.it/>

15 In this respect the MQB which has had more than 50 shows in 7 years is outstanding, much like the Världskulturmuseet that has chosen to follow a policy of temporary and semi-temporary exhibitions, abandoning the permanent exhibition approach.

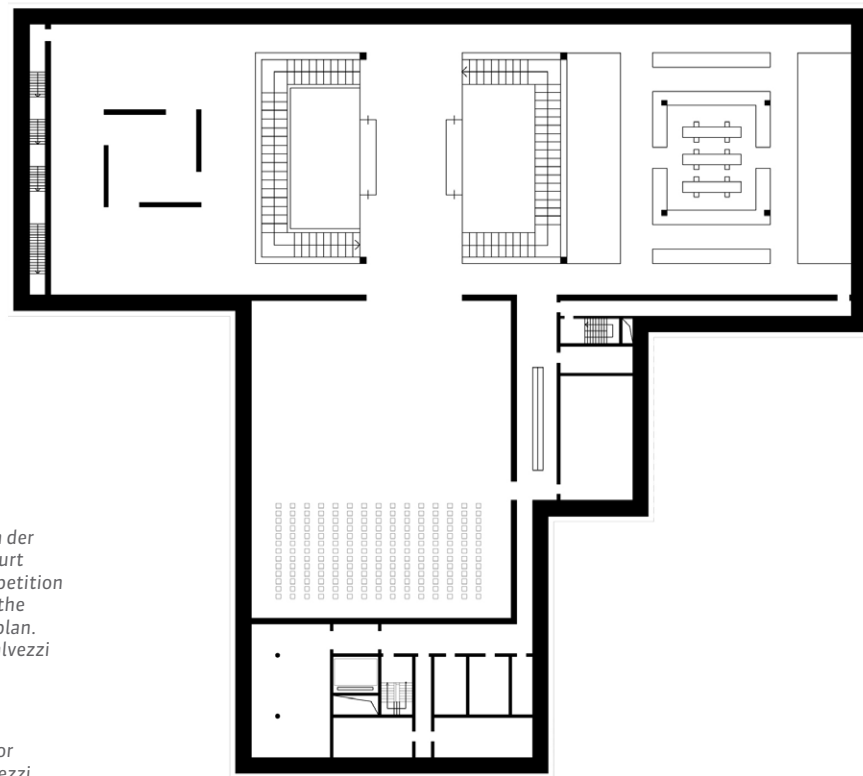
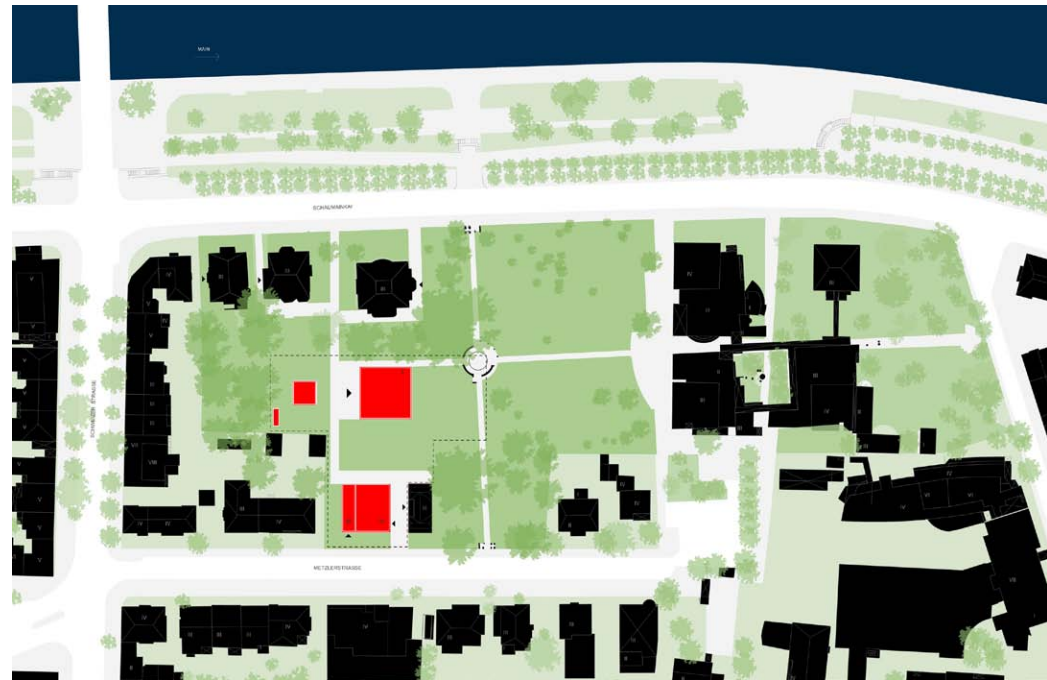


IMG. 3.07 — British Museum, London, United Kingdom. Departement of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, The Sainsbury Galleries. Photo by Sara Chiesa.

is a larger focus on subjects and peoples, which are at times even individualized, with respect to the objects of the collection. With this regard identity-based museums, which are managed by indigenous peoples such as the NMAI or the Te Papa, have played a fundamental role. These museums prioritize the present time and individual stories in order to distance themselves from the “ethnographic present” and the anonymity of non-European objects’ creators, as it used to be in traditional ethnographic museums in the past.

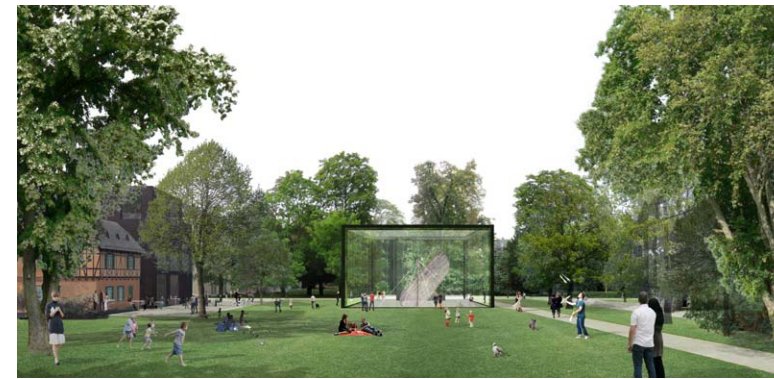
Fourthly, museums are becoming ever more meeting places in which performances, music, and dance take place into the exhibition halls. Therefore, tangible and intangible heritage are combined in the museum display, in part because of the influences of the UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* in 2003.<sup>16</sup>

16 See Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?lg=en&pg=00006> (Accessed 31/1/2013)



IMG. 3.08 — Museum der Weltkulturen Frankfurt a.M., Germany. Competition for the extension of the museum, 2010. Site plan. Project by Kuehn Malvezzi Architects. © Kuehn Malvezzi Architects.

IMG. 3.09 — First floor plan. © Kuehn Malvezzi Architects.



From 2010, under the direction of Clementine Deliss, the Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt developed a new research lab on the borderline between advanced art practice and anthropology. Selected artists and researchers are invited to develop inquiries and interpretations, and to produce art works and new knowledge based on the Museum's collection.

Kuehn Malvezzi Architects won the competition for the extension of Weltkulturen Museum in Frankfurt; their project will give an additional exhibition space that will grant to properly display the museum collections, now housed in three gunderzeit style villas on the Schaumainkai street along the south side of river Main, thus enabling the museum to become an active meeting place, where the diverse cultures of Frankfurt and the world get debated and explored.

The planned extension building will feature three complementary exhibition zones: the permanent exhibition, the public study exhibition and the special exhibition with auditorium. The project is characterized by great glazed volumes interacting with the context: the green space designed by Richard Meier for the Angewandte Kunst Museum.

These emergencies will be not only the light sensors for the exhibition spaces built in hypogeum, but also the "windows" of the museum towards the present at urban scale.

IMG. 3.10, 3.11, 3.12 — Rendering of the new museum building and cross-section of permanent exhibition space. © Kuehn Malvezzi Architects.



IMG. 3.13 — Louvre, Paris, France. Pavillon des Sessions, permanent exhibition. October 2011. Exhibition design by Jean-Michel Wilmotte. © Musée du quai Branly. Photo by Arnaud Baumann.

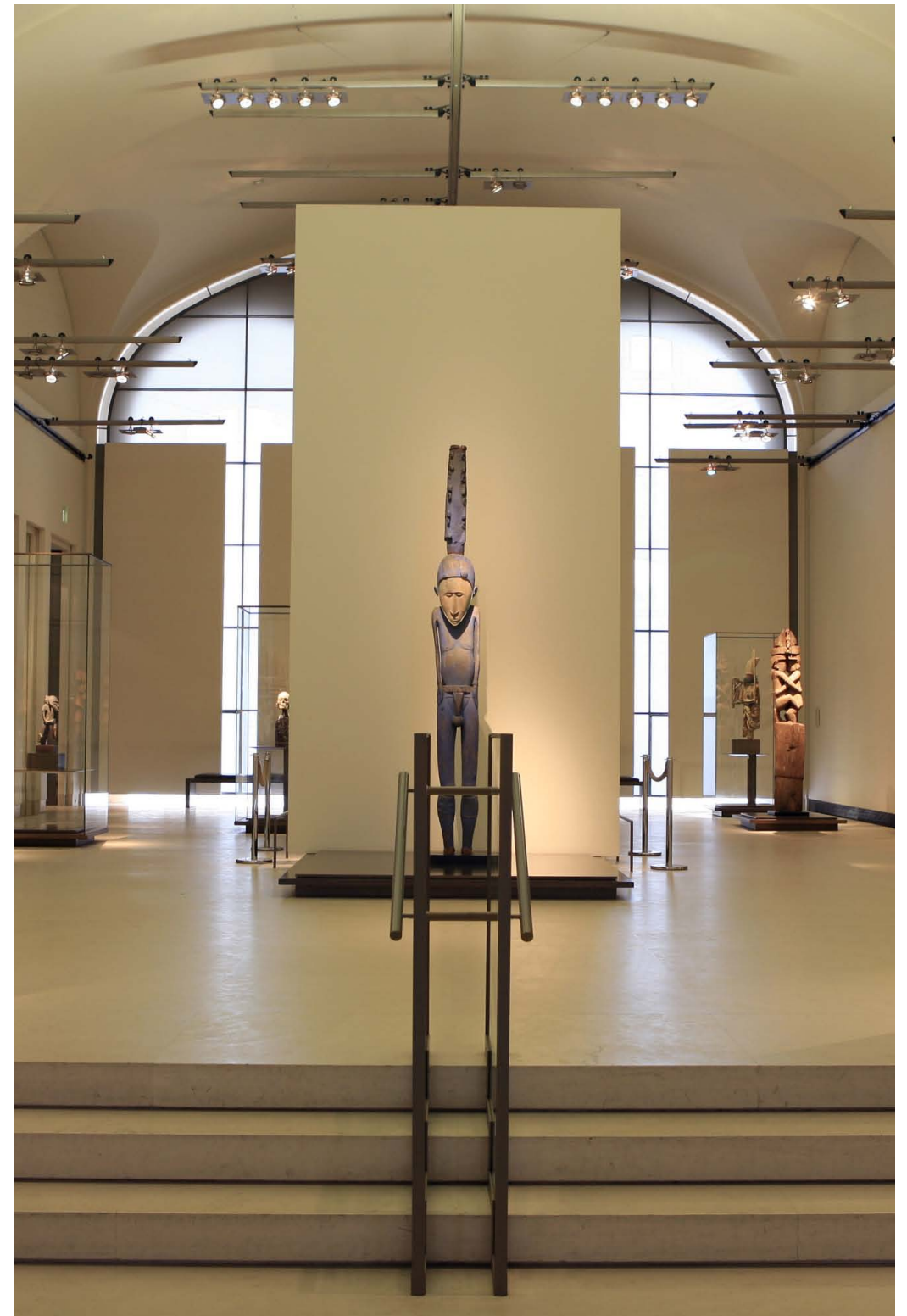
Finally, collaborative projects are increasingly part of museum practice, sometimes officially stated in the statutes of the museum, as it has been the case with COMRAF since 2003 at the MRAC and, at other times in specific projects such as the collaboration with Malian associations in Paris during the Dogon exhibition at MQB in 2011, or the exhibition “(S)oggetti Migranti” at the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico Luigi Pigorini in Rome. This was the result of active exchange and collaboration between professionals from European museums and migrant associations for over a year within the framework of European funded-project READ-ME II (Réseau européen des Associations de Diasporas & Musées d’Ethnographie).

In conclusion, as highlighted forward by Maria Camilla De Palma, director of the Castello D’Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo in Genoa,

Ethnological museums must look for a profound internal renewal if they wish to continue to play a role in contemporary society and revise their own role that they played between the traditional ‘observers’ and the ‘observed’ during fieldwork in the colonial era. Beyond ‘repatriation’, towards museums of dialogue and consultation with native communities, it is time for hybridization and the breaking down of the barriers between disciplines and categories. It is time for social inclusion and shared authority, polyphony and working with each other.

Aware of the challenges of the new millennium, most of ethnographic museums intend to play an active part in civil society. Making themselves places for politics of social inclusion and the recognition of previously marginalized cultures.

Camilla Pagani



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## Exhibition-ism\*

→ MARIA CAMILLA DE PALMA

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*She received a grant from the Getty Foundation in Los Angeles, through which she has cooperated with the Hopi Tribal Council (Arizona) and the National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian Institution, Washington) in the project improving the involvement of the Hopi in the representation of their culture into the museum. In collaboration with the Peabody Museum of Ethnology and Anthropology (Harvard University), she promoted the repatriation of two fragments of the Maya site of Copan at the Instituto Hondureno de Antropologia e Historia (Honduras). She has been a member of the Executive Committee of the section of Ethnography (ICME) of the International Council of Museums (2001–2003) and a founding member of Simbdea, the Italian Society for museology and deno-etno-anthropological heritage.*

*She has widely published and operated in the field of museum anthropology, social inclusion, extra-European collecting and the intercultural use of heritage by the communities of immigrants from non-European countries.*

\* The title of this short paper was inspired by the book *Exhibition-ism: Museums and African Art*, reporting the proceedings of the symposium and the exhibition promoted in 1994 by The Museum for African Art in New York. (Nooter Roberts, Mullin Vogel, and Müller 1994)

PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 3.14 — Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Genoa, Italy. Permanent exhibition. Collections of Inca civilization, Peru. Detail. Installation by Massimo Chiappetta. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo.



→ DO MUSEUMS REALLY MAKE THEIR TREASURES ACCESSIBLE?

The work of a museum revolves around the concept of mediation.

In the case of ethno-anthropological museums, which house collections coming from different countries and, more significantly, cultures and peoples, this operation should be carried out by paying a particular attention to the cultural gap which is imposed to the visitor – as well as to the displayed object – in order to bridge the inevitable difference between distinct worlds. This comes together with the normal gap dictated by the museum: from real life to its reproduction within interior spaces, in desacralising showcases, where objects are abstracted from their original context and situated in a different condition, which is completely distant from the previous one and the intentions of their creators.

As stated by Vogel (1995, 191), “almost nothing displayed in a museum was made to be seen in them”; from the moment of their birth in the western world, ethnological museums have both physically and intellectually appropriated their collections, as well as the right to interpret and to alter their meaning through dislocation, re-contextualisation and attribution of a new sense which is alien to the original one.

Because of historical reasons and the political and economic relationships among Western countries and the rest of the world<sup>2</sup>, objects coming from non-European countries have led a nomadic life in our museums. These objects first appeared in the Renaissance cabinets of curiosities, as strange and fantastic oddities from far-off peoples and places. Hereafter, they entered into the XIXth century natural history museums, together with the flora and fauna of their countries of origin, displayed in dioramas and reconstructions of native everyday life, and treated much like raw materials and scientific samples. With the advent of early anthropological museums, the displays started to feature photographs and more detailed ethnographic documentation. The wider available information and stimuli were exhibited in an objective and scientific perspective, which has only in recent years been called into question and revealed as illusory.

In the early XXth century, Western artists, most notably the Fauves and the Impressionists, discovered the arts which were at that time known as primitive, and the remarkable plastic qualities of African sculpture and other non-European arts; closed in its own ethno-centric perspectives and not interested in hearing the original voice of the works, the West copied and understood solely their form, thus distorting the original meaning of the artworks, and superimposing an aesthetic framework actually reproducing its own art image and beauty concept.

As the works wandered through our museums, down the decades these works fell into different categories and academic disciplines, and so acquired various identities and interpretations, but never their original

identity or meaning. That original identity was something that authoritarian western museums never wanted to recognise.

Similarly, the current sanctification of these objects in the world art galleries in a way does not respect their true nature and emphatically situate them in the context of aesthetic delight, which obliterates the world they come from, a world that has been robbed of its culture, changed and is now unable to produce these objects, no longer using them in festivals, in healing rituals or in ceremonies to summon and embody ancestral spirits.

The admission that the physical location of an artwork defines it as art or as craftwork or as an ethnographic object was a necessary step in recognising that museums are not innocent bystanders in the fate that befalls an artwork or indeed a population. Together with the objects, which are not neutral, museums can manipulate the thoughts of a visitor about their interpretation and value.

Within the awareness of the fictional elements in anthropology and in museums, today it is necessary to acknowledge the subjectivity of the adopted point of view, which is itself culturally and historically determined.

Furthermore, it is now almost a moral obligation for ethnology museums to make visitors aware and critical of the filter through which they are viewing the object. This filter can be provided through the lighting chosen for the display, the tone and content of the written captions, the location within the museum or even how the objects are laid out.

The past few decades have seen ethnology museums increasingly abandon the old authoritative voice of western arts and science museums, and grow awareness that what they do is not representing cultures, but rather on stimulating attentive thoughts and defining non-misleading conditions, in order to encourage an active search for the meaning of the exhibited objects, and to facilitate communication between the visitor and their original creators (Baxandall 1991, 26).

The end of colonialism, with the subsequent transformation of colonial subjects into sovereign citizens, had already started to transform the context of ethnographic interactions, deeply changing the nature of the social relationships between those who interview, observe and represent, and those who are interviewed, observed and exhibited, thus contributing to increase the general loss of credibility of ethnographic representation, as well as of the right to deal with ethnography.

Taking as a given the institutional function of museums to collect and preserve, the new museology puts in doubt the traditional museum practices, in relation to the need to transform the museums' mission to reflect the changes in society, in technology, in the potential public of the museum and the ways in which they chose to spend their free time and to relate to their past, present and future (e.g. Iniesta 1994).

The problem faced by anthropology museums is twofold: firstly, there is the purely museological and museographical problem of giving life to collections (which are frozen in an alien context) through techniques, structures and a multimedia language, calibrated to foster a direct and

<sup>2</sup> Is used here deliberately this name literally translating the corresponding Anglo-Saxon (the West and the rest) to indicate the division of the world that for centuries has been made based on the organization of power, and to emphasize that the exhibition of people has been and is still display of power.

IMG. 3.15 — Collections of Hopi civilization inside the gunboats of the 16th century bastion of the Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Genoa, Italy. Installation by Massimo Chiappetta. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo.



personal learning process for the various museum audiences. Secondly, it is necessary to deconstruct the concept itself of heritage of western museums, which have always been centred on the object; space must be found for the human element and the interpretative parameters of the people who created the objects which are now in the possession of the museums.

It is now clear that the West can no longer claim the right to represent and explain indigenous peoples. The western point of view is not the only one, it is not necessarily the most accurate, nor the least culturally determined and ideologically defined.

#### → MUSEUM AS FORUM OR AS TEMPLE?

In the light of these considerations and of the international debate which they are generating in contemporary society, I have always thought that Castello D'Albertis, which was re-opened after thirteen years of renovation, should not simply represent a repository of non-European heritage for the city of Genoa, merely concentrated on collecting and memory. What was important was that the castle should be a place of dialogue and not a daunting ivory tower of absolute truth and certainty.

The idea was to transform the castle into a “forum” rather than a “temple”—to use the antithetical definitions employed to distinguish between today’s museums and the nineteenth century archetype of the museum (even if created in the 1950s/60s). Naturally there is no wish to belittle the importance of the collecting and the displaying, which must remain the primary purpose of the museum, nor should we forget the role museums play in generating both individual and collective memories, associations and identifications. However, also in Italy by now, if ethnology museums wish to maintain a relevant role in contemporary society, they have to re-invent themselves, to start a profound inner renovation process, and to reverse the traditional roles of “observer” and “observed” that existed in the ethnocentric colonial era. In addition to the “repatriation”<sup>3</sup> of the objects, the dialogic museum and the consultation of indigenous communities, it is time to hybridize and to break down barriers between disciplines and categories, it is time for social inclusion and sharing of authority, polyphony and collaboration.

It is not sufficient to preserve objects and to reduce them to our fetishes, if we truly want to understand and share their meaning. And it is also not acceptable to interview their creators, if we keep on classifying their responses and interpretations to fit in with our own parameters, ideas and expectations.

What we need are the foundations for a dialogue. We need a story, and an encounter over the course of a long common journey. The museum is a living organism which is in a constant state of development and evolution. A place to meet, exchange ideas and build relationships.

The museum can be a place where you can narrate the events that revolve around the objects, a place to tell stories, a theatrical stage upon which the actors (objects), the extras (visitors) and the contexts (those of the museum, those of the objects’ place of origin, those in the visitor’s mind) create fresh narratives in new contexts with renewed meanings.

By their very nature, museums remove the objects from the normal passage of time, make them static and isolate them from everyday life, from action and sounds. To tackle these problems, museums must be encour-

<sup>3</sup> For “repatriation” or “return” means the return of cultural goods to a country / entity of their respective owners in the case of ethnological museums to people descended from those who have suffered the withdrawal / looting and believe to be entitled to the return of artefacts, bones, sacred materials, which form part of their cultural and human heritage.



aged to become contact zones, fostering interactions between men and territories, objects and stories, different worlds and cultures.

Following an interdisciplinary vision of cultural phenomena and in affirmation of the centrality of the man on the object, in relationship to the territory, it was natural for Castello D'Albertis to try to bring the collections to the present day through a variety of routes (relationships with indigenous peoples, relationships with artists, relationships with visual language, relationships with the voices of “the other”) and put everything in a modern context.

Without losing sight of the objects and the scientific data, through loans and fusions, we have planned an exhibition design aimed at emphasising the symbolic value of objects and at fostering the encounter with the visitor, both on a ritual and real level; we tried to exhibit the historical objects through multiple voices, by combining on the scene the voice of the anthropologist, of the artist and of indigenous peoples, in order to show that there is no “unique and authoritative voice” in the museum nor in anthropology.

In this way, the displayed material is at the same time a cultural and an artistic object, the universal symbol of great evocative value, showing the merger and the coexistence of two opposite levels—formal aesthetic and cultural anthropological—which are in conflict in today’s debate on the ethnology museum.

In order to prevent the exhibited material to turn static, harmless and expected, it is necessary to implement a display setting which foster the activation of the visitors, by subverting their ideas and revitalising them, deconstructing their stereotypes and the supposed beliefs. Above all, it is crucial that the life of the museum remains a continuous flux of projects and performances, involving the lives of the artists and the visitors.

Connecting the rich pre-Columbian permanent exhibition to the strong presence of Latin American immigrant communities in the city, telling stories in the Turkish room inspired by Islamic inscriptions on furniture, then going from Gothic to exotic, or inviting a contemporary native artist of the First Nations<sup>4</sup> to read to us the collections of the North American plains, these are just some of the many stimulating events that help us capture the life behind the objects, to ask questions and to understand the complex nature of the representation. Workshops, meetings, parties, seminars, concerts, dances, movies, and a constant stream of initiatives, happening alongside and complementing the exhibition: these can offer multiple perspectives and different angles of approach, helping us get closer to each other, discovering what we are made up of, trying to recreate the whole inside the performance, from a perspective no longer fragmented by the objects, by the barrier of the showcase, or by different disciplines.

4 Gerald McMaster, artist and curator of Cree Canadian origin has interpreted our collections from his cultural area of origin, as it appears in the video that accompanies the museum collections of the North American plains.

The museum is not only the promoter of several initiatives and meetings, it is also increasingly accepting the proposals or different immigrant groups who wish to present to the city in their great occasions, such as the Independence Day or other cultural celebrations: the Senegalese Immigrants Union, for example, celebrated the political and literary figure of Leopold Sedar Senghor through the voices of some Senegalese scholars and students, accompanied by musical and culinary delights. The Dominican community organized a “*semana cultural*” by inviting leading figures in the history of their country; they joined with Genoese citizens in remembering the horrors of dictatorship, including the testimonies of survivors and protagonists of the terrible events in their land. In this way the second generation, born in Genoa, was reminded of its heritage.

Another story, the one of the 500th anniversary of the conquest of America, is periodically relived and remembered in the museum through dancing, singing, fashion shows, documentaries and narrations by Latin American women of *Coordinamento Ligure*.

African women, who are looking for a place where people can get to know them and their story, and who are fighting easy generalisations and the negative stereotypical images created by the media, not only shared their food with us, but also put on the closing ceremony for our first African exhibition, which included meetings with anthropologists, musicians, missionaries and African journalists who told us about their Africa.

But beside African, Japanese or Brazilian sounds respectively associated with fine sculpture, works of calligraphy and workshops about setting up exhibitions on both sides of the Atlantic,<sup>5</sup> it is not uncommon to hear concerts of pizzica from Salento, Genoese trallallero or Romanian music, all of them motivated by the desire to celebrate their culture and share it with others: the indigenous peoples of the world, both immigrant and Genoa born and bred.

Playing *awale*<sup>6</sup>, weaving on a pre-Columbian loom belt, creating their own family crest or a sundial like so many Captains D'Albertis: many experiences are offered to the kids coming to the exhibition, both manual and non-manual, aimed at expanding their vision of the world, accompanied by African drummers or storytellers, North American Indians artists<sup>7</sup>, Indian monks or Persian dancers, making them feel at home, ready

5 Alluded to in the latter case, the experience of working with the Bororo of Mato Grosso in Brazil with which, after 6 years of research in the field, was an exhibition in D'Albertis Castle in 2004 (“I am Bororo. An indigenous people Brazil between rituals and football”), characterized by their presence in Genoa in person, as well as the joint preparation of the exhibition, the rich video and educational material produced by the Bororo, which is included in the exhibition and the catalogue.

6 The awale is the most popular and ancient game sub-Saharan Africa and is prevalent in the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Diaspora, even in the Americas. The model used is presented as a wooden board with two rows of 6 squares carved into the surface. In a small cavities there are equally distributed 48 pieces, generally grains, pebbles or palm seeds. Players try to get hold of as many pieces of the opponent's field in front, moving with simple but precise rules. Despite its apparent linearity, awale is a tactical and strategic game that allows for almost unlimited techniques, to the point that has not yet been resolved by computer.

7 In particular, it alludes to the Hopi Indians of Arizona who opened the museum in April 2004 as a result of the journey of Captain D'Albertis in 1896 to their land, where, in addition to collecting materials now on display in the museum, we took pictures that we have brought back together in 2002, returning them to their Cultural Center in the reserve and inviting them to speak of themselves and speak about

to immerse themselves in the enveloping experience of humanity, which they share with the fellow travellers.

In this way, the museum is designed to offer opportunities for knowledge, dialogue and exchange among peoples coming from different parts of the world and to be a centre of social life; it is a propeller place for progressive initiatives, focused on social inclusion and the participation of local and international communities, triggering new processes on the themes of belonging, ownership and the construction of identity. Castello D'Albertis is not only Captain D'Albertis home, it becomes our own house, the house of our wishes and dreams, our fears and exploration of all the questions that characterise our relationship with the world.

Source: De Palma, Maria Camilla. 2007. "Exposizionismo" in "Il design per i Beni Culturali, dal vincolo alla fruizione," ed. Paola Gamabaro and Elena Rosa, special issue, *GUDDDESIGN* (08): 34–35.

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## Cultural Difference and Cultural Diversity

### The Case of the Musée du quai Branly

→ NÉLIA DIAS

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Difference in all its forms—cultural, temporal, geographical, and physical—is a central issue in museums regardless of their nature—ethnographic, historical, artistic, archaeological, or scientific. So one may ask, why does difference play such a central role in museums and what are the links between museums and difference? To what extent does difference

**PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 3.16**  
— Louvre, Pavillon des Sessions, Paris, France. View of permanent exhibition. Interior design by Jean-Michel Wilmotte. © Musée du quai Branly. Photo by Gautier Deblonde.

require the act of seeing, and particularly those privileged spaces of visibility such as museums? And if the title of this volume were *Museums and Diversity*, what would the implications be? Is diversity as closely linked to visual display as difference?

Difference, and especially cultural difference, presupposes a relationship to the extent that the mental operation of establishing a difference consists of putting in relation two or more things and proceeding with comparison. The comparative exercise underlying the study of cultural difference implies somehow a model or a norm that determines the constitution of objects of difference and of otherness. This comparative perspective is somehow absent in the notion of cultural diversity, which presupposes cultural variability. Thus, if cultural difference requires classification and comparison, cultural diversity operates at the level of the inventory and of the particular.

As institutions primarily dedicated to the display of cultures, ethnographic museums are confronted with the issues of cultural diversity and cultural difference. But although these issues are currently acknowledged, museum professionals and anthropologists rarely discuss them. Moreover, cultural diversity has become such a common notion that it does not seem to require any further discussion. But are the notions of cultural difference and cultural diversity equivalent, or do they presuppose distinct conceptions of otherness? And could it be that these notions have specific contents according to national traditions? My paper, focused on the French context, attempts to explore the notions of cultural difference and cultural diversity by examining the creation of a new museum in Paris, the Musée du quai Branly, which opened in June 2006.

Like all new institutional foundations, the creation of the Musée du quai Branly has given rise to heated debates among anthropologists, art historians, and curators. Dedicated to the display of cultural diversity, this new museum explicitly aims to be distinct from an ethnographic museum—thus its name, reflecting its own geographical location and not any specific ethnographical focus—as well as from the embracing view of the study of man—incorporating physical anthropology, ethnology, and prehistoric archaeology—pioneered long ago by the Musée de l’Homme.

The specificity of the Musée du quai Branly lies in two traits. First, it focuses on non-Western cultures, thus excluding European ones, which have been relegated to the new Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée, scheduled for completion in 2012 in Marseille. Far from being surprising, the absence of European collections within the Quai Branly is the *logical* consequence of viewing European societies as rich in complexity and dynamic, in short as civilizations, as opposed to non-European ones, deemed culturally homogeneous and static. Second, its agenda explicitly stresses the equality of cultures (with the consequent denial of cultural hierarchy) on the one hand, and the defense of French republican values, namely citizenship and *laïcité*, on the other. There are no allusions to cultural difference in this project, as if this very notion was incompatible with the supposedly universal values of French republicanism. To what extent does the recognition of cultural differences constitute

a threat to the French conception of a unitary republic? The acknowledgment of cultural differences seems to be a problematic issue in France, as though it might lead this country along the Anglo-Saxon road of *identity politics*. In the words of the Constitution, the French republic is indivisible, and public opinion perceives separate communities as automatically leading to divisions. Thus the problem is to reconcile the increasing ethnic diversity of French society within the assimilationist tradition. Museums and schools, as state-financed institutions, have since the nineteenth century played a central role in the republican integration of citizens; the challenge facing these institutions nowadays is their responsiveness to changes within French society.

Like the current politics of immigration in France, debates over values such as cultural diversity in the museum world reflect, among other things, the complex and still largely unacknowledged legacy of colonialism on contemporary French society. Although the French imperial enterprise took disparate forms and had widely varying effects in different eras and parts of the world, its long-standing imbrication with scientific inquiry, visual representation, and the acquisition of material objects has played an important role in shaping many museum collections and institutional structures. Collecting as a knowledge project was made possible by and through the social and political control of the overseas territories. The Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro increased its collections throughout the second half of the nineteenth century thanks to French colonial expansion and the role played by administrators, travelers, and missionaries in gathering objects for the museum (Dias 1991). The close links between colonialism and the practice of collecting were still prevalent in the late 1930s, as Alice Conklin has pointed out: “the colonies could clearly provide rich harvests because conditions for collecting by any French citizen were most bountiful where the French flag flew” (Conklin 2002, 284). This colonial legacy even unacknowledged pervades current French debates on the role assigned to the new Musée du quai Branly as a space devoted to cultural diversity.

