



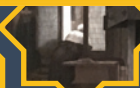
# UCL

# Studying Museums in Qatar and Beyond

EDITED BY

Alexandra Bounia

and Catharina Hendrick



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and Catharina Hendrick



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# Introduction

Alexandra Bounia

This small collection of papers started as a project funded by UCL ChangeMakers, an initiative of UCL Arena Centre for Research-Based Education. UCL ChangeMakers was established in 2014 and aims to support staff/student partnerships on educational enhancement projects (Marie et al. 2016). The project this collection comes from was entitled ‘Making our research visible’ and was submitted in 2017 by a group of MA students and alumni of the Museum and Gallery Practice Programme at UCL Qatar led by the author of this introduction. The students involved were: Elina Sairanen, Anna Ivanovic, Wadha Al-Aqeedi and Thomas Rempel, supported by alumna Elma Attic. Lejla Niksic also supported the proposal at a later stage of its first year.

The aim of this project was to create a learning and research forum for MA students, staff and alumni. As a result, a working group was formed to publish a book consisting of articles written by alumni based on their dissertation which was peer-reviewed and edited by current students and staff. Thus, this working group provided a forum where alumni could share their research experience with current students as well as provide feedback to staff about their experience in researching and writing a dissertation. Current students would have the opportunity to learn from alumni how to do research, as well as how to write and prepare publishable research by example. During the process of working in this group the academics of the MA programme would get useful feedback on their supervision and they would be able to provide extra support to students, as well as to enable them liaising with alumni and displaying their work.

This project aimed to address a number of objectives of the UCL Education Strategy, such as:

- To move towards personalised student support, from first contact to graduation and beyond: by providing support to students to reflect on how to write academic work on a one-to-one basis, and by helping alumni to further explore their potential and skills. Furthermore, providing a mechanism that would allow for academic writing support outside the class and encouraging the integration of students and the development of collaboration among themselves, the faculty and alumni.
- To address and resolve the persistent challenges of assessment and feedback: by making students and alumni active participants in the process of assessing and giving feedback to other students and alumni. Encouraging and exploring peer-to-peer assessment and feedback mechanisms and asking them to take an active stance and responsibility regarding feedback.
- To create cultures of student engagement and leadership: by creating a partnership with students and alumni this project gave them opportunities to take leadership in academic matters. This resulted in helping to create a culture of sharing, openness, academic dialogue and participation.
- To embed the Connected Curriculum across the University: by creating a framework of learning on multiple levels: peer-to-peer teaching and learning for students, connecting research activities such as the writing of a research-based dissertation and their publication with teaching, and, by creating learning opportunities for faculty to engage in exploring alternative methods of teaching and learning based on student-staff collaboration. Finally, bringing alumni's insights (and therefore professionals) into the teaching/learning framework enabled alumni to continue their learning from a different perspective in a more active, collaborative way.

The idea behind this proposal was based on the realisation from the first day I joined UCL Qatar in 2017 that students were producing excellent, original and innovative work in the programme while

writing their dissertations. Taking into account the limited number of publications on museums and museology of the region, Qatar, but also other Gulf states and parts of the world that students came from, i.e. Asia and Africa, these original pieces of research were, in some cases, the only research undertaken for this specific area, topic, or museum.

UCL Qatar began delivering its Master of Arts programme in Museum and Gallery Practice in September 2012. From the outset, the programme had taken a self-reflective approach and aimed to encourage and support the development of practical museum and heritage related skills, founded on theoretical perspectives that would enable the students to – in the words of the colleague who designed and started this programme, Dr Karen Exell – “negotiate the local and the regional heritage concepts with the more obvious international heritage discourse” (Exell, 2014, 583).

From the first academic year, 2012-2013, to the last one, 2019-2020 (as UCL’s contract to Qatar Foundation came to an end) a number of dissertations were produced, almost all of them based on carefully collected primary data. Thus, a small number of papers have been published (see Karafotias, 2016; Mirgani, 2019). This project, therefore, aimed to bring some more of the excellent research undertaken by the students to a wider audience (not just the markers), and, as the title of the research-learning project suggests, we set out “to make our research visible”.

The present volume includes papers by two students who were involved in the first year of the programme and were members of the team who submitted the first application. Students from next year’s cohort author the remaining four papers, when interaction among students and their supervisor was stronger than that with alumni.

The first three papers in this small collection focus on different aspects of art, curatorship and heritage practices in Qatar. In the first paper, *Issa Al-Shirawi* examines the relationship between artists and institutions, and more specifically single-artist’s museums and foundations. He uses two case studies for his comparative analysis: the Henry Moore Foundation in the UK, a well-established and very active single-artist institution, and the Qatar Art Center, an initiative undertaken by the Qatari artist, art historian and patron of the arts, Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al-Thani. The second paper by *Wadha Al-Aqeedi* investigates performance art curatorship, with an emphasis on works from the Arab world. She explores, through interviews with leading curators who live in the West but have close

ties to the Middle East and Arab art, analysis of a temporary exhibition of Arab art and how curatorial practices can play a role in making visible the little-known history of performance art in the Arab world. The third paper from *Ignacio Zamora Sanz* focuses on public art – a very popular topic in Qatar – using the theory of ‘non-places’ by Marc Augé. Ignacio’s research explores the display of public art in Hamad International Airport (Doha, Qatar), and, based on qualitative and quantitative data, aims to understand the impact such a display has on visitors/travellers and how it fits within Qatar’s cultural policies.

The next set of three papers are examples of work undertaken by UCL Qatar students with researching museums and exhibitions from other parts of the world. UCL Qatar attracted an international cohort of students and facilitated inspirational placements across the world. *Lina Patmali* uses the example of the temporary exhibition “*Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and other treasures*” held at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna (Austria), to explore the meaning and importance of self-reflexive exhibitions and institutional curatorial practices. Curated by filmmaker Wes Anderson and his partner Juman Malouf, this exhibition investigated the relationship between the museum, its collections and its visitors. *Lejla Niksic* takes us to the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in order to discuss affect and emotion in museums. She explores, through in-depth exhibition analysis, how affective practices are used by museums to enable visitors to come to terms with contested topics. Lejla examines the exhibition, focusing specifically on the 1990s Bosnian war and the recent war in Syria, through a series of personal objects and the testimonies of those who experienced armed conflict as children. Finally, *Syeda Arman Zabi* discusses another museum that deals with conflict and human trauma, i.e. The Partition Museum in Amritsar (India). She focuses on the strategies the museum uses to construct a narrative and produce knowledge around one of the most contentious and traumatic events that led to the establishment of contemporary Pakistan, India and Bangladesh.

All six papers, despite their different focus and methodologies, are also inter-connected, as they explore issues that were central in the discussions of the course: art curatorship and its different perspectives and developments, as well as the interrelation between western and non-western practices (Al-Shirawi, Al-Aqeedi, Patmali, Zamora Sanz); “difficult heritage” (Niksic, Zabi); cultural policies and politics



(Zamora Sanz, Zabi, Al-Aqeedi); affect (Niksic, Patmali), exhibition-making (Patmali, Niksic, Zabi) are some of the threads that connect these papers.

As all the chapters clearly demonstrate, an international group of students (now alumni of UCL Qatar), were able to develop their critical understanding and thinking of museums, art and heritage practices in Qatar and beyond, and write “theoretically-driven, politically aware” (Exell, 2014, 585), research-based museological papers. The writing has been a journey for all of us, students and academics alike. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deeply felt gratitude to all our students, alumni and colleagues. My co-editor of this volume, Dr. Catharina Hendrick, as well as our colleagues Dr. Georgios Papaioannou and Mr. Argyris Karapitsanis have supported everyone and created an ideal community of practice. This collaboration with students and academics has been an important learning experience for me: it made me appreciate more than ever before the importance of student-led team work.

Doha, 25 May 2020

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## CHAPTER 1

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# "The Artist Comes First": Creating art institutions in Qatar and the United Kingdom

### Issa Al-Shirawi

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### Abstract

In 2018, the focus of Art Basel's programme "Conversations" was "The Rise of the Single-Artist Museum" highlighting the importance of a dynamic, evolving, and emerging field of museology. Often, in North America and Europe, these institutions are formed, legally, as foundations. However, while museums are constantly being established and formed in the Arabian Gulf, there are, not as yet, single artist museums or foundations within the Qatari art and cultural landscape. It is therefore interesting and necessary to explore the concept of these institutions within a museological framework and to raise the question of why artists create such institutions. In order to do this, we looked at the complex relationship between artist and museum and developed an analytical framework to untangle and explore it. Using the Henry

Moore Foundation, in the United Kingdom, and the Qatar Art Center, in Qatar, as case studies, this chapter explores the different motivations and reasons for the creation of such spaces that, amongst others, allow artists to exhibit their own work without institutional restrictions, secure their legacy, and claim back their artistic power. It thus becomes clear that artists establish their own institutions in response to a system that often does not take into consideration their needs.

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## Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the reasons artists create their own institutions to house their art. Historically, artist-endowed foundations date back to 1883 in the United States and 1874 in Italy. Famous examples, among many across the world, include the Keith Haring Foundation, the Andy Warhol Foundation, the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation, the Joan Miró Foundation, the Gala - Salvador Dalí Foundation, and the Zentrum Paul Klee. As noted by Christine Vincent, private foundations created by artists are “a rapidly emerging force in cultural philanthropy and artistic heritage stewardship” (The Aspen Institute, n.d.). This means that they are becoming more popular and emerging as major cultural producers. It becomes clear, therefore, that with many operating single-artist museums and foundations worldwide, and more in development, there is an impetus to explore and understand these institutions within a museological and professional framework. Using the Henry Moore Foundation, in the United Kingdom, and the Qatar Art Center, in Qatar, as case studies, we will explore the different motivations and reasons for the creation of such spaces. Ultimately, these institutions allow artists to exhibit their own work freely, secure their legacy, and assert their artistic importance.

There is a surprising lack of literature on the legal and institutional understanding of foundations, and more specifically, art foundations (Stapper, 2014: 22). A number of reports provide an understanding of foundations in general (European Foundation Center, 2003; Aspen Institute, 2010). They attempt to categorise, define, and suggest governing and regulatory practices associated with such entities. In most cases, foundations, specifically art foundations, are “... typically ... endowed with artworks and intellectual property (and often real

estate, including the artist's home and studio)" (Scutari, 2018). They are spaces that would provide a visitor with a more nuanced exploration of the artist's oeuvre as understood and expressed by the artists themselves (Art Basel Conversations, 2018).

While the reports attempt to generalise these types of institutions, it is important to remember that no two institutions are the same or operate in exactly the same way. These entities evolve constantly and develop their own unique approaches to governance. Christine Vincent, contributing to the report of the Aspen Institute (2010: 28), argues that over time foundations are able to evolve as their functions and activities develop (also Higonnet, 2009: 19). Moreover, it is important to understand that foundations, and particularly art foundations, are not created by a single type of founder. This means that they are created or sustained within very unique regional and artist-specific contexts. Therefore, the policy and practice decisions taken and the reasons for establishing such institutions differ based on the founder's specific views and needs (Aspen Institute, 2010: 57-58). It is from this viewpoint that this chapter aims to explore the local and regional nuances for creating artist-founded institutions within both an English and Qatari museological landscape. The following section will outline three tensions that arise from the relationship between artist and museum: securing a legacy, maintaining visibility, issues of power and control. In this way, it outlines a system in which artists respond to these tensions. In the process, they attempt to claim back authority from the museum; often, by creating their own institutions in the form of a foundation.

## **Developing a theoretical framework**

Before exploring the institutional framework and nature of artist founded institutions, it is important to locate them within the broader museological environment. There exists a wide range of art museums from modern and contemporary to ethnographic (Bennet, 1995: 38). No matter how different their collections are, art museums' primary purpose remains the display of art (Higonnet, 2009: 23). This purpose is an outcome of, as Vera Zolberg points out, "the love-hate affair of artists and art museums" (1992: 105). She notes, despite writing in the early 1990s, that little research has been devoted to the relationship between artist and museum; noting that the literature primarily focused on other intellectual aspects of museology "leaving the artist to be

studied in other contexts” (Zolberg, 1992: 106). This relationship focuses on the artists and how they are involved in the museum through its acquisitions and exhibiting practices. However, beyond this, artists have specific opinions about the museum. Ultimately, it becomes clear that there is a need for artists to create their own dedicated spaces as a response to their interactions with these institutions.

## Understanding the relationship between artist and museum

### Collecting artworks

In a discussion documented in *Arts Yearbook* (1967), Allan Kaprow and Robert Smithson discuss the concept of the museum highlighting, among various other points, a particular relation between the artist and the museum. Specifically, how museums acquire works of art. The artists, Kaprow and Smithson, refer to the museum’s ability to commission works that, ultimately, will be displayed in the museum (Kaprow and Smithson [1967], 1999: 214-216). Often, this form of acquisition is related to living artists and, in some cases, other stakeholders such as dealers and collectors, who also commissioned works later to be sold or gifted to the museum (Zolberg, 1992: 107). In this way, museums are capable of enhancing the reputation and career of artists by selecting their works for its collections.

Beyond commissioning artworks to be exhibited in the museum, artists also interact with museums by offering their artworks as gifts or by bequeathing their works and archives after they pass away (Newhouse, 2006: 75; Zolberg, 1992: 107). A good example of this are Mark Rothko’s ‘Seagram Murals’ which were originally destined for the Four Seasons restaurant in New York. However, in 1969, upon doubting the “appropriateness of the restaurant setting,” Rothko donated the works to the Tate Modern (Tate, n.d.). By gifting works, artists “have thereby captured space within the museum which is separate from that of other artists;” a space “under [their] control” (Serota, 1996: 20). Through this, artists are able to command lasting environments for their works.

### Displaying artworks

One relationship the artist has with the museum is that of exhibiting

and displaying their art within its walls. French conceptual artist, Daniel Buren acknowledged that the museum acts as the only space that allows the visitor to interact with the works on display ([1970] 1999: 220; Smith, 2012: 104). Through this, it becomes a method to provide the visitor with information. Despite this, the museum creates a boundary between the artwork and the visitor typically by encasing the artwork or providing signage or physical barriers preventing and prohibiting any intimate interaction with the works. In doing so, the barrier serves “to signify the monetary value of the artefact” as well as the “auratic” and cultural one (Witcomb, 2003: 107).

In this way, as Daniel Buren reasons, the museum also has an economically validating role in the artist’s career. Although, it is important to note that this connection to the art market is not often acknowledged or discussed by artists and museums (Haacke [1984], 1999: 233; Zolberg, 1992: 108). Despite this, the museum is capable of dictating the importance of the work and aims to preserve it, enshrining artworks and their creator within the confines of the museum (Buren [1970], 1999: 220-221).

### Issues of Control

Despite the close relationship between artists and museums, these institutions were not always considered favourably by artists. In fact, artists’ views on museum practices, policies and administration were explored through published manifestos, exhibitions, and as subject matter and inspiration for their art (McShine, 1999). Through their rebellious understandings, artists wanted to challenge the museum as an establishment and its lack of ability in promoting creativity (Smith, 2012: 106). They rebelled against the “censorship implied by corporate funding of museum exhibitions” (Newhouse, 2006: 109). The most prominent example of this was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who first explored this dissatisfaction with the museum in his *Futurist Manifesto* written in 1909, where he calls museums ‘cemeteries’ ([1909] 1999: 200). In similarly negative statements, other artists like Jean Cocteau (1959), described the museum as a “morgue where one goes to identify one’s friends” (quoted in Troelenberg, 2017: 3). Robert Smithson called museums tombs in which “visiting a museum is a matter of going from void to void” ([1967] 1999, 214). Moreover, he argued that museums are prisons where the prisoner was not the artist but the artwork itself, “disengaged from the outside world” ([1972] 1999: 225). Much later,

in 1992, Fred Wilson, through his exhibition, *Mining the Museum*, at the Maryland Historical Society, understood the museum as a mine, “a place where things are buried, hidden in the ground, and static like prehistorical sediment” (Troelenberg, 2017: 4).

While some artists expressed their frustrations through writing or in curatorial practice, other artists occasionally offered their opinions of the institution through their actual artwork. They were thus expressing their objection to what they were feeling as extreme power over their work. For example, the Abstract-Expressionists, in particular, challenged the “genre boundaries” of art museums in which many works became “either temporary, site-specific or escaped the museum [setting] altogether” (Schubert, 2009: 82; Zolberg, 1992: 111). Donald Judd, an American minimalist artist, had been the most vocal about exhibiting his art within the museum space. While his works were still “museum-compatible”, they challenged the established museum installation practices since his pieces relied heavily on “spatial relationships [that] interacted with the architecture it was set” in (Schubert, 2009: 82-83). Judd, therefore, felt that his “sculptures were crammed in with other art ... and that the objects were denied what he considered their rightful independence and integrity” (quoted in Kimmelman, 2003).

In understanding this, artists often are not satisfied with the conditions and manner in which visitors would view and experience their art (Newhouse, 2006: 102-103). It becomes clear that artists feel excluded from “authoritative positions in ... decision making” within the museum (Zolberg, 1992: 106). For example, Aleksandr Rodchenko felt that:

Artists, as the only people with a grasp of the problems of ... contemporary art and as the creators of artistic values, are the only ones capable of directing the acquisition of modern works of art and of establishing how a country should be educated in artistic matters. ([1919] 1999: 201)

As a result, museums are perceived as controlling institutions that have the power to separate the objects “from the life-forces which gave them their original social and political meanings” (Witcomb, 2003: 104). As artists became more dissatisfied with their interactions with the museum, they began offering new ways to envisage it (Read, 1954: 285) and they required spaces that would allow their art to be exhibited, understood without any restrictions, and on their own terms (Kimmelman, 2003).



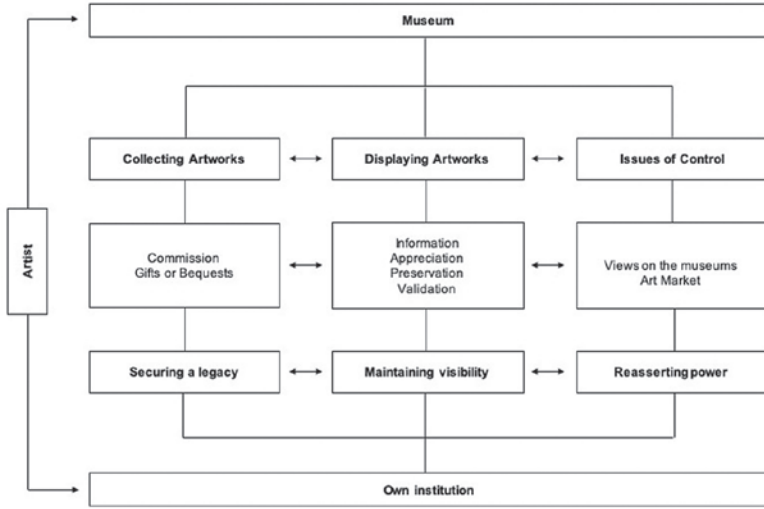
## Beyond the museum

In light of these visceral feelings towards museums, Herbert Read, although not an artist, notes a different type of relationship between the artist and the museum. He suggested that artists should move away from the museum setting and create their own space (1954: 290). In many cases, the spaces that artists created were not museum spaces, “but rather environments that housed alternative, parallel worlds” (Smith, 2012: 131).

These new worlds took the form of artists’ studios or living quarters (Newhouse, 2006: 109; Read, 1954). They became spaces that would provide a visitor with a more nuanced exploration of the artists’ oeuvre as understood and expressed by themselves (Art Basel Conversations, 2018). In doing so, artists attempted to overcome the fear of losing “their works’ meaning and radical potential” by “surrendering” them to an institution (Schubert, 2009: 84). As a result, artists started developing their own spaces to showcase their art in line with their aesthetic vision for those pieces. These new or alternative spaces that artists created or initiated aimed to become what artists hoped the museum or gallery could have been.

In a seminar organised by the Fondation des Treilles in 2017, twenty-two directors and museum professionals, representing various monographic art institutions across Europe and the United States, attempted to understand these new spaces. They developed a manifesto for the ‘monographic museum’ highlighting the “specific identities, stories, issues and challenges” associated with it (Le Bon & Molins, 2018). This manifesto states that the single-artist’s museum is a unique space that has a particular identity and tells a specific story. It is “an ideal place for the preservation and the profound and holistic examination of an artist’s work” (Le Bon & Molins, 2018, n.p.). It acts as a space in which the public can “investigate the materiality and arc of the artist’s production” (Le Bon & Molins, 2018, n.p.). Alternatively, this holistic space, understood in institutional terms, usually takes the form of an art foundation. In understanding the above, the following diagram (Figure 1) developed summarises the relationship among artists, museums and their own institutions.

Historically, the artist’s debut in to the museum setting is through the display of their artworks in its galleries either temporarily or permanently. Through this, the museum offers the artist institutional



*Figure 1- Relationship between artist, museum and own institution  
(Source: the Author)*

recognition and validation. It preserves both them and their artworks within its walls for future generations. However, they have questioned the role of the museum in representing their viewpoints and, as such, the museum as a space for their voice to be heard. They often feel museums suffocate the creativity and disassociate the artwork from its meaning given to it by themselves. Ultimately, this, for the artist, becomes a conflict of asserting hegemony and power to gain back or retain control of their own narrative. By creating their own institutionalised spaces, they are able to address their concerns, maintain their visibility and secure their legacy.

As a means of exploring case specific tensions, this diagram will be used as a framework for the analysis of the Henry Moore Foundation and the Qatar Art Center presented in this chapter. It will aid in the exploration of the artist's background and motivations. It will, ultimately, shed light on the reasons why they created their own institutions in the first place.

## **Analysing foundations in the UK and the Gulf**

In order to select case studies for this research, I conducted a survey of the many artist foundations around the world. While many

more are being established at the time of writing, the Henry Moore Foundation is one of the most active and well-established monographic foundations in Europe. In contrast, while conducting initial research into the museological landscape in the Gulf region and specifically in Qatar, it became apparent that these types of institutions and their governance have not yet been developed or explored in depth, despite the fact that art foundations do exist in the Gulf. Two of the most prominent examples are the Barjeel Art Foundation and the Sharjah Art Foundation, both located in the United Arab Emirates. However, it is important to note that these institutions have not been founded by artists but by collectors of modern Arab art and contemporary art and culture (Barjeel Art Foundation, n.d.; Sharjah Art Foundation, n.d.).

I decided to focus my attention on the Qatar Art Center, as it shares many characteristics with the Henry Moore Foundation. Similar to Henry Moore, Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al-Thani is a recognised artist, and has already established an exhibition and studio space, the Qatar Art Center. Although the Center is not legally considered a foundation, like in the case of the Henry Moore Foundation, it can be perceived as one through its activities and endeavours. Nevertheless, both spaces are ultimately artist-founded institutions which place the artist at its core.

To pursue this research, I conducted semi-structured interviews that highlighted key organisational and practical elements associated with establishing such an institution as these are understood by the curators, administration and policy officers involved with them and, in one case, the artist himself.

## **The Henry Moore Foundation**

Henry Moore was born in 1898. After being trained as a teacher, he studied at Leeds School of Art and then the Royal College of Art in London (HMF A, n.d.; Henry Moore Interview C, 2019). To escape the hardships of the Second World War, he and his wife, Irina, left their home in Hampstead for the quiet English countryside village called Much Hadham in Hertfordshire. Initially, Moore and Irina lived in a shared house called Hoglands (Figure 2) which, he later purchased (HMF B, n.d.).



*Figure 2 - Hoglands (Source: the Author)*

In his book, *Hoglands: The Home of Henry and Irina Moore*, David Mitchinson notes that

... Hoglands provided for Moore ... an attractive, unpretentious base to carry out business of being a sculptor – a happy home where an uncomplicated domesticity never interfered with work; a simple office structure that dealt with production, sales, exhibitions, publications, appointments, and public relations. (2007: 21).

Over time, as Moore's artistic production and, essentially, his collection of his own works increased, more space and facilities were required.

The Foundation today

Driving into the little hamlet of Perry Green, where the Henry Moore Foundation<sup>1</sup> is located, the first thing one sees is the renovated visitor

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1 Hereafter referred to as the Foundation. The Foundation is open Wednesday to Sunday and Bank Holidays from 11am to 5pm.



*Figure 3 - Visitor Center (Source: the Author)*

centre (Figure 3). In the same location as the visitor centre one can find the café and gift shop. Both these entities fall under Henry Moore Foundation Enterprises Limited<sup>2</sup>, a company set-up in order to generate further income for the Foundation. In 1976, the estate consisted of nine different studios. Today, visitors have access to six studio spaces that have been converted into galleries to view different aspects of Moore's oeuvre. The buildings have remained structurally unchanged, but, have been updated to meet current standards of accessibility, health and safety, and visitors' comfort. Next to the visitor centre, one can find the artist's home, Hoglands (Figure 2). To further aid this understanding of Moore's background, the Foundation is also home to the archive centre. Here, visitors are able to understand Moore's true nature as an artist by gaining access to Moore's correspondence, photographs, videos and sound recordings. Thus, the centre supports the Foundation's mission and aim but also advances its capacity to encourage and help scholars and art historians (Henry Moore Interview C, 2019).

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<sup>2</sup> Previously known as Raymond Spencer Company Limited (Mitchinson, 2006: 52; Henry Moore Interview A, 2019)

## Towards his own institution

Moore had a very clear vision for the Foundation. In an interview in 1957, talking about his process of sculpting, Moore claimed that “everything I do is intended to be big” (Henry Moore, 1957: 29). It is this philosophy that guided Moore as he proceeded to navigate the British art scene. Today, the Henry Moore Foundation is considered the custodian of one of the largest single-artist collections. It is also, considered the biggest grant-giving institution that supports “sculpture across historical, modern and contemporary registers and seek[s] to fund research that expands the appreciation of sculpture” (Vincent in Aspen Institute, 2010: 513; HMF C, n.d.).

Henry Moore, like many artists, required institutional support to promote his work. This meant that, locally, he received help from the Arts Council of Great Britain and, internationally, from the British Council. In a letter, dated November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1979, to the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Moore requested additional funds to be given to the British Council on account of their support of young British artists (Moore, 1979). Additionally, he acknowledged that the British Council “did more for me as an artist than any dealer” (Berthoud, 1987: 250). Receiving institutional support, through these partnerships, Moore was afforded the chance to further make a name for himself. In this way, he began to engage and understand a system governed by reputation. By displaying works internationally with such support, Moore was raising his profile as a talented and global artist. Through this, the artist was given the opportunity to approach and conduct business on a larger artistic and economic platform. This further strengthened his visibility and power as an artist worthy of recognition.

Beyond the above-mentioned supported exhibitions which intensified and maintained his visibility, Henry Moore was able to find a way to solidify his contribution to British art. Through gifts to Tate Britain and the Art Gallery of Ontario, internationally recognised museums, Moore aimed to increase his credibility as an artist.

Moore wanted to gift between twenty to thirty works to the Tate in 1964, a time where the Tate (now Tate Britain), was expanding and building its new galleries. In a public letter, published in *The Times* in 1967, forty-one British artists, some of whom worked with Moore, urged the Tate to refuse the gift. They stated that the “Tate has only limited space into which to expand and in which it fulfils its role as

the only permanent manifestation of a living culture” which should not be “devoting itself so massively to work of a single artist” (Craigie Aitchison *et. al* [*The Times*], 1967: 11). Despite this tension, and after clarification from the Tate’s Board of Trustees, the gift went to the Tate in 1979 and was exhibited to celebrate Moore’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday (Mitchinson, 2006: 15). In this way, Moore was ensuring that his works were collected in the nation’s major art museum and, subsequently, included in a future British art history.

Moore also donated sixty-five sculptures to the Art Gallery of Ontario, between the late 1960s to mid-1970s. They were also destined to be displayed permanently in a newly designed gallery. Here, however, there were no concerns expressed by fellow artists. In 1974, the Sculpture Centre opened as a purpose-built space for Moore’s work (Mitchinson, 2006: 16). As Mitchinson points out, “what made it [the gift] unique was the scale” (2006, 16). By having such a large number of works incorporated into historically important institutions in dedicated spaces, Moore was able to establish his place within an institutionalized art history. Placing his works within these spaces increased his appreciation as an artist, as well as market value. In other words, Moore’s gifts empowered him to pursue the building of his legacy at home and internationally, thus becoming an artist of global importance.

