

Observation and Organisation

Notes on the 'Architecture of the Archive' exhibition

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Reduced to the lowest common denominator, 'the origin of the museum' is to be found first and foremost in its function of creating 'a protective container'¹ for things which, for various reasons, are regarded as significant and are worth being stored and, when need arises, being displayed to the public. Whilst containers such as cases, shelves, drawers, crates, boxes and capsules are stored within a museum, the museum itself can be seen as a container and place for the collections, archives and deposits stored in it. Medieval treasuries, collections of relics, cabinets of wonder and Late Renaissance art, in which the method of storage in specially designed cases, cabinets and drawers was at the same time seen as part of the set-up and presentation, can all therefore rightly be seen as the precursors of the museums of today. As a 'theatrum mundi', the sumptuously stored and displayed objects – works of art, antiques, books, natural products, technical apparatus as well as curiosities and rarities – represent the world's universal connections. For example, Ambras Castle in Innsbruck is home to the Cabinet of Art and Wonder which once belonged to Ferdinand II of Tyrol (1529–1595) and which is still today one of the most important collections of its kind.

The earliest item of storage furniture known to us, and only from an illustration, is the cupboard dating from 1565 belonging to the German natural scientist Johannes Kentmann (Image 1). It was used to store fossils which, as 'impressions of nature willed by God', were at that time considered to be particularly precious objects². Also dating from 1565 is Samuel Quiccheberg's treatise 'Inscriptiones vel Tituli Theatri Amplissimi', the oldest preserved handbook of museology in the German-speaking world³. In this treatise, regarded as an early guide on the storage of museum objects, Quiccheberg draws attention for the first time to, amongst other things, the need for wooden slats with recesses or drawers with internal grids, and these items made of small components were intended to be used for storage within a larger piece of furniture. Quiccheberg is also quick to differentiate in his handbook between the 'theatrum', i. e. the presentation area, and the 'promptuarium imaginum', i. e. the picture archive which, depending on the contents, can be translated as 'cabinet' (for essences, medicines or weapons), or as 'store cupboard' or 'storage container' and even as 'archive'. The storage components and classification systems which were subsequently developed on a small scale correspond in their formal design to the large-scale architectural sketches. In this way, for example, William Henry Flower, Director of the Natural History Museum in London, designed the floor plan for a museum in 1889 in which the ideal room arrangement resembles an interior comprising storage components made up of small parts (Image 2)⁴. Equal space was granted to the reserve collections stored in drawers and to the public exhibitions. It is from this ideal 19th century museum that further developments can be traced, via the functional modern museums of the 20th century to the museum buildings of our time, which are no longer content merely to serve a purpose, but demand aesthetic value in their own right.⁵

¹ Griesser-Stermscheg, Martina, *Taboo Depot. Museum Storage in History and the Present*, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar 2013.

² Griesser-Stermscheg (2013), note 36, p. 21.

³ cf. Griesser-Stermscheg (2013), p. 17ff.

⁴ cf. Griesser-Stermscheg (2013), p. 47ff.

⁵ cf. Shehann, James J., *History of German Art Galleries. From the Royal Chambers of Art to the Modern Collection*, Munich 2002.

Since 2010, and whilst working on other projects, Sinje Dillenkofer has kept coming back to work on CASES, a series of photographic views from above into the bottom and onto the lids of historic containers which were used to store silverware and precious vessels, technical and scientific instruments or other objects, usually of historic significance, or items of daily use, and which were specifically mass-produced to serve their purpose. Now, if one regards the photographs thus created less for their aesthetic or formal character but rather from the perspective of the exhibition, then the connection in content between the location of the exhibition and the items in the exhibition, i. e. the CASES themselves, becomes the focal point of interest and subsequent reflection.

The containers of the CASES, which have been specially created for the exhibition in the Ferdinandeum with the title 'Architecture of the Archive', come mainly from the Innsbruck archives. For the most part they belong to objects from collections open to the public such as the Tyrolean State Museum Ferdinandeum, the Regional Heritage Museum, Ambras Castle, the Tyrolean State Archives or the Innsbruck City Archives/City Museum. In other words, they come from places which form, both architecturally as well as physically, a container and a store for a series of collections and archives in which in turn are to be found containers for various items of cultural, historical, scientific, social, political, aesthetic interest etc. Museums – and this is what we are talking about here – are places in which specific behaviours and expectations are generated or in which various questions can be asked of or directed at the objects stored or exhibited in them. In this way museums in the 19th century and up to the 1960s were first and foremost the bearers of aesthetic values or matters of cultural and historical significance at the heart of scientific and public interest. Today collecting, research and displaying items, all part of a museum's work, are seen as the essential component of both our identity and our culture of remembrance and recollection⁶.

Even the containers which are used as models and starting points for the CASES displayed in the exhibition possess a function in terms of content as well representation, which in the first instance is established by their formal design. They are at once bearers of content and keepers – and thus small-scale 'museums' and 'collections', similar for example to Marcel Duchamp's 'boîte-en-valise' (1935–1941) which, as a 'miniature museum in the form of a suitcase', contains Duchamp's works in a handy and transportable form (Image 3).