In sharp contrast to English-speaking countries, where issues of cultural diversity and of multi-culturalism have been and continue to be widely debated, in France the discussion is quite recent and essentially consists of demonstrating the peculiarity of the French approach to this topic. Book titles such as Tzvetan Todorov’s *Nous et les Autres: La réflexion française sur la diversité humaine* and Jean-Loup Amselle’s *Vers un multiculturalisme français* clearly express the supposed French specificity. Much of the debate on the issues of cultural difference and cultural diversity has been conducted by sociologists such as Alain Touraine and Michel Wieviorka, and by philosophers like Tzvetan Todorov (Touraine 1997; Wieviorka, 1996, 2001a, 2001b; Todorov 1989). Surprisingly, French anthropologists have disregarded this issue, with some exceptions such as Louis Dumont and Jean-Loup Amselle (Dumont 1983; Amselle 1996). This is not particular to French anthropology. As Terence Turner has pointed out, anthropologists have been quite neglected by the “new academic specializations in ‘culture’, such as cultural studies, and by academic and extra-



academic manifestations of ‘multiculturalism’ (Turner 1994, 406–407).

Examining the notions of cultural difference and cultural diversity not in abstract terms but rather in a particular field provides a good example of how concepts can shape practices, in this case museum practice. My argument is that, far from being equivalent, cultural diversity and cultural difference are quite distinct in French usage. This is not a minor semantic quarrel; cultural diversity and cultural difference refer, in the French case, to distinct ways of conceiving alterity and its place within the nation.

On the museological level, French debates on cultural diversity are shaped by concerns about “*l'égalité des cultures*,” a concept translated as “equivalence of cultures.” What is at stake in this notion is the assumption that all cultures can be put on an equal footing through the choice, made by Western connoisseurs, of their masterpieces and of their most representative objects. In other words, equivalence of cultures presumes that art is the best way of approaching cultural diversity. Why is France so eagerly attached to the defense of the equivalence of cultures, first at the Pavillon des Sessions at the Louvre (inaugurated in April 2000 as a precursor to the quai Branly), then at the Musée du quai Branly itself? To what extent does this recent interest in equivalence of cultures—equality of human creations as well as equality of works—reflect a decreasing concern for cultural difference? Can equality, particularly equality of cultures, be made compatible with the acknowledgment of cultural differences? Before analyzing the particular case of the Musée du quai Branly, it is important to keep in mind how the issues of cultural difference and cultural diversity have shaped discursive formation as well as museological practices in France. I will focus briefly on two previous institutional settings, the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro and the Musée de l’Homme, which provided, over the course of a century, models for displaying otherness in accordance with the anthropological conceptions of their times.

#### → VISUALIZING RACIAL AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AT THE TROCADÉRO

The first French ethnographic museum, the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro (MET), was founded in Paris in 1878 in the wake of the Universal Exhibition of that year (Dias 1991). Primarily dedicated to ethnography, this institution embodied evolutionist notions of difference, physical as well as cultural. The issue of difference became a theoretical issue in the new field of anthropology, at this time seeking disciplinary autonomy, and museums played a central role as spaces dedicated to the visualization of difference. Like other ethnographic museums of this time, the MET aimed to display human difference, particularly racial and cultural difference, and the development of human civilization through the linkage of race and progress. It is worth noting that the conception of a physical difference—that is, of a *natural* inequality between human groups—was developed not by conservatives but by liberal anthropologists committed to the secular values of the French Third Republic. The fact that these “natural differences” were proclaimed in large public and democratic arenas,

museums, was not considered contradictory to republican egalitarianism.

By displaying side-by-side non-European objects and European ones, in other words “primitive” and popular artifacts, the MET attempted to make visible the differences—in the light of evolutionary theory—between nineteenth-century urban European cultures and “others,” primitive or peasant. The assumption that non-European cultures as well as traditional European ones were different from and inferior to French (urban) culture was based on the supposed universalizing dimension of French civilization. Thus the apparent paradox inherent to the MET: it displayed cultural difference at the same time that the Third Republic’s politics were aimed, both externally (through colonialism) and internally (through civic education), at eradicating such difference.

With the advent of the Third Republic, France’s cultural expansionism turned in the direction of the colonial world in order to spread a secular mission, the *mission civilisatrice*. “The notion of a civilizing mission,” argues Alice Conklin, “rested upon certain fundamental assumptions about the superiority of French culture and the perfectibility of humankind. It implied that France’s colonial subjects were too primitive to rule themselves, but were capable of being uplifted” (Conklin 1997, 1). This mission had a domestic counterpart; it paralleled the effort to create a unitary culture in France from the 1880s on. This task was complicated by the diversity of languages, ethnic groups, and religious practices, and realized only through political will. As Herman Lebovics notes, “struggles about what was France and who spoke for the French people tended initially to be claims for hegemonic domination rather than proposals for inclusion. Culturally, national unity took the form of a population assimilated to a common civilization, which was from the late nineteenth century classical in its content and republican in its prescriptions” (Lebovics 1999, 29). Thus, far from constituting a threat to national unity and to the unity of French culture, the display of French regional cultures at the MET sought to reveal the difference between them and metropolitan culture.

The MET did not need to display urban French culture; it was implied on every wall in the categories used for depicting alterity. In the exhibition room dedicated to France, religious objects were labeled as “amulets,” “curiosities,” and “superstitious things” and thus depicted as remains of traditional beliefs deemed to disappear with the spread of rational thought. Cultural difference was one of those concepts constructed in order to make alterity intelligible and visible; this notion presupposed the principle of incommensurability of cultures and the assumption of a hierarchy between cultures. The other was at the same time different and inferior, a conception that would be called into question by the 1920s.

#### → RACIAL EQUALITY AND DIGNITY AT THE MUSÉE DE L’HOMME

The transformation of the MET into the Musée de l’Homme in 1937 constituted a turning point both in the perception of alterity and in the content of the discipline associated with its analysis. Dedicated to the

study of humankind as a whole, this museum aimed at combining physical anthropology, ethnology, and prehistoric archaeology. For Paul Rivet (1876–1958), the Musée de l’Homme’s first director, committed democrat and opponent of racist theories, the museum’s mission consisted of making visible the conception of the unity of humankind. Arguing in favor of a generally monogenist position, Rivet asserted that the diverse human types had originated from a single species. In contrast to his predecessors, who emphasized racial difference, Rivet sought to demonstrate racial equality, although, as Jean Jamin has aptly pointed out, he never seriously questioned the very category of race (Jamin 1988). It would seem that the urgency of the fight against racist theories prevailed over the need to rethink the notion of race. Thus, the Musée de l’Homme was assigned the cultural and scientific role of defending racial equality in order to challenge current prejudices.

With the accent placed on the pluralist conception of culture and on the rejection of racial hierarchies and biological determinism, the Musée de l’Homme was explicitly promoting cultural relativism. Moral and intellectual differences between peoples were no longer regarded as indicators of inherited cultural capacity, but rather as the result of diverse cultural experiences. By focusing on how distinct cultures had evolved different constellations of values and models of social organization, the Musée de l’Homme’s directors were arguing for the complexity of non-Western societies. The acknowledgment of the complexity of non-Western societies parallels the denial of their supposed “primitiveness.”

As Daniel Sherman notes,

Both Mauss and Rivet rejected the term “primitive” to describe indigenous peoples living in French-controlled territories. Mauss wrote that none of these peoples could accurately be called “primitive,” in the sense of pre-historic; most were “archaic” or “proto-historic.” Rivet preferred to avoid evolutionary schemas altogether, noting that the people ethnographers would encounter in the French empire “are as far, perhaps even farther, from their origins as we; it is just that their civilization has evolved in a different direction from ours.” (Sherman 2004, 678)

Marcel Mauss’s rejection of the term “uncivilized peoples” on theoretical grounds dates back to his inaugural lecture as professor of the *histoire des religions des peuples non civilisés* (history of the religions of uncivilized peoples) at the École pratique des Hautes Études (Paris) in 1901 (Mauss 1902). Although proclaiming racial equality and defending the complexity of non-Western societies, French ethnologists did not seek to promote the equivalence of cultures (*égalité des cultures*).<sup>1</sup> For them the rejection of racial hierarchy did not entail the denial of cultural hierarchy: races exist on an equal basis, but their cultural achievements cannot be put on an equal footing. On the contrary, far from advocating the equivalence of cultures, French ethnologists were instead concerned with the dignity of human

beings and societies, which is quite a distinct concern. The stress on dignity has to be considered from a dual perspective: on the one hand, the recognition of cultural variety in the spirit of relativism, and therefore of the legitimacy and possibility of alternative cultural forms; on the other, the refusal of racial hierarchy. In his close analysis of the notion of dignity, Charles Taylor points out how the modern notion of dignity, “used in a universalist and egalitarian sense,” refers to “dignity of human beings,” or citizen dignity. As a concept “compatible with a democratic society” it contrasts with the notion of honor, which “is intrinsically linked to inequalities.” “With the move from honor to dignity,” argues Taylor, “has come a politics of universalism, emphasizing the equal dignity of all citizens.” Moreover, “the politics of equal dignity is based on the idea that all humans are equally worthy of respect” (Taylor 1992, 41).

To advocate that “all humans are equally worthy of respect”—the basis for the politics of equal dignity—and to defend “the equal value of human potentials” is one thing; it is something else to proclaim the “equal value of what they have made of this potential.” In other words, and as Taylor has perceptively demonstrated, this last assumption leads to the recognition of “the equal value of different cultures.” French ethnology in the 1930s stressed racial equality and the equal worth of human societies; only in the 1990s would French curators come to defend the equal worth of certain material productions, in this case aesthetic ones, in the name of the equivalence of cultures.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1930s, French ethnologists used the concept of dignity without explaining its content. Mauss argued in 1931 that “indigenous arts are relatively just as worthy (dignes) as many of ours” (Mauss 1931, 2). The term dignity is frequently associated with the notion of respect, as the following quotation by the ethnologist Jacques Soustelle, a Mexican specialist at the Musée de l’Homme, clearly demonstrates: “We show that there were and that there exist different civilizations more or less perfect in some respect or other, but all equally capable of practical or aesthetic invention; the museum that we wished to build is nothing more than a tableau of the collective efforts of humanity, under all climates, on all continents, an effort which has everywhere produced works worthy of respect” (Soustelle, quoted in Conklin 2002, 279). Soustelle’s words are significant because on the one hand they point out the equal value of human potentials regardless of the differences in terms of civilization, and they outline a respect for the material results of this potential (*des œuvres dignes de respect*), on the other. But this French ethnologist carefully avoids speaking about the equal worth of the works. In other words, during the 1930s the main concern was still the erasure of racial inequality and the recognition of human dignity.

<sup>2</sup> In this respect I cannot but disagree with Alice Conklin’s argument that “Rivet used both bones and objects to try to convince the public of the equality of all peoples and cultures” (Conklin 2002, 255). Later in her article she states that the museum’s directors “sought to communicate...results that proved the equality of all peoples and cultures, if not their equal degree of civilization” (*idib.*, 289). As I have pointed out, it is necessary to distinguish between equivalence of cultures (*égalité des cultures*) and the “equal degree of civilization.”

<sup>1</sup> The term ethnology was chosen during the late 1920s to designate the science of synthesis, encompassing physical anthropology, ethnography, and prehistoric archaeology.



Although stressing the dignity of human societies, French ethnologists discarded the controversial issue underlying the notion of dignity, that of equal rights. As several historians of French colonialism in Africa have pointed out, French colonial authorities adopted at the same time a politics of assimilation—with the possibility of African subjects eventually becoming French citizens—and a politics of association, “predicated,” as Conklin argues, “upon respect for indigenous cultures, and administration through preexisting native political structures” (Conklin 1997, 187). In parallel, a form of colonialist politics (association) and a disciplinary knowledge (ethnology) both emphasize the equal worth and the dignity of cultures. At stake is respect for an assumed difference of (colonized) cultures both from a cognitive point of view and in colonial policy. As Benoît de l’Estoile has recently pointed out, displaying the diversity of cultures and races was at the core of the 1931 Exposition Coloniale in Vincennes; for Maréchal Lyautey, the chief organizer of this Exposition, “the more one got to know them [‘native races’], the more their supposed inferiority was redefined as difference” (de L’Estoile 2003).

French ethnologists during the 1930s argued for the diversity of non-European societies; the latter were not simpler, just different. Thus the notion of difference connoted not inferiority but rather complexity. By refusing to use terms such as “inferior” and “uncivilized,” French ethnologists aimed at stressing the dignity of all human societies and peoples. Their insistence on fundamental respect for cultural difference among human societies was based on what anthropologists in the 1930s were already calling cultural relativism. Although they provided an essentializing vision of culture, it was to the end of defending a diversity of human value orientations. In the metropolitan context, ethnologists disregarded France’s diverse cultures in the name of the unity of French society. The focus on France’s cultural particularities goes back to the 1930s in the wake of the 1937 World’s Fair in Paris. In that period, as Shanny Peer has pointed out, “the cultural pluralism embodied in the diverse provincial cultures came to be embraced as quintessentially French: national authorities desired to recuperate and recast provincial folk traditions as a cultural bulwark against a new menace: that of mechanical, standardized, industrial civilization” (Peer 1998, 143). Once absorbed by the French nation, “the diverse cultures of provincial France were proudly reclaimed as France’s national patrimony in 1937” (ibid., 196)

In other words, cultural variety was conceived as constitutive of the French nation, in the sense that it was somehow equivalent to regional diversity. Georges-Henri Rivière, former assistant director of the MET and director of the Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires (ATP), founded at the same time as the Musée de l’Homme, “acknowledged,” as Sherman notes, “that France encompassed considerable regional variety, not only in languages but in physical types. Yet his plan for the Galerie culturelle treats these variations as background, asserting that ‘French unity can be understood only in historical and cultural terms.’” (Sherman 2004, 698). French ethnologists tended to assume that social differences were much more important than cultural differences. The eradication of

the social differences of traditional French society would pave the way for the gradual elimination of cultural differences and, consequently, of cultural hierarchies. This was the conception asserted by Rivière when he referred to “a world that was no longer split into educated and popular strata and where humankind, finally, would reclaim its worth (*dignité*).” Herman Lebovics argues that in “ascribing differences in social power and in the valuation of high and popular culture to class differences, Rivière celebrated the elimination of the barriers between high and popular culture as the predictable consequence of the further democratization of French society” (Lebovics 1992, 170).

From the 1930s to the 1990s the Musée de l’Homme continued faithfully to exhibit cultural diversity, largely without renovating its installations or labels. The cultural diversity displayed at the Musée de l’Homme was somehow an outdated diversity, without reference to the changes that occur within one and the same culture. At the ATP the situation was quite similar; the image of France there was of a rural country characterized by a regional diversity that functioned as a sort of guarantee against globalization. Needless to say, French cultural diversity as presented at the ATP was conceived as a harmonious assemblage of diverse regional cultures with little or no reference either to the overseas territories or to immigrants from former French colonies. In both cases, the impulse for a radical transformation of these institutions came from the political sphere rather than from the ethnological community. Prior to the 1990s few French ethnologists cared about or reflected on ethnographic museums. When the French government decided to separate the Musée de l’Homme’s collections to create a new institution, the Musée du quai Branly, renowned ethnologists such as Louis Dumont and Jean Rouch, whose careers were linked wholly or in part to the museum, were the fiercest opponents of this project.<sup>3</sup> These two ethnologists defended the legacy of the 1930s in the name of an embracing conception of the study of man and its underlying humanistic dimension. Thus, only at the end of the 1990s did French ethnologists mobilize to discuss museological matters, although they did not question the notion of cultural diversity and the role of the museum in a multi-cultural society.

#### → THE MUSÉE DU QUAI BRANLY PROJECT

The project of creating a new museum in Paris goes back to 1996 and was intended as a sort of cultural legacy of Jacques Chirac’s presidency.<sup>4</sup> Since François Mitterrand was associated with what were called *les grands travaux*—the Louvre extension, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, and the Bastille Opera house, to name just a few—Chirac also wanted to inscribe his name in enduring monuments.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Dumont’s manifesto “Non aux arts premiers” was published in *Le Monde*, 25 October 1996. Through committees, manifestos, and manifestations, the film-maker Jean Rouch was among the first and the fiercest opponents of the break-up of the Musée de l’Homme.

<sup>4</sup> On this new museum and its links with the Pavillon des Sessions, see Dias 2001; 2002; Debuc 1998.

Placed under the double direction of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Instruction and Research, the Musée du quai Branly has had, since its inception, two directors: a museological director, Germain Viatte, former director of the Musée National d'Art Moderne (Centre Beaubourg), and a scientific director whose real title is *directeur de l'enseignement et de la recherche*. The anthropologist Maurice Godelier, a specialist on New Guinea, occupied this scholarly position from 1997 until his resignation in 2002, when he was replaced by another anthropologist, Emmanuel Désveaux, a specialist on Ojibwa Indians; since early 2005 Anne Christine Taylor has been the research director of this museum. The specificity of the Musée du quai Branly lies in the fusion of two substantial collections, those of the Musée de l'Homme and those of the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie (this means that it will contain a huge number of objects: more than 300,000), and in its focus on non-European cultures; European objects will be on display during temporary exhibitions.

This new museological project has given rise to growing discussions among anthropologists, art historians, and curators centered mainly on the issue of art versus ethnography and incidentally on the absence of European collections. However, less attention has been paid to the underlying political and moral values associated with this new institution. The indifference of the French anthropological community toward museums may provide a partial explanation for this lack of attention; another reason might be the relative absence of French anthropological debate on topics related to contemporary social and cultural questions, a matter left to sociologists and philosophers.<sup>5</sup> Thus, an analysis of the new museum project can provide some tools for understanding French conceptions of cultural difference and cultural diversity. Rather than providing a history of the museological project, my goal here is to stress the four dimensions—cultural diversity, citizenship, *laïcité*, and equivalence of cultures—that both underlie the project and shape its very contents.

#### → CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND UNIVERSALISM

The Musée du quai Branly is explicitly conceived in radical opposition to the Musée de l'Homme, in both its intellectual goals and its civic mission. As Emmanuel Désveaux, the former research director of the Musée du quai Branly, stressed in an interview with *Le Monde*, the Musée de l'Homme is dedicated to the display of the natural history of man, whereas Quai Branly focuses on the cultural history of man (de Roux 2002, 31). The contrast between these two institutions is, according to this anthropologist, accentuated by their supposedly antagonistic frameworks: the Musée de l'Homme was conceived of as a “museum of human evolution” in contrast to the Musée du quai Branly, which has as its main

5 It is interesting to note that the recent debate around the headscarf mobilized philosophers, sociologists, and political analysts. The recent book by the anthropologist Jean-Pierre Dozon, provides a good example. Throughout the 350 pages of the book, focused on the historical relations between France and its former African colonies from the early nineteenth century until 1960s, there isn't a single allusion to the contemporary situation of African immigrants in France (Donzon 2003).

purpose to show “the plurality, the diversity of cultures” (ibid.) Yet the history just outlined casts doubt on this supposed incompatibility between a museum embedded in evolutionism (thus old-fashioned) and a new institution devoted to cultural diversity. In fact, the issue of cultural diversity was at the core of the Musée de l'Homme project, which refused categorically to use evolutionism as a theoretical framework. If there is a significant difference between the two institutions it resides in the close relationship at the Musée du quai Branly between cultural diversity and the stress put on art as a common denominator across societies (Désveaux 2002). Désveaux reiterates the importance of the aesthetic dimension within the new museum. In his view, art constitutes one of the best ways of showing the diversity of cultures. This assumption is based on the premise that “in our own culture, [art] is a value widely appreciated and a matter of consensus.” This last statement is obviously highly questionable due to its ethnocentric presuppositions. Although Désveaux recognizes that the question of the universality of art is still open, he argues that art, being a “substitute for religion,” allows a “respectful approach, a non-discriminatory one, to non-Western cultures.”

Why does art have to be the vehicle *par excellence* for recognizing cultural diversity? Far from accepting the possibility of alternative cultural expressions, the Musée du quai Branly tends somehow to limit the field of cultural diversity to one supposed universal form, the artistic one. Undoubtedly market value plays a central role in the redefinition of non-Western objects as art objects and has an impact on the choice of the objects to be displayed.<sup>6</sup> Since 1998, the Musée du quai Branly has been acquiring objects from private collectors and auction houses; the amount for acquisitions allotted to the museum was 150 million French francs (23 million euros) (de Roux 2001, 27). One of the most expensive pieces, a statue from New Ireland, “has been purchased for 18 million French francs” (2.7 million euros) from a private collector and is now on display at the Pavillon des Sessions (Corbey 2000, 5).

By omitting physical anthropological and prehistoric collections, the Musée du quai Branly intends to take a strictly “culturalist approach,” devoid of any biological reference (de Roux 2002). The separation of the biological from the cultural implies the end of an encompassing conception of anthropology and the affirmation of an autonomous cultural sphere defined strictly in aesthetic terms. Yet, the choice of a supposed neutral designation for the museum, that is, a geographical location (the Quai Branly), was aimed both to overcome the art/ethnography dichotomy and to elude the very question of the status of the objects on display (Dias 2003). It is worth noting that several names were suggested for this new institution: Musée des Arts Premiers (Museum of Early Art), conveying the sense of so-called primordial arts equated with non-European ones, Musée des Arts et des Civilisations, or Musée de l'Homme, des Arts et des Civilisations, leaving open the question of to what extent art could be distinct from culture and from civilization. It would be inaccurate to say that the

6 For the relevance of the trade in tribal art in the new French museological creations, see Corbey 2000.



Musée du quai Branly will center exclusively on the arts; by combining the aesthetic dimension with cultural contextualization, this museum attempts to overcome the boundaries between form and function. A quite similar procedure informs the display at the Pavillon des Sessions; before leaving the exhibition galleries, visitors have access to an interpretive space with interactive consoles providing information about social and cultural context. Yet by spatially as well as conceptually separating objects from societies, the Pavillon des Sessions relegates anthropological and historical data to the status of interpretative complements (de L'Estoile 2003a; 2003b).

The display of cultural diversity has been one of the aims of ethnographic museums since the end of 1920s, and some of the issues discussed by Désveaux, as well as his use of the notion of cultural diversity, are deeply embedded in what he designates as “classic ethnology.” As Désveaux explicitly asserts, the notion of cultural diversity cannot be separated from the concept of difference: “Cultural diversity only exists through difference. If we have begun to better understand the ‘other,’ it is because we have grasped his culture in its totality, its continuity, its coherence, according to its own value” (Désveaux quoted in de Roux 2002). But does this mean that the concept of cultural diversity can still be used without critical analysis? And can it be dissociated from its underlying assumptions, such as the notions of respect and dignity? Gyan Prakash has emphasized, in a paper on museums, the importance of scrutinizing the “notions of cultural and human diversity that have framed the representation of difference.” In his view, “the orders of the West cannot be undone by turning away but by revisioning the organization of cultural difference” (Prakash 1996, 65).

Far from being a neutral term, cultural diversity is embedded in theoretical presuppositions. Two points are worth making, the first concerning the distinction between cultures and civilizations, a distinction institutionalized with the creation both of an “exotic” museum dedicated to cultural diversity and of a non-exotic museum devoted to European and Mediterranean civilizations. It is worth noting that one of the names for the museum in Marseille was “Musée des civilisations de la France et de l'Europe” (Calardelle 1988, 113–118). Why is diversity essentially linked to cultures and not to civilizations? Museums nowadays tend to choose their names based on abstract terms such as “cultures,” “societies,” and “civilizations,” in contrast to nineteenth-century museums named according to knowledge formations. Second, the concern for human and cultural diversity echoes a wider concern about “ecological” issues—climatic diversity, bio-geographical diversity, and natural diversity. In travel literature throughout the nineteenth century the transition from the diversity of peoples to natural diversity occurred frequently; depictions of religious beliefs, social practices, and forms of political organization were preceded by detailed descriptions of the varieties of flora and fauna. The assumption of close links between natural diversity and cultural diversity is reenacted at the Musée du quai Branly. The museum building, conceived by the architect Jean Nouvel, is surrounded by a large garden (18,000 square meters) designed by the landscape architect Gilles Clément. Large magnolias and cherry trees as well as other kinds of vegetation mask the museum's

façade in order to embed the building “in a little bit of nature, a museum in the trees.”<sup>7</sup> The overlap between cultural diversity and natural diversity seems to follow from the contents of the Musée du quai Branly. Until 2002, the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie occupied three floors of the Palais Dorée, the basement of which contains an aquarium.

#### → MUSEUM CITIZENSHIP

Like its predecessor, the Musée de l'Homme, the Musée du quai Branly aims to promote civic values, namely republican values. According to Germain Viatte, director of the museological project since its inception, the new museum is first of all an institution devoted to the spread of republican values such as respect for the law, citizenship, and *laïcité*. (Viatte 2003). As a legal principle, *laïcité*, a term only imperfectly translated as “secularism,” is closely linked to the issue of equal rights. It presupposes the unity of the Republic composed of citizens and is based on three assumptions: freedom of conscience, equality of citizens, and a universalist concern for the public interest (Pena-Ruiz 2003, 128). In addition to proclaiming that the Musée du quai Branly is first of all a republican institution, based on secular principles, Viatte ascribes a particular mission to this institution, to be a tool for citizenship:

The museum is conceived as an instrument, a tool that facilitates knowing and exploring, displaying and disseminating the resources in its care. This vision is founded on a strong consciousness of the institution's responsibilities concerning heritage and culture and the people who will come into possession of those resources. It is connected to the notion of respect and sharing. This institution is part of [*s'inscrit dans*] the institutions of the Republic, in its respect for law and *laïcité* (...). It is an instrument of citizenship for our own society among the multiple components of the Republic. (Viatte 2003, 25)

Why is citizenship one of the most cherished values at the quai Branly? The conception of museums as civic spaces which all citizens have the right to enter without discrimination goes back to the mid-nineteenth century, as Tony Bennett and Glenn Penny have pointed out (Bennet 1995; Penny 1998). But what is at stake in the French case is not the conception of a museum as a civic space but rather its mission in relation to citizenship.

The notion of citizenship implies the sense of belonging to a nation and the idea of a public space based on common interests; to be a citizen requires a principle of inclusion, what is known in France as the “republican contract.” The French nation has since the Revolution been conceptualized around abstract, universalistic, and voluntaristic principles of citizenship, rather than on the particularistic, ethnically based notion of nationhood. This may help to explain why the recognition of cultural particularities is, in theory, in conflict with the universalism inherent to republican values, for such recognition entails discriminating between citizens rather than

7 See *La Lettre*, Musée du quai Branly, February 2002.

treating them as equals. Elements such as a common language and shared values were deemed to strengthen a common sense of citizenship. As Herman Lebovics has pointed out, “French republicanism interpreted the logic of the nation-state as requiring that political boundaries approximate cultural ones, or more exactly, that to share in the life of the nation one had to be a part of the national culture. This imperative of unity, then, required the French state to concern itself deeply with cultural life of its citizens in the areas of language and aesthetics.” (Lebovics 1999, 29).

The founding text of the modern French nation, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789, in its very title asserts the right not just of the person but also of the citizen. Its first article specifies that “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions can be based only on public utility.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, peculiarities of religion, language, or ethnicity are excluded as leading to invidious distinctions, something that the current French Constitution reasserts. The French model stems from the Revolutionary ideal, which enshrines the equal rights and obligations of citizens as individuals—thus the tensions between the rights of the individuals and the recognition of cultural specificities.

French scholars have barely called into question the republican model of integration. For example, the anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle, in the preface to the second edition of *Vers un multiculturalisme français*, notes a contradiction between natural rights or the rights of man and the acknowledgment of cultural difference. In his view, the recognition of a multiplicity of ethnic groups within the French territory offers ideal conditions for the development of racism. It follows, argues Amselle, that the only response to the risk of “segmentation of the population” lies in the republican model of integration, in spite of its faults (Amselle 1996, vii). We find here the assumption that recognition of ethnic diversity and cultural specificities will necessarily destroy the nation. Sociologists such as Michel Wieviorka have tried to overcome the issue of universalism versus communitarianism. According to Wieviorka, instead of setting social equality and difference against each other, it is important to bring them together; one of the ways to combine equality and difference is through “the encounter of cultures.” Museums, particularly museums containing non-Western objects, are privileged places for such an encounter of cultures (Wieviorka 2001a, 214). Even if some scholars explicitly admit the failure or the difficulties of the republican model of assimilation and the gap between republican ideals and everyday practices, this does not mean that they are willing to admit the existence of separate communities. For Wieviorka, democracy implies both the recognition of cultural diversity and the acknowledgment of a dominant culture (ibid.). This sort of compromise is, in his view, the only way to preserve republican values.

The accent the quai Branly’s directors place on citizenship has an underlying premise, the defense of secularism; as Viatte states, “France’s position is at once universalist and secular (*laïque*)” (Viatte quoted in Pomian 2000,

8 Declaration of the *Rights of Man and of the Citizen*, trans. by Keith Michael Baker (Baker 1987).

82). As state-financed institutions, museums, like schools, have the job of forming citizens; this is why both types of institution are expected to apply the principle of secularism. The increasing ethnic diversity of French society, and the growing concern by non-Western peoples about the way they were and are represented in ethnographic museums, require new responses from museums professionals. Conscious about the implications of representing alterity in the new millennium, French curators turn to the republican legacy in order to find answers to disturbing questions.

#### → LAÏCITÉ AS A MUSEUM VALUE

According to Article 2 of the French Constitution enacted in 1958, France is conceived as an “indivisible, secular, democratic and social Republic. France guarantees (*assure*) the equality of all citizens under the law without distinctions in terms of origin, race or religion. It respects all beliefs (*croyances*).”<sup>9</sup> In other words, the very conception of the French republic implies the denial of religious distinctions and respect for all beliefs, leaving aside the question of the content of those beliefs. The separation of the French state from the church goes back to the early twentieth century, more precisely to the law of 9 December 1905; this law capped the process of secularization, which has its roots back in the 1880s with the Goblet and Ferry laws concerning *laïcité* in schools.<sup>10</sup> As a result, no religion can be privileged; religious practice and beliefs belong to the individual sphere and cannot interfere with the public domain. Under this principle, equality before the law for all citizens, regardless of their private beliefs, is supposed to be guaranteed by barring religious institutions and values from the public arena.

Leaving aside the juridical definition of *laïcité* as well as its philosophical basis, I will focus here on its museological implications.<sup>11</sup> Due to the secular character of the French state, museums are conceived as republican, democratic, and secular spaces; as a result, they cannot transmit any particular religious message or privilege one confession to the detriment of others. To what extent is the museum’s mission as an institution providing lessons of citizenship compatible with its supposed neutrality regarding values, namely religious values? Of course, neutrality in a secular state is equivalent to “confessional neutrality” and does not mean neutrality in relation to values; far from expressing moral relativism, the “confessional neutrality” of the secular state is based on values such as universalism, reason, and justice, to name a few (Pena Ruiz 2003, 186).

The defense of *laïcité* is, according to Viatte, one of the principles inscribed in the Quai Branly, along with citizenship and universalism. This concern with secularism has attracted a great deal of attention from the organizers

9 “La France est une République indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale. Elle assure l’égalité devant la loi de tous les citoyens sans distinction d’origine, de race, ou de religion. Elle respecte toutes les croyances.”

10 For a well-documented and lucid approach to this question see the recent and useful book by Henri Pena-Ruiz, *Qu’est-ce que la laïcité?* (Pena-Ruiz 2003). Pena-Ruiz rightly points out the distinction between *laïcité* and secularization, and the specificity of the French definition of *laïcité* as part of the Republican contract.

11 For a detailed and well-documented discussion of these issues, see Pena-Ruiz, 1999; 2001.



of the Musée du quai Branly's project, at least in part as a way of avoiding controversial issues such as the display of objects sacred to particular cultures and the right of native populations to have a voice in representing the meaning of objects they claim as their heritage. Implicitly acknowledging the potential of museums as political minefields for the expression of cultural and religious particularities, the Quai Branly's curators endorse the supposedly universalist values of French republicanism.