However, it is interesting to think about what motivated Moore to gift these works to the Tate. It is clear that there was a tension between Moore and other artists. As Correia (2015) points out, this became a war between the establishment, the museum, and those attempting to fight it. In understanding this, Moore is attempting to secure institutional and art historical attention, to not, as Sir Charles Wheeler points out, be demoted to “the cellars ... where Henry Moore is said to fear his [works] might one day be” (Sir Charles Wheeler [*The Times*], 1967: 13). In light of this competition for space in public institutions, Moore took the initiative to create his own space. In this way, he created a space where he remains relevant and protected from rejection and public debate.

Having acquired international recognition, Moore became a wealthy artist. In the same letter to Margaret Thatcher, mentioned earlier, Moore talks about the heavy taxes he pays for the sales of his artworks. Financial issues often play an important role in the creation of a foundation (Higonnet, 2007: 105; Anheier and Daly, 2006: 195). In doing so, an individual’s finances are diverted in the form of

charitable donations into the foundation they created in the first place. This permits for less heavy taxation and for a more focused use of their resources (van der Ploeg, 1995: 260). This is common practice in the United States and, increasingly, more common in the United Kingdom (Glinkowski, 2008: 13-15).

This appears to be the case for Moore too. It was not until the early 1970s that he took action to ensure the future of his estate against death duties. In order to prevent and protect his estate from being split up to pay these duties, Moore created a family foundation. In this way, he was able to secure his family's future, as well, as his own artistic legacy. Additionally, creating the Foundation, by providing an initial endowment of £250,000 (Berthoud, 1987: 428), afforded Moore the financial capabilities to buy back important pieces he had sold previously. In this way, the Foundation's collection fully represents the totality of his artistic lifespan and thus became the most important site to view his works, exactly as he would have wanted. Through this, Moore controlled his legacy, maintained his visibility and increased his wealth posthumously. It becomes clear, as Roger Berthoud states, that Moore's decision to create a foundation was a "blend of altruism and enlightened self-interest" (1987: 429).

## The Qatar Art Center

### Art Institutions in the Arab world

Before exploring the Qatar Art Center (QAC) it is important to situate it within the broader context of the Arabian Gulf. Traditionally, there has been a lack of academic literature on the subject of modern Arab art (Eigner, 2015: 29). This is not due to a lack of artists and art produced in the region, but rather, a lack of support from local cultural and heritage institutions (Eigner, 2015: 29). Despite this, artists are provided with a "rich laboratory" in which to create art in (Shabout and Mikdadi, 2009: 9). In recent years, it is this artistic laboratory that has been receiving much media attention (Shabout and Mikdadi, 2009: 8). In fact, art market reports show that the Arabian Gulf region is in a "booming state of affairs" with a "new source of goodies for the market's limitless voracity" (ArtTactic, 2018; Adams, 2016; Shabout and Mikdadi, 2009: 8). It is within this economically validating environment, that cultural institutions are being formed: a



happy marriage between commerce and culture (Downey, 2016: 37-38). Kuwaiti born artist, Monira Al-Qadiri points out that this state level patronage of the arts has radically transformed the museological landscape within the Gulf (2016: 335). This is best seen through the state-driven institutions and programmes being developed. These include various museums, residences, and public art programmes; all in the hope to encourage artistic creation and exchange.

However, the effects these state-sponsored institutions have on the cultural production that artists are at the forefront of have been questioned. Heavy criticism, from Western media outlets, suggest that these newly formed institutions accommodate an international community which sees the Gulf as rapidly globalising but without taking into consideration local needs (Downey, 2016: 34). They often criticise these institutions for being “inauthentic” and often question if these are the right institutions to be founded (Mirgani, 2017: 4). It is important then, to question, what are the ‘right’ institutions? Given the lack of literature and institutional support, perhaps the response lies in the manner in which these museums and cultural programmes engage and contribute meaningfully towards a dialogue on modern Arab art? Ala Younis, a Jordanian research-based artist and curator, puts forth the argument that, maybe, it is the artist’s responsibility to “produce institutional models to counter past failings and present day forms of exceptionalism” (Downey, 2016: 33). In doing so, artists are able to address institutional absences that contribute to a lack of cultural production, both artistically and scholarly (Younis, 2016: 288-290). Through this, artists from the region can not only tell their stories, but, be understood and experienced on their own terms. It is within this understanding that the Qatar Art Center operates. It becomes a place where the region’s institutional insufficiencies can be addressed in response to the needs of the artists who contribute towards its cultural environment.

## Understanding the QAC

Sheikh Hassan bin Mohammed bin Ali Al-Thani was born in 1960 in Doha, Qatar. Sheikh Hassan, from an early age, developed a passion and interest in art, recalling his trips abroad to Europe and the paintings hanging in relative’s homes (Al-Khudhairi, 2010: 19). Noticing that, within Qatar, art was not often displayed and while pursuing

a bachelor's degree in history, Sheikh Hassan began questioning the role of art within the region and the role Arab artists had in the story of modern art (Interview A, 2019). As a result, he started making his first purchases towards his own private collection in 1986 (Al-Khudhairi, 2010: 20). Unlike today, this was a time when Arab art was underappreciated and undervalued. Additionally, Sheikh Hassan discovered that there was little to no scholarly or academic work on modern Arab art. Consequently, in 2018, after he received a PhD in Egyptian Art from the University of Bonn, he published a book titled, *Modern Art in Egypt in the Twentieth Century*.

Beyond being a patron, scholar, academic, and collector, Sheikh Hassan is, ultimately, an artist. It is this “cross-regional and documentary vision” that contributes to his art related interests, goals, and aims (Interview A, 2019; Al-Khudhairi, 2010: 20). Not just wanting to commission artworks for his collection, Sheikh Hassan would invite important Arab artists, who could contribute to the production of art and culture, to Doha, Qatar. Here, he created a residency programme in which he provided studios, materials, and “anything they [the artists] needed” (Al-Khudhairi, 2010: 22). He offered a space to come and create art freely, away from the socio-political pressures of their respective countries. As a result of both his artistic endeavours and scholarly interest the QAC was born in 1994.

The Qatar Art Center today

QAC was established in 1994 as a studio space for Sheikh Hassan which he also offered, as a place of refuge, to Iraqi artists; a country with a long history of major cultural production (Al-Khudhairi, 2010: 21). As Sophia Al-Maria notes, the artists “lived and worked sporadically, leaving behind a wealth of work, and also a wealth of information in the form of books, sketches, correspondences and of course photographs” (2010: 44). Unlike other cases, for instance, the Fire Station, (a modern-day residency programme for emerging artists in Qatar), it is a residency for, only, those who have a long history with art; those who are well-established and known within the Arab art world (Interview A, 2019). Thus, the QAC provides Sheikh Hassan an opportunity to learn from other artists who have shaped and defined modern Arab art.



Figure 4 - QAC Exterior (Source: QAC)

Located in Madinat Khalifa South<sup>3</sup>, one first notices its colourful façade (Figure 4). It was designed by Dia Al-Azzawi, to stop the building from being mistaken as a bank, the artist claims (Interview B, 2019). This made a bold statement amongst the, characteristically, beige houses and office complexes of suburban Doha. The space itself consists of three floors and includes two galleries, in the Western ‘white cube’ model, with one clear difference: colourful floor markings and floor windows. Additionally, it has a modern storage facility for some of Sheikh Hassan’s works as well as storage spaces for artistic supplies. Indeed, the QAC has its own archive space and library. However, notably, the QAC is still a private space, evoking a majlis-like environment<sup>4</sup> that is modern, welcoming, but also deeply personal.

QAC aims to advance Arab art by providing a space for the creation and production of Arab art. It allows artists to make use of the best materials possible to create their best possible works (Interview A, 2019). In fact, over the years, distinguished artists, such as Dia Al-Azzawi, Nazar Yahya, Yousef Ahmad, have taken over different aspects of the art-making process (Interview A, 2019). Thus, artists are encouraged to learn from each other and perfect their specialties. In most cases,

<sup>3</sup> A residential suburb of Doha that was developed when Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al-Thani was the Emir in the 1970s.

<sup>4</sup> A majlis is a semi-private and, often, gendered place of reception located either close to or within the courtyard of the house. Most commonly, it is a social space which fosters multi-generational dialogue through personal connections (Exell, 2014: 62).

the QAC offers artists a chance to bring their ideas to life in any form possible whether through sculpture, design or painting (Interview A, 2019). Through the QAC, Sheikh Hassan, has built a platform for artists to come, experiment and work in a relaxed environment; away from the institutional and economic pressures of production, typically required from other art and culture programmes and institutions.

As an artist, Sheikh Hassan does not feel the need to exhibit or donate his work; his paintings are for him alone (Interview A, 2019). By not gifting or displaying works, he is afforded a certain freedom (Interview A, 2019). It is this freedom that allows him to explore and expand on his own artistic practice. Despite this, Sheikh Hassan has offered a significant work, Figure 5, *Motherland* (2018), currently on display at the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ), a very rare occurrence for him. The piece, made of polished steel, resembles a traditional mask older Arab women wear called a *battoula* (Figure 5).

The offer of this work is important on many levels. On one hand, displaying this sculptural piece so prominently before the main entrance to the galleries of the National Museum, Sheikh Hassan is confirmed as a Qatari artist whose work expresses the ‘soul’ of the country in a particular way. In light of this, Sheikh Hassan establishes himself as a seminal contemporary Qatari, Arab artist. Therefore, in displaying *Motherland*, he attempts to bridge a gap between local culture and an elevated appreciation for art and museums. As quoted by Al-Khudhairi, Sheikh Hassan “... had to educate them [the local community] about modern art, and that it wasn’t just decoration – that it has a deeper, wider, philosophical meaning” (2010: 22). In a country that does not have a strong art and cultural context, this is a difficult process.

On the other hand, this is also an important contribution to society and the production of art and culture in Qatar. As his collection started to grow, he felt the need to make it more accessible (Al-Khudhairi, 2010: 21). He was able to install works in four villas, widely referred to as the Art Villas (Interviews A & D, 2019). This meant, for him at the time, creating a museum that did not exist in the Arab world. The Villa turned private museum allowed him to facilitate his own personal involvement with artists by collecting and displaying their works (Al-Khudhairi, 2010: 21). Later, in 2010, he founded Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, a public museum, which now houses the works he collected and displayed. In creating this institutional space, he was able to establish these works as important, and, in turn, elevate the artists’ profiles within a local and regional context. In the process,



*Figure 5 - Motherland by Hassan bin Mohammed Al Thani in the National Museum of Qatar (2018) (Source: the Author)*

it has meant that he was able to increase the artists' visibility and, subsequently, their value. While he is able to do that for others, it also means that he has created a space for himself. The space offers insight in to his own profession, away from the stereotypical and gendered Arab understanding of artists and art (Interview A, 2019). Ultimately, this is an act of preservation; preserving the knowledge and experiences, mainly, Sheikh Hassan has accumulated over the past three decades. In this way, he creates both a physical and meta-physical space where he, as an artist, is also visibly important.

It is clear that Sheikh Hassan aims to educate himself and others (Interview A, 2019). Sheikh Hassan is aware of, and interested in, the commercial system that governs the art and culture sector. Although he does not sell fellow artists' works, he supports its production by providing these artists the resources they require. He understands that artists, especially those emerging in an underdeveloped region, struggle with navigating a pre-designed Western art and culture system (Interview A, 2019). Ultimately, this is an attempt to uplift the artist. In turn, he becomes an intermediary between his contemporaries and other important art institutions globally. In this sense, Sheikh Hassan is able to develop a support system for others, financially and otherwise. It is this support system that, he hopes, will inspire future artists based on the "trusted relationship ... [he has] ... with museums, critics, and

galleries” (Interview A, 2019). In this way, he is able to encourage further appreciation of art produced in the region. Through this, Sheikh Hassan is providing a way for himself and artists to assert power and control on their own terms.

## **Conclusions: 'The artist comes first'**

This chapter aimed to address the question: why do artists create their own art institutions? Using the framework developed to analyse the Henry Moore Foundation and the Qatar Art Center (Figure 1), it is evident that artists create their own institutions in response to a system that does not support their needs. Often, artists are not satisfied with the museum’s control over their contribution to a broader art historical and institutionalised canon. It is through their own space that artists are then able to control their artistic narrative. In the process, they are able to display their works as they feel is more appropriate. This provides them with greater autonomy in the way such art is experienced and appreciated by the public. In this way, artists are able to sustain their self-worth and importance. Creating one’s own institution allows the artist the opportunity to be both part of the institutionalised, pre-determined model of art and culture, while also establishing a space on their own terms that suit their needs first. In doing so, the artist develops a stronger voice worthy of commanding an institutional presence.

Both Henry Moore and Sheikh Hassan understood the contexts within which they operated. As David Mitchinson (2006: 11) points out, the establishment of the Henry Moore Foundation was “a peculiarly English affair which could have happened the same nowhere else”. Understanding and extrapolating from this, Henry Moore worked within an existing Western model of art and culture. In turn, this enabled him to make use of existing resources to establish his own institution. As a result, creating the Foundation was a way in which to gain control over his own narrative in an institutionalised manner. While, for Sheikh Hassan Al-Thani, establishing the QAC responded to a gap within the larger institutional environment in the Arab art world. This meant understanding the pre-determined Western art and cultural traditions and the lack of such a system within the Arabian Gulf context. In this way, it becomes a place to educate himself, fellow artists, and, to a lesser extent, the local population. Sheikh Hassan works to create an appreciation, both locally and internationally, for

Arab art. Understanding this, he created and encourages an environment where fellow Arab artists can be in control of their own story. In doing so, it becomes a place that caters to his and other artist's needs for recognition and support.

In light of these conclusions, one could possibly begin to answer Anthony Downey's question: are there institutional models capable of navigating the 'treacherous waters' of art and culture (2016: xx)? Perhaps, the answer lies with the artist and creating their own spaces for themselves first.

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## CHAPTER 2

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# Curating Performance Art from the Arab World: An investigation into the landscape of an emerging and evolving praxis

**Wadha Al-Aqeedi**

Wadha Al-Aqeedi is a curator and a PhD candidate at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Her research focuses on the history of performance art and its contemporary practices in the Arab world, since the 1980s. From 2016 to 2020, she worked at Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha as an assistant curator, conceiving curatorial and exhibition projects for local and international audiences. Recently, Al-Aqeedi was the assistant curator for *Fateh al-Moudarres: Colour, Extensity and Sense* (2018,); *M. F. Husain: Horses of the Sun* (2019); *Yto Barrada: My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nougat* (2020) at Mathaf, Doha; and *Our World is Burning* (2020) at Palais de Tokyo, Paris.

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## Abstract

This chapter investigates the emerging and evolving practice of performance art curation, with an emphasis on work from the Arab world. Due to the evident development and establishment of performance art curation in London, the research concentrates on contemporary models in this city, and is based on discussions with London-based performance and visual arts curators about their perspectives on the roles and challenges of curating performance art, as well as the structure and infrastructure of the practice. Central to this study is an investigation into

how curatorial practice can play a role in making visible the little-known history of performance art from the Arab world. In an effort to expand on this, I examine an exhibition that addresses the history of performance art *from* and *in relation to* the Arab region. An important finding is that Arab performance art has developed in parallel and in dialogue with different parts of the world. Undoubtedly, there is ample room for further investment and support of performance and Live Art by art museums and institutions in the Arab region.

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## Introduction

The theory and practice of curatorship are continuously evolving to encompass diverse disciplines in arts and culture. Curators play a major role in producing knowledge, addressing specific issues that relate to society, and raising the importance of certain artistic practices, as well as championing and questioning the history of art. Over the past decades, performance art has become more visible internationally due to the many curators who have recognised its importance in art history and have engaged with its current discourse and aesthetics. This research looks at the establishment of a new genre: ‘performance art curation’.

In many parts of the world today, however, performance art is less visible. The history and practice of performance art from the Arab world is relatively unknown, both regionally and internationally. Yet, its traces exist today as a constellation of rare archival materials and references. These have not been consolidated into a coherent body of knowledge on Arab performance. This research aims to address this.

This study recognises the challenges in curating an artistic form that takes place in time and space and is defined by an ephemerality that can only be overcome through documentation. Its key aim is to discuss the role and responsibilities of a performance art curator, as well as the importance and issues around performance art documentation. In addition, it aims to contribute to the understanding of how curatorship can raise the visibility of performance from the Arab world. Furthermore, this research aims to expand on the scholarship of performance curation through the collection of primary data, and to reveal the unknown but

significant history of performance art from the Arab world.<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, the study aims to argue that institutional curators can play a major role in reinforcing the integration of performance art into the museum and other public spheres, whether curated, programmed or collected.

To pursue the aims of this study semi-structured interviews were carried out with London-based curators discussing performance art curation through their personal trajectory. The interviews include leading curators who are based in London, working in museums, foundations, galleries or independently. The criterion for their selection was their personal contribution and activity in the field of performance art and curatorial practice. The participating curators were: Aaron Cezar,<sup>2</sup> Cliff Lawson,<sup>3</sup> Ned McConnell,<sup>4</sup> Lucia Pietroiusti,<sup>5</sup> Lois Keidan<sup>6</sup> and Jeni Walwin.<sup>7</sup> A case study to analyse an exhibition of performance art from the Arab world using mainly archival resources was then conducted.

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1 This research discusses performance art from the Arab world, whether the artists are living within its geography or beyond its borders. Therefore, in this context, Arab performance is not defined by or situated in specific geographies. Culturally speaking, it is challenging to limit the Arab world to fixed borders and a certain geographic area. In the second half of the twentieth century, the Arab region was devastated by conflict, war and political shifts, which led many Arab artists and intellectuals into self-exile to the West, thereby obtaining the status of 'diaspora'. The year 1967 marks the failure of many ideologies, such as Arab nationalism, as well as the rise of civil wars and regime changes (Laurens *et al.* 2003). At the same time, it marks a period of intense cultural and artistic production in response to the status quo. Performance art was used by many artists, such as the Lebanese London-based artist Mona Hatoum, as a medium to document the urban, social, economic and political transformations that took place in the region.

2 Aaron Cezar is the director of the Delfina Foundation. His role is to fulfil Delfina's mission of supporting artists in developing their practice and the philosophy of their work, mainly through residency programmes. (Cezar, pers. comm. 2019).

3 Cliff Lawson has been a Senior Curator at the Hayward Gallery for about ten years, first arriving as a curator. Prior to that, he was an assistant curator at Tate Modern (Lawson, pers. comm. 2019).

4 Ned McConnell is the curator at the David Roberts Art Foundation (DRAF). His role involves developing the Foundation's programme of exhibitions, performances and regional partnerships (McConnell, pers. comm. 2019).

5 Lucia Pietroiusti is the curator of General Ecology and Live Programmes at the Serpentine Galleries, and the curator of the performance *Sun and Sea (Marina)* in the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale 2019 (Pietroiusti, pers. comm. 2019).

6 Lois Keidan is the co-founder and director of Live Art Development Agency (LADA), which opened in 1999. Additionally, she is a writer and cultural activist. She served as the director of the Live Arts department at the ICA in London from 1992 until 1997 (Keidan, pers. comm. 2019).

7 Jeni Walwin has worked as an independent curator, writer and public art consultant for about 30 years. She was an Arts Council officer with specific responsibility for Live Art for five years in the 1980s (Walwin, pers. comm. 2019).

The chapter is structured into four sections: the first reviews the literature on performance art curatorship; the second looks at curatorial views on performance art in general; the third examines performance art from the Arab world more specifically through a discussion and analysis of the exhibition of performance art ‘from and in relation to’ the Arab world – *A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things* – which took place in 2015 at the Delfina Foundation in London. Finally, the conclusion aims to bring together key points and provide ideas for future research.

## Performance Art Curation: An Emerging Practice

Despite the relative novelty of performance art curation, both performance art and curation stand on their own as well-established fields. Rooted in avant-garde art movements in early-twentieth century Europe (Goldberg, 2011), performance art has evolved as a radical artistic language whose discourses relate to society, politics and contemporary issues. The term ‘curation’ in the narrower sense is related to ‘caring for’ cultural-heritage collections, including artefacts and material objects (Hoffmann et al., 2013). However, in the last three decades, the role of the curator has expanded to cultural connoisseur, instigator of social and cultural developments, and cultivator working with artists, institutions and audiences. As a result, curation has become a practice of ‘radical care’, as recently coined by Nicole L. Martin to describe curatorial practice. As such, curators ensure the visibility and viability of artists who are left unsupported by institutions (Devida et al., 2019).

A number of academic publications have informed the scholarship of performance art curation. Theorists and curators such as Jens Hoffman (2013), Paul O’Neill (2012) and Judith Rugg (2007) have contributed significantly to the development of a canon of curatorial practice. The definition of curatorship is an intricate process and many writers seem to have made their descriptions elusive in order to allow for broad interpretations. For instance, in an article on curating performing arts, Florian Malzacher (2010) explains the indistinctness of a curator’s profile due to a diversity of roles: a curator is a programme-maker, a dramaturge, and a link between art and the public.

A historical overview of curatorship, as put forward by various art theorists and authors including Terry Smith, Judith Rugg, Michele



Sedgwick and Paul O'Neill, among others, will help facilitate the comprehension of performance-art curation. O'Neill (2012) provides a historical survey of the emergence of contemporary curatorial discourse from the late 1960s, as well as the changes in curatorial practice since the 1990s to the present day. He states that this period of curatorial practice has witnessed what Seth Siegelau has coined a 'demystification', whereby the conditions for the production and mediation of exhibitions have been made visible by curators. Thus, the current role of the curator is to create a framework for the selection of artists and artworks in an exhibition space, as well as to mediate. The curator draws on the parallel roles of 'artist as sender, curator as mediator, and the viewer as receiver' (O'Neill 2012: 45). Thus O'Neill places the notion of curatorship on a historical map that highlights the antecedents of the curator's role, which can be summarised as bringing together artists and presenting their works to the public in an exhibition space.

Contemporary curatorial practice has revolutionised the museum sphere: museums are no longer merely considered places to preserve and present artworks, but have transformed into agents of social and cultural change through critical curatorial discourses. Evolutions in art curation entail not only the application of new approaches of display and presentation of artworks but also a crucial and creative role in engaging audiences through interpretation and programming. In that sense, the mediation of artworks by curators to create an engaging narrative becomes inseparable from the works.

Milliard et al. (2016) note how independent curating became widespread in the 1980s. As a result, individual initiatives, separate from institutions, became more common, thus making the profession more nomadic and flexible. Smith and Fowle (2012) agree that a growing number of practitioners 'seek shelter under this umbrella', including artistic directors of biennials and blockbuster exhibitions who work as independent curators alongside their institutional role. Whether independent or institutional, however, curators now perform several roles, including administration and authorship, unlike in the past when the role was limited to preservation (Milliard et al., 2016).

In recent years, the concept of performance has grown to involve a wide range of disciplines including art, social sciences and literature. As its usage and popularity have expanded, so has the complex domain of written works about performance that aim to analyse and comprehend the term. Marvin Carlson (2004), in particular, has provided a

theoretical and historical background, while RoseLee Goldberg (2011) offers an instrumental survey of the field in *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*.

The early forms and theories of performance art can be ascribed to the European avant-garde movements, namely Dadaism and Futurism, in the early twentieth century (Carlson, 2004). These movements introduced new methods and experimental ideas that played a significant role in creating performances by European artists, which later resulted in the emergence of experimental work in the United States. Noteworthy developments in performance art in California and New York emerged during the 1960s and 1970s from several disciplines of art, including Conceptual art, Live Art and dance, as reflected in the work of Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti and Ann Halprin (Carlson, 2004). The initial forms and expressions of performance art mainly involved the use of the body as both the object and subject of an artwork. By the 1970s, this focus had led to the term 'body art' (Carlson, 2004).

Goldberg (2011) defines the 1970s as the period when performance art gained acceptance as an artistic expression and a medium 'in its own right'. She notes that by 1979, performance art had moved towards popular culture, in a way that was similar to other visual art forms. Many performances of the 1980s were oriented towards the inclusion of new media as these evolved. In the same decade, performance art addressed issues of identity, 'otherness' and marginalised groups, especially during the AIDS epidemic. As a result, performance art became a form of activism.

Moving on to the twenty-first century, Goldberg (2011) notes that the first decade witnessed many political, social and economic shifts. In some countries around the globe, the ephemerality of performance art was the ideal way to evade governmental watchdogs that considered artist's activities politically disruptive. Yet curators and archivists working in contemporary art museums have countered this ephemerality through documents in their archives. Museum professionals, such as curators, conservators, and registrars, defined these materials as the outcomes of performance art. Thereby, they have incorporated the history of performance art into contemporary art museums, preserving it for generations to come. Furthermore, museums have provided space for people to experience and interact with performance art, as well as articulated it in their mission the aim to continue 'the examination of the history of performance art' (Goldberg, 2011: 228).

The above discussion of curatorship and performance art creates a basis for understanding the concept of performance art curation. Whilst performance art and curation are both well-established, performance art curation is an emerging practice that is gaining ground with its own theoretical framework, literature and discourse. However, very few researchers have analysed the concept of performance art curatorship. *Curating Live Arts* (Davida et al., 2019) is the guiding source for the comprehension of this complex subject, since it brings together a group of international theorist-practitioners who present critical perspectives on the evolving discipline. This recent anthology gives an account of curating Live Art by offering multiple perspectives on its historical framing, ethics, exhibitions and the institutional reinventions of performance art.

Contemporary performance scholar Bertie Ferdman (Davida et al., 2019) describes the role of a performance curator, which she essentially sees as a synonym for ‘programmer, festival director, producer’, as a mediator who ensures that a public confronting an artwork or a performance engages with and understands the work (2019: 17). While performance artists have been preoccupied with the aesthetics and traditional system of performance art, curators have been redefining their role in relation to institutions, artists and audiences in terms of ‘presenting, programming, producing, financing, and experiencing work’ (2019: 17). More recently, the organisation of performance festivals has amplified the visibility of curators and has been an important asset for the development and reception of performance art by audiences (2019: 17).

Lois Keidan and RoseLee Goldberg are identified by Ferdman as two key figures in performance art curation. Keidan co-founded the Live Art Development Agency (LADA) in 1999 in London, to ‘provide a curatorial platform for artists’ experimenting with different approaches to Live Art (2019:19). Prior to founding LADA, Keidan served as director of Live Arts at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), from 1992 to 1997. In 2008, ICA director Ekow Eshun decided to close the department of Live Art and Media. According to him, ‘the art form lacks depth and cultural urgency’ (as quoted in Ferdman 2019: 23). In response, Tim Etchells and Ant Hampton, commissioned by LADA, ‘collaborated to create a virtual programme of project proposals from an international group of artists, curators and thinkers working in and around Live Art, framed as an imaginary re-opening

of the department.<sup>8</sup> The ‘curatorial proposition’, titled *True Riches* (2009), served as a testament to the historical, current and future cultural richness of this art form.

Keidan redefines the term ‘Live Art’, as a cultural strategy to include experimental processes and practices that are excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks (2019: 19). Goldberg places her practice of curation ‘within the realm of visual arts (2019: 19). In 2004, she founded Performa, a non-profit organisation, dedicated to the exploration of the history of performance art in the twentieth-century culture (Performa, n.d.). The Performa Biennial, New York, was launched in 2005 and has been celebrated as the first festival to dedicate attention to the history of performance, as well as to ‘showcasing multidisciplinary contemporary art organised around intertwined curatorial and artistic initiatives’ (Performa, n.d.). Furthermore, this non-profit organisation offers a curatorial fellowship programme to provide comprehensive training in curating live performance and exhibitions of performance art in response to the establishment of performance departments in museums in recent years.

Ferdman notes that a performing arts curator emerges as ‘a visionary who understands institutional models enough to warrant new ways within it, through it, and in constant opposition to it’ (2019: 25). Similarly, artist-scholar Nicole L Martin (2019: 311) defines curation as a ‘practice of radical care’, which ensures the ‘visibility and viability of artists who are viewed as living on the margins and whose work is too often left unsupported by institutional bureaucracy’. In other words, a performance art curator has a valuable understanding of institutions, art and the public domain, which plays a major role in supporting artists who are marginalised and misrepresented in the art field. With the support of curators, performance artists are able to occupy museum and public spaces to engage and interact with audiences in addressing a multitude of issues and subjects.

