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SUBJECTIVE CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT THE ARCHITECTURE, ART AND THE ESSENCE OF THE MUSEUM

SUBIEKTYWNE ROZWAŻANIA O ARCHITEKTURZE, SZTUCE I ISTOCIE MUZEUM

Abstract

The author discusses the little-noticed aspects of art museums related to their architecture and the relationship between architecture and art. In times of increasing internet use and the digitization of resources, museums also use new facilities. They use digital technologies to present their collections virtually. Thus, museums began to function in two areas – real and virtual. The author reveals a new dimension of museums which, while providing other forms of knowledge, sometimes become traps for visitors.

Keywords: architecture, art, art museum

Streszczenie

Autor omawia mało dostrzegane aspekty muzeów sztuki związane z ich architekturą oraz relacją architektury i sztuki. W okresie coraz bardziej powszechnego internetu i cyfryzacji zasobów muzea również korzystają z nowych udogodnień. Wykorzystują technologie cyfrowe do wirtualnej prezentacji swoich zbiorów. W ten sposób muzea zaczęły funkcjonować w dwóch obszarach – rzeczywistym i wirtualnym. Autor ujawnia nowy wymiar muzeów, które zapewniając inne formy poznania, czasami stają się pułapkami dla odwiedzających.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, sztuka, muzea sztuki

1. LIE

When observing reality, one gets the impression that the whole world is built on lies. Le Corbusier, in a letter of November 22, 1908, wrote to his teacher Charles l'Éplattenier "Grasset, Sauvage, Jourdain, Paquet and others, you are hypocritical [...] because you do not know what architecture is."¹ So why should architects also not lie through architecture? We are constantly trying to find a safe place for ourselves, not only from deceitful statements, but also from falsehood destroying an idealistic approach to reality, or simply a pragmatic approach to life. It is also not fully realized that our brain deceives us, which means that cheating is an integral part of life. And not only man but also animals and nature. Jarosław

¹ H. Allen Brooks, *Le Corbusier's formative years. Charles-Edouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1997, p. 153.

Kucharski started his book *The Justified Lie in Modern Applied Ethics* with an unequivocal statement: "Lie is a common phenomenon."² So, if he devoted the entire book to the issue of lies in applied ethics, sometimes called practical ethics, it means that this is a global problem affecting all areas of our life in society. What can we do in this situation? We run away from him and seek shelter from falsehood, ugliness, disorder. We try to get closer to nature, which envelops us with its beauty.

2. TRUE AND FALSE IN ARCHITECTURE

The juxtaposition of these two opposites is like seeing reality only in black and white. But there is a whole range of other shades in between. The way we perceive architecture is not always consistent with the intention of the author of the building. The perception of reality depends, among other things, on our knowledge, previous experiences and sensitivity. In the case of architecture, also on close contact with it. The history of architecture shows how often illusion was referred to for its proper reception. The builders of ancient Greece used knowledge about our visual perception and eliminated optical illusions using various procedures. Baroque used illusionist painting to build an even more powerful and complex image of architecture than it was. Also, the appropriate shaping of the proportions of forms and directions strengthened these activities. A perfect example of this is the illusion of a small presbytery space created by Donato Bramante in the church of Santa Maria presso San Satiro in Milan (1482). The cited examples indicate deliberate attempts to induce an illusion, to notice what in reality is not objectively real. Sometimes architects, for fun, build houses standing on their head or introduce new media that allow you to create the illusion of a different reality. But this is just a kind of game with the recipient. Writers, painters, but also architects are looking for catwalks to lead our senses to the path they shape, to show us the world that belongs to their way of perceiving reality. Surrealists tried to distract the viewer from reality, they built a world of dreams and imagination. Rene Magritte also misled the viewer. Or maybe quite the opposite. Perhaps he wanted to transfer him to another dimension and share his view of the world with him.

