

**ICFA Annual Conference in Palermo
2-7 november 2014**



Palazzo Belmonte Riso

Sunday, November 2nd

The participants met up at Palazzo Belmonte Riso – Museo d'arte contemporanea della Sicilia – greeted by the Director, the Dott.ssa Valeria Li Vigni and the ICFA Committee President, the Dott.ssa Giuliana Ericani.

Following the traditional greetings, the ICOM Italy President, Daniele Jalla addressed the theme of the Milan 2016 ICOM General Conference: « Museums and Cultural Landscapes ». Daniele highly insisted on the « Landscape » concept and its social, cultural and economical dimension as well as the role that museums can and must play in an environment in total evolution.

We took advantage of this reception to visit the museum located in the Palazzo Belmonte which was built at the end of the 18th century for the Princes Ventimiglia di Belmonte. After its acquisition by the Region of Sicily, it is since 2005 the headquarters of the Museum of contemporary art of this region. The Riso, as it is known, actively supports, by exhibiting contemporary Sicilian or Mediterranean artists such as Giovanni Anselmo, Janis Kounellis or Mohamed Elbaz. It is a place full of future promise for the whole of Sicily.

Monday, November 3rd : Study day

Giuliana Ericani, Director Museo Biblioteca Archivio, Bassano del Grappa (Italy): Old and new outfittings in the Fine Arts Museums

ICFA efforded a similar issue in Oxford meeting in 2010, related mainly on changes on museum outfittings.

We heard there about the new outfitting of V&A and meaningfully about the Ashmolean rethinking of the concepts of the courses through its own heritage in relationship with the audiences' culture and expectations.

Now we would continue this issue as I think it is a main challenge in our work.

I will try to explain in which way the matter can be approached and put on the table some arguments that will be presented in the following papers and that could be debated – I hope- at the end of this study day.

The recent discussions on rethinking museums and collections are challenging an hegemonic notions of museum studies and the conventional approaches to capacity building in museums.

Further, historical outfittings challenge innovation projects and anthropological and historical contributions in the interpretation and readings of the works of art.

Furthermore, the changed attention towards the audiences requires a different approach not only to the educational subsidies but also to the outfittings of the museums.

Therefore, the matter can be approached by two points of view, the discipline, the history of art and the museum studies of the fine arts museums, and the public.

Let's begin from the second one.

There are serious studies about the relationship between arts and audiences. The values of arts and culture help people to find creative expression, develop empathy, experience new thoughts, see new views in the world and make connections between ideas. Engagement in arts and culture make life more enjoyable, sometimes more bearable. Even speaking of entertainment, we cannot deny that this is a value concerned with our research, regarding the fact that the people want and need to be taken out of themselves and away from their problems and day by day concerns.

The relationship between art history museums and the public seems sometimes schizophrenic and couldn't be otherwise as it is tightly tied with the interpretation of the our world made mainly by images or better built on images.

La Sistina Chapel made in these days substantial modifications to its climate system to adequate its climate data to the visitors' number that reached 3 millions a year, that is with evidence a turning point. Beyond this influx, there could only fix a quota for the entry. That's the borderline case of these days, but only the latest in this field.

Some news items came recently about the worn-out of the Salon Carré of the Louvre during last summer.

These are two resounding examples of Museums of Fine Arts at the tourists' service.

Are these Museums requiring a sort of upgrade of their outfittings? Certainly yes but in relationship to the use of the spaces and the ware of the works of art, not of their understandability by the people, whose aim is, in a logic of simple entertainment, that of certifying their presence in a important place, worthy to be attended thanks to the presence of an idol, usually one, or to the cult figure itself. The presence there of crowds associated with the same purpose convinces themselves about the rightness of the choice and loads the place down with supplementary significances.

But, another thing to do is to change mind of these audience! Let's go for this to another study day!

There are nevertheless hundreds o even thousands museums not associated with tourism, or even not mainly with tourism, but related to the community as centres of social identity.

The outfittings of these different museums are the same, even if the audiences are different.