The defense of *laïcité* raises two questions: first, does the concept mean that all religions are equal and equally treated in terms of museum display? Second, does it entail an equal treatment of religion and other modes of depicting reality, such as science? In an interview with the French journal *Le Débat*, Maurice Godelier asserts that “for us, in Republican France, all religions are true; any religion could show up in the museum as the only true religion, the other ones being false” (Pomian 2000, 93). By asserting, in the spirit of Emile Durkheim, that all religions are true, and that therefore no one deserves special treatment within the museum, Godelier moves from the juridical sphere to the domains of anthropology and philosophy. The notions of truth and falsehood allow Godelier to argue that within the space of the museum all religions are true, apparently a cultural relativist stance. In fact, however, his position has more to do with the defense of republican principles than with cultural relativism, the excesses of which he criticizes as “hyper-relativism.” If from an anthropological perspective it is possible to assert that “all religions are true,” the same assertion transposed into the sphere of the museum, conceived as a secular space, is problematic.

If the Quai Branly's message stresses that all religions are true, it does not follow that the museum considers religious conceptions equivalent to other ways of apprehending reality, such as scientific ones. Denying hierarchy among religions, by considering them all equal, does not mean that religion and science have equal value. The Musée du quai Branly is not a museum “in which we would assert that all discourses on objects and societies are equivalent, that is, can be equally true” (Pomian 2000, 94). In other words, within an institution devoted to education not all theories deserve equal attention; scientific discourse obviously has pre-eminence over other discourses. This applies to schools as well; the latter, conceived as secular spaces, are deemed to transmit a universal knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

Godelier's defense of science is grounded in his criticism of “discourses” that consider “scientific knowledge as just a form of Western ideology.” This last position is, he believes, “an intellectual error” and “a cultural aggression”—in sum, pure “demagogy.” Although recognizing that his own position will prompt criticism in the U.S. and Canada, Godelier attempts to explain the reasons underlying the questioning of Western knowledge. It is a reaction, he argues, of “peoples uprooted (*déracinés*) and humiliated” to find their own roots and to forge a new identity; a reaction that gives these people the right to see themselves as equals to those who have uprooted them.<sup>13</sup> This last phrase is worth noting. By emphasizing how

12 On the question of *laïcité* in schools, see Pena-Ruiz 2003, chapter 11, “L'enseignement laïque.”

13 “[Q]ui leur donne droit de se penser comme les égaux de ceux qui les ont déracinés.”

the issue of equality between Western and non-Western peoples is central to these questions, Godelier stresses that the real problem is not in judging the correctness of competing beliefs; on the contrary, it has to do with the equal worth of cultures, a problem that the philosopher Charles Taylor has discussed at length. By pointing out how the politics of difference “can end up making everyone the same,” Taylor notes that “the presumption of worth imagines a universe in which different cultures complement each other with quite different kinds of contribution. This picture not only is compatible with, but demands judgments of, superiority, in a certain respect” (Taylor 1992, 71). Désveaux asserted that it would “not be judicious to build a discourse on collections based solely on autochthonous claims;” the latter are not only instable but also incompatible one with another and with the current state of scientific knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

The defense of museums as secular spaces was the object of a debate in anthropology raised by the exhibition Marc Couturier: Secrets, held in 2001 at the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie. This exhibition, curated by an artist, Marc Couturier, presented sacred aboriginal objects, such as *tjurunga*, to visitors. An Australian anthropologist, John E. Stanton, criticized the exhibition on the grounds that it attested to the “overwhelming insensitivity of French museum curators with regard to the knowledge and beliefs of other cultures” (Stanton 2001–2002, 1999). Secrets provided, argued Stanton, a good “example of cultural arrogance,” and he invited French museums to adopt the cultural politics of the U.S., Canada, and Australia to avoid perpetuating “the condescending practices of the past.” Two French anthropologists and specialists on New Guinea, Brigitte Derlon and Monique Jeudi-Ballini, defended the exhibition. One of their arguments centered on the principle of museums as “secular spaces.” Arguing that the museum's main function is to display its collections to the public, it follows, according to Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini, that sacred objects from non-European societies as well as from European ones, presented with respect, should be made visible to visitors (Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini, 2001–2002). The refusal to exhibit sacred objects in a museum is contradictory, argue Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini, with its role as a secular space. Moreover, this refusal can lead to the adoption by the museum's curators of other societies' signs of belief, a position which, according to the two anthropologists, ends up making sacred the other's sacredness. One may argue that in the museum space the only values that can be sacred are republican values.

#### → EQUALITY OF CULTURES, OR TOWARD THE ERASURE OF DIFFERENCE

The Pavillon des Sessions, dedicated to the display of masterpieces from the world over, was deemed a sort of precursor of the Musée du quai Branly (Corbey 2000). Containing a small number (around 120) of non-

14 “Ainsi, par exemple, s'il nous paraît important d'en tenir compte, nous ne pensons pas judicieux de construire un discours autour des collections qui réponde exclusivement aux revendications des autochtones. Car celles-ci s'avèrent instables, peu compatibles les unes avec les autres, ni d'ailleurs avec l'état des connaissances scientifiques.” (Désveaux 2002, 225).

Western objects, mainly sculptures, chosen for their formal qualities, the Pavillon des Sessions was conceived as a space of recognition of arts from non-Western cultures; moreover, the entry of these objects into the Louvre was considered an acknowledgment of the equality of human creations. On that occasion, Godelier, Stéphane Martin (director of the agency responsible for building the Quai Branly museum), and Viatte continually stressed that displaying non-Western objects at the Louvre demonstrated France's openness toward the other. At the same time they insisted on the underlying dimension of this gesture: the denial of a hierarchy of the arts. In other words, even if some of the objects at the Pavillon des Sessions had already been displayed at the Musée de l'Homme or at the Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, they were not displayed as merely art objects; being at the Louvre gives them the cachet of *art*.

As Viatte explicitly noted, the Pavillon des Sessions is the result of a political decision. There was a political will to assert symbolically the equivalence of cultures, and its recognition by France through its most prestigious cultural institution, the Louvre museum (Pomian 2000, 80). Needless to say, the equivalence of cultures is based on the equal worth not of all their material productions but only of their masterpieces. Moreover, the assumption of artistic equality is based on the presupposition that art is a universal value intrinsic to human behavior. In other words, equivalence of cultures is somehow restricted to a specific category of objects, art objects. As Godelier states, "By this gesture [inclusion in the Louvre] all of humanity's masterworks and, with them, the societies that created them become equal. Their presence in the same space demonstrates once and for all that there is no progress in art and that no society has a monopoly on human creation" (Godelier 2000, 55). Note here the move from equality of the masterpieces to the equality of societies. A similar assumption appears in a panel near the exit of the Pavillon des Sessions; it says that the Musée du quai Branly's main goal is to demonstrate that "there is no hierarchy among the arts, and no hierarchy among peoples." The denial of the hierarchy of arts and the rejection of the idea of progress in art are both grounded in classic and canonical examples of art in the West, painting and sculpture; moreover, non-Western objects are submitted to the same canonical criteria that art historians apply to Western art, such as the notion of creation and of the creativity of individual artists.

Désveaux has reiterated the notion of equivalence of cultures at the core of the new museum. Arguing that the aesthetic dimension could be a sort of vehicle for an "anti-evolutionistic message," he claimed, in the name of the equivalence of cultures, that a reliquary from Zaire is worth the same as a Romanesque capital.<sup>15</sup> The common denominator of objects as diverse as reliquaries, masks, and a Romanesque capital is the act of removing them from their "original" context, in other words expropriation, and the act of appropriation by the institution of the museum.<sup>16</sup>

15 "Une écorce peinte aborigène rivalise avec un masque de la côte Nord-Ouest, qui lui-même vaut un reliquaire du Zaire, qui à son tour vaut un chapiteau romain, etc." (Désveaux 2002, 226).

16 On this double process of expropriation and appropriation, see the introduction by George W. Stocking to *Objects and Others: Essays on Museums and Material Culture*, 3-14. Madison: University of

The equivalence of cultures finally has implication for the concept of human dignity. Godelier as well as Désveaux points out that there is "no progress in art." Posing this dictum as the central message of the Quai Branly makes it possible, according to Désveaux, to place "all societies on an equal footing. The moral advantage is considerable." And he adds: "to privilege the presentation of an artistic production goes in the direction of the representatives of these cultures, who will therein find their dignity anew" (de Roux 2002, 31). The assumption here is that the elevation of non-Western objects to the status of art objects presupposes the elevation of peoples identified with them. In contrast with the Musée de l'Homme's message of equal dignity of peoples and consequently, to paraphrase Charles Taylor, of the equal value of all humans' potentials, the Musée du quai Branly adopts the reverse position; it maintains that it is the equality of creations, and especially of artistic creations, that paves the way for the equality of peoples and societies. In other words, through art all societies have equal status because art, as a common denominator, can transcend cultural barriers and establish a "dialogue between cultures."

Why do human dignity and societies' dignity have to be expressed through art? Are there no other ways of expressing human dignity besides works of art? And to what extent does the stress in equality of artistic creations contribute to erase cultural particularities? Charles Taylor has rightly cautioned against the "presumption of equal worth." As Taylor notes, "The peremptory demand for favorable judgments of worth is paradoxically—perhaps one would say tragically—homogenizing. For it implies that we already have the standards to make such judgments. The standards we have, however, are those of North Atlantic civilization. And so the judgments implicitly and unconsciously will cram the others into our categories" (Taylor 1992, 71). French cultural politics in museums contribute nonetheless to this same homogenizing process, by valorizing art as a feature common to all cultures. This amounts to the erasure of cultural differences and helps provide, as Sally Price perceptively notes, "an aestheticized vision of cultural difference" (Price 2001, 1174).

#### → CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Musée du quai Branly is part of a larger enterprise to redesign the museum landscape in France. In addition to the Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille, other museum projects are under discussion: the foundation of a department of Islamic arts at the Louvre, the renovation of the Musée de l'Homme,<sup>17</sup> and the creation of a museum of immigration. These museum projects can be regarded as complementary to the Musée du quai Branly in the sense that they incorporate geographical areas (Europe), topics (relationships between nature and culture), and social groups (immigrants) that Quai Branly leaves out.

Wisconsin Press (1985).

17 Focused on the biological and the cultural dimensions of the human species, the Musée de l'Homme intends also to explore the relationships between human societies and nature. On the project of refurbishing this museum, see Mohen 2004.



At stake in those projects is the desire to solve sensitive political and social issues through culture—the conviction that art and culture can bring together peoples, ethnic groups, and nations, and become the new magical bond. Through objects, museums attempt to palliate government policies and social exclusions. The claim that “there is no hierarchy among the arts, and no hierarchy among peoples” obscures the inequality of the relationships between France and non-European peoples. Thus the role ascribed to museums: to exonerate society for its failure to deal with peoples and cultures whose objects are in museums devoted to cultural diversity.

French debates on cultural difference and cultural diversity are to a certain degree molded by the tension between the acknowledgment of cultural particularities and the defense of republican universalistic values. Republican thought privileges the rights of citizens and demands that differences be ignored. It seems clear that the republican model of integration can exist only through political will; the tendency to direct politics into the cultural sphere helps to explain the role ascribed to museums as schools of citizenship. And it is in the context of a growing social and civic crisis—high unemployment, failing schools, questions of identity and social mobility, and the growing alienation of the young, especially in immigrant communities—that museums are quite paradoxically called to fulfill the republican legacy.

The case of the Musée du quai Branly makes clear the problematic nature of the relationships between museums and difference. By trying to take into account both cultural diversity and human universals, the Musée du quai Branly has put itself in the position of refusing to acknowledge cultural difference. The quest for a common denominator across societies, in this specific case the aesthetic dimension, cannot but erase cultural particularities. Undoubtedly, as Sherman has commented, the combination of “the national and the universal does not always come easily, and, more important, it often involves competing definitions, appropriations, and unequal relations of power.”<sup>18</sup> The criticism of universalism goes back to the late 1940s; in 1947 the executive board of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) elaborated a Statement on Human Rights submitted to the United Nations. “How can the proposed Declaration be applicable to all human beings, and not be a statement of rights conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America?” was one of the questions raised (AAA Executive Board 1947). Since the late 1940s, anthropologists have positioned themselves in opposition to universal values, such as “human rights,” questioning the applicability of those rights to non-Western contexts. But the problem of making respect for cultural traditions compatible with respect for individual rights has not yet been resolved.<sup>19</sup>

The focus of the Musée du quai Branly’s organizers on common features overriding cultural differences has an underlying agenda. They seek to avoid essentializing the concept of culture and thus reducing it, to quote

<sup>18</sup> Daniel J. Sherman, personal communication to the author, November 2003.

<sup>19</sup> For a good account of the discussion on individual and group rights, see Appiah 2005 (chapters 3 and 4), and Ignatieff 2001.

Turner, “to a tag for ethnic identity and a license for political and intellectual separatism” (Turner 1994, 209).<sup>20</sup> The constraints on recognizing the ethnic diversity of French society within museums are not merely institutional but historical and political. Ironically, the political refusal to admit separate communities goes with the institutional acceptance of separate museum projects. The department of Islamic arts at the Louvre is distinct from the Pavillon des Sessions; the Musée du quai Branly will not deal directly with people from former French colonies, who will be melded into a museum of immigration with other waves of immigrants coming from Europe during the early nineteenth century. Yet there is a significant absence in this larger effort to redesign the museum landscape in France: the relationship between French culture and the cultures of colonized peoples. Whether the Musée du quai Branly will pave the way for such a relationship remains to be seen.

Source: Dias, Nélia. 2008. “Cultural Differences and Cultural Diversity: The Case of the Musée du quai Branly.” In *Museums and Difference*, edited by Sherman Daniel J., 124–154. Indianapolis and Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

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<sup>20</sup> This author carefully distinguishes “critical multiculturalism” from “difference multiculturalism.”

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## The National Museum of World Culture

### Interview with Klas Grinell

#### → KLAS GRINELL

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*He has co-curated exhibitions on Bollywood, Vodou and Destination X: on global migration. Recent publications include: Islam och jag (Islam and I, Sekel förlag, 2012), "Expressions, Mediations, and Exclusions in Post-secular Societies: Introduction" (with U. Strandberg), European Review 20:1. "When legitimate claims collide: Communities, museums, and dialogue," Museum and society 9:3. "Border Thinking: Fethullah Gülen and the East–West Divide," in Islam and Peacebuilding: Gulen Movement Initiatives. eds. Yilmaz & Esposito, Blue Dome Press, 2010, "The Politics of Museums in Europe: Representations, diversity, doxa" in European Journal of Economic and Political Studies, 3.1, 2010. Grinell is a member of The International Research Network on Religion and Democracy (IRNRD), and advisory board member of Turkish Journal of Politics.*

**I wanted to start with your biography because it is quite new in an ethnographic or a world culture museum to have a curator of globalisation, as you are. My question is very simple: What is the role of the curator of globalisation?**

It is, as you say, something new. I think it could be kind of an experiment, and it has been developing how it should. You could be an anthropolo-

PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 3.17  
— Världskulturmuseet  
in Gothenburg, Sweden.  
Screen, 2004. Suh Do-Ho's.  
Detail. Photo by Camilla  
Pagani.



gist, or whatever, to think about the role of globalization. My background is a history of ideas, which is also something that is kind of a national investigation. It was pointed out that museums also have a need for that kind of expertise—more a history of mentalities and a history of ideas. In that sense, normally, most curators are experts on material culture, but in our storage we also have large archives and, today, in order to reinterpret the collections we have to contextualize them again and put another focus on what is the role of colonialism in collecting our materials, and so on. Then, I think it is important to have more of a texture or discourse analysis and these kinds of methods and text-based methods to use in archives and in order to see new things in the archives. So that is one part of what I can do or what I try to do.

We also have a huge image and photograph collection. They are underused. So these are some of the things we want to do. Then, as far as globalisation is concerned, I am curator of contemporary global issues.

#### **It sounds a very challenging role.**

It is, of course, impossible. [I try to keep up with some kind of globalisation debate, research, discourse, that has to be on the abstract theoretical level, to keep track or otherwise they are of course limited, less contemporary global issues]. On every project we are discussing, we always try to see if it affects the globe. What is the contemporary role of this question? How can we approach it in a way that makes it relevant? So I do overviews which relate to interesting debates in other areas.

#### **Do you adopt a interdisciplinary approach to globalisation? Regarding economics, for instance?**

Yes. As I said, I try to keep track of it. If you have a feel for curating, normally you would try to keep up with Africa, which is also, of course, impossible. These things are too big. I try to keep on a track where has similar theoretical and joint multidisciplinary discourses. Then, depending on the project, different areas will become important along with it. For example, we had a joint exhibition with a museum in Helsinki. We lent a collection of Bollywood cinema posters, both hand-painted and printed. There, the posters were presented in an Indian exhibition. Our exhibition was “Bollywood, the world’s largest cinema industry.” There was a lot of economics involved but we also did it to show that Bollywood is bigger than Hollywood globally. It was not only about India, but also about Iran, Nigeria, and the UK. We looked for the global effect of that film industry. There is a world culture as a joint thing. It is not only Americanisation, as it is sometimes portrayed.

Then, of course, if we want to understand this and enjoy this different kind of storytelling, maybe we also need to learn a little bit about Indian mythology and religion, but also the global economic and cultural impact of that industry.

#### **So you try to adopt a cross-cultural approach, if I understand your point. Instead of focusing on one specific culture, you always try to compare with others.**

We focus on the culture’s global setting. That is why we often use the concept of “globalisation.” For example, we had a voodoo exhibition; it was a collection of Haitian voodoo materials. It was also in Geneva and in the Tropen museum in Amsterdam. It was a joint thing.

#### **Because in Paris there was also a voodoo exhibition at the Cartier foundation.**

That was not the same collection. Our collection comes from a Swiss woman living in Haiti. What we try to do is show Haiti as one of the important places of world history with the Haitian Revolution in 1794 as one of the most important revolutions in the world. It is neglected in world history today. We wanted to show the resistance of voodoo today in the global setting. It can be a very specific topic and there was a lot of information on these voodoo things, but the exhibition was also on the Hollywood use of voodoo as a dark mythology and the strong focus on Haiti as an important example of decolonisation.

#### **When was this exhibition?**

It was during the Haitian earthquake in 2009 and 2010. After that, we had an exhibition called “Kimono Fusion” on Japanese design in a global context called “out traditional and hyper-modern.” It was about the use of Japanese traditional design and understanding, but in a global fashion context. In that way, you can see how tradition is used with contemporary life, or more in contemporary life. Not as something static.

#### **Would you say you try to analyse the perspective of changing time?**

Yes. Context is always important, how it is part of a global phenomenon even if every local situation has its very specific perspectives and not everybody lives the same life. There are some structures that are similar. We can also see that we are connected, and they are not just strange, foreign people.

#### **What is your strategy for choosing topics for the exhibitions?**

Of course we get a lot of different suggestions from institutions and individuals. Sometimes we cooperate with them. We have had brainstorming sessions where everyone in the museum, from cleaner to director, has the same opportunity to suggest ideas. We have had market surveys asking “which of these 15 topics do you find most interesting?” and then we choose the one with the highest rating. What is mainly changing now is that those strategies have meant that the collections haven’t had a focus point in most exhibitions. That has made critics say that the exhibitions are like cinematic representations, that we should build more heavily on the research of our specific collections. That is something we are now trying to work on while finding a way to keep the positive aspects of having these contemporary topics, and having the community choose our topics.



But we are also trying to get more respect for the collections and build on the specificity of our collections. We are now involved in a programme writing process trying to find out what this would mean.

**Normally when you prepare a programme, how many years is it for?**

That has been one of the difficulties. We have not had any permanent exhibitions and, well, it has been said that it should be there as long as it arouses interest in the audience. This has normally been for a year, a year and a half, but, of course, that's a very hard way to work. It's expensive and it's hard work to create new topics. We don't have that many staff. The museum is six and a half years old now, and with temporary directors—we have had five directors—it has been a problem to find long-term funding, so it's difficult to find a model where we know what we'll be doing for the next five years.

**What message does the world culture museum want to send to its visitors? Is it globalisation? "Glocalisation"?**

The official message is that we are working for the constructive use of global culture heritage in order to produce an open contemporary society, which is vague enough to do anything. For the museum it means that it should be a place which feels at home across borders and sees differences and changes as something interesting and productive.

**Do you think that visitors react to this message? Do they understand the message of the museum?**

I think, overall, it has been successful and well-communicated. In marketing we have a logo, the letter "Y" pronounced in English as "why?". So we are trying to make people think—mainly about where the borders of your identity and your mind are. We are trying to expand these borders with programmes of different sources and exhibitions. I think it has been successful for our main audience. We were rewarded with the Swedish museum of the year award in 2009. The reason was that it had been successful in addressing difficult and important contemporary questions. Then, it has been said that, for some people and visitors, the museum is still being seen as an ethnographic museum, and they ask where the China department is. They want to see the cultures of the world and these are not the materials shown in the museum. We did surveys during the Kimono Fusion exhibition and some people still answered that it was an interesting exhibition on Japan, so the expectations that you have when you go to the museum and see different national cultures are still there.

**Maybe sometimes you surprise visitors because of your very challenging and new approach? Maybe people expect to visit a traditional ethnographic museum divided into different geographical areas focusing on specific civilisations, and they find cross-cultural exhibitions.**

Some people are surprised in a positive way, and this is good. Some peo-

ple have also been disappointed, and others haven't been surprised at all. They have seen this voodoo exhibition, Japan exhibition, and India exhibition and have not grasped the idea that we have tried to expand borders. What is important now is that, on the political front, there has also been a feeling that we haven't done enough to show world cultures—so there is some pressure to return to a traditional approach.

**I want to ask you a question on the origins of the museum. Why did the authorities take the decision to build a world culture museum in Gothenburg?**

It is a very complicated story, but if you think about the main discussions, it is much shorter. Put simply, there was an ethnographic museum in Gothenburg that the city couldn't afford.

**Where was it located?**

In different locations, but originally there was the Gothenburg museum with different departments. And then in the 1950s there was a split into different separate museums and they changed the location a few times.

In the end, the city thought it was too expensive to have an appropriate ethnographic museum with a collection of 100,000 objects. This led to a crisis in the 1990s. This was one of the factors. Then there was the social democratic government of the 1980s and 1990s. A lot of state authorities, especially in the 1990s, were regionalised as a means to democratise or create jobs in different places. Often it was where the army were closing their bases; you could put a state authority in those buildings to save jobs. That was another interesting discussion which was going on. But I think the main reason was that there was a very big investigation going on within the government and with experts on democracy and the need to address a multicultural society. "Digital" democracy was something that was very fashionable. There were discussions such as: Can we have another voting system? Can we reproduce and enhance democracy apart from the traditional parliamentary system?

All that led to a decision to take these collections to Gothenburg and create this new authority, which would be called "world culture," a popular concept in the late nineties. From 1995 to 1999, the authority was established. I think the debate was also very much of its time. If it had been named only a few years later, I don't think that name would have been used. In order to meet all these different demands, this became one of the biggest cultural projects for many years in Sweden. There should be a new kind of museum where people could learn about the world.

The crisis of ethnographic museums discussed globally was also part of this more specific debate. I think the political aim was to create a place that could function where a new Swedish identity could be formed. As such, it was hotly debated and seen as a social democratic project. That led to problems when we had a change of government. People that had been resistant to this project came to power and had more influence.

**Of course, political influences on cultural institutions are often a factor in most countries. At the time of the decision, did you have a model of a world culture museum, or was it the first of its kind?**

I think if you look at the different proposals that were suggested, you will find no example where there was a model museum put forward for us to copy. Of course there were a lot of discussions going on. There were a lot of co-operations. We had a lot of seminars, and people invited the universities to set up different departments. I was involved in this process, inviting a lot of post-colonial theorists. We had Homi Bhabha, Spivak, Edward Said, Robert Young, and other prestigious theorists.

**Were they involved in a scientific committee?**

They came here for seminars, and for the museum setting we had people from the National Museum of Australia; the Te Papa Museum in New Zealand was also an important inspiration. I was at the museum at that time so I don't remember everybody who was there, but there wasn't a lot of effort put into having a productive discussion. The first museum director, Jette Sandahl, came from the Worker's museum in Copenhagen. She had a strong profile as a museum director.

**I was thinking about the British Museum's message "A museum of the world for the world." I think your approach is not comparable with a universal museum but you still deal with universalism in world culture.**

**It is interesting to compare a universal approach with your specific approach, which aims to deal with the world, with globalisation and with universalism, but from a completely different perspective.**

I think, and this is my personal analysis which has not been part of this, that, in a way, we have an advantage. We are provincial. We are on the outskirts of Europe. We speak a language that no one understands. For us to say that we are a museum of the world is pathetic. We cannot say that; we would feel embarrassed because we know we are on the periphery. And I think that this is a positive thing, because it gives a better sense that everything is localised with specific power relations.

Dipesh Chakrabarty has phrased that nicely: "Objectivism is the view from nowhere"—the idea that objective research has no viewpoint. Globalisation critics often end up using a "perspective from everywhere." This is, of course, impossible, because we are always somewhere. I think being open about this "view from somewhere" is key to doing something properly.

**A sort of "glocalisation" is dealing with globalisation, but being provincial, as you said.**

At our best, that's what we should be doing. Sometimes I think we have also fallen into this trap of a "view from everywhere"; it is also part of European paternalism. Of course it is challenging to try and achieve this.

**Can you tell me what the affiliations are with the common authority of the museum? Are you affiliated with the ethnographic museum in Stockholm, and which other institutions are involved?**

The others are the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, called the "East Asia Museum" in Swedish. It is in Stockholm. Another is the Mediterranean Museum as it is called in Sweden. They are now discussing what they are going to call themselves in English. It is a museum of classical antiquities including some Islamic art collections. An "Eastern Mediterranean Museum" you might say. Their biggest collection is from Cyprus, but there are also exhibits from Egypt and classical Greece.

**Is it a fourth institution?**

Ethnographic Museum and us. So that makes four. Far East is one. Mediterranean is another one.

**So you are the only one in Gothenburg?** Yes

**Do you work closely with the other institutions? For joint projects, strategies, topics or exhibits?**

I think the aim of forming the authority was that there should be one management of non-European collections, which makes it a little bit strange that these classical antiquities are part of it. Anyway, due to a lot of different things, the museums ended up being rather autonomous, but now since last year the government has created a new organisation, meaning that we are no longer four different museums. We are one authority with a common strategy and four different venues. Distinct museums are seen as different venues where we have a joint set of goals. Then we divide them so that we are still the one dealing with the contemporary part of how we portray world culture. That means the decisions and strategies are also formulated jointly. One aim is that we should do more touring. Exhibitions would be displayed in Stockholm and Gothenburg.

**When the decision was made to build this museum and to create the authority, did they separate ethnographic collections between European and non-European collections?**

That has always been the case. We have a Nordic museum in Stockholm which, I would say, is a big Nordic folklore museum, and in that respect, is ethnographic. As in Germany, we talk about ethnology for local ethnography, and ethnography, as such, has always been about foreign, primitive people, you could say.

**So you do not collaborate at all with the Nordic museum?**

Of course, we are a state museum and there are connections between the directors of the different museums. But our connections are not that strong. Before the authority was set up, the classical antiquities were part



of the History museum and the Far Eastern antiquities were part of the art museums. The ethnographic museum was separate and this Gothenburg collection was city-based. In this way it was the first time everything non-European was collected in the same authority. The legacies are really different. One of the museums has always seen itself as the historical museum. Of course, the Foundation for European Civilisation led to the Swedish National Historical Museum. Far eastern antiquities were part of “arts” as they were the artistic productions of the world civilisations. The ethnographic museums were both separately and independently part of the ethnographic discourse.

**What is the role of ethnography in the Museum of World Culture? Do you think there is still a “need for ethnography” to return to the RIME symposium held at Museo Pigorini in Rome in April 2012? Does the Museum of World Culture still deal with ethnography or has it gone beyond it?**

I think there was a period when most people would have answered “no” to that question. We are now thinking that the answer might be “maybe.” If we say no, it becomes very difficult to see how our collections can be the starting point for what we do. Of course, you can say that it is not our problem and that we are more of a cultural organisation, but then the main thing is still to keep and to show the collections. This is a fact. We have to think about how we can do something relevant, interesting and spectacular that will bring in the audience, and also appeal to a new audience. To develop this positive, provocative way of expanding people’s minds, how can we use the collection we have, since we have not collected anything since the 1970s because of this history with the Gothenburg museum? This makes us work harder. As you can see, on my table there are books from a former director from the 1920s written after he went to Indonesia to explore that culture. Is it useful to us? How can we make something out of this? I would say we are in the process of re-evaluation of that question from the more triumphal “no” to the more thoughtful “maybe.”

**It is important that you are affiliated to the ethnographic museum in Stockholm? I guess your approaches are very different.**

We have many exhibitions produced here that have been shown in Stockholm. They have had a lot of success there as well. With Stockholm being the capital city, it has more journalists. Some do not notice what we do until it is displayed there two years later, and they are kind of late.

**Does the ethnographic museum in Stockholm deal with contemporary issues?**

Yes, but more traditionally. I would not compare them to Quai Branly, but as with most classical museums there is a more permanent regionally-based exhibition and a space for temporary exhibitions where it can be modern and experimental. The main difference is that their base is still a classical ethnographic permanent exhibition, whereas we do not have anything like that.

**Sweden is defined as a multicultural country in a political sense. I’m thinking of Will Kymlicka’s books for example and I was wondering what impacts multiculturalism as a social and political framework has on the museum? Regarding collaborative museological policies or audiences and visitors, in particular, how does the museum try to build multicultural, inclusive citizenship?**

To a large extent, this museum is a very classical national museum. It is a huge national project to build national identity.

The difference is that the aim is to build a multicultural national identity and not a racially-based, classical nationalistic identity. In many ways we have the same political aims as the classical museums of national formation, but with a specific aim to integrate and produce acceptance and understanding. We are multicultural, and because of that, during the launching process there were a lot of round tables, dinners and different things in the various suburbs of Gothenburg with the local communities. We wanted to say that we should be the official cultural public institution where all Swedish citizens feel at home and feel welcome, as though it were their own project, not like the opera or the state theatre. That was the specific aim and there was a lot of attention given to that. We were very inspired by the Leicester style of museology and community work. Some of the problems with that kind of community approach is that it is very communitarian, in a problematic way.

I would say that this is still a very collective multiculturalism. It is very ethnographic in that way. There are distinct cultures and people belonging to a culture, which is not, by their own definition, much of an ethnic origin. That has been conflict, and what we have tried to do is to treat the hip-hop community, the graphic community or whatever kind of popular culture community, with the same dignity and importance. There is also a tension between being a state institution, being localised here and aiming to have an impact on the world of ethnographic museums. Being an example of the world means that if things are done in close cooperation with local communities then our example becomes local, and it will not be relevant for a global audience.

I think that has been a problem. We have also had a very strong focus so far, as you can see, on doing something new, aesthetically. The exhibition has an aesthetic form and expression that should be multi-focal—having contemporary art together with ethnographic objects, with individual life stories, narratives, and ways of showing documentary photos with popular music. In that sense, the productions are very post-modern, as well as very professional. Sometimes, of course, if you say that you have a strong mandate to local groups in order to empower them, this also leads to tension, because they won’t have that kind of professionalism.

**Has the museum been engaged with Sámi communities?**

Yes. And that is one of the strange things. Normally, we have a national Sámi museum in Sápmi, the Sámi land. All the national Sámi collections are held there, but since our collection was a city collection, when that process was being carried out, we still had a Sámi collection in our

non-European collection. In a way, this is good, as it continues to remind us that the point of collecting non-European objects is not geographical but rather developmental, to do with progress. It is about being a non-modern, primitive people.

Of course, the Sámi were not Swedish in that respect. It reminds us of a very difficult heritage, which is the ethnographic problem that we are all fighting around the world, and to try and address this fact makes it more important. We have a good, on-going collaboration with something called “kompani nomad.” A Sámi dancer and researcher who is exploring Sámi culture from a dance perspective. This is because someone once said that the Sámi were strange because they are one of the few cultures that did not dance. He became famous as a good modern dancer and no one cared about the fact that he was Sámi [and it does not tell of his name but now he is trying to show that and explore his culture]. He has been doing some school programming and putting on shows. The company is trying to theorise his work. The latest research we did with our collections was called “The State of Things.” We had a variety of collections including an important Sami one. Sami representatives were also involved.

**Do you collaborate with the National Sámi Museum?**

A little, but not that much. And this has been more on a community and research level. We also have a strong university department that was set up as a link between the museum and the university. One of the PhD students there was doing some research on the Sámi and the relations between the Sámi and human rights in Sweden.