The signatures of his works are also not the key to understanding his paintings. Although in the case of the painting *The Treachery of Images* and the pipe painted on it with the signature of *ceci n'est pas la pipe*, it reminds the viewer that what he sees is not a real pipe, but only its image. Magritte believed that the artist painting has a secret power to influence reality by building the world of magic. Every action of the artist is a magical one. Through a story, an image, a musical piece, he takes the recipient into the world he has created. The Little Prince, often recalling distant and unreal places, was an exceptional figure. He wanted everyone to see what they see, the way it is. And not through the prism of your imagination. His drawing of a boa that ate an elephant was supposed to be a representation of this very situation, not an association with the image of a hat. This simple example shows that we do not always perceive the author's intentions correctly. Everyone has different associations and the interpretation of what we see may go in different directions. This is also the case with architecture. Not all architects lie or consciously try to mislead us. But many examples

² J. Kucharski, *Usprawiedliwione kłamstwo we współczesnej etyce stosowanej*, Akademia Ignatium-Wydawnictwo WAM, Kraków 2014, p. 13.

consciously falsify reality by building false impressions. One of them is the apparent replica of the Rialto Bridge in Las Vegas.

3. COGNITION

Speaking about the cognitive process, Steen Eiler Rasmussen points out that in a spherical object we not only notice its shape. "A closer look is like touching it with a hand to get to know its various features by experience."³ Although many different objects have the shape of a sphere, above all, the remaining features build a complete final picture and tell about their purpose. Zbigniew Herbert captured the mystery of form in an exceptionally poetic way. According to him, it is impossible to get to know its essence through only visual recognition. "A wooden cube can only be described from the outside. We are therefore doomed to eternal ignorance of its essence. Even if you quickly cut it in half, its interior immediately becomes a wall, and the mystery becomes a skin."⁴ But architecture is not only a form, although it is certainly the most important in building the first impression. Getting to know is a process. Much more complex than repeatedly slicing a wooden cube. You have to walk around it, travel slowly like Walter Benjamin's flâneur, touch it, but also follow the example of Mr. Cogito and watch the moon rise from within.⁵ Multiple encounters with architecture allow you to build a full, undistorted image of it. Repeated contact with it allows you to understand its essence.

4. MUSEUMS AND ART

These words usually evoke unambiguous, though probably different associations. Without trying to illustrate them, one can try to point out the features that are associated, for example, with prestige and value. So they symbolize what has a specific position, rank or recognition. According to Władysław Tatarkiewicz, "art is a reconstruction of things, or the construction of forms, or the expression of experiences – if the product of this reproduction, construction, expression is capable of delighting, moving or shaking."⁶ Władysław Strzemiński treated his work as seeking the truth. Stanisław Fijałkowski believed that he did not paint for the recipient or the gallery, but only for himself. For the uninterrupted inner, intuitive search for truth. At the same time, he was convinced that art is to such an extent an abstract activity that it does not necessarily express itself through lies or truth.⁷ But what is happening today in the art market indicates his idealistic approach to art. Museums repeatedly legitimize the false play of art in their spaces. And although the artist's works create tangible and intangible assets and are not the same goods as other products on the market, they are increasingly becoming only a market commodity providing some profit.

³ S.E. Rasmussen, *Odczuwanie architektury*, Murator, Warszawa 1999, p. 18

⁴ Z. Herbert, *Studium przedmiotu*, Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, Wrocław 1997, p. 72.

⁵ Z. Herbert, *Modlitwa Pana Cogito – podróżnika* <http://www.fundacjaherberta.com/tworczosc3/po- ezja/raport-z-oblezonego-miasta/modlitwa-pana-cogito-podroznika> (access: 12.05.2020).

⁶ W. Tatarkiewicz, *Dzieje sześciu pojęć* PWN, Warszawa 1982, p. 52.

⁷ Z. Taranienko, *Alchemia obrazu. Rozmowy ze Stanisławem Fijałkowskim*, Książka i Prasa, Warszawa 2012, p. 11.

