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In Search of a New Exhibition Space

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Abstract

The buildings considered as raising the prestige and promoting cities are those related to culture. Their impact on urban life is undeniable, which is reflected in a continuous increase in the number of new museum buildings. Apart from places intrinsically linked with culture, which, as such, may be considered as standard - like museum, theatres or galleries - there also appear alternative places of development and promotion of cultural activities.

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1. Introduction

Currently, among cultural spaces, with particular emphasis on exhibition places, it is possible to distinguish two directions of development. The first of those is a traditional one represented by museums and galleries and the other one is modified, represented by different, alternative spaces. Both directions are developing in parallel and are not mutually exclusive.

Non-traditional exhibition places are worthy of particular attention. Their emergence is related to seeking new, sometimes surprising, methods of drawing attention to the exhibition. In the case of museums, especially in recent years, one can observe that both the museum architecture and collections presented there are equally perceived as exhibition space. It so happens, at times, that the quality of the exhibition space and its architecture is so significant that the presented exhibits pale in comparison.

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In the case of space initially designated for other purposes than exhibitions and currently used to that end, a unique, often surprising visual effect is achieved. Art transgressing the borders and entering alternative spaces makes exhibits interact with exhibition places and become an integral part of the exhibition itself.

1.1. What is contemporary exhibition?

According to a dictionary definition, an exhibit is an object that is shown to the public in a museum [7], etc. Such a description will always remain incomplete, as it fails to encompass all the places where exhibitions may be held nowadays. Furthermore, it is not only objects as such that are exhibited. Contemporary art also includes such events as, for instance, multi-media shows. The development and diversification of the forms of artistic creation triggered the search for original exhibition venues, often in surprising locations. Places designated for exhibition are one of the many venues where cultural activities are undertaken. Their unique character lies, among other things, in the manner of organising exhibitions. It is assumed that exhibition somewhat accompanies other cultural events. For instance, exhibition spaces may be arranged in the vicinity of the artists' studios, in cafes or urban spaces. There is certain freedom in a way their organisation is shaped.

1.2. Where does the exhibit belong?

In terms of form and presentation methods, museums and galleries constitute a rather unchanged fragment of exhibition spaces. However, the ongoing evolution of art forms has created the need to establish new exhibition places. Expanding the thematic scope of the exhibition buildings themselves has changed the perception of space. It has become a place integrated with the exhibition itself. Currently, very different spaces may become venues for presenting art, from urban spaces to post-industrial buildings. Along with utilising new places for exhibition purposes, the limits of contemporary exhibition space also changed. Owing to their form and location, they became alternative spaces in respect of museums and galleries.

2. The alternative exhibition spaces

The 19th century was the time when first museum buildings appeared and became popular. They offered the wider public a possibility of engaging in direct contact with very diverse collections - an option previously unavailable. Such places ensured safety to the exhibits and appropriate, from the point of view of their authors, conditions for their presentation. It was clearly determined what constituted an exhibition, and what was exhibition space. However, a continuing development of art reflected in a way new means of artistic expressions are sought, as well as greater availability of art led to a change in a way artistic works are shown. The important exhibition breaking with the long-established canons was held in 1874 in France.¹ An organised exhibition, in a different than usual space, offered an opportunity to display paintings, but it also became a protest against the then applicable rules pertaining to: the way of exhibiting art, the themes undertaken in painting, the size of works, and the form of sale.² In Poland, exhibitions of paramount importance for the development of alternative exhibition spaces were held in 1924.³ The venues were car showrooms whose selection for that purpose was to emphasise the connection between new art and modern technology. [4] Both the location and the goal of the exhibition clearly stood apart from the then applicable rules of organising exhibitions. [3] Drawing attention to the place of art exposition was key to further development of not only museum or exhibition buildings, but to the development of public spaces as such. Art took a first step towards leaving the confinement of museum and gallery spaces.

Another period of significance for the development of unconventional exhibition spaces were the 1960s and 1970s. Those times marked a clear “exit of art from the museum” in a sense of seeking exhibition space outside the building

¹ The venue for the exhibition was the studio of a photographer, Gaspard-Félix Tournachon, made available to painters.

² Academic art in painting drew on the themes from antiquity, imitation of existing works, sublime themes, and large sizes of canvases.

³ Two exhibitions were organised nearly at the same time: one of the works by Henryk Berlewi at an exclusive Austro-Daimler car showroom, and the other, by Blok group at a Laurin and Klement car showroom.

and pointing to new types of exhibits, like, for instance, works of architecture. A demythologisation of the very concept of a museum, but also bringing art closer to everyday life could be observed. Leaving museum spaces by artists in order to occupy new areas such as, for example, the street caused that artists had to explore a new space, determine its scale and proportions. The phenomenon also affected the works of architects who started to be more inclined towards creating museum buildings closer to everyday life. [5]

2.1. *Between the museum hall and the city*



Fig. 1. Creating a meeting spot for tourists in front of the *Mosaic House* and for the inhabitants among art in Prague - May 2015.

The exit of exhibitions from classic exhibition spaces was reflected in cities whose “interior” gained a new quality owing to the presence of art exhibitions. Artistic shows previously reserved for buildings gradually appeared within such urban interiors, blending in their fabric. By taking on various shapes, art started to be presented not only in the courtyards of museums or as landscaping elements. It started to be displayed at places not necessarily designated for its exposure and became tangible in practically any public place, irrespective of the function.

