



Other Room

The phenomenon of culturally significant interiors, exhibited in museums, is one of the most interesting and engaging ways of providing visitors with an authentic experience. But is it possible to exactly mimic the original one?

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In the understanding of a social concept, over last few decades, the role of the museum has been orientated towards a new direction. Museums used to be spaces where important historical or scientific objects were kept, protected from the decay. Containing valuable pieces of art or war trophies, museums were purposed to be visited only by certain social groups. However, these days, the social function of the museum gains entirely new meaning due to the changes in social patterns and a developing understanding of the relation between museal exhibits and visitor experience.

A visitor interacting with an object, applies a personal filter to the interpretation of that object, simultaneously linking the object with the visitor's subjective live experience. Some of the exhibits capture the human's attention more than the others, simply because the person can easily identify with them, creating so called human-object relation, that occurs only if the person feels

associated with an object in some way. The fact that an exhibit is related to a visitor's environment, whether in their past or any other aspect of life, brings a real meaning to the whole museal experience. Then, the visitor discovers a phenomenon of an aesthetic third, when the meaning assigned to the experience impacts on visitor's perception of being in the world or society. Therefore, a visit to a museum may turn out to be an educative, inspiring or even healing experience. But the effect of a visit depends on a personal idiom developed during the interaction with an object.

The Curators responsibility is then, to arrange and select museal exhibits in order to provide visitors with an insightful experience, that they can reflect upon, both, personally and culturally. Through placing socially significant objects in a museum, the Curator can directly impact on values represented by society or influence their existential awareness. Diana Chen, Lecturer at MoMA in New York, puts it this way: “The goal is to curate

experiences that reconnect visitors to their shared humanity.’

The desire to create an authentic experience moves Curators to implement large changes such as the whole interior to the museal space. In theory, there could be nothing more directly related to human reality than an interior, especially if we consider spaces as familiar as bedrooms, kitchens, workshops or offices. Even if they belong to famous personas, like artists, scientists or politicians, there is still something about them that is also an intrinsic part of a commoners life.

Yet after all, is it a truly authentic experience to interact with a space that has been removed from its natural environment? The reactions of visitors seems to be mixed in this case.

Let's look at the Paris studio of Piet Mondrian that in 1994 had been reconstructed in H. P. Barrage's Exchange Building in Amsterdam. The exhibition



Our Room for Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tea rooms in Glasgow - Mackintosh

successfully gathered Mondrian's enthusiasts and numbers of other visitors, because the experience did not only offer products created by so significant a persona, but also provided an insight to his private life. After the tour, a visitor could purchase a scale model of a studio, which only increased the personal and cultural relation of viewer to the artist.

Another example of 'an interior on display' could be the bedroom designed in 1926 by Rietveld together with Truus Schröder-Schräder. It was exhibited for the first time in 1971 in The Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam. In total, it was made from 76 building elements like walls, ceiling and original flooring and 15 pieces of furniture. The bedroom is still a piece of design adequate to the reality of present viewer, similarly as the Frankfurt Kitchen of the Austrian architect Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky.

Both of those designs remain culturally significant as social principals of a minimalist lifestyle that seems to be even more important today in an hour of a global environmental crisis. Even though the interaction with a socially valued space is a unique experience, the visitors admits that the impression of being within that space is not fully authentic to them. Rooms seems to be stripped of its utilitarian purpose as they are no longer occupied by its users. Lack of details that could animate vital functionality of the space, from the time when it was used only multiply the feeling.

