

Art and Heritage: Dialogical Intertwining

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Abstract:

This review analyzes the volume *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, strongly evidencing the intervention of artistic practice in heritage sites. The different case studies give an insight into ways in which remaining heritage can be vivified by always new alternative stories, thereby, quoting Nick Cass, forming “a deeply 'enmeshed encounter' between visitor, artwork and site” (p.185). This review highlights the positive example of the interdisciplinary research this publication is in itself, reconsidering the boundaries of disciplines, art, and narrative forms.

Die dialogische Verflechtung von Kunst und Kulturerbe

German Abstract:

Die vorliegende Rezension analysiert den Band *Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, der den Eingriff der künstlerischen Praxis in Kulturerbestätten deutlich macht. Die verschiedenen Fallstudien geben einen Einblick in die Art und Weise, wie das verbliebene Erbe durch immer neue alternative Geschichten belebt werden kann, wodurch, wie Nick Cass schreibt, "eine zutiefst 'verwickelte Begegnung' zwischen Besucher_in, Kunstwerk und Stätte entsteht" (S.185). Diese Rezension hebt das positive Beispiel der interdisziplinären Forschung hervor, die diese Publikation an sich darstellt, indem sie die Grenzen von Disziplinen, Kunst und Erzählformen neu überdenkt.

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Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces is an edited volume based on a series of events at the University of Leeds entitled 'Intersecting Practices' which took place between 2014 and 2015. The volume is a dynamic framework for academics, artists, and researchers to dialogue about commissioning contemporary artistic work in reference to heritage sites, a growing phenomenon bearing fruit for the major UK heritage organizations.

Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces is divided into four parts, which focus each on an overall connecting theme. The first section — “Reimagining Heritage” — brings to the fore the temporal critique concerning heritage and the role of artists as “catalysts for dialogue” (p. 7). All chapters, each with a different insight and case studies, discuss the ways of thinking about heritage and how institutions shifted from critical thoughts about contaminating contemporary art practices, to the adoption of those very methods following increasingly audience-focused change in museums and heritage institutions. The role of the artist is still at the juncture between an outsider and institutional figure. The last chapter of “Reimagining Heritage” is written by the artists of the collective *Brass Art* themselves. As many other following chapters, the artists’ contributions give insightful approaches which seed the debate and provide a stimulus movement to the whole reading.

“Alternative Stories,” the second part of the volume, focuses on the new possible narratives resulting from contemporary artistic interventions, bringing to the fore the idea of contemporary art as “a call to action for institutional change” (p. 8). In particular, Jenna C. Ashton in the chapter “A Room of One’s Own” evaluates feminist curatorial and arts practices in the framework of the National Trust, evidencing the search for an organizational change through art while examining the social implications of said interventions. Joanne Williams, in her chapter “Contemporary Interventions and Conflict,” examines the aims and role of

institutions dealing with artist commissions. She points out the non-critical role that, in many cases, institutions decide to assume, by letting the institutional critique be commissioned to external artists. Doing so, institutions fail to react to ongoing problematic issues concerning curatorial aspects and narrations inside the museum itself. The chapter of Andrew Brown gives a positive example of arts commissioning. The research project *Mapping Contemporary Art in Heritage Experience (MCAHE)* was an initiative able to move thoughts and expand the engagement between visitors, heritage organizations, and artists, letting the art commissions be a permanent and essential part of the visitor's experience.

Related to this topic, the third part of the volume focuses on the concept of dialogue between disciplines and brings valuable examples of how artists and institutions, but also artists and researchers, worked together on projects resulting in multidisciplinary work. "Disciplinary dialogues," sheds new light on collaborative practices which are gradually assuming more and more importance in academia and heritage institutions. The fruitful cooperation between contemporary art, research, and institutions could potentially lead to new forms of knowledge, a result of the intertwining dialogue between different knowledge fields and research modalities. As the different practices merge, new, unexpected outcomes will be developed. This particular aspect is, in my opinion, essential in order to understand the potentialities interdisciplinary dialogues have to broaden the future perception of arts and heritage: Contemporary artists can give new meaning and reshape forms inside heritage sites, expanding knowledge and narratives of historical places. All in all, "Disciplinary Dialogues" clearly defines the role of the artist inside the institutions as essential for a new expanded experience of our heritage and history.

The final concept analyzed in the fourth part "Liminal Spaces" is the discursive practices resulting from historical spaces and contemporary interaction. The heritage site has the power to be a liminal space which connects times and people, be it visitors, artists, museal institutions. Clear examples, like the Brontë Parsonage Museum (Chapter 12, p. 185) and Bruce Naumann's artworks inside York St. Mary's Church (Chapter 14, p. 216), strongly reveal that a new hybrid perspective is possible for the past to be experienced again and visitors to be the main 'numen-seekers' (p. 188). That is, visitors are the ones who explore and actively engage with the site, by a sense of shifting-time activated through the dialogue between present artistic intervention and narrated, preserved and always re-explored past.

Nick Cass, Gill Park and Anna Powell present with this volume the dialogical intertwining in which the word 'heritage' is now understood. For too long the focus has been on the idea of material traces being preserved, letting heritage sites function just as monuments of a hardly perceptible past. *Contemporary Arts in Heritage Spaces* sheds new light on the contemporary practices and research done in these recent years. The reader is carried through different case studies as a visitor looking through the different installations and perspectives. In this book, theory and practice are bound together into a constant fusion.

The geographical focus of the volume is on UK heritage sites and UK artists and historians working on those topics and practices. Nevertheless, this approach enables the reader to transcend the geographical target and universalize it in the context of an international dialogue about the role of art in reference to heritage and vice-versa. Thanks to the openness and pleasant organization of the different papers, this book doesn't just shed new light on contemporary approaches to heritage sites but also stimulates and encourages broader debates on the role of heritage institutions. Overall, this book will surely be an inspiring and important reading for artistic researchers, and all researchers who are part of institutions and commissions dealing with heritage sites and curatorial practices.