In the face of what is happening on the art market, one must agree with the representatives of the artistic movement Stuckism, who in *manifesto* (1999) recognized that “art that must be in a gallery is not art.”⁸ The founders of this movement, Billy Chikdish and Charles Thomson, were young artists at the time, and their main message was to fight conceptual art and return to figurative painting. Hence, one of the manifesto’s points was the recognition that “artists who don’t paint are not artists.” Their movement has found many supporters around the world. And although the founders of the movement thought that it should not be created with museums in mind, they eventually began to strive to exhibit their works there. Successive manifestos and public demonstrations of their attitude attracted the attention of the media and art critics more and more. Eventually, they were spotted by art galleries and museums. The prices of their works began to rise. As a result, the work of the Stuckists began to become museum exhibits. An artist who wants to appear must have intuition. And not just artistic. He must know what museum curators expect from him. How to best sell? Often, curators do not think about how to fill empty walls and spaces in a museum, but about the success of their museum. Measurable economic success that results from exceptional exhibitions. When describing the basic functions of a museum, French artist Daniel Buren distinguishes the economic function among them, understanding it as giving value to the exhibits presented in museums. It is one of the most important aspects of a museum’s economy, thanks to which the value of the collection continues to grow. So it is a joint benefit for the museum and the artist. But is it always for the recipient who is often manipulated and will not know why this and not another artist stands on the threshold of the vestibule to fame. And big money. This game between lie and truth takes place in galleries and museums. Without the time-honored museum institution, the scale of this activity would probably have been smaller. Moreover, not only art has become a commodity. A museum, or rather a museum institution, is increasingly becoming a commercial product, or even a registered trademark that can be sold well. The term museum industry has appeared, which means that from an economic point of view, the museum has become a commercial product. The brand of a recognized museum is currently an exceptionally good product. The Louvre makes great use of this, as it has sold the right to use its “trademark” to the Emirates of Abu Dhabi.

5. MUSEUM OF IMAGINATION

The museum is associated with a building containing collections. However, not always physically existing artifacts need to build a museum collection. In 1947, André Malreaux in his book *Le Musée Imaginaire* proposed a new vision of the museum. Already his first sentence in the Introduction indicates a continuation of his considerations: “the Romanesque crucifix was not a sculpture at first, Madonna Cimabue was not a painting at first, and Phidias Athena was not initially a statue”⁹ – it reminds that their creation was not only due to the artist’s artistic needs. They fulfilled specific functions in society, and the old forms related to worship were the representations of specific people or gods and did not have the status of artistic sculpture. Malreaux recalls that until the nineteenth century, all works of art were

⁸ B. Childish, C. Thomson, *The Stuckists manifesto*, <http://www.stuckism.com/stuckistmanifesto.html#manifest> (access: 26.03.2020).

⁹ A. Malraux, *Le Musée Imaginaire*, Gallimard, Paris 2002, p. 11.

