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Why museums remain reliable venues

Museums and their exhibitions continue their amazing success story. The new volume in the series, *new exhibition design*, showcases international trends in exhibition design and scenography, on 516 pages and with 110 projects. The editors prove that an alarming paradigm change for the museum is not expected; it is only a case of using knowledge and skills differently.

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Museums and their exhibitions continue their amazing success story. A journey around the world focusing on these two formats reveals an ever-growing number of outstanding presentations covering a whole range of topics, content and ground-breaking designs. And more important than ever: "Exhibitions" are reliable places for effects of democratisation.

Deliberating on the format museum, the ZKM in Karlsruhe announced, "The museum of the future is no longer a museum", triggering a reassessment of its function and nature: "For some years, there has been a growing call for a renewal of the museum. However, it took the coronavirus pandemic to abruptly make it plain once and for all that the museum as a purely physical concept can no lon-

ger exist on its own [...] We have been shoved with force into the digital age; no forms of production and reception will be left untouched. The move or extension of culture into the virtual space is inevitable and irreversible."¹ The modified definition of the museum sees it as a place of communication, integration and the mediation of knowledge, "the museum is a place of permanent conference"² (Joseph Beuys) and a "social powerhouse" to use the term

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coined by Alexander Dorner as early as 1949. "The museum in the 21st century must be conceived as an 'assembly' of people, not a collection of objects. [...] The museum of the future must have a holistic concept: as an intelligent hybrid of analogue and digital, it is bound by the educational mandate to open as many doors as possible to enter into a critical discourse with the development of society. [...] It must manage the balancing act between physical and virtual space if it wants to reach the public of the 21st century."³ Museum space, architecture and museology: the museum is a kind of building and space. With displays as spatial presentation. The museum is an organised space. Space, as it were, improves objects and objects improve the space. The museum as "city" and as "machine". Special information is conveyed, and different levels afford different experiences.⁴ (...)

What does a panoramic view of exhibitions reveal: there are more exhibitions, more budgets, more effort going into conception and design, there are wonderful objects and fascinating scenographic presentations, elaborate catalogues and splendid designs. They still quote heavily and unabashedly from old designs and the old masters, but also add new ideas and media. The imagery has become more complex. There are exhibitions about exhibiting, "from the 'Wunderkammer' to the curatorial situation". There are no longer permanent exhibitions in the conventional sense. Walk-in collections of objects on display no longer seem to be the ultima ratio; rather the archive, the collection and the exhibition combined with everything that the museum as institution has to offer create more hybrid spaces. The "Wunderkammer" remains a pretty picture but does not solve the problem (although they often still look very beautiful). The text remains the echoing success, the poetry of the narration is getting stronger.

There are no longer permanent exhibitions in the conventional sense. [...] Keywords that describe the situation, the discourses and the themes: immersive, participatory and inclusive.

Even back in the year 2000 it was obvious how the change process of conceptional access and scenography would evolve: from the object to experience, museum and functions in structures and society, the transcending and deconstruction of objects and things, museum experience and the "real thing", ethical principles in the museum "The Good Life of the Public Servant", the museum as "permanent conference" and educational instrument to continue

the enlightenment and ("The Museum in Transition"⁵). Keywords that describe the situation, the discourses and the themes: immersive, participatory and inclusive. The arrangement in the digital context, transmedia storytelling and the search for what comes after the digitalisation. "The power of things. The tenacity of museum arrangements" (Friedrich von Bose) in encyclopaedic situations. Presence and theme in the dramaturgy of the routing. Democratisation of the museum as place of social responsibility and perception. Reappraisal of colonialism, racism and social injustice. Cultural commemoration and the acquirement of the past in the Anthropocene. Migration and overpopulation as central questions for the model of the "future of the earthlings" (Marc Augé). Ecological responsibility and sustainability. Education in life-long learning. Neuroscientific insights and the question of how to convey scientific information in a time of "bullshit communications". But at the same time a continuing fascination with aura and the "language of things – museum artefacts between sign and appearance" (Thomas Thieme)⁶ (...)

The museum can create spaces for people in which they can find themselves.

An alarming paradigm change is not on the cards for the museum; there has evidently been a consensus on everything that had to be analysed and said for quite a while – it is now time to use the knowledge and tools in new ways. The blueprints for the world at large and the small effects are at our disposal. Immersive and effective knowledge spaces are quite possible in the staging of mixed reality. The museum can create spaces for people in which they can find themselves. Both in a very concrete, real sense, and as a transcendental experience.

From the preface
Uwe J. Reinhardt, Philipp Teufel

¹ Impulskonferenz *Das Museum der Zukunft ist kein Museum mehr*, Karlsruhe: ZKM, 3.7.2020.

² Joseph Beuys, *Das Museum – ein Ort der permanenten Konferenz*, in: *Notizbuch 3. Kunst. Gesellschaft. Museum.*, Hrsg. von Horst Kurnitzky. Berlin: Medusa, 1980, p. 56.

³ See 1.

⁴ Kali Tzortzi, *Museum Space. Where Architecture Meets Museology*, London/ NYC: Routledge, 2015.

⁵ Hilde S. Hein, *The Museum in Transition A Philosophical Perspective*, Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 2000.

⁶ wissen-und-museum.de on 8/1/2020.



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The new volume in the successful series New Exhibition Design presents and documents in images, text and information the museum and its exhibitions – a fantastic success story. A broad overview of current concepts and trends in exhibition design and scenography from around the world. With more than 110 projects. There are numerous outstanding presentations with varied themes, content and ground-breaking designs. In interviews 16 experts explain their take on present-day discussions and an exciting array of methods. Uwe J. Reinhardt and Philipp Teufel provide an analysis of the current social and political discourse and open up new strategies for poetic spaces.

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