**And when was the National Sámi Museum created?**

I don't know, though it must have been in the 1990s. I know their collection was formed before 1999 otherwise our collection would also have ended up there, but I don't remember exactly when. Probably it was like us, they were formed and it took some years to be a public thing. The museum field in those days didn't really care.

**I just have a few technical questions to have a more precise idea about the museum. You mentioned the exhibition, so, here, what is the difference between the permanent, semi-permanent and temporary ones?**

So far, there have been no distinctions. We have had exhibitions and they are all called temporary. The longest period has been almost three years for one of the opening exhibitions, but there are factors that have to be taken into account. There are technical considerations involved in changing exhibitions, but also, if it is still very popular, there is no point closing the exhibition just because it's supposed to be temporary. This will eventually change because we have to operate within the funding we have available; we need to have something which won't be called a permanent exhibition, but rather a kind of a semi-permanent or stationary exhibition. We are trying to find out how that can be achieved.

**What is the role of objects in the exhibitions? Do you use your own collections or do you look for other museums' collections?**

Our exhibitions have had objects from our collections in them.

I think there has been a lot of criticism of our not showing enough of our collection.

**Where is your collection based?**

It is a few kilometres south of here in Mölndal, in storage. The original project was to build a house where the collection could be kept, but that became too expansive, and so now we rent an old factory.

**How many items do you have?**

In terms of material objects, there is something like 100,000, about 1,000,000 photos and a substantial amount of archives. It is a normal-sized collection. I think 75% of the material objects are from South America. There has always been a strong South American focus. That is, of course, something of a problem, as we are a museum of world culture showing some a representative global out-take. It is strange to have 75% of the objects from South America.

**But this is because of the history of the collection. You can't change that.**

Of course not. But we could be a museum with a South American focus. That could be one objective and it would make it easier perhaps to have a stronger focus on the collection. But if you have counted the items, you will know that we don't show that much of the collection. This is still comparable with many other museums, who show only about 5% of their collection.

Interview by Camilla Pagani



## [S]oggetti Migranti

Interview with Vito Lattanzi

→ VITO LATTANZI

*Anthropologist by trade, who currently acts as Head Curator of the Mediterranean collections and Director of the Educational Department at the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini" (Rome), where he has been working since 1987.*

*He studied Ethnology and History of Religion at the "Sapienza" University in Rome. His research specialty is on Mediterranean cultures, with special focus on Historical Anthropology, the Ethnology of Religion, and the museographic and educational aspects of cultural heritage. He has designed and organised exhibitions and museums, and has published anthropological and museological writings. He is a board member of Simbdea (Società italiana per la museografia e i beni demotnoantropologici) and of the journal "Antropologia Museale," both founded in 2001.*

**"Migrant subjects/objects – (S)oggetti migranti" is the end result of the European Project READ-ME 1 which started in 2007. How did the project get started? What role does the show "Migrant subjects/objects – (S)oggetti migranti" play within the European project READ-ME 2?**

How did we get to "Migrant subject/object – (S)oggetti migranti"? On the one hand, it gets harder to remember everything with the passage of time but on the other hand the perspective of time renders the whole picture and its logic clearer.

In 2007 at the Museum Pigorini we were re-launching our didactic activities (I, amongst other responsibilities, am in charge educational services). Our school educational projects, which last many years and are therefore not intermittent, have always treated school children and teachers as a special and privileged community so as to build a long term relationship with them. I became involved in the educational services of the museum in 1991 and in 1992 I proposed a project called "A culture of living" to some Roman schools. This project would last three years and involved a comparative study of prehistoric life, life in the students own neighbourhoods and life in other cultures. The project, concluded

**PREVIOUS PAGE, IMG. 3.18** — Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico "Luigi Pigorini", Rome, Italy, Exhibition "Migrant subjects/objects – (S)oggetti migranti" (01.08.2012/16.06.2013). Yoruba maternity sculpture: "object of affection" for african community. The theme of this exhibition is about the migration journeys of the objects that are preserved in the ethnographic museums. Museum objects are adopted by diaspora associations to involve them in personal or collective narrations of diaspora. This sculpture is outside the windows to report how is difficult for the representatives of associations to accept the museum as institution. Photo by Mariella Brenna.





with a substantial show in which the children presented the various cultural contexts. Over the three years period of the project the students had made sets: the Dogon village, the world of the Tucano Indians of Brazil, an Inuit igloo and also Palaeolithic and Neolithic habitats.

This was before the introduction of the Ronchey law on the extra services of state museums. The Ministry financed the educational services of the museum didactics and the research of unregistered young anthropologists, who led guided tours but were also involved in these special projects. This was really the beginning of the season of educational services as provided by the museum to schools. The Museum could offer something different to the pupils and teachers, a place where they could look at things in more depth and obtain a different quality of knowledge.

Following on from this type of experience, step by step, projects began to demand an “intercultural” element. This element has rapidly become central to instructive and educational work. In 1998 the Council of Europe passed a resolution that called for the transformation of education from the mono-cultural to the multicultural and intercultural. It was then that Intercultural education, which hadn’t existed before, really took off and in the museum it was viewed as an opportunity for schools to get involved in a new approach which was in line with our way of thinking. At this time we started to develop relationships with various cultural associations. In this new and exciting intercultural situation the associations had the opportunity to create closer ties to cultural institutions and to the museums in particular.

Then, in 2007, with the approach of the year of intercultural dialogue, I placed this way of thinking into the core educational aims of the museum, and almost simultaneously we received a series of external proposals. For example the Ministry of Fine Arts invited us to participate in the European project Mosaic. Melting the Colours of Europe. This was an essentially institutional and traditional project (concerts, symposiums, conferences), but in the fifth section of the program there was a requirement for intercultural dialogue to be featured. Thus museums involved in the 2008, year of the intercultural dialogue, were invited to put on some exhibitions. Also in 2007, this time from Brussels, we were asked to join the READ–ME project. We were to work in partnership with the Museum of Central Africa of Tervuren in Brussels, the Quai Branly Museum of Paris, and the Etnografiska Museum in Stockholm. READ–ME was funded at the end of 2007, and its co-incidence with the Mosaic project was very useful in the construction of a Roman network of diaspora associations with the Museum “Luigi Pigorini.”

**How did you choose the immigrant associations with whom Museum Pigorini would work?**

Tervuren already had a good relationship with immigrant associations, following an earlier re-launch of the Museum. In Rome, Paris and Stockholm the situations were different. Anyway, once the Mosaic project got going, we decided to get to know the Roman immigrant associations

and invited those who we felt were most suitable for cultural work to the Pigorini Museum. We met with Latin American, Moroccan, African and Asian groups and selected the groups to join READ–ME network and substantially support us in the European partnership.

The choice of some of these associations benefited the Mosaic programme through the project “Saperci fare” (“Know how”), Intercultural education at the National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography Luigi Pigorini. The associations collaborated on four teaching exhibits and the schools got a feel for the worlds shown in the Museum by these associations. For example, “Associna,” a second-generation Chinese association, had an exhibit featuring the game mah-jong, which was presented to the public by an association member. The Roman Peruvian community put on an event about the rites and dances tied to Andean potato farming. The Africans considered the central role of oral culture where words transmit values and traditions. They stressed how important words are in the proper understanding of certain objects. The Moroccans presented a work on the use of henna for tattooing.

“Saperci fare” (“Know how”) project attracted many schools and led to a strengthening of our bonds with immigrant communities. When READ–ME 1 started it was natural to involve the same associations in the new experience. We saw the birth of a real network involving the museums and immigrant associations.

The project READ–ME 1 was designed to create, via the various partner museums, a series of scientific and technical work-shops on the theme of the mask. The Pigorini Museum of Rome organised an international work-shop entitled “Museo e diaspora: maschere e identità plurali” (“Museums and diasporas: masks and plural identities”). Artists, storytellers, authors and intellectuals of different diasporas discussed the mask as a metaphor of identity. The Roman work-shop was a great success. The project concluded with a major exhibition on masks held at and organised by the Tervuren Museum. The whole READ–ME 1 project concerned itself with masks, and therefore an object common in ethnographic museums and well suited to building bridges between museums and immigrants associations. Everything was limited to intercultural dialogue, and therefore was bound to discuss the topics connected to post-colonialism and the valuation of museum objects. As was also the case in Paris and Stockholm, the discussion remained theoretical: curators and anthropologists made presentations about masks and the associations presented the problems associated with immigration, but all in all it was all very conventional, even dryly academic.

When READ–ME 1 ended we all had a look at ourselves and said: “What now?” Our colleagues in Brussels were at that time very busy as leaders of an important international project (RIME, Rete Internazionale dei Musei di Etnografia: the international network of Ethnography museums) and therefore asked us if we could co-ordinate the proposal for a second edition of READ–ME to the European Commission. The Pigorini Museum was more than happy to act as project leader and thus we came to lead the



second project. As is usually the case, it is the project leader who comes up with the concept note and we decided to follow in the Italian tradition of truly opening up our museums to the local communities. It seem to us that the time and the project were right to invite into the heart of the museum representatives of the immigrant communities and let them have their say on the meaning and significance of the objects. In this way we could make progress in the relationship between the museum and the public and more specifically between the museum and the diasporas.

The idea was to do something more substantial, you could even say more provocative, than READ-ME 1. The diasporas would be invited to the “high table” and allowed to enter into managing and decision making processes, to which they had hither to been denied access.

**So, this is how READ-ME 2 “Migrant subjects/objects – (S)oggetti migranti” got going? Why Migrant subjects/objects?**

Yes. The heart of the project had to be heritage, it had be the objects kept in museums. Objects that are naturally to do with diasporas and migrations, because they came here through migrations because they bear witness to the migrations of peoples across this planet, because they are here due to the search for knowledge, but also because of looting, clashes and conflicts. Let’s just say that the objects already represent in themselves and by themselves evidence of human migration and what this migration had represented in history. But the problem with objects in museums is the subjectivity of he who has produced them has been subtracted and subjectivity, ultimately, is the most important thing when it comes to giving meaning and value to the object. “Migrant subjects/objects – (S)oggetti migranti” is a play on words about the thing and the person, this is made even more explicit in the title with its explicit title: “Migrant subjects/objects” behind the thing the person.

**What led to this journey from object to subject?**

In the early meetings, with our partners I used this example to explain myself. The objects certainly had their first life in the places where they were made and where they were used for their original function, be it technical, social or symbolic. Their second life started once they arrived in a museum. Now the curators studied them, explained them and gave them a value, listed them, put them in the catalogue and made them part of the archives. They can now, however, have a third life through the diasporas and this must be encouraged by the ethnographic museums. In the contemporary world museums need to re-position themselves, we could say be re-launched by curators who are willing to listen to the diasporas. Museums need to live in the moment and be spaces for reflection and for a genuine intercultural dialogue.

Personally I’m inspired by the collaborative museography that was championed in Italy by Pietro Clemente in *The third principle of museography* (1999). He called for a renewal of museography as a theatre of contexts

in which several agents are in play and where the object, even something from your life experience, finds its value and importance.

Recalling a modernist experiment performed by Man Ray, Clemente, during a lecture course in the late 1990’s, asked his students to think about “objects of affection,” that is the emotions attached to every object. It’s worth looking at this in some detail. The experiment was for the students to display everyday objects from their own lives in a museographic fashion and to use memories, feelings, dreams and personal views. All of this is radically new compared to the rationalist museography of Cirese [anthropological field-encoded from Alberto Mario Cirese volume titled *Objects, Signs, Museums – 1976*], in which the objects are contextualised according to traditional techniques of identification, scholarship and knowledge. When I came up with the idea “Migrant subjects/objects” I was thinking of this “object of affection” approach. How the object can come to life in the modern world and become of current cultural significance that can be communicated through narrative forms. We can say that from the beginning the spirit of the project belonged to a new school of thought in museology.

**But not only this I’d say. Other than “objects of affection” what else inspired you?**

Of course, the great debate about the role of anthropological museum which has raged since 1980’s was in the mix of our thinking. Above all what has been going on in American museums. The achievement of natives Americans in reclaiming their heritage, then the writing of James Clifford on American museums and exhibitions, and, last but not least Clifford’s work with the native American community at the Portland Museum of Art (Oregon, USA), recounted in his book “Routes: Travel and translation in the late twentieth century,” where he introduces the idea of the museum as “contact zone.” We also included the recent anthropological notions of the museum as a meeting place but also a place of disagreement, conflict and clashing views.

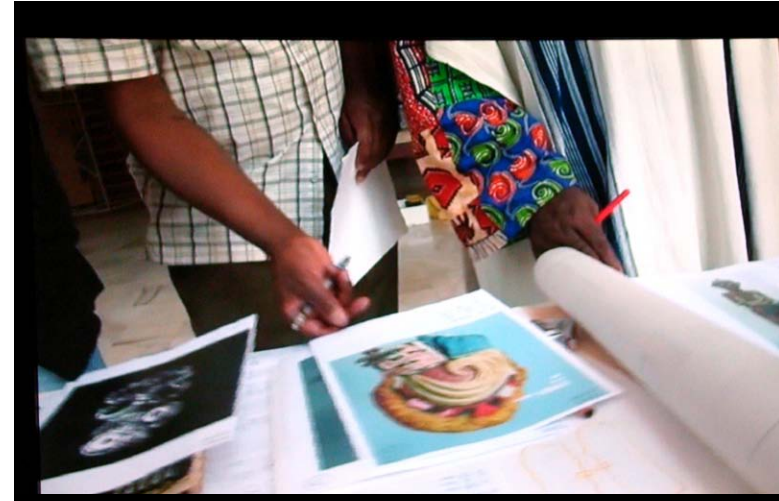
We have, therefore, museums as “third space,” inside which dialogue is possible but there is also the possibility of presenting different points of view, viewpoints different from those of the expert or even the curator.

So the museum is not only a place to tell the stories connected to the objects, but also a place that recognises of values attributable to heritage, where the authority of the curator is put in doubt, as it was in the field, when the anthropologist met with the native, the informer, the community and starkly discovered his inability to objectively represent what he was observing.

**Did you experience any differences in interpretation between museum curators and representatives of the immigrant associations? And if yes, how did you overcome the misunderstandings and disagreements?**

Yes, the museum has truly become one of the many places where you discover the inadequacy and precarity of anthropological learning and

IMG. 3.19-3.24 —  
Exhibition storyboard.  
From narration labs to  
exhibition installation.  
Images of work team  
formed by museum ethno-  
anthropologic curators  
and some representatives  
of diaspora associations:  
Associna, Buudu Africa,  
Comunidad Mexicana  
in Rome, Comunidad  
Peruviana in Rome, Kel'Lam  
Onlus. © Museo Nazionale  
Preistorico Etnografico  
"Luigi Pigorini".





this precariousness, this inadequacy, is obviously that of the curators. The curators are doubted by the community leaders. The community leader feels empowered and almost exercises control over the museum's collection, and when asked his opinion, he often contradicts the curator or adds something different.

**That's his opinion, only his, not that of a group.**

His, certainly, but as happened in American museums, all of this became a pressure that the associations exerted upon the museum. Even in Europe, the Tervuren Museum was pushed and made the wake up by the local Congolese community.

For sure Cultural studies have played an important role in postcolonial studies. In 2004 the Consultative Committee of the Congolese diasporas (COMRAF) attached to the Tervuren Museum was established, following a series of problems within the museum. There are two principal reasons for this committee.

On the one hand, there was the anachronistic situation of the Museum of Central Africa of Tervuren, which at the moment is undergoing a re-launch and a re-structuring programme, but then displayed in an old-fashioned way fauna and stuffed African animals together with exhibits of African communities. A natural history museum that sees man as wild life. This is a primitive context that comes from our old way of thinking, seeing and knowing.

This was one part of the story. The other is that Tervuren put on an exhibition concerning Belgian colonialism in the Congo (*La memoire du Congo: Le temps colonial*, 2005). The Congolese community in Brussels strongly objected to this exhibition and following their complaints it was completely re-designed and is now a permanent section of the museum, and will presumably remain so following the general renovation.

It was from this first clash that the initial dialogue with the local diaspora began. From here a consultative committee came into being, which now has a more or less permanent role in the running of the Museum.

The committee is made up of nine elected members of the Brussels diaspora and acts in steering and criticising policy. These members are consulted regularly, and they played an important role in designing the READ-ME project.

The Tervuren Museum has never seen itself as one of the principal European museums. It's provincial indeed, but at a certain point it discovered the opportunities that arose from being involved in networked projects. The first European project was in 2005–2006: "Afrique: musées et patrimoines pour quels publics?" In partnership with the French and the Dutch museums, this project looked at museums in Africa and museums about Africa. There were two important meetings, firstly in Bamako (Mali) and secondly in Lubumbashi (The Democratic Republic of the Congo).

From this experience, together with the events concerning the diasporas

discussed above came the idea for READ-ME: "Rete Europea delle associazioni della diaspora e dei musei di etnografia" ("European network of Diaspora Associations and museums of Ethnography"), which concerned itself with masks, the Tervuren Museum houses an extremely important collection of masks. Du Quai Branly Museum had already acted as a partner in the previous project. The network was completed thanks to the excellent relationship with the ethnographic Museum of Stockholm and the enthusiasm shown by the Pigorini Museum for the project at a meeting of the European network of ethnographic museum directors (EEM DC). The Pigorini Museum has been part of the network since 1999.

A very intense collaboration started in 2007 due to us being in harmony with the aims of our partner museums. It was therefore natural to launch READ-ME 2 when READ-ME 1 came to an end, even if (as I mentioned before) this time with a more concrete concept note. If we were to make progress, I told myself, we would have to improve the ties with the diasporas and try to make a leap forward in quality as I have previously indicated. It's not as though the curators of the Pigorini Museum had established edifying relations with the diasporas during READ-ME 1. The diasporas associations in Italy are hard to describe and hard to represent. The African ones are even impossible to link to a formula, such as that which we sought to spend on that first occasion, accepting the project a "Federation of the African diaspora in Rome and Lazio." A sort of "invention" that some African leaders have literally proposed to the museum, and that, at the beginning of READ-ME 2, has been questioned by other members entered into a new relationship with the museum. A trick, due to the need to have in the project some associations able to exercise against the museum a representative instance. A single person does not have this possibility.

At the end of READ-ME 2 we can say that we have achieved not so great results in terms of representative clarity, however, we understand better the difficulties of the job and how difficult it is to work with the associations, intercept them, locate them, give credit to them. There are problems of self-legitimation for them and of recognition of the museum.

Now we should deal with the sensitive issues of the critical points of the subject READ-ME, which maybe are downstream of the strong points, i.e. precisely bringing in a great national museum, and for the first time, diaspora associations.

**Okay. Tell us about the problems.**

Without doubt inviting the diasporas to the "high table" and letting them have their say about the Museum created problems. Remember that the curators eat at this high table every day. It was a highly provocative move which I don't regret and in a way I'm proud of. However it caused wounds, lacerations, disappointment and disaffection, we have to remember that Italy is not Belgium and that Pigorini Museum is not a Museum of central Africa.

The Tervuren Museum of Central Africa is a museum about African identity, or better, Congolese identity. It's clear that since there is already an integrated Congolese community in Brussels (with its own neighbourhoods businesses and associations) that the Tervuren Museum is very nearly a local museum of African identity. The community goes and sees exhibitions of their traditional objects and can then judge, criticise and communicate with museum professionals.

The Pigorini Museum, the Quai Branly Museum, and also the Vienna Museum of ethnography (which in READ–ME 2 replaced the Museum of Stockholm), on the other hand, are national museums that do not address a single minority group. They, therefore, are not the focus of attention for the diaspora and subsequently the diasporas are often unaware of the relevant cultural heritage housed in these museums. So we can say that the African communities came to the Tervuren Museum whereas we had to go to immigrant communities. Sometimes we had to go out and look for the diaspora associations and invite them to work with us.

I recall that my initial preaching had a political slant because this type of European project always has a strong political and cultural element. European museums deal with heritage and so play a role of public and political importance. In the long term working with civil society and diaspora organisations, particularly forming networks, can help to foster integration. This is something that the museum believes in, although it may be only a small part of the overall activity of the museum. It is important for immigrant associations to recognise that cultural institutions can play a valuable role in promoting social inclusion. Unfortunately this is not yet the case in Italy. Museums are not viewed as places to go to achieve something useful for immigrant communities. The associations are still principally concerned with the very serious and practical issues of primary support for immigrant communities, such as literacy and the protection of rights.

I would like to mention that in the first year of the project we developed a good relationship with the Moroccan community thanks to the very active and engaged cultural centre in Rome, the Averroè Centre. Its main work is in literacy but Moroccan women use the centre for counselling and support on issues such a physical abuse and birth control, which the Moroccan community wishes to address and improve. So they were more interested in getting visibility as a cultural centre than in following our proposed focus on cultural heritage to gain social inclusion.

When considering the African Diaspora we found that they reject the idea of the museum as a place to conserve and evaluate their cultural heritage. They still, more or less, regard museums as inappropriate places to house art works that are removed from their natural context. This is especially true for holy objects. The majority of objects found in museums are related to rituals. It is no coincidence that the final object of the exhibition “Migrant subjects/objects” the adopted African object is not kept under glass and beside it there is an empty glass case with the message that it is an unsuitable place for a certain type of object.

**So all of the work has helped to create, also inside the Pigorini, a contact zone but to what end?**

Essentially to give a third life to the objects, as we discussed earlier, but also to encourage the associations to adopt part of the heritage and various objects of the museum. Bit by bit the associations got to know about the objects and make them known to the members. Finally a selection could be made of representative and emblematic objects for the exhibition. This was more or less the path we wanted to follow.

A difficult path. The rationale was that either the community (or even better the association) already invests heavily in heritage as a means for political and cultural results or if the community self-consciousness is still underdeveloped the project will at least stimulate and raise awareness.

Now we had four associations involved: a Peruvian and Mexican Association. They worked with great determination and willingness following the outlined path correctly and doing the simple things in practical and productive ways. Then there was Associna, a second generation Chinese Association which aimed to attract the second generation by selecting highly representative objects notable for their excellence and beauty. They therefore chose objects from the Forbidden City. Their workshop representative told us that if we wanted to appeal to young Chinese we should avoid the “cricket cage” because it doesn't mean anything to them, they would stay in their showrooms. The “cricket cage” is still shown in the introductory section of the museum which is devoted to mysterious objects.

**But for those of us familiar with Bertolucci's film, the cricket cage is a key to understanding.**

Sure, but not everyone has seen the film so it's lost on them, in Associna's opinion it was better to advertise the Pigorini as a museum with essential and major works and that the community can view the museum as a place of affection. As I have mentioned the Africans viewed their relationship with the collection quite differently and this led to conflicts. It is at this point that the project ran into difficulties and is the reason why READ–ME 3 isn't happening.

**This journey from the object to the person can generate tensions amongst different peoples.**

It's principally a problem of recognition. Once that is given you can start to work. Gothenburg Museum has recently had a project, featured at the latest RIME workshop, where we presented our READ–ME experiences. It consisted of the redefinition of the categories by which some Museum objects are represented housed and classified. This redefinition was put together by five eminent personalities who come from the places where the objects originated. An African American Professor of postcolonial studies, a Sami woman who works in a Norwegian public institution, a scholar descended from Australian aborigines. You could say, people who come from the world of native populations and have obtained





IMG. 3.25 — Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico “Luigi Pigorini”, Rome, Italy. View of the exhibition “[S]otteggi migranti.” Murales by Siglo (Marco Pinto). Scenography Carmela Spitera. Photo by Mariella Brenna.

positions in the world of the intellectual elites but who preserve within themselves a strong attachment to their worlds of origin, know their own traditions and are involved in anthropology, sociology and museography. The Museum organised residencies for these people, lasting from one week to a fortnight, in the course of which they looked at various objects, object cards and object labels. They then discussed amongst themselves the descriptions, namings and classifications. All of this naturally led to some interesting thoughts and ideas on how to overcome some evident contradictions between the world of origin of these objects and the reading and interpretation of them today by museum visitors, even visitors coming from the original country of the objects.

Choosing these eminent visitors was very different from choosing a diaspora association, where it is not always easy to find institutionally recognised figures. For example the representative of the Cameroonian association, Kel’lam, is the son of a patriarch and is therefore something different to an intellectual. His approach to the museum is different from the professorial or academic one, his intellectual function needs to be recognised and accredited at least in terms of the relationship between itself and the Museum. Without mediation skills it’s inevitable that conflicts will arise within the team. What struck me most was the difficulty in mediating in the roles people play within the project. It is difficult to initiate new ways of thinking to create a “togetherness.”

These problems didn’t only occur in Rome, where we were doing real workshops with the collection and where we offered the diasporas the opportunity to put on a show, but also in the three-day workshops, where

ideas could be exchanged, held in various museums. There were also meetings, in addition to the plenary meetings, between members of the diaspora and museum curators, where it was possible to frankly address the problematic areas of the project.

The same problems arose more or less everywhere and this is indicative of the widespread tendency, at least in the project museums, of keeping a rigid demarcation line between the museum professionals and the diaspora members. It’s as if the competence of the museum was going to be threatened. It’s just that the associations claim the right to have a curatorial voice within the museums. In North America this is already a reality. There are native America curators, they are now insiders. There is little to say about this fact which is simply an indication of democracy.

It was not that we built a barricade but I sensed a certain naivety and lack of metrological tools, I would say ethnographic tools, in managing relations between the museum and the associations. I never felt that my role was called into question by the others involved in the project, even when I was criticised because the game, the rules of the game, must be those that encourage storytelling and dialogues. We are not looking for a different expert opinion on the objects, on discrimination between true or false. We want to reason, to reflect, to tell, to reveal and to see to what extent an object can be interpreted in one way or another and what are the cultural values it can have from a diaspora viewpoint.

In this conversation, even when something happens that shuffles the pack, I don’t see a problem. However, sadly, the curators closed ranks not only in Rome but elsewhere. It was as if a pitch invasion by the diaspora would ruin the game. It seemed like, to use an expression of the colleague from Brussels, the role of the dash in READ–ME changed to that of a slash (READ–ME to READ/ME). We lost our balance.

The whole point of READ–ME is represented by the balance of that dash. Diasporas find the Museum and feel at home in it, and the curators welcome them in and share the collections with them. This interaction is only possible with excellent interpersonal skills. Poor relationships can be due to the diaspora or the curators, the dash promises compromise but conflict is always just around the corner. You must not let the relationships deteriorate. If this happens it is better to take a break and that is why we decided to freeze the READ–ME project. At the end of READ–ME 2 we presented a new project which while not excluding the diasporas is something different. Also following two editions of READ–ME, the diasporas have asked, quite rightly, for a role as partners with financial recognition. Currently in European projects only the museums are directly funded and they can then use that money to pay the diasporas. READ–ME is made up of Diaspora Associations – Ethnographic Museums but after two editions the associations are still out on the limb without having received a penny.

In READ–ME 2 via a ruse we managed to assign the diasporas € 6,000 from each partner museum, we couldn’t do more but at least we were able to provide the association representatives with a minimum refund of

their expenses. The demand for a more acceptable economic arrangement for the diasporas meant that in READ–ME 3 museums and diasporas would have been on the same level. Despite some worries we asked the associations to confirm the possibility of co-financing the European funding but the associations were unable to co-finance in a way acceptable to the European commission and therefore they cannot participate as an effective partner. READ–ME 3 would have started in imbalance, with frustrations and limitations. So we decided to stop. All of this discussion was going on just a month from the deadline, so it's just as well that we made this decision. A little bitterness remains because some people who wanted to go ahead with the project were put off by the disagreements.

**What is the new proposal about then?**

The new project is called EMMA: Ethnographic Museum and Migrant Arts. It is centred on artist residencies. The migrant artist works with the collection and then produces artwork inspired by the museum's collections. The residencies last a month. There are eight residencies and in addition a final show of the completed works.

**The choice of the arts field as a space for mediation.**

The idea is to compare two codes, two languages, two means of expression, different but today complementary: ethnography and art.

Interview by Mariella Brenna  
Text translated by John Elkington.

## Case Studies

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# le musée cannibale

musée d'ethnographie neuchâtel

9.03.02 - 2.03.03



de 10h à 18h tous les jours sauf le lundi - entrée libre mercredi - 4, rue saint-nicolas neuchâtel - suisse - www.men.ch

IMG. 3.26 — Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Poster of the exhibition "Le musée cannibale," 9.3.2002 - 2.3.2003. Direction by Jacques Hainard, Marc-Olivier Gonseth. Graphic design by Nicolas Sjostedt. © Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel.

## Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel

Museum of Ethnography Neuchâtel, Switzerland

The Swiss Confederation has several ethnographic museums that in recent years have undergone renovation of both their purpose and their premises.

The Rietberg Museum in Zurich has devoted itself to an aesthetic ethnographic vision and has recently (2007) built an underground extension (Alfred Grazioli and Adolf Krischanitz project) adding to its exhibition spaces an interesting deposit of its collections open to visitors.

In Basel the "Volkerkundemuseum und Schweizerisches Museum für Volkskunde," one of the first ethnographic collections open to the public in Europe, renamed "Museum der Kulturen Basel" in 1996, from 2011, with an improvement project by architects Herzog & De Meuron, has renewed its mission and its spaces.

In Geneva there are two museum headquarters devoted to Ethnography: the "Musée Barbier-Muller" devoted to an aesthetic vision of Ethnography and the "Musée d' Ethnographie de Genève," which in 2014 will open its renovated and expanded premises (Graber Pulver project).

In this context it is worth drawing attention to the impact of the work done by the Neuchâtel Museum of Ethnography, over more than thirty years, in the debate about the role of ethnographic museums in today's world. This theoretical work has been performed in long-term collaboration with the Institute of Ethnography and is today bearing fruit through an original exhibition policy for thematic exhibition.

The Neuchâtel Museum of Ethnography is a municipal museum of a small university town in the french speaking part of Switzerland. The museum owes its origin to General Charles-Daniel de Meuron (1738–1806), who served the British Empire in both Ceylon and South Africa. In 1795 de Meuron donated his "cabinet de histoire naturelle" to his home town, Neuchâtel. It's from here that the collections of

three civic museums were founded: a museum of art and history, a museum of natural sciences, and, more to our point, the Museum of Ethnography, that in the nineteenth century was enriched thanks to the donations of missionaries, travellers, and traders from the city. The museum's collections, coming from five continents, today amount to about 40,000 objects. The museum stands on the hill of Saint-Nicolas in the old villa of the merchant James Ferdinand de Pury (1823–1902), built in the middle of a large park by the architect Leo Chatelain in French Renaissance style. The villa was donated to the city in 1902 and the Museum of Ethnography has been housed there since 1904.

The Museum currently consists of three distinct buildings. In 1954, under the guidance of Jean Gabus, a new space was constructed next to Villa de Pury. This new building was designed to house temporary exhibitions and hold the museum's collections in its basement, while in 1986 a third building was inserted between the two pre-existing in order to expand the Institute of Ethnology and to confirm, also from an architectural point of view, the bonds between the Institute/Research James Ferdinand de Pury centre and the museum.

