

Case Museo d'Italia. I luoghi dell'abitare. La camera da letto.

The Bedroom and its History as an Essential Living Space

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The ICOM-ITALY House Museum Working Group over the last few years has organized conferences and published their proceedings on kitchens and bathrooms, as part of the living experience in historic houses across Italy. The intention is to provide guidelines for museum and house museum curators to better interpret these spaces, display their contents and generate interest among the public.

In this latest conference, the analysis has been extended to the bedroom bringing together experts and curators across Italy in a two-day symposium hosted by the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in Venice, on 22 and 23 November 2024.

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The sequence of the event ran as follows:

In the morning there were opening addresses as well as an introductory overview session.

The OPENING ADRESSES included short statements from Cristiana Collu, Director of the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Michele Lanzinger, President of ICOM Italy and Monica Bietti, Coordinator of the ICOM-ITALY House Museum Working Group.

Three INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEWS followed these:

Gianluca Kannés, member of the Demhist Board provided an overview of the historical development of bedrooms over the 17th to 20th century; Francesca Baldry, curator of the Acton Collection, Villa La Pietra, Florence discussed the bedroom as reflected in the literary work of European authors particularly in the 18th and 19th century. Finally, Elisa Bellato, professor of Anthropology, Rome, La Sapienza, discussed how bedrooms of the poorer classes have been the object of ethnographic investigation and recently become part of house museums presentations.

Two further presentation in the morning session displayed a number of case studies. Lorenza Mochi Onori, Deputy Chair of the Association Dimore Storiche Italiane, touched on bedrooms in historic houses in the Marche Region, while Adriano Rigoli, Chair of the Association Case della Memoria, presented a range of bedrooms belonging to illustrious figures (from Morandi to D'Annunzio to Gramsci and many others) as displayed in the house museums entitled to each of them.

PRESENTATION OF CASE STUDIES

The afternoon session, chaired by Dr. Caterina Bon, a renowned art historian and former senior member of the staff of the Ministry of Culture, presented 10 papers, each examining a case study of a house museum where a bedroom or bedrooms feature prominently as part of the visit. A common feature of all the papers was that bedrooms constitute one of the main attractions for house museums' visitors.

In some cases new archival documents have allowed the curators to reinterpret the role and function of the bedroom inside the House Museum (Castello Bufalini, Palazzo del Quirinale, Reggia di Caserta), in others the effort of the curators has been to highlight the different styles of bedrooms inside the same house (Imola Palazzo Tozzoni and Villa Carlotta). Most case studies touched on examples of either royal or aristocratic residences. Among these notable the bedroom in the Querini Stampalia House Museum as well as those contained both in the Palazzo Reale and in the Venaria Reale in Turin.

One of the conclusions of the symposium was that the search for sustainable solutions must start from the aim of correctly reproducing the historical context, through archival research, oral history and other kinds of investigation. Only on this basis, is it then possible and desirable to reinterpret the role, function and meaning of the bedroom as part of the visitor's experience. This may involve bringing the past alive by comparing it to the present, or setting the scene for a representation of the bedroom as part of the wider social and human picture of the inhabitants of the historic house. There may be different solutions, also facilitated by tools such as visual imaging. Solutions presented ranged from the reinterpretation of single pieces and objects in the bedroom reflected in dedicated panels, or of small featured text messages and the like.

The second day of the event was reserved for guided tours of a number of house museums in Venice. The first tour was offered by the Fondazione Querini Stampalia itself, conducted by Dr. Babet Trevisan also one of the main organizers of the symposium. Querini Stampalia happens to be the first house museum to be officially opened in Italy in the mid-19th century; and it displays a very interesting bedroom as well as an important picture gallery and a dining table laid with fine porcelains. The following visit was offered by FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano) at a beautiful palace overlooking the Canal Grande in the apartments of former collector Bortoli. This apartment now entrusted to the FAI is open only selectively for small groups of visitors and it displays the taste of a late 20th century collector of Venetian objects. The third house museum to be visited was Palazzo Pisani Moretta.

OUTREACH AND PUBLICATION OF PROCEEDINGS

The importance of the Conference was that it allowed the House Museum community to explore topics, which have never gained in Italy the attention of scholars and curators. Many speakers starting from Dr. Monica Bietti highlighted the importance of the link between our work in Italy and the investigations carried out by the Demhist Community both in terms of providing research stimuli and in terms of allowing the results of this conference to become part of a wider comparative framework.

An audience of about 50 people attended the symposium in person while 40 more were connected on line. The audience consisted of museum operators and curators, ICOM members, Academics, University and high school students mainly of fine arts and architecture, University and high school teachers, architects and curators.

The event was highly publicized on social media and attracted the attention of the press as testified by an interesting piece appeared on an online Venice News Website <https://ytali.com/2024/12/02/il-museo-in-una-stanza/>

The organizers envisage publishing the conference proceedings (in bilingual form) as already done for kitchens and bathrooms (now available on the Demhist website). It is also envisaged to produce a short illustrative video, as already done for the former symposium on bathrooms. It would be most desirable if we could count on Demhist further assistance for these further developments.

Budgetary issues

The budget for the whole event was mainly supported by the hosting organization, Fondazione Querini Stampalia, with the addition of a contribution from ICOM Italy, which covered two coffee breaks and the lunch for the speakers.

The Demhist special Grant reimbursed the costs of the final dinner offered to all the speakers and organizers for the sum of 800 euro, as documented in the invoice of The Fondazione Ranieri di Sorbello ETS, whose President was part of the organizing committee.

Attachments: Pro forma Invoice

Photos relating to the Venice Event

Final budget