



EMOTIONS



Network of European
Museum Organisations

and LEARNING

in MUSEUMS

A **NEMO** Report

by **LEM** – The Learning Museum Working Group

Edited by **Paolo Mazzanti**
in collaboration with **Margherita Sani**

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The LEM Working Group

The working groups of NEMO (The Network of European Museum Organisations) offer their members a European perspective on different topics that are important to museums. The Learning Museum Working Group (LEM WG) explores topics relating to the fields of museum education, audience development, intercultural dialogue and lifelong learning. It started out as a continuation of *LEM - The Learning Museum*, a network project funded by the EU and carried out between 2010 and 2013, in which NEMO was a partner. Carrying on the legacy of LEM, the working group today supports the exchange of information and learning among museum professionals in Europe through study visits to various museums in Europe for its members, as well as through studies and reports produced by the group.

Introduction

- Margherita Sani

Since its inception in 2014, the LEM WG – the Learning Museum Working Group – has focused its attention on museum education and learning, one of the key areas of museum work. It has done so through study visits and peer learning activities, and by commissioning research studies¹, which have looked at how educational activities can target different audiences, e.g. young people, or be carried out in different kinds of museums, e.g. natural history museums; explored whether authentic objects are really indispensable; and examined whether learning in museums can be achieved via other means or technologies.

In 2020, it was decided to concentrate the working group's research and publication on emotions and learning, and on the role the former play to support the latter. This decision was also determined by the intention to bring together and give more visibility to the outcomes of two initiatives that have looked at emotions as a centrepiece in museum work in recent years. The first of these was the international Connected Audience Conference,

The Role of Emotions in Audience Engagement, which took place in Berlin in April 2019, organised by KulturAgenda and the Institute for Learning Innovation in collaboration with the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin and NEMO. The second was a series of workshops, Emotional Museums, which have been taking place in Italy since 2016 on the initiative of the MICC – the Media Integration and Communication Centre of the University of Florence, a member of NEMO and the LEM WG.

Both initiatives analysed emotions in the context of museum visiting and learning, concluding that they play a role at every stage of the museum experience, starting from the decision to visit to the post-visit take-away, and that the emotional involvement of visitors is a precondition for effective and authentic learning. This implies that museums must acknowledge that the people coming through their doors should not be considered as an undifferentiated audience, but as individuals different from one another, with different

¹ <https://www.ne-mo.org/about-us/working-groups/working-group-the-learning-museum-lem.html>

needs and expectations, moved by rational as well as emotional drivers.

If Gardner's notion of multiple intelligencies² and the different learning theories that have influenced museum work, such as David Kolb's,³ support museums to adopt a more pluralistic approach and offer a personalised experience to visitors, awareness of the role emotions play in museum visiting and learning leads to innovation and experimentation in museums, encouraging them to design environments and educational activities that fully engage visitors with all their senses. Regarding education in particular, this approach means moving away from the idea that museums should convey facts and figures in the first place, and embracing a constructivist approach and a concept of learning as spelled out by the UK Campaign for Learning many years ago:

“Learning is a process of active engagement with experience. It is what we do when we want to make sense of the world. It may involve the development or deepening of skills, knowledge, understanding, awareness, values, ideas and feelings, or an increase in the capacity to reflect. Effective learning leads to change, development and the desire to learn more.”⁴

But museums are not just engaged in an effort to arouse emotions in their visitors. From many sides, the invitation comes for museums to be places that also teach people to be emotional and become empathetic.

In 2017, the Center for the Future of Museums included empathy in its yearly report on future trends as something museums should strive to engender. Starting from a 2011 US study that showed a 48% decline in empathy over the previous four decades, the report acknowledges how crucial empathy is for the overall functioning of democracy, and prompts museums to do their part to bridge the empathy deficit, thereby reinforcing their social role and giving evidence of the benefits they provide to society.

From this discussion, the notion of the ‘empathetic museum’⁵ has emerged – a people-centred organisation and an institution with a clear vision of its role within the community, inspired by values such as inclusion, social justice, equality and representation.

The year 2020 has been a tumultuous one all over the world. Museums have been open off and on, and it remains to be seen how they will recover and how many will survive the pandemic crisis. Many people are encountering severe economic problems and experiencing huge strains, trauma and social isolation.

Having to limit admittance to venues and access to their physical assets, i.e. collections, museums have already had to partially reinvent themselves and their offer to the public.

² H. Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, 1983

³ D. Kolb, *Experiential Learning. Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 1984

⁴ <https://www.campaign-for-learning.org.uk>

⁵ <http://empatheticmuseum.weebly.com/>

By focusing on emotions, they have the potential to confirm themselves as restorative environments and to reiterate the healing power of beauty and culture.



*Connected Audience Conference:
The Role of Emotions in Audience Engagement
April 2019. Photo: P. Mazzanti*

Gemäldegalerie – Exhibition “Mantegna and Bellini Masters of the Renaissance” April 2019. Photo: P. Mazzanti



Emotions inside/out museums

- Paolo Mazzanti

“Unable to perceive the shape of you,
I find you all around me
(...) for you are everywhere.”

The Shape of Water (2017)
movie by Guillermo Del Toro

In this contribution, I'm going to introduce an Italian experience and a case study, starting from my own point of view – I graduated in philosophy with interdisciplinary education, focused on user experience and digital interaction design in museums and creative sectors.

First of all, I'd like to begin with a matter of fact: it is difficult for anyone to define the objective shape or form of emotions, otherwise their content would be more accessible and immediate in a direct and subjective way. We feel emotions immediately and from a first-person perspective. Emotions are everywhere around us but, above all, inside us. Emotions have a typical temporal duration and a unique emotional tonality. They pervade our actions, motivate our choices, make our experiences sensory and memorable.

Philosophical and psychological studies on the mind are considering the subjective and qualitative properties of some mental states such as emotions, whose effects can influence human thoughts and behaviours. We 'think' in two ways: the first with analysis,

logic, procedure, cognition; the second with intuition, immediacy, simplicity, emotion. Philosophy has always privileged the first over the second, placing the emotional dimension in a subordinate position to the cognitive one. Knowledge and emotion are traditionally conceived as belonging to two discrete areas. Traditional Cartesian philosophical dualism reduced knowledge and the learning process to a cognitive and conceptual one – *cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am), René Descartes. Philosophy, neuroscience and cognitive science are actually discovering the absolute relevance of the body dimension in cognitive processes. Phenomenological studies on the mind and recent neuroscientific researches highlight that mind and brain are not separated. Knowing and more generally perceiving something, requires the involvement of an emotion. Body and context (situation, family, socio-economic context, culture, historical era, gender...) can influence our perceptions, thoughts and decisions. Our emotions are in fact closely related to the biological functioning of bodies.¹ Phenomenological studies have

¹ Mazzanti, P. (2007) Emotions, Learning and Cultural Heritage http://www.paolomazzanti.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/MAZZANTI_Emozione_Apprendimento_Fruizione_BeniCulturali.pdf

considered emotional experiences as content-rich events, related to what is felt in the first person by a human being.² Emotions are context based and affect cognition and rational choices,³ because they have power and essentially they are energy in motion, 'emotion', from the Latin *ex-movere* (to bring out). They are a collection of physiological and mental states experienced at a given time.

The recent theory of the neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barret suggests that emotions are not innate but made⁴ and we are "*architects of our emotions*". We can learn and construct our emotions and we can also talk about 'emotional intelligence'. Recent advances in neuroscience are highlighting a connection between cognitive and emotional functions that influences the understanding of learning in formal contexts such as schools, and also in informal museum contexts.⁵ I do not want to enter into the details of this debate, but these premises are useful to highlight the role played by emotions for learning in formal and informal contexts. When we are in a museum, we always have a personal experience based on our own perceptions, feelings, emotions. Our perception and emotional experience are always based on a point of view: visitor, curator, artist and more. Perceiving, seeing and sensing are essential requirements for

users' learning as well as for creating and inspiring artists.⁶

Consequently, the question to ask in museum contexts is: "What improves our learning ability in museum visiting? How do we feel and what inspires and motivates us in museum-going?" Too often in museums I found very conceptual but not enough emotional solutions used in exhibitions or educational activities. For example, user information and activities often are based on panels with too much text and concepts, difficult to understand and sometimes too boring because of a specific language for experts.

Some recent studies on learning in museums underline the role of emotional experience. Museums of the 21st century are places to exhibit objects and collections, but above all places to research and share knowledge, to learn ways of being, to relate to and feel good by sharing ideas and socialising. Educational activity in museums is no longer a transfer of knowledge but a process of building individual social identity, according to the personal learning style and with the use of new emotional and exciting languages that enhance wellbeing, intercultural dialogue and social cohesion. New trends highlight that multisensory tools can improve

² German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl refers to emotions as subjective "lived experiences" (Erlebnisse); Martin Heidegger in *Being and Time* introduces "emotional tonality" as atmosphere or "mood" (Stimmung) that "comes neither from 'outside' nor from 'inside', but arises out of being-in-the-world, as a way of such Being". Moods are possible only because *Dasein* (existence) is fundamentally a worldly being, a being-in-the-world (Lebenswelt).

³ Damasio, A.R. (1994) *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, New York: Avon Books.

⁴ Barret, L.F. (2017) *How Emotions are Made: the Secret Life of the Brain*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

⁵ Immordino Yang M.L, Damasio A. (2007) *We Feel, Therefore We Learn: The Relevance of Affective and Social Neuroscience to Education in Mind, Brain and Education* V.1 N.1: "When we educators fail to appreciate the importance of students' emotions, we fail to appreciate a critical force in students' learning. One could argue, in fact, that we fail to appreciate the very reason that students learn at all.", p.9.

⁶ About perceiving and feeling from a personal point of view, the painter Van Gogh wrote in a letter to his brother Theo, "The cypresses still preoccupy me; I'd like to do something with them like the canvases of the sunflowers because it astonishes me that no one has yet done them as I see them..." 25 June 1889, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence

learning and motivate users to learn more. A recent study about the so-called “*NL Factor in practice*”, carried out in Dutch museums that participated in the Children in Museums Award⁷ singles out good practice in this direction: an experiential approach to learning inspired by constructivist theories where the active role of the learner is acknowledged and encouraged. Museums are here considered as ‘experiences’, with the acknowledgement that the best way to learn is ‘learning by doing’, and that experiencing something personally has more enduring learning outcomes. Moreover, interactivity is considered as key in the combination of computer-based and physical interaction, with technology used as a tool and not an end in itself.

This differentiation of learning objectives and visitors’ experiences, and the setting up of multisensory, immersive and theatrical environments where the ‘*wow factor*’ is guaranteed, however, should not be to the detriment of sound and well-researched content. Twenty-first century museums are becoming user-centered, because the focus is now moving from museum to ‘*multi-tasking visitor*’, immersed simultaneously in the physical and digital dimension. New museums trends are related to multisensorial and multimedia spaces (sensors, touchscreen, digital tools...) with a convergence of experiences and a continuous flow, through a dialogue between exhibits and visitors. There is a diversification of content, making and sharing narratives through participatory storytelling via social media before, during and

after the museum visit.⁸ In these museums, emotions become triggers of interest and curiosity, which can create relationships and affect the length of the visit.

These “*museums of experience*” are also called “*out of the box*”⁹ with “*open-minded*” attitude, co-creative thinking spaces “*for yes*”,¹⁰ made up of transversal teamwork with diverse and motivated people having interdisciplinary and mixed skills. Emotional experience is a state of feeling free, and the freer the museum visit is, the more engaging and exciting it is. Emotional visitor experience is end-to-end interaction between museum and visitor, and emotional museums are above all empathic, relational and audience-responsive, a place to meet people, and tell and share moments and stories – both those of the collection and those of the user. Open to the new forms of engagement and ‘*edutainment*’, using new languages to listen to and tell the experiences and needs of different audiences

To be effective and emotional, the museum must be empathetic, connecting with its audiences. It must invest in a strategic approach of audience development/engagement to increase and diversify audiences, placing people at the centre of museums of the future. Emotions and empathy are becoming a trend in different social contexts, in marketing and communication strategies for many audiences, especially for new generations. In *Sense8*, a Netflix series about emotions and empathy, there is an episode that inspired and provoked

⁷ Sani, M. (2018) *The NL Factor: a Journey in the Educational World of Dutch Museums*, published by NEMO.

⁸ Negri, M (2016) *The Great Revolution of European Museums*, Museum Proms, Marsilio.

⁹ [NEMO 26th Annual Conference](#) 2018, La Valletta Malta

¹⁰ Toolkit #2 Spaces for Yes <http://creative-museum.net/toolkits/#spaces>

me, set at the Diego Rivera Museum in Mexico City. It tells the story of a relationship at the museum that plays out in front of Rivera's fresco, *Man at the Crossroads* (1934), which was commissioned by Rockefeller for New York's Rockefeller Center.¹¹ It is an invitation for museums to become more relevant by bringing art to life, to make sense by looking at different engagement strategies and new interactive experiences close to the expectations of different audiences. To use senses and emotions to connect people, to put oneself in another's shoes, to make museums a place to listen, have dialogue and co-create. To represent more perspectives and voices, to be liquid¹² and transparent about collections, to reflect the diversity of people within museum collections and all around them.

The main character of this episode tells the controversial story about that museum artwork, alongside his personal story experienced at museum. This is a good representation of a relational museum and of participatory storytelling via a new digital media, investing emotionally in the past by connecting with individual present narratives that are close to the themes and needs of new generations of young people.

At the Heritage in Motion 2020 awards, the winner of the Apps and Interactivity category

was *Please Touch!*, an inclusive art experience powered by the ARCHES (Accessible Resources for Cultural Heritage Ecosystems) project, which makes museum visits accessible to people with special needs by using a novel combination of 3D services, computer technologies and multimedia applications, allowing visitors to experience a visual work of art through different senses. Presenting the award, Sneška Quaedvlieg-Mihailović, Secretary-General of Europa Nostra, said:

*“Cultural heritage is not just about keeping and preserving the past. Every generation has to reinvent our collective heritage and renew its connections to it. It is our responsibility to keep it alive and most importantly to keep it relevant. We have to retell the stories of our ancestors and connect those stories to our own stories, to our own lives and our own communities. It is what makes cultural heritage such a vital aspect of our society. The Heritage in Motion Awards celebrate the new ways in which we can tell these stories and make these connections visible, especially now during these trying times in which digital communication becomes even more important.”*¹³

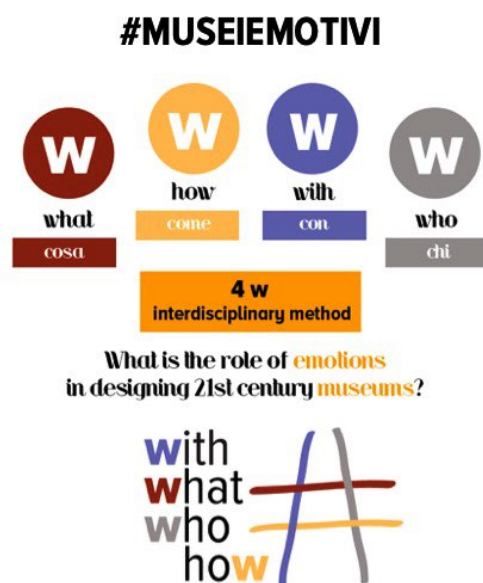
¹¹ Here is a part of the scene <https://vimeo.com/130625971> (season 1, episode 9). *Sense8* is a drama series about people linked psychically through their senses, with increased empathy and awareness of others' experiences and emotions. Created for Netflix by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, the producers of the Matrix Trilogy.

¹² In the sense of being fluid and dynamic, like water. A metaphor used by the famous Polish sociologist-philosopher Zygmunt Baumann speaking of "liquid modernity" to indicate new forms of production, which are as liquid and changeable as the whole society in which we live. The transition from solid to fluid modernity indicates that all the certainties of modernisation are disappearing now. Replaced by a flexibility of social relations, without rigid boundaries between areas, where persons with their own experiences and needs return to be the center of interest. Baumann, Z. *Liquid Life*, (2005).

¹³ Heritage in Motion website <https://heritageinmotion.eu> and video of the 2020 ceremony at min. 27.48 <https://youtu.be/UfdUO7WvbiA>

What is the role of emotion in designing 21st-century museums? This question inspired me in 2013 when I created a concept idea for cultural and creative sectors based on emotional engagement, which won the @Diversity European Idea Competition Awards.¹⁴ Later in 2016 I asked the same question to the director of NEMECH New Media for Cultural Heritage, a competence centre founded by the University of Florence and Tuscany Region, where I work, proposing that he invest in this topic for interdisciplinary research and dialogue between the technological and cultural sectors. We designed *MuseiEmotivi*, an interactive training workshop series for museum professionals from museums and cultural heritage institutions, together with an interdisciplinary Scientific Committee of museum experts interested in the trend of emotions in museums. The workshops include training sessions with talks by recognised scientists and experts from different disciplines, addressing the relationship between emotions and museums, and solutions for user engagement. They are taken inside Italian museums – physical locations that provide facilities and the opportunity for interactive lab sessions with proofs of concepts. A focused community and open-minded network of international experts and over 200 professionals has formed over the years, which shares ideas, best practice and the challenges of contemporary museums, looking at museums

as user-centered dynamic and social spaces where both digital and physical tools harmonise with each other to improve knowledge transfer and audience engagement and remove any accessibility constraints. This approach explores collections in a creative, emotional and customised way, in multisensory and immersive environments where the emotional wow factor is guaranteed as a way to motivate access to the researched content. The Italian word ‘MuseiEmotivi’ means not only emotional but also ‘e_motive’: using emotions to motivate learning in museum. Our vision is to work in an interdisciplinary way to think and redesign emotional museums, considered from main four points of view – the ‘4Ws’: emotions in museum via the CONTENTS side (What), the EXHIBIT side (hoW), the TOOLS and TECHNOLOGY side (With) and the PEOPLE side (Who).



