

INTRODUCTION

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The international conference *Design Objects: Musealization, Documentation and Interpretation* sought to problematise the design object regarding its place in the museological context. In other words, it intended to study its relation to the canon, its narratives and the challenges for the recent expansion and renewal of this historical knowledge.

Recent research on objects related to design studies has fostered new understandings and interpretations of design objects. Based on different theoretical, ideological and critical perspectives, these pluralistic voices have been dissociating the objects and collections from instituted discursive archetypes, namely those historically generated by art history and design history and confirmed by academies and museums. This redefinition of discourses on design objects has cultivated the emergence of new questions in the museology field, namely on the perception of what a design object is and what narratives they take on — or should do so — nowadays in museums if one intersects economic, political, social and cultural perspectives.

Furthermore, this conference aimed to contribute to creating a space for sharing and discussing issues related to the musealization of design objects, in particular to the topics associated with collections management (documentation) and interpretation (exhibition and education) of these objects. It was expected to provide the spaces: 1) to know and evaluate new instruments and approaches in the organisation of knowledge on design objects (policies and practices for the categorisation of objects, narratives imputed to objects); 2) to collaborate for a re-evaluation of musealization processes practised in museological institutions (reanalysis and reformulation of policies, practices and exhibition discourses).

The conference also sought to bring together research groups from the fields of Museology and Design to relate the competencies produced in Academies to the problems generated in Museums, getting together theory and practice. A relationship was thus established between research groups from different universities dedicated to Museum and Design Studies, with museological institutions and other agents involved,

bringing together analogous or related research questions in order to contribute to an update of the theories and practices of diverse topics discussed by the two disciplines. The scientific meeting was aimed at researchers and professionals in the fields of museology and design and others who have museums and their contexts as an object of study.

The contributions of the speakers were quite diverse. Predominantly, the disruptions and discontinuities of the statute of the object of design in museums — and the disciplinary camp itself — were pointed out, and the itineraries and practices in which the design object moves were discussed. This book brings together some of the insights of that scientific meeting.

Part I. Design object statute and documentation in museums

Jonathan M Woodham claims that it is fundamental to question traditional design principles and that museums must be aware of developments in the methods of both investigating and understanding them. He asks why museums mimic objects in their exhibition spaces and encourages them to integrate different design histories that take their regional identities into account and promote the equality and diversity of design.

Maddalena Dalla Mura problematises graphic design in the different institutions that hold them, revealing them in their various frameworks, from material to digital, from reproducible to ephemeral. This highlights the need for more investment in preserving these collections, trustworthy sources of historical, artistic, graphic and communications knowledge.

Iva Knobloch has demonstrated that the design object can be transposed beyond the design discipline and that the interdisciplinary and interinstitutional approach is a method for better understanding these objects in their different contexts.

Sandra Senra essentially introduces some of the issues that motivated her doctoral thesis, framed in the debate about how the material culture related to design should be institutionalised, understood and organised in museums today when there are so many areas of knowledge that also devote themselves to the study of the same objects. Her research produced a conceptual framework with contexts to consider museum design objects and the different descriptive dimensions that can create them.

Part II. Design object interpretation in museums

Alice Semedo explores close and active listening as curation and design, arguing that museums need to build abilities and capacities to practise it if they are to work with others in designing and implementing policies that improve lives and communities.

Helen Charman describes the curatorial process conceived in the permanent *Designer Maker User* exhibition at the Design Museum in London. This approach

was based on interpretative assumptions that explored the design object's different disciplinary dimensions.

Francisco Providência describes and critically analyses the communications presented by José Bártolo and Bárbara Coutinho (Coutinho was unable to be present but was represented by a text), where he assumed the role of mediator during the conference. He also presents a critical exercise on museology and design museography.

Part III. Round table

The importance of Portuguese private collections for constructing the history of design in Portugal was also discussed. Many of these objects, rescued and archived by these collectors and investigators, tell the country's history.

Bártolo's text explores the multifaceted nature of exhibitions, encompassing various media channels upstream and downstream of the exhibition. The author emphasises the significance of posters, catalogues, and public programming in shaping the exhibition experience. While primarily focusing on design exhibitions, it acknowledges the broader impact of design projects in fields like visual arts and architecture.

Nuno Coelho explores the graphic narratives of Portuguese product packaging and labels from his private collection, describing them in their respective curatorial and expository contexts as a designer-curator, particularly when they were made public.

Sofia Rocha e Silva reflects on some of the difficulties contributing to the construction of Portuguese graphic design history. This is a demonstration that the historical analogic rescue, almost always private, is fundamental for the construction of collective memory, but furthermore, digital graphic production should be addressed.

The articles in this book explore the relevance and urgency of reevaluating and reformulating the musealization processes of design objects and collections. Not only in expository discourses, the most visible facet of the narrative regarding the object, but also in the practices of investigating, documenting and interpreting. The different dimensions that cross design knowledge and its various formats should be described and explored to make them more inclusive. Museums may find in this problematic the opportunity to evoke their role as cultural mediators to explore the interpretative flexibility of the design object¹.

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