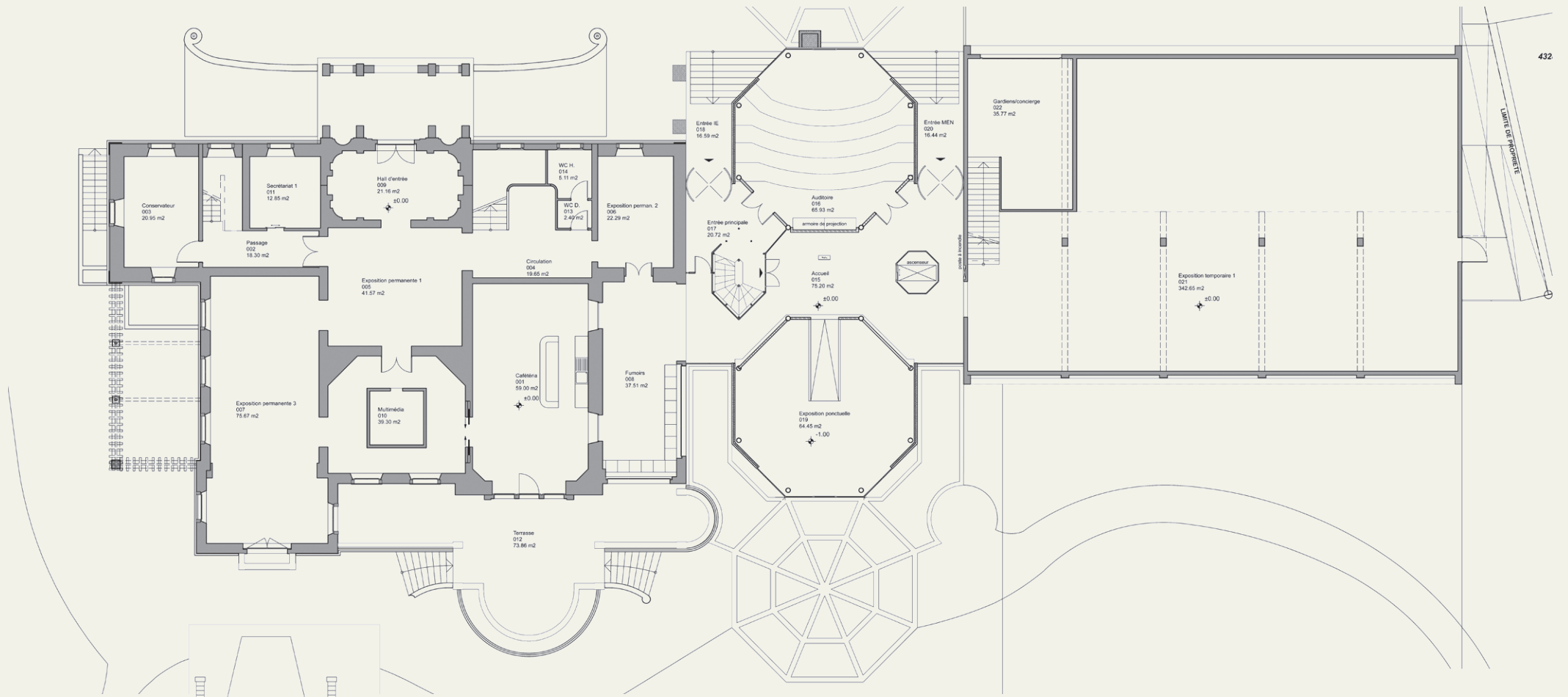
Currently the old villa is in the process of being restored.

### → MUSEOLOGIE DE LA RUPTURE

The MEN stands out for its transformation of exhibition and curatorial practices, implemented year after year by the successive museum directors.

At the end of the 1970s the division of the Museum from the University led to a general rethinking of the museum's purpose, its place within its community, and about the role of the collection, of the subject of ethnography, in the exhibition activities.

IMG. 3.27 — Ground floor plan. The drawing clearly illustrates the three phases of the evolution of the museum: on the left, the original building, Villa de Pury; on the right, the '50s extension, dedicated to temporary exhibitions; in the middle, the most recent wing providing a new entrance to the museum. © Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel.



IMG. 3.28 — Southern front of the museum. © Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel.





IMG. 3.29 — Exterior view of of the three buildings which compose the museum. © Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel. Photo by Alain Germond.



IMG. 3.30 — Exhibition “Le musée cannibale.” Musée d’Ethnographie Neuchâtel Direction by Jacques Hainard, Marc-Olivier Gonseth. Dining room, where different museographic approaches are parodied in form of banquet. Scenography by Sabine Crausaz. © Musée d’ethnographie Neuchâtel. Photo by Alain Germond.



IMG. 3.31 — Exhibition “Le musée cannibale.” Musée d’Ethnographie Neuchâtel. Detail. © Musée d’ethnographie Neuchâtel. Photo by Alain Germond.



For over thirty years, from 1945 to 1978, under the direction of Jean Gabus, the museum’s work was focused on the subject of ethnography. It’s thanks to Gabus that the concept of the “object témoin” (after Jean Cocteau) was introduced into the vocabulary of museums and ethnography. An “object témoin” that is an object interpreted like a document, as material evidence of human activity.

Pierre Centlivres, who succeeded Jean Gabus at the Institute of Ethnology attached to the museum, introduced Neuchâtel Museum to the simple idea that ethnography cannot only be about the long-term study of exotic cultures, but must also look at limited periods in Western societies. It is no longer about highlighting a specific geographic region or population, but a multidisciplinary approach is called for to reveal similarities and differences. Still ethnographies, but in the plural, not just looking at the “exotic” but also at closer to home, in order to evaluate with a monographic approach traditional ethnography.

For example, the research undertaken by students of the Institute of Ethnology of Neuchâtel on “Camping” and “Backpacking” in the 1960s and 1970s deserves mention. These studies led to the “Être nomade aujourd’hui” exhibition of 1979 which reflected upon the recent nomadic societies of the West and was a key moment in the development of the museum, since it marked the first occasion in which the revolutionary principles of the Institute of Ethnology, a theoretical and cross-sectional comparative approach, were applied to an anthropological museum and resulted in fresh insights into Western societies.

So here we have the first example of what is known as “Museologie de la rupture” (Breaking museology) which would be further developed by Jacques Hainard, transferring his experience from the Institute of Ethnology to the museum, as director and curator of exhibitions from the 1980s to 2006, with “the fundamental aim of deconstructing our prejudices about the other and about ourselves,” as Marc Olivier Gonseth, a close Hainard associate since 1983 and direc-

tor of the MEN since 2006, says.

Rather than focusing on what divides, what is being developed is a completely different approach, a systematic discussion of the similarities and differences among human societies. Carrying out researches in the midst of western society leads to a redefinition of the concepts of what is exotic and what is proximate. On the one hand we can discover how much we share in common with something distant from ourselves and on the other we are shown how surprising and stereotyped is that which is close to us and that which we take for granted.

From the museum’s point of view, “museologie de la rupture” is expanding upon the views expounded by Jean Gabus. The object is now not a witness but an excuse/reference for new narratives.

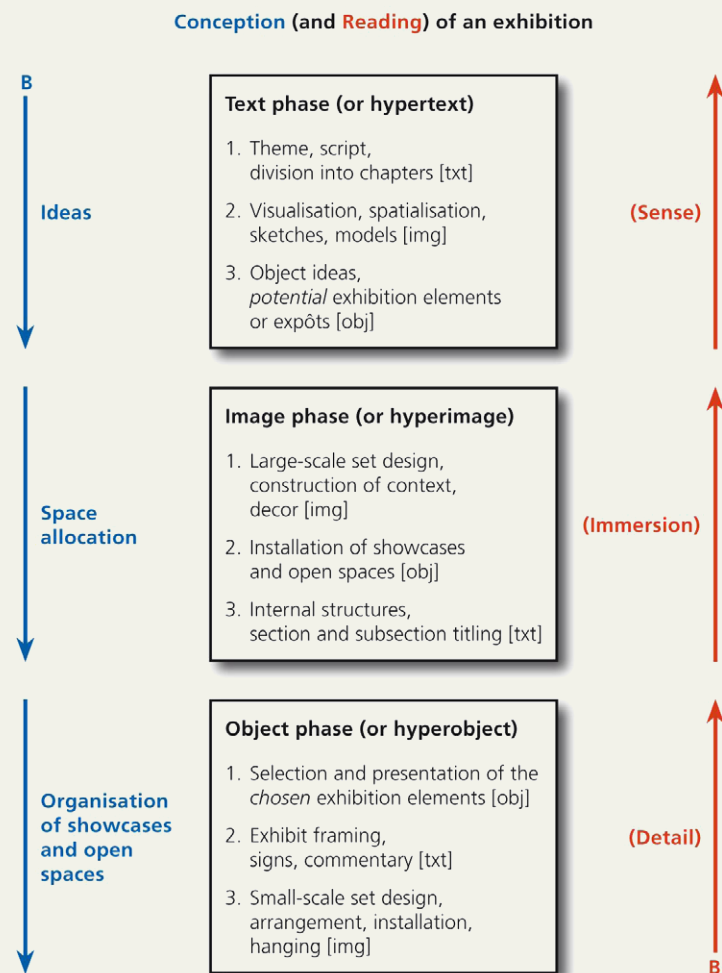
The relationship between the object and the visitor (or conservator) is put into a situation where the emphasis moves to the visitor and the present day. The objects now act as words chosen in the “expositions de synthèse” (“Themed shows”) to tell stories. The curator’s task is to create a plot and a narrative by using the objects as a writer uses words. The objects are displayed to tell a story. The objects are the curator’s material, waiting for a glance or prompt to start them spinning their tales.

As Hainard has written: “Conservators were slaves of their objects. We have changed that formula: objects are now our slaves and we make them talk inside our narrative so that they can tell us something new each year.” Hainard called this approach to museology “expologique.”

The expologique process is at the centre of exhibition/narratives, the “meta-discursive exhibition.” Setting up an exhibition goes through three phases: having the idea is the first step (text phase), and then space allocation (image phase) and finally organisation (selection and objects presentation phase).

These phases correspond to what visitors go through in the exhibition but in the reverse order: read the details, dive into the space, interpret the exhibition.

IMG. 3.32— Conception of an exhibition, Musée d'ethnographie Neuchâtel. Source: Gonseth, Marc-Olivier. 2005. "Un atelier expographique." In "Cent ans d'ethnographie sur la colline de Saint-Nicolas 1904-2004," edited by Marc-Olivier Gonseth, Jacques Hainard, and Roland Kaehr, Neuchâtel: Musée d'ethnographie, p. 392.



Besides "Etre nomade Aujourd'hui" of 1979, it is important to remember at least some of the following exhibitions, which have made important the philosophy of MEN in the last thirty years.

"Collection passion" from 1982 is about private collecting and what motivates it. A series of questions are posed to the visitor about the passion for collecting; Is it an aesthetic pleasure? Is it the instinct to own things? The desire to accumulate things? Is it done to acquire scientific knowledge, power, fame? To build an image? To fight against death?

"Objets prétextes, objets manipulés" (1984) can be seen as a manifesto of MEN museology.

It is the summary of several years of research about the status of objects in general and the museum objects in particular. In the first section there is a discussion about objects in museography (Objets pré-textes), then a reflection on museum objects (Du terrain au musée) and finally our vision of "others," in this case the Bushmen (De l'usage des sauvages).

The second section is about the manipulation of everyday objects: from clothes (Ces objets qui parlent pour nous) to art (De l'unique en série) to the packaging of objects (Magie de l'emballage), to Coca-Cola and the power of the brand (Le consommateur emballé) to the waste cycle (Trajet du déchet) to the troublesome removal of waste (Rejet du déchet) to the

passion for DIY and gadgets, and objects that clutter our homes (Ca suffit me).

"Temps perdu, temps retrouvé" in 1985 and "Le Salon de l'ethnographie" in 1989 continue the reflection on the position of the museum and in particular the position of the museum of ethnography in our society.

Next we come to the exhibition "Le musée cannibale" of 2002–2003, where the museum is compared to a cannibalistic institution. The desire to "devour" other cultures can be read as the foundational principle of ethnographic museums, but this exhibition is set up in order to give a reverse perspective: it is the visitor who is invited to enter into deep communication with the other, to "eat" it, to "devour" the exhibition.

"Hors-champs" (2012) is a new chapter in the research project on immaterial cultural heritage, on the use of images in anthropology, on the relationships between what gets inside the picture and what stays outside the picture.

The exhibition is on three levels: the first is concerned with the history of museums; the second features virtual images shown via new technologies; and the third takes a poetic and ironic approach in order to produce cognitive shocks that go beyond the purely educational. Thus the visitor is invited to go outside the boundaries because each evoked field can open up to new associations beyond our expectations.

Mariella Brenna

Text translated by John Elkington

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IMG. 3.33 — Världskulturmuseet, Gothenburg, Sweden. Project by Brisac and Gonzalez architects, 2004. Interior view of the public atrium. © Hélène Binet.

## Världskulturmuseet

National Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg, Sweden

The National Museum of World Culture is a new national museum founded by the Swedish government, which was opened in Gothenburg in December, 2004. The museum is part of the National Museums of World Culture Agency, set up in 1999, which comprises four museums, three of which are based in Stockholm: the Museum of Ethnography, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities, and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities. The history of the museum dates back to 1946, when the Ethnographic Museum of Gothenburg became an independent division of the civic Gothenburg Museum, which was founded in 1861. Until 1993, the Ethnographic Museum was located in the East India Building. Its collections mainly include exhibits from the areas of South America; regarding this, it is worth mentioning the collecting activities performed by Erland Nordenkiöld, who became the museum's director in 1913. The collections were later enriched with objects that came from Southern Asia, Asiatic South East, Australia, New Zealand, Congo, Northern Africa, and Western Africa.

However, given the scarcity of space in the museum, debates and proposals aiming at finding new premises started to arise in the 1940s. When the Gothenburg Council decided to reorganise the various museums the city, the Ethnographic Museum was assigned the site of the Industrial Museum, which, in the meantime, had joined the Archaeological and Historical Museum in the City Museum. Nevertheless, the new premises also turned out to be inadequate to display the whole collection, which included 100,000 exhibits and 30,000 books. Moreover, as the museums of Gothenburg and Stockholm were undergoing a moment of general crisis, the authorities undertook some public policies targeted at rationalising the costs and modernising the institutions. For this reason, in 1997, under a proposal by the culture minister, Marita Ulvskog, the parliament voted a law to estab-

lish the National Museums of World Culture Agency. The agency was set up in 1999, with the aim to adapt ethnographic collections within a multicultural society and in relation to the globalised socio-economic and cultural context. The proposal also included a project related to the erection of a building which would house the new museum. As a result, Gothenburg Council granted a plot of land to "Event Row," next to Liseberg Funfair. The tender was won by the architecture studio, Ice Cube, based in London, set up by architects Cecile Brisac and Edgar Gonzalez.

Consequently, the Ethnographic Museum of Gothenburg, which was a municipal institution, was closed in 2000, and the Museum of World Culture, a national museum, was opened on December 29th, 2004.

The mission of the four museums is to show the current transformations undergone by Sweden and by the world, through a reflection on the theme of identities. In particular, the new museum aims to adapt historical and ethnographic collections to the contemporary theme of migrations and multiculturalism through an interdisciplinary perspective.

The museum does not present a real permanent collection. Rather, it has five spaces for temporary or semi-permanent exhibitions (for a total number of 37 since its opening) on current topics or related to the collections. It also has a theatre and a conference room. The museum collaborates with *Museion*, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research at the University of Gothenburg. The centre is located in the same building and organises Master's degree courses in Museum Studies and lectures for students. Besides exhibitions, many educational, musical, and artistic activities take place in the museum, with the aim of involving member of the public of all ages. With an average number of 220,000 visitors per year, in 2009 the museum was voted Museum of



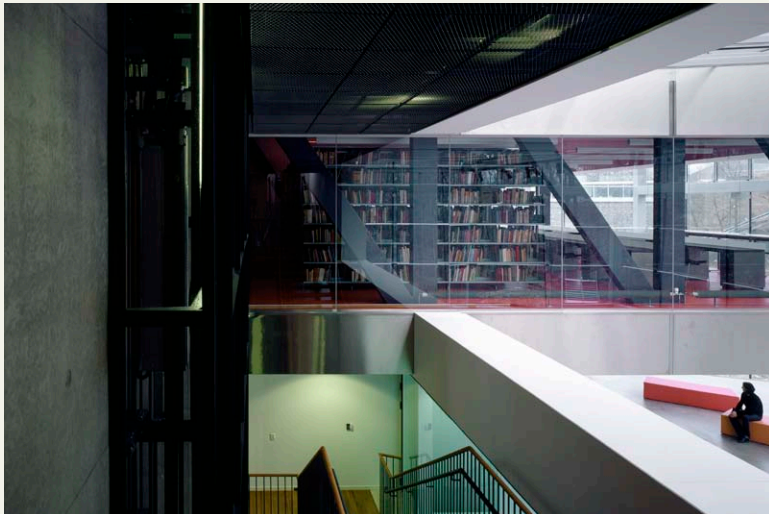
IMG. 3.34 — Exterior view of the museum. © H  l  ne Binet.



IMG. 3.35 — View of services level at first floor. The installation “Screen” by Korean artist Do-Ho Suh acts as filter of the restaurant space. His work explores the relations among individuality, collectivity, and anonymity. © H  l  ne Binet.



IMG. 3.36 — Interior view of library at the fourth floor. © H  l  ne Binet.



the Year by the Swedish International Council of Museums (ICOM), in collaboration with the Association of Swedish Museums (RSM).

→ A NEW GLOCAL MUSEUM WITH A TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS STRATEGY

In order to understand the importance of the establishment of a new national museum within the Swedish context, it is necessary to highlight the political intent expressed by the government to join three already existing museums and a newly created one under the same agency. The three museums, which display extra-European collections, are the Museum of Ethnography, the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities and the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities). As stated in the Official Government Report of 1998:

“The National Museum of World Culture will create something new in the world of museums, something that does not yet exist. It will mirror similarities and differences in ways of thinking, lifestyles and living conditions, as well as cultural change in Sweden and in the world. Visitors will be given the opportunity to reflect on their own cultural identity and those of others” (Lagerkvist 2008, 89).

The decision to set up a new museum and to unite it with the three existing ones was taken with the aim of facing the challenges of multiculturalism in Sweden. This would be done through the exhibition of international collections and the collaboration of the various museums with universities, research centres, international experts and members of the civil society, as explicitly indicated in the official mandate by the government. In fact, Sweden is a country which explicitly defines itself as multicultural and implements policies for the acknowledgement of its national minorities (S  mi, Swedish Finns, Tornedaler Finns, Roma and Jews). Given the critiques of postcolonial theories on the origins of collections in ethnographic museums, which are more or less directly linked to colonial history and European domination over the other continents, it was decided to bring about a sweep-

ing change within the Swedish museum context. Following the directions of UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), the museum has focused on the theme of cultural diversity and globalisation.

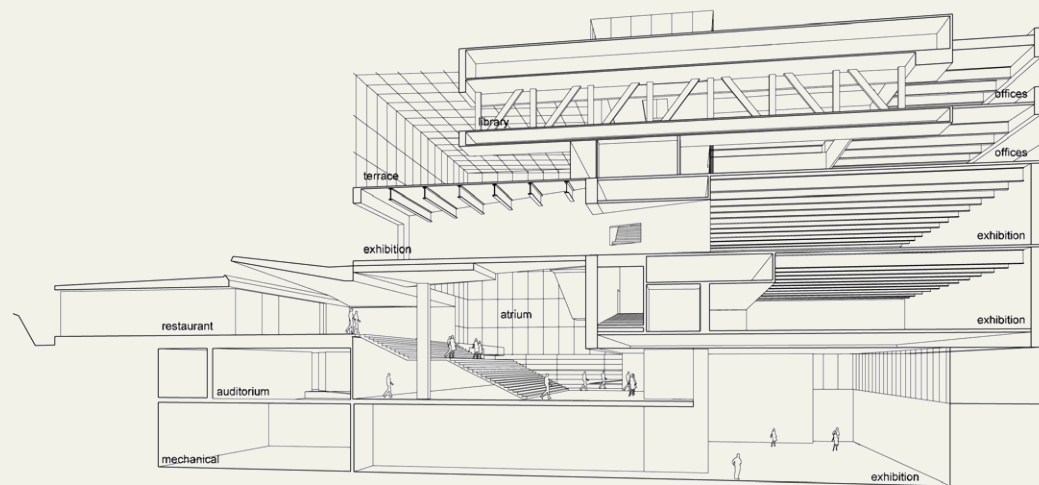
The first interesting point to note in the critical analysis of the Museum of World Culture concerns its own category. It is no longer a museum of ethnography, but rather a “museum of world cultures.” The term *V  rldskultur* is a Swedish neologism, which presents different possible interpretations as far as the distinction between singular *culture* and plural *cultures* is concerned. In the English translation, the singular has been chosen, in order to show contrast with the tradition of ethnographic museums, which aims to study and exhibit “cultures.” By choosing the singular form instead, cultures are no more referred to as defined and closed entities. The museum does not aim at cataloguing the various cultures as if they were identifiable. On the contrary, it has an interest in world culture, which is interpreted in relation to the notions of diversity, pluralism, hybridity, and multitude of voices and approaches (Lagerkvist 2006). This new definition implies giving up the use of ethnography as a reference discipline in order to adopt an explicitly interdisciplinary approach aimed at examining world cultures “in a dynamic and open-ended manner” (Museum of World Culture 2004).

As stated in the presentation backgrounder, this is expressed in two guidelines: “On the one hand, various cultures are incorporating impulses from each other and becoming more alike. On the other hand, local, national, ethnic and gender differences are shaping much of that process.”

The institute will take into account such duality, showing both every individual’s aspect of reciprocity and interdependence, and that of specificity and peculiarity:

“World Culture’ is thus not only about communication, reciprocity, and interdependence, but the specificity and uniqueness of each and every individual” (Museum of World Culture 2004 Backgrounder). The geographical approach, which was the preferred one in traditional mu-





IMG. 3.37— Cross-section of the museum. © Brisac Gonzalez Architects.

IMG. 3.38 — First floor plan. © Brisac Gonzalez Architects.

seums of ethnography, has been put aside in favour of a new perspective that explores current and transnational or global themes, beyond geographical, territorial or cultural differences. Within this context, the museum aims to combine global problems with local interpretations, proposing to conform to a perspective that aims at being “glocal” (Lagerkvist 2008). As can be deduced from the official mission of the new institute, the museum is conceived as a place of encounter and debate, which allows visitors to feel at home across borders: “In dialogue with the surrounding world and through emotional and intellectual experiences the Museum of World Culture aims to be a meeting place that will make people feel at home across borders, build trust and take responsibility together for a shared global future in a world of constant change” (Museum of World Culture 2001).

One of the purposes of the museum is to give importance to modernity. As a consequence, exhibitions are driven by current themes and ideas, and only then, they focus on objects. Indeed, the museum does not present a permanent exhibition, as the objects of the Ethnographic Museum of Gothenburg are preserved in an external location. The five expository spaces are assigned to temporary or semi-permanent exhibitions (from a few months to about three years) which are not necessarily connected to the objects of the collection. So far, they have dealt with themes connected to current problems, such as sexually transmitted diseases, migration, gender and LGBTQ (LesbianGayBi-TransQueer-persons) issues, cultural diversity, and interreligious dialogue.

For this reason, a new and experimental role has been established, namely the “curator of contemporary global issues,” whose task it is to propose an interdisciplinary interpretation of current themes and problems. Since 2008, Klas Grinell, historian of ideas at the University of Gothenburg, has undertaken such a role, and has curated various temporary exhibitions regarding current problems, sometimes thorny and delicate ones. For example, the temporary exhibitions that have been proposed so far—37 altogether—have dealt with current themes

of social denunciation and critique of present times, such as *No Name Fever. Aids in the Age of Globalisation* (2004) about the spread of HIV in the world, *Human Trafficking* (2006) about the illicit trafficking of people, interpreted as a current phenomenon of slavery, or *Destination X* (2010) on the theme of mobility on a global scale, of legal and clandestine migrations, of tourism and borders. Another example is the photography exhibition Jerusalem, a project by photographer Ohlson Wallin and homosexual theologian Lars Gärdfeldt. The photographs showed LGBTQ people following the three Abrahamic religions in Jerusalem, in naked scenes or involved in explicit sexual activities, next to quotations from the sacred texts of the three monotheistic religions that condemn LGBTQ attitudes. The project aimed to discuss questions of faith, sexuality, heteronormativity, and oppression, and it included spaces for public debate and conferences within the exhibition path (Grinell 2011).

The global vs. local levels are reflected in a double narration: individual and local voices are accompanied by a more generic museum voice, which plays a mediating role with respect to the multiple and different perspectives where personal stories intertwine with those of groups or associations, international experts, and institutions. Actually, minorities are asked to cooperate and are involved in the decision-making process regarding the contents of exhibitions, without stigmatising categories of people or groups. Within this context, it is worth mentioning the European Union project, *Advantage Göteborg: World Cultures in Focus*, realised on occasion of the exhibition *Horizons: Voices from a global Africa* in 2004. The purpose of the project was to denounce discrimination in the Swedish labour market through the inclusion of migrants from Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia who live in Sweden for work reasons. The museum’s role went beyond mere organisation of the exhibition. It was a real mediator among different actors in order to promote principles of social justice, tolerance and inclusion. Among the partners of the project are the Diversity Unit of the City Council of Gothenburg, the Integra-

tion and Gender Equality Section of the Regional Administration, the Trade and Industry Group of Gothenburg & Co, the Swedish Association of Ethnic Entrepreneurs, The Public Employment Service in Gothenburg and the Swedish Integration Board.

However, one of the two paintings of the series, *Scène d'amour* by Algerian artist Louzla Darabi, which were part of the exhibition *No Name Fever*, was the object of a very difficult mediation and ideological clash with public opinion. The painting represented an explicit sexual act next to a quotation *Surat Al-Fatīha* verses from the Quran. Following requests—sometimes threatening ones—to remove it by some Muslims, the work was withdrawn from the exhibition, raising critiques of the media and public opinion. As stated by Lagerkvist, the museum was in a very delicate position and questioned itself about the freedom of expression in a public institution in case of pressure on the part of groups of people.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the case of *Jördlingar* (2012), an innovative exhibition, as far as adaptation to a 'special' public is concerned. Indeed, the exhibition was conceived and realised specifically for children. Consequently, a different perspective was adopted, with the use of alternative, children-oriented spaces, rather than traditional ones, and interactive and recreational tools.

Besides the temporary exhibition rooms, on each floor, along the stairs, there are some permanent showcases conceived as a space for historical and "meta-museum" reflection on collecting activities of extra-European objects during the colonial era. Of particular impact is the showcase on Congo, which shows objects of rare beauty in front of a background with rifles and blood.

In sum, it is necessary to understand the multifaceted nature of the Museum of World Culture. Rather than a museum, it is a cultural centre, which enhances educational, musical, and scientific activities, and which also often organises performances, music events, and debates within the exhibition spaces, in order to implement a multidisciplinary approach where the material and immaterial cultural heritages

converge. The use of new technologies and interactive tools makes it possible to highlight this purpose. In order to involve different groups and associations, the museum also organises Community Nights, *when the museum spaces* are made available to groups and organisations for their events. Among the various groups that have participated, there are local arts organisations, non-governmental organisations, migrants' associations, and cultural associations. The only prerequisite required to participate is the respect for Human Rights.

Last but not least, the museum works in close collaboration with the three museums of Stockholm. Many temporary exhibitions, indeed, are moved from one museum to another, and so do the personnel. Among the numerous partnerships with museums and research institutes around the world, there should also be mention of the museum's participation in the European project RIME—the International Network of Ethnography Museums and World Cultures.

Camila Pagani

Text translated by Ilaria Parini

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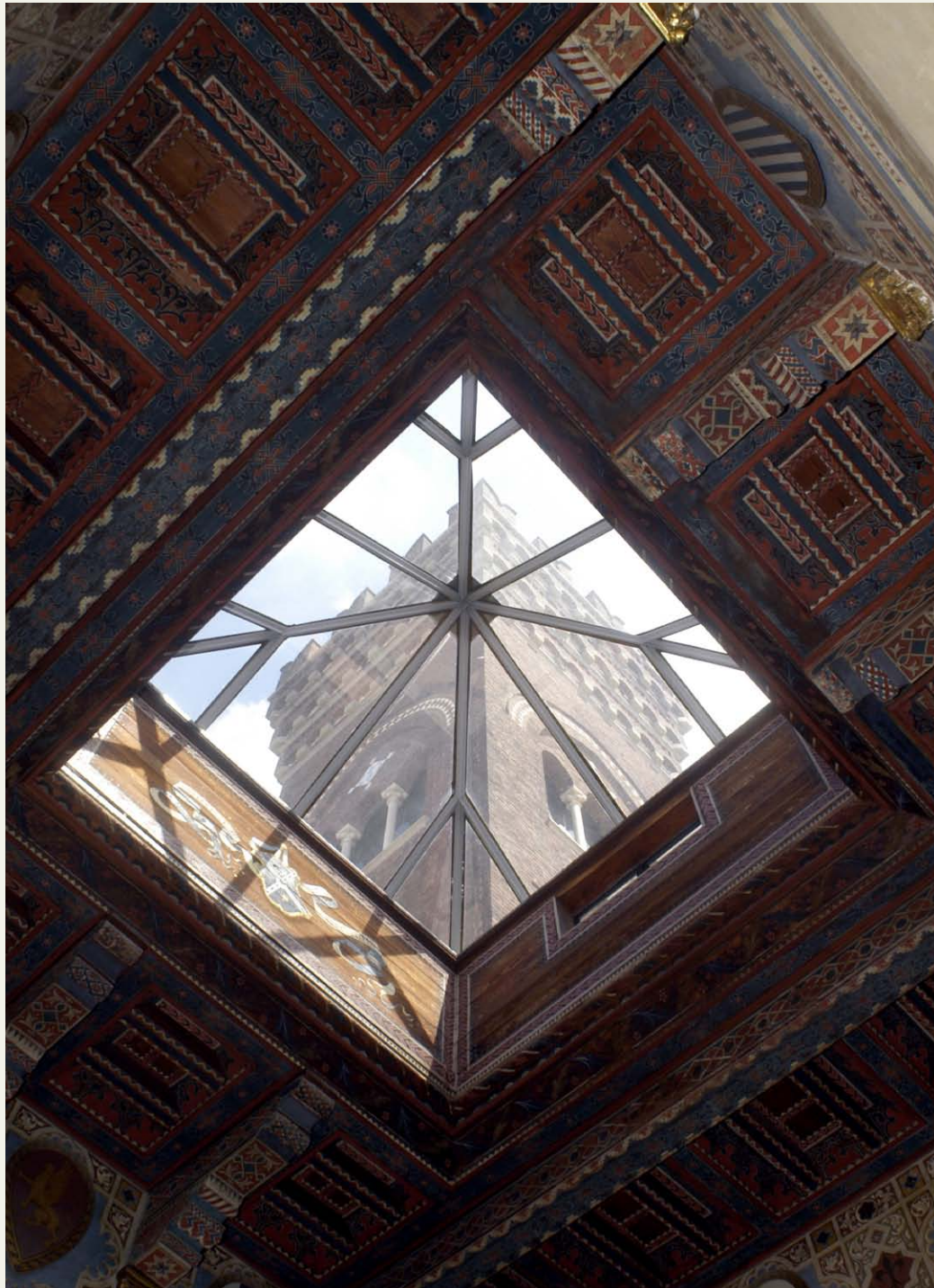
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IMG. 3.39 — Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo, Genoa, Italy. The battlements of the top tower of the D'Albertis Castle seen through the skylight of the main staircase. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo.

## Castello d'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo

Castello D'Albertis World Cultures Museum, Genoa, Italy

Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo is part of the museum system of the Municipality of Genoa. Established in 2004, it includes the Museum of World Cultures, the Museum of Popular Music and, since 2012, a permanent section dedicated to medicine of the people in partnership with Celso Institute of Oriental Studies of Genoa.

The museum was originally the home of Captain Enrico Alberto D'Albertis (1846–1932). D'Albertis had travelled extensively by land and sea during the 19th and 20th centuries. He was also a writer, photographer, amateur archaeologist and naturalist and sundial maker (Edmondo de Amicis called him: “wandering creator of sundials”). He designed and built the castle himself between 1886 and 1892 in a neo-Gothic style under the supervision of the architect Alfredo D'Andrade.

The castle stands on the Montegalletto hilltop overlooking the city of Genoa and its port. It was built on the ruins of an ancient bastion, part of the 16th-century fortifications of the city, and encompasses the remains of a medieval tower. Surrounding the house and in keeping with the eclectic character of the complex, D'Albertis created an extensive park, contained within crenellated walls, with terraced gardens, sundials, artificial caves and secret passages leading to other buildings (the caretaker's house and the towers).

Throughout the castle, both inside and out, the personality and intelligence of its original owner prevails. Within the house, Captain D'Albertis collected, documented and exhibited the recollections and testimonies of his passion for adventure, exotica and archaeology, including colonial trophies and wunderkammer. On the death of the captain, the complex was donated to the city of Genoa as a venue for a museum, although the fate of the ethnographic museum remained uncertain for a considerable time.

