

Perspective منظور Perspektive

Blickpunkt وجهة نظر

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PERSPECTIVE

Perspective can be derived from the Latin word *perspicere* which means to see/look through something. It describes the spatial relationship of objects in a space which is bound to the location of the viewer and can only be changed if the viewer changes its location or the location of the objects are being changed in the space. The second meaning of perspective is the point of view from which something is perceived. Both definitions hold a meaning when it comes to understanding how important the term perspective is for the museum world.

To me, the term perspective implies a specific, individual viewpoint from which we see and contextualize our everyday life and the world around us. This viewpoint is based on our social status, our upbringing, the places we went to school/work for, the neighbourhood and home we live in. It's something that develops constantly, starting in our childhood and ending in our last days of life. It shapes how we behave and relate to others, handle our feelings and challenges that stand before us. In order to maintain a healthy coexistence as a society, each one of us has to realize that our own perspective isn't the only one existing and can't be projected onto someone else's life experience. The beauty of life is that we're all different individuals and can learn from one another's perspective to evolve together, therefore it is very important to gain different perspectives as it enables us to become more understanding and it teaches us about other realities which we usually don't face. Gaining perspective can be an active choice of dealing with an issue or a person, but

contrarily it can also be an active choice of not facing it or not wanting to be introduced to other perspectives.

Coming from the field of urban studies, I have always been pushed by my professors as well as public debates to question from which perspective cities are being built and which voices are unheard in urban development processes. Who do we build the city for? Which people are getting involved? Who is supposed to use the architecture and landscape, what are the needs? Only with the involvement of different perspectives in a participatory process one can have a vast, valid answer to these questions. In the urban landscape, unfortunately there are a lot of negative examples how the inclusion of only one dominant perspective turned a potential multi-cultural and multi-functioning space to a soulless, meaningless place. Examples from my hometown Hamburg are the newly constructed neighbourhoods called HafenCity and Neue Mitte Altona which had been planned without any invite for participation and are now being heavily criticized for missing out on basic needs like affordable housing, public spaces for recreation, nearby schools or healthcare centres, cheap supermarkets, cultural institutions that would support the sense of community and ignite collective activities, etc. Another big failure was naming completely new streets after representatives of the colonial history, such as Marco Polo or Amerigo Vespucci. The city planners decided to ignore gaining perspective through participatory processes with the public, and turned the neighbourhoods into spaces for the rich instead. Unfortunately, the majority of citizens can't identify with these quarters and avoid them as they feel unauthentic or as I would like to call them: „artificial“. If there would have been participation in the planning process, lots of the things could have been prevented and designed for the majority of citizens which are in need of more social places to live.

The same question of perspective pops up when one thinks of museums: Who is telling whose story, to whom, and why? Who is interpreting the objects? Who is

deciding which exhibitions are getting displayed and which aren't? And most importantly: Who is truly being represented? As for now, the inclusion of diverse perspectives is lacking in the European museum landscape. Through the majority-minority mechanism which is a very active outcome of colonialism, museums are excluding a lot of people from different backgrounds by silencing and ignoring voices until today. As museums have a transformative power to educate and are shaping our social identity, it is incredibly important to include diverse viewpoints and work for justice and equality as an institution. Through bringing new perspectives into all spheres, museums can ensure that their content stays accessible and relevant to a broader spectrum of visitors. It will also help overcoming outdated or one-sided representations by bringing a more inclusive and equitable approach into history and art.

During SAWA and our museum visits in Sharjah and Berlin, I learned the most about objects and art through a constant dialogue with my fellow participants, expanding my own perspective by soaking up other's. Not only has it been a moment of sharing, but most importantly a moment of empathy and bonding in which the object became the medium. Especially in the Pergamonmuseum and the Neues Museum I could only understand and build interest for some of the displayed objects by listening to stories and the knowledge my fellow participants were willing to share with me. It made me realize that museums can act as facilitators for bringing people together and create a space for empathy where thoughts, feelings and memories can be shared in a low-threshold way. It also made me realize that museum collections urgently need to be seen through a contemporary lens as the meaning-making will become harder for my generation. I personally feel like there are a lot of exhibitions in museums that fail to build a bridge between the past and the present, leaving the visitors with very complex, hard-to-understand object descriptions instead of awakening the visitor's interest with easy-to-access, relatable perspectives on the artworks. That could be changed effortlessly if museums would not only let academic museum professionals put their

perspective on the objects or exhibitions, but instead invite people from many different backgrounds to look at the collection and reinterpret the objects they are being drawn to. This can be done by anyone interested in museums, but also people who usually wouldn't visit a museum because they feel like they're not being represented. Consequently, I believe in a change of museums through a change of perspectives!