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8 <http://timetchells.com/projects/true-riches/>. *True Riches* featured contributions from Geraldine Pilgrim, José Antonio Sánchez, La Ribot, Gary Stevens, Vivi Tellas, Nicolás Goldberg, Christine Peters, Yara El-Sherbini, David Rosenberg/Shunt, Rajni Shah, Bill Aitchison, Goran Sergej Pristas, Frauke Requardt, Momus, The Centre of Attention, Duckie, Lois Keidan, Borrowers-International-Network, Hannah Herzig, Home, Zhana Ivanova, Station House Opera, Janez Janša and Stefan Kaegi.

## Curators' Perspectives on Performance Art and its Curation

In this section, we aim to review some of the issues around performance art and its curation through the views and ideas of the curators interviewed.

### On the Terms and Definitions of Performance Art

Performance art has been referred to by many terms, such as 'action', 'intervention', and 'happenings', a term coined in the late 1950s by American artist Allan Kaprow (1927–2006) (Goldberg, 2011: 128). An initial objective of this work was to understand what performance art is today. When asked to give their definition, some of the curators discussed its different approaches, while others highlighted how it has shifted to become primarily known as 'Live Art' today.

Curators agreed that defining performance art is not easy since it crosses multiple disciplines (Cezar, 2019; Keidan, 2019). It can be a performance of the spoken word, or theatrical or dance, as well as addressing the 'performativity' of objects. It does not necessarily tell a narrative, but rather, it provokes a mood. Aaron Cezar considers performativity to be key, as opposed to performance itself: taking into consideration the processes, acts and rituals through which we understand ourselves, rather than looking at the spectacle. Above all, he views performance art as an alternative way of writing and reading history, where the artist's body becomes the archive, as well as 'a place and a repository of memory' (Cezar, 2019). 'Performativity' is an integral component in performance art, and often viewers think of some artworks as performative in nature, even if they are not defined as such by their authors. For example, installations using sound are often considered performative. Thus, performance art does not have clear boundaries (Lawson, 2019).

As Jeni Walwin pointed out, in the 1980s, artists working within a fine art tradition looked at the 'needs' within their work and incorporated their own physical presence as an integral part of their oeuvre to create performances (2019). To this day, this remains an important aspect of performative work. According to Lois Keidan (2019) performance art emerged when visual artists rejected object-based works and the art market, giving precedence to the physical presence of the artist and

the audience, and, in the process, creating a sense of community by offering people agency and visibility, whether in galleries, the theatre or any public space. Therefore, performance art is not about creating objects, but meaningful experiences determined by the conditions of place and time, as well as the artists' ideas.

From another perspective, Lucia Pietroiusti (2019) reflected on the performance she curated for the Venice Biennale, *Sun & Sea (Marina)*, where there was a rapport between theatre and Live Art. The performance borrowed theatrical and operatic elements and was staged with the support of a large group of collaborators. Instead of being presented in a traditional black box theatre, however, it was conceived for an unconventional space within a military zone in Venice. For Pietroiusti, performance art breaks the boundaries between traditional theatre and Live Art, encompassing many different disciplines. It relies on the collaboration of artists, producers, designers, curators and directors to bring the piece to life.

The term 'Live Art' is used by other curators as well (Keidan 2019; McConnell, 2019). Live Art is defined as a 'cultural strategy' comprising ways of working that are excluded from the traditional curatorial, cultural and critical context. It is an umbrella term that ranges from performance art to theatre practices and emphasises the liveliness of the experience, the live presence of the artist and the audience. As such, it is important to question 'Live Art' today, and determine what kind of art it can be, how it is conceptualised and staged, where it is taking place, how it can be experienced, written about and archived. 'Live Art is everything', as stated by Keidan, which relates to critical, cultural and curatorial practice as much as to artistic vision. Above all, Live Art is inclusive of artists who are socially and culturally marginalised, such as artists of colour, disabled, or from the LGBTQ community (Keidan, 2019).

### On the Roles and Responsibilities of a Performance Art Curator

Today, curators hold many roles. Curator Natasha Hoare emphasised this fact when she titled her book on the subject *The New Curator [Researcher] [Commissioner] [Keeper] [Interpreter] [Producer] [Collaborator]* (2016). In order to understand what curatorship can contribute and offer to performance art, it is important to unpack the many roles and responsibilities of a curator towards artists, institutions and communities.

Curators are often considered conduits between artists and the

public. To achieve an effective facilitation between the two, it is important to have an understanding of both the artist and the public domain (Walwin, 2019). A performance art curator, similar to a visual art curator, aims to facilitate the relationship between artist, public and institution. Principally, a curator must ensure that sufficient information concerning the background and context of an artwork is communicated to the public. However, in the case of performance art, a curator is more concerned with negotiating the limitations of performances, whether temporality, logistics or other practicalities. It is important to come up with engaging methods to communicate the idea of a time-based work to audiences (McConnell, 2019).

Moreover, the role of a curator entails administrative support, fundraising, managing both the artist's and the audience's expectations, as well as interpretation of the work. In the case of performance art, there are no absolute requisites for a curator to have specific skills and knowledge, but, it is important to respond to the skills of the artist in question, which might require sophisticated technical support (Walwin, 2019) for intricate installations or 'new media' technologies, such as the digital and virtual.

A curator of performance art must take on 'an enormous development of care', and possess effective communication and mediation skills. Moreover, responding to institutional or organisational demands is key, whether logistical or conceptual, as well as being the person who is the 'most optimistic' when it comes to problem-solving in complex situations (Pietrojusti, 2019). Curators are essentially thinkers and organisers, who enjoy an amount of institutional power that helps to increase the circulation of performance art, as well as championing its intellectual ideas. Some performances are inevitably expensive, often including dancers, choreographers, rehearsals and venue, so the curator must have a network of connections to help secure financial resources and manpower (Lawson, 2019).

Despite the fact that the role of a performance art curator has many parallels with the role of a visual art curator, performance art curatorship requires a different skillset. First, it is important for a curator to be a 'people person' – someone who is social and has an expanded network; someone who can initiate collaborations and secure funds. Second, it is crucial to nurture ideas in respect to artists and performances. And finally, a knowledge and background in art history and theory provides a critical understanding of what and how the work is situated within its context, as well as identifying references that are not necessarily

visible to an artist. The way in which a curator interprets the work for a large audience, and situates it within its rightful history and context are fundamental to his or her contribution to performance. Furthermore, having a thorough understanding of the artist's process, especially when their work deals primarily with emotions, attitudes and moods, as opposed to objects, is equally important. A curator is in a position to bring out the ideas of creative individuals, as well as help them meet their aesthetic goals (Cezar, 2019).

However, curators should be aware of the thin line between the role of the curator and the artist. In other words, they should not force ideas that could influence the artistic outcome of the performance (Pietrojusti, 2019). Performance art curators working in museums and galleries often have a strong passion for performance art and this has been an integral factor for its introduction into the museum sphere. Tate Modern's Curator of Contemporary Art and Performance, Catherine Wood, for example, took the lead in activating performance art at Tate and was one of the first curators to have 'Performance' in her title. The relationship between curator and artist is highly collaborative, involving defining what the work is, how it should be situated, and what its conditions, context and audiences are (Keidan, 2019).

### On the Challenges of Curating Performance Art

Performance art crosses many disciplines to create engaging and provocative experiences that address our history, identity, gender roles and socio-political issues. It can be aesthetically radical and therefore its curation requires radical care. Moreover, since it deals with human subjects and new technologies, it becomes increasingly challenging for curators to work with.

Often the challenges of curating performance art depend on the curator's familiarity with the artist and the performance's subject, and whether the performance is being staged for the first time or repeated. Sometimes, curators collaborate with artists on controversial and dangerous work. Walwin (2019), for instance, gave an example of an artist with whom she has worked with on multiple occasions, Stephen Cripps, who uses fire and pyrotechnics in his performances. Today, it would be difficult to stage such a performance, due to safety issues.

In such a context it is important to be able to articulate to the public why the performance is appropriate and make a connection between the artist's work and the site. Above all, it is vital that the curator puts



safety measures in place in order to ensure that nobody will be harmed, including the artist (Walwin, 2019).

Another example came from Keidan (2019), who recalled the collaboration with the Italian performance artist Franko B and the live piece he installed at the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern that involved blood. The presence of blood immediately raises concerns and even fear. This meant that it was difficult to licence and to convince the Arts Council, who were the commissioners of the live performances, to stage the piece. Tate was very understanding, however, especially the Head of Security and Head of Health and Safety, who were on board to support the artist and the team during the performance. Keidan argues that 'If Tate can do this, any museum in the world can do it.' (Keidan, 2019).

From another perspective, it is often challenging to work in small teams when curating performance art, due to its specific demands. Performance might include musicians, lighting designers and security staff (Cezar 2019). It can also be difficult to manage the artist's expectations, since the curator is not able to determine the end result of the performance. Therefore, similar to performance in general, curating performance art involves improvisation. Moreover, it is important to support the artists intellectually and emotionally since they often put themselves in vulnerable situations (McConnell, 2019).

Cezar (2019) discusses the challenges of curating a historical performance. The main questions one must ask are: 'Does the documentation exist? Where is it? What state is it in? How do you find the context in which to present it?'. It is important to know how to access the documents, but most importantly, to understand their original context.

Furthermore, many funders find it difficult to understand what performance art is, why it matters, and why it should be supported. Nonetheless, institutions and museums are increasingly recognising the impact of performance art on audiences and communities, and therefore supporting it. Above all, curators are challenged by the context and presentation of the performance, and the need to ensure that the performance is appreciated in itself as an autonomous medium, and not as a sideshow (Cezar, 2019).

### On the Documentation of Performance Art

The nature of a live performance is its ephemerality and temporality. It exists through the presence of the artist's body, the spectator as a

witness, and its ability to create a meaning or an experience embedded in one's memory. However, the question about whether performances need to be documented is central in performance curatorship, not just for historical performances. Some of the interviewed curators agreed on the value and significance of documentation, while others disagreed. Artists themselves have different opinions about the documentation of their performances: some dismiss it and consider it unnecessary, emphasising the live experience as a crucial element of the performance. Nonetheless, there is often monetary value in documenting performances, which helps in raising funds for future works, as well as sharing documentation as a portfolio presented to galleries in order to secure venues in which to perform (Walwin, 2019).

Pietroiusti (2019) argues that even though performance art exists in the realm of ephemerality and can only be comprehended in a given instant, this does not mean that its memory has to disappear. In her practice, she has sometimes asked for and offered institutional documentation of the artists' works, and it is up to them whether they edit the documentation or transform it into a new work. In fact, she values documentation as a necessity in performance, as well as a source for archives. She argues that this question of documentation is overly problematised when the answer to the question is quite simple: 'Documentation of a performance is a performance itself'. A curator is in a position to contextualise the documentation of a work, narrate it, and position it in a space that will inform the work (Pietroiusti, 2019). However, documentation can become seen – even by the artists themselves – as the end result, to the detriment of the live work and the audience (Keidan, 2019).

There is a difference in the role of an image in the realm of Live Art practice as opposed to visual art practice. In the case of visual arts, an image can be considered an artwork, whereas in Live Art, it is considered a record. As the profile of performance art increases, it has entered the art market, enabling the photographers of performances to make a profit. This raises the question of intellectual property, since the documentation of performances is sold on the market as artworks, often made by those other than the performers. As a result, many performance documents are not under the ownership of the performance artist, but, rather, the photographer, an issue that raises legal concerns. Manuel Vason has developed a collaborative initiative of documenting live works that result in creative photographs, rather than documentation. However, there is a dual ownership of the images

in terms of accreditation and profit (Keidan, 2019).

Further to the problem of copyright for performance documentation, when the documentation is made by an institution, it can easily be defined as a document rather than an artwork (McConnell, 2019). As Pietroutsis (2019) highlighted, institutions are able to capture and offer documentation materials to artists to either edit or turn into new work. After all, the role of a curator is to nurture and support artists in any way possible.

### **The exhibition 'A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things'**

In 2015, the Delfina Foundation presented a major group exhibition entitled *A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things*, curated by its director, Aaron Cezar, with contributions from the curatorial fellows of Delfina's research and commissioning platform, Staging Histories, Ala' Younis and Barrak Alzaid, as well as Jane Scarth. It assembled artists who are primarily from the Arab world, alongside those from Asia and America, exploring performance art as a form of 'recording and rewriting history' (Ibraaz, n.d.).

*A Prologue to the Past and Present State of Things* was one of the first exhibitions dedicated to the history of performance art from and in relation to the Arab world, and can thus be described as a primary point of reference in relation to the topic of this research. It grouped together thirteen international artists, including Mona Hatoum, Hassan Sharif, Emily Jacir, Wael Shawky and Sharif Waked, who use performance art in their work. The title of the exhibition is derived from the idea of 'looking back, as a way of looking forward' (Cezar, 2019) when writing and thinking about the history of performance art. '

Steering away from the idea of presenting a historical and comprehensive survey of performance art, the exhibition looked at the role of performance throughout history in relation to the Arab world. It examined how performance was employed as a medium to process and respond to critical events and shifts that were taking place as an 'echo, a preface, or a consequence of some political economic movement that happened in relation to the region' (BBC Arabic, n.d.).

The exhibition's concept was divided into two curatorial streams: 1) the historical and 2) the current. Through a wide range of themes, including the body, gender, war and conflict, politics and identity,

the works were grouped together to articulate a collective narrative. Additionally, a series of reference materials made by renowned artists and performance practitioners, such as RoseLee Goldberg and Adham Hafez, were included in the exhibition to complement and contribute to the body of knowledge (Cezar et al., 2015).

The exhibition comprised early performances from the 1980s by Hassan Sharif and Mona Hatoum, artists who have overlapping backgrounds, since both studied at the Byam Shaw School of Art in London, and both have inspired generations to come through their radical work addressing gender, sexuality, war and conflict. For instance, Sharif's *Hair and Milk Bottle* (1984) is a performative gesture, documented in photographs, that challenges the intersection between the private and the public: the artist pulls pubic hairs out of his trousers and attempts to throw them into a milk bottle placed on the floor at a distance. When he succeeds, the bottle is sealed and the performance ends.

In addition, Hatoum's *Variation on Discord and Divisions* (1984) was filmed and staged at the Western Front in Vancouver. Taking a Brechtian approach – a technique borrowed from epic theatre to address contemporary and political issues (Britannica, n.d.) – Hatoum played both the victim and the perpetrator (Cezar et al., 2015).

At the beginning of the performance, she appears vulnerable and silenced, crawling between the rows of spectators towards the performance space. Then, she emerges from her struggle, finally taking slices of raw kidney out of her overalls and serving them to the audience on immaculate white plates. At the end, excerpts of news showing the horrors of war are projected on a backdrop (Cezar et al., 2015). Without addressing a particular geography or conflict, Hatoum comments on the horrors of war as a global issue. Both performances correspond to the theme of the exhibition: the idea of looking back as a way of looking forward.

The exhibition also included contemporary works addressing the current status quo in the Arab region. The work of Palestinian artists Emily Jacir and Sharif Waked, for example, focused on the daily struggle of crossing Israeli checkpoints imposed on Palestinians following the second Intifada (2000–2005) through very different approaches: documentary, archival materials and a fashion show.

In Jacir's video *Crossing Surda (a record of going to and from work)*, filmed in 2002, she records her daily journey to work, crossing the Surda checkpoint to Birzeit University where she teaches. Following

an attempt to film at the checkpoint, the artist was held at gunpoint by Israeli soldiers and had her video tape confiscated. As a result, Jacir decided to film through a hole in her bag for eight days. While the performative video may appear banal, it has profound political and personal implications.

Sharif Waked's performative video *Chic Point: Fashion for Israeli Checkpoints* (2003) addresses the same issue by employing an ironic approach. Waked stages a fashion show of garments that expose the body parts that are subject to Israeli soldiers' inspection at checkpoints. Images of the fashion show are followed by historical photographs of Palestinians crossing checkpoints, lifting their clothes during strip searches. In this way, Waked reflects on the absurdity of the situation lived by Palestinians in their everyday life. While both artists employ different approaches to subvert the status quo, their works share the idea of employing performance as a way of recording history (Cezar et al., 2015).

While the exhibition mainly revealed the history of performance art in the Arab world, its concept was to present performance art 'from, and in relation to, the Arab region'. Thus, it also included works by artists from America and Asia, such as Sharon Hayes, Xiao Lu, Lin Yilin and The Yes Men with Steve Lambert. This inclusion of non-Arab artists created a dialogue between the two, responding to key moments in the Middle East and drawing on shared histories, common issues and global concerns.

In *Sand Dune* (1997) Chinese artist Lin Yilin comments on the rapid urbanisation of his city by displacing a wall of bricks from a construction site and rebuilding it on a sand dune. The wall fails to maintain its shape and sinks into the sand.

Concurrently, Emirati artist Mohamed Kazem was looking at his city, Sharjah, which was experiencing the same rapid urbanisation. In his photographic series, *Photographs with a Flag* (1997), Kazem moves around the circumference made by a flag that has been planted to define the line of private properties and construction sites. This performative gesture responds to the economic and urban transformations of his city (Cezar et al., 2015).

Lin Yilin's performance *A Kind of Machine Called 'Liberation'* (2003) responds to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. A circular structure of bricks is placed on the ground, trapping the artist's left leg. On top of the structure, a man circles on a child's bicycle until the structure collapses. The action, which implicates the audience as witnesses,

reflects on the urban destruction and human helplessness caused by war and conflict (Cezar et al., 2015).

This bringing together of performances from the last three decades by Arab and international artists – one of the first exhibitions to do so – was a curatorial strategy employed to tell a collective story and document a history through multiple interwoven perspectives that connect different geographies across the world. It also showed that Arab performance art has developed in dialogue and in parallel with other parts of the world, connecting to ‘global politics, economics and cultural shifts’ (Cezar et al., 2015). The exhibition had no linear narrative, but provoked a mood, whether disturbing or comforting, through the grouping of works that were in dialogue with each other and conveyed similar concerns through the medium of performance and performativity.

## Conclusions

Performance art is ephemeral and difficult to translate. However, it is imperative to consider the context in which it is situated since this plays an important role in informing the art piece. Moreover, it is important to explain the conditions of the performance to the public. Similarly, it is vital to ensure that it is appreciated and understood as an art form in its own right by the public and supporters, in order to encourage its production and presence in the museum and public spaces. The research findings clearly illustrate that live performance art requires significant human resources and management, safety measures, as well as collaboration between the artist and the institution, facilitated by the curator.

Another challenge of performance art is that it is costly because it involves human subjects requiring space, time, safety and pay. Curators must therefore ensure that performances receive the necessary funds and support, using their institutional power, networks and resources as tools to support and reinforce the presence of performance art in the museum and public sphere. Curators also contribute to performance art through their knowledge of art history and art criticism, which allows them to nurture ideas and interpret the work effectively to the public.

Given that performance art from the Arab world has not received the attention and visibility in the museum sphere that it deserves, this study extends the knowledge of how it is curated and presented in an

institutional context. The empirical results provide a new understanding of how curatorship can raise the visibility of performance art from the Arab world, particularly by examining how the exhibition situated Arab artists alongside American, Cuban and Chinese artists. By doing so, it emphasised how Arab performance developed and exists today in dialogue and in parallel with different parts of the world.

This study has only examined the curatorial practice of performance art in London, and has only investigated one case of curating performance art from the Arab world. What is now needed is research into how museums in the Arab region can raise the cultural and historical visibility of performance art through research, exhibitions, symposiums and festivals.

The recent cultural history of the Arab world has witnessed the development of major museums supporting the collection and production of art, such as Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (Qatar), Louvre Abu Dhabi (UAE), and Sursock Museum (Lebanon). While some of these museums champion modern and contemporary art, they lack strategies to raise awareness of the history of Arab performance art in the museum. Nonetheless, institutions, platforms and foundations such as the Fire Station (Qatar), Sharjah Art Foundation (UAE) and 21,39 (KSA), Art Jameel (KSA and UAE), Beirut Art Centre and Ashkal Alwan (Lebanon) and Darat al Funun (Jordan) are currently investing resources to present performance art in programmes and events. In order to achieve this, museums and institutional curators need to: promote performance art as an autonomous art form; recognise the historical and cultural significance of performance art today; identify and collect archival and reference materials; consolidate research and knowledge on the history of performance art; collect performance and performative artworks; increase public interest in and awareness of performance art; dedicate resources, spaces and platforms; prioritise performance art production and presentation.

The research suggests that we are still in the early stages of the practice, and that the investment of resources to develop curatorial strategies and approaches would help establish and professionalise the practice of performance art curation in the museum field. Moreover, the findings have highlighted critical areas for future research into the practice of curating performance art from the Arab world.

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## CHAPTER 3

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# Public Art for Non-Places: Understanding the impact of public art at Hamad International Airport

**Ignacio Zamora Sanz**

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### **Abstract**

Hamad International Airport (HIA) and similar modern airports around the world are often considered a contemporary version of Marc Augé's 'non-place': i.e. a public space characterized by lack of specific identity. Qatar Museums, as per its role as cultural promoter, has strongly invested in a public art master plan commissioning local, regional and international artists whose works are displayed all over the airport. This chapter aims to understand the impact of the presence of public art at HIA. It is based on qualitative and quantitative research that has been undertaken in collaboration with participants who have experienced the airport and the art on display there.

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## Introduction

Marc Augé's thoughts in his work *Non-Places, an introduction to supermodernity* (1995) are a common starting point for discussions on public art and non-places. Augé defined non-places as spaces for circulation, consumption and communication. Non-places are transit spaces such as airports, train stations, supermarkets or hospitals. They lack the main characteristics that, as per the author, define an anthropological space, i.e. those elements that generate a relation between the space and its users that eventually confer an identity, create a place. He concludes that: "If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity will be a 'non-place'" (Augé 1995: 63). From this perspective, and referring to the theme of this chapter, it is interesting to explore how public art can provide relational, historical and concern with identity elements to help a 'non-place' become a place.

This chapter will focus on the case study of Hamad International Airport (HIA) located in Doha (Qatar), in order to explore how the public art collection at HIA contributes to making it a 'place' and relevant to its users. More specifically, we aim to explore: what is the perceived impact of public art at HIA; what are the public's thoughts on HIA's public art collection; what is the contribution of public art in a transit space such as HIA; and, ultimately, whether public art can indeed create a sense of 'place' in a 'non place'.

Two research methods were used for this work: 1) semi-structured interviews with frequent travellers at HIA, people who are not professionals in the field of arts, with the aim to obtain spontaneous answers to questions around their experience of public art in the airport; and 2) semi-structured interviews with art professionals who could provide a deeper understanding about key concepts discussed in this paper. In addition, we collected data from two online surveys shared with two groups of people who attended a public art tour at HIA. All data was collected in 2019. The first part of this chapter focuses on key texts and ideas that relate to public art and 'non-places' and aims to provide a frame for the discussion to follow. Then, the data collected and analysed during this research will be presented along with a discussion of them.

## A place without identity

Marc Augé describes the present period of time as *supermodernity*, characterized by the abundance of ‘non-places’, especially in cities. This idea is shared by Javier Maderuelo when he refers to contemporary urban spaces and their progressive loss of narratives that establish identity bonds between the public and those spaces:

Now that the massive use of automobiles has reduced the function of cities to the handling of traffic and the monuments that narrated their history have been supplanted by advertising, cities have begun to be invaded by non-places: stores, outlets, buildings run by multinational firms that display their corporate image... (Maderuelo 2001: 179).

The definition of ‘non-place’, however, needs to be understood as a contextual factor, given that each individual establishes a different relationship with a place (Aragay 2009). Some people may find places in ‘non-places’ and vice versa. These contextual parameters have to do with the characteristics of the user of the space: generation, origin, culture, and so on. Understanding that the existence of ‘non-places’ is becoming a common issue in urban spaces leads to a higher collective awareness about this loss, and it increases the necessity to implement a series of measures in order to recover the identity of those spaces. Augé, in an interview, denounced today’s lack of sensibility when facing new emblematic architectural projects, which end up becoming copies of themselves no matter where they are placed: “There are some ten or twenty well-known architects whose buildings the cities of the world want to have, because having them, having one of their iconic works, means making a place for yourself on this international network” (Aragay 2009).

‘Non-places’ today, such as modern airports, are characterized by what Guy Debord defined back in 1967 as ‘performative spaces’ (or spaces for simulation), created with a single and straight forward purpose, which is to facilitate the mass flow from point A to point B, keep the order, and increase the profit (Debord 1999). Consequently, the public is expected to behave following a series of rules: “As soon as his passport or identity card has been checked, the passenger for the next flight, freed from the weight of his luggage and the everyday

responsibilities, rushes into the ‘duty-free’ space” (Augé 1995: 81). Contemporary cities tend to behave like Debord’s spaces, increasing the loss of referential elements: “changing from being embedded in the social fabric of the city to being a part of a more impersonal and fragmented urban environment” (Mandanipour 2010: 238).

Public art can be used as a tool to create a sense of place for sites without identity and as a reconciliation element between the public and public space. Maderuelo, in *Public Art: Nature and City* (2010), brings together a reflection about the importance of public art in contemporary urban spaces that have lost their sense of place and have ended up becoming ‘non-places’. The author claims that three main threats are responsible for public spaces’ deterioration: vehicles, publicity, and loss of identity elements; all three lead to a non-place. Therefore, cities become spaces for transit, with almost no noticeable differences between them.

One of the possible solutions to revert this increasing lack of identity is the implementation of public art (Maderuelo 2001: 179). However, public art presents limitations at three different levels: (1) The public authorities, whose frequent lack of knowledge in the arts leads them to implement ideas that are not valid anymore (i.e. old fashioned monuments with political messages); (2) The artists behind the creation of the artworks are usually not included into the design phase discussion of the public space, but, are invited at a later stage to offer an aesthetic contribution; this leads to a disconnection between the artwork, its meaning and significance, and the space allocated for it; and (3) the public, whose knowledge and understanding of contemporary art often leads to a lack of appreciation for remarkable complex conceptual works and appreciation for simple ones. Sometimes this vanguard public art is understood as imposed by authorities, creating public discontent and rejection (Maderuelo 2001: 188). A holistic model about how decisions about public art need to be made seems not to be possible, since each case is different with its own context. The ideal scenario would be for a large-scale communication campaign before any public art implementation project that would address all stakeholders involved (authorities-artist-public) with the aim of creating consensus around planned interventions before these take place (Maderuelo 2001: 190).

## Airport: a transit museum

Airports around the world often host artworks. They are also often called ‘transit museums’, as they are seen as offering similar resources, facilities and programmes to standard museums. However, what is it that makes the collection of artworks presented in an airport a public art collection, and not a museum collection? Cher Krause Knight discusses the definition of public art wondering if the difference between public and non-public art is just a question of the implementation of an entrance fee (Knight 2008:50). Following this argument, and in relation to public art being placed in transit spaces, Wendy Feuer wonders about “people who have not paid to see art but have paid to be provided with transportation services” (Feuer 1989: 151). In other words, if there is a fee but this is not related to the artistic experience. In the case of an airport, a place with strictly limited access to the airside area, where only people with a boarding pass are allowed to enter, there are obvious parallels between holding a boarding pass and having paid an entrance fee. But, if the notion of a “secured area”, limited-access area is removed, then it is reasonable to assume an airport as a public space, and therefore artworks displayed in its facilities can be considered public art. As mentioned already, the context influences the definition as well as the functional approach to the meaning of public art.

Regarding public art’s contribution when displayed in a transit space, Feuer claims that it “should be challenging and contribute to an overall improved atmosphere” (1989: 145). In *Public Art in the Context of American Democracy*, Siah Armajani (2009) reflects on the meaning and functionality of public art, understanding it as a process of creating collective meaning where the artist and the artwork are just a piece of a much bigger structure. Armajani calls for a change of the principles of public art, and offers a new approach where the artwork is not conceived for a specific space but for the people who transit it (Armajani 2009: 96). In contrast, Richard Serra, argues that the artist’s action and his or her importance is a crucial element in building significance by the combination of an artwork and its context (quoted in Crimp 1986: 165). Serra believes that the artwork is experienced together with its context. Work and space are inseparable, and the work shall cease to exist if the two are separated (for, instance, by moving the artwork somewhere else). This bond enriches the public experience when engaging with the artwork, and creates deeper connections on the relational content and/or a perceived function. To put it differently,

a piece of public art is more than just a random, decorative object for a random space (Crimp 1986: 165).