¹⁴ The idea won [@Diversity European Idea Competition Awards 2013](#) launched by the European Parliament and organised by the Commission’s Directorate General for Education and Culture in order to recognise outstanding examples of ICT (information and communications technology) innovation to promote culture in Europe. Based on smartphone application, it promotes culture, emotional involvement and informal learning in museums. It brings interactive information about artworks to museum or gallery visitors just by taking a picture. Unfortunately, the system was not developed for several technological reasons. But this experience was useful to enhance my convictions about user experience and the value of emotions in museums, and to create a dialogue within a network of experts.

This experience triggered a debate and led to an interdisciplinary network of experts from different sectors (museology, museography, philosophy and psychologists, AE/AD, ICT and new media, etc.). It is not just a matter of guiding visitors' emotions, but of leaving them free to choose their own emotions. The aim is to use emotions stimulating the attention, curiosity and interest of the public, designing museum contexts in an engaging way, focusing on the 'trigger - emotions' effect. Leaving the visitors free to discover, imagine and feel the emotion they like. If we are architects of our emotions, we can also design immersive and emotional environments for museum experiences using innovative solutions with new and multimedia technologies. We can create new forms of interactivity between people and museums, defining the relationship between visitor and artwork,

sharing interests and contents. We can use ICT and immersive solutions based on virtual or augmented reality, at the service of narrative structure and contents. We can put people at the centre, creating spaces, opportunities and tools to increase imagination, participation and learning. Emotional and empathic museums must also be representative of the territory and local communities, places of multiple experiences, even a playable museum that uses gaming technologies to create, play, learn and desire to learn more.

4 w
interdisciplinary method

**What is the role of emotions
in designing 21st century museums?**





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<http://nemech.unifi.it/musei-emotivi/>

www.linkedin.com/groups/8423480/



To better understand what I am referring to, I'd like to introduce the emotional visitor experiences that I made in the context of

European museums, during some study visits of the LEM WG organised by NEMO.



- 28-30 May 2015, Hamburg, Germany: NEMO Study Visit, LEM WG. An opportunity to visit museums in Hamburg and talk to relevant people connected to learning and education in museums. At the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg, participants were met by the head of the Department of Marketing, and at Hamburg Museum – Historic Museums Hamburg Welcome, by the head of museum education.
- 5-7 October 2016, Sarajevo. Bosnia and Herzegovina: NEMO Study Visit, LEM WG. The regional museum coordinator of the Foundation Cultural Heritage without Borders (CHwB) Bosnia and Herzegovina and the secretary-general of the Balkan Museum Network (BMN) organised an intensive programme for participants, who not only learned about the Bosnian museum and cultural landscape, but a lot about post-war problems still affecting people's everyday life and the work of museum professionals. They also had the opportunity to visit and talk to the directors of the National Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- 7-9 September 2017, Riga, Latvia: *Building a Museum. Focus on Museums and Creative Industries*. This NEMO and Think Tank Creative Museum event brought together European museum professionals to take a look at practical examples of cooperation between museums and creative industries. The focus on museums and creative industries was explored through practical approaches to the topic with visits to the Riga Motor Museum, the Latvian National Museum of Art, Zanis Lipke Memorial and the Latvian National Museum of History. In these locations, the concept for each museum was examined from the perspectives of architects, designers and museum professionals.



Network of European
Museum Organisations



WHAT

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**Historical Museum of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Sarajevo - Bosnia-Herzegovina**

“Sarajevo under Siege” Exhibition, Permanent Galleries ¹⁵

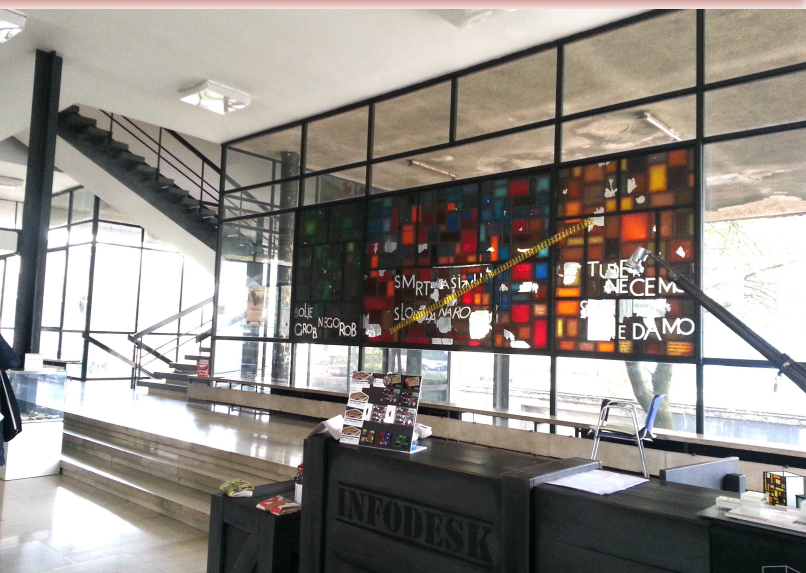
¹⁵ “Sarajevo under Siege” exhibition <https://muzej.ba/sarajevo-under-siege>

- * The *Sarajevo under Siege* exhibition tells the story about the life of the citizens during the siege of Sarajevo from 1992 to 1995. Museum curators involved the local community of Sarajevo citizens, inviting them to participate in the creation process by donating war objects to the museum, and sharing their war stories and memories. The exhibition tells stories of the resilience, resourcefulness and creativity of Sarajevans through photographs, documents and lived objects made by the citizens. In this exhibition the objects speak and tell emotional stories. Despite the difficult situation of the museum and its history, this exhibition triggers the visitor's attention by showing highly significant, talking artefacts that create an emotional relationship between objects, people and stories. Pictured is a kitchen reconstructed with objects from Sarajevans and a simple label that describes it as a hidden and safe place during the siege adaptable to new circumstances. The exhibit stirs an emotion that is difficult to forget



Za kuhinju se birao najzaštićeniji dio stana, tamo se kuhalo, jelo, ložilo, sjedilo, čitalo, spavalo. Za vrijeme opsade Sarajeva ona je bila centralno i najvažnije mjesto u stanu, jer je cijeli stan bio sveden samo na prostor za preživljavanje. Izgled kuhinje bio je potpuno prilagođen novim potrebama.

Kitchen was the central and the most important part of apartment during the siege of Sarajevo. Usually, it was the most hidden and safe place of the apartment. It was a place for cooking, eating, heating, sitting, reading, playing cards, sleeping and for all kind of activities. Its appearance was completely adapted for new circumstances.



"Kitchen and Label"
"Sarajevo under Siege"
 Historical Museum
 of Bosnia and Herzegovina
 photos: P. Mazzanti



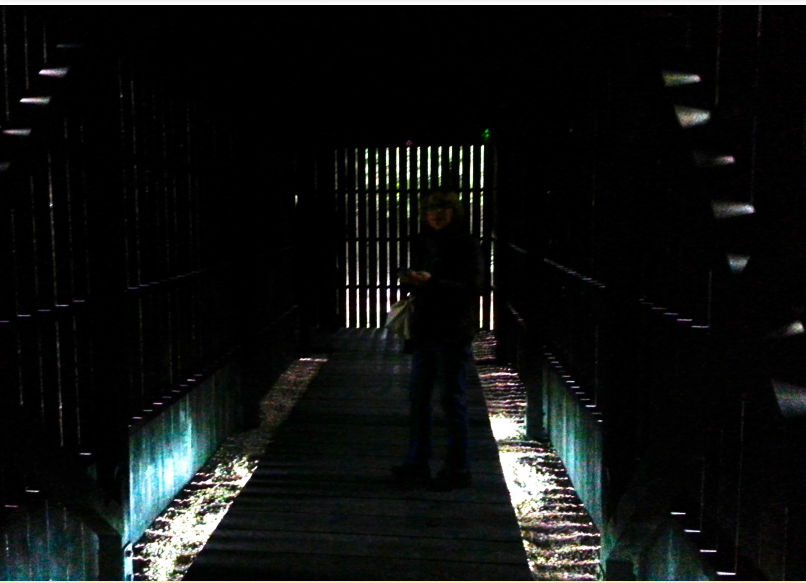
HOW

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Žanis Lipke Memorial Museum, Riga - Latvia ¹⁶

¹⁶ <https://lipke.lv/en/museum/architecture/>

- * Žanis Lipke Memorial is placed on Ķīpsala island in Riga, in a yard that is the endpoint of the tiny street, where under a woodshed an underground (3×3m) bunker was dug out by the Lipke family, a hiding place for people saved from the Jewish ghetto during the Second World War. The appearance of the building is similar to the tarred sheds of the Ķīpsala fishermen and sailors, which were made of floated logs with their characteristic color and smell. The entrance is dark with a closed tunnel that does not let the visitor perceive the structural dimension of the building. It takes a while to locate its centre. The basement level contains a reinforced concrete bunker in the original size with nine bunks dropping down from the wall. The idea is to make the visitor perceive what it is like to live in such extreme circumstances for long periods of time. By making this bunker 'inaccessible' to visitors, the memorial aims to make us identify with the stories and experiences of the people refuged there. The inside of the museum is a labyrinth, affecting the senses: vision, hearing, olfactory. The visitor is emotionally guided along the perimeter of the shed, then climbs to the attic and comes to the hatch through which the bunker at the bottom of the cellar can be seen. It is a hidden museum, where the metaphor of darkness captures the visitor's interest, inspiring the imagination. In the pictures: the museum entrance is similar to a common house, where visitors ring the bell to enter. There is a "coefficient of good adversity" well-designed to engage visitors by triggering emotions and affecting the senses. Displays show a few objects linked to the stories of the people who lived in the bunker: letters, drawings, personal documents. Admission is by donation. This museum is linked to an international and territorial network and has a new building dedicated to education.



Zanis Lipke Memorial Museum
photos: P. Mazzanti



WHO

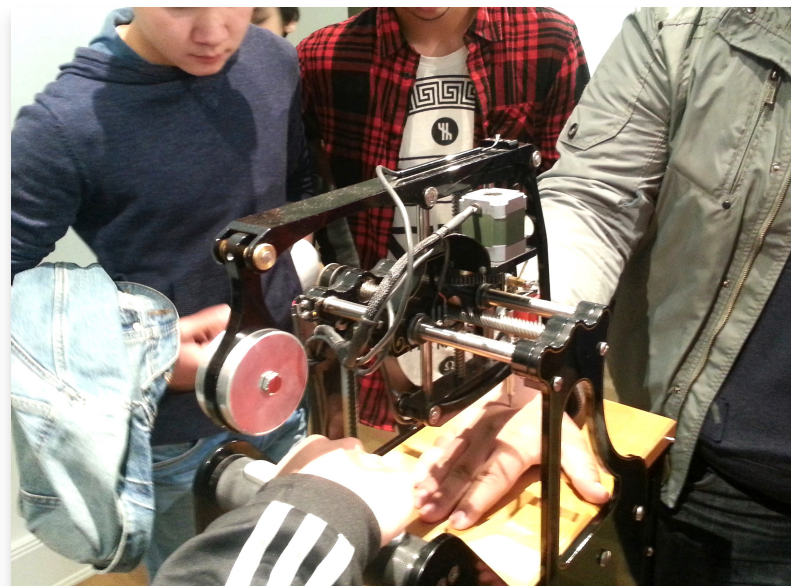
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**MK&G - Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg
Hamburg, Germany**

“Tattoo Temporary Exhibition 2015” ¹⁷

¹⁷ <https://www.mkg-hamburg.de/en/exhibitions/archive/2015/tattoo.html>

- * In this innovative exhibition, MK&G looked back on the long tradition of the Hamburg tattoo scene, which had its cradle in the port milieu of the late 19th century. On display were pieces of work, including photographs, colored woodcuts, paintings and sculptures, as well as video clips and audio installations, stencils and historical specimens of tattooed skin and tattooing instruments. Hidden out of sight in winter, proudly displayed in summer, tattoos have become a ubiquitous trend – they can be seen everywhere today. Tattoos tell personal stories, create identity and a feeling of belonging; they are intended to decorate, heal and protect, they fascinate or repel, are mystified or part of a trend. My abiding feeling was of meeting people everywhere in the museum, especially a new audience of enthusiastic young people or a tattooed man interested in an exhibition on tattoos. An audience that highlights that the museum was right to invest and focus on a contemporary theme, and able to involve a local community, telling old traditions and new stories focused on artistic, craft and cultural themes. Stories were used to create identity and participation, showing historical photos about typical tattoos of the working class in Hamburg, alongside a kinetic sculpture and a learning-by-doing interactive experience.



MK&G
 Tatroo Temporary Exhibition
 photos: P. Mazzanti



WITH

< emotions by **technology** side >

Riga Motor Museum, Riga - Latvia ¹⁸

¹⁸ . <http://www.motormuzejs.lv/index.php/en/about1>

- * Riga Motor Museum houses the largest and most diverse collection of antique vehicles in the Baltic states and offers a truly interactive, fun and educational journey into the world of motors. Visitors, especially children and young people, can learn the rules of road traffic safety and the history and science of the automotive industry. The museum showcases more than a hundred unique antique vehicles and the collection has been regularly enriched with several significant acquisitions. Visitors explore the story using modern and diverse multimedia and design features, as well as participating in several interactive activities. Historic vehicles displayed in a modern way make a visit to Riga Motor Museum an exciting, unique and truly explorative experience. On the museum's website is written: *"The museum not only acquires, conserves, researches, restores and promotes antique vehicles; it's also a creative place for learning and education. Here every visitor, especially children and youth, can learn the rules of road traffic safety, development of the automotive history and sciences."* Through a variety of tools and media, the metaphor of the car is used to tell different stories on videos or interactive screens, virtual touchscreens and augmented reality. It's a place where different audiences, especially but not only children, can interact and learn in a creative way. My emotional trigger effect came under a video camera showing me on board the famous Rolls-Royce 'Silver Shadow' of the Kremlin Collection via a projection on the room's video-wall. Or enjoying an interactive table with silhouette and textures that enables users to redesign a PAZ bus; then later taking a seat inside and taking a fun virtual ride to a 70s Kolhoz wedding around Riga.



*Riga Motor Museum
photos: P. Mazzanti*

MuseiEmotivi and Covid-19



Photo: Study day, “*MuseiEmotivi e motivi post Covid-19: Listening, rethinking and sharing good practices in museums*”, [MAD Murate Art District](#), Florence, Italy, 10 September 2020

Following the forced increase of digital solutions in museums due to the Covid-19 lockdown, the *MuseiEmotivi* Scientific Committee started an investigation about experiences and new opportunities for “more digital” museums in the post-pandemic era. The experiences and opinions of some of the members of the *MuseiEmotivi* community were collated in a new Italian report, *MuseiEmotivi e motivi post Covid-19* (MuseiEmotivi and considerations post Covid-19). A study day, *MuseiEmotivi e motivi post Covid-19: Listening, rethinking and sharing good practices in museums*, took place on 10 September 2020 to discuss the experiences in the report and share opinions on the role of digital in museums in the post-Covid era, in dialogue with museum experts.¹⁹

The focus of the *MuseiEmotivi* initiative is more topical than ever; being forced to close to the public, museums have had to exploit digital technology to keep in contact with visitors. This has given them an opportunity to generate evidence for both the strengths and

weaknesses of digital from multiple perspectives. Several points were raised. Clearly, museums have had to define their digital strategy and rethink how to keep in touch with their audience and create a museum community. Digital tools were acknowledged as an effective solution to improve interactivity and put museums in a more direct relationship with people, and a powerful tool to stimulate emotional involvement and improve knowledge. Recommendations included promoting enhanced digital skills and technological innovation for smart, sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and developing new communication models and cultural services for public engagement and participation.

The lockdown has made more evident the well-known problems and defects in this area, and driven effective solutions – among them, the need to give greater attention to the local community, rediscovering and highlighting the museum’s geographical identity and links to the local community – while maintaining original scope and scale. Museums have discovered the need to be increasingly audience-focused, with stories that demonstrate the motivations of the public and the needs of staff to help a museum identify barriers to participation.²⁰

Some quotes of this report have been selected by EMA - European Museum Academy Foundation and published on *TPTI 2020 Research Project Museums and the Web at the time of the Covid-19 - in search of lasting museological innovations during the pandemic*.²¹

¹⁹ <https://www.universityheritage.eu/en/emotionalmuseums/>

²⁰ See also the Benedetta Tiana's interesting point of view on the LEM/NEMO Report titled - *Is Learning Better Without Objects?* (March 2020) - “*During the Covid lockdown I am more than ever aware of our responsibility to operate within wider society, as learning organisations that must stay relevant. We need to focus on delivering experiences that satisfy social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual needs. We need to reflect seriously on how museum learning can improve society in the light of human rights issues, social justice, cultural access and people’s wellbeing.*”

https://www.ne-mo.org/fileadmin/Dateien/public/Publications/WG_LEM-Learning_without_objects_Benedetta_Tiana_04.2020.pdf

²¹ <http://europeanmuseumacademy.eu/museums-and-the-web-at-the-times-of-covid-19-in-search-of-lasting-museological-innovations-during-the-pandemic/> European Museum Academy and University of Padova, Italy - ‘A territorial case. Witnesses from Italian local museums’ section, p. 29.



