

Call for Papers



Does war belong in museums?

A joint event of the Styrian Armoury, the Museum Academy and ICOMAM - International Council of Museums and collections of Arms and Military history 21st - 23rd September 2011, Graz, Austria

In 2011, the Joanneum Universal Museum will be celebrating its 200th anniversary. The Styrian Armoury is one of the oldest and historically most interesting collections in the Joanneum, with the greatest appeal to a broad public. In the bicentennial year, the Armoury is organizing a conference where discussion will focus on the way war and violence are featured in museums generally, but also on the Armoury itself, which is looking for new, analytical and discursive modes of interaction for its "depository" and historical exhibits.

Presentations of war and violence in museums generally oscillate between the fascination of terror and its instruments and the didactic urge to explain violence and, by analysing it, make it easier to handle and prevent. The museums concerned also have to face up to these basic issues about the social and institutional handling of war and violence.

Does war really belong in museums? And if it does, what objectives and means are involved? Can museums avoid trivializing and aestheticising war, transforming violence, injury, death and trauma into tourist sights? What images of shock or identification does one generate -

and what images would be desirable? Can anything of the dialectic of friend and foe be made accessible? Is it ultimately about frightening off, warning, pondering and shocking?

About emotional manipulation, comparing, historicizing and learning? About keeping a sense of detachment in museums, maybe defusing? Or what?

How can we avoid making fetishes of things and documents? How can we relativise and break the spell of fascination that weapons obviously exercise? What strategies are there for specialist museums, what do they aim to achieve, and how to they come across?

The Styrian Armoury has been a museum since the late 19th century, and is a special case of an authentic armoury that has survived largely intact. It is an ensemble that was built up over a long period, and thus has a specific documentary value and aesthetic appeal that appears to overlay all other functions and questions. In such a context, should the conference also deal with the question of whether it is necessary and desirable in the first place for collections of this kind to go beyond the historical significance, revisiting it and reinterpreting it? Discussion will touch on the expectations of visitors and effects that such a literally weapons-heavy collection can have, and also the views of curators of the collections and museums concerned.

You are cordially invited to respond to the call for papers.

The closing date for submissions is 31st December 2010. Contributions to the conference are anticipated to be up to 30 minutes long, followed by 15 minutes of discussion. The final design of the conference will be fixed in December 2010. Information about the programme will be sent in good time in answer to all submissions.

Submissions should include the working title, an outline proposal (max. 1 page) and a brief c.v.

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