While non-places, transit museums and public art meet at airports, the public reaction and perceptions still remain understudied. What are the opinions of the airport users on its ‘public art collection’? What about the professionals in the field who are behind the implementation of public art programmes in such spaces? Why are they doing it? How do the ideas presented above resonate with the practice and its perception? The ultimate question is, if public art is indeed a successful tool to generate a sense of place in locations considered ‘non-places’.



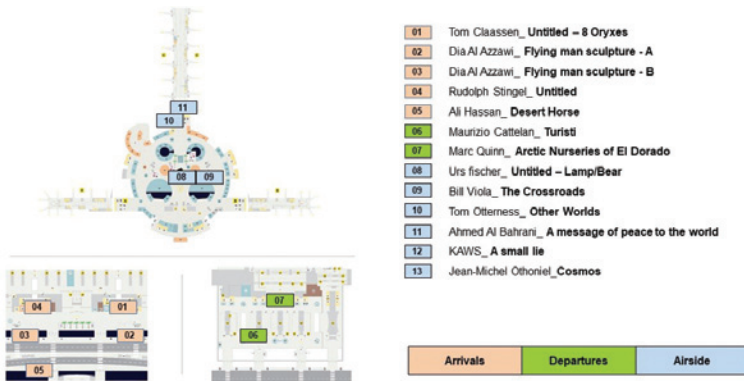
*Untitled-Lamp/Bear by Urs Fisher is considered an icon at HIA  
(Source: Ignacio Zamora Sanz)*

## **Public art collection at Hamad International Airport (HIA)**

Hamad International Airport (HIA), located in Doha (Qatar) is the case study of this research. To introduce its public art collection, HIA uses as its motto the phrase “colours, textures and perspectives from around the world” (HIA Website, n.d.). This approach is an extension of Qatar Museums’ vision when, together with HIA, started a long-term partnership to deliver public art in the airport “to prove that art can be enjoyed far beyond the confines of a gallery” (QM Website, n.d.). According to QM’s website: “We want to bring the museum experience into the airport so that visitors and residents in Doha are encouraged to re-consider the airport environment and understand that art can be appreciated outside of the four walls of a museum”

(QM website, n.d.). Furthermore, public art at HIA, is located at the main gate in and out of Qatar, and thus becomes a representation of the country's cultural sector, its best ambassador for an international audience. HIA users interact with artworks and this interaction aims to raise their curiosity about visiting other art spaces in Qatar.

The public art collection at HIA began display at the same time the airport was inaugurated in April 2014, and, it is expected to grow as the airport expands its terminal. The following artworks are currently on display and have been categorized in two groups according to their physical location: 1) Arrivals/Departures (those that are located in free access areas for the public; and 2) Airside (those that are located inside the terminal and only passengers can visit).



*Map of Public Art installations on display at HIA*

*(Source: Ignacio Zamora Sanz)*

## Public art works located in HIA Arrivals/Departures

Some of the artworks are located in the accessible parts of the airport, while others are located inside the controlled parts of the building. The work *Untitled – 8 Oryxes* by Dutch artist Tom Claassen (1964), located at Arrivals, is one of the most visited public art installations because of its location, welcoming passengers once they arrive to Doha, near the taxi pick up area. These series of life-size sculptures made out of bronze consists of eight figures representing the Oryx, a native animal species in the Arabian Peninsula and a symbol not only of the State of Qatar, but also of its national airline Qatar Airways. The sculptures



have the characteristic playful look, with rounded shapes that create a feeling of softness. The public can interact with the sculptures and they soon became an attraction at the arrival section, especially for younger audiences.

The only outdoor installation at HIA, at the time of writing this paper, is *Desert Horse* by Qatari artist Ali Hassan (b. 1956). This sculpture is made out of corten steel and represents a horse as a symbol of the Bedouin nomadic spirit. The artwork is designed following Hassan's calligraphic work of the letter "N" (ن from the Arabic alphabet), representing this letter in different ways across the horse-shaped structure. The artist has spent the past twenty years exploring ways to study this letter, combining classical and modern reinterpretations, and transforming them into three-dimensional elements. The sculpture is located at the Arrivals section in front of the building, near the parking area.

The artist Dia Al Azzawi (Iraq, b. 1939) installed two similar works at HIA: *Flying man sculpture A* and *Flying man sculpture B*. Both are located at opposite corners of Arrivals, and they can be seen from the Departures level as well, thanks to their remarkable height (seventeen meters). Both pieces have a similar structure, with a tall cylindrical pedestal of around 15 meters and a human figure on top carrying an ancient flying artefact. Both installations are made out of bronze, steel and aluminium alloy. They acknowledge modern aviation and refer to the influence of the Islamic world in its development.

*Untitled* is the work by Rudolph Stingel (Italy, b. 1956) also located at Arrivals. Similar to other work by Stingel, this installation invites public participation. It is composed of three blocks cast in copper and electroplated with gold. A large number of professionals who worked at the airport during its construction participated in shaping this artwork by engraving their names or short messages on it. This work became a kind of recognition wall to all of those who worked for the construction of the building.

The artwork *Turisti* is one of the most surprising and often unnoticed public art installations at HIA. Created by the Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan (b. 1960), this work is composed of forty real doves – the outcome of taxidermy. The doves are located at the Departures level, placed on top of the screen panels that show information about flights. The doves represent a satirical approach to the users of the airport, in particular the tourists (therefore the title of the artwork), flying around in a chaotic manner.



*Turisti by Mauricio Cattelan, an artwork that often remains unnoticed*  
(Source: Ignacio Zamora Sanz)

*Arctic Nurseries of El Dorado* is a sculpture by Marc Quinn (UK, b. 1964) also located at the Departure level right before passengers head to security control that leads to airside. The piece is composed of different plants, fruits and flowers; an amalgam of natural elements that transmit a message of hybridization and transportation of people (as they were seeds) from all around the world in just a few hours. The sculpture is made out of bronze with white paint that aims to create a lighter and delicate effect.

## Public art works located in HIA Airside

Probably the most recognizable public art installation at HIA, *Untitled – Lamp/Bear* by Urs Fischer (Switzerland, b. 1973) is located in the middle of the terminal's main plaza. Given its dimensions, of around seven meters height, it is the first element that passengers see when they complete their security check and enter the airside zone. The artwork reminds travellers of childhood and precious objects from home.

*The Crossroads* is a video installation by the artist Bill Viola (USA, b. 1951). The work is located airside, near the central plaza towards

Concourse B. *The Crossroads* is displayed on a massive LED screen (twenty-five meters wide by five meters high) and plays for approximately forty minutes. It shows a group of thirty actors walking on a desert landscape wearing traditional clothes from different countries from around the world. In this work, the airport is understood as a point of intersection for different races, cultures and religions.

The work *Other Worlds* by Tom Otterness (USA, b. 1952) can be found in three different locations along Concourse C. It consists of a series of bronze sculptures that create a playful space for the public to interact, in the form of a playground with slides, platforms and small ladders. The site-specific installations are composed of endearing human figures of different sizes, some monumental and some tiny, that are adapted to the architecture and embrace the visitor in a warming environment despite the coldness of the material used for their construction.

Also located in Concourse C, in the centre of the waiting area before the shuttle stop, is the artwork *A message of peace to the world*. Created by the Iraqi artist Ahmed Al Bahrani (b. 1967), this bronze cubic shaped sculpture is a tribute to the organization *Reach Out to Asia* (ROTA) and its solidarity work towards providing resources to numerous countries in need across Asia. The work is a reinterpretation of ROTA's logo, showing the different elements on the sculpture's surface that represents the organization's main motto: investment in economic security and education equates to the well-being of children.

*Small Lie* by Brian Donnelly, better known as KAWS, (USA, b. 1980) is a monumental size wooden artwork representing a human figure that combines a series of elements from American iconographic pop culture. The sad gesture creates contradictory feelings in the observer, who can be intimidated by the scale but at the same time feel compassion for something that looks fragile despite its size. The artwork is located in the intersection between Concourses C, D and E.

*Cosmos* by the French artist Jean-Michel Othoniel (b. 1964) is an installation that hangs from the ceiling of the airside plaza which connects concourses C, D and E. This artwork, fabricated in aluminium with an external layer of gold freitacolor, was originally inspired by the oldest Islamic astrolabe in the world, which now resides in the Museum of Islamic Art's collection. The work resembles a small universe, with its own movement, just like an airport and its organized chaos of travellers.



*Small Lie by KAWS is a giant wooden sculpture  
(Source: Ignacio Zamora Sanz)*

The public art collection at HIA represents one of the most ambitious public art collections located in an airport today, with iconic installations distributed all over this building. They play an important role as ambassadors of Qatar’s support towards local and international art, offering a prelude of what travellers can encounter when they visit the country.

### **Public art at HIA and its impact**

The investment in public art at HIA is generally perceived as an efficient tool towards the positioning of “Qatar as a regional art hub and a referential cultural touristic destination” (HE Sheikha Al Mayassa, 2012). This statement is endorsed by almost all the participants in this research: *The airport, being an important hub for global travel, positions the State of Qatar as a catalyst in [the global] cultural scene, and promotes Qatar Museums’ vision of using art as a form of cross-cultural dialogue* (Interview 5). There seems to be a convincing support of this view from the audience as well; 28 out of 29 participants in this

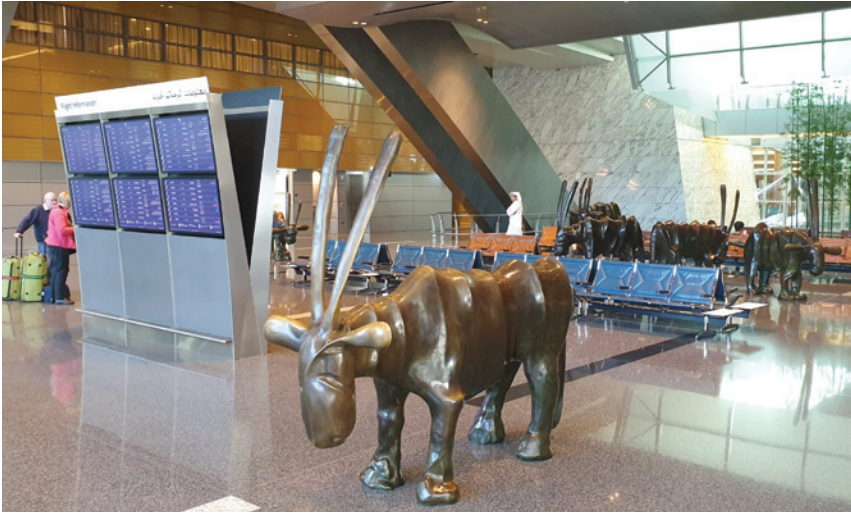
research endorsed this idea of displaying public art in HIA, highlighting its positive impact for the investing institutions, as well as for the public. In this sense, public art as a differential factor that enhances the travelling experience (Feuer 1989: 145), is considered a key element for the participants in this research: *It gives some kind of life to the place and builds a memory of the airport and the country, even if the art is not presenting the local culture* (Survey additional comment).

The relationship that public art establishes with the audience is crucial for understanding the impact of these installations in a place like HIA: *You do not expect art pieces at the airport – and as soon as you recognize the art, you stay away from the hectic and chaos of travelling for a few moments* (Survey additional comment). Constantly transited by crowds, each member of the public will establish a different bond with the artworks they encounter and there maybe changes in the experience, depending on other contextual factors as well: *The art offers an alternative experience than one would normally expect at an airport, in that the airport is presented as a museum outside of any normal museum environment* (Interview 1).

The educational factor associated with an encounter of public art in a transit space and outside the typical museum environment was also highlighted by the interviewees: *The benefits of investment in public art touch upon a few themes including education, cultural awareness and investment in tourism. The benefits to the local education system are many. The acquisition of public art allows the local community a glimpse into the art world that many may not have seen* (Interview 2). Public art is understood as an element to spark public interest on educational and cultural aspects of the hosting country: *It is a fact that (public art) increases the perception of the people towards culture and art. It helps the citizens of the country and the travellers of HIA to improve their knowledge and increase their appetite for art* (Interview 3). Experiencing public art raises public interest on what is going on in the art scene (Crimp 1986: 165). When this happens in an unexpected context, like a transit space, it can improve the experience of the traveller: *I personally enjoy discovering new art installations with every trip I take. [...] There is something new and exciting to discover every time you visit the airport. This soothes the trip and puts a smile on your face when you pass by something new that is iconic* (Interview 2).

The airport itself, as a building with a very specific purpose, whilst providing a substantial number of recreational facilities, is enriched by the inclusion of public art installations according to the interviewees:

*The artwork is intentionally not grouped in one specific area but the airport itself becomes an area of discovery. Passengers have this unique opportunity to have access to famous artists' work (Interview 4).*



*Untitled-8 Oryxes by Tom Claassen at arrivals  
(Source: Ignacio Zamora Sanz)*

## Opinions on the HIA's public art collection

HIA's users encounter the airport's public art collection every time they walk through the terminal, and they have diverse opinions on it. Due to the structure of the airport's terminal, with multiple concourses, only works located in central nodes of communication are accessible by almost all visitors and passengers alike. Works like *Untitled-8 Oryxes* by Claassen or *Untitled-Lamp/Bear* by Fisher are placed strategically in the arrivals section and the airside central plaza, respectively, and their visibility is clearly appreciated by visitors. *Untitled-Lamp/Bear* by Urs Fisher is considered the most recognizable artwork at HIA: *Who hasn't taken a picture in front of Urs Fisher's Teddy Bear who is now a landmark for HIA?* (Interview 4). This visibility makes *Untitled-Lamp/Bear*, statistically lead when it comes to the most integrated artwork at the airport. In addition to Fisher's work, the survey also shows that the series of sculptures titled *Untitled-8 Oryxes* by Tom Claassen are equally well received and recognised. The main reasons for this are its location and the immediate connection between the sculptures and the

country. As one of the members of the public noted: *Every piece of art at HIA represents itself and most of them have a message to the audience; however, the Oryx might be the most integrated [one] as it is representing part of the country's environment* (Survey additional comment).

On the other hand, some works remain far from the main flow of traffic (as for instance the *Small Lie* by KAWS); or, they are difficult to spot due to their integration within the architecture. However, it is precisely the fact that some works are relatively 'hidden' that makes them more interesting to the public as, for instance, is the case of *Turisti* by Cattelan: *I fondly remember the pigeons at the immigration. I remember this because of the happiness I felt when I noticed them* (Interview 2). *Turisti* uses the surprise factor to engage with the public: when they spot it, people remember this work as that which makes HIA a unique airport: *Cattelan's Turisti adds a playful intervention to an otherwise functional area of marble and digital screens, bringing in a human element which creates a sense of place*, claims one of the professional interviewees. Another installation that catches the public's positive attention is *Other Worlds* by Otterness. This artwork is particularly popular with families, as it creates a playground space for young kids and adults to enjoy their waiting time together. *It is something that is given to the kids; it is public art; they (the public) use it; they do play it; is not just visual... I really like that idea* (Interview 3).

The experience as a traveller at HIA seems to be defined by public art, at least as per the majority of the answers collected on the survey under the question "Would your experience of HIA change without public art?" A large percentage of the respondents (62%) positively acknowledge that the experience would be completely different; whereas the remaining percentage (38%) responds also positively, their perception of how different the experience would be is more moderate, as they answer "yes, but not significantly". None of the participants selected the option that the experience of the airport would remain the same. Similar views are expressed by those who were interviewed, as the idea that transiting HIA without public art would impoverish the public experience: *Without public art my experience through HIA would be mundane and uneventful. Public art affects all the senses and can dramatically change your mood when beginning a long trip* (Interview 2). All interviewees agreed that the airport would lose identity and uniqueness with the absence of public art: *Absolutely. It would be just a standard airport, just a random airport. People*

*walking, people running, people crossing each other, security all the time... There would be no charm* (Interview 3).

When asked about suggestions for improvement, participants in this research point towards practical concerns. For instance, it is a common request to increase the information available to the public about the artworks, through labels or an online catalogue. Another point relates to accessibility of artworks that are located in exclusive sections of the airport, such as the VIP lounges or other exclusive access spaces: *Some of the artworks are installed within the Business and First Class lounges, which are not accessible to all passengers* (Interview 4). It is interesting to highlight the different layers of accessibility in a contemporary transit place like an airport, where the user can access certain spaces depending on their status (traveller of this or the other category, travellers vs. non travellers etc).

Some participants also stressed the importance of having artworks that are related to the place where the airport is actually located: for instance, one of the participants – who apparently had not realised the relevance of the artwork with the collections of the Museum of Islamic Art – argued that: *When you think of public art inside the airport, it is the first gate to the city and it should be somehow linked to the city. [...] but artworks like Cosmos by Jean-Michel Othoniel, it could be located anywhere and you would not know this is actually located in Qatar* (Interview 6). Despite the obvious misunderstanding, there seems to be an interest in what has been mentioned already as one of the intentions of this public art collection, i.e. the need to operate as an ambassador for the values of the country and its cultural and artistic scene.

## **Public art and its contextual function**

Public art is widely understood as a functional element beyond its aesthetic contribution, especially when it is displayed in transit spaces where artworks can play an active role as a landmark and establish higher levels of engagement with the public. The importance of public art is often determined not in relation to the intentions of the artist(s) as in other forms of art or display of art (Aragay 2009), but on the perception of this art by the people. In the case of transit spaces, contextual characteristics have an impact on the reception of art. For instance, the majority of the participants in this research (80%)



suggested that they see the contribution of public art in the feeling/perception of the airport, as being both aesthetic and functional (as opposed to merely one or the other). No one could see a functional reason alone for the artworks to be in the airport; however, a smaller number of participants (20%) could see just aesthetic reasons for these installations.

There seems to be a common consensus around the role artworks play in the space. This can be summarised as the artworks being landmarks and navigational elements for users of the airport: *For me this airport is pretty huge, so I use public art more for navigation (Interview 6)*. In other words, artistic interventions across transit spaces become cues for the public to identify a particular location, to remember a specific place or path to go from one point to the other, and also to identify where in the world they are: *First thing, it improves the airport, it looks better. The second thing, it helps as a gathering point. It gets famous and it becomes a gathering point. (Interview 3)*.



*Cosmos by Jean-Michel Othoniel is the central element of the intersection between concourses C, D and E, helping passengers to navigate the terminal (Source: Ignacio Zamora Sanz)*

Following on from the previous sentence, artworks are often considered as symbols of a place, reaching audiences beyond the location itself because they are promoted as a branding element of the hosting space (Feuer 1989: 148). In HIA, there is a clear example of using a public art installation as a call for engagement and identification with the airport's central plaza. *Untitled-Lamp/Bear* by Urs Fisher is one of the most photographed elements not only at the airport, but in the

whole country: *If you consider the “Teddy Bear”, it has become an iconic figure of the HIA ecosystem. It is a recognizable figure and it has been directly linked with Hamad Airport inter-alia* (Interview 4). This popularity is a key factor to scaffold the relation between the public and the artwork, triggering further interactions with other pieces from the HIA collection: *Through its enormous popularity on social media for example, the Lamp/Bear becomes a familiar and recognisable symbol, personalising people’s experience of the airport, and providing a meeting point, an activity (a place to Instagram with your friends and family), and a familiar sight that is easy to relate to* (Interview 1). Therefore, public art is perceived to have an active role or function in a place like the airport, contributing *More global exposure and memorable experience for visitors* (Interview 6); *helping as a gathering point* (Interview 3) or *serving as functional play areas, not just art to be looked at* (Interview 1).

### **Creating a sense of place**

Vanguard transit spaces are often perceived as alien places, spaces for their designers’ self-promotion, without taking into account users and their needs (Aragay 2009). This leads to a feeling of emptiness in the user, a sense of being involved into a systematic process that leaves behind the human factor. *Airports are cold, and normally everybody is rushing... so when you see art in a place like an airport, it even gives you a bit of peace. To just even take a few seconds to have a look at it calms you down* (Interview 3).

In modern cities, the gradual increase of the number of these spaces provokes an equal increase of non-referential places whose function is mainly associated to consuming and transit. Public art can thus be understood as an element that harmonizes a space, establishes relations with the public beyond the architectural shape or specific function. This is well reflected in the collected feedback from both the interviews and the survey, as participants associated transit spaces with stressful situations while encountering art is perceived as a therapeutic contraposition to this: *Passing through an airport can be stressful, uneventful, boring, and a somewhat mundane activity. Having iconic pieces in HIA encourages visitors to remember their time in Doha and make their transit a memorable one* (Interview 2). The survey participants also endorsed the perception of public art as an element

that humanizes transit spaces: *The artworks make me smile, even if the traveling is stressful...sometimes it makes me stop and think about it for a few minutes, which is very relaxing*, a survey participant claims.

When a traveller has a unique experience at HIA thanks to their encounter with a public art installation, a bond is established and the place becomes a space to remember. This is what it means creating a sense of place (Crimp 1986: 161). Participants in this research generally agreed that public art has the potential to generate identity for places that lost it due to their strict functional nature. Professionals in the field were asked about how public art contributes to creating a sense of place for a location such as HIA, arriving to similar conclusions with non-specialized participants in the study: *The artworks personalize the airport and create recognizable and memorable landmarks for visitors in transit, transforming what could otherwise be described as purely functional spaces designed to facilitate ease of transit, into meeting points or areas for play* (Interview 1). This understanding of the role of public art as transforming a space often has a more personal approach as well: *The experience of art leaves its mark on visitors, creating a physical and emotional reference point that visitors consciously or unconsciously will return to* (Interview 5).

A transit space usually repeats physical structures (in the case of an airport: ticketing, security control, waiting area, restaurants, gates...) in order for the user to get familiar with the system (Debord 1999: 61). At the same time, this repetition is also how a place becomes a non-place, increasing the feeling of being constantly in the same location, no matter how far away these places (in this case airports) are from each other (Augé 1995:81). The creation of a sense of place is a key factor when introducing referential elements into a transit space: *Public artworks represent creativity and personal identity, and invite a personal reaction from viewers, so respond to the individual in a highly personal way, all of which contribute to creating a sense of place. Rather than just being a place of transit, HIA becomes a destination itself. [...] HIA has created places which exist in their own right, rather than as non-places for transit only.* (Interview 1). In this sense, public art has tremendous potential to break up the symmetry between transit spaces, creating a specific identity for a space and thus establishing a deeper connection between this space and its users.

This argument leads to the question if public art can revert the non-place status of a particular location (Augé 1995:63). The interviewees' feedback demonstrates the need for more referential elements that

would connect the local context with the artworks on display. If a particular transit space does not offer any significant relational element, then public art can create a sense of place by incorporating relational elements from the actual location of the non-place space. *I think public art can revert the non-place status of a particular location, through personalizing the space, through providing an opportunity for a different form of engagement than just transit with the location* (Interview 1). This conversion of the non-place into a place can happen by engaging with works of art that can establish a playful dialogue with the public, thus creating bonds that would not be easy to create through the architectural space alone.



*Other Worlds by Tom Otterness is both a public artwork and a playground*  
(Source: Ignacio Zamora Sanz)

The results of this research showed an unequivocal positive opinion regarding the perceived impact of public art at HIA, with interesting views on the collection currently on display. Participants understand that investing in public art in places like HIA enhances the image of its promoters and strengthens the bond between the users of the facility and the hosting country, in this case Qatar. The information collected from professionals and non-professionals presented similarities in

general, with an overall agreement on the main themes proposed. Non-professionals approached the questions from an individualistic perspective and focused on their feelings, while professionals tended to be more analytical and paid more attention to details that usually remain unseen by the general public. As a collective perception, encountering public art when walking through the airport is positive, as it is seen as a benefit to their travelling experience. The function of public art within a transit space like the airport is generally considered important to increase the attractiveness of the place, not just having a passive aesthetic function but also being an active element with a practical purpose. The participants in this research agreed that art creates contextual variations within non-places that transform them, reverting their undefined status into a recognisable (and sometimes memorable) one. This has deeper implications when it comes to understanding the capacity of public art to recover identity aspects of a non-relational space or a space that lacks any recognizable identity.

## Conclusions

Due to factors like security, safety or time and cost efficiency, transit spaces such as airports tend to present similar characteristics, no matter their location. This has, as a result, a sense of loss of identity for their users who cannot distinguish among spaces even if these are located in opposite parts of the globe. This research focused on how the relation between a transit space and its users can change thanks to public art. Public art is understood as a tool to create a sense of place for spaces that have lost, or are in danger of losing their identity. To explore this topic, Hamad International Airport (HIA) and its public art collection were discussed as a case study.

Perhaps the most valuable outcome of the data collected would arise once it is compared to a similar research in a different context (for instance, the San Diego International Airport, California, United States, which also has a large collection of public artworks). The comparison of the data collected changing the context of the place, the collection and its users can generate interesting understandings of synergies and differences that may help to build a common theory about the value of public art in transit spaces. This juxtaposition between cases study could spark ideas and conclusions that would not be as evident when studying isolated case studies.

Overall, there seems to be a common understanding that public art can generate memorable experiences for the public spaces for transit, either connecting to the identity of the location or even radically transforming it into something different. This artistic input can be used as a powerful tool to temporally evade the monotony of transiting between origin and destination and the associated stressful situations we all encounter in those facilities. The incorporation of public art to places like an airport often increases the sense of identity of the place, creating unique features that can make a difference from other airports. This is indeed the main purpose of HIA and Qatar Museums (QM) delivering the public art collection at Doha's international airport.

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CHAPTER 4

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## Rethinking Museum Practice through Exhibitions

The case of the exhibition *Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and other Treasures* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria

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### Abstract

In the wake of new museology and critical museology in the late 1980s and early 1990s, museums started to employ 'self-reflexive' exhibitions more systematically. These exhibitions are concerned with the museum and its institutional practices. What started as a critique developed in to reflection on what museums are doing, how museum professionals can improve their practices and how museologists can rethink the museum. Even today, these exhibitions are used by museum professionals to experiment with their practices as a way to reintroduce their institutions and their collections and ultimately become relevant.

This chapter will investigate the impact of 'self-reflexive' exhibitions on institutional curatorial practices. In order to fully capture how self-reflection is exhibited, this chapter used, as a case study, the



exhibition *Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and other Treasures* at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria. Curated by filmmaker Wes Anderson and his partner Juman Malouf, this exhibition investigated the relationship between the museum, its collections and its visitors. As a 'self-reflexive' exhibition, it proposed new ways of arranging and displaying objects, and commented on museum practices, such as the *Kunstammer*. In this way, 'self-reflexive' exhibitions become an exercise of action research for museum professionals to rethink their approach and the museum altogether.

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## Introduction

In 1969, Andy Warhol was invited by Jean and Dominique de Menil at the Rhode Island School of Design Museum to curate an exhibition using the museum's stored collection. This resulted in the exhibition *Raid the Icebox I with Andy Warhol* (1969-1970). The selection of objects displayed in this exhibition was quite provoking compared to museum standards. Firstly, Warhol selected entire collections, for example, of shoes, Windsor chairs, Indian blankets and even broken or stained objects instead of displaying the collection's finest objects (Bright 2001: 286). Secondly, objects were exhibited as they were in the storage or in unorthodox ways; chairs were hanging from the ceiling, and paintings were positioned on the floor with sandbags holding them (Lobel 1996).

Inviting a well-known artist such as Warhol to curate an exhibition was an attempt to make the museum's collection relevant to younger visitors (Musteata 2016: 1). However, Warhol's practice turned out to be quite personal and his selection criteria 'seemed random, indiscriminate and maliciously indifferent to value', contrasting the institutional curatorial practice of that time (Bright 2001: 280). In a way, his exhibition acted as an institutional critique not only of the profession of the curator but also of the museum itself (Musteata 2016: 3).