The idea for this publication, *Emotions and Learning in Museums*, was conceived with **Margherita Sani** in 2019 while participating in the Connected Audience Conference, *The Role of Emotions in Audience Engagement*. I thank her for her enthusiasm and interest in this trend and in *MuseiEmotivi* workshops. Her collaboration was important, along with the support of the NEMO team, international experts of the Berlin Conference and the following experts from the *MuseiEmotivi* Network:

- ◆ **Alberto Del Bimbo**, professor at the Department of Information Engineering, University of Florence, expert on Multimedia, Computer Vision and Artificial Intelligence, founder and director of the NEMECH New Media for Culture Heritage Centre, co-coordinator of *MuseiEmotivi* - who likes to visit and interact within museums.
- ◆ **Lorenzo Greppi**, architect specialised in the integrated design of multimedia installations for exhibitions and museums, co-coordinator of *MuseiEmotivi* - who likes to trigger emotions and inspire imagination in museums.
- ◆ **Antonia Silvaggi**, project manager at an Italian consultancy organisation active in the field of culture, tutor at some *MuseiEmotivi* editions - who likes to connect emotions, people and stories in museums.
- ◆ **Elisa Bruttini**, scientific coordinator of the Italian Museum Foundation, collaborating on the third edition of *MuseiEmotivi* - who likes museum networks and communities in an emotional perspective.

Emotions in digital

- Alberto Del Bimbo

"Emotions are complex states of mind which include physiological correlates, social roles and cognitive factors. Emotions give a person the energy for a reactive behaviour with the possibility of delaying and thus controlling the actual response"

This is a comprehensive definition of emotions given by Paul Ekman and Richard Davidson in their essay *The Nature of Emotion – Fundamental Questions*.¹ In museums, emotions are the vehicle for a deeper affective and intellectual transfer between artworks and visitors. Standing in front of the authentic object has been believed and proven to provide this emotional plus and is the distinctive factor of a satisfying experience of visitors.² It results into a holistic unity of intellect and affect.³ Strong emotions arise from surprise, when you suddenly see amazing and unexpected exemplars. I was overwhelmed by emotion when I was in front

of the huge Pergamon altar at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, the impressive *Lamassu* of the Khorsabad palace at the Louvre, and the awesome *Toro Farnese* at the Archeological Museum in Naples. Emotions can also arise when you observe unique masterpieces of extraordinary perfection like *Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss* by Canova at the Louvre, or *The Birth of Venus* by Botticelli at the Uffizi. They may also occur when you fully understand an object, where it comes from, its story and life, its inner meanings. Think of it when you are in front of the Rosetta Stone at the British Museum, or Picasso's *Guernica* at the Museo Nacional in Madrid....

However, despite the wide range of experiential diversity, for a long time the privileged method with which museums have communicated with visitors has been via the cognitive dimension. Museum exhibits,

¹ P. Ekman and R.J. Davidson (1994) *The Nature of Emotion – Fundamental Questions*, Oxford University Press, ISBN: 978-0195089448.

² J. Hohenstein and T. Moussouri (2018) *Museum Learning: Theory and Research as Tools for Enhancing Practice*, Routledge, ISBN: 9781138901124.

³ E. Wood and K.E. Latham (2013) *The Objects of Experience: Transforming Visitor-Object Encounters in Museums*, Left Coast Press. ISBN: 978-1-61132-213-2.



Hamburger Bahnhof - Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin DE. Photo: P. Mazzanti

cultural heritage site layouts and visitor guides have been designed to target a sort of standard visitor with the intent of transferring information to as many people as possible in some average, meaningful way. Thankfully, this has been accompanied in the last century by the work of modern architects and designers who have highlighted the relevance of the emotional dimension for a more complete visitor experience. They have offered new principles for designing exhibition spaces, with appropriate lighting and disposition of artworks and careful planning of visitors' pathways to create expectations and surprise. They have redefined the cultural experience as a cultural and aesthetic practice. This has proven to result in a recovery of attention and a more positive disposition and interest, as well as a better memory of the visitor's experience.

Nowadays we live in a digital era. Digital technologies are technologies for immaterial augmentation. In the last few years, their great progress has led to more and more museums adopting them, most of the time in a naive way, but in some cases with appropriate

planning and design. The presence of museums in social networks has become common practice. Museum objects have been augmented with beacons that connect to the visitor's app.

Museum rooms have been enriched with interactive elements such as screen panels, and virtual artefacts such as audiovisual effects or reconstructions in 3D computer graphics. The visitor experience has been improved with smart apps, wearable devices and augmented reality. Overall, digital technologies have offered the opportunity to extend museum visits into sessions of experiential education by expanding the modes of visitor engagements. A well-founded question arises on whether, in doing this, digital technologies might also contribute to establishing a stronger relationship between the artwork and the visitor: whether they are able to create emotions.

Social network connectivity

Social networks and business platforms have shown the extent to which users' choices can be monitored and preferences interpreted. However, in the museum context,



Marino Marini Museum, Florence, Italy, 5th edition MuseiEmotivi, March 2019. Photo: P. Mazzanti

the visitor profile as obtained from ‘likes’ on social platforms has little more information than is present in the standard visitor model. The visitor's social activity may only discover cultural macro-interests with high statistical generalisation. While these are useful to suggest one museum visit instead of another, they are unable to detect the interests of visitors during the visit and cannot contribute to the visitor's affective and intellectual experience, which comes from the combination of pleasant visit, augmented knowledge and emotional sensations, satisfaction of personal interests and surprise of contents. There are a few digital technologies that are central to this goal, particularly mobile and wearable devices, sensor networks, artificial intelligence (AI), and multimedia augmented realities.⁴ Let's have a brief overview of their capabilities and limits.

Information contents in the hands of the user

Mobile technology is key to putting information content directly into the hands of the user. Bluetooth sensors on board the

device capture proximity information and permit to convey appropriate outputs to the visitor at the right location. While this is a minor improvement on traditional audio guides, onboard AI and Computer Vision can improve the visitor experience beyond it. Imagine your mobile device in some holder applied to your neck in a way that the device camera can act as your third eye. The Computer Vision software will understand whether you are just walking or looking at an artwork, recognise the artwork in front of you, measure how long you are observing the artwork, check the way you are looking at it and infer your degree of interest and finally, as a result, provide adequate information according to your current condition. Moreover, through the microphone, you could ask questions about the artwork and an AI software for Visual Query and Answer could interpret your questions and answer appropriately, so satisfying your present interests. There are obvious limits to the effective implementation of this scenario. Most depend on the processing capabilities of

⁴ R. Cucchiara and A. Del Bimbo (2014) Vision(s) for Augmented Cultural Heritage Experience, IEEE Multimedia, DOI: 10.1109/MMUL.2014.19.



Ferragamo Museum, Florence, Italy, Italy in Hollywood exhibition, 2018-2019. Photo: P. Mazzanti

the mobile device, whether or not it has a GPU, the number of operations that need be performed in the cloud, the effectiveness of the Visual Query and Answer subsystem... Nevertheless, it is already something within the reach of the current technology.

Sensors added to artworks and museum rooms

Sensors installed in museum rooms or added to artworks are essential to enable a system understand context and provide personalised experiences to visitors with higher engagement. Processing such sensory data by AI will permit museums to build time-varying visitor profiles, interpret the momentary affective status of the visitor, understand and anticipate their needs, and provide adequate responses. While some of these functions are useful for curators to improve the standard

visitor experience, others can be exploited to provide personalised contextual answers to individual visitors. In the first case are the functions of crowd analysis, target tracking and re-identification. In the second, the detection of the visitor's emotional status. Detection of crowding conditions generally requires top view cameras. Computer Vision solutions are available that count crowd density accurately and follow crowd movements. Target tracking and re-identification require multiple top view cameras in a networked configuration, which can reconstruct the visitor's path, monitor the pauses in front of the artworks, and reconstruct expectations and contextual interests. This information can provide useful suggestions to the museum's management staff to plan appropriate paths for the visit that improve the average visitor



MUSE - Museum of Science of Trento, Italy. Exhibition "GENOMA UMANO: What makes us unique". Photo: P. Mazzanti

satisfaction. Target tracking with re-identification is not free from drawbacks. It barely works in crowded contexts as obstructions generally hamper its ability to obtain reliable descriptors of targets. A key discriminative element for re-identification is which feature of the target is detected, whether the face or the body; while the former is a strong discriminative feature, the latter is much less. This might lead the system to confuse targets and result in an unsatisfactory performance. In most cases, top view cameras don't have the capability of detecting target faces with enough resolution to allow re-identification. This means real-time open-set re-identification is certainly challenging for Computer Vision. Finally, face re-identification poses serious privacy issues. The processing of biometric data, as long as the processing concerns the provision of services and

monitoring of people's behaviour, is subjected to the European General Data Protection Regulation. The institution is burdened with the obligation to put in place adequate technical and organisational measures to ensure, and be able to demonstrate, that the processing is carried out in accordance with the regulations.

Detection of emotional status from facial micro-expression and body movements has been the subject of active research in Computer Vision. Facial landmarks located in the eyes, eyebrows, nose, mouth and jawline, and their temporal evolution, are used to recognise the feelings of an individual while looking at a target. Age, sex and ethnicity can also be automatically detected from facial traits. Body posture conveys information about personality traits and social standing, and reveals current emotional states and inner



M9 - The Museum of the 20th Century, Mestre, Italy. Photo: P. Mazzanti

feelings. In museums, camera sensors should be added to objects in order to observe in close view visitors that stand before the object. Computer Vision can interpret the reactive behaviour of the visitor in front of an artwork, detect the degree of surprise, interest and pleasure, and convey information appropriately according to the affective status. Privacy concerns also hold in this case.

Effective dialogue between visitors and artworks is hard to obtain via AI in its present state. Despite the great progress made in speech recognition and natural language processing, and the developments in Visual Query and Answer systems, we are still far from having a natural interaction between person and machine. Machines are not able to understand the emotional state of the speaker due to the extreme acoustic variability, difficult association of emotions and speech segments,

and dependency on the speaker's culture and personality.

Display of virtual contexts

From our previous discussion, it is apparent that mobile devices, sensors and AI cannot provoke emotions. They are instead opportunities for a more satisfying visitor experience. Understanding the affective status and conveying appropriate information at the right location and the right time is a way to make the intellectual experience of a visit more complete and emotionally engaging. However, emotional states can be excited and amplified by creation of immaterial virtual contexts that complement the physical objects. This is particularly true for the new generation of digital native visitors that are highly tolerant of the use of simulacra instead of real objects. Digital reproductions and holograms can provide local replicas of

distant objects, reconstructions of lost elements, artificial completion of elements no longer present. We are used to considering the white of classical statues as their original feature and assuming it as a standard of beauty. But ancient statues were richly and vividly multi-coloured, a feature that they have lost over the centuries. Colours have indeed a fundamental role to give the viewer information about the nature of objects and can also stimulate the viewer to respond with emotions. Digital technologies can easily provide a replica of the original that can accompany the actual object. Sensors could detect the proximity of the visitor and light up the projection of coloured lights that restore the original appearance of the artwork. This can create surprise and increase desire for knowledge. Several years ago, I was walking in the night in the city of Brescia when, in a small square in the historic centre, the huge shape of a Roman building, the temple of Vespasian, suddenly appeared before me. That apparition was astounding... The day after, in the daylight, I realised that the temple had been largely reconstructed with bricks in the 20th century. But seeing the whole shape instead of a few ruins had a great emotional effect on me and motivated me to know more about the object. Today, similar effects on a smaller scale can be easily obtained with holograms and digital reconstructions.

The expression of emotions and emotional responses is a central concern of artists. Digital technologies and particularly AI will allow artists to create new artworks and new forms of art. They will also give architects and curators the opportunity to design and develop new museums with artificial reactive environments that reinforce the holistic union of intellect and affect.

Virtual museums

The pandemic has moved a large part of museum visits to virtual. While this has brought the opportunity to experiment with new services, create links between institutions, expand the cultural offer and open the museum to a wider audience, the emotional side of the visit turns out to have been greatly sacrificed. It is hard to believe that it can be recovered on the internet.

The place of emotions in museums: the scenographer's point of view

- Lorenzo Greppi

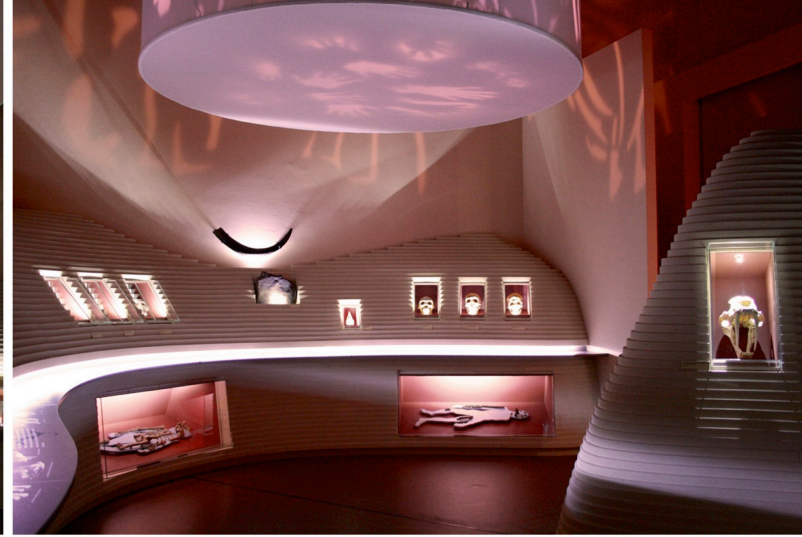
The place of emotions in museum scenography is the central theme around which all my work as a museum designer revolves: a theme that guides me, fascinates me and, indeed, excites me, and which has animated my cultural and disciplinary approach for a long time, constantly accompanying and inspiring my research and professional militancy.

Within this framework, I aim all the time to articulate and push my reflections starting from three questions that I consider fundamental – between doubts and certainties, experiments and intuitions. First of all, trying to find an adequate answer to the question ‘why?’: why take emotions into consideration when setting up a museum or an exhibition? Secondly, ‘where?’: where to place emotions or, I should say, what is their rightful place within an exhibition trail and its dynamics?

And finally, ‘how?’: which tools, what approaches should we use to stage emotions in an accomplished museum setting?

Where the greatest difficulty lies is in the elaboration of appropriate and innate answers, in line with the coherence, pertinence, and correctness of the formal transcription of content in dialogue with the container and the public: answers that cannot be framed within ready-made formulas that are the same for everyone, but must be chosen and tailor-made, constantly drawing on imagination, creativity, sensitivity, and the critical capacity to question everything.

1 Answering the first question ‘why take emotions into account?’ means first of all recognising that they are of absolutely fundamental importance. A decisive importance



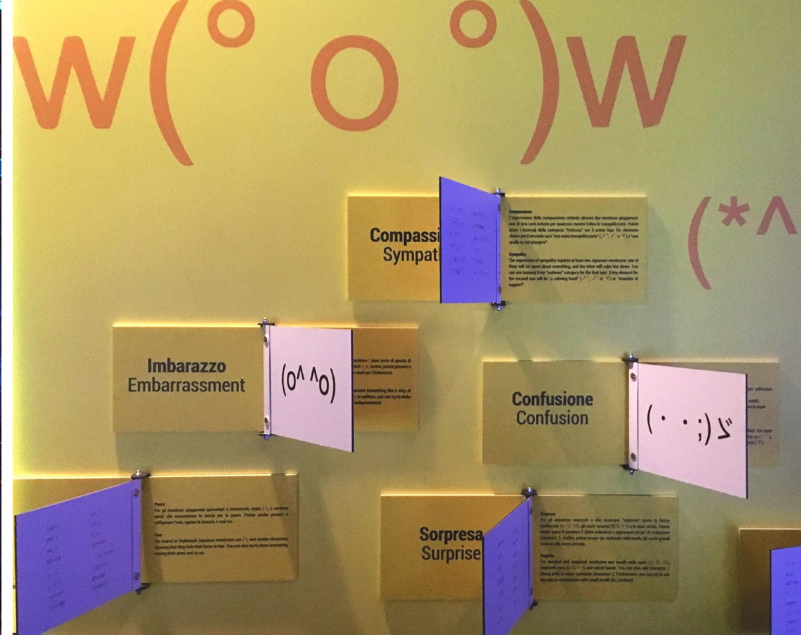
Natural History Museum of Venice: 1. On the traces of life: how to read a fossil ?; 2. On the traces of life: the apparition of man; 3. Rooms of movement: moving in the water; 4. Rooms of movement: moving in the air. Photos: Lorenzo Greppi

that starts from personal considerations and beliefs about the function, cultural and symbolic role of the museum, as well as on the centrality of emotions in everyday life, fuelled by the observation – now widely recognised – that emotions are the basis of the cognitive and learning process, and that science, neuroscience, philosophy and various other disciplines have fully confirmed the existence of forms of ‘emotional intelligence’, linked to intuition, simplicity, immediacy, empathy and – indeed – emotion.

