

The museum as a forum of knowledge

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In the cultural dialogue in the city of the future, museums will increasingly be challenged not only to present themselves through exhibition activities, but also to fulfill their role as the expert in the field of art and art history and as the institution with the responsibility for conveying this information to the public. There is, therefore, a growing need for projects that will transform the museum into a hub of (knowledge-) activities with an impact on the city's cultural and educational landscape.

Two such projects by the Hamburger Kunsthalle are setting new trends: the continuing practical course and the coordinating knowledge forum. This presentation focuses on possible changes in the role of the museum and its future opportunities.

Based upon the idea of “the museum as a forum of knowledge”, there are five areas in which the museum of the future can be seen as a center of excellence. It is a center in the cultural sphere and can shape opinions; it is capable of being a center of information exchange; it can function as a moderator in cooperative projects; it may be seen by outsiders as a model for quality management and quality awareness; and it can act as a pool of ideas. All of these five functions can be very effective in two areas: on the one hand, in training young art historians for possible roles in museums of this kind, and on the other hand, in improving connections with the public.

The most obvious cooperation partners for such new projects are, of course, universities, but also churches and consulates, for example, and cultural institutions that are affiliated to these consulates. Even large consulting firms, which decorate their offices with art collections, are increasingly turning to the Kunsthalle for advice.

In the field of training, I would like to discuss the “Museum” practical course, which has been offered at the Hamburger Kunsthalle since 2002. This course is organized in cooperation with the Hamburg Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe (Museum of Arts and Crafts). It runs for a period of two months at a time and gives eight trainees the opportunity to gain a special insight into museum work. This unique course is publicized nationally. We believe that it is particularly important to devote close attention to students from the seventh semester onwards who have not yet gained a qualification that entitles them to perform a particular role. Unlike study courses such as Museology or Museum Management, this practical course focuses on the significance of creativity, knowledge of the collection and work with that collection. We teach all the skills required to run a museum – administration, budgeting, project management, and so on – but place special emphasis on the fact that the future of museum work cannot consist primarily of these abilities. A successful museum always relies on the curators' knowledge of the collection and their ability to present it in a new and relevant light. This plays a particularly important role in times of decreasing funding.

The Hamburger Kunsthalle has successfully initiated a pilot project within the educational landscape of Hamburg, thereby increasing public awareness of the museum's work. The purpose of this project is

the documentation and examination of the demolition of the Hamburger Dom 200 years ago. This medieval cathedral (whose construction began in around 1035 and consisted of a number of phases) was torn down in 1806 on the orders of the senate. Some of its works of art were destroyed; other parts of the collection were given away and divided amongst different churches. For example, following its restoration by the Hansestadt in 2000 and its presentation as a loan at a large Kunsthalle exhibition, the "Marienaltar", the Dom's most famous altarpiece, has been returned to the Polish National Museum in Warsaw.

The aim of this project is to gather findings on the question of the former Hamburger Dom and to present them publicly in a joint exhibition. The Hamburger Kunsthalle is serving not only as a center of knowledge for the treatment and presentation of exhibits, but is also responsible for the management of the project and the process of imparting knowledge. Moderated by Dr. Martina Sitt at the Kunsthalle, five academic institutions from Hamburg are cooperating on a joint project for the first time. As part of a joint seminar, students from the university; from the Hochschule für bildende Künste (the art academy)/HafenCity University; the Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften (HAW, Hamburg University of Applied Sciences); and the Hochschule für kulturelles Management (University of Cultural Management) will work with the Hamburger Kunsthalle to investigate the subject of the demolition of the Hamburger Dom and the question of its original shape and its decoration with artworks in the Middle Ages. Whilst the university students are more concerned with research into the history of the art and architecture of the building, the aim of the HAW students is to create a modern computational reconstruction, which could be used as an impressive means of bringing the building back to life. Students from the Hochschule für kulturelles Management are viewing the exhibition content in terms of advertisement and marketing. During the first joint meetings, it became clear that combining these completely different approaches and motivations would give considerable impetus to the discussions.

The initial results of this pilot project will be on display as early as 6 October 2006 at the Hamburger Hauptkirche St. Jacobi, in a small exhibition on the demolition of the Dom and the surviving artworks. More extensive research will form the basis of a 2008 exhibition, in which new knowledge about the art of Hamburg around 1400 will be presented, focusing particularly on Master Francke and his contemporaries.

This idea of combining areas of interest with partners from different backgrounds will be increasingly necessary for museums in the future and will enable them to become firmly anchored within the cultural landscape of the city.