This exhibition is one of the many instances through which museums rethink and even challenge their own institutional practices. Through these exhibitions, visitors are invited to engage with the museum and understand it as a whole; as a complex institution and not just as a repository of authenticity and 'truth' (Bennett 1996). This type of exhibition can be called 'self-reflexive' and aims to offer an alternative

view of the museum itself, helping museum professionals re-evaluate their practices and possibly become more relevant to their visitors. Reflexivity has been a pivotal subject in the work and thinking of social scientists such as Bourdieu and Foucault. However, this chapter will only focus on museum studies.

This chapter will explore how through ‘self-reflexive’ exhibitions we can rethink museum practice. Initially, it will identify the forms that ‘self-reflexive’ exhibitions can take and discuss their evolution. Secondly, it will explore their potential for curatorial practices through the analysis of the temporary exhibition entitled *Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and other Treasures*, curated by filmmaker Wes Anderson and his partner Juman Malouf at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria that was on view from November 2018 until April 2019. This exhibition was selected because it was curated by artists unaware of institutional practices, it aimed to reinterpret the museum’s collection and reconsider its history and practice, and, it was hosted at a world-renowned institution with a long history and a large collection. For the analysis of the exhibition, we used only material publicly available: the exhibition itself, text panels, the audio guide featuring the curators of the exhibition, as well as the exhibition’s publications, i.e. the brochures and the catalogue. The study of these materials aimed to decode certain aspects of the exhibition by identifying the intent of the curators and their messages, since it was not possible to conduct interviews with them. The data was collected while visiting the exhibition in April 2019. Thirdly, it will discuss how ‘self-reflexion’ can occur in an exhibition and the methods that have been implemented through design, narrative and content. Lastly, it will conclude with some thoughts on how ‘self-reflexive’ exhibitions can contribute to museums and museology in general.

## The development of self-reflexive exhibitions

Following the epistemological trend in the humanities in the late 1980s and early 1990s there was a shift in museological thinking. As museums struggled to maintain visitor numbers, engage with visitors, keep up with current trends and cover their high operational costs, there was a need for them to rethink their existence (Macdonald 1996). Museum professionals and scholars alike started to reflect upon and review their work and practices (Duclos 1994: 4). In the English-speaking world,

this shift was called ‘new’ museology (Macdonald 2006; Vergo 1989), a term resulting from the dissatisfaction with ‘old’ museology and its focus on practices rather than theory (Vergo 1989: 3). Principally, ‘new’ museology shifted the emphasis from collections management and museography to theoretical matters that revolved around the museum’s impact on society and its visitors (Stam 2005; Kreps 2003: 315; Duclos 1994: 4). Specifically, curatorial practice expanded from the idea of object connoisseurship to that of audience mediation (Nielsen 2014; Stam 2005; Kreps 2003). Overall, basic concepts of ‘new’ museology introduced topics such as value, meaning, access, politics and economics into museum practice and theory (Stam 2005: 57).

In the museum literature, ‘new’ museology meant the extensive use of cultural, sociological and anthropological theory into museological thinking (see Mason 2006; Fyfe 2006; Preziosi 2006; Shelton 2006). Museum scholars such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, Susan Pearce, Tony Bennett and Ivan Karp, alongside contributors from other fields, such as James Clifford, Pierre Bourdieu, Jacques Derrida, Linda Hutcheon or Neil Postman, developed interdisciplinary critiques to existent museum practices (Duclos 1994). As a result, museology was positioned as the ideal field for ‘postmodern interventions of both thought and actions’ (Duclos 1994: 4).

Postmodernism offered an opportunity for scholars and professionals to challenge the authoritative curatorial knowledge and the museum’s purpose (Weil 1999). In parallel, museum professionals started evaluating and reflecting on their practice (Duclos 1994: 2). The introduction of new educational theories also expanded the ways in which the learning process and communication in museums was conceptualised (Hooper-Greenhill 1999; Hein 1998; Falk and Dierking 1992). Reflections on the ways of meaning-making led to a better understanding of curating exhibitions (Silverman 1995), as it became important to consider ‘poetics and politics’ alike – i.e. both the personal choices of museum professionals and the socio-cultural context within which exhibitions are produced (Lidchi 1997). Furthermore, the emphasis shifted towards approaches that would allow for greater engagement of the audience, and practices such as open storage (Black 2005) or active involvement of audiences in the creation of exhibitions and/or other museum activities (Simon 2010).

It is within this context that ‘critical’ museology emerged in the first decade of the 2000s. Critical museology, often referred to as ‘reflexive’ museology (Butler 2012), considers how museums operate (Shelton

2013: 8; Lorente 2012: 243) and is concerned with subjectivity in museums and the construction of history and truth (Shelton 2013). More specifically, it emphasises the need to move away from the ‘traditional and anonymous institutional discourse’ (Lorente 2012: 245) and the idea of the curator as the ultimate source of knowledge (Kreps 2003: 315) by exposing authorship in museums, including non-institutional voices, and encouraging physical and mental participation as well as interaction between museum visitors (Lorente 2012). For example, sharing curatorship with the communities is one way to ensure truthful representation of culture, shift the authority of knowledge, and making the museums more personal and inclusive (Kreps 2003: 214). Additionally, museums invited as guest curators either well-known curators (Arnold 2015; Morgan 2013) or prominent professionals of other disciplines that become curators for one project such as architect Frank Gehry or theatre director Robert Wilson (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 372). This practice resulted in ‘unexpected and improbable outcomes’ (Arnold 2015: 327) that fitted the museums’ purpose of changing perspectives and actively experimenting with their collections or their practices (Janes 2009).

Generally, ‘new’ museology and ‘critical’ museology changed not only the way scholars think about museums but also how museums operate. Museum professionals used exhibitions as media to critically question existing museum practices, experiment with different ideas and eventually propose new practices, while offering the public a glimpse into museums’ functions and, at times, contribute in the discussion. These exhibitions are often called ‘self-reflexive’ exhibitions. Similarly, Duclos (1994: 1) used the term ‘*post* museum’ to describe this introspective reflection in museum culture, and explained that a ‘*post* museum’ deviates from what museums were doing before since it does not take its practices for granted but scrutinises them internally, but also externally, through exhibitions that audiences can visit and experience, thus participating in this process of scrutiny and reconfiguration. Duclos (1994: 1) concludes that:

the *post* museum would, in all its historical and social complexity, become the object of its own study, an artefact in itself – one to be analysed and interpreted within its own exhibition spaces.

Therefore, 'self-reflexive' exhibitions have an inward nature with their main topic being the museum itself and its practice, past, present and future, but, they also have an outward nature in the sense that they aim to share with visitors practical and theoretical concerns of and about the museum.

In this process of public self-reflection, elements of 'resonance and wonder' are often implemented. The term 'resonance' (Greenblatt 1991: 42), refers to 'the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by the viewer to stand'. Therefore, resonance is the ability to create meaning that the viewer can discover. Greenblatt suggests (1991: 45) that resonant exhibitions interpret objects in the context in which they were created and the life they have in the museum to provoke visitors, using their own background knowledge, to think about the choices made behind the choice of exhibits. Hence, the resonant element is that which makes the viewer participate mentally.

Furthermore, Greenblatt (1991: 42) understands 'wonder' as 'the power of the displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention', simply, to impress the viewer. 'Self-reflexive' exhibitions can achieve this effect either through unique and peculiar objects or through a spectacular design associated with curiosity, awe and shock (Counts 2009: 274). In this way, 'self-reflexive' exhibitions can be an exhibitionary experiment that can expose and demystify the museum by employing wonder (Basu & Macdonald 2007).

Self-reflexive exhibitions were employed more regularly during the 1990s as a result of the developments in the museological discourse described in brief earlier. In an attempt to discuss their evolution, we argue that self-reflexive exhibitions can be divided into six categories based on their theme and the way their narrative is constructed.

The first form of self-reflexive exhibition is the *artist-curated* one. Artists are invited as curators to offer a new outlook on the museum's collections. Their creativity, experimentation and idiosyncratic nature that challenges displaying techniques and objects' selections can act as an intervention or a disruption of the museum canon (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 372). These exhibitions are often associated with institutional critique due to their ironic comments (Butler 2015: 172). Andy Warhol's *Raid the Icebox I* (1969-1970) and Eduardo Paolozzi's *Lost Magic Kingdom* (1985) at the Museum of Mankind in London

are two early examples of this category. A more recent example is Grayson Perry's *Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman* (2011) at the British Museum (London), that juxtaposed the museum's collection with the artist's work offering a 'fresh insight' into object interpretation (Arnold 2015: 331).

The second category is that of exhibitions that address *theoretical concerns around the museum*. This type of exhibition put museums under 'self-scrutiny' (Pearce 1999: 392) and 'share its self-interrogation with the visitors' (Beard and Henderson 1994: 8). For instance, *The ?Exhibition?* or *Curator's Egg* (1991-1992), presented at the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), challenged with humour the relationship between the museum and its visitors by inviting the public to question the authorship of the exhibition and the objects' appropriation and value (Beard and Henderson 1994: 33).

A third type is the *metamuseum*, meaning museums that have preserved their original displays despite them being antiquated, as a form of creating 'historical awareness' (Bal 1992: 562) and inviting reflection on the museum's past. Bal (2008: 72) has further developed this term to introduce the *meta-exhibition*, i.e. an exhibition 'that explores the nature of exhibiting'. This type of self-reflexive exhibition uses past display methods to construct narratives. For instance, *The Worlds in Miniature, Worlds Apart* (1991-1994) at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology at Harvard University analysed the use of dioramas and other display techniques to discuss the perceptions of the people who create them (Corrin 2012: 330). Similarly, in the exhibition *Partners (The Teddy-Bear Project)* (2003) at the Haus der Kunst in Munich, the narrative was constructed through the positioning of objects, artworks and photographs, in a way resembling the Wunderkammer display practices. Moreover, the exhibition *Exhibiting the Exhibition. From Cabinet of Curiosities to the curatorial situations* (2018) in Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden focused on the evolution of exhibiting methods through the course of the years by presenting artworks inspired by exhibition furniture such as painting frames, pedestals, labels, and design such as walls and colours (Holten 2018: 3).

A fourth category is of exhibitions that 'examine the *museum itself as a historical artefact*' (Corrin 2012: 331). These exhibitions focus on the institution that organises them and how it 'reconstrues its contents according to its own history' (Beard and Henderson 1995: 234). In a sense, this type of self-reflexive exhibition investigates the museum's

practices based on the socio-cultural context they were produced; the ‘poetics and politics’. The difference with the previous category is that *metamuseums* are concerned with the display practice, whilst this category narrates the history of the institution. For example, the exhibition *A Museum Looks at Itself: Mapping Past and Present* (1992) at the Parrish Art Museum (New York) focused on objects that the museum’s founder cherished in order to understand and problematize the museum’s history.

A fifth type is that of the *post-museum*, a term used by Hooper-Greenhill to describe a museum which is no longer the absolute source of knowledge and allows other viewpoints to be expressed: ‘the post-museum will negotiate responsiveness, encourage mutually nurturing partnerships, and celebrate diversity’ (2000: 153). The post-museum is a space to challenge an established structure by embracing subjectivity (Ball 2006: 529-30) and interdisciplinary approaches. Fred Wilson’s *Mining the Museum* (1992) at the Maryland History Society (Baltimore), using irony, focused on the lack of representation of African American history in the museum’s collection and underlined the way museums write history (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006: 365-366). Most recently, the exhibition *I object: Ian Hislop’s search for dissent* (2018) at the British Museum invited journalist Ian Hislop to choose objects that showcase disagreement with the establishment and authority, including the British Museum. Using satire, the exhibition attempted to present alternative readings of history and explore parts of the collection through a different perspective.

Lastly, the *reflexive museum* as proposed by Schorch (2009: 28), sees the exhibition as a process that ‘is not only self-aware, but [it] confronts, critiques, questions and ultimately transforms itself and invites visitors to democratically participate in the process’. This category is characterised by the transparency of processes that allows visitors to get ‘behind-the-scenes’ (Schorch 2009). The exhibition *Travelling and discovering: From the Sepik to the Main* (2007-2009) at the Museum of World Cultures in Frankfurt, Germany, for instance, offered a look ‘behind the scenes, to both museum discourse and museum agency’ (Schorch 2009: 29). It presented the objects in different contexts; in dioramas, then as works of art and later as source of information in a museum storage-like environment. The Centre of New Technologies at the Deutsches Museum in Munich in its exhibitions discusses scientific research by including functioning science laboratories and the public’s opinions through digital interactives such as ‘dialogue stations’

(Schorch 2009: 29).

This categorization makes it clear how self-reflexive exhibitions have developed over the years; what started as a form of intervention in the museum canon soon became institutional critique, and turned into an experiment in terms of installation and an artefact in terms of content. The last two categories we discerned above also show an effort towards democratisation of knowledge and participation. This evolution is of course parallel to the changes in the curatorial profession.

## The Wes Anderson Experiment

The Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien is a national art museum located in Vienna, Austria. The Museum was commissioned by the Habsburgs to host their immense collections that spanned from antiquities to 17<sup>th</sup> century art and opened in 1891 (*KHM* n.d.). Recently, the current general director, Sabine Haag, gave curator Jasper Sharp the task of rejuvenating the museum's image and attracting new audiences by reinterpreting the Old Masters in relation to the contemporary art scene. Sharp employed three approaches: an annual contemporary art installation, a biennial monographic exhibition of modern artists, and an artist-curated exhibition series (Mark 2016). The latter was an initiative that invited artists to offer an alternative view of the museum by choosing objects from its collection and organising an exhibition which was inspired by *Raid the Icebox I with Andy Warhol* (Sharp 2018a: 141; 2018b: 13; Haag 2018: 5). Sharp viewed this project as a way to 're-examine the relationships between museums, artists, collections and their public' (Sharp 2018b: 13). The first exhibition of the series featured American artist Ed Ruscha, while the second one involved British writer Edmund de Waal (Sharp 2018a). *Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and other Treasures* was the third exhibition of the series and was curated by the American filmmaker Wes Anderson and his partner, Juman Malouf. The two artists, who had no prior experience with exhibitions, provided their own perspective on the museum and its collections (Sharp 2018a: 142).

Wes Anderson is a critically acclaimed American film director known for his distinctive aesthetics in films such as *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001) and *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014). His symmetrically centred and frontal frames (Lee 2016: 409) as well as specific colour palettes and settings (Buckland 2012: 4) craft his nostalgic fictional



world. Moreover, his films often employ a surreal sense of humour and include quirky characters in ironic situations (MacDowell 2012). Juman Malouf is an illustrator, a writer and has worked as a costume and set designer for theatrical plays, opera and film.

After two years of planning, the exhibition *Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and other Treasures* opened to the public in November 2018. It displayed 411 objects that came from public museums in Vienna and Schloss Ambras Innsbruck (Sharp 2018b: 13). The curators were inspired by the cabinets of curiosities and their main intention was to highlight objects that were neglected by curators and visitors alike (Anderson 2018: 19). The exhibition was located in the Berger Hall, between the *Kunstkammer* and the Roman antiquities collection. The curators felt that this was the ideal space to house their exhibition, as it was in the centre of the collections (Audio Guide A 2018). The exhibition space was divided into rooms in different colours, each focusing on a specific theme.

Visitors could enter the exhibition through the *Kunstkammer*, which was recommended by the curators, through the Hall which again, allowed access to the beginning and through the other end of the exhibition. In each entrance, there was the introductory text panel and a free gallery guide in two languages, German and English, which included information about the objects on display. There were no interpretation texts or object labels inside the exhibition. An audio guide featuring Anderson, Malouf and Sharp, was also available to rent. This lack of interpretive material inside the exhibition could be interpreted as a way to let visitors employ their imagination and their own understandings to navigate through it.

However, the design of the exhibition guided the viewers subtly. Each room had its own theme and visual differentiation to help visitors understand the sections. The visitors could navigate between the sections freely without any particular order (although the curators had a proposed order in the gallery guide). For instance, Room 2 was painted green and featured green objects, whereas Room 7, which presented wooden objects had wooden walls.

In each room, the objects were placed in a well-lit glass case behind the wall. Since, the exhibition had dimmed lighting, the lit display case guided visitors to examine the objects inside. This put emphasis on the objects and not on design. The visitors had to look at the objects and understand why they were there. These cases were also positioned at all heights, at times very high or very low. For example, in Room 3, the

*Portrait of a Young Prince Reclined in Bed* (17<sup>th</sup> century) was placed above a display case and near the ceiling so that the visitor had to look up to see it. Due to its small size, it could be easily missed. In contrast, in Room 4, tiny objects were positioned in very low cases. The visitor had to either sit on the floor or bend down in order to see them. In this playful way, visitors were asked to look below and above the eye level as they would in a *Kunstkammer* and make a physical effort to view the objects.

The theme of each room was represented by the objects on display. The organisation of these objects broke away from the typical scientific taxonomy that may place objects chronologically or geographically but followed the curators' personal categorisation. In Room 5, they deliberately chose to exhibit artworks, such as the ivory *Phoenix*, juxtaposed with natural history artefacts such as the tortoise skeletons. For the curators, nature can have artistic value and art can be as real as nature. Therefore, they blended reality with imagination breaking the boundaries of such typologies (Audio Guide A 2018). The intention was for visitors to look beyond standard classifications and develop their own stories about the objects.

## Guessing games

The objects in the exhibition were meticulously selected and arranged by the curators to create different associations. Due to the lack of interpretation inside the exhibition space, visitors had to decode them, just like fitting puzzle pieces together. Nevertheless, some of these connections were more visible than others. Given Anderson's meticulous work in film, nothing was left to chance in the exhibition either. The connections with the objects and the environment they were placed, provided clues to the narrative of the exhibition and the logic behind it.

For instance, the first object the visitor would see was the *Cabinet of Curiosities* (1620/1625), a painting by Frans II. Francken. This painting acted as an introduction to the exhibition because it depicted a cabinet of curiosities, the main inspiration of the exhibition. The cabinet of curiosities made their appearance in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. They were usually associated with scholars and/or the elite and displayed collections in a systematic encyclopaedic way (Abt 2006:120; Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Greenblatt 1991: 51). The objects on display were divided into

*naturalia*, natural objects, and *artificialia*, man-made objects. However, they were usually displayed together (Abt 2006: 120; Hooper-Greenhill 1992: 90). Thus, these rooms acted as a representation of the world in miniature, the *world in microcosm* (Greenblatt 1991: 51). The Kunsthistorisches Museum is a museum that stemmed from such cabinet of curiosities, or *Kunstkammer*. Currently, the museum features a section that presents the various *Kunstkammer* that belonged to members of the Habsburg dynasty.

Following this painting, the visitor could see three portraits of the ‘Hairy’ people, the Gonsalvus family with a condition of hypertrichosis. People with unusual characteristics were considered wonders of nature and often displayed in cabinets due to their peculiarity (Audio Guide A 2018). Consequently, these paintings, alongside the first painting, further reinforced the narrative of the 15<sup>th</sup> century *Kunstkammer*.



Figure 1: The ‘window’ composition (Source: Author)

The next two compositions facing each other resembled scenes from a film. The first composition included two paintings, *Woman at a Window* (1654) by Vrel and *Man looking through a Window* (1653) by Hoogstraten (Figure 1). The first painting featured a woman who is looking out of her window; the viewer can only see her back side and gesture. The painting next to this one featured a man looking through

a window. Together these paintings created a scene, cutting from one frame to another. Similarly, the second composition of two paintings depicted festivities; a nocturnal banquet (1640) and an imperial banquet at the Court of Emperor Leopold I (1666) (Figure 2). The similarity of colours and tone gave the impression that it was the same banquet painted from different angles. These examples highlight how Anderson used these paintings to create film frames inside the exhibition.

Room 2, the green room, displayed only green objects in different shapes and sizes. However, there were also deeper connections among the objects. The three display cases on one side presented green fabrics through the *Hedda Gabler* (1978) costume dress and three paintings featuring green outfits. The ‘green’ objects in the opposite showcase presented different materials including the attention-grabbing *Emerald Vessel* (1641) which was considered by Anderson and Malouf as ‘the purest green’ (Audio Guide B 2018). It was located in the middle of the case, between objects of organic materials and minerals such as malachite, bronze, and bird feathers. Malouf commented that the curator of the *Kunstammer* once told her that in the past, malachite and emerald had the same value and this was what they were trying to show (Audio Guide B 2018). The emerald and the dress were juxtaposed to showcase the similarities between the two materials (Anderson 2018: 19).

A more obscure connection was in Room 6. The historical display case was juxtaposed with smaller object boxes and cases. The curators, thus, highlighted the overlooked containers of objects that are equally well crafted and fascinating (Audio Guide B 2018). The theme of the ‘container’ or ‘treasure chest’ is also mirrored in the general exhibition



Figure 2: The ‘banquet’ composition  
(Source: Author)

design. Each room is ultimately, a box containing the objects. Sharp cleverly argued in the Audio Guide that the setup of the room was like a Russian doll, there was a room inside the museum, a case inside the room and a box inside the case (Audio Guide A 2018). However, the main aim of the display case was to show the evolution of cases and the ‘introduction of the hinge’ (Anderson 2018: 19).

## Exhibition narratives

Based on the presentation above, we can argue that there were three main narratives in the exhibition: a contemporary take of the *Kunstkammer*; a story about insignificant and overlooked objects; and, a personal understanding of curating museum collections.

## Kunstkammer

The narrative of the *Kunstkammer* was constructed throughout the exhibition. Firstly, it featured peculiar objects in personal classification systems. Secondly, the origin of these objects was from the imperial *Kunstkammer* and collections and were probably displayed in the original *Kunstkammer*. For this reason, Anderson placed the exhibition after the *Kunstkammer* as its continuation (Audio Guide A).

Inside the exhibition, there were elements that referenced the *Kunstkammer*. For instance, Room 4 depicted a miniature version of a *Kunstkammer*, ‘taking the notion of depicting the big world into a small scale to the extreme’ (Audio Guide A 2018). Moreover, it used categorisation techniques of the *Kunstkammer* such as exhibiting art and nature together in Room 5, or classifying objects based on their material in Room 7, which featured wooden objects. Furthermore, design of Room 7 resembled a *studiolo*, another version of the *Kunstkammer* (Audio Guide A 2018).

Overall, the exhibition was a re-invention of the *Kunstkammer*. Sharp compared it to an “explosion” as it rejected standard classifications (Audio Guide A 2018). Lastly, the curators did not want to provide an academic representation of the objects and the *Kunstkammer* (Audio Guide A 2018).

## Neglected objects

The exhibition presented “neglected objects”, that is objects which are not usually considered exhibition material or “star-objects”. That is the case with the object that gave this exhibition its title, i.e. the *Spitzmaus Mummy*. The *Coffin of a Spitzmaus (Shrew)* is a wooden box containing a mummified shrew that dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC. It was displayed in the Ancient Egypt wing but it was usually overlooked (Audio Guide A 2018). In this exhibition, the *Spitzmaus* was displayed in a single object display case in the centre of Room 5 and the Berger Hall and it was given the importance that it deserved.

Another example of “neglected objects” were the object cases that were not considered artworks or important to be showcased and were overlooked by the Museum. The cases protected the objects in storage but were never exhibited before. When Anderson and Malouf were looking at the collection to select the objects for display, they noticed them and wanted to exhibit them (Audio Guide B 2018). To show their importance, Anderson intended to place the empty historical display case in the middle of the exhibition, but it could not be materialised due to technical issues (Audio Guide B 2018).

Through this narrative, the curators challenged traditional museum practices, including the museumification and validation processes. These overlooked objects were given importance and value. Yet, this value was very personal to the viewer.

## The curators' selections

As with the previous two exhibitions, the aim of this one was to rejuvenate the museum's collections through the ‘taste’ of the guest curators (Audio Guide B 2018). This ‘taste’ reflects the two artists' background. The criteria of choosing objects were based on the personal way Anderson and Malouf ‘sensed’ them and not on the value that was attributed to them by the curators, the art market or the academic world. Sharp noted that, although both artists, Anderson and Malouf came from a completely different creative world, that of film and design, they deliberately followed their own approach (Audio Guide B 2018). Therefore, their arrangements were ‘intuitive, emotional, playful’ unaffected by provenance of the object or the ‘traditional values that curators apply to objects’ (Audio Guide B 2018). For example, they

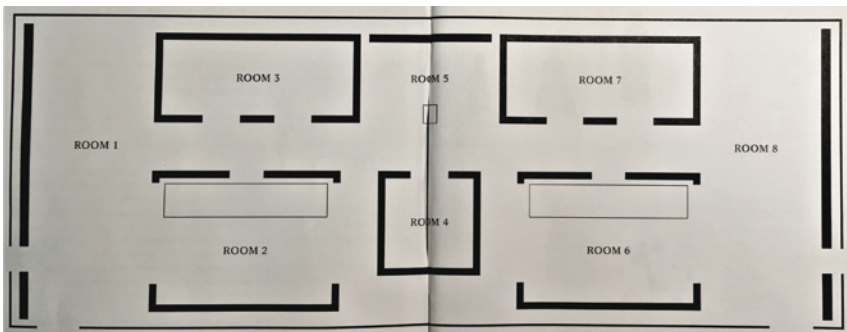
created a display featuring a doll with different pairs of footwear of different origin and era. Also, Anderson confessed that one of the children's portraits does not actually depict a child, but, for the needs of the exhibition they considered it as one (Audio Guide B 2018).

Anderson's distinctive cinematic style was mirrored in the exhibition. Firstly, he explored people's emotions and their over-the-top reactions through portraits. Anderson and Malouf did not care about the maker or the story behind them but wanted to show what people looked like (Audio Guide 2018). In Room 3, the children's portraits explored their emotions. Secondly, symmetry, Anderson's trademark cinematic style, was a dominant characteristic of the exhibition. Room 4 was the epitome of objects



*Figure 3: View of Room 4 (Source: Author)*

objects symmetrically arranged as they were placed according to their size; from short to tall to short (Figure 3). Furthermore, the overall layout of the space followed a symmetrical approach (Figure 4). Room 1 and 8 had the same layout and content, while Rooms 2 and 6, and 3



*Figure 4: Exhibition Layout (Source: Exhibition Gallery Guide)*

and 7 were identical. Furthermore, symmetry occurred in a conceptual level. Diagonally to the ‘Hairy’ people, there were the portraits of the peculiar people in size, including Titian’s *Duke John Frederick, Elector of Saxony* (1550/1551) and *The Giant Bartlma Bona with the Dwarf Thomele*. Moreover, Room 2 and Room 7 reflected on the classification methods of the *Kunstkammer* and were placed diagonally.

As both Anderson and Malouf are experts in constructing stories due to their occupation, these personal selections crafted a fictional world. This way of interpreting artworks challenged the way the museum framed and interpreted them. It also allowed visitors to experience the curators’ taste and aesthetic.

### **Towards self-reflection**

Through exhibition analysis it is apparent that its content, design and narrative constructed an exhibition that aimed to challenge the institutional norms and reinterpret the museum collection. Following the categorisation of self-reflexive exhibitions discussed at the beginning of this chapter, this exhibition can, therefore, be categorised as an *artist-curated* and self-reflexive one. Each of its narratives offered a series of reflections regarding the museum’s present, past and future: the *Kunstkammer* narrative examined the history of the *Kunsthistorisches Museum* including past collecting practices; the “neglected objects” narrative commented on processes of value attribution and selection in museum collections. Lastly, the curators’ selections were a way of rethinking the collections through a very personal, as opposed to an institutional, academic standpoint.

However, this exhibition also fits the characteristics of the *post-museum*. The *post-museum* reflects on the authority of knowledge by implementing subjectivity, plurality of voices and interdisciplinary approaches. Since, the curatorial profession has opened up to include different voices, this exhibition presented another perspective of museums and collections through the standpoint of two artists, unfamiliar with museum practices. Anderson’s aesthetics and quiriness such as symmetry, the human subject, even his ironic sense of humour, were evident in the exhibition. Hence, it was subjectively questioning the museum’s authorship.

Lastly, the exhibition challenged the notion of ‘objective truth’ through the personal meaning-making of its curators and its audience.



The curators disregarded all the interpretations that the museum's curators assigned to objects and created fictional stories around them that suited their narrative. Consequently, truth became a personal matter and a space was created in the museum for other 'truths' to be told and more voices to be heard. In addition, the "small" personal narrative was juxtaposed with the "big" official museum one.