primarily representations of what existed or did not exist before they became works of art. In fact, for a painter, a painting was a painting. For Malreaux, the museum is above all one of the places that gives the highest idea of man. It is a place where a person is reflected as if in a mirror. His idea for *Musée Imaginaire*, sometimes called *a museum without walls*, resulted from a new look at art, expressed by comparing styles, not by interpreting the content and the message of works of art. In the 19th century, due to the rapid development of knowledge about different cultures, the accumulation of more and more works of art and products of culture, and the possibility of comparing them, museology has developed rapidly. However, the number of artifacts scattered all over the world, collected in often remote places, and the inability to see them in one museum accessible to all, gave rise to the idea of creating a museum of the imagination, where you can see them in the form of reproductions. This idea stems from a philosophical view of art and its history. This virtual museum, created thanks to the dynamic development of photography and subsequent media, was supposed to allow for an unlimited dialogue between any works of art that were created even in distant eras. Unfortunately, they did not only provide direct contact with them, and thus the possibility of individual survival. But now, wandering the great museums, squeezing through the crowd thirsty for masterpieces, can we experience real contact with them? Is watching Mona Lisa or Pieta through bulletproof windows from a considerable distance what we expect? Is this way the museum does not cheat us by giving the possibility of apparent contact with art? An opponent of such a view of the museum was Theodor W. Adorno, for whom “the German word museal [museum] has an unpleasant overtone. It describes objects with which the observer no longer has a significant relationship and which are just dying [...] The museum and the mausoleum are related not only phonetically. Museums are family tombs of works of art.”¹⁰ For Adorno, museums caused the dying of works of art, which, torn from their original environment, lost not only the message that was at the root of their creation, but also the power of expression that resulted from this original context. In this statement, the Malreaux idea still seems valid, because we search for sources of art and refer to many contexts. Thus, the research fields are constantly expanding. It would seem that Malreaux placed the museum of the imagination above traditional museums. In reality, however, he treated reproduction as a form of communication of some kind that can reach anyone and anyone can build their idealistic museum, which is only their choice. He decided that the museum does not need a building, because the collection is to be reproductions of works of art that can be viewed from anywhere in the world. Malreaux was not about simple reproductions, but artistic photos of outstanding photographers who were supposed to breathe new life into the photograms. As the originator of the virtual museum, he never questioned the need to create “real” museums. Moreover, as the Minister of Culture of France (1958–1969), he did a lot for traditional museology. Malreaux died before the birth of digital technologies, which greatly advanced what he proposed in the mid-twentieth century.

6. MUSEUM OF OTHER REALITIES

The path mapped out by André Malraux was followed by the creators of virtual museums presenting works of art owned by these institutions on the Internet. Currently, almost every

¹⁰ Th.W. Adorno, *Prisms*, Neville Spearman, London 1967, p. 175

major museum has a “virtual” replica. Equipped with VR goggles, we can wander through mapped museum rooms or in spaces built exclusively for this virtual adventure. The next step in creating this type of space for art was the Museum of Other Realities (MOR), providing artists with a virtual space in which they can create and experiment with a new art medium that uses VR (virtual reality). The possibilities of creating are endless. Also, availability is unlimited. All you need is the internet, a computer and a VR (virtual reality) kit. The museum also offers a special application for smartphones and tablets to experience augmented reality (AR).

After entering its virtual space, the 3D model helps with navigation. In the museum hall, we can get acquainted with information on the forms of using the museum, and then we start wandering around rooms with different spaces. Some of them were specially designed for the works of artists that are in the possession of MOR. In this way, the virtual world of art merges and permeates with virtual architecture. The Museum of Other Realities, developing Malraux’s thoughts, has one more connection with earlier ideas for a museum. Virtual space allows for continuous enlargement of the object adapting it to the type and increasing number of works by artists. It can be enlarged freely, as is the case of Le Corbusier’s Musée de Croissance Illimitée (1939). The flat body of the infinite museum was to be placed on poles above ground level. The entrance and exit were planned in the immediate vicinity, as the spiral is formed by two parallel closed corridors, each seven meters wide. After entering the building, the visitor was to follow the spiral form that was shrinking all the time until it disappeared in the centre of the building. The vanishing spiral suddenly changes direction, begins to “unscrew” and enlarge until it reaches its end located just at the entrance. The museum conceived in this way does not have a permanent facade, and adding new segments were supposed to give the building an element of dynamics. In the Musée de Croissance Illimitée the border between the interior and the outer space is blurred. At any time, the wall that has remained outside so far may turn out to be an internal wall. This solution has two unquestionable advantages related to the economics of erecting a building and the functional use of space. Before Le Corbusier, no one had come up with a museum in which the wall surface would be used so economically for exhibition purposes, with a small projection area of the museum at the same time. Only digital possibilities have created a new version of the infinite museum, which is positively received by visitors. On the Museum of Other Realities website, we can find a comment that appeared in Forbes: “MOR is an experience and not a game or demo. It is designed like a real-word art museum, giving some of the best VR artists in the world a venue to show off the amazing VR art they have been making for the last two years. I went into MOR with no expectations and came out with my mind completely blown. Everyone and anyone curious about VR needs to try this thing out.”¹¹

