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Liminal museum. Artistic installations at the threshold of public realm

Introduction

The complex relationship between public art and iconic architecture, as is defined by Sklair (2006), unfolds both on the museum's façade, in terms of visual connection with the context, and on its threshold, in terms of physical transition to the public space. The former questions the flexibility of the elements of contemporary architecture (Koolhaas, 2014), the latter tackles the issue of analysing the interaction mechanism between owners, organisers, and users of a public space (Chiodelli and Moroni, 2014). The threshold that articulates the complex transition from the exterior to the interior of a museum (Parry et al., 2018) is here assumed as a liminal exhibition space in itself that can offer a complementary program to that of the interior, and a more direct relationship with the context in terms of social and visual connections. Building on Barrett's (2011) understanding of the museum as a visible institution that can sparkle critical debate, utilising its physical and immaterial publicness, we will investigate this duality between public art and architecture, assuming that the balance of the art-architecture complex is often conflictual but at the same time increasingly integrated in a whole (Foster, 2011). This creates a competition between the content and the container, the architectural quality of the building versus the impact that the public installation seeks. In such dialectics, we argue, the façade is a possible area of interaction between the two agencies involved.

First, we set the framework of the notion of threshold in application to our field of investigation. We look at the theoretical definition of liminal museum and define three fields of investigation. Secondly, we look at the relationship between artistic interventions and the neighbourhood, intending the museum as a landmark for creative activities. Then, we focus on the architectural aspects of liminality, being the outcome

of the art-architecture relation. The text continues with a digression on the instrument of living labs used for citizens' engagement in art production and education. Finally, we propose the case study developed in Altamura, Italy, against the background of other art projects involving the façade of a building.

Art at the threshold of public space

Through examples of designs in recent history, Tzortzi (2015) pointed out the importance for a museum not to be considered just an isolated building but as a part of the city. The design of public space surrounding the building or adjacent to it is the first step towards this concept: Bernard Tschumi's new Acropolis Museum in Athens, completed in 2009, is distant from the Greek acropolis but at the same time has constant visual connections with the Parthenon, complementing the visiting experience of the interior with the surrounding panorama; differently, the M – Museum Leuven designed by Stéphane Beel is in a compact urban setting but has a composition of volumes that conveys transparency, namely a gradient from the street to the museum, articulated with balconies, loggia, terraces, and a semi-public square covered by the museum. This condition is generally addressed as transitional space, but also intermediate area or third area, as that space where experience is triggered by transitions across interior and exterior. The term is borrowed from transitional phenomena studied by Winnicott (1953) on infant's notion of possession, in which the act of transition of an object that was previously not owned is ultimately a cultural experience. To a certain extent, this process can be associated with the different degrees of ownership of public space and the acceptance of physical transformations in the public realm (Resta, 2021). Here what is disputed in terms of ownership is not an object but a patch of land.

The public plays a significant role in the museum's growth and has become central to the museological reflection in recent years. A new approach is centred on the visitor as a critical agent rather than a passive spectator, with diverse needs and characteristics according to the varying backgrounds that each one has. The museum has to relate to a differentiated audience and form a relational structure in which curators, experts, and visitors are all part of the same community. And the objects shown in a museum transfer cultural values in personalised ways.

The concept of liminal museum proposed in this text is where we can challenge those boundaries that separate performer and spectator, or public and private, that Luger and Ren (2017) discussed in their book on the disruptive power of public art in the urban realm. The formation of the concept of a liminal museum would help to build a framework to understand the uncertain status of the threshold, starting from its theoretical formulation by Herman Hertzberger (1991), Georg Simmel (1994), and Robert Musil (2006), up to the concrete application on a case study that will be analysed in the last section.