The exhibition had both characteristics of resonance and wonder that prompted visitors to participate. The sense of wonder was present in the *Kunstkammer*, as Greenblatt argues; the *Kunstkammer*'s sense of marvel, uniqueness, peculiarity or workmanship contributed to the evocation of visual stimulation and admiration (1991: 51). In this exhibition, the objects on display were spectacular, such as the *Emerald Vessel*, or unusual such as the 'Hairy' people portraits. As Sharp (Audio Guide A 2018) stated, this exhibition aimed to have this 'wow-effect', to encourage people to look at things in a fresh manner and to be taken aback by the objects themselves. Even the positioning of the exhibition in-between two collections aimed to highlight how visually different this exhibition was from contemporary museum standards. Furthermore, Anderson's aesthetic approach also contributed in achieving wonder.

The resonant element of the exhibition was evident in the connections between the objects and the way they were exhibited. The objects were decontextualised and introduced into the narratives of the two curators. This had an impact both on the museum and on the visitor. For the museum, it created an inquisitive environment that challenged traditional museum practices such as taxonomy and meaning-making. On the other hand, the visitors were asked to mentally participate in this new way of meaning-making by looking closely at the objects and interpreting them based on their own experience. This engagement created personal meanings of the objects, an act that prompted visitors to think about the museum and its practices.

However, due to the lack of interpretation inside the exhibition, understanding the personal perspective of the curators was not easy. Without the two curators talking about the exhibition, many of the ideas and nuances of the display were not accessible to the visitor. People unaware of the curator's work or the museum's collection were excluded from an understanding of the exhibition. The use of the audio guide was the only way to mitigate this exclusion. Yet, another question needs to be raised: who is the audience for these exhibitions? Do self-reflexive exhibitions really open up to an audience, or, are they aimed primarily at museum professionals and scholars who understand

the themes presented or are interested in these topics, perhaps offering something like an ‘inside joke’?

In my view, self-reflexive exhibitions are, by definition, primarily aimed at the institution. They aim to critique the institution or to allow for self-reflection around how things are done and why. However, *Spitzmaus Mummy in a Coffin and Other Treasures* did not just want to critique the museum; it wanted to offer a solution. Thinking about this exhibition and its result, Wes Anderson (2018: 19) stated that:

We do harbour the humble aspiration that the unconventional groupings and arrangement of the works on display may influence the study of art and antiquity in minor, even trivial, but nevertheless detectable ways for many future generations to come. [...] But, should our experiment fail on these levels, we are, nevertheless, confident it will, at the very least, serve the purpose of ruling out certain hypotheses, thereby advancing the methods of art history through the scientific process of trial-and-error. (In this case, mostly error).

The two curators wanted to make an exhibition that would propose different ways of thinking about museum objects and practices. Although this exhibition was an exercise that failed for its curators, it prompted professionals and scholars to learn something from their errors. They managed to spark a discussion that would lead to different approaches.

In a way, this exhibition was a form of action research. Action research could include the way the museum operates and the visitors’ reaction to this, but also the way professionals work. For instance, Sharp (Audio Guide A 2018), from the perspective of the museum, argued that: ‘through these exhibitions, we learn more about our own holdings, we learn unfamiliar things about familiar objects’. Moreover, it offered museum professionals the opportunity to think differently about their practices and about the museum they work in. Sharp (2018b: 13) concludes that ‘a project of this kind re-examines the relationship between museums, artists, collections and their publics’. Consequently, understanding the visitors’ needs could help museums become inclusive and relevant.

In conclusion, self-reflexive exhibitions are inward-looking exhibitions that are directed at museum professionals and not the visitor. They allow museum professionals and scholars to evaluate their institutions and their practices by placing them in the foreground. Thinking about their choices, their topics or their approaches can lead to exhibitions or other museum practices that are more relevant to their audience. A crucial part of this process is experimentation, trying out different methods and proposing new interpretations. That is why, self-reflexive exhibitions are a form of action research. And as Wes Anderson proposed, trial and error can lead to this result.

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## CHAPTER 5

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# Affect of War: Content analysis of the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo

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## Abstract

War is a contested topic and presenting its brutality for public consumption is especially challenging in cultural institutions such as museums. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the topic of war in museums is increasingly



being presented in the form of testimonies, through the survivors' remembrance of their personal experiences, making it difficult to remain emotionally impartial to the brutality of armed conflicts. More recently, museums have started to utilise affective practices to evoke various collective and individual emotions and understandings of often-contested topics, including that of war.

This article investigates the relationship between war and emotions and presents findings from a qualitative content analysis of the exhibition at the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo. The exhibition at the War Childhood Museum presents war, specifically the 1990s Bosnian war and recent war in Syria, through a series of personal objects and testimonies of those who experienced armed conflict as children. This research demonstrates that, when narrated from a child's perspective, stories of war evoke expected emotions such as pity, sorrow, distress, and tragedy, but also, more importantly, conjure emotions of love and humour.

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## 1.0 Introduction

“... Damn you, why are you killing our souls, which exist only to love? To love peace, to love play, to love happiness... But then again, I won't curse you, because you are also the fathers of children who love peace and happiness...”

Nina (Nirvana) Zeljković (1983 – 1995)

Object label, *My sister Nina*, 2019, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

War is a contested topic: it is difficult and painful, but also glorified and dignified; it impacts those who have won and those who have lost, victims and perpetrators. The topic of war has been presented in museums for centuries. Originally, it was used as a means of presenting a national history of victory and triumph in museums, which, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, resulted in the emergence of institutions specifically dedicated to the topic of war in the form of military and war museums. The two World Wars were significant events in the world's history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and both have been extensively presented in museums across the world. Following World War II, the emphasis in war museums shifted from heroism to victimhood. Thus, war came to be presented not only

from the historic perspective of the nationally accepted narrative, but also from the survivors' perspective through testimonies to first-hand experiences away from the battlefield (Wieviorka 1998, 2006; De Jong 2018).

Bosnia and Herzegovina has seen numerous armed conflicts take place across its territory. However, it is probably best known for the assassination of the heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne, an event that set in motion War World I, and for the 1990s Bosnian war that took place during the dissolution of former Yugoslavia. While there are numerous museums in Bosnia and Herzegovina that commemorate armed conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the 1990s Bosnian war is the most frequently memorialised armed conflict in Bosnian museums; perhaps because it is recent history and has resulted in ethnic and political divisions. The War Childhood Museum (WCM) in Sarajevo, which officially opened in 2017, unlike other war museums in Bosnia and Herzegovina commemorates armed conflict from the unique perspective of those who experienced the Bosnian war as children.

Although childhood in war has been well documented in 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, such as the classic *Diary of the Young Girl* by Anne Frank and *Fatelessness* by Imre Kertész, it is a perspective and subject rarely presented in war museums, perhaps because children are not often referenced within the historical narratives of war. While legislative significance has been given to the subject through The Declaration of the Rights of the Child, drafted and issued by the League of Nations in 1924, and later adopted and further developed by the United Nations in 1959 and 1989 (Humanium n.d.; OHCHR n.d.), children continue to be forcefully displaced, victimised, sexually assaulted and even mobilised as soldiers in wars (UNICEF n.d.; UNICEF 2018). The WCM thus highlights visitors of society's responsibility to protect children during an armed conflict, especially during present and future wars, by emotively engaging and affecting visitors through children's testimonies.

This article aims to contribute to the existing body of literature concerning the study of affective practice in war museums by answering two research questions: 1) what affective strategies are employed at the WCM, and 2) whether the experience of war, when narrated from a child's perspective, takes the emphasis away from, or concedes to, ideas and emotions generally associated with armed conflict.

## 2.0 War, Testimonies and Affect in museums

War museums emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the sole purpose of strengthening national pride and identity by commemorating heroes and celebrating victories through the chronological musealisation of war-related memorabilia, such as armour, uniforms, weapons, trophies, and medals (Hacker and Vining 2013: 41-43). This form of commemoration resulted in a rather one-sided account of armed conflict, the sole narrative being one of victory and a nation's sacrifice (Winter 2013). In contrast, following the end of World War II, new museums and memorials emerged to commemorate mainly Holocaust victims, but also the many non-combatant victims of the war beyond Europe's Jewish population. Among them we can mention the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (established in 1955) and the Piskaryovskoye Memorial Cemetery, in St Petersburg (established in 1960) (Winter 2013). Yet, while thematic focus shifted from victory to victims, the commemoration of conflict through the exhibition of tangible objects remained common practice in museums for decades following the two World Wars (Hacker and Vining 2013).

Over the last 30 years, however, war museums have re-examined how they present conflict, moving beyond simply displaying objects to utilising artefacts as narrative tools (Hacker and Vining 2013). This new approach calls for displayed objects to tell stories that focus on individual experiences, which, according to Winter (2012), support representations of war. Simultaneously, displays are expected to expand on the factual context of war (Muchitsch 2013), enabling the artefacts to participate in a larger social narrative, thus “[accommodating] the new social history” (Hacker and Vining 2013: 53).

Kavanagh argues that there is a direct connection between history and memory within the museum context noting that “museums are a meeting ground for official and formal versions of the past called *histories*...and the individual or collective accounts of reflective personal experience called *memories*” (1996: 1). She also notes that while there are always multiple versions of history narrated through memory, both history and memory facilitate museums’ “very different ways of telling” (Kavanagh 1996: 12). Opposing Nora's (1996) view of history as something that is in the past, rational, and universally authoritative, Kavanagh argues that histories in museums take a form of “negotiated realities” (1996: 6).

Furthermore, scholars have established more links between history and memory, emphasising the authenticity of personal memories. For example, in Wiewiorka's (1998, 2006) concept of the "era of witness", legitimacy of the historical fact is attributed to the individual's testimonial. De Jong (2018) emphasises that an individual who has personally experienced historically important events is characterised as a "witness of the past". However, once this same individual shares their experiences – or testifies – in the public realm with the intention of addressing a wider social group, they become a "witness to history". By testifying, the "witness to history" is constructing a certain "narrative of the past – a certain history" (De Jong 2018: 32-33).

Personal testimonies, especially those that speak of and produce evidence relevant to the topic of war, are usually solemn. Using personal narratives as a communication tool allows for more relatable encounters and content exploration from multiple perspectives, which may induce "a greater emotional involvement" (Minore 2012: 144). A central characteristic of the human mind, which is usually considered synonymous with emotion is affect. Fisher and Reckitt (2015) note that "affect accounts for the feeling of exhibitions" (Fisher and Reckitt 2015: 361). Human connection has been identified as an important component in the construction of affect in museums. Studying interpretive approaches in the Immigration Museum in Melbourne, Witcomb notes that an interactive encounter "based on hypothetical but historically accurate case studies" (2019: 272), where visitors role-play an immigration officer, deciding who may enter or remain in Australia, enables visitors to connect with narrating individuals on a more personal level. Cooke and Frieze (2017) examine the importance of human interaction and note that replacing individual survivor guides at the Jewish Holocaust Centre (JHC) with media such as film may negatively impact the visitor's emotional engagement with the narrative, noting that the personal "encounter between visitor and survivor guide was understood as an affective event" (Cooke and Frieze 2017: 84).

Furthermore, McKernan and McLeod (2018) and Shea (2018) note that affective responses in war museums or memorial sites may be either collective or individual. Drawing a comparison between the *Australia in the Great War* exhibition at the Australian War Memorial and the *WWI: Love and Sorrow* exhibition at the Museum Victoria, McKernan and McLeod (2018) note that emotions of pride, gratitude, fear, danger, pity, suffering and loss emerged in both exhibitions. Affective responses were achieved using objects, images and personal

stories. However, objects at the *Australia in the Great War* exhibition facilitated a collective experience of war, while personal stories and personal objects at the *WWI: Love and Sorrow* exhibition called for an “intimacy with the people who are featured, and thus we can enter into an affective practice that is based upon connection to another person rather than to the nation” (McKernan and McLeod 2018: 65). Lastly, Shea (2018) examined affect and engagement at *Temple*, a memorial pyre constructed to commemorate individual memories of the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland. *Temple*’s symbolism as holder of personal stories – many conflicting – brought into the public domain a therapeutic affective practice which helped extinguish “emotional burdens associated with a history and heritage shaped by conflict and violence” (Shea 2018: 53).

### 3.0 Methodology

The main purpose of this research is to investigate the relationship between war and emotions with a particular focus on the personal objects and oral testimonies exhibited at the War Childhood Museum (WCM) in Sarajevo. In contrast to several other war museums in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which commemorate fallen heroes and civil victims using a purely historical and often political narrative, the WCM takes a different outlook and approaches the topic of war from the personal perspective of those who have experienced it as children. In order to examine whether this experience from an arguably unique perspective takes the emphasis from, or concedes to, general ideas and emotions associated with armed conflict, it is imperative that we examine, in detail, the contents of the WCM. To address the main research questions, we utilised qualitative content analysis methodology, collecting the data during the week of April 22 - April 26, 2019. Babbie notes that content analysis is “the study of recorded human communications” (2013: 295); and Tucker suggests that “labels and voice” (2014: 4) are important as they deliver messages that impact visitors’ attitudes towards exhibitions. Tucker further supports her stance by quoting Gurian, who suggests: “labels may assume the role of a teacher, co-conspirator, colleague, preacher, gossip columnist” (1991: 185). In addition, testimonies in the WCM take the form of objects’ labels as they accompany personal objects donated to and exhibited at the WCM. And in turn, objects are a central focus for the testimonies.

Thus, even though academics suggest that content analysis is primarily an analysis tool for texts, we argue that the WCM's exhibited objects are as important as the testimonies and need to be included in our analysis.

The method of qualitatively analysing collected data derives from two theoretical concepts. The first is the concept of "exhibition as theatre" (Maure 1995: 155). According to Maure, objects that exist in a pre-defined space do not convey meaning on their own; we need to examine and understand the relationships between the objects in order to produce meaning. Here, we have analysed the relationship between objects and accompanying testimony, but have also investigated displayed objects in relation to one another. Second, we have analysed the data by making "valid inferences from text" (Webber 1990:10), manually coding the key emerging emotional themes in the WCM testimonies. For example, we have analysed each of the testimonies by identifying the most poignant themes related to our research question of the relationship between emotion and war. Further, the most common and representative themes were selected and divided into relevant thematic categories.

## 4.0 Presentation and analysis of the Museum

### 4.1 War Childhood Museum

The War Childhood Museum (WCM), located in the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, is the result of the book, *War Childhood*, first published in 2013. The book's content was compiled via a national crowd-sourcing campaign initiated by the author, Jasminko Halilović, that requested personal reflections on the question: "What was a war childhood for you?". The short testimonials, no longer than 160 characters each, were a driving force behind the socio-entrepreneurial idea of establishing the WCM.

The WCM organised its first exhibition in May 2016 at the History Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It is set against the complex and divided socio-political background of its host country, but, as its founder notes, "The War Childhood Museum became a platform that brought together people who refuse to concede to division" (Halilović 2018: 229). The museum officially opened in its permanent space in Sarajevo in 2017. Since its inauguration, it has organised two

annual exhibitions dedicated to the theme of war childhood, and one temporary exhibition specifically dedicated to war childhood in Syria. Initially, WCM and its collection were primarily oriented towards the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but, recently the museum broadened its work internationally and it now operates in Lebanon, Ukraine and the United States (War Childhood Museum n.d.).

The museum space is small and spans a floor area of approximately 250 square metres. The content analysed for this article is from the WCM 2018-2019 untitled annual exhibition, and predominantly comprised oral testimonies and donated objects by those who experienced the armed conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also included a small section of oral testimonies of children from war-affected Syria

## 4.2 Qualitative exhibition content analysis

The first part of the analysis focuses on the displayed objects. Here, we studied the relationship between displayed objects as well as the relationship between objects and the testimonies that accompany them. In the second part of the analysis, discussion is centred on the emotional themes that have emerged from the testimonies.

### 4.2.1 Exhibition's thematic and temporal structures

We began by analysing the WCM exhibition from a macro-perspective, studying how such an exhibition is introduced to the visitor. We also looked at the way in which exhibited materials are interpreted and organised in the WCM.

Notably, we noticed that the exhibition under consideration is not titled and that an introductory panel, which is usually present at the beginning of any exhibition, in this case is absent. Instead, upon entry, the WCM presents visitors with a display of the *War Childhood* book accompanied by a short text. Rather than providing any insights into the exhibition that follows, the text explains the reasoning behind the founding of the museum. Then, the exhibition occupies a single space divided into four spatial units, a division that seems to have been chosen mostly for convenience purposes, rather than to organise the exhibition in to thematic or chronological sections. While the WCM exhibition presents an all-encompassing experience of war from a child's

perspective, it does not do so by exhibiting testimonies chronologically or thematically.

However, our analysis revealed a single thematic cluster within the exhibition space. In the museum's third spatial unit, we noted that testimonies by Syrian children are clustered together, surrounded by testimonies from the Bosnian war. While testimonies of children from Bosnia and Herzegovina offer accounts of events from the past, testimonies of Syrian children, in contrast, testify to more recent and even current events. Yet, as these current testimonies are not displayed at the end of the exhibition, they do not contribute to its chronological structure.

Ultimately, all exhibited content contributes towards the exhibition's central topic, but the strategy of including this distinct thematic cluster raises several questions. First, chronologically speaking, does the juxtaposition of past and current events aim to encourage some sort of comparison between the two temporal references? Or, perhaps, is it its purpose to remind the visitor that not all wars are matters of the past? The second, more emotional concern, may involve a heightened emotional engagement from the visitor. Do we empathise more with those who are currently experiencing the ramifications of an armed conflict in comparison with those who have experienced it in the past and have managed, to some extent, to move forward? Or, finally, is this strategy mainly used to demonstrate that the WCM is a museum not solely dedicated to the 1990s Bosnian war, but to 'war' more generally?

#### **4.2.2 Objects and testimonies: Narrative and emotional links**

Another point of analysis calls for a consideration of relationships amongst the displayed items. First we will investigate the relationship between objects and their testimonies. Second, we will examine the relationship between the displayed objects themselves. The WCM exhibition relies heavily on objects donated by those who have also provided testimonies. Hence, the focus of the exhibition is on personal stories. While quotes that are borrowed from the *War Childhood* book and video testimonies are not displayed in combination with any physical objects, it is the juxtaposition of displayed objects and testimonies in the form of text that we are most interested in. Our research reveals that testimony takes on the role of the object label and is displayed alongside



the donated object at the WCM. Testimonies are interpreted in the form of bilingual text, Bosnian and English, that is written in small font and always displayed on the wall behind the object, a common practice when placing object labels in many other museums. This form of interpretation of testimonies requires a visitor to move physically close to the exhibited object to read the testimony. This form of display allows us to enter into an affective practice constructed by establishing a level of intimacy between visitors and witnesses.

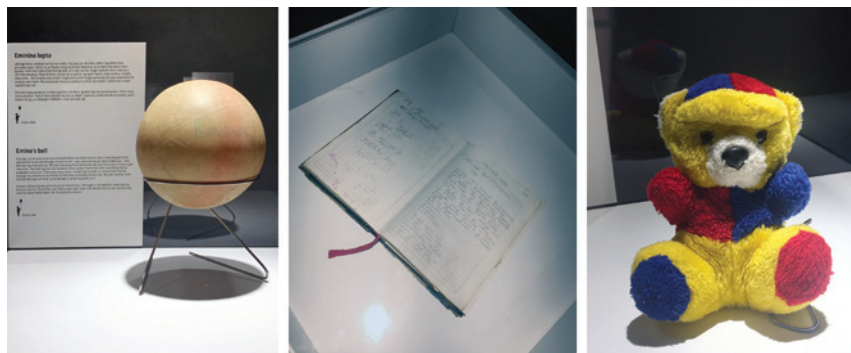
#### 4.2.2.1 Objects of innocence vs. stories of distress

At first glance, unlike in many other war museums, it appears that the objects displayed at the WCM are not closely related to the theme of war, as this is usually conceived. The exhibition is devoid of weaponry or any other military memorabilia, but, rather, is filled with candy and food wrappers, children's toys, books, diaries and clothing items.

The lack of military-related objects and the display of such a guileless collection may, at first, call into question the museum's underlying focus. What is the relation between these objects and armed conflict? How can war be represented through a series of children's objects? How can such objects evoke the emotions of pride, suffering or distress, often conjured at other war museums? This is where an object label, a testimony, takes on the role of a narrator and co-conspirator (Gurian 1991), attesting that each of the objects is in fact closely related to the war experience.

By examining the contents at the WCM we note the juxtaposition of childhood objects and distressful testimonies. Here, children's toys, such as a swing, a doll or a small robot, are homage to painful memories of war. We particularly single out the juxtaposition of such objects with testimonials that attest to death. For example, a teddy bear, a diary and a ball are placed against the testimonies that speak about the loss of a family member, as is evident in *Emina's ball*, *My sister Nina*, and *Teddy bear* (Figure 1). Whether associated with someone who has been killed, as with the *Emina's ball* and *Teddy bear* testimonies, or with the display of an object that once belonged to a child killed in war, as with the *My sister Nina* testimony, objects at the WCM defy our pre-determined and dogmatic notions and emotional relationship towards war. The WCM represents war by means of a child's innocence, untainted by historic, glorious and even sorrowful stories or objects from the battlefield. It is

an approach that, perhaps, facilitates a deeper understanding of armed conflict and its ramifications, as visitors emotionally connect with objects that they too may have once owned as children and have their own pre-established emotional connection to these, or similar, objects.



*Figure 1: Objects of innocence exhibited with distressful testimonies  
(Source: Lejla Niksic)*

It is clear that at the WCM objects alone do not produce meaning. Their importance in the meaning-making process lies in the emotional and intellectual understanding of what these objects mean to the visitor and what they meant, and perhaps still do, to their owners. However, the aforementioned juxtaposition of childhood objects and painful memories do raise some questions. First, there is a question of the intensity of our emotional response to these objects. Do we emotionally respond in the same way towards an object that is associated with the loss of a loved one as we do towards an object that belonged to a child killed in war? How could something as innocent as a ball or a teddy bear testify to something as distressing as death? Whatever the visitor's emotional response, it is undeniable that objects of innocence are transformed into objects of pain at the WCM.

The second question raised relates to the museological practice at the WCM. Considering that each object and the testimony that accompanies it is donated by the same individual, what is the extent, if any, of curatorial involvement in organising displays in such a manner? The WCM's underlying theme of the experience of war during childhood relies not on the displayed objects or testimonies alone, but, rather, on the inseparable relationship between the two. Therefore, it becomes evident that juxtaposing objects of innocence against painful stories is not a result of the curatorial interpretation of the collection

but is rather the discretionary decision of those who donated objects. Perhaps, the lack of curatorial interference alludes to a more authentic historical validity of the objects and testimonies on display. After all, isn't the WCM a place where witnesses to the past become "witnesses to history", as mentioned by De Jong (2018)?

#### 4.2.2.2 Wounded childhood and pledge of "never again"

Further examining affective curatorial practice at the WCM, we also studied the relationships between the objects themselves. Although we initially noted that neither objects nor testimonies are arranged in any particular thematic clusters, with the exception of the group of testimonies and objects from Syrian children, we did observe two specific instances where the relationship among exhibited objects is established solely due to curatorial intervention.

First, we identified two uniquely different objects that are displayed near one another within the exhibition. Although we have noted that objects displayed at the WCM have a visual value that relates to the innocence of childhood and that the visual sense of aged, broken or destroyed objects, as one may expect from a war is absent, there are two objects that visually bear witness to the armed conflict: the *Chalkboard with a shrapnel hole* and the other consists of pieces of a destroyed jungle gym (Figure 2).

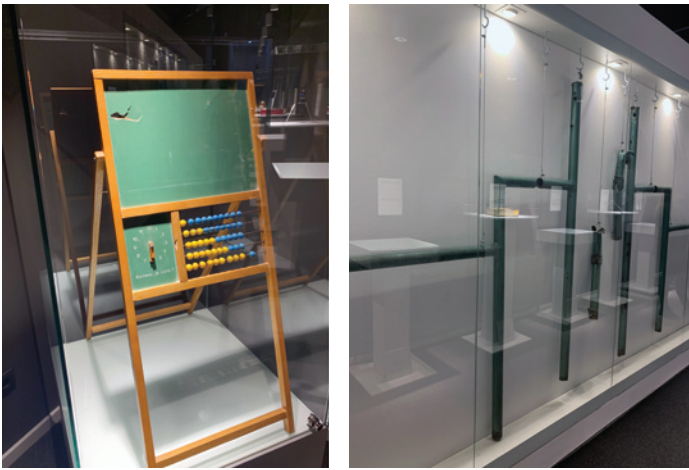


Figure 2: The only two objects in the exhibition that bear witness to armed conflict (Source: Lejla Niksic)

These objects are placed at the point of moving from the first into the second spatial unit, and while, as previously determined, the WCM narrative overall is not constructed of thematic clusters, this specific placement prompts the question of whether there is a special relationship between these two objects. Although a common similarity between the two objects is that they have been damaged by shrapnel, there are also three main differences between them. The first is that we are undeniably able to identify the chalkboard, although evidently damaged, whilst, the jungle gym is destroyed beyond recognition. Random remaining metal pieces of the jungle gym, which would otherwise be used by children for climbing, hanging and spinning in the playground, are now silently resting suspended on the wall behind a glass display. The second difference concerns the intended use of these objects. One is used for learning and the other for playing – two of the most prominent activities associated with childhood. Thus, epistemologically speaking, what can be constructed of this display? Is this relationship meant to enable us to immediately associate these naive objects with war without even having to read the testimonies that accompany them? Or, perhaps, does the relationship between damaged objects evoke a sense of pity by suggesting a ruined childhood? The third and final difference is in the testimonies that accompany these two objects. While both testimonies allude to an imminent danger due to shelling, the ramifications are quite different. *Chalkboard with a shrapnel hole* speaks of survival and perseverance. In contrast, *Jungle gym - a holy shrine of iron*, attests to pain and death. The latter also speaks of the emotional attachment of the wounded individual to the object of pain and his inability to move forward. In terms of meaning-making, the chalkboard remained true to its original intended use – an object associated with learning, education and success. The jungle gym, however, has long lost its original association with a carefree childhood, and has rather become a painful temple of remembrance.

The second instance where we have observed an intentional affective curatorial practice is the strategy of repetition. The fourth spatial unit at the WCM, dedicated to the epilogue, is the only area of the exhibition that displays neither donated personal objects nor testimonies. Hence, this part of the exhibition is solely interpreted and presented to the visitor by the museum staff. The final spatial unit features a plain white swing suspended off the ceiling in the middle of a dark room and a text label, same in size and font as that of the testimonies, titled *The Beginning*. Here we argue that the WCM exhibition concludes with

a duplicate of an authentic personal object, a swing, seen at the very beginning of the exhibition (Figure 3). This display of a sole object in a space physically separate from the rest of the exhibition, with a single directional light focused on a white swing that sways in an empty room, leaving a shadow on the floor, requests the visitor to engage in an affective experience of war by interacting with the object for the purpose of remembrance and introspection. The visitor is taken back to the beginning of the exhibition, where they first encountered a swing with a small bell accompanied by *The safest hiding place in besieged Sarajevo* testimony. It speaks of a mother's hope for her child's future, highlighting the importance of the WCM. The swing with a small bell and part of the testimony below are arguably used as a point of departure to the experience and emotional engagement in the WCM exhibition:

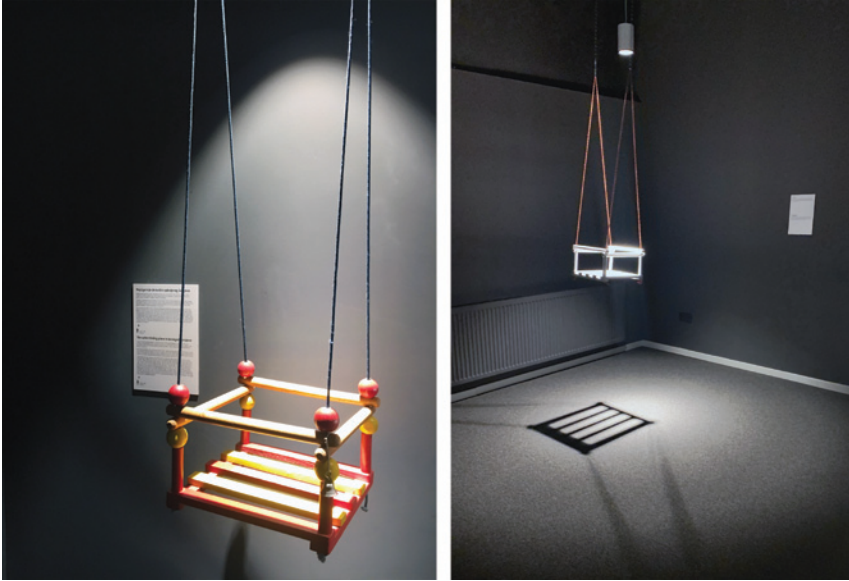
... That was when I realized what it had come to represent: a reminder of my grandfather who passed away too soon; safety, in my mother's eyes; my home, leisure, and an escape from the daily realities of war. I no longer hope to pass this swing with its little bell on to my child. I hope that my child will have a carefree childhood, filled with playdates at the park. I do not plan to tire my child with stories from the war. Instead I will bring my child to the War Childhood Museum to show her this swing filled with dreams, fantasies, and hopes – the safest hiding place in besieged Sarajevo.