It is for this reason that I prefer to speak of ‘emotional museums’ rather than ‘exciting museums’: in the sense of museums capable, on one hand, of bringing emotions to life and making them resonate with the audience and visitors who, on the other hand – and precisely

for this reason – will themselves be interacting with the emotions aroused. Museums that capable of – at the same time – arousing and exciting emotions.

2 The second question is ‘what is the place of emotions?’: the answer deserves a more articulated discourse and, above all, must be framed in a wider and evolving perspective, starting by acknowledging that emotions are in a central position, at the heart of the dialectical relationship between content, container and visitor. This is a strongly dynamic, flexible, fluid position, which is neither rigidly subordinated to the constant predominance of the work on display, as still happens in many classical exhibitions, nor subjected to the supposed centrality of the public, as improperly supported by much



National Cinema Museum, Turin, *Faces/Emotions: from Physiognomy to Emoji*. Photos: Lorenzo Greppi

contemporary museological discourse. Rather, emotions are placed ‘at the heart’ of a permanent dialogue between forms and content, exhibitions and design, collections and staging, playing precisely with the trilateration of these three elements: protagonists, bearers of meaning, and narrative.

This is an ‘interactive’ position in constant evolution, which never ceases to change, to vary in form and size, becoming more and more necessary day by day, and which the appearance of Covid-19 and its consequences have made even more indispensable and urgent, at the service of a ‘real’ audience that no longer admits grey areas, ambiguities, fake news or virtual virtuosity for their own sake but, on the contrary, is in search of deep truths, meaningful emotions, authentic and shared values, space-time dimensions of sociality and exchange...

A ‘multiform’ position that integrates and completes itself in the accomplished vision of an ‘emotional museum’, capable of being at the same time:

- ◆ **a museum of emotions**, a unique and extraordinary treasure trove of impressions, sensations, suggestions, wonders; a

magical, special place, absolutely unique and not reproducible elsewhere, which communicates at the highest cultural and disciplinary levels starting also – and first of all – from amazement, with an ability to surprise, to excite the imagination, to push every visitor to the pleasure of observation, to critical attitude and questioning, to awaken curiosity, creativity, memory, dream and imagination; emotion as the first engine of every cognitive process;

- ◆ **a museum for all tastes**, which solicits new forms of physical, sensory, aesthetic and intellectual experience open to the most diverse audiences, in which each visitor has the opportunity to find their own level of interest, their mode and time of visit and the keys to interpretation that are most congenial to them;
- ◆ **a museum for all the senses**, which is not only to look at but also to touch, listen to, taste, feel, smell, inhale, live: a multisensory, sensitive space-time that breathes, pulsates, vibrates, resonates – **without an excess of technology** – but rather working by subtraction to give each visitor time, space, the pleasure to imagine, taste, rejoice in their emotions;



Natural History Museum of Florence, Stories of a Whale. Photos: Lorenzo Greppi

◆ **a museum without limits**, at the same time centrifugal and centripetal, that refuses to lock itself up to protect and defend its physical perimeter and its institutional fortress, but projects outwards, towards the outside, its fourth extra-mural dimension, marking the trace and the cognitive plot of a series of openings, windows, breaches, real and virtual explorations to and from the territory, the outside, the otherness, the present and the future: a museum that accepts the challenge of contemporaneity, that puts itself and its prestige at stake in order to explore – from its privileged point of view – the great contradictions, problems and open questions of our societies today and tomorrow;

◆ **a welcoming museum**, which takes the whole of its public into account, to offer, on the one hand, a collective, shared participatory dimension of great sociality, and, on the other, an individual, more intimate, confidential presence of secret complicity: a space-time in which everyone can feel at the same time ‘at home’ and ‘at the heart’ of a public institution, open, accessible, participatory. Where ‘the Museum’, with the article that precedes the capital letter on the facade, becomes ‘my museum’, capable of combining the possessive adjective ‘my’ with the institutional, public and social concept inherent in the noun ‘museum’. An ‘emotional museum’ that excites and fascinates its audience as well as the various professional actors who contribute



Musée de la Résistance Nationale (MRN), Champigny-sur-Marne (F). 1. The invasion; 2. The wall of gunfire; 3 The first clandestine glances. Photos: Lorenzo Greppi

to its design, implementation and management.

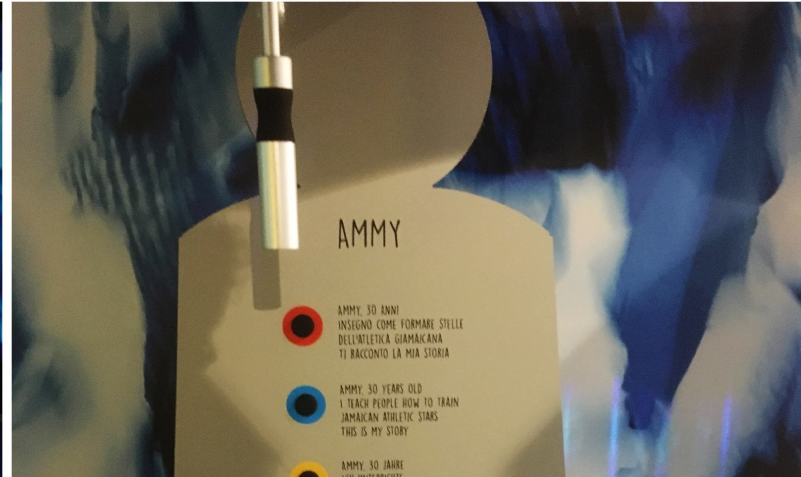
A museum conceived as a great emotional journey between imagery and imagination: an initiatory journey of stories and geography, external and mental, that starts from the power of the images on display to stimulate each visitor by leveraging the enormous potential of their imagination.

A journey, however, does not admit tricks or shortcuts, but rather imposes a pact of solidarity and trust between the museum and its visitors: a deep understanding that is not built on slogans or artificial artefacts but is based on a practice of truth, correctness, consistency between cultural, disciplinary and pedagogical content and its transcription in

scenographic terms. A pact that – precisely in this period of social distancing, of estrangement, of loss of identity references – is becoming stronger and stronger, more urgent...

3 The third question that I intend to answer every time I tackle a project – even with all possible attention, precautions and doubts – is **‘what attitudes, what tools should I use to stage emotions?’**

This starts first of all from integrated multidisciplinary practice – between scenography, design, graphics and communication, audiovisual and interactive systems, sound and sound spatialisation – that leads to the vision of a complex set-up: a multimedia, interactive, immersive, three-dimensional,



MUSE - Museum of Science of Trento, Italy. "GENOMA UMANO. What makes us unique" exhibition. Photos: Lorenzo

experiential display, where the goal is not so much to make BEAUTIFUL scenography, but rather to create EFFECTIVE scenography, at the service of the content and the poetics of emotion. This happens within a multiple attitude model that, in my work, privileges:

- ◆ the aspects of **communication**, in the choice of a relevant vocabulary of forms, elements, instruments and techniques of interaction integrated in the setting, between sounds and silences, lights and shadows, pauses and sequences, solids and voids;
- ◆ the aspects of the **micro-arrangement**, in the selection and positioning of the single object according to its expressive and narrative strength, its ability to participate with its own singular voice in a great polyphonic, choral and plural tale;

- ◆ the aspects of sound and **sonorisation**, which I insist on a lot because of their ability to create emotions in an absolutely direct and immediate way and which concern the choice of music, as well as reproduction technologies. Here, again, it is not a matter of creating pleasant background music but, much more, of developing effective sound atmospheres, appropriate for the overall story and capable of achieving their own acoustic dimension;
- ◆ the aspects of **time**, in the development of a way of visiting that is articulated through a succession of three moments in time, which must integrate and support each other in the best way.



Musée Olympique, Lausanne, Running after Time. Photo: Lorenzo Greppi

Where:

* the first is the time of amazement, **emotional intelligence**, disorientation and decontextualisation – in practice, the time of falling in love: I, the visitor, go through the rooms, I do not receive any rational cognitive information, I do not read or observe anything specific, but things, objects, shapes, colours, lights, sounds and their atmospheres, come towards me and arouse my emotions;

* the second is the time of **analysis**, the time of love: emotions capture me, stimulate me, give me the desire to investigate, to try to understand, to go further, to deepen, to learn, to know: I, the visitor, slow down and linger;

* the third is the time of **knowledge**, of intimacy, of complicity, the time of love ecstasy: I, the visitor, stop. Time suspends and comes to a halt, time and space no longer exist. I am lost in an emotional museum

Emotions, stories and storytelling for audience engagement strategies

- Antonia Silvaggi

“We want stories. We love stories. Stories keep us alive. Stories that come from a place of deep insight and with a knowing wink to their audience, and stories that tease us into examining our own feelings and beliefs, and stories that guide us on our own path. But most importantly, stories told as stories.”

Joe Lambert, Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community

“It is important for leaders to know their stories; to get them straight; to communicate them effectively.”

Howard E. Gardner, Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership

I graduated in archaeology. To be more precise, I specialised in prehistory. I was totally fascinated by that part of our history, the scientific approach you had to apply to understand evidence.

In 2015, I finally had the chance to go on holiday to France, to the Périgord area – a paradise for archaeologists like me. You cannot visit the real Lascaux Cave, for conservation reasons, but the reproduction is amazing – breathtaking. We also visited an interesting museum, in which there was a reproduction of the famous Lucy (*Australopithecus Afarensis*). My friends were fascinated by the story, but an hour in the museum was too

much for them; the display of the objects was too academic and didn't really engage them.

This left me thinking. Of course the display resonated with me – I have spent years studying and trying to understand different flint-knapping techniques such as Levallois, or tools like stone scrapers, points and spearheads, trying to identify the different typologies and techno-cultural areas. Often, museums are only seen as places of learning, and they think that their role is to present factual data. However, they should also aim to trigger our curiosity and enable us to discover something unexpected about ourselves. How can we improve people's experiences of museums? How can we tell diverse and



District Six Museum – inside and museum guide. Photos: @Storyaproject

meaningful stories that resonate with different audiences? We hear a lot about storytelling in museums – it has become a buzzword – but I believe it is a powerful tool for museums, because, as Nina Simon argues: “*The stories that we should tell aren’t just about someone making a link to an institution. They are about making connections that unlock meaning*”.¹

Telling stories is an innate human instinct. We have always told stories to make sense of the world around us. Recent research suggests that the human mind was shaped for

story, so that it could be shaped by story.² We are social beings and thrive on connection with others.³ Our minds are designed to learn and gather information from observing the actions and emotions of our fellow humans through the mirror neuron system, which is a group of specialised neurons that ‘mirror’ the actions and behaviour of others. This aspect of brain function allows us to understand and anticipate the actions, movements and intentions of other people. Narrative thinking is the ability to perceive and create

¹ Nina Simon (2016) *The Art of Relevance*, Museum 2.0, p.22

² See Jonathan Gottschall (2012) *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, for example.

³ There are many resources on mirror neurons including Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal*



District Six Museum – inside the museum. Photo @Storyaproject

connections between sequences of actions and feelings.⁴

In a world in which we are bombarded with information, stories hold our attention. In a recent study on oxytocin, the chemical connected with care, connection and empathy, it was found that oxytocin is released in our brains when we encounter a good story.⁵ Paul Zak, who conducted the study, tells us:

“Oxytocin is incredibly important to storytelling because, as we know, stories change our behaviour. When our brains encounter a good story, oxytocin is released,

causing us to feel empathy. The empathy is what causes us to want to take action”⁶

According to Zak, a story must have a dramatic arc in order to facilitate the audience’s emotional connection to the characters. When a story is told well, we recognise it, and our minds synchronise with the characters in the story, regardless of the topic.

The District Six Museum in Cape Town, South Africa, which unfortunately is now under threat of closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic, is a great example of a museum

⁴ See Elisabetta Falchetti (2014), 'Dal pensiero narrativo allo storytelling digitale in museo', in Da Milano e Falchetti, *Storie per i musei. Musei per le storie. Storytelling digitale e musei scientifici inclusivi: un progetto europeo*, Nepi, Vetrani, p.36

⁵ See Paul J. Zak, Why Inspiring Stories Make Us React: The Neuroscience of Narrative <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4445577/#b15-cer-02-15> (Consulted October 2020)

⁶ Paul J. Zak, Why is Storytelling Biologically Important for Survival? <https://www.convinceandconvert.com/podcasts/episodes/why-is-storytelling-biologically-important-for-survival/> (Consulted October 2020)



District Six Museum – outside the museum. Photo @Storyproject

that utilises storytelling to enhance visitors' experiences. The museum was developed as part of a plan to commemorate the community, who were uprooted from that neighbourhood and had their homes destroyed during the Apartheid government of South Africa. The museum exhibits objects belonging to former District Six residents and these objects are used to tell their stories. The museum's guides are people local to the area, who lived through the Apartheid era.

When I visited the museum, I found the stories told with the use of these objects to be compelling for a number of reasons. They seemed authentic and personal, told from the storyteller's point of view, and about things that happened either to the storyteller or to

someone connected to them. They were clearly told and well-paced, and seemed to have clear purpose and context. The characters and imagery used were detailed, enabling audience members to clearly imagine what was being described. The stories expressed conflict, vulnerability and achievement – things anyone can relate to – so the stories resonated.

Katie Markham, writing about the District Six Museum says 'viewing the photographs on display in District Six's 'Interior' section is an intensely intimate and moving experience which often provokes extreme emotional reactions in museum visitors.'⁷ Markham follows Professor Roy Ballantyne in calling

⁷ Katie Markham (2017) 'Two-dimensional engagements: photography, empathy and interpretation at District Six Museum', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Routledge, p.10.

District Six a site of “*hot interpretive experience*”, saying:

*“There is no doubt that the arrangement of its photographs on the ‘Interior’ display are designed to elicit deep levels of emotional identification in visitors, which have the potential to be transformed into empathy. The ‘Interior’ wall also provides a crucial orientation for first time visitors to the museum, where scenes familiar to most visitor such as the jubilant snapshots of weddings, birthdays and religious holidays greet the viewer, providing a universal emotional anchorage from which identification with District Six residents can emerge.”*⁸

Stories engage us and make us more empathetic, so can be a force for transformation. That's why museums should invest more in telling their own stories, those of their staff and communities. Most of the world's museums are small, but they all have stories linked to their collections that could be used to make connections and unlock meaning. All have communities that are waiting to be engaged. It's important to make the shift from seeing visitors as passive audiences to more active communities who feel a sense of belonging and believe that they themselves can make a contribution. In order to make this shift happen, we need a particular kind of leadership; a more inclusive one that creates space for conversations and the building of a sense of community and belonging inside the organisation and outside, where emotions are nourished and welcomed.

In organisations that have a strong orientation towards their audiences, it is

particularly evident that storytelling can draw visitors and partners, as well as employees and collaborators, into a ‘circle of belonging’ created by the sharing of a story and its values of reference. Stories encourage our empathy and lead us to engage in emotional relationships with others. They are an element of lifelong learning and enhance knowledge acquisition.

In a study I worked on we drew the following conclusions: The museum as an institution is increasingly called upon to redefine and re-elaborate itself as a collective body, fed by the communities that support it (local citizens and all the cultural and scientific communities that it interacts with). As a place for the construction of communities and the shared planning of cultural proposals, the museum gauges its value on the basis of the quantity and quality of the relationships it is able to establish.⁹ The current global crisis has raised greater awareness of the importance of building more meaningful relationships with our local communities and not just relying on tourism to bring in visitors.

In this time of transition, digital innovation and storytelling provide an infrastructure that multiplies the opportunities for exchange, accessibility and participation. In a study that was published as part of the Mu.SA project, Domenico Sturabotti and Romina Surace write:

“Since the aim is to facilitate a new way to create long-term involvement in the public, the museum of the future will opt for a virtuous mix of direct storytelling (the museum narrates itself) and indirect

⁸ Markham, 'Two-dimensional engagements', p.10.

⁹ A. Silvaggi, F. Pesce & R. Surace Museum of the Future, Digital Skills for Change and Innovation in Italy. Retrieved from http://www.project-musa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Museum-of-the-future-Italy_eng.pdf

storytelling (visitors narrate the museum), in favour of a participative storytelling. Individuals, both the public and its staff, are encouraged to create their own stories and connections with the museum itself and the history it represents.”¹⁰

Amid the current turmoil, storytelling as a key competence can support museum professionals to become agents of change. The value of a museum is no longer seen to be determined solely by the value of the collections it hosts, but also by the value of the relationships it can establish within society, with other institutions and with all kinds of stakeholders.

Therefore, the focus for museums should be more on the story. By this I mean more on taking care of the relationship with the people around us, finding new ways to connect with them. For instance, in a project called Parch with schools in different cities, Palermo, Roma, and Favara (Sicily), we saw that many children did not have access to digital infrastructure. We organised ourselves; we sent a ‘surprise box’ with different gadgets that children could use at home. In another project, we organised online meetings to check in with our participants, to see how they were doing during these challenging times.¹¹ We need what Melissa Dibbles calls “*radical intent, discontinuity from previous practice and shift in assumptions*”.¹²

Digital technology is a means to reach out to different audiences and, with the help of new technologies, we have more means at our disposal to tell stories. This presents museums with a great opportunity. Digital technology is first and foremost an instrument of social participation and, with the right kind of leadership, it can support museums in offering cultural programmes that involve a greater degree of sharing and participation. Used in combination, this can be a powerful tool and can bring institutions closer to the different communities that gravitate around them.