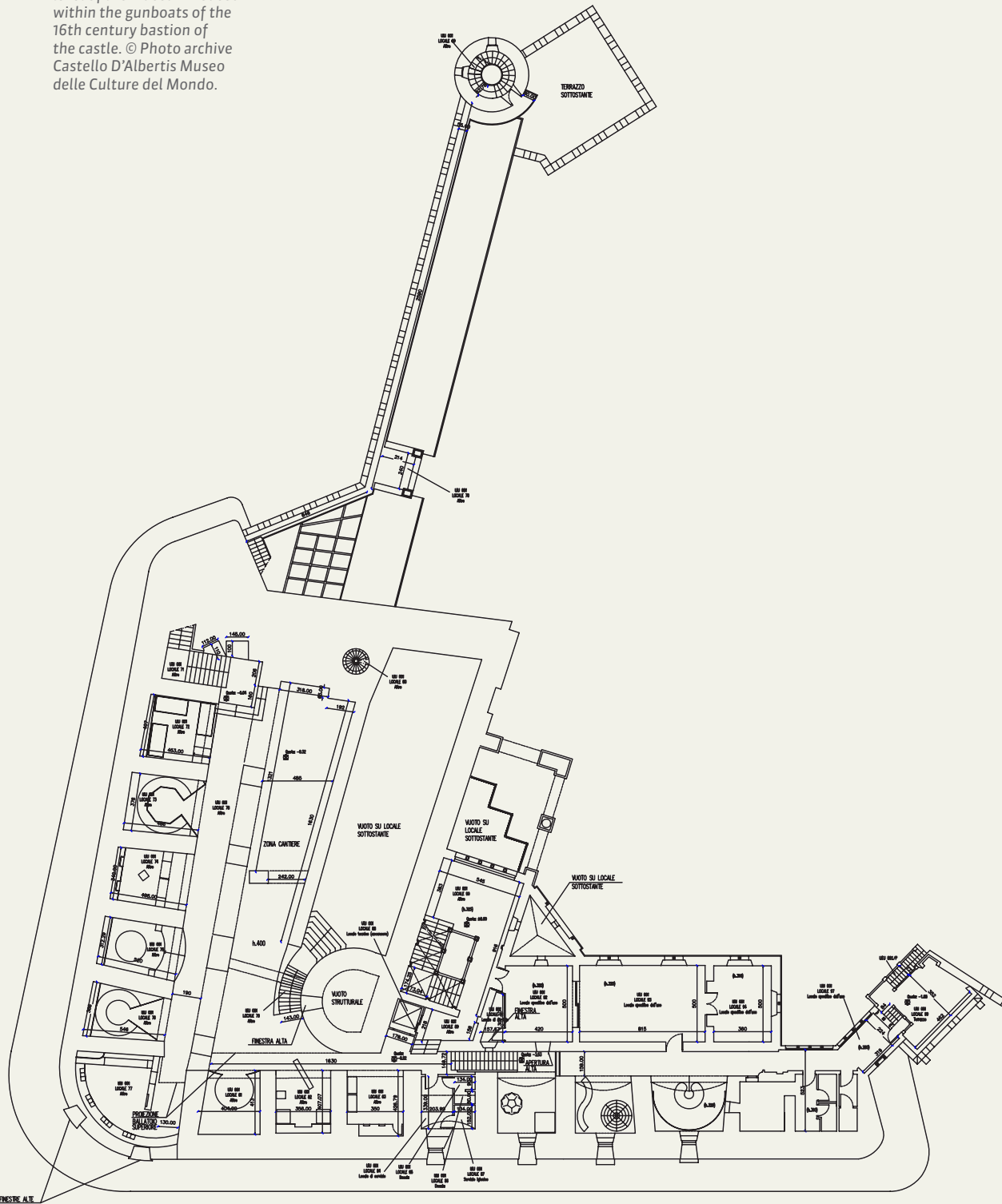
Forty years passed between the donation and its actual opening to the public. It was only in 1972 that, following the closure of the International Congress of Americanists in Rome, a viewing of Genoa's North America ethnological and pre-Columbian archaeological collections was held in some of the rooms; this exhibition lasted until 1977. Finally, as part of the Columbus celebrations in 1992, the necessary measures were taken to restore the castle and implement the project to transform it into a museum (by Eng. Luciano Grossi Bianchi and architect Roberto Melai).

The work took thirteen years, a period which allowed for comparison with the most recent anthropological research and the process of “decolonisation” of ethnographic museums within the international sphere. This provided time to reflect upon the real purpose of the museum within the local community, with multi-ethnic and multicultural new dimensions increasingly present in Genoa, and to try out a new approach to setting-up of the museum (via partnerships with other museums and with communities from outside Europe who were invited to participate in the project). New ideas for the visitor layout of the Castle also emerged, ideas which were more in tune with the architecture of the place and its ideological roots.

The project is clearly divided into two, with the house on one side and the bastion and park on the other; there is a marked distinction between the decorative excesses of the captain's house (house-museum in colonial style) and the sobriety of the military cannons, discovered during the clearance of the sixteenth-century bastion. Here, other cultures (via pre-Columbian materials and objects from Africa, North America and Oceania) express themselves through the display by the sculptor Massimo Chiappetta and by the director (since the creation of the museum) Maria Camilla De Palma.



IMG. 3.40 — Plan of the first level of the museum housed within the gunboats of the 16th century bastion of the castle. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo.



IMG. 3.41 — View of the castle from the inner park of the museum. Photo by Mariella Brenna.



IMG. 3.42 — The Turkish Parlour set up by the captain on the second floor of the castle. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo.



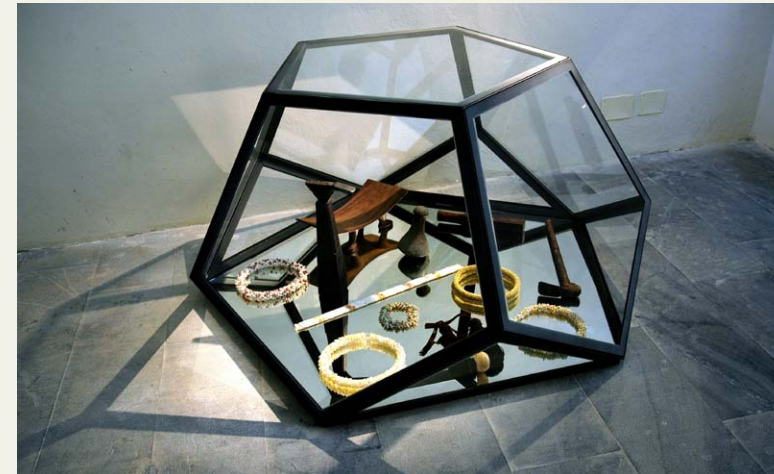
IMG. 3.43 — The Hall of Sundials. Original furnishings and the captain's instruments recreate the domestic space where the captain used to design his sundials. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo.



IMG. 3.44 — View from the balcony on the freed space between bastion and late medieval tower. Photo by Mariella Brenna.



IMG. 3.45 — View of the installations on the ground floor. Installation by Massimo Chiappetta. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo



IMG. 3.46 — Display of the collections of Eastern Polynesia, abandoning the form of the showcase as a container in vertical section. Installation by Massimo Chiappetta. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo.



IMG. 3.47 — Display of Pre-Columbian and Meso American collections. Installation exhibition as a "place of exchange" among the body of the visited objects, the body of the architectural space, the body of visitors. Installation by Massimo Chiappetta. Photo by Mariella Brenna.



IMG. 3.48 — Display of Inca collections, Peru. Installation by Massimo Chiappetta. © Photo archive Castello D'Albertis Museo delle Culture del Mondo.



→ THE MUSEUM OF WORLD CULTURES AND SHARED  
AUTHORITY BETWEEN MULTIVOICE

Since its reopening in 2004, the museum has been designed as a meeting place, providing opportunities for dialogue and exchange with other cultures, addressing issues of belonging, ownership and construction of identity, and implementing initiatives aimed at social inclusion and the participation of local and international communities.

“With this aim, [the museum] pays particular attention to public involvement and participation. The objective is to increase access to collections and knowledge of a museum designed as a public service that participates in the development of the local community and all its citizens, old and new.”

The goal is to move from a historic house museum to a communities museum—the museum as a contact zone—by means of a stunning and unique tour.

The part of the tour which focuses on the 19th-century house is linked to Captain D’Albertis’ Genoese passion for the sea (the “Captain’s Cabin”), his devotion to Christopher Columbus (the “Hall-Library of Columbus”), his curiosity for exotic and colonial conquest beyond Europe (the “Cabinet of Wonder and Curiosities” in the Columbian Room—in Wunderkammer style—and the exhibition of artifacts from New Guinea, the “Turkish Parlour”).

Passing the threshold that leads to the 16th-century bastion, the museum reveals a second itinerary; in the spaces created in the embrasures of the fortress, the museum opens itself to the cultures of the world (the “mouths” of cannons as the “voices of the people,” according to Ruth Phillips). The focus is no longer on the objects, but rather on the people. These are the stories of where the objects originated, objects which were donated and/or acquired subsequent and in addition to the captain’s original collection.

We move from the old world charm of a 19th century taxonomy to today’s multi-cultural, where historical ethnographic and archaeological objects are juxtaposed with contemporary

contexts, giving voice to the protagonists of the stories. For example, the findings of the pre-Columbian civilisations of Peru and Central America alongside today’s images testify to the continuity of pre-Columbian techniques in the production of manufactured goods. The representation of the culture of the native North Americans (Cree Plains Indians, the Hopi of Arizona) becomes the voices of their descendants—an example of the planned participation in the museum by both indigenous and immigrant communities.

“D’Albertis Castle is not only Captain D’Albertis’ home, it becomes our own house, the house of our driving forces and fascinations, our fears and exploration, of the dilemmas that conjure up our relationship with the world.”

We pass from the museum of collections to the museum of dialogue, a place of shared knowledge-building, leading to new descriptions, interpretations and presentations of the collection). The museum as institution (static museum, museum of collection and pillage, place of stored, frozen collections) becomes a museum which acts as an engine for new relationships and experiences with the community (following the breakdown of the boundaries between observer and observed.) We go from the museum as “cannibal” (of objects, peoples and cultures, for its own use and consumption) to this new, current museum, which claims a new dimension “in time” for the collections. The centrality of the human being in the object is established by bringing the collections up to and including the present.

This new perspective is also emphasised by the choice of lay-out. Without losing sight of the objects and scientific data, a lay-out was sought that emphasises the symbolic value of the objects and fosters communion with the visitor, attempting to display the objects through gathering together the multiple voices of the scene. This is made possible by the simultaneous presence of the anthropologist, the artist and the indigenous peoples themselves, and abandoning the single, authoritative voice of the anthropologist, and of the museum.

In the work of the designer Massimo Chiappetta there is a renunciation of the form of the modular uniform display case, in favour of varied solutions, designed to achieve a multiplicity of interactions between the bodies of the visitors, the objects visited and the body of the architectural space (small, intimate areas created within the gun room). For example, we begin with a moment of reflection in the first gun room through the placement of a semicircular bench, which gives us the opportunity to sit and meditate before the funereal remains of the moche civilization, which gradually open up into an X-ray of a human body containing them. The nasca ceramics are placed in a large bowl, emphasising the exchange of space between the visitor and the object visited. The precolumbian fabrics are placed underground, taking them back to their original position. The axes from Costa Rica are placed in a semicircle on busts specially made for the occasion by casting the shoulders of young South Americans, resulting in a reversal of the normal visitor-object relationship. The visitor is transformed into the object of observation. The stereotype of the appropriator perspective, typical of the West (and the omnivorous visitor), is turned on its head. Temporary exhibitions have also been held in accordance with the founding principles of the new museum. We recall, for example, the inaugural “Captain D’Albertis and Hopi (1896–2004),” and the show “Io sono Bororo—Un popolo indigeno del Brasile tra riti e futebol” (“I am Bororo—indigenous peoples from Brazil between rituals and football”) October 2004—February 2005, where the perception of the object was completely at odds with Western traditions (to smell, to hear, to use the five senses to interact with the objects). On that occasion, together with the exhibition, there was a calendar full of related activities, including workshops, meetings, parties, seminars, concerts, dances and films. The museum has recently hosted the exhibition “Bagatto-Baratto” (“The Magician-The Barter”, 2013), as part of the project “baratto poetico” (“poetic barter”) by the artist Clara Luiselli. “Baratto poetico” is an itinerant work of public art that is involv-

ing places, persons, objects, stories, travels and memories since 2009, establishing new connections among the lives of individuals crossing one another.

The exhibition aims to let people reflect on the dilemma of the migration of objects, their receptive value and their ability to change their role. The barter of a little wizard—a “Magician” which in the Tarot symbolizes the first Arcanum—is the beginning of a series of exchanges, transfers which leave traces documented by the artist with some sort of cards, showing the image of the given object, the one received in return, along with a photo of the new keeper. All the stories are narrated in a blog.

Mariella Brenna

Text translated by John Elkington

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IMG. 3.49 — Musée du quai Branly, Paris, France. Exhibition boxes of “plateau des collections” in the northern front towards the Seine. Project and exhibition design by Atelier Jean Nouvel, 2006. Photo by Filippo Bottini.

## Musée du quai Branly

Paris, France

The Musée du quai Branly (MQB) is the result of a project by President Jacques Chirac, which follows the so-called Grands Travaux in French tradition, meaning that a President of the Republic manages a large-scale project in French cultural policy. The museum, which was inaugurated in June 2006 near the Eiffel Tower, holds 300,000 items coming from the former Musée de l’Homme (200,000 items) and the Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie (25,000 items) collections. The foundation of a new institution and a new building should be analysed as part of a more general plan of significant change in the landscape of French museums. This cultural policy plan implied:

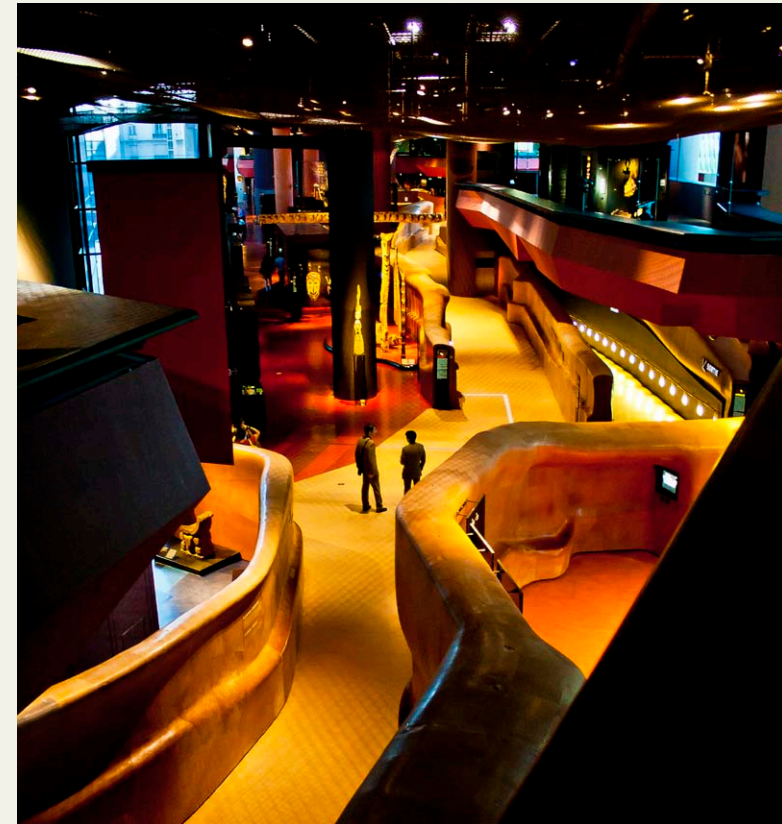
- The closure of the Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie (former Colonial Museum) at the Porte Dorée, and of the Musée National des Arts et Traditions Populaires in Boulogne;
- The restructuring of the Musée de l’Homme (to be opened in 2015) which lost its entire ethnographic collection (80% of the total), which was divided between the MQB (non-European collections) and the Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille (European collections), and
- The opening of the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration (with no collections) in the colonial building of the Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie at La Porte Dorée and the Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille (to be opened in 2013, with collections from the Musée de l’Homme and the Musée national des Arts et Traditions Populaires).

This significant transformation of French museums implied three different key issues:

- The distinction between the ethnographic collections between “Europe,” designated for the Musée des Civilisations de l’Europe et de la Méditerranée in Marseille, and “Non-Europe,” which went to the MQB in Paris;
- The separation between nature and culture with the Musée de l’Homme’s naturalist project of renovation and the foundation of the MQB (focused on art and civilizations from Africa, Asia, the Americas and Oceania), and
- The erasure of colonial memory with the foundation of the Cité Nationale de l’Histoire de l’Immigration in a former colonial museum, which represented one of the most important buildings of French colonial heritage.

The historical roots of the MQB’s foundation lie in 1990 when African art collector Jacques Kerchache signed the manifesto in the French newspaper *Libération* “Pour que les chefs d’oeuvre du monde entier naissent libres et égaux” (“all masterpieces are born free and equal,” 15/3/1990) affirming that every masterpiece from every part of the world should be represented at the Louvre and calling for the opening of a section explicitly dedicated to arts from Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas. This petition was backed by President Jacques Chirac, who then launched a commission in October 1996, chaired by Jacques Friedmann in order to officialise the opening of a new section at the Louvre and a new museum. The former was the Pavillon des Sessions des Arts Premiers, which was inaugurated in 2000 and designed by architect Jean-Michel Wilmotte. The latter was the opening of the MQB in June 2006. With a budget of €232 million, this new building was designed and constructed by architect Jean Nouvel. The garden was the work of Gilles Clément.





**IMG. 3.52** — Interior view of "plateau des collections" space, dedicated to permanent exhibitions by geography. Photo by Filippo Bottini.



**IMG. 3.53** — View of the access ramp that spirals up from reception hall to collections. Photo by Filippo Bottini.

**PREVIOUS PAGE**  
**IMG. 3.50** — Museum front on quai Branly. The glass wall of 200 meters long and 12 meters high divides the acoustic space of the museum from the city traffic. © Musée du quai Branly. Photo by Philippe Ruault.

**IMG. 3.51** — View of the administration building of the museum with the library in the middle (the facade of vertical green was designed by Patrick Blanc, the garden covering an area of 18,000 square meters by Gilles Clément). © Musée du quai Branly. Photo by Philippe Ruault.



The museum hosts a permanent exhibition in the Collections area, the so-called “Plateau des collections” and several temporary exhibitions in three spaces—the Garden Gallery, to the right of the entrance, which usually hosts 6-month temporary exhibitions, the Mezzanine East and the Mezzanine West, which both host 3-month temporary exhibitions above the Collections area. In addition, there is a multimedia space, which provides visitors with more specific information on anthropology and languages. The museum’s intention is to be seen as a cultural centre, since it also includes the Claude Lévi-Strauss Theatre (about 400 seats), a cinema (about 100 seats), the Jacques Kerchache Reading Room, a Library and three rooms and spaces for scientific and educational activities. With an average of 1.4 million visitors per year, the MQB has become the fourth French museum.

#### → A DIALOGUE OF ARTS THROUGH A DIVERSIFIED STRATEGY

To start with a critical analysis of the MQB is fundamental in examining the definition which has been chosen for it. The toponomic name “Quai Branly,” which refers to its address, avoids the problem of overcoming the distinction in French scientific categorization between ethnography and art. The MQB cannot belong either to the former or to the latter. However, it explicitly proposes something new and hybrid within French museum tradition. The legitimization to found a new institution which aims to go beyond the category of ethnography museums has been constructed around the new French concept of arts premiers. This expression is untranslatable and refers to non-European art, and is intended to replace the previous, negative category of “primitive art.” It was Jacques Kerchache who firstly introduced the term in order to overcome the evolutionist and racist tradition of primitivism, and to give value to non-European art through a universalist and aesthetic perspective (De L’Estoile 2007). This change permitted a shift from a strong tradition linked to XIX–ethnography and European colonial history to a new aesthetic paradigm. Consequently, in French public opinion, due to

the spread of the expression in the French media, arts premiers became a popular concept to refer to non-European works of art.

The change of definition is not just a simple semantic problem, but rather implies an ideological and political project of heritage redefinition and restructuring. Thanks to a new philosophy, the plan of building a new museum with substantial public funding was generally legitimised. In 1996, the museum’s intended name was “Musée des Civilisations et des Arts Premiers” but the term “premier” was considered ambiguous and too close to the word “primitive.” Consequently, in order to avoid possible controversy, the toponomic option was adopted. This paradox shows the nature of a hybrid and multi-form museum, which cannot be easily analysed within the category of ethnography or of art, but needs to be understood via the study of all its diverse activities. For these reasons, the MQB is extremely interesting from a MeLa perspective, since it is a new institution in the field of ethnography and world culture museums which intends to be highly innovative and inventive in terms of museology. It is more than a simple museum; it is a cultural centre and scientific and educational venue, with everyday cultural and scientific activities of interest to all kinds of visitors, from children to specialist scholars. In terms of the public strategies, it is worth mentioning that it successfully attracts large audiences, thanks to the use of new technologies, a dynamic practice of temporary exhibitions (more than 50 in 7 years), a rich and diversified agenda and several innovative projects outside the museum, including the suburbs, in partnership with the suburban populations of Paris.

According to the official statement concerning the mission, the MQB is the place “where cultures dialogue,” the museum being the place—at the centre of Europe—which creates the dialogue between African, Asian, American and Oceanic cultures possible. According to anthropologist Nélia Dias, the recognition of non-European peoples, discriminated against for many years, occurs within the framework of art, to the extent that the dialogue of cultures is made possible through a dialogue of

arts (2008). Consequently, the valorisation of an equal dignity of peoples is linked to a form of aesthetic recognition, to the extent that objects play the role of “ambassadors,” acting as a bridge between visitors and the peoples who produced them—as stated by Stéphane Martin, the museum’s director. Nevertheless, giving value to the populations and cultures represented through a form of universalist aesthetic recognition—which is symbolised by Jacques Kerchache’s slogan—lacks a historical perspective. According to some criticism one should question the issue of an aesthetic approach, which cannot acknowledge the history of collections and the colonial legacy, (See: B. de L’Estoile, 2007; J. Clifford, 2007; S. Price, 2007). Thus, the MQB has been widely criticised by scholars and anthropologists, above all for its permanent exhibition. The most common reasons are: 1) the lack of historical perspective; 2) the ethnocentric and primitivist approach; 3) the erasure of ethnology as a core discipline of the institution. Nevertheless, little research has been carried out on temporary exhibitions or on the cultural activities the museum promotes.

Dominic Thomas, Chair of the Department of French & Francophone studies at UCLA, interprets the MQB message according to four topics: reparation, globalisation, cultural diversity and aesthetic experience, (2008: 3). Art, for its universal function, should be the symbolic ambassador permitting cultures and peoples to dialogue, as we can understand by reading Chirac’s opening speech on June 2006:

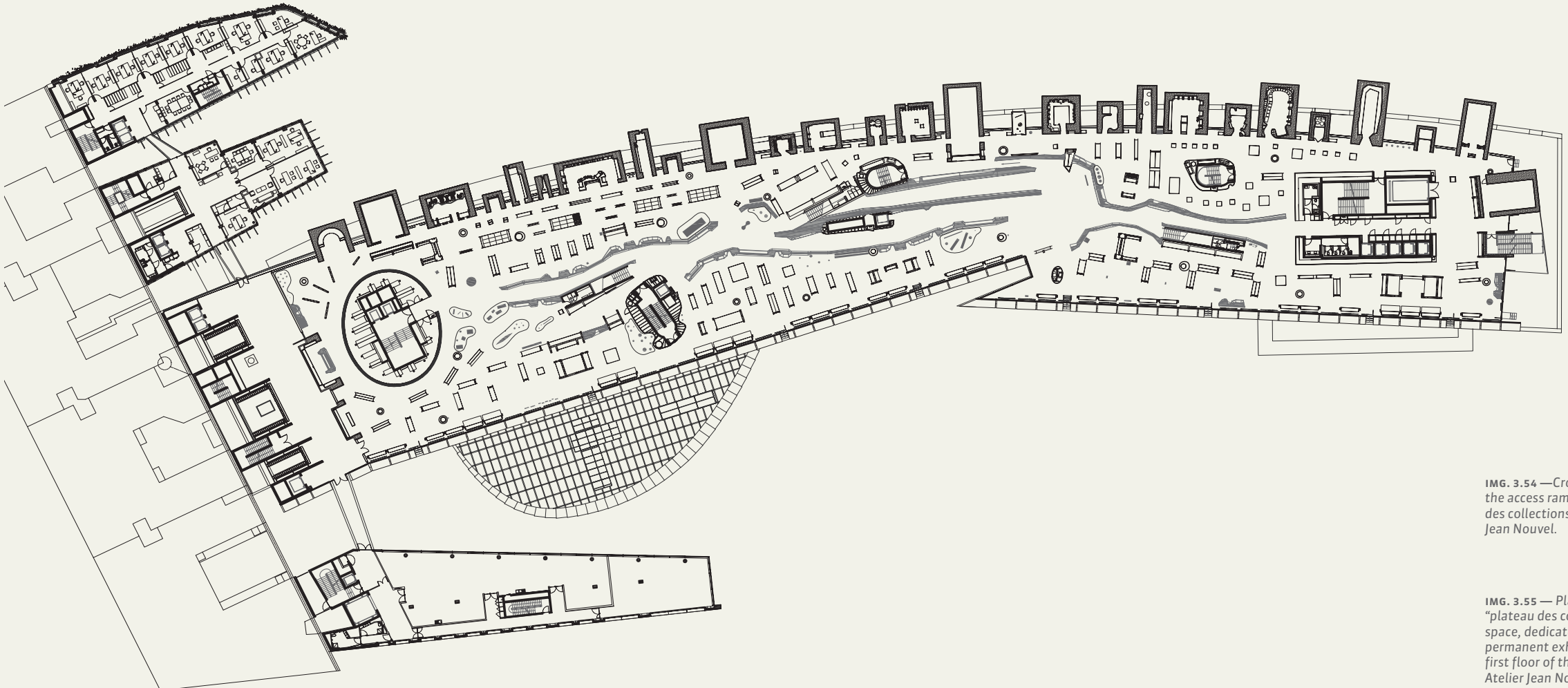
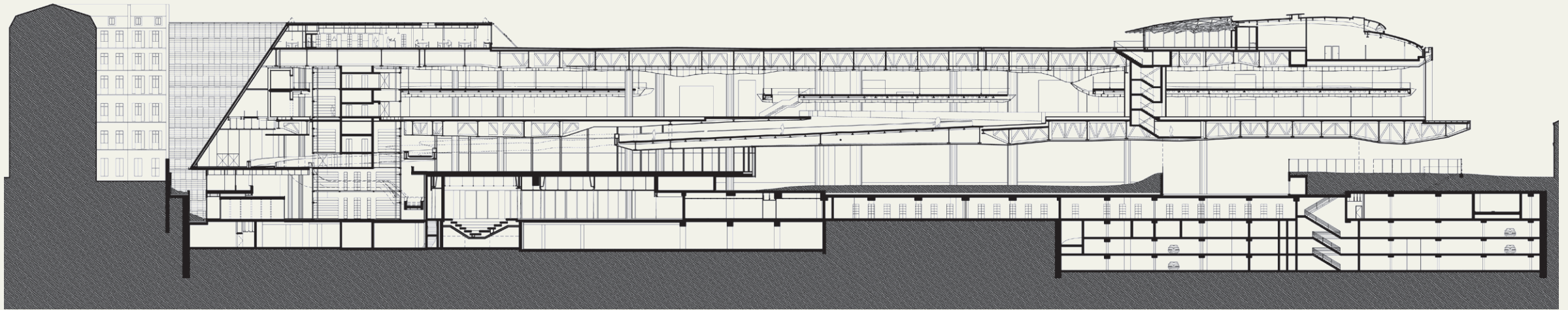
There is no hierarchy between arts and cultures nor between peoples. It is above all the equal dignity of world cultures, which founds the Quai Branly museum via a new cultural institution focusing on other cultures, the French establishment wants to send a universal egalitarian message, through a universal approach to art, which needs to be analysed within the framework of French specificity, (Todorov, 1989). To this extent, Dias points out that the link between art universalism and cultural difference at the MQB is founded on a republican and secular interpretation of cultural pluralism. Cultural egalitarianism is thus made possible

under the flag of aesthetic universalism, which levels cultural particularities, (2008, 136–143). This approach calls into question, on the one hand, the issue of the return of objects and, on the other, the claims made by communities for special treatment of sacred items and human remains. As Dias stresses, by quoting the museological project director Germain Viatte, the MQB fosters *laïcité* as a museum value, along with citizenship and universalism. Hence, according to her, the dialogue of cultures is a republican and secular dialogue, which implies a particular interpretation of cultural difference.

Besides the permanent collection area, which has been strongly criticised for the lack of historical perspective on the origin of collections and the adoption of a French monologue on other cultures instead of a real “dialogue of cultures,” an examination of the highly intense and diversified strategy of temporary exhibitions should be carried out. Since the opening the museum, more than 50 exhibitions approaching different topics have been held.

- A specific geographical area or culture (from Africa, Asia, Americas, Oceania);
- Archaeology (i.e. Teotihuacan 2009, Maya 2011, etc.);
- Anthropology, (i.e. La Fabrique des images 2010, Les Maîtres du désordre 2012, etc.);
- Contemporary art (i.e. Romuald Hazoumé 2006, Rouge Kwoma 2009, Aux sources de la peinture aborigène 2012, etc.);
- History (i.e. Présence Africaine 2009, Exhibitions. L’invention du sauvage 2011, etc.);
- Thematic / “dialogue of cultures” (i.e. D’un regard, l’autre 2006, Tarzan! 2009, Planète métises 2009, L’Orient des femmes vu par Christian Lacroix 2011, etc.);
- Music (i.e. Le siècle du jazz 2009, etc);
- Photography (the most important is Photoquai—a biennial exhibition of non-European photographers along the riverside in front of the museum).

Before accessing the “plateau des collection”



IMG. 3.54 — Cross-section of the access ramp to "plateau des collections." © Atelier Jean Nouvel.

IMG. 3.55 — Plan of the "plateau des collections" space, dedicated to permanent exhibitions on first floor of the museum. © Atelier Jean Nouvel.



IMG. 3.56 — Detail of Oceania exhibition. Photo by Filippo Bottini.



IMG. 3.57 — Detail of the scenographic installation of the Oceania collection. Photo by Filippo Bottini.



via a ramp, there is the contemporary installation *The River*, created by Charles Sandison (March 9th 2010), and commissioned by the museum in order to allow visitors to “immerse themselves in a river of moving words projected with varying rhythms and concentrations.” This exemplifies the case for using new media and sophisticated software which creates a text based on the derivation of the contents of the permanent collection in order to interact with visitors and introduce them to the visit. The Collections Area follows a geographical division providing visitors with an “all-in-one geographical journey including 3,500 objects from the four corners of the globe”: Oceania, Asia, Africa and the Americas.

The Collection Area in itself seems to express a single voice, based on a universalist and aesthetic perspective, whereas the museum as a whole provides visitors with different narratives depending on the activity selected. Firstly, besides the Collection Area there is a Multimedia Centre, which enables visitors to deepen their knowledge of collections through the use of computer screens and interactive alcoves (23 consultation terminals). Moreover, the MQB is very disability-aware and all collection and exhibition texts are available in Braille.

Along with the visits, different cultural activities linked to temporary exhibitions take place in different areas of the museum, such as the Calude Lévi-Strauss theatre, the cinema, the Jacques Kerchache reading room and the workshop rooms, which are basically designed for children and families. One of the most important examples, the Université Populaire, offers several conferences for the general public held by intellectuals and specialists on the history of colonisation or on non-European cultures. In addition, in order to attract young audiences, the museum organises the *Before*s, which are informal meetings with performances, shows and events.

On the research and teaching side, the museum has an impressive policy of international symposia, conferences, research grants and partnerships with ten French universities that deliver

lessons inside the museum. A well-stocked library with more than 250,000 documents and 600,000 iconographic documents offers free access to scholars and students.

Finally, in order to reach out to different audiences living in the suburbs, and thus far from the museum, several “Outside The Wall” activities are organised. For example, in 2011, on the occasion of the exhibition “Dogon,” the museum formed a partnership with the City Council of Montreuil, which hosts the largest Malian community in Europe. Several cultural activities linked to the exhibition and Malian culture were held in Montreuil and, via collaboration with a local transport company, free tickets for both transport and a museum visit were offered to inhabitants of Montreuil; for most of them this was their first visit to a museum, or even their first visit to the centre of Paris.

We can conclude by saying that it would be more suitable to consider MQB to be a case study for a new museology, based on the concept of cultural centre and entertainment rather than simply traditional museum, in order to comprehend its richness and complexity.