The exposition for schools, Italian, German, Dutch, Spanish and, among these, for authors in chronological sequences answers to a classifier standard, as we know, that takes its origins still from the second half of XVIII century.

The Fine Arts museums was born in the mid XVIII century strictly related with the new discipline, the history of art , even if they – and is the case of the Granducal collection of the Uffizi, or Correr collection in Venice – often repeated the outfittings of their collections, not open to the public till then.

The classifier standard of the outfittings, related to a professional audience, had a substantial change in the second half of Nineteenth century, when the museums became the bourgeoisie's parlor , who identified the collections with their history. It is the case of Padua, Verona, Venise, Milan or the entire corpus of museum of the municipalities of the north and central Italy.

The break of the Great Wars, the bombing ruins of several museums, ruined also this concept, that couldn't be substituted by a similar strong one.

The discipline lost its monolithic feature. Different methods for the interpretation of the work of art came forward; an idealistic interpretation, grounded on the individual approach to the values of composition, color, light was the easiest for an educated audience, who perceived the work of art as a solitary pleasure of the individual.

The works of art became single entities, detached by the environment – the parlor wasn't any longer needed – detached from their history and from their relationship with the artists and the works of art of the same time. There is no interpretation by the public; the only interaction allowed is the audience's empathy.

They became a genius painter o sculptor's work: the outfittings of the rationalism, by Scarpa, here in Verona and Palermo (1955-1965), Michelucci and Albini and still Scarpa in Uffizi Florence, the room of Cimabue, emphasise the links between the work of art and the new architecture, isolating them in a separated space, that enhances the formal values but doesn't give those who don't appreciate these values any information.

The isolation of the work of art is stressed by the missing frame, element that created a further caesura from the environment and by the missing label – choice that forces to read the work cut off the time and the place.

Compared with the fifties, the word where we live changed

The democracy links the audience with the heritage and the audience with the museums in a different way. The museums became the mirror of a new society and of a different culture. The museums are meeting places, debate spaces, trough their study and research channels between the society and its culture.

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This new approach is now part of the normal practice of the museum didactic; in the great museums in the world tours according to a stylistic or historical perspective are customary. This require a good curatorial and educational staff and is turned to a devoted audience not to a generalist one.

But, lastly, how to create the emotional connections between ancient art and the audience? Emotional connections are nourished by knowledge and the relationship

between the works of art are technical, historical, stylistic: all these aspects should enter in the new outfittings of a museum.

The policy exhibitions in the last thirty years has learnt us that if the assumed concept is a tale, the walk through the works of art is easier to be understand and to be covered. The historical link between works of art and the historical relationship through them and around them can help to understand the background and help to understand the works of art themselves.

In deep analysis of the collection, in deep analysis of our audiences – totally lacking - strong methodological approach and a dose of bravery should guide us in a new approach to our collections.

This is the new challenge we have, if we want to remain relevant and survive.

Dr Peter Carpreau, Curator in chief Museum Leuven (Belgium)

Présenting a collection: creating opportunities for a permanent museological laboratory (abstract)

M Leuven is an art museum in Belgium. In 2017 we are planning a new presentation of our collection and we are going to make a shift from a static art historical presentation towards a dynamic presentation that should act as a laboratory for continuous research into the interaction between art objects and the audience. Using a temporary cluster system, M Leuven offers the possibility to test theoretical ideas in a real museum.

This study day was followed by the board meeting and the Committee general assembly and finished at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna located at the Ste. Anne Convent.