7. FALSE MUSEUM

It has long been said that a man needs a museum so that he can see himself, which means that the museum is a mirror of society expressed through the art of artists filtered in the

¹¹ Museum of Other Realities [in:] *Steam*, https://store.steampowered.com/app/613900/Museum_of_Other_Realities/ (access: 24.03.2020).

museum. However, not all museums, regardless of their profile, exhibit anything. We can meet institutions that call themselves museums, but they are not really. Due to the popularity of selfie photos taken in various places and circumstances, selfie museums are established in many places around the world. And they do not even display any photographs, allowing only participation in something unusual. You can see yourself in unique scenery, create your image, have the impression that our photo becomes a work of art as a work in a museum. A visit to such a museum takes on meaning through self-photography. In the selfie museum, the rank of which is raised by referring to the museum institution, you can take a photo of yourself and feel like an artist at the same time. We stop experiencing art, we are only looking for a suitably attractive background for ourselves. Selfies are taken by everyone, everywhere. Regardless of age, place and circumstances. Each unique place becomes a destination for tourist pilgrimages to capture yourself and your loved ones in this type of photos.

A wave of comments was sparked by an incident that took place in a former brownfield site temporarily converted into an exhibition space in Los Angeles in 2017. Simon Birch and a group of friends artists presented an artistic installation that is constantly changing and engaging visitors in the creation process. Their goal was to gather experiences related to the influence of contemporary art on society. The planned social involvement at some point took on a completely unexpected form. A young visitor to the exhibition wanted to take a selfie, which ended up with the accidental deduction of exhibits and losses estimated at around \$ 200,000. In the same year, the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington opened his exhibition *Infinity*, which consisted of rooms built of mirrors, and thus giving the impression of unlimitedly extensive. One of the visitors lost his balance while taking a selfie and destroyed part of the exhibition by falling. Due to the problem of inattentive visitors, who more and more often accidentally damage museums, these institutions began to designate special places for taking such photos or forbid them completely. Although, you do not need to take a selfie to accidentally damage. And even have an accident. Museum spaces and even works of art can be dangerous. A serious accident happened at the Serralves Foundation in Porto. In the park, near the museum designed by Alvaro Siza, Anish Kapoor's installation *Descent into Limbo* (1992) was set up in 2018. Inside the concrete rectangular room, an opening is made in the floor, under which there is a dark void symbolizing the endless of space. This hole, giving the impression of a painted black spot on the floor, became an unintentional trap into which one of the visitors fell and landed in the hospital. The entire installation, which is also a form of a small object, expresses Anish Kapoor's interest in the metaphorical play of light and dark, interior and exterior, closure and infinity. In this case, this infinity has become a dangerous trap. The selfie fashion has triggered a certain cultural shift, which we also see in museums. The more that the museums themselves are involved in this process. Even such esteemed institutions as the National Museum in Krakow, which organizes *the Museum Selfie Day*. Not only does it encourage you to take selfie photos in the museum, which can certainly increase the number of visitors, but also inspires new ideas. One of them is the ingenious action *Here's what our works of art do when they think nobody is watching....* The Museum of Selfies was founded in Los Angeles. And although the name evokes the institution of the museum, it is, in fact, a unique space for fun and entertainment with your telephone.

8. CONCLUSION

Maybe we shouldn't assume that architecture is lying, maybe "only" is deceiving our senses. Can we really clearly define what is a lie in architecture? We talk about the truth of architecture more often. Or is a lie just an illusion? Being suspended between lies and truth. So often truth mixes with falsehood and it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. Or maybe just museums, including the virtual ones, create the illusion of being in a special place. Sometimes they are also more interesting than the art presented in them. Or maybe their greatest value is that they let us feel that we are on the border of two worlds. The real, built, painted, sculpted and imagined ideas of artists.

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