Camila Pagani

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IMG. 3.58 — Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Architectural project by Schneider & Sendelbach, 2010. Exhibition design by Atelier Brückner. >>

## Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum—Kulturen der Welt

Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum—Cultures of the World, Cologne, Germany

The Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum—Kulturen der Welt is a newly built municipal museum owned by the city of Cologne. It is located in Neumarkt, the new cultural district of the city, and was inaugurated in 2010.

The original Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum was founded in 1901 and opened in 1906, and it was located in the district of Ubierring, in south Cologne. The original core of the museum was the private collection of German traveller Wilhelm Joest (Cologne 1852-1897), which consisted of over 3,500 objects collected all over the world. When Wilhelm Joest died, the collection was inherited by his sister Adele and her husband Eugen Rautenstrauch, who later donated it to the city of Cologne. Moreover, Adele financed the building of the museum, in memory of her brother and her spouse, who had died in 1900.

Under the supervision of the ethnographer Wilhelm Foy, the collection grew for over a quarter of a century, constantly acquiring new donations from its citizens (which still keep coming and continue to enrich it). Indeed, the collection presently consists of 60,000 objects from Oceania, Africa, Asia and the Americas, as well as 40,000 books and specialised journals and 100,000 historical photographs.

The museum was severely damaged by bombings in World War II and, as a result, it turned out to be inadequate to accommodate the whole collection and its rich programme of activities, despite being expanded during the sixties. Floods of the river Rhine in 1993 and 1995 irretrievably damaged the building and its storage areas, making it essential to construct a new building.

In 1995 the council passed a resolution for the construction of a new building. In 1996 archi-

itects, Schneider & Sendelbach won the international competition. The project provided for a budget of €66.7 million, €18.9 million of which was granted by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia and €5.1 million from the funds for urbanisation plans (Städtebauförderungsmittel).

In 2002 the old Kunsthalle and the Josef-Haubrich-Hof were demolished, and the new building started to be built in that area. The work was completed between 2005 and 2010. It is at the same time a simple but monumental concrete structure, with the surface covered in clincher. It is made up of four volumes connected by glazed passages. The display rooms of the museum and of the theme-based exhibitions are located in the two largest buildings. In the eastern building, there are offices and accessory spaces (restaurant, shop, reception and information point). The bookshop, the reading room and the Junior Museum are located in the fourth building.

The Rautenstrauch Joest-Museum—Kulturen der Welt has once again gained a prominent position in North Rhine-Westphalia. Indeed, it is a unique institution of its kind, with varied programmes of exhibitions and events to spread culture all over the world. As Jutta Engelhard states in the introduction to the book, *People in their Worlds: The New Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World*, the educational mission of this museum becomes more and more important in dealing with current topics and problems, such as living together in a multicultural society because, only by knowing other cultures and other lifestyles, can we foster mutual understanding, respect, and tolerance among people.

In 2012 Rautenstrauch Joest-Museum—Kulturen der Welt won the Council of Europe Museum Prize 2012. The Council of Europe Museum Prize is awarded to museums which promote respect for human rights and democ-

>> An Indonesian Rice Barn in the foyer is the hallmark of the new museum. It exemplifies the various aspects of the theme-based exhibition "People in their Worlds" for the new Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Martin Claßen and Arno Jansen, Cologne.



IMG. 3.59 — Exterior view of the new museum. Photo by Rheinisches Bildarchiv Cologne / Wolfgang F. Meier.



IMG. 3.60 — Section “Prologue.” Theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” The theme-based exhibition starts with a media-installation of people from all over the world welcoming the visitor with their special forms of greetings. © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Atelier Brückner.



racy, aim a bridging cultures and place their collections in the European perspective. This prestigious award is intended to highlight the need to preserve and promote the European cultural heritage as a factor uniting the Council of Europe's 47 member states. It involves recognition of the excellence displayed by the winning museums in the approach they take to museum work, fully complying with the EMYA criteria.

#### → SPACES FOR A COMPARATIVE APPROACH OF CULTURES

The first element that is worth noting in the critical analysis of Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum concerns its designated category. It is no longer a museum of ethnography, but a museum of “cultures of the world.” The addition of the phrase “Kulturen der Welt” (cultures of the world) to the original name of the museum “Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum” (which maintains its collections' colonial legacy in the names of its founders) is indicative of the wish to break with a hundred years of history of the museum and of the new interpretation given to the collections and to their role within the new spaces and the new museum set-up. Collections are no longer presented according to their geographical origin, but following the theme-based presentation “People in Their Worlds,” which was entrusted to Atelier Bruckner from Stuttgart after winning an international competition.

The museum no longer applies the traditional approach of museums of ethnography, which usually represent and put together various cultures from different habitats, regions, countries, and even whole continents, often across various centuries. The new set-up proposes a new concept of museum, made of emblematic examples, with which different “ways of living” are presented across space and time, as variations of man's universal questions in various cultures, displayed one next to the other or juxtaposed or interspersed with references to contemporaneity. Such an approach makes it possible to put “our” culture in the “right” perspective and to provide visitors with continual comparisons. This aim is achieved through a peculiar use of set design.

The exhibition covers 3,600 square metres on three levels and a series of spatial “scenographic” narrations is revealed, which allows visitors to shift their interpretative focus, room after room.

In the entrance foyer there is a large Indonesian rice barn, which is the symbol of the museum. Visitors start their museum journey by walking through the music room. Music, indeed, is the universal language of humanity, and in this room musicians play the instruments of the Javanese tradition (gamelan). They then access the rooms whose topics revolve around two overarching theme complexes of the main theme-based presentation “People in their Worlds,” namely, “Comprehending the World” and “Shaping the World.” It is possible to walk through the two overarching theme complexes, as visitors can pass through the theatrical spaces delimited by thresholds and doors.

It is worth briefly mentioning the topics which are proposed in the permanent exhibition of the museum. The first overarching theme complex “Comprehending the World,” is devoted to four different levels of encounter with different cultures from a European perspective:

- Encounter and Appropriation (Crossing Borders: 19th century travellers embodied the desire of educated middle-class men to broaden their horizons through cultural encounters far from their home countries).
- The Distorted View: Prejudice (Prejudice is necessary to integrate the “other” into our own view of the world and, at the same time, to dissociate ourselves from the “other.” Prejudice often makes us re-evaluate ourselves).
- The World in a Showcase: The Museum (Museums of ethnology reflect the encounter with other cultures in their collections. They preserve and study artefacts of societies from all over the world and convey ways of looking at other cultures with their exhibitions).
- A Matter of Perception and Opinion: Art (The purely aesthetic perception of artefacts is one of the possible ways of approaching “other” cultures. In this view,



influenced by the European concept of art, the original functional context of the work recedes into the background).

“Shaping the World,” on the other hand, proposes a multitude of insights on different “ways of living” across time and space (“living spaces,” “clothes and adornments,” “death and the afterlife,” “religions” and “rituals”).

It starts with: “Living Spaces – Ways of Living: Living Places” (Different environments influence different ways of living and dwellings. Environment forges identity).

The next four sections are divided into:

- The Body as a Stage: Clothes and Adornments (People use clothes and ornaments to position themselves in society. Their artistic design can convey multiple meanings).
- The Staged Farewell: Death and the Afterlife (Death affects everybody and it calls for a critical situation to be overcome within the community).
- Diversity of Belief: Religions. (Religion is the fundamental expression of world views. Human beings have always attempted to find answers to existential questions).
- Intermediary Worlds: Rituals (People celebrate religious rituals in order to propitiate supernatural powers. On these occasions, masks often play an important role).

The main narration of the theme-based presentation “People in their Worlds” tells a story that has its own overall consistency, through a multitude of points of view. Each thematic section has been individually designed according to its content within a wider context.

The museum faces the question of intercultural communication in the overarching theme complex “Comprehending the World,” presenting the “European” point of view and, at the same time, criticising the traditional approach of museums of ethnology.

The complex starts by proposing the theme “Encounter and Appropriation,” using the ma-

terials collected by Joest and other travellers during the colonial epoch.

It subsequently highlights the resulting distorted view of the “other,” focusing on the various “prejudices,” stereotypes and clichés of the western man as he encounters “other” cultures.

The section “The World in a Showcase,” and the section on art, underline how the western concept of museum and of art influenced the aesthetic perception of artefacts, so that people consider such ethnographic objects interpreting them as they wish, attributing to them different meanings from their original ones.

“Shaping the World” presents a multifaceted reality. It fosters “other” and parallel interpretations, showing ways of living in different cultures across space and time. This implies a “comparative” cultural approach capable of emphasising the value of other cultures and stimulating dialogue. The references to our own culture in this comparative insight contribute to making the European perspective relative. Narration no longer has a local-national scope, as it originally did (with Joest and the other travellers), but it is much wider.

Special “Blickpunkte” help visitors dig deeper into the most debated topics with the aid of multimedia applications. Visitors can visit the museum library, which is open to the public, and access 40,000 volumes and specialised journals, which can be read in its beautiful reading room.

The “Junior Museum,” which is not part of the main theme-based presentation, allows children to follow specific “exploratory” paths, focusing especially on initiation and socialisation rituals in five different countries.

Mariella Brenna

Text translated by Ilaria Parini

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IMG. 3.61 — Section “The world in a showcase: the museum.” Theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Atelier Brückner / Michael Jungblut.



IMG. 3.62 — Section “Living spaces—ways of living.” Theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Atelier Brückner / Michael Jungblut.



IMG. 3.63 — Masks in section “Between worlds: rituals.” Theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Atelier Brückner / Michael Jungblut.

IMG. 3.64 — longitudinal section of the central space of the foyer. © Atelier Brückner /Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World.

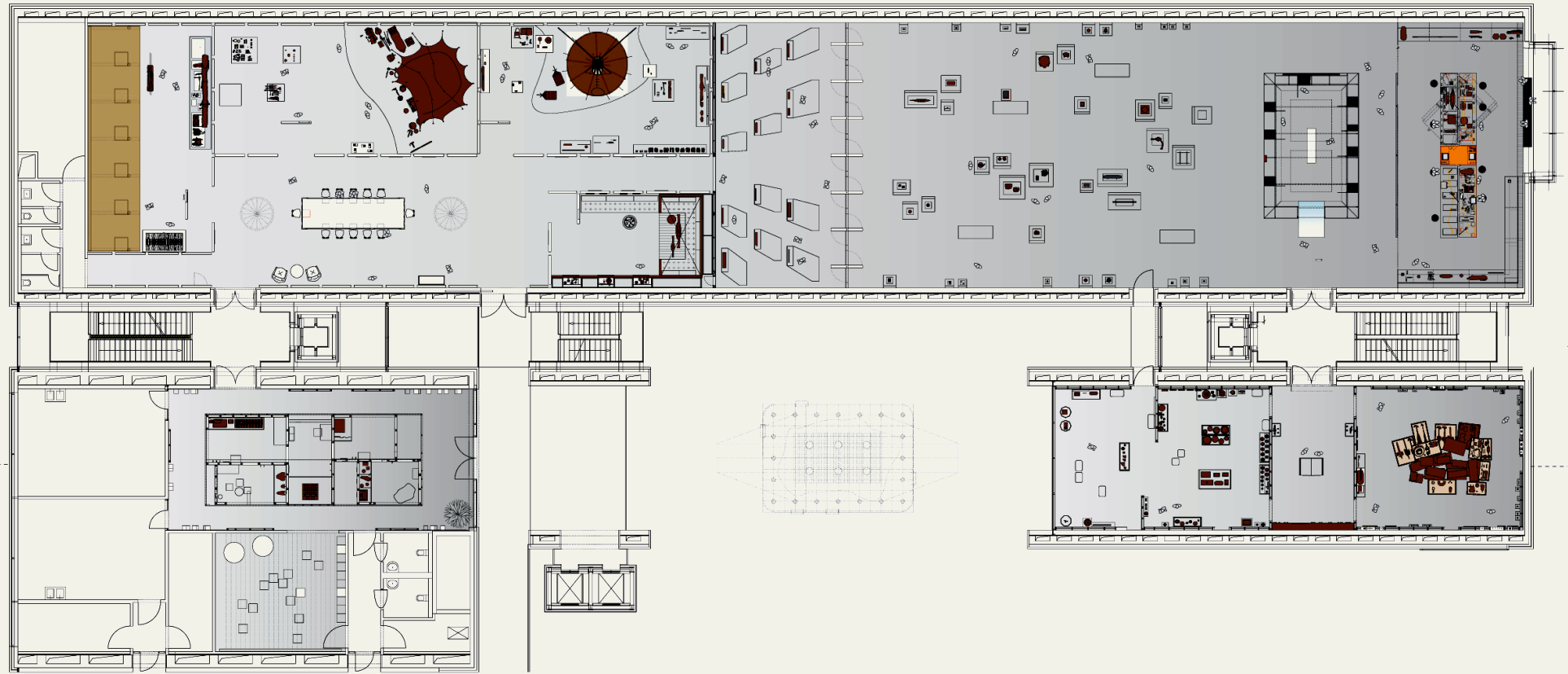


IMG. 3.65 — Second floor plan. Sections about “Shaping the World” themes. © Atelier Brückner /Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World.

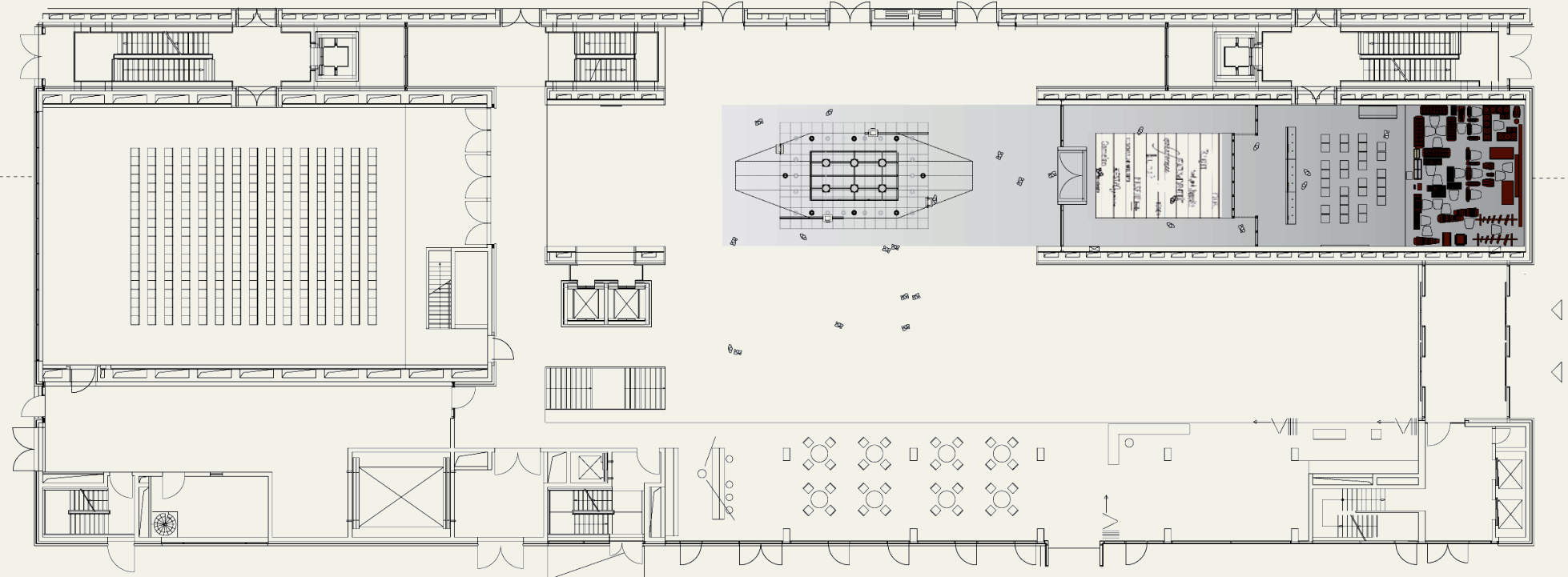




**IMG. 3.66** — First floor plan. Anticlockwise from below to above, sequence of scenographies for: “Encounter and Appropriation: Crossing Borders”; “The Distorted view: Prejudices”; “The world in showcase: Museum”; “A Matter of perception and opinion: art”; “Living spaces— Ways of living. Living Places”. © Atelier Brückner / Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World.



**IMG. 3.67** — Plan of the foyer with the hallmark of the new museum: the Rice Barn. © Atelier Brückner / Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World.



**IMG. 3.68** — Section “Creating the right mood: music.” Theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Atelier Brückner / Michael Jungblut.



**IMG. 3.69** — View of the section “Encounter and appropriation: crossing boundaries—Max von Oppenheim / Explorer, Collector, Diplomat.” Theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Martin Claßen and Arno Jansen, Cologne.



**IMG. 3.70** — View of the section “Matter of perception and opinion: art.” Theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Martin Claßen and Arno Jansen, Cologne.



**IMG. 3.71** — Visitor in section “Between worlds: rituals,” theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Atelier Brückner / Michael Jungblut.



**IMG. 3.72** — View of the section “The staged farewell: death and the afterlife,” theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Martin Claßen and Arno Jansen, Cologne.



**IMG. 3.73** — Children in the section “The staged farewell: death and the afterlife,” theme-based sequence “Man in his Worlds.” © Rautenstrauch-Joest Museum—Cultures of the World. Photo by Atelier Brückner / Nikolai Wolff.







IMG. 3.74 — Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée, Marseille, France. Project by Rudy Ricciotti, 2013. View of the museum northern front and the footbridge towards the Fort Saint Jean. Photo by Lisa Ricciotti.

## Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et de la Méditerranée

Museum of Civilisations from Europe and the Mediterranean, Marseille, France, 2013

The Museum of civilisations for Europe and the Mediterranean (MUCEM) in Marseille is the fruit of the decentralization and transformation of the Museum of the Popular Arts and Traditions of Paris (MNATP), from where the collection originates, together with part of European collection of the Trocadero's Musée de l'Homme.

The MNATP was founded in Paris in 1937 as the French section of the Musée de l'Homme and excelled, under the leadership of Georges Henri Rivière, in the fields of ethnographic, historical and archeological research. In 1972 MNATP moved to Bois de Boulogne into a building designed by the architect Jean Dubuisson, where a new gallery for specialists was opened focusing on popular French culture and technological processes in preindustrial times, while the gallery on material and immaterial, created by Rivière in collaboration with Claude Lévi-Strauss, was opened to the public in 1975. In 2000 the decision was taken to transfer MNATP to Marseille and to transform it into MUCEM. In 2002 the scientific and cultural project for the new museum was published under the direction of Michel Colardelle; as result of "Reinventer un musée" acts, it suggested to overcome the national borders and open the museum to Europe, giving an international dimension to this institution.

The main site chosen for the MUCEM new building was a former Marseille port terminal (J4 pier) together with the restoration of near Fort Saint Jean (located at the entrance of the old port). Another site was identified in the Belle de Mai district for the storage and study of the reserve collections: the Centre for Conservation and Resources (CCR).

Since 2003 temporary exhibitions were held at Fort Saint Jean, anticipating the types of themes that the public will experience in the new museum: a dozen shows with around 300,000

visitors in total (up to 2010). In 2004 Rudy Ricciotti won the architectural competition for the Fort Saint Jean and J4 pier projects, and Corinne Vezzoni the other one for the Centre for Conservation and Resources. In 2006 the financial contract was signed with the funding coming from the State and local authorities (the City of Marseille, the Bouches-du-Rhône Department and the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Region). In 2007 the "Espace Georges Henri Rivière" was opened in Fort Saint Jean. In 2009 Bruno Suzzarelli replaced Michel Colardelle as museum president and then Zeev Gourarier was appointed as new director of the scientific and cultural project. In 2009 works started on the restoration of Fort Saint Jean and the construction of the new building at J4 pier, while in 2010 works began on the CCR.

Agency APS was awarded by the contract for the setup to garden of the land surrounding Fort Saint Jean. In 2012 the work for the construction of CCR was completed and it was used to stock and catalog the collections coming from previous Paris institutions. This was a huge project and, in fact, the first time that the entire collection of a national museum has been relocated.

In June 2013, during the events of Marseille European Capital of Culture, the new museum was officially opened.

The museum is located in three sites: the new building at J4 pier, Fort Saint Jean, and the Centre for Conservation and Resources (CCR).

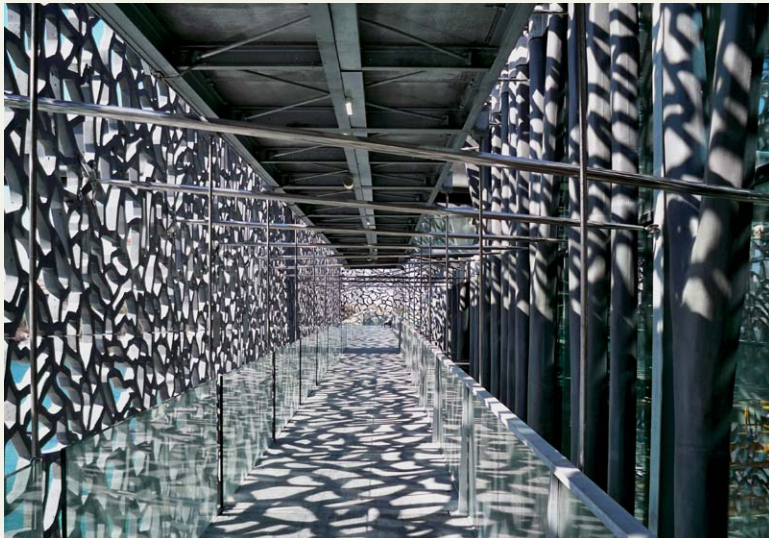
Rudy Ricciotti's new concrete building at j4 pier is the centre piece of MUCEM and boasts two exhibition floors (the reference exhibition of the Mediterranean on the first floor and temporary exhibitions on the second). In addition there are areas for children, an auditorium, a bookshop, offices, and a restaurant on the



**IMG. 3.75** — View of MuCEM southern front from the “Villa Méditerranée” International Centre for dialogue and discussion in the Mediterranean (Stefano Boeri architects 2013). Photo by Mariella Brenna.



**IMG. 3.76** — View of the ramp that goes up from ground floor to the terrace. A public path connects the museum and the fort and, using a similar footbridge, the fort and the Panier district. Photo by Luca Basso Peressut.



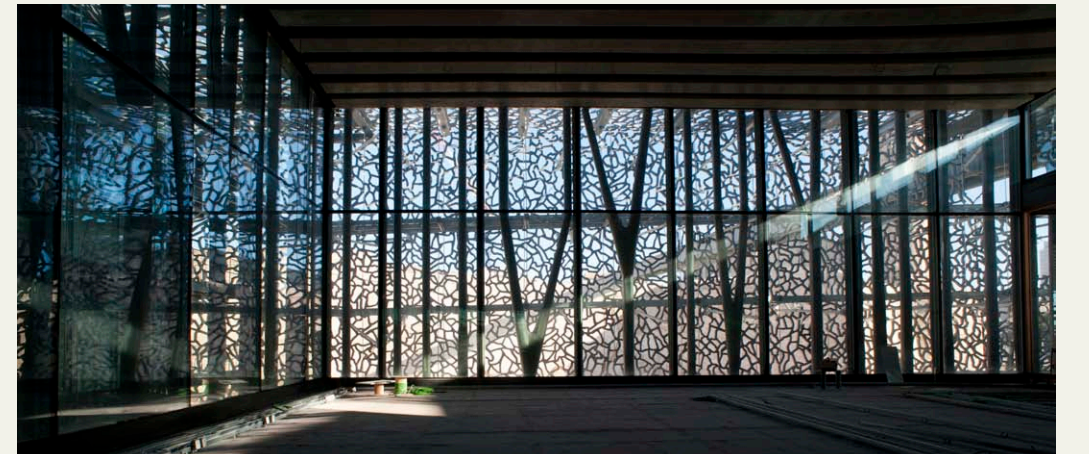
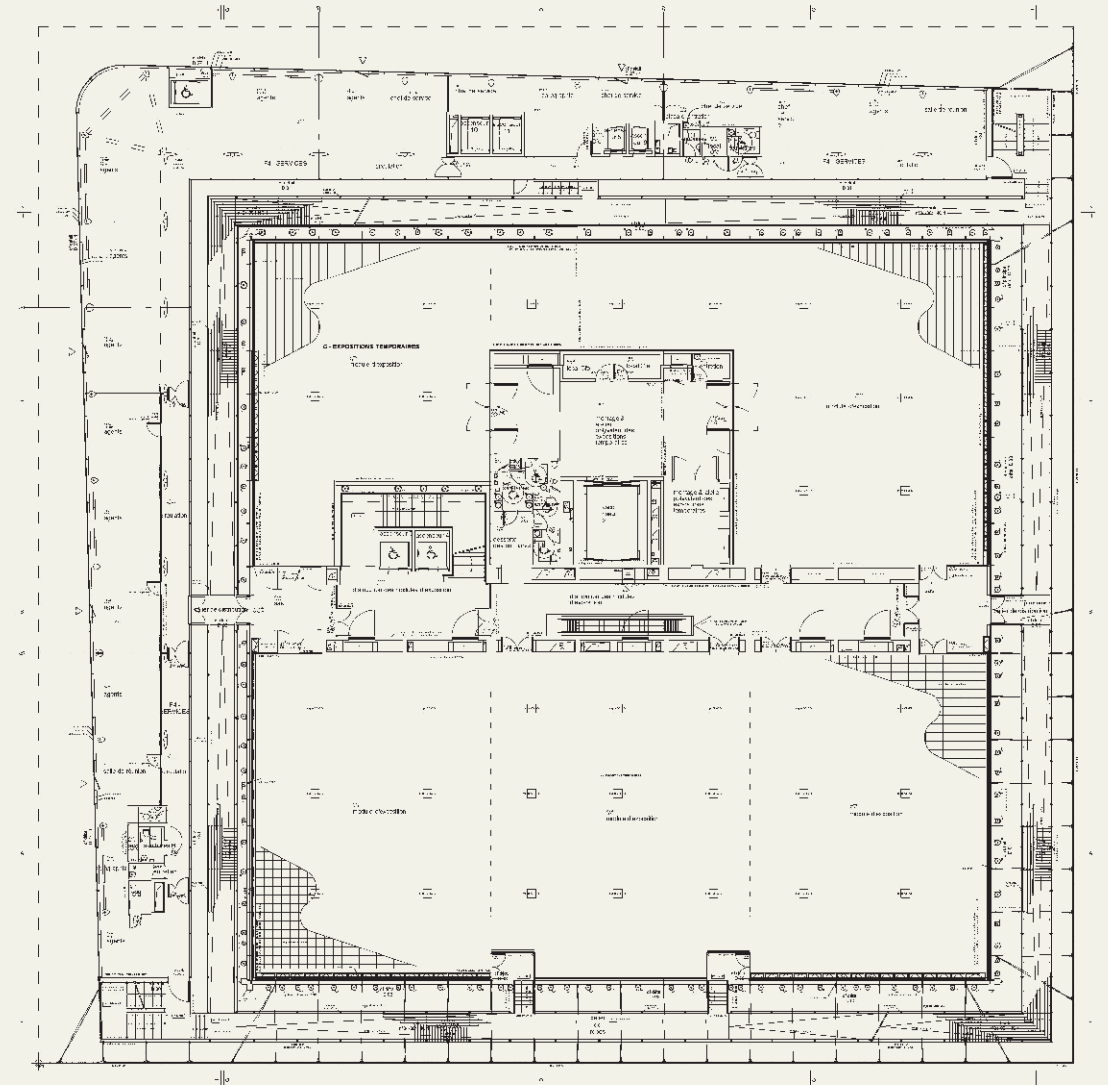
**IMG. 3.77** — View of MuCEM southern front and Fort Saint Jean footbridge. Photo by Luca Basso Peressut.



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**IMG. 3.78** — First floor plan, used for temporary exhibitions © Rudy Ricciotti.

**IMG. 3.79** — Interior view of ground floor before the installation of the “Galerie de la Méditerranée.” © Photo Lisa Ricciotti.





**IMG. 3.80** — View of an “exposition de reference.” “Jerusalem Une ville sainte, trois révélations.” General Commissioner of the “Galerie de la Méditerranée”: Zeev Gourarier. Scenography: Studio Adeline Rispal (Adeline Rispal et Sonia Glasberg). Photo by Mariella Brenna.



**IMG. 3.81** — Exhibition “At the Bazaar of Gender. Feminine – Masculine in the Mediterranean” (2013.6.7 – 2014.1.6). General Commissioner: Denis Chevallier; Artistic Advisor: Patrick Rogier; Scenography: Didier Faustino – Bureau des Mésarchitectures. Photo by Luca Basso Peressut.



**IMG. 3.82** — View of an “exposition de reference.” “L’invention du citoyen et le développement de la démocratie.” The third section of the “Galerie” displays the notion of citizenship in the European and Mediterranean societies, from Athenian democracy to contemporary defense of citizen and human rights. Scenography: Studio Adeline Rispal (Adeline Rispal et Sonia Glasberg). Photo by Mariella Brenna.



**IMG. 3.83** — “Jerusalem Une ville sainte, trois révélations.” New installation of Michelangelo Pistoletto work: “Luogo di raccoglimento e di preghiera”, Michelangelo Pistoletto, 1997-2000-2013 (mirrors, rope, metal frame, fabrics, objects representing the four faiths and agnosticism); in the middle the work: “Il Metro cubo d’infinito” 1966 Cittadellarte- Fondazione Pistoletto, Biella, Italy. Photo by Mariella Brenna.





panoramic terrace with breathtaking views of Marseille. From here, using the new footbridge, you can reach Fort Saint Jean, where you can find selections from the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions collections; there is also a new promenade along the fortress wall with a Mediterranean garden (“jardin des migrations”) and a new connection to the historic district of Panier, which was home of many waves of immigrations in different ages.

The CCR is located in another part of Marseille near the Saint Charles railway station on a former military site (“caserne de Muy”) and it is intended for the conservation and academic study of the collections by researchers, but it can be used by the public on demand by reservation.

The new building, designed by architect Corinne Vezzoni and associated AURA agency, appears as another concrete monolith, providing protected spaces for the documentation collections, the scientific archives, the workshops and the library for researchers.

The areas on three levels are partitioned in modules, so that the collections can be organized and conserved according to their size, material and specific environmental needs.

The areas for object takeover and processing—such as packing/unpacking, quarantine room and objects preparation for exhibitions—are located near the delivery space.

The section covering the history of the museum pays homage to the memory of Georges Henri Rivière, recreating the layout of the gallery of the Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions.

#### → “CONTACT ZONE” OF THE MEDITERRANEAN CULTURE

With the transfer to Marseille the first major museum focused on Mediterranean culture has found home, thanks to a comparative and multi-disciplinary vision, where European voices but also those of countries across the sea can be listened and can be compared.

From this point of view, Marseille is a fitting choice and location, because of its long history

of repeated and perennial contacts between the two shores of the Mediterranean.

The principal sites of MUCEM (J4 pier and the Fort Saint Jean) are particularly symbolic and symbolism is emphasized by the architecture: the fort, which for centuries protected the old port, and the pier, where ships from all over the world landed. The fort and the pier areas are now connected by a footbridge that stands between the sky and the sea, like a new horizon. This new horizon links the fort and the pier and metaphorically the north and the south shores of the Mediterranean.

The building at the J4 pier presents itself to the world with a pre-compressed concrete external skeleton, like a new cliff/fortress on the seafront, living in the elements of the place and opening up new views of the coast, the port, the fort and the city, as the corner stone of a greater urban renewal project for Marseille, European Capital of Culture 2013.

The reference exhibition on the first floor (“Galerie de la Méditerranée”) contains selected objects from the museum collections and from the most important museums of France and the world, giving an experience that will change and evolve over time, reflecting the unique Mediterranean cultures in all their peculiarities and complexities. Therefore not only one identity is displayed, but a world-culture, made of multiple and supra-national identities.

Four themes have been identified to explain the history of the Mediterranean through its various landscapes and cities and, at the same time, they help us to understand the present realities, the environment, the religions, the rights of human being and the relationships with “the other.”

The four themes are:

- L'invention et l'extension des agricultures
- Une Ville Sainte, trois révélations
- Citoyens et droits de l'Homme
- Au-delà du monde connu.

“L'invention et l'extension des agricultures” looks at the history of agriculture in the Medi-

terranean, an area characterized by the cultivation of wheat and olives, elements that are essential to the food culture of this part of the world (“the mediterranean diet”).

