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**THE MUSEUM WORLD IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION:
A NEW APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

by Prof. Dr. Martin Roth

Why should this be a subject of discussion in the museum world? Are there reasons why we should consider an even greater degree of internationalisation? Is it not sufficient that there are numerous major exhibitions taking place on a plethora of different themes? Or, from the opposite point of view, do we really wish to endanger the objects – the paintings and drawings, the porcelain objects and textiles, the ethnographical items and archaeological artefacts - through frequent transportation and risky presentations?

If you will permit, I will come back to these questions later, omitting for now the issue of art and culture and devoting my attention instead to simple management problems. And I should like to subdivide these issues into European and international questions.

Existing Museum Networks

Since many of you are not museum specialists, I should like to say just a few words about museum organisations and associations. Nearly every European country has a museum umbrella organisation, and there are also international associations such as ICOM, along with their subordinate organisations – each with its own distinctive characteristics – which are also active at national level. For various reasons, which are not important at this point, I do not wish to talk in detail about these international associations, since what we are concerned with here are internal representative bodies of specialists and not museum management networks and international collaboration between decision-makers.

It seems to me that it is important, especially for those who are responsible for administering, preserving and presenting Europe's past - i.e. in storing its history for the future - that we listen to and promote proposals for establishing new alliances in a new Europe, or in the old Europe but using clever ideas for European cultural

institutions for the Europe of the future. The European museums are deeply rooted in their national histories, and that is something we should not wish to change. Nobody is about to suggest suddenly turning national museums into European ones. We only need to think of the collections in one of Europe's most beautiful and oldest national museums, the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest. Nevertheless, the question may be asked how European (art) history could be presented by all these institutions together, without them having to give up their national identity.

Planning Future Structures

It was the Hungarian President who gave me the idea of questioning the role of museums in Europe: during a meeting of seven European (federal-state) Presidents in Dresden he suggested that more expression should be given to what we have in common and what binds us together in our European culture. One of his suggestions was a joint Europe-wide cultural television channel modelled on the Franco-German channel, ARTE.

Such a joint venture would first have to be established in the media, but in the context of our museums it already exists! We have both a common history and artefacts which attractively demonstrate and present that history.

But how do things stand as regards joint European thinking in the field of management and the planning of future structures? We expect a lot of European cultural policy, yet we are constantly disappointed because the necessary political concepts for supra-national action do not exist; we wonder about the image and the contents, but perhaps what we should be asking is what those of us who are involved in culture can do for Europe, rather than constantly asking what we can expect from Europe as regards cultural policy.

I am not referring to the establishment of new institutions, such as the European Museum in Brussels, a political institution which, faced with increasing criticism as to the practicability of its original concept, has been whittled down to a small, more or less virtual presentation in Brussels whilst aiming to link up existing historical museums in a Europe-wide network. This project demonstrates the difficulties faced by new projects, given that there are plenty of historic artefacts in magnificent collections all over Europe.

Sharing Research and Expertise in Restoration and Conservation

What, then, is missing? What is required? To a large extent, what is needed is for the know-how connected with organising exhibitions, which already works well, to be transferred to other aspects of museum work. What I mean is joint research projects: for example, research into the provenance of objects would be much

more effective if it were conducted at European level. In the field of restoration and conservation it would be more than advisable to create links between the centres of excellence that we have in Europe. In the past we all looked towards the Getty Conservation Center and were amazed at its productivity, only to realise that we, too, could be much more efficient if we were to pool the work of some of Europe's renowned institutions – something that indeed often happens at a practical level but which could certainly be done at management level as well.

Promotion of Europe's Cultural History and Identity

If we conduct joint research and conservation work, what is there to stop us from making joint purchases, enlarging our collections and holding joint exhibitions? We are not talking here of mere strategic alliances born out of necessity because European museums are constantly expected to do more and more with fewer and fewer funds at their disposal. Rather, what we are talking of are links between museums of similar type, format and content. If we wish to devote ourselves to European matters, then the structures must be prepared for that whilst preserving our national roots; above all, we must sense the European dimension in our everyday lives. But museum work concerning the history of a nation certainly does not mean that the organisational structure of the museum has to be restricted to the national level. The collections of most of the great art museums of Europe are, by definition, European in scope. The Dresden museums are exemplary in this respect: take the Italian, Dutch, French and German paintings in the Old Masters Gallery; the Cabinet of Prints and Drawings as a mirror of European creativity; the Grünes Gewölbe as a European treasury and storehouse of world knowledge; the Porcelain Collection with the works of European manufactories and, above all, with its documentation of European responses to encounters with China and Japan.

The Dresden Armoury has a magnificent Turkish Chamber and a textile and costume collection that presents fashion and craftsmanship from the whole of Europe. So why do we set ourselves such narrow limits when it comes to questions of administrative structures, management and organisational policy?

