

CONFERENCE, 2005 Lisbon, Portugal

Safe Keepers of memory: Conservation of buildings and their collections

(NOTE: Papers are arranged by year and alphabetically by country)

BRAZIL - "The Eva Klabin Foundation and Castro Maya Museum, An Alternative Perspective"
Marcio Doctors and Paulo Sergio Moraes de Sa, Rio de Janeiro

The Klabin Foundation has developed a strategy to keep alive the memory of its founder because it is difficult to compete with the cultural dynamics of a big museum or a cultural center. With the complexity of the contemporary world young people have withdrawn from institutions that have the image of being too attached to the past, such as house museums. A successful art exhibition program of classical and contemporary art side-by-side has been developed to overcome this view. It offers a fresh perspective of the collection, opens a dialogue and focuses upon other ways of seeing and feeling. A similar experience has been developed in the house museum of Castro Maya that relates to art and nature while calling attention to this new trend in Rio de Janeiro.

GUATEMALA - "Safe Keeping of Memory: Conservation of Buildings and Their Collections"
Berta Beatriz Quevedo Mejicanos, Guatemala City

Conservation of CASA MIMA (International House Museum of Artistic Movements) contributes to the memory of Guatemala City by playing an important role in saving the heart of the historical district. It was established when the Historical District as Patrimony of the Nation began a series of private conservation and restoration efforts. Constructed in 1870 and restored in 1998, exhibits include decorative and utilitarian arts from the late 19th and early 20th centuries belonging to the family (1920-1963).

The museum began as a family estate and includes furniture, ornaments, clothing, linens, books, documents, pictures, eating and cooking utensils important for visitors' historical memory. The vision of one woman, it helps acknowledge Guatemala's heritage while keeping it safe for future generations.

MALTA - "Reconstructing Memory Through the Conservation of Buildings and Sites"
Samantha Fabry and Malcolm Borg, Malta and New South Wales

Buildings and sites carry memories linking them together with each component significant in revealing the true context of both. Yet can conservation of a particular building or site contribute to the construction of memory? Using a layered approach to each period of occupancy, the property is captured and revealed. Researched and documented correctly, such information can be used to assist interpretation.

This approach was used at Susannah Place Museum by the Historic House Trust of New South Wales and could be applied to a unique timber building transported from Australia to Malta in the 1930s. A prime objective is conservation of specific buildings and sites by working with government and private owners to apply 'best practices' in the museum field.

NETHERLANDS - "Risk Assessment - A Tool for Preservation of Historic House Museums"
Tessa Luger, Amsterdam

In 2003-04 the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage undertook a risk assessment of the Amstelkring Museum, the oldest house museum in the city, following a method developed by the Canadian Museum of Nature. This involved the moveable collection and building with its interior features treated as collection units. An overview of potential risks helped decide how to limit threats to this 17th century house (with a hidden church in the attic) as well as collections with staff becoming more careful in day-to-day use and maintenance. This assessment resulted in a new way of dealing with historic buildings and collections especially when planning to expand the museum while considering risks involved. This method is now being developed for use by other historic house museums.

NORWAY - "Learning by Doing: Understanding Buildings and Transferring Skills"
Roy Hoibo and Grete Holmboe, Sand

The Ryfylke Museum is devoted to keeping most of its buildings on original sites. A major challenge for this open

air museum requires learning and maintaining skills to preserve these wooden buildings. To develop this understanding includes the transfer of traditions from skilled elderly men to younger craftsmen by working together while documenting the process. Taking care of the buildings requires 'learning by doing' while passing along a deeper understanding of memory. All sites should be arenas of learning and the process going on at the Ryfylke Museum is an important part of its education program.

PORTUGAL - "Historical Houses and Museological Functions - The House of Jose Regio"
Antonio Ponte, Vila do Conde

Set in an urban environment, this small building reflects the presence of a renowned poet, artist and collector through the collection. His daily life is interpreted within the domestic setting with mementos of his work as well as leisure activities while the garden helps develop interaction with the building. Structural conservation and care of collections is a constant concern with a study about these issues underway. This includes how to present the historic house to the public as well as how to welcome disabled visitors. Of utmost importance is clarification of the types of houses and house-museums in the process of interaction with the public in an attempt to broaden knowledge and consciousness about these sites.

SPAIN - "Recuperation of Historical Ambiences of the Cerralbo Museum of Madrid"
Maria Angeles Granados Ortega, Madrid

The Cerralbo Museum, created at the end of the 19th century by the Marques de Cerralbo, exhibits his Spanish prehistory archaeology collections plus more than 50,000 other objects. The Marques designed the displays in the sixteen rooms, used only by the family for social events. These were donated to the nation in 1922 on condition there would be no changes (this was not followed during the Spanish Civil War). After serving as a family residence, the building has been adapted to fulfil its original functions. The main floor is now being restored to its original splendor after consulting historical documentation. This challenges some traditional views on conservation and security but also includes the aesthetic approach of the founder. Three areas have recently been restored and help interpret life of a noble family at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries.

USA - "Preserving Fenway Court and the Collection of Isabella Stewart Gardner"
Valentine Talland and James Labeck, Boston

Located in Boston, the Isabella Stewart Gardner museum's collection of fine art from Europe and Asia is permanently exhibited in a century-old building designed as a Venetian palazzo and includes a major collection of architectural sculpture from Venice and elsewhere. In 1992-96, installation of climate control resulted in the largest intervention in the building's history. In 2004 the museum received a grant from the 'Save America's Treasures' program to install a new lighting system and plans were also made for a new building (by architect Renzo Piano) to remove program activities from the original site. Preservation of the collections sometimes resulted in a conflict with preserving the building and lessons learned from these projects will help with new plans that also call for successful integration of collections and building preservation, including conservation of architectural sculpture.

TOURS

- Lisbon: Palacio Nacional da Ajuda. Palacio Fronteira and Casa Museu Dr Anastacio Goncalves, Fundacao Medeiros e Almeida and Museu de Arts. Decorativas da Fundacao Ricardo do Espirito Santo Silva..
- Cascais: Museu-Biblioteca dos Condes de Castro Guimaraes and Casa de Sta Maria plus Museu Verdades de Faria and Casa-Museu Reinaldo dos Santos.
- Palacio Ducal de Vila Vicosa.
- Sintra: Palacio Nacional da Pena e Casa - Museu Leal da Camara.