Object label, *The safest hiding place in besieged Sarajevo*, 2019, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

By physically touching the white swing in the epilogue room, setting it in to motion, visitors experience their own physical involvement in the exhibition. This form of interaction makes visitors critically engage with the ramifications of war and the role every individual plays in it. Further, the label, not the testimony, titled *The Beginning* reminds us of our own role and indefinite responsibility towards the world we live in. This form of curatorial interpretation may invite visitors to silently, but emotionally, engage with the pledge of “never again” – a promise that we, as individuals will not or could not allow another child to be a war victim. Here, the WCM exhibition, one last time, reminds us of hope, and of the value of life:

... You are now exiting the War Childhood Museum, but this swing continues to sway, just like life continues after war childhood – because life lasts longer than us and our experiences.

Object label, *The Beginning*, 2019, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.



*Figure 3: The swings: the authentic personal object at the beginning and its duplicate at the very end of the exhibition (Source: Lejla Niksic)*

### 4.2.3 Key emotional emerging themes

#### 4.2.3.1 Testimonies devoid of identifying the perpetrator

Testimonies at the WCM offer an all-encompassing narrative of childhood during the war such as having to leave home, lacking necessities such as food, water or electricity, and escaping or succumbing to imminent danger. These are valid inferences to emerge in a museum about war. However, another expected assumption is that war museums, in most instances, include authoritative histories of war. Thus, we have examined if, and how, the testimonies at the

WCM address the armed conflict from the perspective of the nationally accepted historical narrative.

From the outset, it becomes apparent that testimonies at the WCM do not offer many direct references to the warring sides. There are only two instances where the name of an army, in this instance the Army of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH), is mentioned. However, only one of those testimonies refers to the sense of relief when crossing into the territory controlled by the ARBiH. Thus, who was on the other side? Which side is good, and which is bad? Are any?

The “other side” is not identified in the WCM’s testimonies. The testimony *Letters from the other side* geographically refers to the other side as Belgrade and Banja Luka. However, at the WCM, for example, there is a testimony titled *Blue Bunny and Red Teddy Bear* which is from a child from Banja Luka. This indicates that WCM takes on an apolitical stance regarding the 1990s Bosnian war. The WCM is impartial to military, political, ethnic, or national affiliations. Further, at the WCM, perpetrators take the form of unknown men, guards, and soldiers:

... Men with black masks stopped the convoy. They held us  
hostage for three days. ...

Object label, *I was a refugee, too*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... The guards were on rotation. One of them was young and  
acted friendly. He would leave his gun against the wall, as he  
talked to the younger detainees. ...

Object label, *My most cherished treasure*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... That was another particularly frightening experience,  
being alone, leading three armed soldiers in bandoliers,  
walking for the first time in three months along the street  
that you used to take to school every day, and seeing that it  
is completely different now, deserted, empty, totally devoid  
of people or things. As I walked, I prayed to God that  
somebody would see me... Someone.....

Video, *Untitled*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

All three roles evoke a sense of the unknown and mystery, but also fear and distress. However, at the WCM remembering such fearful experiences is done without assigning the role of a perpetrator to any group, army, or country. Here, the emphasis is on the perpetrator as another human being, and not a specific army. This does not allow for an affective experience of hostility towards another nation. Rather, the WCM introduces us to the affective experience of antipathy towards the perpetrator, whoever he/she or they may be.

#### 4.2.3.2 Affect of loss

As anticipated, direct references to killing or death are present in several testimonies but have different historical and emotional implications.

For example, the text below is from one of the testimonies with a direct link to death, but it also indirectly references a specific act of genocide during the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

I got this teddy bear from my uncle who I lost in the war,  
on July 11, 1995. ...

Object label, *Teddy bear*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, July 11 is commemorated as a day of mourning and remembrance of July 11, 1995, when over 8,000 civilians were mass-murdered in Srebrenica, a small town in the north-eastern part of the country. This crime against humanity was condemned at the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in the Hague, where the Srebrenica massacre was officially declared a genocide (OJEU 2010). However, the testimony does not refer specifically to Srebrenica or mention historical details of the war. For those familiar with the July 11 commemoration, this reference has a powerful capacity to induce a heightened emotional connotation of the loss of a loved one due to the act of genocide. It could also result in a profound sense of empathy, transforming empathy for the loss of a single life into compassion towards numerous victims. Further, this association may call for a much broader emotional questioning of the morality of mankind. In contrast, those not familiar with the history of Srebrenica are likely to understand the above reference from



an emotional point of view as the death of a single individual, without considering the date's much broader moral or historical connotations. In both instances, emotional engagement from a visitor's perspective is present, yet it would be emotionally understood and experienced differently, depending on the visitor's previous knowledge and understanding .

Further, our analysis indicates other references to the loss of loved ones: father, brother, sister, friend(s). However, just as has been demonstrated in the previous testimony, this is achieved without identifying or assigning responsibility to the perpetrator(s). For example:

... Emina's ball quickly became everyone's favorite toy. It brought us all together, especially my brother and me. My brother was killed a year later. ...

Object label, *Emina's ball*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... She was wounded on August 27, 1995, one day after competing in a dance contest. She passed away at the hospital a few days later. My sister, Nina (Nirvana) Zeljković, was only 12 years old. She was one of the last children killed during the siege of Sarajevo. ...

Object label, *My sister Nina*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... Amel was killed on May 3, 1995. It was during a period of truce. He was killed by a sniper coming from the Špicasta Stijena, located above Sarajevo. ...

Object label, *A sniper killed my brother*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

The interpretation of the death of a loved one is not only demonstrated in the testimonies of those who experienced war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similarly, the testimony of a child refugee from Syria bears no reference to the identity of those who are at war when sharing the loss of a family member.

...One day, on his way to work, a shell hit his car. He died before he could finish this bottle of perfume...

Object label, *My Father's Perfume*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

At the WCM, the loss of a loved one due to armed conflict is perceived and interpreted from a child's perspective, devoid of assigning blame or responsibility to any army, country, group or warring side. As a consequence, we posit that, at the WCM, the emotion of distress as it is connected to death, becomes universal, regardless of the visitor's nationality, cultural and ethnical background, or political view.

Additionally, our analysis revealed that victims are remembered quite differently at the WCM. On one hand, there are testimonies referring to those who were killed through their relationships to those who testify: uncle, brother, and father. On the other hand, there are testimonies that refer to the victims by name. This is evident in the two testimonies above and is further demonstrated in other testimonies:

... That day, Admir Bradarac (1976), Sanela Hadžiomeric (1978), Aldina Čolpa (1979) and Admir Čolpa (1985) were killed at those chin-up bars. Dzenita Hadžiomeric, Aldijana Grigorijević, and I, Haris Barimac, were all wounded by the shrapnel...

Object label, *Jungle gym – a holy shrine of iron*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

A single flash, a detonation and... Sanjin, Belma, Senad, Almir, Nihada, Velida, Sinanudin – Children's games over forever.

Wall text, *Untitled*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

Speaking from the viewpoint of emotional engagement, this form of remembrance prevails at the WCM. Here, names are given, and visitors glimpse the personalities of those victims; they become somehow immortalised at the WCM. These children are no longer considered mere statistics. Instead, they are real individuals; related to someone

who still exists. They are, in fact, somebody's children, somebody's brothers and sisters, and somebody's friends.

Lastly, some of the testimonies are somewhat ambiguous and imply the loss of life without explicitly stating it or using words specific to death or killing. For example, this is evident in the above testimony, where it is left to the visitor to deduce that children have been killed as a result of war (shelling). We notice a similar approach in the following testimony:

Regretting not kissing dad one more time before he set off  
for Trebević.

Wall text, *Untitled*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

Visitors are given an opportunity to construct meaning on their own. This would first depend on visitors' pre-existing knowledge. To those who are familiar with Sarajevo and the history of the 1990s war, Trebević is a direct geographical reference to the mountain on the eastern edge of the town; in the besieged Sarajevo it was a demarcation line. This testimony implies that the concerned individual probably did not return home. Yet, while those who are not familiar with the geographical reference would likely still deduce a loss of life from the testimony, they could also construct an altogether different meaning where the individual concerned is still alive. In both instances, feelings of remorse and sadness are evoked. Here, visitors are given a kind of emotional responsibility: to construct their own meaning. Is this a testimony to death, or is it a story where the visitor notes how important it is not to miss out on opportunities to express affection towards loved ones at any given moment?

As seen from the above, death at the WCM emphasises the innocence of the victims, honouring them, while giving little importance and not directly assigning blame to perpetrators. During their visit to the WCM, visitors are invited to enter into an affective practice of loss; the museum leaves it up to visitors to choose whether to emotionally engage in antipathy or assign blame. Furthermore, the WCM allows visitors to construct their own narratives. By doing so, visitors may affectively engage in experiences of war by constructing an alternative history, one that may allow them to better cope with the troublesome realities of armed conflict.

### 4.2.3.3 Feeling safe: finding a refuge

Another theme that has emerged from analysing testimonials at the WCM is related to the sense of safety. Some have referred to feeling safe in a specific place such as a basement or even another country. Others, on the other hand, have associated safety with formal treaties such as a ceasefire or peace accord. But how safe could any war be?

For example, several testimonies tell the story of leaving the country during the war, seeking refuge abroad such as in Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden or the United States. Here we, as visitors, attain a sense of safety for those who have left war-affected areas. While testimonies of those who survived the Bosnian war do not provide details of life as a refugee, testimonies of children from Syria certainly do. These warn us that a sense of safety in a time of war extends outside of the geographical parameters of war zones. For example, the testimony below points to not feeling safe in a refugee camp:

... I only go to school and I stay at home. I cannot convince my parents to let me play outside. They tell me it is not safe to walk around alone in the Shatila refugee camp.

Object label, *Ring*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

Additionally, other testimonies expand on a false sense of safety. This is achieved through references to a ceasefire. A truce during a time of war indicates safety, at least temporarily. However, testimonies at the WCM warn of the dishonest and untrusting practices of war, with dire consequences:

... Amel was killed on May 3, 1995. It was during a period of truce. ...

Object label, *A sniper killed my brother*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... I started practicing volleyball during a short truce in 1994. I was hoping that the war would end soon, but the truce was quickly broken, and the war continued. ...

Object label, *My first volleyball jersey*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

Interestingly, several testimonies at the WCM attest to seeking a feeling of safety during war in the parallel reality of a child's imagination:

... I would imagine a secret door... a shell-proof room behind it where there was always power and water and even a fridge! Fully stocked!

Wall text, *Untitled*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... I imagined my friends and myself as characters in these books. Each hour spent reading was an hour without war... Even if it was only in my head!

Object label, *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

The above personal experiences allow visitors to better understand the various dangers of war, not only those relevant to the battlefield. Here, visitors are reminded of the much broader effects of war: lack of necessities, imminent danger to civilians, especially children, and even the dangers of the refugee camps. This form of testifying to the lack of safety and looming danger, allows WCM visitors to enter into the affective practice of impulse to offer protection.

#### 4.2.3.4 How do we love at the time of war?

We expect war museums to evoke feelings of fear, distress and sorrow, but our analysis reveals that, in addition to these, feelings of love also emerges in the WCM exhibition. Whether it is a child's love towards a parent, as expressed in *Happy International Women's Day, Mom!*, or vice versa, as demonstrated in *Barbie with a new haircut*, or love

for a friend as conveyed in *Medal*, the expression of love is undeniably present at the museum. The strength of the bond between parent and child is universally understood, but at the WCM, a parent assumes the role of a protector, one whose acts of love and sacrifice may at times even seem irrational:

... Just ahead of the tunnel, which was muddy and sodden, a soldier gave her something extremely valuable - waterproof boots! However, as we left the tunnel, I caught a glimpse of a man holding this Barbie doll in his hands. Immediately I cried for it - I wanted it so badly! My mother, out of her desire to make me happy, traded the new waterproof boots, which she had just received, for my Barbie!

Object label, *Barbie with a new haircut*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... There was a head lice epidemic one of the years during the war, so my mom shaved my head completely. Just in case! ...

Video, *Untitled*, 2019, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

Mom scolding me for showing the neighbor the eggs she's paid a fortune for – I'd drawn a fried egg the day before and cried.

Wall text, *Untitled*, 2019, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

Also, another kind of love is referenced at the WCM – adolescent love - which emerges in the museum's video testimonies. One such video refers to love as an adolescent mischief, or a passing phase. In contrast, another video testimony points to a much deeper understanding of love and a prominent connection between love and war:

... Girls learned how to kiss for the first time ... You would take a fildžan and put a bean in it, and that was a "proper way of kissing". That's an urban legend we grew up with!  
And those are some phases I went through. ...

Video, *Untitled*, 2019, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... It's probably a defense mechanism, but one tries to remember more of the good. The first thing that I think of when I think about the war is, believe it or not, love. In 1993 I met my soul-mate, my forever love, spent the whole war with him, married him, and today, out of that love, we have two beautiful children. In a certain sense this love makes me a war profiteer.

Video, *Untitled*, 2019, War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

It becomes evident that, at the WCM, the love of a parent towards their child is latent and manifested through action. On the other hand, adolescent love is either passing or the permanent eternal love that results in a hopeful future.

#### **4.2.3.5 Dark humour as a tool to ameliorate negative aspects of war**

Probably one of the least expected themes to emerge in the war museum is that of humour. In addition to highlighting love as a theme, the WCM exhibition also challenges pre-conceived perceptions of war as only painful and traumatic by introducing fragments of testimonies that refer to humorous situations. This is done in a way that compels us to imagine the physical appearance of a toothless child, or a child with a “consolation prize” haircut who wears ill-fitting clothes just because they wanted to relate to their peers – testimonies that may even elicit a smile from a visitor:

... Haris is not the only one who has a problem with his teeth. I slipped in a bathtub the other day and broke my tooth, so now I'm ugly. ...

Object label, *Letters from the other side*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... For some time, she sold “original” Levi’s Jeans from Turkey. When it was finally my turn to buy a pair, the only ones she had left were two sizes bigger than what I wore at the time. Even so, I decided to buy them, and, as a consolation, I got a free haircut from my neighbor who was a hairdresser. ...

Object label, *The Original Levi’s Jeans*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

While the above extracts refer to somewhat humorous situations, they also evoke a sense of pity – pity for a child with a lack of self-confidence, or pity for a child who is unable to purchase proper clothes.

Furthermore, we discovered that humorous situations also emerged from a fear of not obeying parents. Here, the WCM again invites a level of intimacy, where visitors enter into an affective practice by emotionally connecting with the individuals who have testified by recalling mischiefs from their childhood:

I asked Dina to go out, but she said, all worried, that she didn’t dare, because if she died, her mom would kill her.

Wall text, *Untitled*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

... Her shoe fell into the swamp that lined the stream. Because we did not dare return home without the shoe, nor were we brave enough to tell our parents that we had strayed from our building, my friend and I stuck our arms shoulder deep into the swamp and found the shoe! ...

Object label, *Our Savior, Pony*, 2019,  
War Childhood Museum, Sarajevo.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The aim of this article was to examine affective practices in museums that deal with recent armed conflict by conducting qualitative content analysis of the exhibition organised by the War Childhood Museum in Sarajevo. More specifically, we have attempted to answer two main



research questions: first, what affective strategies are employed at the WCM, and, second, whether the experience of war, when narrated from a child's perspective, can take the emphasis from, or concede to, ideas and emotions generally associated with armed conflict?

The qualitative content analysis of the WCM exhibition has demonstrated several affective strategies that allow emotional connections to be created between visitors and witnesses. The WCM exhibition, for example, focuses solely on displaying personal objects and testimonies and the museum's underlying theme of war is presented through the inseparable relationship between the object and a testimony that relates to it. Focusing the exhibition on personal stories enables visitors to experience war from the victims' perspective. Here, visitors establish an intimate and emotional relationship with individuals who have testified and enter into an affective practice that is based on this relationship. Furthermore, by juxtaposing guileless objects against distressful testimonies, objects of innocence become objects of pain at the WCM exhibition. A doll, a swing, a ball, a small robot, a teddy bear, and similar childlike objects become representative of and pay homage to painful memories of war. This affective strategy further strengthens the relationship between visitors and witnesses. There is a high probability of associating such objects with visitors' own childhoods, which, in turn, may be considered an opportunity for visitors to better understand the ramifications of armed conflict. Additionally, the qualitative content analysis has revealed that, in the WCM exhibition, perpetrators take on the role of masked and unknown soldiers, presenting them as individual human beings rather than as a military group. This calls for the affective practice of antipathy rather than hostility. Similarly, by not identifying perpetrators, the affect of loss at the WCM is experienced from a universal point of view that is not dependent on visitors' political views, nationality, cultural or ethnic background. Lastly, one specific affective curatorial strategy that of repetition has been identified. The exhibition opens and concludes with essentially the same object – a swing. The difference, however, is that the swing in the epilogue room is a duplicate of an authentic personal object seen at the beginning of the exhibition. Here, the affective engagement is arguably a dialogue between a mother who has donated a swing, exhibited at the beginning of the exhibition, and testifies to her hope for a better future for her child, inviting visitors' introspection and the pledge of “never again” by engaging with the white swing in the exhibition's epilogue.

Also, qualitative content analysis showed that the WCM exhibition challenges general ideas and emotions associated with armed conflict. Unlike many other war museums, the WCM exhibition does not display military memorabilia such as weaponry, uniforms, medals or trophies. Instead it features objects that are reminiscent of childhood: candy wrappers, diaries, books, and toys such as a ball, a teddy bear, a doll, and a swing. Thus, by representing armed conflict through a series of childlike objects, the WCM exhibition takes the emphasis from pre-conceived ideas that war is simply a military conflict on the battlefield.

Furthermore, it was revealed that although the WCM presents topics that are expected to emerge in war museums, such as escaping from or succumbing to imminent danger, or the lack of necessities such as food, water or electricity, the WCM exhibition removes emphasis on the historic and nationally accepted glorious narratives of armed conflict. The personal testimonies at the WCM present armed conflict from the perspective of those who experienced it as children without emphasising the political, nationalist or historic narratives that are often present and associated with armed conflict at other war museums. This, in particular, is an interesting finding, as it counters general ideas associated with armed conflict. Unlike many other war museums, the exhibition at the WCM does not aim to strengthen national pride or identity.

Also, our research has demonstrated that, in addition to feelings of fear, distress and sorrow, which are easily associated with the topic of war, feelings of love and humour also emerge from the exhibited testimonies at the WCM, which is an unexpected element in museums and exhibitions that deal with the topic of armed conflict. We suggest that testimonies narrated from a unique perspective – that of an innocent child – can result in unexpected outcomes which are different to those experiences generally associated with armed conflicts.

Lastly, and relating to the temporal focus of the exhibition, by exhibiting objects and testimonies from Syrian children, who, at the time of this research, were still experiencing the ramifications of their country's armed conflict, the WCM exhibition strongly implies that the theme of war is not a matter of the past, but also one of the present.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# Difficult Heritage in Museums: India's first Partition Museum

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### Abstract

Museums that are dedicated to exhibiting and displaying difficult heritage employ different strategies in their narrative construction and production of knowledge. This is because the 'difficulty' in difficult heritage usually arises from the tension between the memory of a conflict, war, genocide or any other moment in history and present experiences of national, local, or individual identity. This research presents a case study analysis of The Partition Museum in Amritsar, India to examine the strategies this institution utilizes when displaying and exhibiting the history of the partition of India and Pakistan. Through a content and display analysis of its permanent collection, the study has examined the narrative approach of the museum and its construction of the past through various points of analysis.

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## Introduction

Most countries and communities have experienced violent conflict that have shaped generations and had a lasting impact on how identities have been formed. Many of these conflicts have resulted in death and destruction. Today they are a painful memory for those who are lucky enough to have survived. Making sense of such conflicts can be complicated and it often involves identifying a perpetrator. However, reality is often more nuanced than that. How can a community reconcile with conflict when the community itself may have had an active hand in perpetuating violence? It is through remembering and fully understanding the past, accepting responsibility and taking ownership of the past that nations, societies, and individuals can ensure that such events do not occur again. Museums, as cultural institutions, hold the power to tell untold stories, preserve memories and challenge views.

This comes with its own set of challenges. Museums that exhibit difficult heritage and contested histories must navigate a series of decisions on *how* they tell that particular story. Several museums have dedicated themselves to memorializing conflict. However, it took nearly 70 years after the partition of India and Pakistan for the establishment of a museum that would be dedicated to this painful story. The focus of this paper is to examine and analyze the Partition Museum in Amritsar, India to gain a better understanding of how the violent creation of two countries has been represented in a museum.

We are going to consider the display as a communication system in which objects take on a new form of function as they are incorporated into an exhibition. In other words, this analytical approach will consider object as a signifiers and, ultimately, producers of meaning, or of a “story” within an exhibition. Then we will focus on how this “story” is being told and what narratives emerge through it. We will try to understand the narratives, stories, and ideologies constructed through the exhibition, and consider the role of the museum in preserving the memory of a complicated and painful story (Whitehead, 2016).

### 'Difficult heritage' in museological discourse

The academic research that critically examines how difficult heritage is dealt with within the space of a museum has been growing in the last decade (Macdonald 2009; 2015; Cameron & Kelly, 2010; Segall, 2014;

Rose, 2016). However, what is it that makes heritage difficult? Writing in 2009, Sharon Macdonald introduces the term in her book discussing the Nazi past and its memory in Germany. She argues that it is “a past that is recognized as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity” (Macdonald, 2009: 1). Macdonald’s case study of Nuremberg demonstrates how difficult heritage can be viewed as an amalgamation of various negotiated material and discursive realities. Heritage is difficult because of a series of interrelated factors including locality, local identity formation, and relationship to the past.

From another perspective, the volume published in 2014 edited by Amy Ryall et al examines how emotional or affective staging can be a strategy for museums dealing with difficult heritage. Academics from different disciplines attempt to understand how museum professionals and visitors deal with challenging, difficult history and how institutions can engage visitors with the challenging past by invoking emotive responses (Kidd, 2014). Using material that is “emotional” rather than purely “factual” allows visitors to empathize with those who endure difficult pasts, while still conveying the harsh reality of conflict.

From another perspective, it is important to consider how identity creation manifests itself within the museum space. While *The Political Museum* by Theopisti Stylianou-Lambert and Alexandra Bounia uses Cyprus as the central case for its analysis, its findings are particularly relevant when considering most post-colonial states marred with conflict. This research examines how different external forces like politics, conflict, nationalism, and individual agendas, can shape museum narratives to aid in the creation of national, community, and personal identifiers. It also explores how museums use their collections and interpretive media “to selectively construct collective memories through inclusion and exclusion.” (Stylianou-Lambert & Bounia, 2016: 15).

While these texts differ in their use of case studies and in their contributions, they share some commonalities. All of them presume a definition of difficult heritage that is congruent with each other. To put it simply, all texts attempt to analyze the *ways* in which the history of conflict that might be challenging or uncomfortable for the nation-state or for a community, is presented in a museum. This provides a basis for discussing and understanding the Partition Museum in Amritsar and its exhibition. The themes of identity formation, affective staging and the ethics of presenting such heritage will be used to structure the analysis in this chapter.

## 'A' Partition Museum

Writing five years prior to the opening of the Partition Museum, Anindya Raychaudhuri details the demands for such an institution, reasons for its absence, and makes suggestions about what form the museum could take. Raychaudhuri argues that there is a “keenly-felt need from many different sources for a national monument” (Raychaudhuri, 2012: 175) that would serve as a tool to educate the population and to abate the prejudices held within religious communities in the contemporary states of India and Pakistan. Raychaudhuri (2012) also points to the fact that memories of partition raise uncomfortable questions for the Indian state and its current political needs. A nostalgic vision of a unified India would be difficult to incorporate with the current ruling party’s military actions against the Pakistani state. Ultimately, she argues that retelling the history of partition may be difficult to navigate for the Indian state, however, such a museum or memorial is necessary to preserve the experiences of thousands that were impacted by the events of 1947 (Raychaudhuri, 2012).

Writing in a similar fashion, Urvashi Butalia (2011), a scholar who spent years collecting narratives and material on the partition, explores how these memories could potentially be displayed and preserved. Butalia argues that the inability of the Indian state to memorialize this aspect of its history is indicative of its culpability in the partition and its insistence to present a grandstanding version of Indian independence (Butalia, 2011: 24). She also points out that creating an institution dedicated to the memory of the partition would force segments of the Hindu establishment to challenge their view that “Muslims were in some way responsible for Partition” (Butalia, 2011: 25).

Both of these texts were written prior to the opening of the Partition Museum in Amritsar in 2016. They discuss the complications of memorializing difficult heritage and demonstrate how doing so can come in conflict with the narratives constructed by the nation the museums are located within. While these texts do not provide any insights on the existing Partition Museum, they are extremely useful in understanding the expectations of the institution and in demonstrating the gaps that the museum should ideally fill. Considering that there has not been any academic literature on the Partition Museum since its opening, it is necessary that the concerns raised by Raychaudhuri and Butalia are further explored. These texts also reinforce the ideas



raised in academic literature about difficult heritage in museums. They acknowledge the power an institution like The Partition Museum might have in shaping identity by discussing the relationship between the government and/or the state and how governments might be quick to capitalize on a museums' epistemological power. For the purpose of this research, these texts will serve as a benchmark for evaluating and understanding how the Partition Museum has presented historical narratives.

## 'The' Partition Museum

The Partition Museum was opened in 2016 by The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust (TACHT). The organization was created purely because no other institution like the museum existed. TACHT was able to open the museum with support from the Punjab Tourism Board and the Government of Punjab. Its collection consists of donations from partition survivors and their families (The Partition Museum, n.d.). The museum is located in a segment of the Town Hall building in Amritsar, Punjab and spans fourteen galleries. The galleries are briefly described in Table 1, to provide an overview of the exhibition.

Gallery Name	Description
<b>Gallery 1: Why Amritsar?</b>	This gallery provides background information on the city of Amritsar. It features textiles and artefacts that demonstrate the city's rich industrial background prior to the arrival of the British. There are photographs of the city before and after partition-related rioting. As the title of the gallery suggests, it provides a justification for the location of the museum in Amritsar as opposed to the capital or another city of India, e.g. New Delhi or Mumbai.
<b>Gallery 2: Punjab</b>	This gallery is in a corridor that features objects that demonstrate the religiously and ethnically diverse nature of Punjab, the state. It showcases objects that are French and Arab in origin to paint a picture of harmonious existence in the state. In this gallery texts from early British involvement in India (through the East India Company) are featured.