Sharing Training and Availability of Museum Personnel

Aside from the fact that our personnel structures have not adapted to the opportunities presented by Europe as regards training and the availability of experts – that is, the need for a more international staff - I ask myself why we did not raise the supervisory bodies, the boards and trustees, to European level long ago.

The same applies to our supporters' associations, patrons and sponsors. You are probably now wondering what benefits such internationalisation would bring and how such joint structures would function. The

benefits are obvious, for the expensive business of holding exhibitions in Europe has run wild and could be given a lot more substance if the organisers were to move away from their present 'blockbuster' mentality and place more emphasis on content. Our priorities should be education, joint research, joint conservation and presentation, and – again and again – education, as our most important resource! We must learn to become more open and to think in European terms if our organisational structures are to shift as a matter of course to supra-national level.

New Concepts of Museum Sponsorship in the Globalising Economy

In so doing, we must not forget that business enterprises – and, often enough, also private individuals who support our museums - have structures that are anything but restricted to the local or national level. These enterprises have for a long time expected us to act in a way that suits their way of doing business. Everyone must judge for themselves, but the sponsorship provided by E.on, for example, follows the route of the pipelines and is guided by the company's aim of presenting E.on as a promoter of culture in those countries where the political system and the public are likely to be impressed by E.on's engagement in the cultural sphere. They are acting internationally, whilst we restrict ourselves to our own roots; something is out of balance there.

Museum Mergers across Frontiers

That leads me to expand my question further. What opportunities are offered by the fact that in today's world art can be regarded in a completely globalised way? If we continue along the path towards Europeanisation, if we link and enlarge our institutions, how can we then react to international demands? China, where only a few years ago contemporary painting was still seen as illegal, is now the largest export market, as we recently saw in the *Artnewspaper*. That has very little to do with art but a lot to do with political developments and even more with global markets. The art market has long since cast off any national bounds. Yet museums still restrict themselves to their national financial resources and their national cultural connections. We would be able to react more appropriately to the art market and the global art scene if museums in an international context were either also to cooperate or, following the model of business concerns, create merged institutions. Here again I can only ask what it is - apart from a suspicious press - that prevents us from doing with the Getty Trust, for example, what we already began years ago: joint research projects and exhibition projects, such as the current Caspar David Friedrich and Gerhard Richter exhibitions. What is there to prevent us from developing more utopian ideas and expanding such low-level joint ventures further? Why shouldn't joint institutions develop from them, joint boards, joint management - perhaps as an initial step simply joint long-term, future-oriented projects. But please regard this simply as a specific example!

Museums as Supra-national Cultural Institutions

Would not such supra-national cultural institutions also be ideal for reacting more effectively to our wide-ranging social problems? Issues such as migration, urban development, community-oriented education and demographic trends are just some of the phenomena to which we could react with the necessary degree of flexibility, understanding and hence also tolerance. It may sound like a truism, but a museum can devote itself to the question of education among immigrants if it can develop relationships with cultural institutions in the immigrants' countries of origin. The exhibition about the history of Turkey at the Royal Academy was an excellent example of this. I ask you once again: Why do we not form alliances with museums in Turkey? The fact that Dresden has an excellent Turkish Chamber, for example, provides an excellent opportunity to discuss such issues openly.

As I mentioned at the beginning, we must question whether and how the boom in exhibitions can be continued in a meaningful way. The exhibitions often have more to do with museum and city marketing than with content. And to be frank, I often wonder what the long-term effects will be of many exhibitions taken to Beijing and Shanghai by European museums in the wake of the Chinese economic boom. This is European tourism marketing with very little educational value.

We must also ask ourselves whether our exhibitions in Europe and the USA are still reaching the public that we originally intended to reach. If educational goals are met, then we succeed in reaching minorities (a particularly important factor in times of demographic change). But how can we convince the trustees and politicians that education is the highest good and that we need appropriate funding. The yardstick for fundraising should not be the fulfilment of quotas, i.e. exhibitions that attract large numbers of visitors; our aim should be to achieve quality in the sense of educational value.

Summary

Especially in times of global commercialisation in art and culture, the major museums have an obligation to concentrate on their classical and traditional tasks. These include, above all, collecting, preserving, developing and also opening museums so as to respond to current social issues. And in this connection education is the ultimate goal of our work. In order to achieve this goal in a way that is much more efficient than is the case at the moment, we need alliances and partnerships of a completely new dimension. Those who wish to deal efficiently with the tasks at hand must join together with other European museums in management alliances. Joint ventures with museums in the USA are also much to be recommended. The principle of the ready-to-go exhibition consisting of 'frequent-flying' Titians and Rembrandts, Gojas and Picassos should be replaced in the not too distant future by real and intellectually profound education.

