

## **The Museum of the Future. From Dining Room to Kitchen.**

Christine Litz

The museum as a public institution, although a relatively recent invention, is, from its self-concept, designed for a non-finite future. The 250-year history of the public institution museum shows that it has undergone enormous changes to date - from the miracle chamber and study collections, to collections for the purpose of teaching, often linked to a library, from an outmoded, unfashionable venue where history is preserved in an kind of ivory tower appealing only for specialists and enthusiasts, to the nowadays being-up-to-date, trendsetting, popular, fashionable event venue targeted at the large public. From this wide, sometimes conflicting reach one can see that the institution museum is per se a constantly changing institution that has to reinvent itself and wants to reinvent itself, in order to create a meaningful and successful platform for both the production and reception of art, placing it in a compelling, thought-provoking and interesting context.

Lately the factor production extended the tasks of a museum specified in the ICOM (International Council of Museums) standards, which includes five main fields of action: collecting, conserving, researching, exhibiting and mediating art. In the last decades the museums became places for production. The fact that art is actually produced in a museum, commissioned by the museum or suggested by the artist for a specific exhibition or situation poses challenges to a museum on different levels.

I concentrate on some of them that are connected to the notion of future: For example the infrastructure of a museum is not designed to be a studio where actually the production of art is happening. The conservators, usually dealing with the installation, are used to handle finished art objects and have specific rules on how to treat them from white gloves, to the appropriate intensity of light and humidity. All for the sake of preserving the art for the infinite future at their best ability. Often also with the knowledge of being contradictory to the wishes or demands of the art / the artist but operating on the premise of the museum.

If you take part as an art historian in this kind of production your perspective and relation on the art shifts from the keeper to the eye-witness/partner in crime. You gain a very different knowledge. In regard to the notion of the future it is an important question what information of this knowledge is documented and how is it documented as well as what information of this knowledge is accessible and how it can be made accessible.

The most striking relation of production and future is that if you commission a work of art or if a new production is suggested to you one does not know what one will get at the end of this process. It is a wild card that is inevitably bound to a fundamental openness towards experiment, processes

and changes as well as the willingness to take a risk and to fail. This brings me to the knowledge that only can be known in the future.

The future describes an abstract period of time, which is characterized above all by the fact, that one can not have experienced it before. Thus we are dealing with the unknown and therefore depend on speculations, premonitions, and imaginations. Often what one imagines about the future tends to be dramatically overbooked and overreaching and ranges in a negative scale from disaster and downfall and in a positive scale from ideal conditions to paradise. However, the not-yet-attained is their mental premise.

The French Philosopher and Deconstructionist Jacques Derrida differentiates between a predictable, foreseeable future and *l'avenir*, which means someone/something to come whose arrival is totally unexpected.

"In general, I try and distinguish between what one calls the Future and "*l'avenir*" [the 'to come']. The future is that which – tomorrow, later, next century – will be. There is a future which is predictable, programmed, scheduled, foreseeable. But there is a future, *l'avenir* (to come) which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me, that is the real future. That which is totally unpredictable. The Other who comes without my being able to anticipate their arrival. So if there is a real future, beyond the other known future, it is *l'avenir* in that it is the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival." (quoted from *Derrida*, 2002, documentary film, directed by Kirby Dick and Amy ZieringKofman)

To approach the future on the basis of unpredictability involves not only the necessity but also the opportunity of permanent reflections and self-surveys, and at the same time it also means one has to deal with existential questions. Not only does art reach its limits, it transposes and transcends, or even calls into question the very basis of boundaries, the museum as well can adopt these reflections with regard to its objectives and structures. Maintaining new and unexpected claims or conditions is a constitutive part of this operation.

In order to not determine the unpredictable and at the same time using it as a productive force it needs to be free jazz, a mental liberty of action and therefore I feel comfortable to address it as a first-person-narrative:

I imagine the museum of the future as an educator willing to reflect ideas and keen to learn. With the ability to perceive and respond to one's individual awareness. Neither patronizing through art nor exploiting the art. It is a public space for exchange, encounter, learning, negotiating and insists upon not only presenting safe, mainstream positions, thoughts, and ideas that have a broad appeal, but also those that have been marginalised, suppressed or otherwise pushed aside.

If I were to imagine a museum of the future I would like to think of it as a kitchen. This is probably because I often perceive museums today as a Dining Room, where the visitors are invited to dinner which the museum has cooked, the tableware is diligently set, the best silver is polished, the order of food is chosen, the light is dimmed, and the seating arrangements are well-thought-out. It leaves the guests to take part in the conversation during the dinner the topics of which have already been predetermined. To imagine a kitchen not only strengthens the production side but serves as a metaphor that touches the very basis of representation.