2.2. *Business and art*

The works of art emerging out of art gallery buildings started to appear in shopping galleries. Vast commercial spaces, with their varied shopping and entertainment offer, proved to be excellent venues for art display. Exhibition spaces started to be created in passageways open to the public, as well as in halls specially designated as venues for art exhibitions, like for instance in *Stary Browar* (Old Brewery) in Poznań. It is a place where art and business intertwine. Apart from commercial activity, various cultural events are held there, such as: exhibitions of art by famous artists (Igor Mitoraj *Światło księżycy* [Moonlight] in 2003) and young artists from the Academy of Fine Arts in Poznań or fashion shows (Art&Fashion Festival in 2009). Such initiatives are aimed at bringing closer and promoting art which owing to *Stary Browar* marks its presence in the everyday lives of the city inhabitants.

2.3. *Adaptation of buildings for art display purposes*

Art may become one of the goals of the existence of a building, as well as, apparently, a factor saving the buildings from destruction. Moving away from the classic exhibition spaces, modern art is highly successful in paving its way

towards places of completely different character. Many buildings are given their second life and a chance to continue functioning owing to the change in their previously prevailing function into, for example, grouping various forms of culture along with their exhibition functions. One of such places in Gdańsk is Wyspa Institute of Art founded at the site of former Gdańsk Shipyard in 2004. The Institute combines artistic activity and promotion of revitalisation initiatives in the district. [1] The former vocational school building now hosts a gallery, artists' studios and a cafe.



Fig. 2. (a) Wyspa Institute of Art in Gdansk in a former school building by the Gdansk Shipyard (b) Installation on the front wall of MeetFactory in Prague - May 2015.

Similar activities are undertaken in Prague, the Czech Republic, where post-industrial buildings are saved from destruction or falling into oblivion by becoming art display hubs. One of such buildings is the seat of *MeetFactory*, situated between a busy motorway and railway tracks. No considerable interference into the architectural structure was necessary. The place gathers theatre, music, as well as visual art creators. It is a seat of three galleries. Two of those are located inside, and one on the outside, on the gable wall - Wall Gallery.

The function here is to present street-art works. The exhibitions created on the walls of this building are temporary and unique in nature. Their creation is legal on the space provided, yet the uniqueness of that assumption consists in the change of the exhibitions as per the rule for a gallery operation.

2.4. Exhibitions within the city



Fig. 3. Promotion of cultural events in Gdansk entitled *Przycupnij z kulturą* (Nestle down with culture) – May 2015.

Popularisation of art and providing information on cultural events also became a specific form of exhibition. Within city space, exhibitions in an organised form are displayed in city centres. The manner of presentation is agreed on and planned. Posters informing about the scheduled cultural events are presented in such a way as to reach the widest possible group of recipients. What matters in an exhibition of this kind is a selection of the place? Such displays in the city serve as open galleries. The message behind the items shown may be cultural as well as social.

2.5. Art and sacrum



Fig. 4. The renovated St. John's Church in Gdansk as an example of combining sacral and cultural functions.

Adaptation of new spaces for exhibition purposes also entails recognising new possibilities offered by, for instance, the space in churches, not necessarily deconsecrated. Saint John's Church in Gdańsk is an evidence that a building of this kind may become a multi-functional one. Apart from its sacral role, the building serves also as a concert and exhibition hall under the auspices of St. John's Centre. [6] Introduction of new functions into the church does not hinder its activity, and even adds to its attractiveness among other sacral buildings of the city. Moreover, it exemplifies an actively operating historical building.



Fig. 5. Café Bomba in Crakow, walls are place of exhibition artistic works – October 2015.

2.6. Art alongside

Yet another group of unusual exhibition spaces constitute places where art is shown as an element additional to the core function. Such places can encompass cafes, student cafeterias where the paintings hung on walls constitute an interior decoration element. A change of the exhibition triggers the new quality of the place.

3. Conclusions

Marcel Duchamp's concept of a *Suitcase* from 1941 about making a portable museum whose contents would fit in a salesman's suitcase was at the time of publication a rather utopian idea. [Buchloh,2005]. However, nowadays it is reflected in the alternative exhibition spaces. The focus on miniaturisation of the works, as well as on the universal nature of the "box" containing it, namely the exhibition space, is highly pertinent in contemporary reality. The choice of diverse, often surprising, places for exhibition purposes adds to the diversity of the exhibitions. It allows for evoking new emotions in the audience, which meets the expectations of contemporary artists. What is helpful the use of a new - different - background for the exhibits, rendering it possible to achieve effects otherwise impossible in standard exhibition settings. One must not forget, however, that new spaces, i.e. post-industrial, somewhat try to imitate galleries, for instance through the whiteness of wall paint or omnipresent emptiness. Yet the very fact of not going to a museum, but to a gallery located in a place that is not necessarily prestigious evokes a different feeling. Mobility of contemporary art, as well as its potential for adaptation to various conditions, makes it more accessible. It is a form of play with the recipient, who may not be aware of where he or she can encounter an exhibition. A spectator sometimes unknowingly becomes involved in events held within the city space. It is surprising where works of art may be displayed. Such uncertainty is one of the integral elements of contemporary exhibition. For some it will be a game, for others fun, and by some it may be viewed as a change to find new incarnations of urban spaces.

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