¹⁰ Domenica Sturabotti & Romina Surace, Museum of the Future: Insights and reflections from 10 international museums. Retrieved from <http://www.project-musa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/MuSA-Museum-of-the-future.pdf>

¹¹ Antonia Silvaggi, Reflections during the Pandemic, Del Bimbo, A. Greppi, L. Mazzanti, P. Rosati, C. (2020) http://nemech.unifi.it/MuseiEmotivi_reports/MUSEIEMOTIVI_e_motivi_post_Covid_19.pdf

¹² European Conference – 5th episode: Tempestuous Times: the Crisis, Recovery and Change, WorkLab, Melissa Dibble <https://bit.ly/3p7ljQU>

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Use-case: transforming a museum network into an emotional approach

- Elisa Bruttini

“I cried in a museum in front of a painting by Gauguin, because I don’t know how he managed to paint a transparent pink dress. (...) I cried at the Louvre in front of the Nike of Samothrace. She had no arms, but she was so tall.”

James Elkins, Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings, 2001

Emotions and creativity vs habits and stereotypes

I have always been fascinated by James Elkins’ theory (strangely relevant to the current situation) on the more or less contagious illnesses that can affect museum visitors: they may feel ecstatic under the effects of Stendhal Syndrome, dazzled by being too close to beauty; or too distant and inadequate when struck by the malady of Mark Twain (not coincidentally a much more sanguine and concrete fellow than his French counterpart); or withdrawn, silent and inert in the case of those who, like the mythical Niobe, are left petrified and immobile (or perhaps they shed invisible tears), incapable of an emotional

reaction, concerned only with hollow theory – perhaps we art historians and museologists, impaired by professional prejudice?

Confessing this sensibility of mine, and my regret at having found it difficult to apply in practice, I could not help but be grateful for the opportunity to host the third edition of the *MuseiEmotivi* workshop series in one of the museums of the Fondazione Musei Senesi (FMS), the network that unifies and coordinates more than 40 museums spread throughout the territory of Siena.

The Accademia dei Fisiocritici Natural History Museum in Siena was chosen on the basis of a few meaningful elements: a



Accademia dei Fisiocritici Natural History Museum in Siena, Italy. Photo: Bruno Bruchi, FMS

collection that is still in part displayed in its original 19th-century layout, making the place a sort of ‘museum of itself’; a museum rooted in the history of the city and the territory as the context from which its objects come, and one particularly geared towards narration; an institution committed to a mission of scientific research and education, with a physical and symbolic value built on people (scholars, donors, etc.). The workshop provided an opportunity for shared reflection on how a museum portrays itself regarding its various layers of history, in a dialogue open to contemporaneity and its issues, and to the use of innovative technologies.¹ Beyond the stimulating occasion for the hosting museum,

which engendered innovative programmes that are still running, the first follow-up to that experience was the seminar *Emotions and technologies for an inclusive museum* (15 October 2018), organised by the University Museum System (SIMUS) in collaboration with FMS, focusing on questions of cultural accessibility.²

More specifically, the Sienese edition of Emotional Museums initiated a new period and an innovative approach to policies to enhance the museum system – composite arrangements balanced between the need for institutional supervision and respect for the specificity of each individual museum, all very different in terms of history, vocation,

¹ *MuseiEmotivi* was held in Siena from 30 March to 1 April 2017: for further details see: <http://nemech.unifi.it/portfolio-posts/musei-emotivi-terza-edizione/>

² The seminar was organised with the contribution of the Region of Tuscany within the sphere of the 2017-2018 Integrated Plan for Culture <http://www.simus.unisi.it/it/2018/10/04/emozioni-e-tecnologie-per-un-museo-inclusivo/>; <http://www.simus.unisi.it/it/2018/10/25/emozioni-e-tecnologie-per-un-museo-inclusivo-un-seminario-sui-temi-dellaccessibilita-e-dellinclusionemuseale/>



Accademia dei Fisiocritici Natural History Museum in Siena, Italy 3rd edition MuseiEmotivi, March – April 2017. Photos: @fisiocritici

geographical location and management. Shortly thereafter, thanks in part to contacts made through the workshop (or rather, friendships, because those of us who work in this sphere cannot help but engage in earnest, heartfelt exchanges with colleagues), FMS had the opportunity to participate in the Erasmus+ *Connect* training project on the themes of audience development and audience engagement.³ So we began to develop tools to put into effect a process of change – not immediate, of course, but gradually shared with the museums and their various stakeholders, linked to developing events and the new role that museums were taking on as the current crisis manifested.

A few projects had already proven to provide fertile terrain for experimentation in that sense. First and foremost, there is the digital eco-museums platform, a mapping of tangible and intangible heritage in the Siena area, created by facilitating encounters with residents and with the support of scholars. Particularly noteworthy examples are the case of the Contradas (neighbourhood associations) of Siena, about which residents themselves produced all of the content, interpreting the living memories of their places; and various ‘emotional’ location files, with sounds of the autumnal landscape, GoPro videos of runs around medieval city walls, and intergenerational and intercultural conversations with various members of communities.⁴ Some of these

³ The project, coordinated on the Italian end by Fondazione Fitzcarraldo and MeltingPro, and its relative materials, are available at www.connectingaudiences.eu

⁴ The initial seven sites, one for each of the territorial areas of the province of Siena, were brought into the web portal <https://eco.museisenesi.org>, in light of the Region of Tuscany’s redefinition of optimal tourism areas. The project, chosen within the sphere of the International Council of Museums’ Musei e Paesaggi Culturali survey for the International Conference Milano 2016, was carried out in collaboration with the Anthropology Department of the Università di Siena.



Accademia dei Fisiocritici Natural History Museum in Siena, Italy 3rd edition MuseiEmotivi, March – April 2017. Photo: @fisiocritici

communities had already lent a social meaning to their museum, in a sort of mutual aid arrangement – for example, we have the Te.Po.Tra.Tos., the museum dedicated to the Teatro Povero (People’s Theatre) of Monticchiello, which serves as a distribution point for medical prescriptions and protective masks for villagers, and a gathering place for young people. Newly conceived museum spaces also benefit from this type of imprinting: the Archeodrome of Poggibonsi, a late-medieval village reconstructed using ancient building techniques ‘live’ on Facebook, offers living history initiatives and reenactments revolving around public archeology, a sort of time-travel expedition on a hilltop overlooking one of the provinces of Siena’s most industrial towns; and the Museum of Mercury in the Mining Park of Abbadia San Salvatore, designed by Studio Azzurro, which, in addition to interactive multimedia content in which visitors are immersed, explores the contentious chronicle of a community that, after the closure of the

mine, first rejected and then rediscovered its history; and finally, the Museum of the Landscape in Castelnuovo Berardenga, soon to reopen after renovations designed by Lorenzo Greppi, which, in line with the Florence Convention, invites visitors to reinterpret relationships between the landscape and human living and working spaces, stimulated by everyday objects (a window, a bread-storage sideboard, a pair of binoculars) and an Archive of Memory that contains documents on the Chianti landscape. Memory and its arduous re-emergence is also the focus of workshops for people with dementia, part of the Tuscan Museums and Alzheimer’s project, in which the Musei Senesi network participates in a project, Emotions at the Museum, in which collections become a pretext for participatory narration and stimulate reminiscences.

Following this path we’ve chosen, it can become complicated to decide – and it’s a choice the institution cannot avoid making – in what audience we want to arouse these

museum emotions: that of resident communities or potentially habitual visitors, who will testify to and legitimise the relevance and sustainability required of such institutions today,⁵ or visitors who are just passing through, the presumed quarry of tourist marketing. Perhaps the reality is simpler and less poetic than Elkins' categories: the visitors who enter a small-to-medium-size museum like those scattered throughout the province of Siena are already enamored of the landscape, already enchanted by the romantic streets of a medieval village, often a bit dazed by a sip of wine – art lovers predisposed to the 'experience'. But it is difficult to assess the emotional added value that the museum offers in this suitcase full of souvenirs. And if we keep telling ourselves that a museum has to be a livable, everyday space, then how can we preserve the magic that is capable in itself of triggering authentic emotional reactions? Or, as in the best marriages, can habit leave room for a spark every now and then, and keep the (museum) love alive? Because one can fall in love with a museum (and also IN a museum), and miss it, too.

"The best thing about that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody'd move. (...) Nobody'd be different. The only thing that would be different would be you."

J.D. Salinger, The Catcher in the Rye, 1951

The new world: tests of resistance to the pandemic

In the months of lockdown, I like to think that some of us, and not only the museum-emotional types, felt a sense of nostalgia for the living culture that museums should exemplify every day. I'd like to think that the many Italian visitors who came to museums this summer were motivated in part by this renewed affection, cloaked in civic pride, and by the desire to return to a familiar rite. Those who work in the cultural sector fully comprehended the concept of *humanitas* that underpins literary studies, and the need for physical contact with their colleagues and the public and, in the case of museums, with artworks. A boundary had been put up for all of us, and each of us, opening the door again and opening our eyes anew, discovered we were different from before.

In February 2020, FMS, in line with its strategic revitalisation programme, had rejuvenated its institutional image, redesigning the logo, website and social network publishing plan, aiming to lend a solid identity to an institution that is by nature ethereal, but with a critical mass much greater than the sum of its parts, i.e. the individual museums it comprises. Hence the new catchphrase, "*one territory, many stories*", aimed at emphasising the uniqueness of a territory made up of a multitude of museums and people. Along with the rebranding, a relevant programme of events and projects had gotten underway, but the health emergency forced us to substantially rework it, considering the impracticability of any sort of public gathering, and to propose

⁵ I have borrowed these two key terms from Alessandro Bollo, current director of the Polo del '900 in Turin: see his release of *Il marketing della cultura*, Carocci, Rome, 2019.

digital alternatives, still based on storytelling, to continue disseminating the energy of our museums without quashing their initiative.

First of all, we went ahead with the development and implementation of the feature *FMStories*⁶ (one of several pretexts for incorporating the cursive S of our acronym), conceived as a series of short narrations, often linked to specific celebrations, ‘deviating’ from the object of the collection to a more engaging perspective tied to everyday life.⁷ Then we came up with the social media challenge #almuseocomeacasa (at the museum as at home),⁸ which was easy to set in motion given the widespread ready access to apps, launched with a video reiterating Orhan Pamuk’s idea of small museums as a new cultural paradigm, close to home and familiar: we asked our followers to publish their most treasured, venerated domestic object, presented with the reverence of a work of art, perhaps with a few words about the motive for their affection.⁹ It was a form of virtual museum crowdsourcing from which to create an album, the catalogue of an ideal, collective museum. The last experiment was the fundraising campaign *Un biglietto per*

domani (A ticket for tomorrow),¹⁰ offering free entry to the museum of the giver’s choice up to June 2021 in exchange for a donation today. The campaign was faced with several challenges: the technical management of donations that had to be transmuted into tickets to be delivered to the museums in question; the concept of a museum visit in the company of others after our distressing period of solitude (“You choose who to go to the museum with! You can go with your partner, your family, your friends or whoever you want.”); and finally, the participatory, narrative approach appealing to each person’s responsibility to support cultural heritage utilising four characters, one for each type of museum (art, archeology, science and memory) to communicate topical content (the house, schools, fake news, lessons of the past) and invite people to return to a museum that finds meaning only in the physical presence of its audience.¹¹ Last but not least, our website has recently published a new community section intended to permanently host these latter two projects, as well as a guestbook where visitors can leave comments on their visit, and a series of surveys to

⁶ See <https://www.museisenesi.org/stories>

⁷ It is no coincidence that in the midst of the lockdown, a popular post was one on the sea-silk gloves – not exactly ‘personal protective equipment’, but prized accessories often given to sovereigns as gifts – from the Accademia dei Fisiocritici Natural History Museum in Siena.

⁸ See <https://www.museisenesi.org/notizia/2020/al-museo-come-a-casa-la-sfida-social>

⁹ For the ‘stories’ we were inspired by the Pinacoteca di Brera’s website, and shortly thereafter, Brera seems to have taken some cues from FMS with a project called *A museum at your house*. See Orhan Pamuk, *L’innocenza degli oggetti*, Italian version, Einaudi 2012.

¹⁰ See <https://www.museisenesi.org/notizia/2020/un-biglietto-per-domani>

¹¹ Among them is the phrase corresponding to Giuseppe Cassioli (depicted in a painting by his father, Amos, conserved at the Museo Cassioli in Asciano): “*We have been apart for too long, come and admire beauty with me. With wonder in your eyes like a child’s.*”; and Pirro Maria Gabbriellini, founder of the Accademia dei Fisiocritici, who says: “*I investigate reality to distinguish the true from the false. When we meet, I shall reveal the secrets of nature to you.*” These characters are depicted in an institutional way, without cartoon-style speech bubbles, so to make them a bit more ‘pop’, we invited FMS’ Instagram followers to suggest ironic phrases.

analyse qualitative and quantitative data and systematically collect the various suggestions.¹²

In this period that seems a sort of threshold between two epochs in which our expectations are calculated in the short term and with great uncertainty, and as cultural programming correspondingly shortens its project timelines, the challenge for these resilient museums lies in maintaining a delicate equilibrium. Perhaps the digital intensity of these months will once again give way to the 'analogical tradition', an almost historical return to the more human and thus more naturally empathic and emotional approach.

Perhaps this will also be a way to make audiences the focal point and to sustain the phenomenon of change that had already begun in museums: in offering new enticements, it seems that in a certain sense the museum space must continue to be reassuring, something we want to be able to find always the same, the friend who knows when and when not to ask questions, how to respect a silence or break it with the right music, and who does not make us question ourselves in our fragility.

¹² FMS, as part of its regional '100 researchers for culture' contribution, hosts a graduate researcher engaged in monitoring audiences and creating a cultural observatory for the province of Siena.

Connected Audience 2019 – conference overview

- Judith Koke

In early April of 2019, some 160 people gathered in Berlin for the third Connected Audience Conference. Connected Audience is a group of professionals and academics interested in audience research and its application to audience experiences within cultural settings such as museums, theatres and concert halls. This three-day conference, organised by KulturAgenda and the Institute for Learning Innovation in collaboration with the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, offered keynote presentations, workshops and panel discussions revolving around the theme of *The Role of Emotions in Audience Engagement*.¹

Rather than a conference in which only experts presented ideas for consideration, the format of this conference was that of an interactive working group, comprising participants from 36 different countries who spent three days sharing knowledge and questions, and making meaning together.

The theme of the conference was supported by several keynote presentations.

Intentionally, the meeting kicked-off with a keynote presentation by neuropsychologist Dr. Maria Gendron of Yale University, designed to provide participants with an overview of the basic science of emotions. In addition to covering the basics, Dr. Gendron shared some of the latest neuropsychology research that she and internationally renowned emotion researcher Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett and colleagues have been conducting on the constructivist nature of affect and emotion.² This work speaks directly to the importance of understanding the life experiences visitors bring to our cultural sites, and how those experiences shape predictions about their current interactions and influence learning and engagement.

Other keynotes built on this topic. For example, a keynote by Dr. John H. Falk underscored that visitors come to museums to fulfill their own needs and bring different motivations that strongly shape their experiences and sense of fulfilment (or lack

¹ <https://www.ne-mo.org/news/article/nemo/connected-audience-conference-2019-programme-released.html>

² cf., Barrett, L. (2017). *How Emotions are Made*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

thereof!). One presentation by Paul Spies and Brinda Sommer of the Stadtmuseum Berlin focused on specific examples of the use of the emotions in designing exhibitions. Dr. Sheila Watson's keynote called on cultural organisations, and museums in particular, to re-examine their sense of academic objectivity and to recognise and incorporate emotion as part of visitor learning and memory-making. Both Dr. Falk and Dr. Watson revisit many of these ideas in the following pages.

A series of workshops and labs were held to allow participants to actively explore methods for researching, engaging and impacting visitor emotions. Examples included techniques for mapping audiences' emotional experiences, training front-of-house staff to understand why visitors come to our sites and how to best support their visit, the use of theatre for facilitating emotional experiences, and strategies for building empathy among visitors. Other examples included a close study of the emotional power of a first impression (see the following piece by Owen), and a session on future ideas for best practices in audience research related to emotions and learning.

Panel presentations were very short (seven minutes) in order to maximise opportunities for small group discussion. Topics ranged from museums' role in building empathy, to the use of technology in tracking and measuring emotions, to presentations on the emotional consequences of presenting difficult topics and confronting users with challenging narratives.

Many reviewed important work already happening in the area of emotions. For example the Minneapolis Institute of the Arts is collaborating with social scientists, artists,

educators, and others to research and explore practices for fostering empathy and global understanding through the power of art and has developed a Center for Empathy and the Visual Arts. For more on this topic see Karleen Gardner's article below.

Collectively, these three days of presentations, workshops and hallway conversations built new international relationships and inspired many of us to continue this important work. In the following pages you will read a synopsis of some key conversations from that conference.