Because having guests in a kitchen is quite different to inviting guests in a dining room. The kitchen that I imagine is publicly accessible with no commercial interests and everybody is invited to contribute. Everybody brings something, not a complete dish, but ingredients, knowledge, skills, stories. Some things are cooking, burning, simmering. There are a lot of things to be negotiated amongst the participants, it is as much as possible a setting for l'avenir – and maybe in the end there is something to eat. Maybe not. There is experience, encounter and exchange for sure.

What does it imply to think of a museum as a social space both open to all people as well as to different knowledges? The public museum belongs to everybody and nobody in particular. I quote your introduction paper where you describe the expectations of a museum, which has "to reach out to the young and the old, the initiated and the non-initiated, the wealthy and the poor, the people from its vicinity and foreigners from afar". The basic question is: How can the museum of the future address, access and use these potentials? If you take the notion of a social place seriously and acknowledge the radical basis of this approach it is neither a pedagogical tool nor a marketing strategy. It will affect the hierarchies, representations and production of knowledges. It will turn the museum into a platform for

l'avenir ready for friendly takeover. Maybe even have an impact on the production of art itself.

Starting from this open, unstructured guidelines that the invitation in the kitchen provides I would be interested how the following four fields can be transformed in the museum of the future:

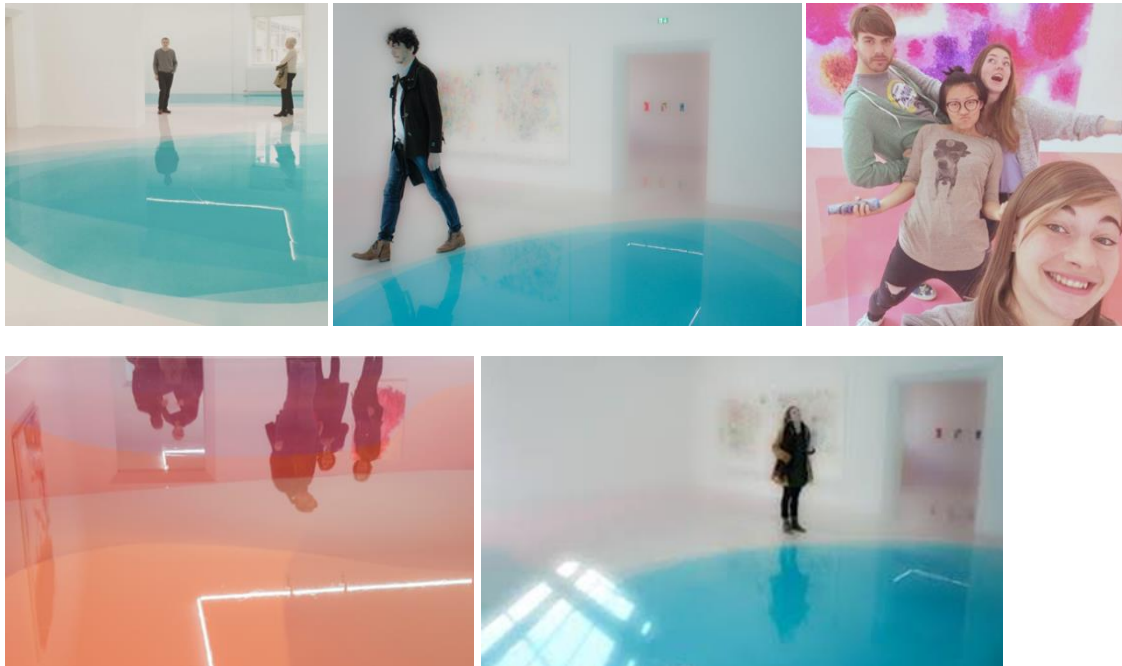
- Embodiment
- Alienation
- Quality of Encounter
- Activation/Participation

In the following I outline these notions. I added some images to get a better understanding. The images derive from past projects of Museum für Neue Kunst and should be perceived as a canny hint on the shapes and directions these notions could take.

#### 1) Embodiment – in a physical sense.

A museum visit implies a gathering of physical bodies. It is an embodiment in its literal sense and this needs to be addressed as an outstanding asset in our digital times. The body is requested while experiencing art, not only to be the carrier of your head but to position yourself in the space, to interact physically. A museum visit implies a body experience.

As a guest you bring your body also to the kitchen. Tastes, knowledges, habits, skills are crucial. You interact and invent, you be considerate of special diets, you learn from each other and together. You make new experiences in the sense of "as of recently and therefore not having existed before", "different from before", "as yet unknown". Also in the sense of "strange", "out of the ordinary", "original", "unusual" as a motivation, to be open and unbiased. It is also new experience in the sense of untrained.