Tuesday, November 4th

The morning led us to the Palazzo Abatellis which we went through with the Director Gioacchino Barbera. The Palace has been built between 1490 and 1495 by Matteo Carmilivari and Nicolo Grisafi; it is also known under the name of Palazzo Patella and is located near the sea in the Kalsa district. It used to be the residence of Francesco Abatellis, manager of the Kingdom of Sicily ports. After having been used as a convent for a long time, the Palace now shelters the *Galleria Regionale della Sicilia* gathering the rich collections of medieval and modern art originally spread around various places in Palermo. Having suffered many damages during World War II, the Gallery, completely refurbished by the architect Carlo Scarpa (1906-1978), was inaugurated on June 23rd of 1978. The visit of this museum is a brilliant demonstration of the 'Outfittings' of the study day. With this Gallery, C. Scarpa accomplished his greatest museographic master-piece and applied his basic principles: « Correctly displaying a work of art implies that we understand its most specific nature, its character and its essence ». He mainly used simple materials and was able to perfectly reflect the spirit emanating from a sculpture, at a period when this was hardly understood, badly studied and imperfectly displayed by the art historians. His modernity remains very current; as well as the humility he was showing facing a work of art, particularly with the *Virgin Annunciate* painted by Antonello da Messina that has to compel admiration. Each work is displayed for itself and is not drowned in a pretentious museography. The Palermitan heritage, and Italian by extension, emerges reinforced and magnified.

We then visited the Saint Lorenzo oratory with the highly knowledgeable Prince Bernardo Tortorici di Raffadali; built at the end of the 16th century on a private property and then granted as a concession to the Saint Francisco convent, it was decorated by Giacomo Serpotta (1656-1732) between 1698 and 1710; in this Sicilian baroque master piece, the artist traces back the story of the Saints Francisco and Lorenzo. Let us recall that the high altar was decorated with the famous 'Nativity' painted in 1609 by Caravaggio; it was stolen in mysterious circumstances on October the 18th of 1969.



Palermo from S. Salvatore

In the afternoon, we met up at the cathedral to admire the Treasure accompanied by the Dott.ssa Maricetta di Natale. Everyone could appreciate the wealth of the collections and in particular the *Constance of Aragon's crown*. Worn by Frederick II for his coronation in 1220, it is a spectacular goldsmith craftwork, characteristic of the style that was in fashion at the Palermo court at the time.

Wednesday, November 5th

This second day devoted to Palermo begins with the *Museo internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino*. The Director, Marianne Vibaek traced back its history. The founder, Antonio Pasqualino, passionate about art and popular Sicilian traditions, left us with a wealthy heritage of more than 3,000 figurines and especially a museum full of charm and history.

We met again with le Prince Bernardo Tortorici at the end of the morning who guided via narrow stairs to the top of the Saint Salvatore dome, jewel of the Sicilian Baroque and where one can contemplate the city stretching away. The Prince then honoured us by welcoming us to his Palace, the Palazzo Tortorici Raffadali which origins trace back to the second half of the 14th century with extensions dating from the 17th century. The aperitif offered by our friend achieved this lovely morning full of art and History.

In the afternoon, the visit of the Castello de Maredolce is a good introduction to the Norman past of Palermo and Sicily. As explained by Professor Ferdinando Maurici, this castle

is part of the Favara Park, located in the Brancaccio district, in the west part of the city. Built for Roger II around 1153, it was part of the royal residences whose traces are lost little by little nowadays. The estate spreads on 40 hectares and consists in a garden designed and planted according to the Islamic model; the castle, rectangular-shaped, has been subject to a stunning restoration. The facing of the masonry is impressive by its beauty and the quality of the stones used. The interior that we have been allowed to visit, stroke us by the architectural research in the rib vaults. We hope that the restorations carry on and further enhance this building, jewel of the Sicilian art in a quite deprived neighbourhood.

Palermo has also known an intense intellectual and artistic life during the 19th century; proof of this is the construction of the *Teatro Massimo* by the architects Filippo and Ernesto Basile between 1875 and 1891. Everyone could admire its famous Pompeian theatre, known for its decor and unique acoustic due to the asymmetrical domes of the painted roof by Ettore de Maria Bergler (1850-1938). We discovered the stage decors of this artist at the Whitaker Foundation that we visited with the Director, Enza Maria Carollo. Amongst the English families settled in Palermo at the end of the 19th century, the Whitakers, who made fortune in the Marsala wine trade, had a lavish villa built for them, la Malfitano between 1885 and 1889 at the request of Joseph Withaker (1850-1936). This well know archaeologist made himself famous for his excavations and the purchase of the island of Mozia where is exhibited this surprising ancient Greek *Efebo*. The committee had a chance to admire the Villa Malfitano's collection, where is gathered together many art works while conversing in the summer lounge painted by Ettore de Maria Bergler. (Art works such as the five tapestries illustrating the *History of Aeneid* and landscape paintings by Francesco Lojacone: 1838-1915) - This intense day came to an end in the lounges around a Sicilian buffet generously offered by the Foundation.