PROGRAMME SUMMARY

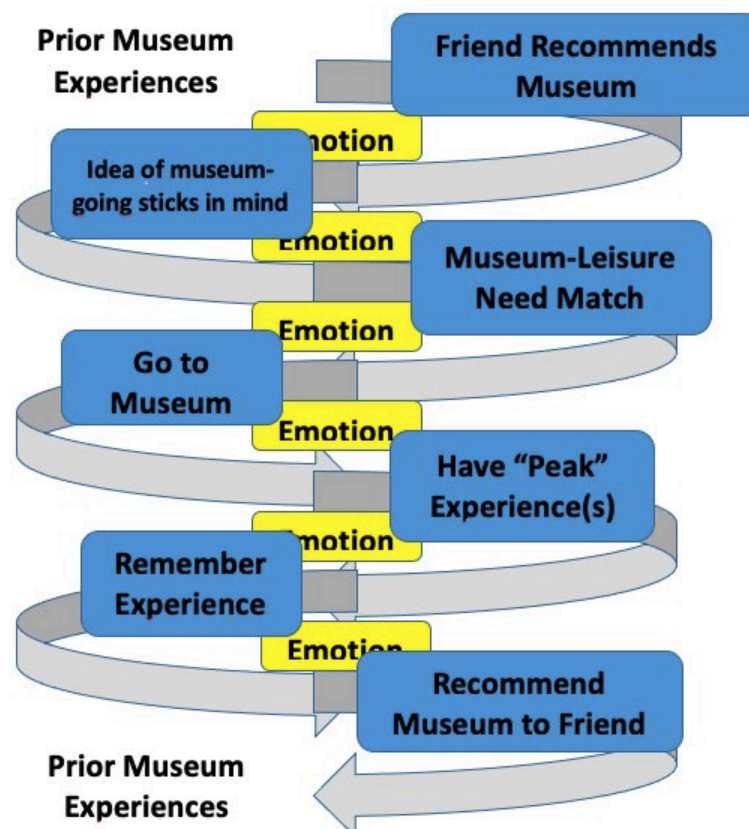
- **KEYNOTE: Maria Gendron** (US), Yale University - *"Emotions and learning"*
Sheila Watson (UK), Leicester University, Museum Studies - *"Museums as emotional places"*
- **KEYNOTE: Paul Spies** (DE) and **Brinda Sommer** (DE), Stadtmuseum Berlin - *"Connecting the audience"*
- **KEYNOTE: John Falk** (US), Institute for Learning Innovation - *"Emotions and museum-going"*
- **Anja Schaluschke** (DE) Museum for Communication - *"Get connected"*
- **IMPORTANT BUT DIFFICULT STORIES**
 - Demetra Socratous** (CY), Drama Facilitator - *"Impact of the use of drama with young children"*
 - Bernd Holtwick** (DE), DASA - *"Dive in deep! Exploring the benefits of storytelling in exhibitions"*
 - Joe Hancock** (UK), Burn the Curtain - *"The role of movement, magic and shared experiences in cultural understanding and engagement"*
- **THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN VISITOR**
 - Marie Hobson** (UK), Natural History Museum - *"Biodiversity"*
 - Katerina Mavromichali** (GR), Archeologist - *"An innovative outreach programme and the aesthetic third"*
 - Ewa Goodman** (BE), House of European History - *"The role of emotions in visitor engagement and satisfaction"*
- **APPROACHING DIFFICULT NARRATIVES AND DECISION MAKING**
 - Jane Redlin** (DE), Museum of European Cultures - *"The role of emotions and cultural experiences"*
 - Areti Damala** (FR), Hellenic Open University - *"Scaffolding difficult heritage narratives"*
 - Martin Brandt Djupdræt** (DK), Den Gamle By - *"Let the decision makers do the audience research"*
- **CAN MUSEUMS HELP PEOPLE BE MORE EMPATHIC?**
 - Laura Dravniece** (LV), Latvian National Museum of Art - *"Let's be friends"*
 - Karleen Gardner** (US), (Minneapolis Institute of Art - *"Fostering empathy through the visual arts"*
 - Rachel Mackay** (UK), Kew Palace - *"Madness of King George"*
- **AUDIENCE RESEARCH FORUM** with **John Falk** (US) & **Judy Koke** (US), Institute for Learning Innovation
 - Elif Gokcidem** (US), **Orna Cohen** (DE) and **Thomas Rockwell** (US), Dialogue Social Enterprise - *"Empathy building through emotions"*
 - Tom Owen** (US) & **Diane Lochner** (US), PGAV-Destination - *"Designing for emotions"*
 - Christiane Birkert** (DE), Jewish Museum Berlin - *"Visitor experience mapping"*
 - Irene Knava** (AT), Audiencing - *"The importance of training front of house staff"*
 - Katharina Wenzel** (DE) & **Friederike Busch** (DE) Deutsches Theater - *"Theatre - more than a stage"*
- **EMOTION LAB** with **Lisa Baxter** (UK) & **Philippe Brasseur** (BE), *"The Experience Business - An exploratory, experiential exercise in emotional tuning-in and design"*
- **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH EMOTIONS**
 - Emma Morioka** (UK), Historic Royal Palaces - *"Transforming the past: the role of emotions in the audience experience"*
 - Irina Mihalache** (CA), University of Toronto - Museum Studies - *"The state of 'emotions' in contemporary museum dining: food as disconnect"*
 - Miriam Wenzel** (DE), Jewish Museum Frankfurt - *"Experiencing jewish culture with all senses"*
- **HEARING SENSATIONS, MEASURING IMPACT**
 - Martin Tröndle** (DE), Zeppelin University - *"Concurrent session from mapping the museums experience to measuring the concert experience"*
- **Kerstin Glasow** (AT), Wiener Konzerthaus - *"Creating an emotional brand: re-positioning the Wiener Konzerthaus"*
- **Jana Marks** (DE), Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg - *"The meaning of emotions for experiencing interactive exhibitions"*
- **INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY**
 - Ludovico Solima** (IT), Second University of Naples - *"Games and emotional engagement"*
 - Simone Eick** (DE) & **Katie Heidsiek** (DE), German Emigration Center Bremerhaven - *"Digital strategies to present emotions alongside facts and figures"*
 - Anna Kovaleva** (RU), Boris Yeltsin Presidential Museum - *"Shaping hearts, enlighting minds, winning loyalty"*
- **FISHBOWL DISCUSSION** with **Maria Gendron**, **Martin Tröndle**, **Sheila Watson**, **John Falk**, **Elisabeth Tietmeyer** & **You** *"Creating emotions in cultural experiences - what are the ethical boundaries"*

The role of emotions in museum-going

- John H. Falk

What motivates people to visit museums? What determines when and why museum visitors perceive that they have peak experiences? What do people remember about their museum experience weeks and months after a visit, and why? Although historically these three big questions have been seen as unrelated, they are in fact all tightly interconnected. As shown in the figure

below, the museum experience turns out to be not linear but cyclical, with emotions playing a critical role at EVERY stage. In order to understand both this figure and the role of emotion it is necessary to understand a few basics about emotions.



Understanding emotions

People have been studying emotions for a long time, but current understandings of emotions have undergone a significant revolution over the past several years – both in understanding exactly what they are as well as an enhanced appreciation for their central role in all human thoughts and behaviours. Although emotions were once thought to be primarily a biological/physiological phenomenon, which in turn created a mental state with thoughts, feelings, behavioural responses and a degree of pleasure or displeasure,¹ it is now appreciated that the biological/physiological processes and psychological/cognitive processes are co-involved and co-equal in importance. In fact, it turns out that emotional processing is not an occasional event, but rather a continuous, critical part of virtually ALL mental processing, including and particularly decision-making.²

This means that all decisions, all choices, ultimately involve and are largely determined by emotional considerations rather than primarily rational thought. This of course is not how we have traditionally thought about decision-making, but recent neuroscience research confirms that without emotions, we would never actually be able to make a decision.³ The basic process works as follows.

The mind assesses all new information for its relevance and importance, with the

‘salience networks’ of the brain acting as important filters for these assessments. Ultimately, those things that are judged to be directly relevant to the individual’s fundamental, self-related needs are considered to be highly salient and worthy of attention, and further processing continues; if not, they are ignored. Past experiences are particularly important in this process, as past satisfying/unsatisfying experiences create a template for future experiences, with expectations of satisfaction/dissatisfaction becoming largely self-fulfilling.

Thus, whenever a person encounters a new situation, they are predisposed to only engage with those things they have previously found satisfying. In addition, the person uses these expectations of what has previously been seen/tasted/felt as the basis for how this new thing will look/taste/feel; these preconceptions are so strong that they can even influence a person to believe that something is satisfying when it is not.⁴ Virtually all of this happens unconsciously (of course if someone is asked why they liked something, they will come up with a (rational) explanation even if they have no idea why they were really satisfied).⁵

Also fundamental is the fact that there are psychological and contextual aspects to emotions. Although people have long assumed that emotions are primarily biological and reflexive, recent research has shown that virtually all of the numerous emotion-driven ‘salience networks’ in our heads are actually

¹ Panksepp, J. (2005) *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

² See review in: Falk, J.H. (2018) *Born to Choose: Evolution, Self and Wellbeing*, London: Routledge.

³ Damasio, A.R. (1994) *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*, New York: Avon Books.

⁴ Panksepp, J. (2005) *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁵ Wegner, D.M. (2002) *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

‘learned’ and ‘constructed’ rather than purely innate.⁶ What this means is that how any two people emotionally react to a particular life event or choice is neither predictable nor always similar.

Every individual’s emotional responses are dependent upon that person’s unique lived experience; i.e., their cultural upbringing, social networks, past history, as well as the immediate context.⁷ For example, two individuals of the same age and socioeconomic background growing up in Paris are more likely to have similar emotional responses while standing in front of a painting by Monet than they would with someone who lacked those prior lived experiences.

However, even these two Parisians are likely to experience different emotional responses depending upon their own unique lived experience. In fact, even the same individual could have a different experience depending upon who they are with or why they are visiting. Such is the nature of learned/constructed, context-dependent behaviours.

From this very brief introduction, we can begin to see why I suggest that emotions play a critical role in every aspect of the museum experience. Below are some more specific details.

Before the visit

What all of the above means for the first question posed, ‘why do people visit museums?’, is that all museum-going decisions are actually emotion-driven, learned experiences. In order for a person to decide to visit a museum, they need to have learned, at some point in their life, that museums are places capable of positively supporting one or more fundamental self-related needs. In the absence of that primarily unconscious and emotional perception, no one would ever willingly visit a museum.

The way this process works for most people is something like the following. As a consequence of past experiences and word-of-mouth recommendations from friends and family, large numbers of people (but not all) think of museums as good places for satisfying particular leisure-related needs.

For example, many people think of museums as good places to go for positive family outings or as places that will help them satisfy their personal interests in art, history or science. Thus, when a person wakes up on a weekend day and begins to muse about how to spend their time that day, consciously or unconsciously, they begin to think about both what their leisure needs for that day might be and which places might best satisfy that need. Once they land on a particular leisure goal, like spending a nice day with the family, they then try to decide which of the various leisure options they are aware of might best allow them to fulfill that goal, such as a movie, a

⁶ cf., Barrret, L. (2017) *How Emotions are Made*, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

⁷ Barrett, L., Mequita, B. & Gendron, M. (2011) ‘Context in emotion perception’, *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(5), p.286-290.

museum or day at the park. This is when past experiences and word-of-mouth recommendations kick in. If a person recalls that their need(s) for that day might possibly be ‘best’ met by a museum visit, then voila, the decision pops into their mind that this is where I should go. It feels like a rational choice, but underlying it is a strong dose of ‘constructed’ emotion. Thus, the vast majority of museum visitors ‘decide’ to visit museums because they perceive that a museum visit will be a satisfying way to fulfill their self-related leisure-time needs.⁸

A wide assortment of researchers have attempted to enumerate what the various reasons/needs are that visitors seek to satisfy by visiting museums. Although a diversity of schemes have been developed for characterising these findings, all have largely converged on the same handful of basic reasons/needs.⁹ My own research on why people visit museums suggests the following seven major categories of visit motivation:¹⁰

* **Explorers:**

Visitors who are curiosity-driven with a generic interest in the content of the museum. They expect to find something that will grab their attention and fuel their learning.

* **Facilitators:**

Visitors who are socially motivated, whose visit is focused on primarily enabling the experience and learning of others in their accompanying social group.¹¹

* **Professional/hobbyists:**

Visitors who feel a close tie between the museum content and their professional or hobbyist passions. These individuals are typically motivated to visit by a desire to satisfy a specific content-related objective.

* **Experience seekers:**

Visitors who are motivated to visit because they perceive the museum as an important destination. Their satisfaction primarily derives from the mere fact of having ‘been there and done that’.

* **Rechargers:**

Visitors who are primarily seeking to have a contemplative, spiritual and/or restorative experience. They see the museum as a refuge from the work-a-day world and place where they can unwind while being surrounded by inspiring and beautiful things.

⁸ Falk, J.H. (2009) *Identity and the Museum Visit Experience*, Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press

⁹ For a summary of these, see Falk, J.H. (2009) *Identity and the Museum Visit Experience*, Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.

¹⁰ The validity of these categories have now been established by data from dozens of investigators across many dozen museums of all kinds, from every corner of the planet. For a review, see Falk, J.H. & Dierking, L.D. (2019) *Learning from Museums*, 2nd Edition, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

¹¹ A number of researchers have split my Facilitator category into two, with one type of being individuals facilitating children, e.g., parents or grandparents, and a second type being individuals supporting peers, e.g., friends or out-of-town visitors.

* **Respectful pilgrims:**

Visitors who are motivated to visit because they see the site as important or sacred. They visit out of a sense of duty and a desire to feel that, by visiting, they have honored the people or place represented.

* **Affinity seekers:**

Visitors who are primarily seeking to reaffirm their personal sense of self. They see the museum as a place that can support their desire to learn more about who they are, where they came from and how they, and people like themselves, have made a difference in the world.

At the museum

Once at the museum, visitors view exhibitions, talk to the people they arrive with, people-watch, and utilise shops and cafes. Of course, what a person specifically attends to/ does while at the museum depends upon where they go and what they see.

Typically, though, two key criteria tend to focus visitors' attention:

- (1) objects and exhibitions that directly support their entering self-related visit motivations, including things they have been told about, or have heard are worth seeing/doing; and
- (2) objects and exhibitions that, though potentially peripheral to their primary visit agendas, still deeply resonate with their prior interests and experiences.

Although what happens within the museum is never fully predictable, visitors frequently find experiences that help them satisfy their visit agendas particularly emotionally salient, e.g., the moment at the museum when a 'facilitator' parent really connects with their child or the moment when an 'explorer' suddenly discovers something that ignites their interest and satiates their curiosity. Visitors often consider such moments as 'peak experiences', which in turn significantly contribute to their sense of satisfaction with the visit. In fact, visitors who are successful at fulfilling their entering visit motivations in this way are highly likely to report that they had a very satisfying visit.

After the visit

Not only do 'peak experiences' enhance museum satisfaction, they also result in long-term memories. People remember experiences they find highly satisfying. The fact that virtually all museum visitors self-report having positive experiences and virtually all can recall and describe these positive experiences months and even years later, is a testament to the significant value and emotional salience of these types of visit experiences. These emotionally positive, memorable experiences are also exactly the kinds of things visitors share with others later, i.e., the experiences that result in positive word-of-mouth recommendations. In this way, past emotionally satisfying experiences drive future visits to museums.

Conclusions

The museum experience is anything but linear. Each step in the process feeds the next, and every step is mediated by emotions. Feelings, and not rational thought, drive visit decision-making, visitor satisfaction within the museum, and ultimately, long-term memories and future visits to museums.

Museum practitioners can apply these insights to inform and enhance practice. A better understanding of how emotions contribute to why people visit, why people behave the way they do when at the museum, and how and why positive in-museum experiences result in long-term memories and positive word-of-mouth recommendations, can lead to significant improvements in

several key museum activities, including, in particular, increased visitor satisfaction and a greater likelihood of repeat visits. These ideas can also provide insights into how museums might successfully encourage people without a museum-going history to visit museums in the first place. Every facet of the museum experience begins, and ends, with emotions.

Pauline Gandel Children's Gallery: Promotional Photoshoot: Melbourne Museum
© Joel Checklev - Tiny Empire Collective 2016 - Source: [Museums Victoria](https://www.museums.victoria.gov.au/)



Planning for emotions in museums

- Tom Owen

Is it safe to assume that emotions play a big role in the museum experience for visitors? Would anyone go to a museum for an emotionless experience? Of course not. We go for a wide variety of reasons, but we go “to satisfy a need”, according to John Falk, and those needs are emotional – social, aspirational, inspirational, affirming. Even when we think the motivation is about learning, emotion drives the decision to visit. “I want to learn because I feel empowered.” “I want my child to learn because I feel like a good parent.” “I want to feel awe from standing beside something extraordinary.” Almost by definition, museums exist because of emotions.