As mentioned, a threshold marks the transition between different spatial conditions. In phenomenological terms, such transitional element can be as thick as a building or as thin as a line of separation between private properties. In this understanding, it is essential to identify the figure of the opening, namely the section of the enclosure

that can be stepped over in order to leave one space and enter the other. Openings also imply symbolic meanings, sometimes carrying references to the world about to be disclosed (Koolhaas, 2014). In Doors and Portals, Robert Musil (2006) explored the act of building in its social implications, understanding the rich repercussions that the act of crossing entails. He wrote that the threshold is not at the centre of the aesthetic research anymore.

"How then should there be doors if there is no 'house'? The only original door conceived by our time is the glass revolving door of the hotel and the department store. In former times, the door, as part of the whole, represented the entire house, just as the house one owned and the house which one was having built were intended to show the social standing of its owner. The door was an entrance into a society of privilege, which was opened or shut in the face of the new arrival." (Musil, 2006: 62)

Hence, the threshold still retains the function of control, but also activates a series of actions that form a ritual. When the passage from one public space to the other is loose, all the rituals connected to the materiality of the door disappear. In his work, Musil also explored the idea of threshold in a metaphorical sense. In *The Man without Qualities* (1930–42), Ulrich himself is a threshold for his sister Agathe who wants to commit suicide.

"She would have been willing to imagine a God who opens up His world like a hiding place. But Ulrich said that this was not necessary, it could only do harm to imagine more than one could experience. And it was for him to decide in these matters. But then, it was also for him to guide her without abandoning her. He was the threshold between two lives, and all her longing for the one and all her flight from the other led first to him. She loved him as shamelessly as one loves life." (Musil, 2017: 154)

In their complex relationship, the threshold materializes in a person as the last resource keeping Agathe from the realm of the dead. Also, Georg Simmel (1994) discussed the theme of connectedness and separation in Bridge and Door, emphasising the conceptual difference between the figure of the door and that of the bridge as main elements of mediation between two spaces. A door implies, at the same time, the act of separation and that of reconnection, as it is an interruption of a uniform continuum. Where "the bounded and the boundaryless adjoin one another, not in the dead geometric form of a mere separating wall, but rather as the possibility of a permanent interchange—in contrast to the bridge which connects the finite with the finite" (Simmel, 1994: 7). Taken to the urban scale, the concept of a spatial bridge connects two detached and different areas, while a door, being a physically defined threshold, separates what is uniform and continuous. For a museum, it is crucial to establish metaphorical doors in the public continuum rather than bridges between one institution and the rest of the city. Elements that can be opened and closed to modulate the interaction of the building with the community.

The locus where this exchange takes place is a third place, the in-between, which reconciles opposites as Aldo Van Eyck suggested. Here is where cultural institutions meet the neighbourhood and the community in general. Van Eyck saw the in-between as the perfect space to develop a dialectic of conflicting actors, if we consider the social level, or conflicting experiences, if we consider the physicality of architecture (Strauven, 2007). In his formulation, city patterns are scaled to the dimension of buildings and

vice versa. Likewise, Dutch architect Herman Hertzberger addressed the transitional space as an entity with its own status, where "the threshold provides the key to the transition and connection between areas with divergent territorial claims and, as a place in its own right, it constitutes, essentially, the special condition for the meeting and dialogue between areas of different orders" (Hertzberger, 1991: 32). He underlined the importance of laying out an architectural design that allows these worlds to dialogue, and provide spaces with potential for social contact.

The concept of a liminal museum that we propose, as the threshold across the public and the private realms, forms a theoretical framework that is drafted under the hypothesis that cultural institutions should establish a strong interaction with communities. We believe that three are the main aspects that should be taken into consideration when curatorial domains interact with the liminal museum: dialogue with the neighbourhood and co-design (a); dialogue with architecture (b); quality of the installation (c). The latter is primarily site-specific and out of the scope of this article; hence we will cover the first two aspects.