Palermo - Teatro Massimo

Thursday, November 6th

Still in Palermo we were due to visit the Palatine Chapel and the Royal Palace, iconic places showing the spiritual and temporal powers of Sicily. Without reminding the whole history of these two prestigious monuments, let us just say that the Palatine Chapel, built, as the Royal Palace, after 1130, is the meeting point between the Byzantine, Muslim and Latin cultures with a rare architectural and decorative unity overlooked by the image of the Christ

Pantocrator dominating the interior of the dome; the most significant episodes of the Gospels are depicted on the wall of the main apse. The central nave is devoted to the Old Testament and the side aisles to the Saints Peter and Paul.

The Royal Palace, in which the Palatine Chapel is located, incarnates the Norman power; they rebuilt and increased the original castle, which from fortress became over time a Royal Palace as testified by the many lounges of which some, like the *Sala di Ruggero*, still contain mosaics of Guillaume 1st era.

The Kalsa district still delivered us a few more secrets at the end of the afternoon as we are taken on a tour of the *Palazzo Chiaramonte-Steri*. Built in 1307; it became famous during the 17th century by being the prison at the time of the Inquisition. The recently refurbished cells are daubed with many graffiti left by prisoners while being detained. The end of the day finishes on a lighter mood at the Palazzetto Mirto with Professor Sebastiano Tusa and at the Palazzo Mirto with the Dott.ssa Giovanna Cassatta. Those two buildings send us to the history of the powerful De Spuches and Filangeri families which lived there until 1980. The Palace and its collections are then handed over to the Sicily Region. Several lounges can testify to the exquisite taste of this family for the works of art, tapestries and furniture.

Friday, November 7th

This final day is dedicated to Cefalù; a medieval city located on the seaside and overlooked by the famous *Duomo* erected by Roger II in 1130-1131 in order to be used as his sepulchre. The choir, was designed according to the Norman Roman art principles and shelters the famous mosaic of the *Christ Pantocrator* which is generally dated back to the third quarter of the 12th century.



Cefalù. Duomo

We are then guided to the *Museo Mandralisca*. The Professor Vincenzo Abbate spoke about the history and the intellectual path of the Baron Enrico Pirainio di Mandralisca (1809-

1864), collector of works of art, archaeology, musical instruments and ornithology. It is mostly his humanistic role that got our attention. The Baron, man of progress, supported the rise of an educated working-class by creating the high school (*Liceo Mandralisca*) and primary schools that were clearly lacking in Cefalù. The collections of this humanist, added to those of the Lawyer Cirincione, constitute the actual Mandralisca museum collection. It is in this very intimate atmosphere, still affected by the memories of the Baron, that our Committee was able to admire the *Portrait of a man* painted by Antonello da Messina or the sumptuous Siceliot crater in red figure depicting the *Tuna seller*, great tribute to the antique activity of the Sicilian fishermen.

The day finishes at Bagheria, old residential city of the Palermitan aristocracy where some too rare villas of the 18th century still remain. Amongst those, the Villa Cattolica shelters the *Museo Guttuso*. The villa, built for a Spanish Grandee, Francesco Bonanno (1675-1739), Prince of Cattolica, has known a variety of fortunes following the death of the Bonannos; after its purchase by the Scaduto family, at the end of the 19th century, it became the headquarters of a preserved food factory. The villa then breathed new life thanks to the painter Renato Guttuso (1911-1978); born in Bagheria, he bequeathed a collection of artworks to his hometown that are exhibited since 1973 in the museum that can now be visited. We therefore could admire paintings from as early as his childhood (such as a portrait of his father, Gioacchino Guttuso, a man passionate of culture, literature and liberty), to the great compositions he made in the 60s and 70s.



Bagheria. Museo Guttuso