“Une Ville Sainte, trois révélations” is about Jerusalem (the city of three revelations, the birthplace of the three great monotheistic world religions), documenting with many relevant objects, together with contemporary works of art, the cultural identity of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

“Citoyens et droits de l'Homme” shows how citizenship and democracy are universal values, born and fostered on the shores of the Mediterranean (i.e. the citizens of ancient Athens, the merchants of Italian maritime republics, the republicans of Barcelona) and right up to the most recent revolutions in the name of the human rights (the Tunisian blogger).

“Au-delà du monde connu” shows how the Mediterranean, home of the 7 wonders of the known world, is also the place of departure and return for great voyages towards other worlds (pilgrimages, explorations, long distance trade).

On the second floor we find the temporary exhibitions. The themes chosen for the opening days are as follows:

- Le Noir et le Bleu, un rêve méditerranéen
- Au bazar du genre, féminin/masculin.

“Le Noir et le Bleu” is about the stories and journeys, from Napoleon to today, of various dreamers (artists, conquerors, travelers) with their lights and shadows (Bonaparte and Volney, Abd el-Kader, Tahtawi, Lord Byron and Winckelman, Kavafis, Taha Hussein, Garcia Lorca etc...). For too long we only spoke of the dreams of one shore of the Mediterranean, but this show aims to honor both sides of the coin. Using documents, rare books and manuscripts, archive images, the works of artists such as Goya, Courbet, Maillol, Picasso, Masson, Pistoletto, etc... the multifaceted story of the Mediterranean is told.

“Au bazar du genre, féminin/masculin” explains

the question of cultural identity from the point of view of gender, with a journey through the numerous ways of being a man or a woman in today's Mediterranean societies.

The Museum at Fort Saint Jean preserves the memories of the MNATP, presenting it in a selection that will rotate every three–five years.

The selections are organized on the theme of “festivals”.

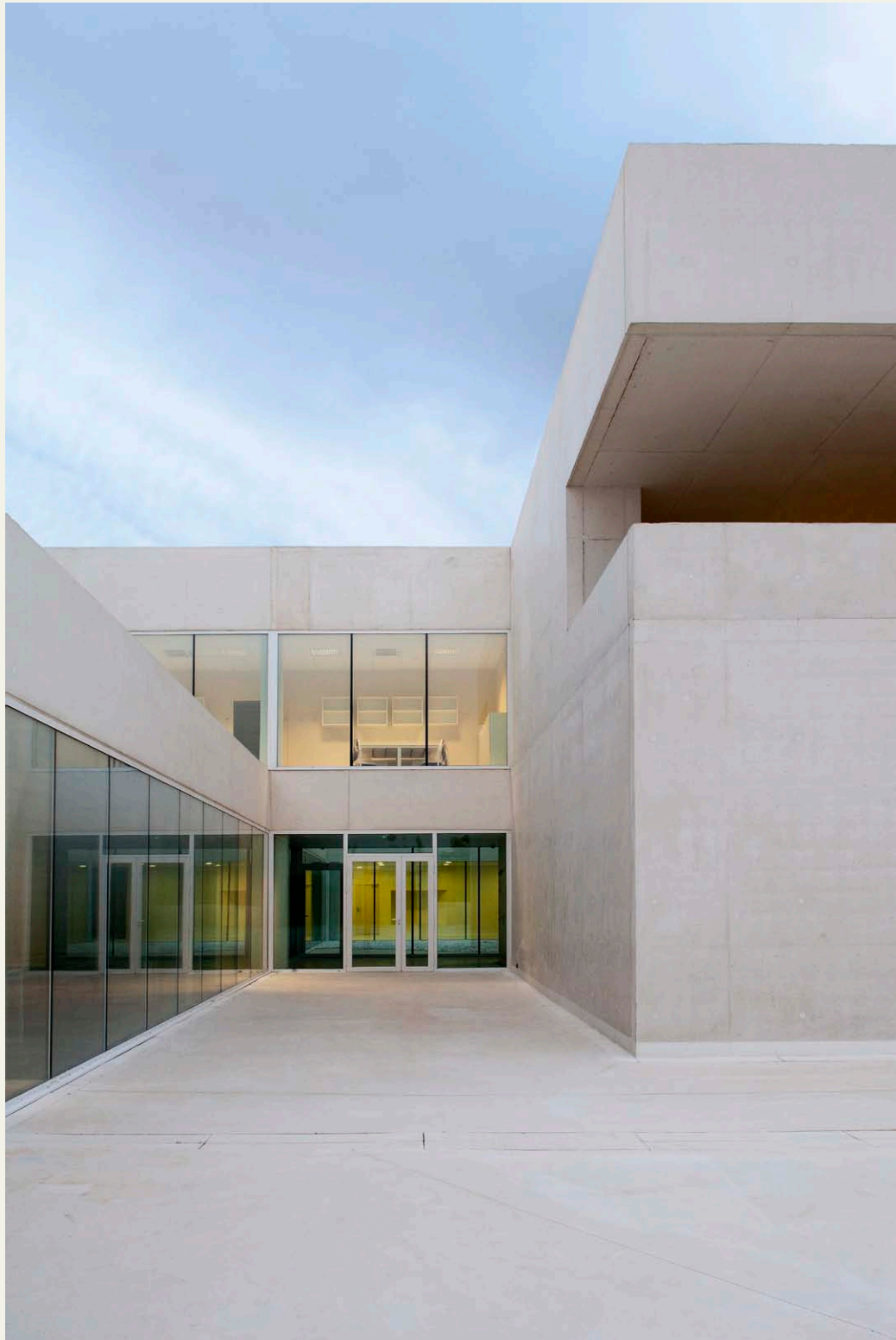
- The festival of everyone, in the fort chapel, shows the rites of passage from one age to another (birth, puberty, marriage, career and funeral).
- The cyclical festival of the annual calendar in the upper gallery of the fort (winter solstice, spring equinox, summer solstice, autumn equinox, carnival).
- The invention of entertainment in the lower gallery of the fort (the circus, the museum, the restaurant, the funfair and the illusionism shows).
- Popular entertainments in the other spaces of the fort, with objects connected to the world of the circus, puppets, fair-ground attractions, with “follies” that are installed outside the fort reflecting the themes shown inside.

The external spaces are gardened and cared for by the landscape architecture agency APS, favouring Mediterranean species for the rock garden, mixing native and imported plants in order to use even botany to make us reflect on change, flux, migration and evolution. Everyone is free to go for a “promenade” in this part of the city.

The building in honour of Georges Henri Rivière (founder of MNATP) houses the temporary exhibitions, in particular photographic shows, as ever on Mediterranean themes.

The CCR houses the reserve collections of the museum, the documents, the library and the scientific archives. It is intended as a major research center. The reserve collection building is naturally more introverted than the MUCEM as it tells the story of the hidden works and de-





velops what is not visible - unlike the MUCEM, which represents the visible part of the institution. For the architect Corinne Vezzoni, “the reserve collections are the other side of the coin, what is behind the scenes.” However, appearing as a monolith with the same 72x72 meter size of MUCEM, this building’s unique volume communicates an urban message, echoing the MUCEM. The shell is made of rough wood-textured concrete, that highlights the luminosity of the white reflective concrete in the heart of the building. The roof is covered by large slabs of colored concrete, creating a fifth facade, easily identifiable from the Le Muy barracks and the train railway.

Mariella Brenna

Text translated by John Elkington

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IMG. 3.84, 3.85 — Views of the Centre for Conservation and Resources (CCR). Project by Corinne Vezzoni and associated AURA agency. Photo by David Huguenin.





IMG. 3.86 — Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, Tervuren, Belgium. External view of the museum building designed by Charles Girault, 1910. Photo by Sara Chiesa.

## Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale

Royal Museum for Central Africa, Tervuren, Belgium

The Musée royal de l'Afrique Centrale (MRAC) is a federal scientific institute and a research centre devoted to Africa and is based in Tervuren, about 15 kilometres from Brussels, in a sumptuous park. It dates back to 1897 when, during the Brussels World Fair, a colonial section was set up in the Colonial Palace in Tervuren to represent the "Congo Free State" which, at that time, was under the Belgian king Leopold II. Given the high number of visitors—over a million in six months—the colonial section was turned into a permanent exhibition the following year through the foundation of the "Musée du Congo," which was designed by the Belgian architect Albert-Philippe Aldophe inside the Colonial Palace. The museum was divided into five sections: Botany, Zoology, Geology and Mineralogy, Anthropology and Ethnography. Due to the scarcity of spaces, and the conflicting purpose of increasing the collections, Leopold II entrusted architect Charles Girault with the creation of a new building, which was inaugurated in 1910 next to the Colonial Palace, and which is still the main site of the MRAC.

When Congo became independent in 1960, the museum changed its name into "Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale," as it also aimed at investigating other countries of Central Africa. In fact, until the 1960s, 99% of the museum collection came from DR Congo. Thereafter, however, the RMCA's scientists broadened their focus and developed research activities in West, East and Southern Africa, and acquired several important new collections. At present, about 85% of the collection comes from DR Congo and Central Africa, and the rest from other African countries or from America and Oceania. The extremely rich and varied permanent collection comprises:

- 10,000,000 animal specimens;
- 6,000,000 insects;

- 800,000 fish;
- 400,000 photographs: photographic archives;
- 650 films about DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi from 1940 to 1960;
- 150,000 ethnographic objects;
- 60,000 specimens of woody plants;
- 40,000 aerial photographs;
- 20,000 geological maps;
- 16,000 minerals;
- 8,000 musical instruments,
- 4,000 works of modern art,
- 3 km of historical and geology archives (including over 10,000 letters and photographs, 88 diaries and notes of—among others—Stanley).

Besides some important changes on the occasion of Expo '58, the general structure of the permanent exhibition has never been changed, either at the level of contents or of set-up. This is why a policy of redefinition and change is currently being implemented, in order to redefine the role of a museum with an explicit colonial heritage in a post-colonial and global context. The renovation works will be starting in Summer 2013 and are managed and financed by the Federal Buildings Agency of Belgium. The architectural works have been entrusted to the studio of the architect Stéphane Beel who was selected after a public tender in 2007. Dirk Verbist and Terenja van Dijk are the RMCA project coordinators.

In 2010 the museum was visited by 196,396 people, of whom 54,734 took part in its educational and cultural activities. Since 1992, MRAC has been offering a wide range of educational and museum-mediation activities targeted at children, young people, families, and associations, in order to integrate and expand their knowledge



of Belgian colonial history, of the origins of the museum's collections, and of the contemporary problems of Central Africa and its relationship with Europe. Moreover, it organises and supervises training, often in collaboration with museums based in Africa, and works with secondary schools to support teachers in their teaching activities on colonial history.

Finally, MRAC has many international partnerships with museums and research institutes in DR Congo, and in other African countries, as well as in Europe. Among the most important collaborations with museums, it is worth mentioning the project with the National Museum of Lubumbashi (MNL) and the Institute of National Museums of Congo (IMNC) in Kinshasa; and, in Europe, RIME (Réseau international de Musées d'Ethnographie), which it supervises, and READ-ME I and II (Réseau européen des Associations de Diasporas & des Musées d'Ethnographie), which require its active collaboration with the associations of migrants and the African diasporas in Belgium.

→ A RENOVATION PROJECT TOWARDS A METAHISTORICAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

In order to understand the complex and heterogeneous structure of MRAC, it is necessary to consider its dual mission, one scientific, the other related to the museum. Indeed, an analysis focusing only on the display rooms would not be complete if we did not also take into consideration all the research activities that the museum supervises in situ, often in collaboration with universities and research institutes, both in Africa and Europe. Moreover, the museum also investigates Central Africa both from the perspective of the Humanities, and of the Natural Sciences. The official mission of an "Africa-oriented" institute is reflected in its aim to enhance the past and the present of African societies, as well as the territory and environment, as can be inferred from the official declaration of the museum: "The museum must act as a world centre for research and knowledge dissemination on the past and present societies and the natural environments of Africa, in particular of Central

Africa, to foster—among the general public and the scientific community—a better understanding of and interest in this field and, through partnerships, to make a substantial contribution towards the sustainable development of Africa. Thus the core tasks of this Africa-oriented institution consist of acquiring and managing collections, conducting scientific research, implementing the results of this research, disseminating knowledge, and presenting to the public a selection from its collections."

Since 2001, MRAC has actively worked with international experts, civilians, researchers, and African and migrants associations, in order to renovate its permanent exhibition and to contextualise critically the colonial origins of the building and its collections, mediating with the representatives of the "Congolese diaspora" in Belgium and African experts. Such a process originates from the idea that "the history of the institution and its collections belongs to Belgians as much as it does to the peoples of Central Africa and their diasporas" (RMCA 2008. *Activities Report*). The renovation project aims to re-think Belgian colonial history and to present visitors with the history of the museum, of the building and its collections, and, at the same time, deal with contemporary subjects about Central Africa. This is achieved through temporary exhibitions that focus on current topics and provide a modern vision of Central Africa, trying to include multiple voices in the interpretation of the collections.

In order to understand how the museum aims at "modernising, restoring, and adapting the structure and the surroundings of MRAC to the 21st century" it is necessary to focus on the analysis of the renovation process. In 2003, a general plan aimed at reorganising the seven pavilions of the complex brought to light the difficulty of attributing functions, which are not strictly related to the museum, to the historical buildings. Once the actors in the project had been appointed, a group consisting of representatives of the architects, the *Régie des Bâtiments* and the RMCA, following the guidelines of the *Régie des Bâtiments*, developed the drafting of a general master plan

which involved all the pre-existing structure.

The four key points of the project were:

- Moving the original entrance to the museum complex back to Avenue de Tervuren, planning a car park near the Palais des Colonies;
- Placing collections and archives, which are now disseminated throughout the six pavilions, inside a "Tower of Collections", which will probably be open to visitors;
- Moving the Research Centre, which is now housed in four different buildings, to the interior premises of CAPA; the distribution of the administration, offices, laboratories, and library will follow rational principles;
- The Palais de Colonies (where some of the research and event facilities are presently located) will be a public place again, as a conference and training centre, audio-visual library, and a place for cultural activities.

New welcoming rooms, catering outlets, and the bookshop will be located in a new pavilion, which will be connected to the historical museum building through an underground tunnel lit by natural light (for a total space of 900 m<sup>2</sup>). The underground tunnel will house two rooms for temporary exhibitions, an auditorium, and the rooms dedicated to pedagogical workshops. Therefore, the museum building will no longer be used improperly, and it will be brought back to its original asset.

The exhibition project aims to answer among others the following question: How should we talk about Africa today through collections of the past, above all taking into consideration their colonial origin? The purpose is to provide a contemporary vision using collections that cover a period which largely includes the entire colonial era up to the 1960s.

The building cannot undergo significant changes as it is part of Belgian historical and cultural heritage, and is consequently a protected site. Likewise, the permanent collection showcases cannot be completely changed, and 60% of them are protected heritage. Taking into con-

sideration this limitation, through the permanent collection and the historical building, the museum could function as a "place of memory," as it should recall the past while keeping it at a distance. Such an approach could be defined as "meta-historical," as it allows visitors to be reminded of the history of the museum, at a due distance and with an appropriately critical eye. Keeping many architectonic and museographic aspects unaltered will act as a historical trace, which the museum means to display. Therefore, visitors will be able to travel in time between historical memory and a contemporary contemplation of the present. Moving the entrance to a new building will make it possible to inform visitors about the colonial origins of MRAC before they access the historical building.

The approach used with the permanent collection, on the other hand, is purposely interdisciplinary, choosing thematic criteria rather than the traditional divisions into scientific categories, in order to sensitise the public and involve them more closely. Such a change of perspective is particularly important as it focuses on the needs of the public and of communication, rather than on those of researchers. For the moment, four main themes have been proposed, even though they are still provisional and might be subject to change:

- Art, expressions and representations
- Societies
- Resources
- Landscapes and biodiversity

Through the multidisciplinary approach, the permanent collection transmits a contemporary, varied and dynamic image of Central Africa, putting history at a critical distance and breaking down the stereotypes that were constructed during the colonial era and had taken root in Belgian imagery. Moreover, the museum will deal with themes such as Central African urbanisation, contemporary art, and the history of slavery.

In addition, the museum has been organising temporary exhibitions that have already started the work of historical memory and reflection on

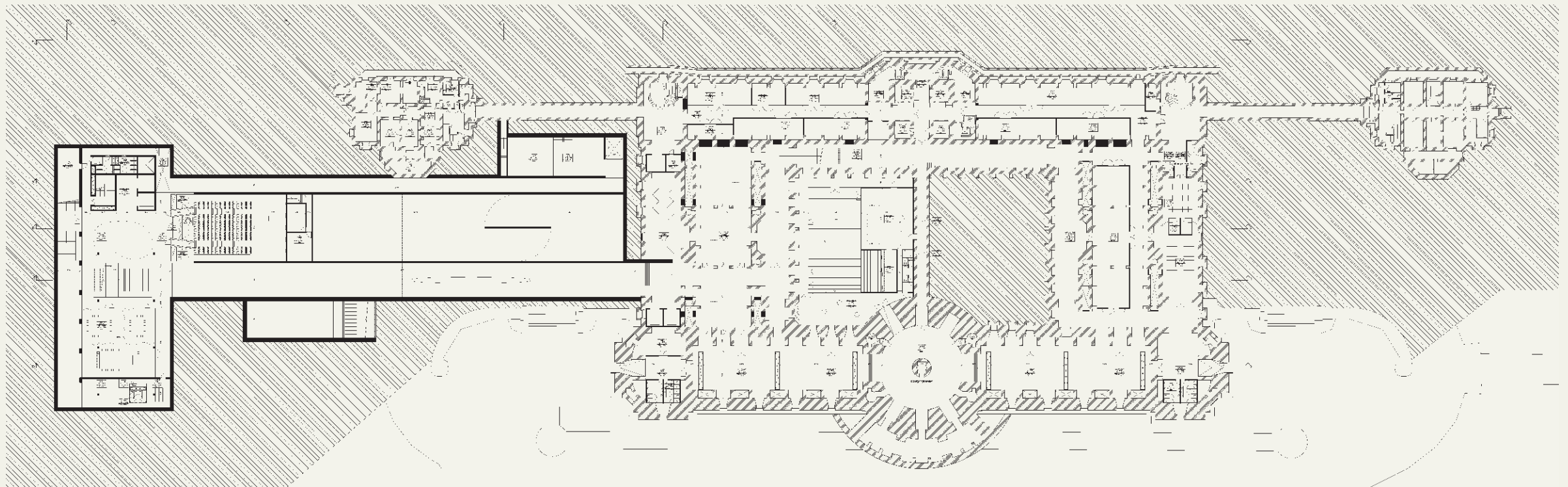
IMG. 3.87 — Permanent exhibition. © Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale.



IMG. 3.88, 3.89 — Royal Museum for Central Africa extension. Project by Stéphane Beel architects MRdAC. Rendering of new reception pavilion. © Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale/ Stéphane Beel architects.



IMG. 3.90 — Basement plan of the museum with the extension. An underground gallery will take you from the reception pavilion to the old museum building. Here is where new temporary exhibition spaces are housed. Visitors enter the museum building via the current cellar floor. The first part of the new permanent exhibition will be displayed on this underground level of the museum building. The remainder of the exhibition will be located on the ground floor. © Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale/ Stéphane Beel architects.





the present that will be the focus of the new permanent exhibition. Among the most recent ones, it is worth mentioning *Memory of Congo. The colonial era* (2005); *Indépendance! Congolaises tell their stories of 50 years of independence* (2010), put together for the 50th anniversary of Congo's independence; *Fetish Modernity* (2011) on how "ethnography museums were responsible for the spreading of clichés as regards to who or what is modern"; and *Our Bodies, Our Stories. A journey through lives with HIV/AIDS* (2012). This last exhibition was part of the project *Body Mapping* in Kenya, which aimed at eradicating prejudices against people living with HIV/AIDS and consisted of human-sized paintings and workshops where HIV-positive people told their stories.

Representatives of the Congolese "diaspora" in Belgium advise the group responsible for the renovation project, specifically through COMRAF, which was founded in 2003, and through PACSA – Participation Active et Continu Société Africaine. Indeed, the museum's aim is to officially involve multiple voices in the interpretation of the permanent exhibition and of the display of objects, as well as in the choice of temporary exhibitions. COMRAF, the RMCA-African Associations Advisory Committee, which is elected every three years, makes proposals about the content and planning of the museum's exhibitions, and its educational and cultural activities. It has 17 members, five of whom are members of the RMCA, nine are members of African associations, and three are resource persons.

The mediation function is not only performed by the display rooms, but also by the educational and pedagogical activities offered by MRAC, thanks to the workshops targeted at specific groups of visitors (children, teenagers, adults, associations of migrants). The educational department works closely with the National Museum of Lubumbashi (MNL) and the Institute of National Museums of Congo (IMNC) in Kinshasa. In particular, since 2003, MRAC and MNL have been working on an educational project funded by Coopération belge au Développement, in order to create and implement a pedagogical programme for

Lubumbashi schoolchildren.

Among the many cultural activities of the museum's rich agenda, it is worth mentioning *Africa Tervuren*, a day of artistic and cultural events that has been taking place every two years since 2003 and is organised in close collaboration with African associations with the aim of opening up the museum to a new public. The events include exhibitions, concerts, dance and music workshops, installations and recreational areas for children which, among other things, highlight the importance of the intangible heritage, as emphasised by the UNESCO 2003 Convention. For example, the museum offered a space for common reflection on European and African identities—through writing and music composition workshops—to the group of musicians of Congolese origin *HERITAGE*, founded by the artist Pitcho Womba Konga in 2011, which led to the release of a CD.

Finally, the museum has numerous projects whose purpose is to reflect on colonial memory, such as the digitalisation of colonial films and the storage of all documents on the history of diasporas. Moreover, it is also involved in programmes which focus directly on the renovation of the museum, such as the project by the Educational Department to make a film with anthropology and art history professors and students on how the museum should be.

Camila Pagani

Text translated by Ilaria Parini

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# **Index of Authors and Editors**



## Index of Authors and Editors, Volume 1

### Luca Basso Peressut

Luca Basso Peressut, Architect, PhD in Architectural Composition (IUAV, Istituto Universitario di Architettura, Venezia), is Full Professor of Interior Architecture, Exhibition Design and Museography at the Politecnico di Milano, and coordinator of the PhD in “Architecture of Interiors.” He is co-founder and director of the Level II Master course “IDEA in Exhibition Design.” He is Director of the International Workshop of Museography and Archaeology “Villa Adriana-Premio Piranesi” held in Tivoli and Rome since 2003. He is member of the Scientific Committee for the National Conference of Interiors 2005, 2007 and 2010, and member of the Scientific Board and co-organizer of the international conferences IFW-Interiors Forum World. He is member of the Scientific Board of Museography of Edifir Publisher and consultant for the architectural magazine *Area* since 1997. He has carried out several researches and projects in the museums field.

### Francesca Lanz

Francesca Lanz holds a PhD in Interior Architecture and Exhibition Design and a MS in Architecture. Since 2006 she has been collaborating to several research projects and teaching activities, teaming up with different departments of the Politecnico di Milano. Since 2009 she teaches interior design at the School of Ar-

chitecture and Society of Politecnico di Milano and collaborates as post-doc researcher with the Department of Architecture and Urban Studies. She’s currently involved in the EU-funded project “MeLa,” serving as Assistant Project Coordinator, Dissemination Manager and appointed researcher.

### Gennaro Postiglione

Gennaro Postiglione is Associate Professor of Interior Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano. Researches focus mainly on domestic interiors (questioning relations among culture of dwelling, domestic architecture and modernity), on museography and on preserving and diffusing collective memory and cultural identity (connecting the museographic issues with the domestic ambit). In this field he carried out several research projects amongst which: “The Atlantic Wall Linear Museum,” “Abarchive – archivio borghi abbandonati,” “One-hundred houses for one-hundred architects of the XX century.” Besides, he has a specific interest in the architecture of Nordic countries. From 2004, he is promoter of PUBLIC ARCHITECTURE @ POLIMI, an interdisciplinary research & operative group that puts the resources of Architecture in the service of the Public Interest and from 2006 of IFW-Interior Forum World, an academic network and a web platform for research edited by the PhD in Interiors at POLIMI.

### Mariella Brenna

Mariella Brenna is Assistant Professor of Interior Architecture at the Politecnico di Milano, School of Architecture and Society, Department of Architectural Design (DPA). She graduated in 1990 with a thesis on museum and building refurbishment (supervisor Prof. F. Drugman). From 1992 to 2000 she was post-doctoral fellow of the Chair of Exhibition Design and Museography and took part in researches carried out by MURST and the Faculty of Architecture. In 2000 she held a research scholarship for the project “Museum of Labour”. Between 2001 and 2005 she worked in the Department of Architectural Design, first as a temporary teacher of Museography, Museology and Criticism of Arts and Restoration, and later as a regular teacher of Architectonic Planning. She developed in association with Prof. L. Basso Peressut projects for museum exhibitions in Milan and Lodi. She has also taught courses for museum operators and conducted researches on museum standards on behalf of the IRER Lombardia.

### Fabienne Galangau-Querat

Fabienne Galangau Querat is an Associate Professor in Museology in the Man, Nature and Societies Department (UMR 208, PaLoc) at the National Museum of Natural History (Paris). Her research work in the field of science communication is focused on communities, museums and natural heritage displays. She was involved, as project manager, in the renovation of the Grande Galerie de l'Evolution (Paris) and has created temporary and permanent exhibitions in other different museums (France and abroad). She coordinates the Master Degree Program in Museums Studies at the MNHN.

### Sarah Gamaire

Sarah Gamaire is a fellow researcher in Museology in the National Natural History Museum of Paris for the MeLa Project. She holds a post graduate research master degree in anthropology. Her anthropological studies, specializing in the European area, focus principally on relation-

ships between societies and their environments. In 2010, she went on to study for and obtain a professional master degree in museology. She trained in exhibition conception and benefited from experience at the Musée d'Ethnographie de Neuchâtel, where she created the exhibition ‘MétéKi, on stereotypes of young muslims in Switzerland’ (2009). She also worked for ten months on the renovation project of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris (2011). During the summer of 2012, she worked in Australia at improving the valorization of the natural and cultural heritage in the Nitmiluk National Park (Northern Territory), jointly with its aboriginal owners.

### Laurence Isnard

Laurence Isnard is a curator, graduated of the Institut National du Patrimoine (National Heritage Institute). Previously, for about 10 years she had been working in her capacity as a certified teacher of natural sciences. She was involved in the renovation programme of the Museum of Mankind, Musée de L'homme, Paris Natural History Museum, from 2009 to 2012. And more specifically on the future permanent exhibition conception. Since January 2013, Ms Isnard has taken up the position as a Museum Advisor in the Ile de France Cultural Affairs Agency. There, her duties include putting into operation cultural and heritage policies of the Ministry for Cultural Affairs and Territorial Communication. She acts in the capacity of a government scientific and technical overseer on those museums operating under the official label “Musées de France” in the Ile de France territory.

### José María Lanzarote Guiral

José María Lanzarote Guiral is a LabEx HASTEC post-doc researcher at the Centre Alexandre Koyré, Paris. In January 2012 he defended his Ph.D. thesis at the European University Institute (Florence, Italy) on the topic “Prehistoria Patria. National identities and Europeanisation in the construction of prehistoric

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### Camilla Pagani

Camilla Pagani holds a Master's degree in Political Science from Sciences Po Paris and is actually a PhD candidate and teaching assistant at the Department of Philosophy at Université Paris-Est-Créteil and Università degli studi di Milano. Her thesis is on museums of ethnography and identities nowadays, focusing especially on multiculturalism, globalization and cultural minorities in Europe and in the United States. She published *Genealogia del Primitivo. Il musée du quai Branly, Lévi-Strauss e la scrittura etnografica*, and presented her papers in several international symposiums. She collaborates with UNESCO on different projects and she is an independent researcher for MeLa.

### Giovanni Pinna

Giovanni Pinna is Professor in Paleontology and museologist. For over thirty years (1964-1996) he was a member of the staff of the Natural History Museum in Milan, first as Curator in Paleontology then, from 1981 to 1996, as Director. Throughout these fifteen years, the Museum was completely renovated—research sections and didactic activities were reorganised, scientific and technical staff were increased, archives were re-ordered and improved, the permanent exhibition was renovated—and in the early 1990's it was numbered among the seven greatest European Natural History Museums. From 1980 to 1996 Giovanni Pinna also directed the Planetarium in Milan, contributing to its renovation. Today he operates as museum consultant; his recent experiences focus

on international cooperation, and he has been actively involved in the International Council of Museums, as Chairperson of ICOM ITALY (1997–2000, 2001–2004), Chairperson of the International Committee of Historic House Museum (1999–2002), member of the ICOM Executive Council (200–2004). He has published widely on in the field of museum studies, and he is the editor and director of the journal *Nuova Museologia*, founded in 1999.

### Clelia Pozzi

Clelia Pozzi is a PhD candidate in Architectural History and Theory at Princeton University. She graduated in Architecture at Politecnico di Milano, and received a MDesS in History and Philosophy of Design from Harvard Graduate School of Design. She recently served as Research Associate at Politecnico di Milano, where she collaborated to the European research project MeLa–European Museums in an age of migrations. Within MeLa, she conducted research on national museums and co-edited the book *Museums in an Age of Migrations: Questions, Challenges, Perspective* with Luca Basso Peressut. Before collaborating to MeLa, Clelia worked in architectural offices in Milan and served as Agnes Mongan Curatorial Intern at the Harvard Art Museum/Busch-Reisinger Museum in Cambridge, MA. She is the recipient of the 2011 Dimitris Pikionis Award from Harvard Graduate School of Design, and the 2008 Pier Daniele Melegari Award from the Accademia Lombarda di Scienze e Lettere.



## MeLa\* - European Museums in an age of migrations

Research Fields:

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examines the historical and contemporary relationships between museums, places and identities in Europe and the effects of migrations on museum practices.

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transforms the question of memory into an unfolding cultural and historical problematic, in order to promote new critical and practical perspectives.

**RF03: Network of Museums, Libraries and Public Cultural Institutions**

investigates coordination strategies between museums, libraries and public cultural institutions in relation to European cultural and scientific heritage, migration and integration.

**RF04: Curatorial and Artistic Research**

explores the work of artists and curators on and with issues of migration, as well as the role of museums and galleries exhibiting this work and disseminating knowledge.

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investigates and experiments innovative communication tools, ICT potentialities, user centred approaches, and the role of architecture and design for the contemporary museum.

**RF06: Envisioning 21st Century Museums**

fosters theoretical, methodological and operative contributions to the interpretation of diversities and commonalities within European cultural heritage, and proposes enhanced practices for the mission and design of museums in the contemporary multicultural society.

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EUROPEAN MUSEUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: SETTING THE FRAMEWORK (VOL 1)

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## EUROPEAN MUSEUMS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

This book grew out of the earliest work of the MeLa Research Field 6, “Envisioning 21st Century Museums,” aimed at exploring current trends in European contemporary museums. Analysing their ongoing evolution triggered by this “age of migrations” and with specific attention to their architecture and exhibition design, the volume collects the preliminary observations ensuing from this survey, complemented by the some paradigmatic examples, and further enriched by interviews and contributions from scholars, curators and museum practitioners.

*With contributions by Florence Baläen, Michela Bassanelli, Luca Basso Peressut, Joachim Baur, Lorraine Bluche, Marco Borsotti, Mariella Brenna, Anna Chiara Cimoli, Lars De Jaegher, Maria Camilla De Palma, Hugues De Varine, Maria De Waele, Nélia Dias, Simone Eick, Fabienne Galangau Quérat, Sarah Gamaire, Jan Gerchow, Marc-Olivier Gonset, Klas Grinell, Laurence Isnard, Marie-Paule Jungblut, Galitt Kenan, Francesca Lanz, José María Lanzarote Guiral, Vito Lattanzi, Jack Lohman, Carolina Martinelli, Frauke Miera, Elena Montanari, Chantal Mouffe, Judith Pargamin, Giovanni Pinna, Camilla Pagani, Clelia Pozzi, Paolo Rosa, Anna Seiderer.*

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**VOL. 1, COVER IMAGE** — Biodiversity showcase at the Natural History Museum of Berlin. Courtesy of Museum für Naturkunde, Berlin.

MeLa—European Museums in an age of migrations



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