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EDICIONES  
COMPLUTENSE

## INTRODUCTION

### Rethinking the museum

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With this edition of *Anales de Historia del Arte* we commemorate the bicentenary of the Prado Museum and aim to present the museum in new light and open a forum for research into the past, present and future of this institution, an institution which is so closely bound with the teaching of our Art History Department and which is always in our field of view as researchers.

We present as a guest writer Uwe Fleckner, Professor of Art History at the University of Hamburg and Director of the Warburg-Haus, whose text on the use of the human body as an exhibition theme brings to the fore, once again, the function and purpose of museums.

We have also included two essays by two of our most eminent and respected teachers and colleagues whose recent passing has left us with copious work and insight on the same theme. These two texts, which juxtapose and complement each other, open fertile ground for scientific debate on the meaning the Prado has in our lives. The museum, as Francisco Calvo Serraller states in an article we've included below, is a great achievement of the French Revolution, while conversely for others, such as Ángel Gonzalez, it's a place striving for what should be it's ultimate goal: pleasure.

Paul Valery said that museums have some of the qualities of prisons. Once entered they create the sensation of coercion - places where cold confusion reigns and whose purpose isn't always clear:

“Have I come to be informed, look for something to please me, or only to keep up appearances? Or even as a peculiar picturesque exercise in which beauty distracts me from all sides, navigating masterpieces like a drunkard goes from bar to bar?”<sup>1</sup>

There is dispute about the museum as a place of knowledge, a place of conservation, or a pleasure palace. The work of Muntadas, reproduced on the cover of this edition, comes to mind; the sign on the door of the *Cittadelarte* states, “Beware, perception implies compromise”, and demands dedication and commitment from the public with respect to the various works exhibited.

We have debated about the function of the Museum and its relation with the University with Miguel Zugaza, ex-director of the Prado Museum, who is closely associated with our department. Jesusa Vega, Professor of Art History at UAM and ex-director of the Lázaro

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<sup>1</sup> Valery, Paul (2005), *Piezas sobre arte*, Madrid, Visor, p. 106.

Galdiano Museum, points out in her article that a museum's discipline is no longer History of Art, and that with their commercialisation, museums should return to being fora for dialogue, based on mutual respect, with academia. We are reminded of the definition of a museum according to ICOM:

“A museum is a permanent public-service non-profit institution which acquires, conserves, researches, interprets and exhibits mankind's material and immaterial heritage and its context for the purpose of education, study, and pleasure”.

We also present in this edition various studies of individual museums and collections; the Convent of the Dominican Mothers of Córdoba, the Tapestry Collection of the Linares Palace, The Episcopal Palace of Segovia, the Contemporary Art Collection of the University of the Basque Country and the Julio Romero Torres Museum in Córdoba. But new social challenges and means of communication also demand a recasting of museums from unforeseen perspectives. This is argued by Julio Pérez Manzanares in his text about the appropriation and reinterpretation by the Prado Museum of some works of art to legitimise them in the context of gender and queer theory. Valeria Calporesi's essay reflects on the inclusion in the Museum of commercial films, and Francisco Falero on cultural tourism and its impact on heritage.

As is appropriate, this edition also includes content on the role of collectors and artists. Beatriz Cordero's text deals with this in symptomatic manner and starts with a dinner with Faust who says: “What you call the spirit of time is in reality the spirit of the men in which this time is reflected”. But who are these men for the museum? Ángel González García asks this question in a pertinent manner: whose home is a museum? He answers that the rich are appropriating public museums, distorting them and their common roles within our fragmented society. Between the “unimaginable museum” of Georges Duthuit and the “Imaginary Museum” of André Malraux, the institution threatens to become both a place of exposition for the powerful, and a theme park for the masses. Our times are also witnessing the transformation of the museum into exhibition space for things which previously weren't considered art, such as the human body, the capricious collections of the rich, and images hung in substitution of originals. Museums are ceding their agency to what is termed “event economy” and processes of mediation. All this in the context of political interest which distorts their essence and makes the role of academia and science subordinate to spurious influences.

Finally, the museum has even ceased in its function as a container for art. In her text Selina Blasco talks about the indivisibility of art and its exhibition space. She analyses artistic practices which present museums as empty spaces which can even block and obstruct the access to the works inside. Between empty museums and street art traditional definitions of the museum are blurring. The future of museums in the 21st century offers us rich ground for debate with museums presented as funeral homes for art,<sup>2</sup> all the way to refuges for the muses. Ángel González García reminds us that time passes differently in museums, that they can shift from being temples of knowledge - ordered places for history and the preservation of collective memory, all the way to being implausible self-absorbed “dens”<sup>3</sup> for the passing of time. At any rate, they continue to be the focus of research for art historians.

2 Cioran, Emile (2004), *Desgarradura*, Barcelona, Tusquets, p.32.

3 In Spanish “antros”.