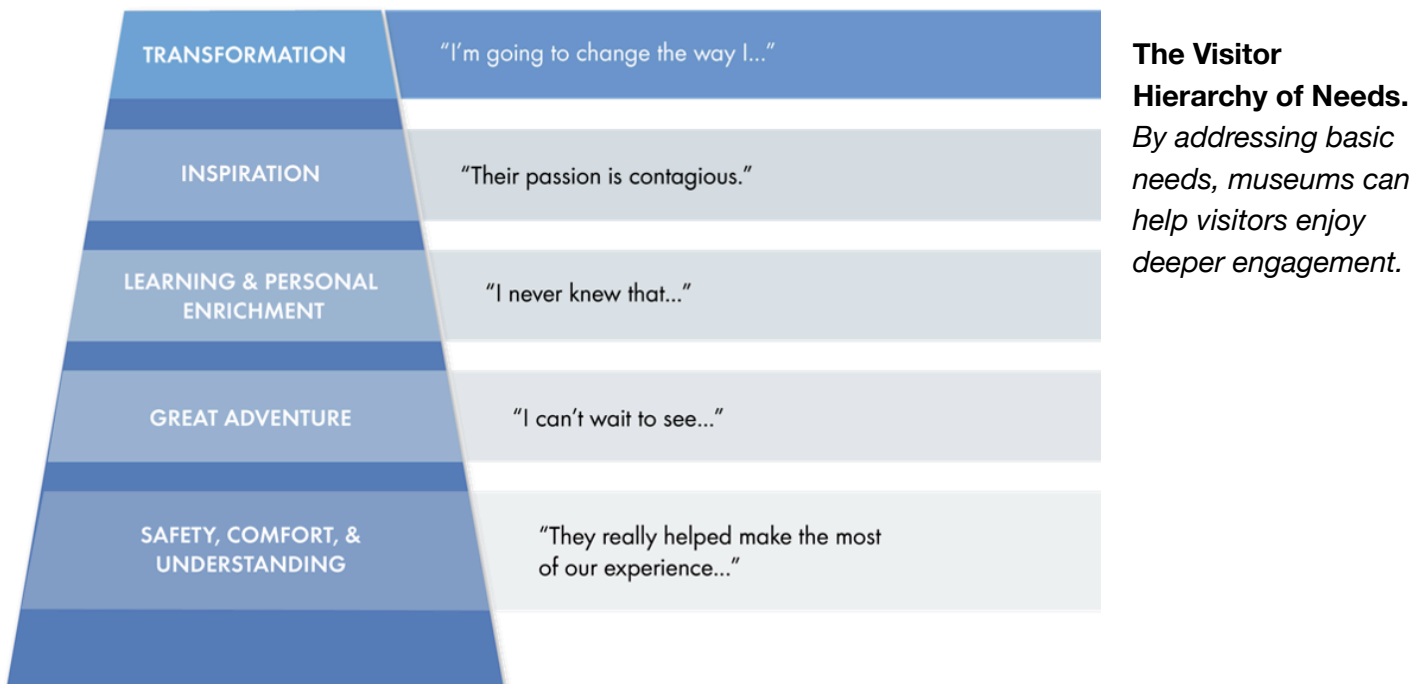
“The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusions.”
Neurologist Donald B. Calne.

In the book *How Emotions are Made*, neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barret describes how emotions are unique to each of us, constructed in our brains based on our individual experiences. This theory differs from

earlier ones that treated emotions as universal hardwired reactions. If every visitor will have a unique emotional response to the visitor experience, how can creators of museum experiences plan for emotions?

Abraham Maslow theorises that people must first fulfil their basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and safety before they can move up the *Hierarchy of Needs* to attain self-actualisation. It makes sense that a similar emotional process takes place with an individual’s museum experience.

Most museum professionals planning a new exhibition, programme, film or immersive experience aspire to transform the visitors that experience it. Will the visitor see the world a little differently because they were emotionally moved by a painting, awed by the diversity of life, inspired by observing a scientific phenomenon, or disgusted by the brutality of an historic object? To fully engage with what a museum experience has to offer, the visitor needs to be ‘ready’ and open to the possibilities, with distractions sufficiently managed to allow engagement.



Emotional planning strategies

Planning for visitor experiences in museums often involves extensive discussions of learning. Interpretive content is researched and written. Labels and interactive exhibits are developed. Education programmes are built, often based on standards of learning from school districts and departments of education. Museums are known as centres of informal learning.

When museums ask people why they visit, motivations like 'be with my kids', 'make a spiritual connection', or 'a friend told me to check it out' usually rank higher than learning. Learning is a big part of what differentiates museums from other places. But with other factors ranking higher – emotionally driven factors – it makes sense to focus as much effort on emotions as we do on learning.

Experience designers can make maps of visitor scenarios and be strategic about the placement of experience elements to create a rich emotional experience.

Lisa Feldman Barret explains why we can't expect to activate specific universal emotions like turning on a switch. But she also explains how emotions can be seen along a graph of arousal (low to high) and unpleasant to pleasant.

Designers use tools like this all the time. For example, stepping from a dark space into one with harsh bright light would startle most people and would be considered a high arousal/low pleasure experience – potentially appropriate to an exhibit about interrogation methods. By contrast, a gradual transition from bright exterior lighting to relatively dim gallery lighting can have a calming, low arousal effect. An emotional planning strategy

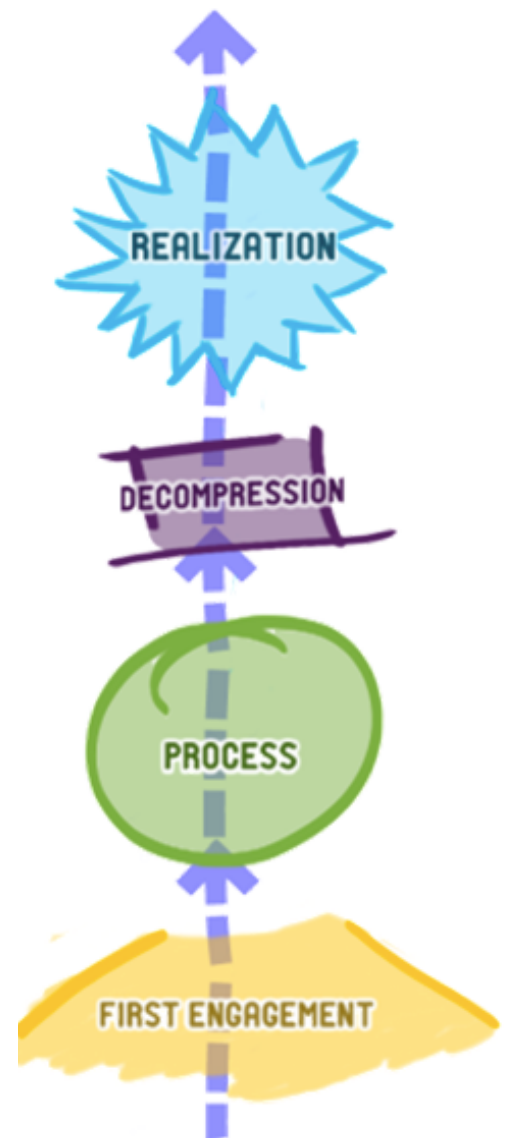
and diagram can be a valuable tool to shape the visitor experience toward desired goals.

Arguably the part of the museum experience that most warrants emotional planning is the arrival experience. First-time visitors in particular may not know what to expect. They often arrive with high-arousal – excitement about visiting, but maybe frustration with long lines, discomfort from heat or cold, or fatigue from travel. They will immediately begin to ‘size-up’ the place. Does it seem worth their time, effort and money? On first appearances does it exceed their expectations or fail to meet them.

The arrival experience often involves experience pain points – waiting in a queue, going through security, purchasing tickets with options for packages that visitors don’t understand, impatient family members, and the urgent need of a bathroom. Pain points can be mitigated, but typically not eliminated. Orchestrating arrival helps visitors navigate uncertainty and creates a positive impression that shapes the entire visit.

The departure experience is equally important to the arrival. It is the last impression made during the visit. For most museums, visitors exit where they came in, so the arrival and departure experiences must work together.

Most museums are not laid out in a linear path, meaning planners don’t know in what order visitors will experience exhibits, theatres, etc., except arrival and departure, amplifying the importance of these areas. If the museum experience was a movie, the script can be certain of the opening and closing scenes, but the scenes in the middle will change based on choices by the visitor.



Orchestrating Arrival:

- ◆ First engagement – an icon or other element to foreshadow good things beyond
- ◆ Process – security and ticketing
- ◆ Decompression – time to gather loved ones, personal items, and thoughts
- ◆ Realisation – stepping into the moment.



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This structure cycles visitors through the hierarchy of needs. Safety, comfort and understanding is required before ascending to transformation. When a visitor exits an experience where they might have engaged deeply, they come back to a moment of ‘what next’, which is often driven by hunger, a bathroom break, a time check and a map check. An emotional map can account for these cycles and help visitors navigate them.

Hospitality may be the most important of all in emotional planning. *Oxford Languages* defines it as “*the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers*”. Hospitality is above all a cultural requirement. Museums must prioritise hospitality to make it succeed. Even seemingly simple acts of hospitality such as a front door greeter require planning and infrastructure. A good host anticipates and plans for the needs of their guests.

In the United States, people of colour, especially African Americans, were historically not welcome at many museums. Museums

can be intimidating to anyone with little or no experience visiting, so exclusion perpetuates. Planning should include ways to welcome all visitors, but with extra emphasis on first-time visitors and anyone less familiar with the museum or museums in general.

Museums are inherently sensory experiences. Designers use lighting, music, sound effects and video to add drama and impact to museum experiences. Other techniques include surprise, intentional congestion, loud crashes or countless other ways to make experiences memorable. For topics such as the interpretation of gravity at a science centre, dramatic elements can make the topic more fun and compelling for many visitors. But when does a lot become too much?

High production values and loud noises may be the right solution in certain situations to raise the level of arousal. But if everything is loud, nothing is loud. Designers know that contrast is critical to creating an effect. Bright lights seem brighter in a dark room. They do not need to be very bright to appear bright. All bright and all loud is also fatiguing, causing

visitors to feel uncomfortable. An emotional experience strategy can map out where intense spots are located, as well as areas of sensory respite. This is especially important for visitors with sensory processing disorders.

High arousal may be appropriate for a gravity exhibit, but in an exhibit about the Holocaust, slavery in America, or other atrocities, the subject matter, stories, and images evoke powerful emotions.

In these situations, production tools can be used to create calm. And equally important, places to step away from the intensity of the topic.

Emotional planning for a museum experience may not be an exact science. But with visitor research, prioritisation of visitor experience, and recognition of emotions as essential to experience planning, museums can make use of a powerful planning tool and better serve their visitors

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Fostering empathy through the visual arts

- Karleen V. Gardner

“When there is no imagination of others’ lives, there is no human connection, and therefore, no compassion. Without compassion, then community, commitment, loving kindness, human understanding, peace – all shrivel. Individuals become isolated, the isolated can turn cruel, and the tragic hovers. Art –and literature – are antidotes to that.”

Susan Vreeland, author

The divisiveness in our world today around issues such as xenophobia, Black Lives Matter, gender inequities, immigration policies, LGBTQI+ rights, politics, global warming, the Covid-19 pandemic, and numerous others, makes it clear that our failures to understand other people’s feelings and perspectives are exacerbating prejudice, conflict, and inequalities. If we wish to develop not only a more equitable society, but a happier and more creative one, we need to look outside ourselves and attempt to identify with and understand the experiences of others. This critical skill is called empathy, which “*has the power to transform relationships, from the personal to the political, and create fundamental social change.*” (Kznaric 2014)

Why empathy?

Empathy enables people to relate to others in ways that promote cooperation and unity rather than the conflict and isolation we often see in the world today. It has become apparent that there is an urgent, growing need for more empathy in our world. Decades of scientific research show that people are kinder to those they view as human beings. The reason is that, when we make the imaginative effort to step into the shoes of another person and see things from their perspective, we become less capable of ignoring their suffering. Like trust and altruism, empathy is increasingly seen as a ‘social glue’ and the evolutionary basis of human cooperation. Many people, including President Barack Obama and numerous psychologists, are reporting an “*empathy deficit*” or a lack of

compassion and corresponding rise in narcissism. (Honigsbaum 2013)

A study conducted between 1979 and 2009 by Dr. Sara Konrath and colleagues found that “*college kids today are about 40% lower in empathy than their counterparts of 20 or 30 years ago, as measured by standard tests of these personality traits. Temporal changes in empathy might help explain certain interpersonal and societal trends that suggest people today are not as empathic as previous generations.*” (S. K. Konrath 2010) However, Konrath states, “*just because it's [empathy] decreasing doesn't mean it's not changeable. There are things we can do and learn. It's like a muscle that we can exercise and develop.*” (S. K. Konrath 2017)

Why art?

Engagement with art can help us flex our empathy muscles and provide us with a very low risk way of entering worlds and lives and minds that are far from what we would normally experience. (Musiker 2015) Engagement with artworks offers new ways of seeing, perspective-taking, and possibilities of changing the ways we view and act in the world. Art expands our perception and leads to emotional responses – and to empathy. The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) is dedicated to creating positive civic impact by using the power of art to cultivate empathy. The museums’ expansive collection of over 92,000 artworks spanning 5,000 years of human history offers a rich and complex range of material that can be utilised to nurture a greater understanding of humanity and the self.

With the generous support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Mia established the Center for Empathy and the Visual Arts (CEVA) in 2017 and is partnering with academic institutions to research the impact of strategies and practices for cultivating empathy in museum visitors. Experiments and prototypes include facilitated gallery tours, exhibitions, interpretive strategies and didactics—including wall text, audio and video, and interactive hands-on experiences. By establishing CEVA, Mia is leading the charge in bringing the art museum into the forefront of the empathy movement, as virtually no quantitative research exists on the effect of the visual arts on cognitive and emotional empathy. (Winner 2013) CEVA will disseminate research findings and easy-to-use tools that guide educators, curators, content-creators and others in using art museum collections to foster empathy.

The origins of empathy

Our understanding of empathy was born out of the visual arts. The German aesthetic philosopher Robert Vischer (1847-1933) coined the word *Einfühlung* (literally ‘feeling into’) in 1873 to describe the projection of human feeling into an inanimate object, such as a work of art. The term was adapted by Theodor Lipps (1851-1914), who postulated that the meaning of art did not arise from the work itself but was made essential by the viewer projecting themselves into the object. In 1909 the British psychologist Edward Titchener (1867-1927) translated the concept of *Einfühlung* into a new word: empathy. It comes from the Greek *empathēia*, meaning ‘in



*Artist Fres Thao in a spoken word performance as part of a partnership with Advocates for Human Rights
Photo © Minneapolis Institute of Art*

pathos', i.e., in passion or suffering. (Nowak 2011, 301-325)

Experiencing art can help us open up, igniting emotions and curiosity, and making us vulnerable and able to connect with something bigger than ourselves. Through such experiences, people can become less narcissistic and feel more connected to humanity. They can exhibit empathic and generous behaviour; they can be more inclined to help others and give of themselves.

Gallery teaching for empathy

Facilitating such experiences is core to Mia's educational philosophy and approach to object-based engagement strategies. Using a Dialogic teaching model, educators provide

"learners of all ages opportunities for engaging with and making sense of artworks through: close looking; questioning and wondering; making interpretations and forming evidence-based hypotheses; creating connections to things they already know; considering different viewpoints and perspectives; delving below the surface to discover complexities; and forming conclusions." (Richart 2006) Research conducted by John Falk and Lynn Dierking shows that museums provide a unique setting for Dialogic teaching in which cognition, affect, social context, and the environment are fully integrated, which makes them ideal places for independent and group thinking and discourse. (Dierking, 1997)

With a focus on dialogue, Mia's Learning Innovation team is continually experimenting

NAIROBI NATIONAL MUSEUM



*Girls Design the World participants at the Nairobi National Museum, Kenya.
Photo © Minneapolis Institute of Art*

with object-based teaching methodologies for fostering empathy. Examples include the ‘Global Thinking Routines’ developed by Harvard’s Project Zero, which encourage perspective-taking, questioning, self-reflection, and encourage participants to consider themselves and their relationships with others in a global context. (Mansilla 2018)

Another framework for prompting multiple responses and points of view is ‘Critical Response Protocol’, a structured process that encourages learners to pay close attention to a specific work of art. This practice is centred on the following premises that all are essential for empathy-building – creating a safe space for

all voices to come forward; encouraging emotional responses; honouring all perspectives and inspiring critical thought and questions; and the value of deferring judgment. (Critical Response Protocol n.d.) Through CEVA research, we will test these frameworks, as well as numerous others developed by our team and fellow museum and school colleagues.

Programming for empathy

Mia is also exploring cultivating empathy through partnership programs. Collaborating with organisations such as the Islamic Resource Center, the Advocates for Human

Rights and others, the museum is working with artists and community members to create experiences in which they share their stories and worldviews. Through talks, spoken word, poetry, literature, and performance, audiences are engaged in exploring issues of race, Islamophobia, LGBTQI+ rights, immigration, and other relevant topics. By centring the experiences and voices of historically marginalised people, Mia can begin to decolonise the museum by highlighting the talent, expertise, knowledge and contributions of artists and community members of diverse identities and cultures.

Through conversation and activities, people from different cultures and communities come together and learn from one another. One of the goals for dialogue-based programmes is social bridging, defined as the connections that link people across a schism that typically divides society, such as race, class or religion. (Claridge 2018) Such initiatives are crucial for building empathy and greater understanding among our populations as they become increasingly diverse.