Sometimes a space reconstructed in a different environment could make us think of it

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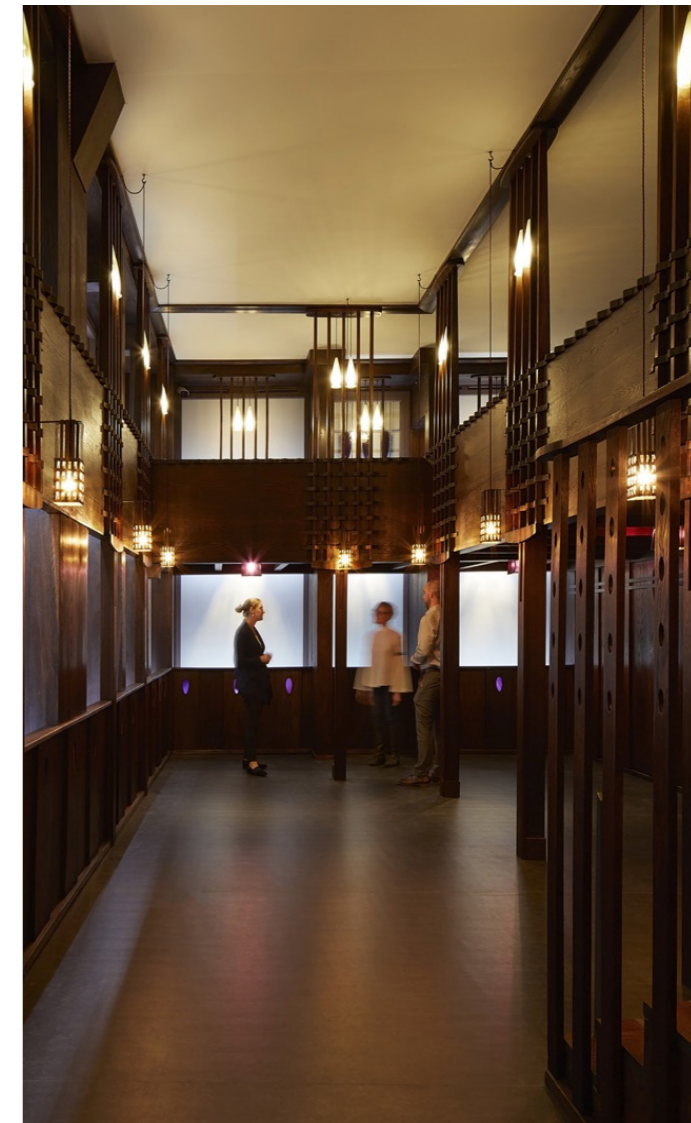
as a kind of supplant imitating an original object, even if it is fully authentic piece of architecture. Is it than just an imitation of the authentic experience?

If we visit the recently opened V&A Museum in Dundee, we won't pass through the exhibition of Scottish Designers without entering the Mackintosh's Oak Room designed for Miss Cranston's Ingram Street Tea rooms in Glasgow. The first impression after entering the room awakes a sense of wonder as the visitor, being in the contemporary museum, enters an entirely new world. Colors of light and most of all an intense smell of an old oak brings back the nostalgic narrative into the space. Subtle imprints on the surface of the wood, tells a story hidden behind the emptiness of the space. The overall feel of the space in the opinion of most of the visitors is authentic, especially if they relate their experience to an importance of a cultural

origin of the idea of a tearoom and the significant position of Mackintosh as a designer. Alison Brown, a curator at Glasgow Museums claims that "Visitors will walk into the interior and have a powerful experience of how Mackintosh treats space."

However, after some time in that space, some have described a feeling of alienation, because of the narrative expected from the place like a tearoom. Objects, sounds and other sensations accompanying the experience of being in a tearoom, like furniture, clinging teapots, smell of tea and gentle noise of conversation are missing for the space. Here again, the experience cannot be full authentic, especially not without the knowledge of cultural concept to the object. The understanding of why the object is significant to the society, majorly changes its meaning to an individual receiver, as without this knowledge, the empty oaken room, even the most charming one, still remains just an antique oaken room without deeper cultural meaning and known purpose.

The phenomenon of culturally significant interiors, exhibited in museums, is one of the most interesting and engaging ways of providing visitors with an authentic experience, because of the deep personal meaning of an interior space in human's life. Unfortunately, it may be impossible to mimic the exact experience that could be perceived during the visit into an original side, because of the fundamental separation of an object from its original purpose. Yet, the constant changes in our environment, do not let us to keep every significant space in its original location. It becomes a kind of a supplant, that might be the best that could happen to the interiors, as well as to the potential receivers of the interior.



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