



Mela⁺Books

REDEFINING
THE LOBBY
OF THE MACBA
STUDY CENTER

Selection of proposals

edited by the Museu d'Art
Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA)

**MELA BOOKS 00 – RFO5 EXHIBITION DESIGN, TECHNOLOGY
OF REPRESENTATION AND EXPERIMENTAL ACTIONS**

Published by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA)

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The Lobby as a Design Challenge for the MeLa Project

→ GENNARO POSTIGLIONE

Gennaro Postiglione (Napoli, 1961) holds a PhD in Interior Architecture (1994) and he has been an Associate Professor at Politecnico di Milano since 2005. His main interests are the transformations of existing environments through adaptive reuse interventions. He is a promoter of the following research: REcall-Museography for Conflict Heritage (2012–14) (www.recall-dow.eu); MeLa - European Museums in an Age of Migrations (2011–15) (www.mela-project.eu); and Re-Cycle Italy (2012–14).

+ THE MELA STUDY

The challenge undertaken by the MeLa Project - *European Museums in an age of migrations* is to research the potential repercussions of migrations and the Europeanisation of Europe (that is, the construction of a new supranational European citizenship) on the collections and exhibition rhetoric of museums and galleries.

Based on this postcolonial condition that characterises the contemporary multiethnic metropolis, we are forced to embark upon a historical-cultural revision of the idea and shape of the museum and its exhibition techniques, given that all representations inevitably imply the other, the foreigner, not only as recipients but simultaneously as objects or subjects. The positivist universalism debate on the one hand, and the very idea of cultural identity as a factor in discrimination on the other, undermines the very foundations of the global knowledge/power structure, which until recently was accustomed to being articulated autonomously, unquestioned. As a window providing glimpses into other stories and other cultures that inhabit modernity, and which have an equally legitimate right to be represented in places designed for this purpose, museums must discover the need to rewrite the history of the past and the memory that it is charged with conserving. And this revision must be capable of avoiding the contrast of diversities and of including more than segregating, relativising the dominant culture and homogenising the themes.

View of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) and surrounding area © Julio Cunill

Consequently, in a somewhat utopian sense, European museums are considered to be engaged in the process of redefining themselves as public spaces of collaboration, shared control and complex translation. From places of power and knowledge, today they are becoming places of cultural integration where we can start to shape a different idea of Europe, one that is not viewed as a simple expansion of national borders but is instead more like a political-cultural entity with the capacity to debate the very idea of limit, of confines, of nation, deconstructing the classic contrast between state and nation.

It is clear that some people view a vision of this kind as futuristic because of the very identity of museums in the sphere of the national context, even though the current hybridism of contemporary culture is imposing an in-depth revision, and the structural revision which we strive for should be understood as an indispensable, necessary operating horizon.

→ THE MACBA CALL FOR PARTICIPATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE MELA PROJECT

The call for participation issued by the MACBA Study Center (CED), should be situated in this context, as a chance borne from the need to reinvent the lobby and find new connections between the Museum building and the research building, to inquire into new ways of understanding Museum spaces and their communication with the city, with its habitants – both Catalan and non-Catalan – and with the thousands of tourists who invade it on a daily basis.

The design of the internal space is consequently the outcome of reflections, most of which take place outside the CED, starting in the square where it stands, the mythical meeting point of skateboarders from all over the world, Plaça dels Àngels. An urban and social crucible, located in the Central District of the Raval, in the historic district of Ciutat Vella, not to mention the extraordinarily high presence of (non-EU) immigrants and the large Chinese community. This is a multicultural district yet one with none of the glamour of other zones in Barcelona; furthermore, the social fabric is even more complex because of the superimposition of flows of tourists and students that cross it incessantly, the skateboarding community and the homeless people who, in fact, live right there in Plaça dels Àngels. The square is the heart of the neighbourhood, bounded by MACBA on two sides: to the north the Museum and to the west the CED, while to the south is the headquarters of Foment de les Arts Decoratives (FAD). It is a true cultural district if we bear in mind that the Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB) and several university faculties are located behind MACBA.

It is not easy to grasp the fact that these communities do not engage in dialogue with each other and in fact virtually ignore each other even though they are forced to live together all day long, every day of the year. In this sense, interpreting the competition's call for participation from the perspective of MeLa gives rise to a series of reflections in which the urban and social context in which MACBA's structure is located is a particularly fertile ground. They enrich the design challenge by adding

a layer of complexity that encourages reflection on more than just the functional aspects of the project. The CED lobby thus becomes the focal point of design attention that takes into consideration either the brief drawn up by the organisers or the social and cultural practices that can be discerned in the zone, expanding the potential of the solutions to be investigated. The museographic project must, in fact, mediate in the requests of the CED, the links stemming from the act of intervening in an existing building and the need to use installation strategies capable of enlisting involvement and including all the different souls that live together in the neighbourhood who, to some people, clearly exemplify the core theme of the need for inclusion that the post-colonial museum should have in order to respond to the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The crux of the matter is the need to introduce spatial, exhibition and communicative choices that are capable of neutralising the typical museum rhetoric that places a premium on certain social and cultural categories at the expense of others, who in practice are shed or excluded from the story as either object or subject. The goal instead is to pluralise the narrative and the story in order to become a community that welcomes as opposed to one that distinguishes and divides.

In consequence, the extensive CED archive is an incredible resource that must be exploited so that the communities that move about outside it can converge: they are all potentially represented and can all potentially recognise themselves, even though it is important that the project leader's efforts must also be capable of building effective bridges to forge ties between the objects on display and the community of visitors. Connecting: this is the purpose of the refurbishment project. Connecting people, objects and places so that relationships emerge that always offer new and different interpretations, new routes, just like in a kaleidoscope where the action of the person using the object influences its outcome. Another unquestionable goal is to imagine the possibility of adding to the stories already in the archive, both tangible and digital, other materials, also tangible and digital, which, as they enter into contact with the collection, pluralise it, introducing this indispensable element of comparison and contrast that serves to deconstruct without halting the narrative, while turning it into something nomadic and hybrid at the same time. Somehow, similar to the structure and behaviour of libraries, the CED archive is a place of shared, participative cultural emancipation, which, however, like all books, requires the active participation of the reader who is asked to play a crucial role in its success: if nobody picks up the volume, opens it and reads it, the revolutionary content it has been filled with remains just inexpressive potential. Like a chair before someone sits on it. For this reason, it is equally indispensable for the archive to leave the archive and to contaminate the city space, invading Plaça dels Àngels, and for the city to enter the archive with neither filters nor censorship and to appropriate its lobby as if it were yet another space in the square, another place to cross through instead of a dead-end, a room with no exit.