Our world is also becoming smaller and more complex, which requires people to be able to think critically, collaborate effectively, and approach problems creatively. Researchers now believe that empathy might be a critical key to unlocking these skills. (Bright Horizons Education Team 2020) With a focus on engaging teens and fostering 21st-century skills, Mia, in partnership with the National Museums Kenya, Nairobi, launched *Girls Design the World: Supporting Green Communities with STEAM* (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Maths) in 2015. Through a joint initiative of the US

Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the American Alliance of Museums, teens researched environmental issues in their respective cities, creatively addressed these challenges through the empathy-centred process of design thinking, and connected with one another through web-based discussions. Through travel exchanges, the young women were able to experience each other's worlds.

Despite their geographical differences, they came to realise that they shared many things in common and also learned a great deal about themselves. Through post-programme surveys, 100% of the young women from Minnesota and 86% of the young women from Nairobi stated that they gained greater understanding of one another's cultures. (McGuire 2015)

Empathy in exhibitions and interpretation

Mia is also focused on cultivating empathy through exhibitions and interpretation by acknowledging and representing diverse areas of expertise and knowledge through the inclusion of multiple voices, stories, perspectives and world views. *Living Rooms* is an initiative in which the museum is reinvigorating our historic period rooms. In creating a dialogue between the past and the present, Mia is widening the conversation to include missing narratives – often those of historically marginalised people. *The Many Voices of Colonial America*, the 2017 reinstallation and reinterpretation of the 1872 Charleston Dining and Drawing Rooms, included the histories of enslaved Africans who cultivated rice on the South Carolina plantation and those of the Cherokee



Installation view of the exhibition Art and Healing: In the Moment; 17 June - 29 July 2018, an exhibition of artwork made by community artists in response to the fatal shooting of Philando Castile; Cargill Gallery; gallery 103. Organised by Minneapolis Institute of Art. Photo © Minneapolis Institute of Art

descendants of the owner, Colonel John Stuart. By adding stories and contemporary and historic artwork by Native American, African and African American artists, as well as photographs and video interviews of living indigenous and diaspora artists and community members, Mia aimed “to encourage a greater connection between visitors and historic inhabitants’ stories”. (Ingram and Madrid, Evaluation of the Minneapolis Institute of Art's Period Room Reinstallations 2017)

Findings of the evaluation, funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, indicate that the reinterpretations of the rooms “had a positive impact on museum visitors, particularly concerning creating a connection to inhabitants’ stories and stimulating surprise about the rooms’ history and events”. Before the reinstallation more people referred to the decorative arts objects and physical space, and after the reinterpretation, 10% more

participants compared their lives to the lives of the rooms’ inhabitants. (Ingram and Madrid, Evaluation of the Minneapolis Institute of Art's Period Room Reinstallations 2017) By creating opportunities for human connections in gallery installations, Mia can foster historical empathy which impacts today’s audiences.

In 2018, Mia collaborated on a timely and resonant exhibition focused on fostering empathy and greater understanding across difference. Partnering with Valerie Castile and a community advisory committee, the team developed *Art and Healing: In the Moment*, featuring artwork created in response to the deadly shooting of 32-year-old Philando Castile, an African American man who grew up in Saint Paul, Minnesota. He was fatally shot on 6th July 2016 by a police officer after being pulled over for a traffic stop. In the months after his funeral, artists across the community were motivated to make art to process their grief and begin healing, while also bearing collective witness to the tragedy

of his untimely death. The family, moved by this generosity, approached Mia with a desire to publicly share these artworks. As Castile's mother, Valerie, wrote in the introductory exhibition text panel:

"I wanted to create something that is strong, spiritual, and educational. It should touch people's emotions and show hope and kindness. It is important to me that it helps develop conversations around injustices. I hope that when people engage with this exhibit, they begin to understand what it's like to be a black person in America. Black people in this country have been stereotyped for generations and have had to live in other people's concepts of who they are. I hope more people can begin to understand this struggle and join together to work against negative perceptions and biases. All things can change if we are able to transform our perceptions of who we are to one another."

Reactions to the exhibition were emotional and powerful. A response wall in the installation offered visitors the opportunity to express and share their thoughts and hopes: (Gardner 2019)

"When will people finally figure it out? We are all humans! Respect for all people."

"Forgive our silence. Show us how to show empathy and change behavior."

"Teach my son to see the person, not the color."

"Grow my understanding, empathize, and act."

"I feel moved to tears, yet uplifted by this art." (Anderson 2018)

A call to action

Art is an expression of what it is to be human, and by intentionally developing content and experiences that inspire emotional connections and perspective-taking, museums can expose people to different cultures and ways of thinking. In our divisive world that is rife with conflict and prejudice, museums have the opportunity and capacity to use our collections, exhibitions and programmes to cultivate more empathic individuals and a more understanding and tolerant society.

Mia is leading such an effort in establishing CEVA and developing scientific, evidence-based tools and strategies that will help institutions transform their own practices and impact individual and societal wellbeing. CEVA will benefit the field as it becomes the locus for arts-based empathy research, dialogue and resources. Through a collective vision and dedication to fostering empathy through art, museums can alter mindsets and create fundamental social change, empathy research, dialogue, and resources.

"We are in a time once again where our need for the arts is growing more and more apparent. Controversy and anger and fear seem to swirl around us these days in large supply. This has happened plenty of times in our history. We have needed and sought the healing and teaching power of the arts for a long time, perhaps forever."

Robert Lynch, President and CEO, Americans for the Art (Lynch 2016)

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Emotions in the history museum

- Sheila Watson

Emotional responses in history museums are usually only deliberately provoked for specifically moral, ethical or political reasons. Most history curators are products of a changing discipline that has seen them turn to narrative as a way of engaging audiences (Cheng 2012:130) while at the same time ascribing to a notion that the history they make in the museum is both truthful and dispassionate. The exception to this is the use to which emotion is put for political or social ends, in which case strategies to encourage emotional responses may be used in the design to encourage a form of prosthetic memory (Landsberg 2004; Arnold-de Simine 2013) that in turn encourages particular political, social or moral attitudes both to the past and the present. Many historians and curators consider this avoidance of emotional involvement as part of their professionalism and ascribe to a traditional attitude whereby a historian adopted a disinterested approach to the story of the past in order to tell a form of truth. Some historians in museums fear that if they are affected by emotions then they become “*enacted upon*” (Ahmed 2004: 2- 3) and lose

their independent judgment. Such curators believe they record the past in a serious but unbiased manner, telling a form of truth as they see it.

Many museum professionals, while sometimes prepared to attempt to elicit emotion in museums, on the whole adopt an evolutionary approach to the idea of emotion (Ahmed 2004: 3). In other words they regard some emotions as better than others. The idea of an aesthetic pleasure, divorced from historical context, is often promoted by art galleries, while history museums promote feelings of empathy to elicit sympathy for others. Other emotions, such as rage, fear and disgust that, following an evolutionary interpretation, suggest weakness or primitiveness, are examined and explained to the visitor but rarely encouraged as a visitor response. However, within some history museums, these emotions are encouraged for political purposes.

One example of a museum where undesirable or less elevated emotions are

evoked is in the National Military Museum, Istanbul, in its explanation of the Armenian massacre by the Turks in the early part of the 20th century. This is an event the Turkish government denies to have been genocide, and here the interpretation of that event is a form of defence against the Armenians' traditional narrative, which is widely accepted in Europe. One small room's walls are covered with black and white photographs of mutilated Turkish bodies. They challenge the traditional Western view of Armenian victimhood. Here the Turks are the victims. The images are grotesque and shocking, and rather than reproduce them here, these are some of the texts used to describe them:

"Turks massacred by kindling fire on their groins and cutting their faces."

"Children massacred on the road."

"Women, children massacred by the Armenians and the fetuses taken out of their mothers' wombs in Subatan village of Kars."

How do native Turks respond to this, those who are instructed by their government not to believe the Armenian claims?¹ Emotions are here governed not only by the cultural context in which they are placed but by notions of what museums are expected to exhibit. Atrocity images are made all the more shocking by the infrequency with which such photographs are shown in museums, even military ones. In this example we can see that the museum chose to exhibit images not normally shown and thus 'transgress' the

accepted evolutionary order of emotional responses to encourage anger (along with shock, disgust, pity and horror), but only in a regulated political context. Here there was no need for new technologies – the impact of the photographs was unmediated and stronger for being so simple.

Museums rarely present nuanced versions of events where there are clearly identifiable victims. Indeed the moral message that evil has been done and must be condemned is nearly always unmediated by alternative viewpoints. When museums attempt to elicit pity for victims, the motives of the perpetrator are infrequently examined. There is a binary good/bad in most historical narratives of victimhood. Displaying the perpetrator as a flawed human being and attempting to understand their actions immediately runs the risk of eliciting sympathy for the evil-doer. This traditional attitude to the perpetrator is understandable, particularly when victims are still alive. In the conference in which this lecture was given, a discussion that sought to question whether such attitudes were always desirable was shut down by emotional responses from those who condemned the idea that perpetrators are not irremediably evil. The points below are those I would have made in person had the public discussion continued.

A more nuanced study of the past, outside the museum, provides plenty of evidence that evil-doers may themselves do evil deeds but they are also all too human. They have many reasons for their actions. Sometimes they are trying to protect their own families (Watson

¹ This case study is examined in more detail in Watson, S. (2016) 'Why do Emotions Matter in Museums and Heritage Sites?' in Carla van Boxtel (ed) *Sensitive Pasts: Questioning Heritage in Education*, Oxford, New York: Berghahn Publishers



“Collection Dutch Resistance Museum” © Verzetsmuseum, Amsterdam

2015), they may be motivated by fear for their lives, they lack the moral courage to go against a majority view, they may hate themselves but still continue on their path of inflicting pain and destruction. Our emotional response to their actions, a sense of anger and disgust felt at their role in inflicting suffering on others, may blind us to the reasons they acted in this way. Thus museums rarely attempt to understand how and why evil actions, perpetrated by otherwise ordinary human beings, happened in the past. Museums allow us to take the moral high ground, to feel disgust with the perpetrators, but not to question and understand their motives. In so doing they fail to engage us in a process that would enable us to learn from the past, to understand why situations arise in which evil happens. It is, of course, so much easier to damn the perpetrators and draw a clear distinction between us and them.

An exception to this is the Resistance Museum (Verzetsmuseum), Amsterdam, where

collaborators as well as resisters to the Nazi regime explain their actions. The former sometimes stayed in their official posts as they thought they could mitigate Nazi oppression; some claimed to think that the only alternative was communism and they supported the Nazis to thwart the communists. Others loved their country and believed in the future the Nazi party offered them. None were wholly evil, although they committed evil acts

Unpopular though this view may be, I consider it important that museums encourage visitors to understand not only that good and evil happen and people suffer, but why so many people perpetrate cruel deeds or silently look the other way while they take place. Museums that take the moral high ground, signalling a binary good and bad, take the easy route to visitor emotional satisfaction, as they enable people to empathise with the victim and demonise the perpetrator. It is much harder to encourage the public to

understand the emotions and motives of all those who transgressed against common human decency in the past. Some of these people may well be irredeemable psychopaths but all too often they will be just like you and me, trying to do our best but not always making the right choices in difficult or impossible circumstances.

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"Collection Dutch Resistance Museum" Verzetsmuseum, Amsterdam © photo Merijn Soeters



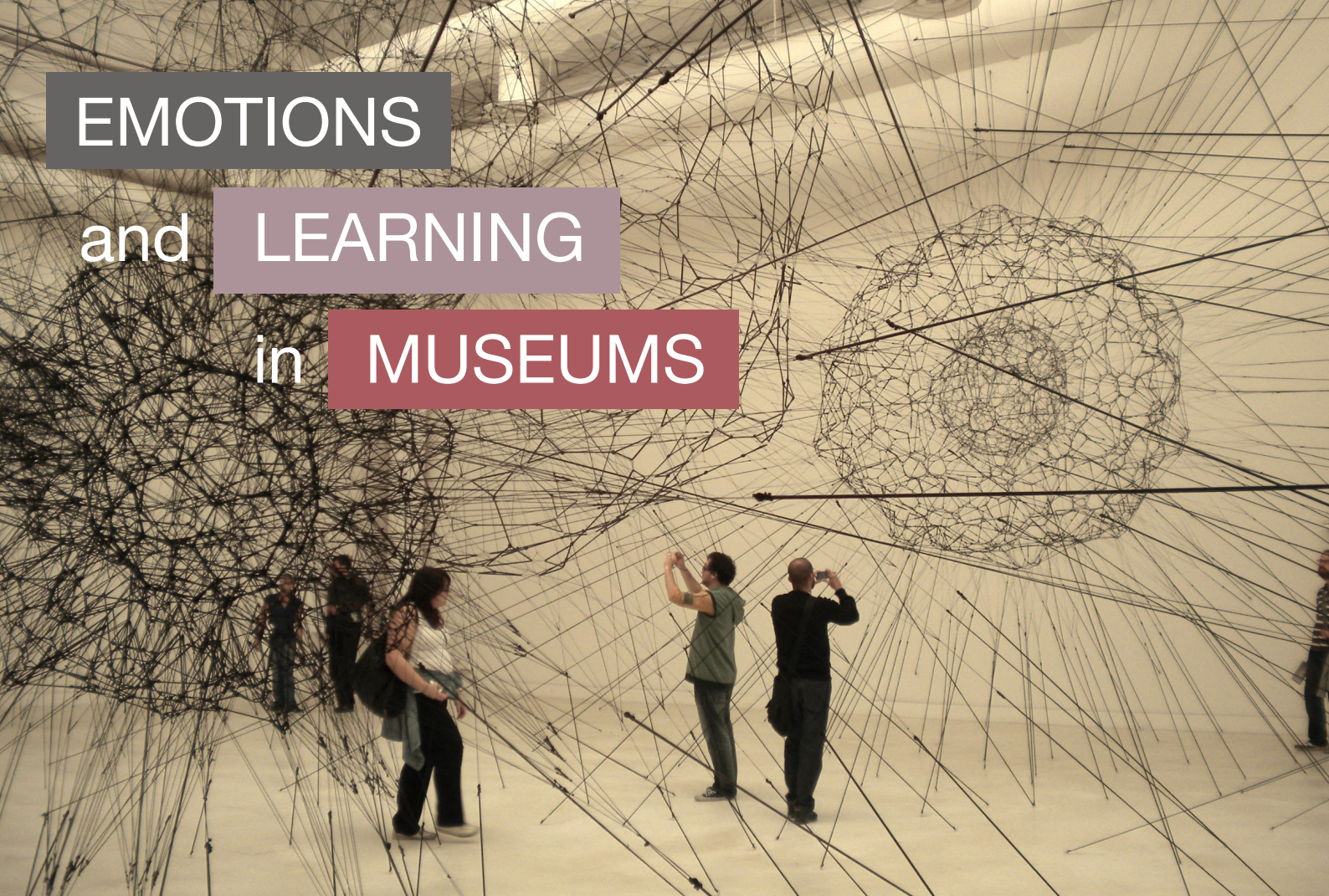
EMOTIONS

and

LEARNING

in

MUSEUMS



Tomás Saraceno - 2009 BiennaleArt, International Art Exhibition, Venice - Italy. Photo: P. Mazzanti

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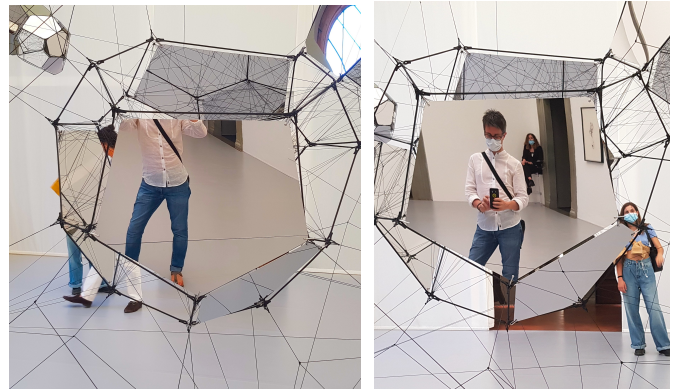
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Credits:



Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Florence Italy - Exhibition "Tomás Saraceno" ARIA 9th July 2020 - My first Museum Experience after the first Lockdown COVID-19 - Photos: P. Mazzanti

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Page 69 "Girls Design the World Participants at the Nairobi National Museum, Kenya." by © Minneapolis Institute of Art

Page 71 Installation view of the exhibition "Art and Healing: In the Moment"; 17 June 2018 - 29 July 2018; an exhibition of artwork made by community artists in response to the fatal shooting of Philando Castile; Cargill Gallery; gallery 103; Organised by Minneapolis Institute of Art" © Minneapolis Institute of Art

Page 76 "Collection Dutch Resistance Museum" © Verzetsmuseum, Amsterdam

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Publication Inprint:

"A web of reciprocal alliances, where if one thread were to move, the vibration would spread, reverberating across the whole structure, producing a greater frequency than could be produced by one thread alone."

Tomás Saraceno "Connectome 2020" - "ARIA" EXHIBITION WALKTHROUGH - Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, Italy.

Published by:

NEMO – The Network of European Museum Organisations
Deutscher Museumsbund e.V.
Taubenstraße 1, 10117 Berlin
Germany
www.ne-mo.org

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Editing of the English text:

Geraldine Kendall Adams
UK Museum Association

Published in:

February 2021
ISBN: 978-3-9822232-1-6



Network of European
Museum Organisations



Co-funded by the
Creative Europe Programme
of the European Union