*Table continues overleaf*

<b>Gallery 3: Resistance (1900-1929)</b>	<p>This gallery tells the story of the early independence movement in India in which Indian independence protestors demanded <i>Purna Swaraj</i> or complete independence. There is also an introduction to the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League. This gallery also has a section dedicated to the Jalianwalabagh Massacre of 1918.</p>
<b>Gallery 4: The Rise (1930-1945)</b>	<p>This space highlights the progression of the independence movement mentioned in Gallery 3. Several issues are explored here including Indian involvement in WW2, cultural production in Lahore, the move for separate Pakistani statehood, the Dandi March, and, the Government of India Act. It features a combination of both Indian and British perspectives on the independence struggle.</p>
<b>Gallery 5: Differences (1946)</b>	<p>This gallery is dedicated to the violence that erupted between the religious communities in India. The response of the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League to the rioting is displayed. The gallery also features a secluded section where visitors can view the explicit images of the aftermath of the Calcutta Riots and Direct Action Day.</p>
<b>Gallery 6: Prelude to Partition</b>	<p>This is a narrow gallery that deals with the treaties and alliances that led up to the partition. It features Lord Mountbatten, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Tara Singh. In this gallery, chants, associated with different communities, provide a soundscape.</p>
<b>Gallery 7: Boundaries</b>	<p>This is a gallery solely dedicated to the boundaries drawn to separate the two countries. Visitors are introduced to Cyril Radcliffe and the Boundary Commissions of Punjab and Bengal.</p>
<b>Gallery 8: Independence</b>	<p>This is a relatively small gallery that presents the Independence Days of Pakistan and India and subsequent celebrations.</p>
<b>Gallery 9: Borders</b>	<p>This gallery is a small connecting space between Galleries 9 and 10. Its walls feature large photographs of the migration that followed partition and its floor is made up of broken shards of mirror arranged in a circular pattern. It has no text panels.</p>

<b>Gallery 10: Migration</b>	This is a large gallery dedicated to the migration that began in 1947. It features a train platform with a projection of refugee footage by train, multiple oral history accounts, objects that refugees carried with them, contemporary art, and an installation of a broken house to simulate the effects of rioting. It also touches upon Sindhi migration.
<b>Galleries 11 &amp; 12: Divisions</b>	The purpose of this gallery is to talk about 13 lesser-known aspects of partition. It covers the impact on women, the army, culture, money, civic institutions, sports, Dalits, Bengal, music, industry, press, religious sites and border troops. The gallery also features a large installation of a saw cutting through a brick wall, and a well to represent the women who took their lives to avoid rape or kidnapping.
<b>Gallery 13: Refuge</b>	This gallery is dedicated to the lives and experiences of refugees from both sides of the border. It details the experience of refugee camps, the belongings refugees could bring with them, and their hopes and aspirations. It also features contemporary art created in a refugee camp.
<b>Gallery 14: Hope</b>	The Gallery of Hope, the last gallery, is intended to be a forward-looking space. It tells the story of reconciliation and success in sports, film, and contemporary art. In the middle of the gallery is a large tree, <i>The Tree of Hope</i> , made of barbed wire where visitors can share their thoughts by writing a message on the leaves and attaching it to the tree.

*Table 1: Galleries of The Partition Museum, Amritsar. (Source: The Author)*

As is clear from Table 1, the museum presents a linear, chronological narrative. The overarching story is the causes and consequences of the Partition of 1947. A number of smaller narratives, or sub-plots, can be identified in some of the galleries, such as the demand for the establishment of Pakistan, the experience of women, the role of early independence fighters and the role of culture. However, if this is the “story”, it is interesting to examine *how* this story is told by the museum, to reveal how the institution has dealt with the intricacies of the story it tells.

## Temporality and Chronology

As already mentioned, the galleries take a chronological approach to telling the story of the partition. The story begins in a space depicting Amritsar prior to the arrival of the British and ends in the *Gallery of Hope*, a gallery that looks to the future. Since visitors have to walk through the galleries in an ordered, sequential manner (that is one cannot begin in Gallery 14), the ordering and progression of material in the galleries impacts how visitors view them. In this sense, the curators of the museum are making statements on the causes and effects of the events depicted (Whitehead, 2016). For instance, the fact that rioting is spoken about quite heavily in Gallery 5 might give the impression that the periods covered in the preceding galleries (1900-1929, 1930-1945) did not witness any major cases of communal rioting. This is because Gallery 5 is dedicated solely to the riots. One reason for this decision is to pay homage to the victims of the riots by giving them a separate gallery space where visitors can reflect on the horrors they underwent. Thus, until this point, the main perpetrators of violence and injustice we encounter are the British colonists as can be seen in the sections on the Jallianwalabagh Massacre (Gallery 3) and the Crawling Order (Gallery 3). In Gallery 5, visitors are confronted by the fact that many of the atrocities committed during partition were a result of the actions of Indians themselves. However, considering the chronological order the galleries follow, this also suggests that the Indian people did not commit any wrongdoing *until* the involvement of the Cabinet Mission in 1946.

The fact that the last gallery is meant to be a contemporaneous, forward-looking space is also indicative of the narrative approach of the museum. Therefore, it is meant to represent reconciliation that is possible in the aftermath of such events and to end on a positive note. Visitors are made to realize that even though these events are real, they must now ensure they will never happen again.

## Representation through objects

The main introduction panel of the exhibition describes The Partition Museum as a “people’s museum” that dedicates itself to telling the story of the individual. The act of displaying is inherently representational. When dealing with the history of a conflict, individual accounts can

often be contradictory or even in direct opposition to one another. Three mediums can be explored to best understand representation in this exhibition:

(a) **Oral History Accounts:** Many galleries feature recordings from survivors of the partition. These are played in various sections and headphones are provided for visitors to listen. This is done in an attempt to preserve the memories of those who witnessed something as monumental as the partition. The intricacies of presenting oral history accounts arise when we consider that these recordings have been placed and edited according to the thematic section they are located in. They have different levels of functionality in the exhibition: they provide a bottom-up perspective of the events, a perspective that the museum has repeatedly emphasized. They serve as a form of evidence to reinforce information in text panels and other parts of the exhibition. They also add to the authenticity of the exhibition as a whole. However, their manner of presentation transforms these individual narratives into representations of larger communities. For example, in the “women under attack” section in Galleries 11 and 12: Divisions, we can watch the account of Amol Swani, a woman who migrated from Peshawar. She speaks of her time running and hiding from Muslim men and rioting groups. While her account is certainly moving, it also has several cuts or edits, and the questions the interviewer asked are not included in the video. Without the unedited footage and the context in which her account was given, the video becomes a product used by the curators as interpretive media (for reinforcement of the text), rather than an organic telling of one’s experience. This manner of presenting videos can give visitors the impression that they are to consider Amol Swani’s experience as representative of the experiences of *all* women.

(b) **Object Biographies:** Many of the galleries feature objects that belonged to people who lived through the partition. These objects might be ordinary, everyday items like pots or clothing, but are of great significance to the people that owned them. The utilitarian function of the object is irrelevant to its display. Instead, it is the history of the object and its relationship with the owner that are highlighted in the exhibition. For example, a tin box is displayed with an accompanying label that reads,

*Sudershana Kumari, then 8 years old, picked up this tin box*

*from a burned-out house. She loved dolls, having left all hers behind, thought this would be a good place to store her dolls when she reached her new home.*

The visitors do not necessarily engage with the physicality of the box but rather with the biography assigned to it and subsequently with the owner, Sudershana. It is also interesting to consider the power of the institution in creating and assigning value to that object. The very act of displaying the authentic item and telling the story behind it is what makes the exhibit a compelling representation of a person. The same object with no context would have little to no impact, just as would the story of Sudershana's box without that item present.

(c) **Photography:** The museum utilizes documentary photography throughout its galleries. It is often displayed alongside interpretive panels presenting a particular event. In this instance, the photograph acts as evidence of the event and as a reinforcement of accompanying text. Photography is a common choice in museums dealing with difficult heritage and documentary photography, in particular, is "considered a mechanical reproduction of reality at a specific time and place" (Stylianou-Lambert & Bounia, 2016:141). It can also provide shock-value for visitors through jarring imagery that text cannot. This can be extremely effective in eliciting emotional or empathetic responses from visitors. For example, within Gallery 5, explicit imagery of the aftermath of the riots is on display in an enclosed structure. On the exterior of the structure, there are photographs of people covering their noses to block the stench of decaying bodies left on the streets after the riots. There is also a sign warning people about the explicit images displayed within the structure. While the structure and the photographs outside are an effective and practical tool to warn visitors, it also infers that they should feel a particular response (for instance shock, respect, sympathy). However, the issue lies in the authoritative power photography has in knowledge production for visitors. Just like in the case of a novel written within a specific context and subject to the demands of the author, a photograph is also heavily authored by the photographer. The photographer has the power to decide what to omit and what to include, when and what to take a picture of, and how to frame it in a particular way. This reality is often not highlighted when photography is used in museum exhibits, leaving the photograph to serve as representative proof of a given event or person. Doing so

would include a description or context behind the staging of the picture. In the Partition Museum, photography is widely used, but without any contextual framing.

## Omissions

Regardless of a museum's intention to remain a neutral actor, exhibitions are inherently political because display necessitates representations as has been demonstrated in the previous section. The narrative a museum constructs is also politicized because curators engage in acts of omissions and inclusions when constructing narrative. We can see what has been included both through text or through representation in objects and photographs; however, what has been omitted is not usually made explicit, or even easy to discern. On absences in narratives, Alix Powers-Jones writes,

*Absences, voids and omissions are not always just empty spaces: they are missing things in the material or narrative record. Deliberate absences may be subtle, skillfully hidden and apparent only to the consummate observer who is already familiar with the earlier iterations of a piece or its subject. (2014: 52)*

When considering the narrative construction in The Partition Museum, we can see that there have been attempts to be as inclusive as possible. For instance, Galleries 11 and 12: Divisions are dedicated to the lesser-known aspects of the partition. With that being said, there are two major omissions that have been identified during the content analysis of the exhibition.

Explaining the riots and communal violence that erupted in these years can often be difficult. It is acknowledged that the museum does make a point of stating that there was some precedence for religious tension in the subcontinent before the partition years. However, what the exhibition does not explore is the role of the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League in perpetuating religious tension through the use of identity politics and even armed groups. This was not necessarily occurring at the level of leadership that Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammed Ali Jinnah found themselves at, but, it certainly was happening in the subsidiaries of the parties at local and state level.

This omission leaves a large gap in understanding the events that occurred in 1947. The rioting that occurred prior to 1947 fueled and enabled mobs to commit acts of violence when the partition plans were announced. The reasoning for this omission could be two-fold: First, discussing the political intricacies of the INC and the League could be difficult and impractical to do given the exhibition space and the focus of the exhibition. Second, admitting that the Indian National Congress was culpable in the conflict could delegitimize the very foundation of the Indian government. Similarly, simply pointing to the League as the perpetrators would also be seen as an overtly pointed remark at the Pakistani government. Excluding this information certainly granted the museum freedom to present the story of the partition without upsetting any particular group, but, it did so at the cost of providing a holistic understanding of the conflict.

The second exclusion occurs in Gallery 14: Hope. As mentioned before, this gallery is explicitly said to be a forward-looking gallery. It was interesting to note that the gallery did not directly or indirectly reference any current cases of religious violence or tension present in the country today. Instead, it presented individual cases where reconciliation was made, or where people were able to establish successful businesses after migrating. This exclusion is important because choosing not to present anything to do with the current political climate disassociates communal violence today with communal violence that occurred in 1947. Perhaps, this is also an attempt to remain a neutral party and not upset any particular religious group, or even the political establishment of the country.

In the following section, we are going to focus on specific aspects of the exhibition, and analyse the articulation of the ideas of the exhibition in terms of architecture, exhibit types, space and layout, design colour and light, and subject, message and text. This is based on field research undertaken by the author in the museum.

## **Articulation of ideas through the display**

### Architecture

The Partition Museum is housed in the town hall building of Amritsar which was built by the British in 1866. The old colonial building housed the British Administration until their departure in 1947 and is now



home to the local administration of Amritsar and the museum. It is located in the center of the city and is a short walk from the Jalianwala bagh Massacre Memorial and other important landmarks in the city such as the Golden Temple and Heritage Street.

The Town Hall is an imposing building and easily recognizable. The building's architecture is unique and, as a consequence, it stands out from other governmental buildings in the vicinity. This immediately establishes it as a place of historical value and authority. A parallel can be drawn with the impact neo-classical architecture some museums has on visitors. Such architecture reinforces the notion that museums are authorities on the subjects they present and that, by entering the structure, visitors are entering a "temple of learning and that what they see is important and true" (Moser, 2010: 24). Similarly, the architecture of the Town Hall reinforces the notion that the institution is an authority on the partition.

Furthermore, there is a clear relationship between the historical use of the building and the subject matter of The Partition Museum. It is befitting that the museum is located in a building that was once used by the British. This is particularly the case considering the exhibition clearly details British colonial rule, their role in the partition and the violence that ensued. The location is integral to the institution's identity and is closely linked to its ability to tell this story. A visitor's experience is heightened by the fact that this building was once a central authority from which discriminatory orders like the crawling act (referenced in the exhibition) were sent. One can make the case that the Town Hall has been reused and repurposed to undo the ills that emanated from the same building by giving a voice to those who suffered during the events of 1947.

## Display Types

The Partition Museum utilizes a variety of display types that shape and influence a visitor's engagement, learning and experience of the exhibition. These include:

### **1. Oral History Narratives**

As discussed earlier, the recordings of partition survivors are available throughout the exhibition. They serve as both an emotive tool (Powers-Jones, 2014) and one that reinforces the authenticity of the display.

The recordings are presented on screens with headphones for visitors to view. They serve to supplement the material of each section. For instance, in Gallery 7: Boundaries, a gallery dedicated to the borders drawn to divide Punjab and Bengal, visitors can watch Kuldeep Nayyar, a renowned Indian journalist, speak about his interview with Cyril Radcliffe, the head of the Bengal Boundary Commission and the Punjab Boundary Commission.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Photography

Photography plays a dominant role in the museum. Almost all sections within the galleries utilize photography as an interpretive tool. They allow visitors to visualize the information conveyed through text and oral history recordings. They also cater to visitors who are not typically inclined to read text panels in a museum. Many of the photographs used are by Margaret Bourke-White, a famous photographer of the Partition. Her images are widely known and instantly recognizable.

## 3. Music/Audio

Gallery 3: Resistance, Gallery 6: Prelude to Partition, Gallery 10: Migration, and Gallery 11: Divisions, all utilize different types of background music/audio to enhance the visitor experience. In Gallery 3, visitors can hear revolutionary songs that were popular in the early independence struggle of 1900-1929 like *Rang De Basanti*. This gallery portrays this period as one of (relative) unity where Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh revolutionaries fought for a common goal – a nation free of British rule. The music in this gallery is a powerful tool to invoke feelings of patriotism or the romanticism commonly associated with revolution. In Gallery 6, visitors hear slogans that were typically used in the years prior to the partition such as *Leke Rahenge Pakistan* (We will ensure the creation of Pakistan), *Nahin Banega Pakistan Baat ke Mera Khalistan* (We won't allow Pakistan to be created by the division of our Sikh homeland), *Hindustan Zindabad* (Long live India), as well as the slogans of each religious community: *Har Har Mahadev*, *Allahuakbar*, *Sat Sri Akal*. Gallery 10 features the sound of trains to complement the theme of rail migration. And finally, in Gallery 11, visitors can hear a Hindi poem on the struggles of being a woman echoing through the space.

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1 Radcliffe was an established British judge who was appointed as head of the border commissions despite the fact that he had “none of the requisite technical skills for drawing a border and had, infamously, never been to India.” (Khan, 2017, p. 105).

#### **4. Contemporary Art**

Artistic interpretations of the partition are presented in many of the galleries. The works of Indian artists, like Satish Gujral, are presented alongside objects from the partition years. This provides an interesting contrast for visitors as they can see the material they have received through text panels, oral history recordings, and objects being interpreted as modern art. It also conveys the notion that the events of the partition are not lost in the past, but remain subjects of artistic production even today.

#### **5. Objects**

As discussed earlier, objects in the museum are often accompanied with a back-story that details their relevance to the collection. Many of the objects on display are ordinary, household items that have importance to the people who donated them to the museum. These objects are not in the collection for their utilitarian function, but, rather, because of their role in constructing a narrative of the partition. Other objects include archival material such as newspaper clippings, letters, court orders and government proceedings. Since these objects are “official”, they can be perceived as indisputable evidence. However, as is the case with the display of any archival material, it is a question of inclusion and exclusion of the context in which this material was created and used.

#### **6. Installations**

There are several installations in the galleries that have been detailed below:

##### **a. Jail Cell – Gallery 4: The Rise (1930-1945)**

In the center of Gallery 4, there is a recreation of a cell from Dhacca Central Jail that is similar to those which held Indian resistance fighters. Visitors can look inside to see photographs and court orders convicting people for resisting British rule.

##### **b. Train Platform – Gallery 10: Migration**

A reconstruction of a train platform is located near the entrance of Gallery 10. On this platform we see objects that people carried with them as they crossed the border into

India or Pakistan. Archival footage of migration by rail is played on the wall behind the platform. The platform is particularly impactful as it sets the stage for the gallery.

**c. Riot-Hit House – Gallery 10: Migration**

Another installation is located in the same gallery: a house damaged by rioting. The text accompanying it reads: “This installation of a riot-hit house is based on archival images and gives a sense of the scale of devastation that caused people to flee.”

**d. Saw – Galleries 11 and 12: Divisions**

In the middle of Galleries 11 and 12, a large metal saw cuts through a brick wall. This denotes the divisions that occurred at different levels during 1947. Since it is so large and its symbolism so overt, it is an immediate signifier of the theme of the galleries.

**e. Well – Galleries 11 and 12: Divisions**

A well has been constructed in the “Women Under Attack” section of Galleries 11 and 12. This is a potent symbol of all the women who took their own lives in order to avoid capture, rape, or murder.

**f. Hanging Banners – Galleries 11 and 12: Divisions**

Along with the well, there are banners hanging in the “Women Under Attack” section in Gallery 11. These are large white cloth banners that hang from the ceiling. They are designed to look like they have blood splattered on them and include statistics on missing women printed on them. They are dramatic and serve as a reinforcement of the text presented.

**g. Refugee Tent – Gallery 13: Refuge**

Within Gallery 13, visitors can go inside a tent similar to those found in refugee camps in 1947 to watch an oral history recording. Despite the small size of the tent, the text accompanying it lets the visitors know that more than one

family would typically be housed within this tent. This allows visitors to experience how the refugees of the period might have felt, or may have faced during this instable process.

#### **h. Tree of Hope – Gallery 14: Hope**

In the center of the final gallery stands a barbed wire large tree with paper leaves hanging from its branches. The text accompanying this installation reads as follows: “The Tree of Hope Installation is a participatory installation that provides a space for visitors to reflect on Partition and on their visit to the Museum.” Visitors are encouraged to write their reflections on a leaf and then hang it from a branch, or read what others have written.

Considering that many of these installations are reconstructions, their use raises an interesting question on the act of witnessing in such a museum. Do such installations allow visitors to come close to witnessing the events that took place? Does witnessing allow for greater authenticity of display, or better visitor experience/understanding? The issue that arises with authenticity of display is in the fact that some of these installations are simple reconstructions housed in a colonial building. The location of the museum in a historical site may give the impression that the authenticity of the building suggests truth. This, coupled with the reconstruction of riot-hit houses and wells, may create “a feeling in the visitor that this is what it must have been like and that this is a true and accurate representation of events” (Rosendahl and Ruhaven, 2014: 76). Thus, while these installations provide good visual aids and interpretation for visitors, there is always the risk of giving the visitors the sense of exaggerated authenticity.

### Space and Layout

The size of the galleries has an impact on the way visitors might perceive the objects and themes within them (Moser, 2010). Most rooms are rectangular in nature with most objects and panels placed near or on the walls, with a few exceptions. This guides visitor flow in the galleries. As is indicated on the floor plan of the museum (Figure 1), there are three large galleries and a series of smaller ones. Each

gallery has one entrance and exit into the previous and next gallery respectively. Visitors should take a specific route and encounter the narrative in a particular sequence. The layout of the museum therefore constructs a narrative that is chronological. For instance, the act of stepping out of Gallery 3: Resistance (1900-1929) into Gallery 4: The Rise (1930-1945) is similar to stepping from one defined era in the independence struggle into the next.



*Figure 1: Museum Layout. Retrieved from The Partition Museum Website at <https://www.partitionmuseum.org/museum/museum-layout/>. Copyright © 2020 The Partition Museum.*

Since all the galleries are not equal in size, the decision to house a theme in one gallery as opposed to another can have an impact on the narrative of the exhibition as a whole. For instance, Gallery 10: Migrations, Gallery 11: Divisions and Gallery 13: Refuge are the largest galleries in the museum. This suggests that the material presented in these galleries is of greater significance or importance than that exhibited in other galleries. It is also interesting to note that the gallery dedicated to the Independence Days of India and Pakistan (Gallery 8) is quite small. This stands in contrast to the narratives and nationalist fervor associated with Independence Day in both countries. The reasoning for this might be threefold. Firstly, museum curators wanted to tackle the apprehension many had about the opening of this museum, as discussed previously,

regarding its ability to easily contribute to state-sponsored narratives. Secondly, the museum professionals might have thought that since there is an abundance of discourse on Indian and Pakistani independence in politics, the educational system, and in popular culture, the museum does not need to emphasize its importance in the exhibition. Thirdly, it could be a remark on what the story of the partition (at least in the museum) *should* be about. If we are to consider the size of the galleries on divisions, migration, and refugees to be indicative of their narrative importance, then a comparison can be made between them and Gallery 8 in understanding relevance to the story of the partition.

### Design, Color, Light

The color palette and decorations used within the gallery do not stand out when considering the façade of the building the museum is housed in. The reddish tones that are found outside continue within the gallery spaces. The color palette and decorations of the galleries are not meant to be jarring and distinct, but instead, provide a neutral backdrop for the exhibition. One could also make the case that since the façade of the building is reminiscent of Amritsar's colonial past and imbues a sense of authenticity, the fact that the interiors are a seamless extension of the building's exterior further reinforces this notion.

As for lighting, most of the galleries are well lit so that all objects and aspects of the room are in clear view. However, there are some galleries that are dark, at least compared to others. For instance, Galleries 10 and 11 are lit by dim yellow lighting that serves as an immediate signal to the visitor that the themes and objects within these galleries are of special importance, or are of a more sombre nature. While dim lighting might have a practical purpose, given that a large projection is used in Gallery 10, it does not change the fact that it impacts how visitors experience the gallery. Another use of darkness can be found in Gallery 5 that has a sectioned area for graphic images of the riots. Once visitors walk into the structure, they are engulfed in darkness and can only see the images projected on the opposite wall. Even if there are more people in the structure, the use of light isolates each one and creates a space where images take on the primary role and visitors can reflect on what they see. The use of lighting in these galleries aids the narrative construction in the exhibition as it guides visitors and is used as a signpost for what is deemed important by the institution.

## Subject, Message, Text

Text is a key component of this exhibition. Each gallery includes written interpretive material in the form of an introduction panel and object labels. While this might be standard for most exhibitions, the textual material in any exhibition is worth examining in order to understand the display. All introduction panels and object labels in the galleries are written in English and Punjabi. This choice is indicative of the audiences the museum wishes to target. If the panels were not written in Punjabi, this would have the potential to isolate local visitors who are not well-versed in English. However, the main introduction panel for the exhibition that visitors see when they enter is also written in Hindi. The introductory text to the exhibition provides an overview of what visitors might expect to see in the galleries, explicitly stating that the museum will take you “on a journey through time.” This immediately allows the visitor to expect galleries to progress in a chronological manner and explain events in a cause and effect manner. The panel also states that the museum is a “*people’s museum*” that tells the stories of millions impacted by the partition that remembers their trauma and sacrifice but also pays tribute to their resilience”, which emphasizes the importance of bottom-up narratives and individual accounts. Considering the tone and content of this panel, it is not surprising that most galleries have oral history accounts from survivors of the partition.

An examination of the panels suggests that the text is largely informative and descriptive. It does not seem to provide a negative opinion on any of the actors involved in the events unless it is discussing the role of the British in India. This can be considered an attempt at not upsetting particular religious communities, and, perhaps to safeguard neutrality. The titles of the panels (and the galleries) are emotive in nature. The panel detailing the experience of women in the events of 1947 is titled “women under attack.” This is strong language that complements the display in this section. We can contrast this with the smaller section on the Dalit experience where the text panel is simply titled “Dalits.” The provocative nature of “women under attack” suggests that the museum wants to highlight the experiences of women exclusively.



## Discussion

As demonstrated, there are various facets of an exhibition that can be analyzed that contribute to how the visitor might perceive the narrative of the exhibition. All of these observations can be consolidated to gain a sense of how The Partition Museum navigates the challenges associated with displaying difficult heritage.

The museum has done so by creating a large narrative meant to encompass the various meanings of partition. To begin with, the museum commits itself to being a people's museum. The chronological approach of the exhibition sheds light on how the curators have perceived causality when telling the story of the partition. This approach has allowed visitors to have a notion of reconciliation through the presence of the final gallery. The museum's narrative is also impacted by the various acts of representation made throughout the galleries. These representations include oral history accounts, object biographies and documentary photography. All of these techniques become a powerful set of media for engagement with visitors (Bedford, 2001: 33). Oral history accounts provide a powerful storytelling aspect of narrating the past. Object biographies provide an added layer of depth and relatability to what would otherwise be common inanimate objects. Photography is used as factual evidence while also being used as a tool to preserve memory. Having been removed from their original context the photos are displayed in an established authoritative institution and "thus become sources of historical truth" (Stylianou-Lambert & Bounia, 2016: 153).

However, as in all institutions, understanding of the narrative is only complete once we understand omissions as well as inclusions. The content and display analysis have provided an insight into how the museum creates knowledge for its visitors. It appears to do so by making specific decisions in the various modes of display in order to direct visitor experience. Studying each category of analysis has demonstrated that the Partition Museum has constructed a narrative that allows it to navigate the challenges typically present when displaying difficult heritage (i.e. telling an unbiased story, providing individual perspectives and accounts, and creating a visceral, relatable experience for visitors). While these strategies are not unique to The Partition Museum – parallels can be drawn with other similar institutions - they are uniquely tailored to the physicality of the museum, the nature of its collection, and the subject it presents.

When it comes to whether the museum addressed concerns academics had prior to its opening, it is interesting to note that it does present somewhat of a departure from the typical narrative on the partition. The museum does not present the partition to be a necessary evil for the creation of the Indian nation. By including oral history narratives and explicit documentary photography it is clear that the museum would like to emphasize the horrors of the events. However, through inclusion and omission of particular information, the museum attempts to be a neutral arbiter of information. The text panels are informative and descriptive rather than being provocative or offering divergent opinions. The willingness to portray “both” sides of the conflict between religious groups also seems to reaffirm this. However, the museum does not challenge people’s views as much as it could have. For example, if a visitor were to hold the view that the cause of the violence was because of a particular religious community, it would be very easy for them to walk through the exhibition without this view being directly challenged. This is mainly because of the intricacies of the political meandering that both the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League participated in which are not explored in-depth. There is reference to the tensions that erupted, and to the fact that Direct Action Day was connected to the League; however, this is not as comprehensive as it could have been. The main strategy the museum employs in dealing with this difficult history is to try to be a neutral party that is inclusive of diverse audiences.

Of course, this is only our reading of the exhibition. There is no way of truly discerning whether this is what the museum intended unless museum professionals involved in the exhibition’s creation are consulted. Being unable to speak with museum professionals who assembled this museum was a limitation that prevented me from being able to gain a well-rounded understanding of the institution. There is, of course, much more to be analyzed in the museum but this was beyond the scope of this research. Nevertheless, this research is a preliminary study of the museum which can, undoubtedly, be expanded upon. Extending this research through a comparative study of an exhibition on the same subject in Pakistan would be very worthwhile and beneficial. Finally, it would be of academic interest to locate The Partition Museum in the larger discourse on South Asian museology.

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UCL Qatar delivered a Master of Arts programme in Museum and Gallery Practice from 2012 to 2020. This demanding programme was designed to help shape future generations of museum professionals and cultural leaders in Qatar and beyond. There was a strong emphasis on theory and practice and a focus on nonWestern museology and students were encouraged to develop critical thinking and challenge museum practice. Most of our graduates are currently employed in museum and heritage institutions in Qatar and other parts of the world.

This publication highlights the excellent work that our MA students have undertaken and illustrates the range and diversity of topics which were covered in the degree. The themes in this publication include curatorship, exhibition-making, non-Western museum practice, difficult history and cultural policy. Their important research reveals interesting insights into museum practice in Qatar and beyond, and, as a consequence adds to the body of knowledge in museum studies.