Images all taken and shared by visitors, without any notice or interference by the museum. They are found in [www](http://www). when searching *Peter Zimmermann: Freiburg School, Museum für Neue Kunst*, 2016, where Zimmermann produced a 450 square meter large floor painting to step on. The floor

with its colourful and glossy surface, its reflections and impact on the perception made the visitors aware of their body in the space.

2) Alienation – in the sense of not familiar, understood as the “irregular”, as the “abnormal”, “atypical”, “conspicuous”, and as an argument for “contentious”, “debatable”, “questionable”, “uncertain”, “open”, “insecure”, “controversial”.

I show the following images of our current display of the modernist sculptures in our collection because I want to make a strong argument against affirmation. Because affirmation not only simply confirms the mutual horizon but prevents and circumvents an unbiased questioning. Through the notion of alienation a complex status could be accomplished where one is right and wrong at the same time, which will only endure but turned into a productive force.



IMAGE: Permanent Collection of Museum für Neue Kunst, shelf of sculptures (photo: Marc Doradzillo)

What fundamentally distinguishes sculpture from other genres is the fact that it works with volume that relates to and exists in the surrounding space. This presentation takes up a different meaning of volume: borrowed from the shelves of the museum's depot, one is confronted by virtually the entire mass of the museum's sculpture from the classical modernist collection. Arranged according to size, it represents the sheer diversity and similarity of those sculptures produced either in or with reference to the region between 1917 and 1960, and which found their way into the municipal collection. It doesn't reflect a selection as such, but rather the totality from which this selection is made directly from the shelf. It eschews the use of critical criteria regarding quality or merit, delegating this task instead to the viewer. It is an almost serendipitous discovery of less frequently shown, in part under documented and/or under researched positions. Thus, to a certain extent, it is a kind of meta-presentation, exposing the very principles of museum presentation themselves.

The fixtures and fittings, steel shelving, protective foam and transportation trolleys allude collectively to a way of dealing with artworks behind the scenes altogether different from the aura they derive from their traditional mode of presentation.

3) Qualities of encounter– in the sense of “anew”, “once again”, another catalyst for a repeated engagement.”

On the occasion of its 30th anniversary, the Museum für Neue Kunst has turned its attention to its collection, or more precisely to that part of it, which represents both the cornerstone and the starting point of its collecting activity, focussing thus on the museum’s very identity. *30+30 retro/perspektiv. Dix, Macke, Oppenheim & Co.* is an exhibition about alternative narrative voices. It dares to identify the museum’s incomplete collection – incomplete in the sense of an art historical canon – as a framework in its own right and, with the aid of contemporary contributions, to engage with current discourses. To this end we have selected contributors from varied field of knowledge, whose respective expertise provides interesting parallels to each of the individual works in the collection.



Images from *30+30 retro/perspektiv. Dix, Macke Oppenheim & Co.*, Museum für Neue Kunst 2015 (photos: Andrea Mihaljevic)

The title of the exhibition *30+30 retro/perspektiv. Dix, Macke, Oppenheim & Co.* provides a first idea of how the museum’s own modernist art is approached: *30+30* refers to a selection of thirty artworks, which were juxtaposed with thirty direct responses from a diverse range of disciplines. They present a plus, in the sense that they add something to the works in

question. What is important, however, is not the added value itself, but the proposed shift in focus as an opportunity to reassess the collection in an open and fresh manner. The neologism *retro/perspektiv*, inspired by documenta X, provides a further indication of the way that we approach art from the past that has already been categorized in terms of schools, styles and methods: while retro describes the aspect of looking back through history, the element of perspective represents the attempt to relate this past to the present day and to the future.

The visitors loved to sit opposite to the artworks, like meeting a person. It was an intense study situation. Deceleration and slowing down were intended as well as not only broaden but also deepen knowledge, encounter and perception. Hanno Rauterberg recently wrote a plea in *Die ZEIT* for more readiness to take risk and against walk-in encyclopedias. Entitled *Schluss mit der Ewigkeit (No more Eternity thanks! DIE ZEIT, 16.8.2012)*, it puts forward an alternative, namely "a museum that liberates itself from its standard documentary obligations. A museum that is open to idiosyncratic, unusual art histories. [ . . . ] This shows us how the future might look: incomplete, temporary, recklessly varied. A museum that strives against eternity and thereby enacts the very thing that modernist art has always dreamt about."