Aesthetic creativity has always been an 'expression of storing, processing and transforming sights and experiences. The picture is like a container in which these experiences are deposited'.⁷ Dillenkofer's CASES are, on the one hand, such stores translated into pictures, but on the other hand they also take the very notions of storing and archiving as their theme. The artist thus establishes a link with the tradition of artistic engagement with the archive and archiving.⁸ In contrast, however, to Marcel Broodthaers for example, whose engagement with the museum as a place for collecting and archiving leads 'to the question about the

⁶ cf. Melichar, Peter, *Is the Museum a Memory?*, in: *Cultural Histories. Austrian Magazine for History*, col. 23, Innsbruck 2012, p. 110-139 and Csáky, Moritz/Stachel Peter (ed.), *Stores of Memory. Libraries, Museums, Archives*, Part 1, Vienna 2000 and Part 2, Vienna 2001.

⁷ Schwenk, Bernhart, *The Warehouse as Work of Art*, in: Schaffner, Ingrid/Winzen, Matthias (Hg.), *Deep Storage. Arsenal of Memory. Collecting, Storing, Archiving in Art*, Exhibition Cat. Haus der Kunst, Munich i. a., Munich-New York 1997, p. 226-230, here p. 227.

⁸ cf. Schaffner/Winzen (1997).

interaction between a work of art and its place of representation⁹, with Sinje Dillenkofer's CASES it leads to a visualisation of the storage system itself, which is the basis of all museum work. Dillenkofer's CASES are at once storage devices translated into pictures, and photographs or representations of storage and classification systems.

Images:

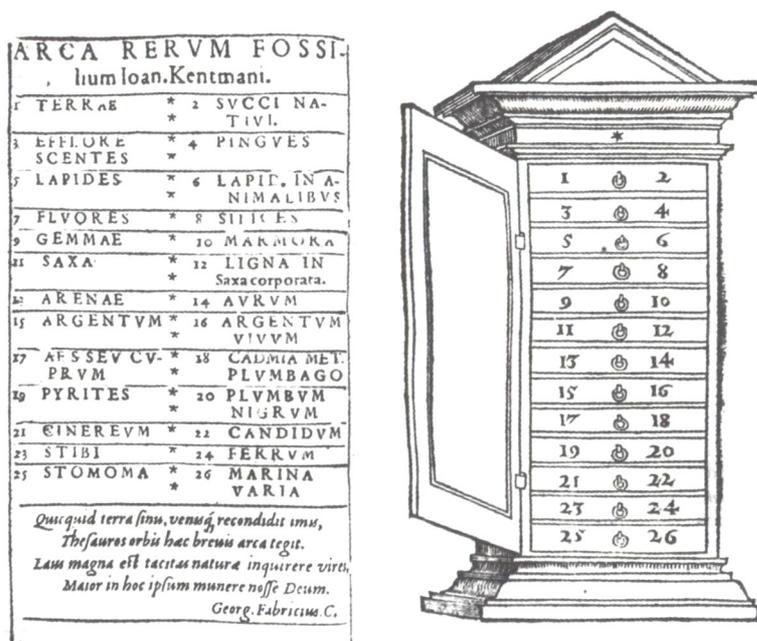


Image 1

Johannes Kentmann's fossil cupboard (arca rerum fossilium), 1565 (from: Griesser-Stermscheg, Martina, Taboo Depot. Museum Storage in History and the Present, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar 2013, p. 22).

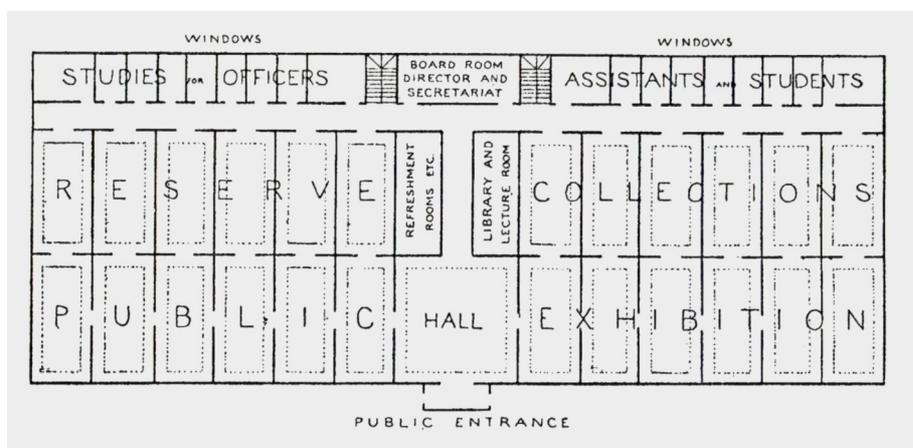


Image 2

Ideal museum floor plan by William Henry Flower, 1898

⁹ Schultz-Möller, Regina, Archiv, in: Butin, Hubertus (Ed.), DuMonts Dictionary of Concepts in Contemporary Art, Cologne 2002, p. 25.

(from: Griesser-Stermscheg, Martina, Taboo Depot. Museum Storage in History and the Present, Vienna-Cologne-Weimar 2013, S. 48).



Image 3

Marcel Duchamp, La Boîte-en-Valise (The Box in a Suitcase), 1938–1941 (1958)

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