#### 4) Activation – in the sense of participation and interpretation.

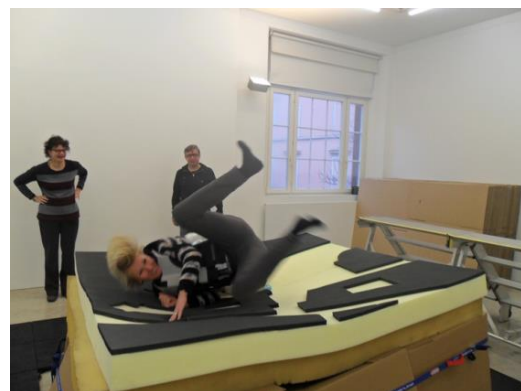
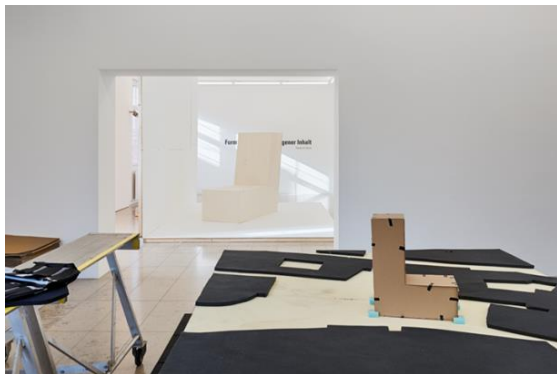
The idea of including activities of the visitors other than looking derives from the late 1920s: El Lissitzky, *Cabinet of Abstraction* for example provides the spectator with changing viewing conditions. The walls, can appear white, grey or black depending on the position of the viewer. To further involve the activity of the visitors movable partitions and rotatable glass-cases were integrated. Through their continuous displacement new spatial combinations inside the structure could be produced. About fifteen years later Exhibitions as Art of this Century (1942), initiated by Peggy Guggenheim, opened as a museum designed by the architect Friedrich Kiesler, was speaking to all the senses with a high degree of active involvement of the visitors. Another twenty years later DYLABY an experimental exhibition perceived as a dynamic labyrinth was set up at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam by six artists: Jean Tinguely, Martial Raysse, Per Olof Ultvedt, Robert Rauschenberg, Daniel Spoerri and Nicki de Saint Phalle.

The examples show that it is not about what you can get from or what you expect to be art or from the art but what you can contribute. In this sense I show you some images of Georg Winter's exhibition *Lichtung im Forst. Neues Museum für Neue Kunst* where he proposed a new building for the museum situated at a central location in the city, in a unapologetic shape that stands out from its surrounding and offers spaces with flexible use such as Integrative



Cloud/Media Swarm Dynamics, Dry Think Tank, Re-Entry White Cube, Space for Interaction and Difference. Georg Winter invited the audience to be part of the planning. They could contribute to the shape of the building by jumping on it. To this end he facilitated a jumping site where the visitors inform with their body the future museum. Over 900 visitors chose to jump.

What I like a lot about this kind of invitation to participate is the fact that not only an intellectual contribution can be made but also a physical. It takes courage to jump and to not be able to influence the results. If one thinks that through maybe knowledge production can not only to be found in the one area of intellectual expertise and maybe knowledge production is not the purpose but a tool to broaden on different not only intellectual levels ones horizon in order to emancipate oneself.



Jumping site equipped with security vest, where visitors contributed through jumping on the architectural model to the future museum. In *Georg Winter: Lichtung im Forst. Neues Museum für Neue Kunst.*, Museum für Neue Kunst 2013



A selection of results from the visitors for the architectural shape of the future museum. Images from the exhibition *Georg Winter: Lichtung im Forst. Neues Museum für Neue Kunst.*, Museum für Neue Kunst 2013 (photo: Museum für Neue Kunst)

When I imagine the museum of the future as a kitchen I do not only mean it as a metaphor, but also think there should be an actual eat-in-kitchen, a public space where people can gather, meet, hang out. Freely accessible and not commercialized. There also should be apartments where the people from abroad (experts, lecturers, artists) that engage in the museum's programme can stay. This would open up the opportunities of encounter in various forms and constellations. As a invited guest you could make your scientific and artistic practice available over a certain period of time in designated and haphazard encounters and forms.

My work on the museum of the future is inspired by the sense of possibility as it's been stated by the author Robert Musil in his book *Man without Qualities*:

"If there is a sense of reality and no one will doubt that it has its justification for existing, then there must also be something we can call a sense of possibility. Whoever has it does not say, for instance: Here this or that has happened, will happen, must happen; but he invents: Here this or that might, could, or ought to happen. If he is told that something is the way it is, he will think: Well, it could probably just as well be otherwise. So the sense of possibility could

be defined outright as the ability to conceive of everything there might be just as well, and to attach no more importance to what is than to what is not.”



Images of musée social by Georg Winter, from *Lichtung im Forst Neues Museum für Meue Kunst.*, Museum für Neue Kunst 2013 (photo: Museum für Neue Kunst).