Engaging the neighbourhood in co-design activities

In 1971, ICOM organised the ninth general conference in Grenoble on the topic "The museum at human service, today and tomorrow." In this framework, John Kinard, director of Anacostia neighbourhood museum, presented the project Neighbourhood Museum as a prototype of an institution in contrast with the traditional way of functioning of the museum (Demma, 2018). As one of the museums emerging in the 1960s and 1970s in United States under the initiative of civic movements, the Anacostia museum quickly gained a worldwide influence (Alexander, 1997): embracing the daily needs of people, the museum directed by Kinard adopted new strategies and methodologies in order to trigger the interest of the community. In opposition to traditional museums, community museums have deep roots in the local context in which they operate, featuring elements of local history, folklore, and society. For this reason, Anacostia attracted especially local residents and school children, positioning the museum as a place for social commentary and critique (Autry, 2016).

In the same years of the Black museum movement, Duncan F. Cameron wrote an essay entitled "The Museum, a Temple or the Forum" (Cameron, 1971), focusing his attention on the role of society in the museum experience and calling for structural reform in that direction. Josè Jiménez also criticised, in his The Theory of Art, the paradox of underestimating the role of an education department in the organisation of a museum (Jiménez, 2008). On the contrary, museums provide an environment for informal education that encourages active learning (Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 1999). Dierking underlined how a museum as social learning space could also embrace diversity, "groups bring many assets to their visits: shared background, history and knowledge; for the most part they understand how others in the group learn, their interests, strengths and weaknesses" (Dierking, 2013: 203).

Throughout the seventies, relevant experimentations of temporary performative art took place in Italy. Artistic practice was conceived as an essential component

of urban planning, essentially connected with architecture and the city. Art was part of an urban design strategy, at least in activating latent energies already present in the city. The most used methodologies were inspired by situationist dèrive (urban drifting), hinged on the interaction with city dwellers and the value of the sign as an activator of experiences. All artists involved in the movement tackled their work from an anthropological perspective and embedded socio-political and cultural issues in their aesthetics. This resulted in a reduction of the distance between the figure of the artist and the public, attaching democratic connotations to art. Relevant exhibitions and happenings in the urban space were conducted by artist Eliseo Mattiacci in Rome, Michelangelo Pistoletto in Turin and others that moved to small and remote centres. The work of art became a collective artwork, installed in scented landscapes or abandoned buildings, putting forward the idea that creative actions can revitalise marginal territories. It was the first urban expression conceived as a happening in order to open a new collective awareness in which the public is part of the artistic intervention. In this framework, the urban space acts as a relational space: the public is part of the exhibition and joins the "happening field." The work develops an open relationship with the spectator. Richard Long, Anne Marie Boetti, Jan Dibbets, Pistoletto, and Ugo La Pietra were some of the artists who worked in this direction (Pioselli, 2015). Events such as Campo Urbano by Gabriele Basilico involved passers-by and neighbourhoods as direct stakeholders, while the city was transformed into a large-scale art project.

We believe that some of the lessons learnt throughout this fertile period for art could be embedded in the ordinary activity of contemporary cultural institutions, though inevitably losing part of that situationist, spontaneous, drive that institutionalisation would mitigate. If this experience is integrated with current methodologies and theories on museum, the latter could widen its potential reach and overcome the comfort zone of having only a narrow target audience. The design of spatial boundaries plays a central role in making citizens and local actors more involved in their activities. They would build a recognisable unique identity altogether, generate new relationships in the area, and catalyse latent energy in a creative framework.

Dialogue with architecture: liminality as a resource

The importance of space in museums has been acknowledged by museum studies investigating the relationship between architecture and museology (Tzortzi, 2015), spatial and social context beyond economic values (MacLeod, 2020), museum thresholds (Parry et al., 2018) and the spatial factors that transform museums in learning spaces (Falk and Dierking, 2013), including conceptual coherence, visitors' movement and narrative strategy (Psarra et al., 2007), and finally gendered interaction (Crowley et al., 2001).

According to Tzortzi, architecture affects the museum experience not only through the physical form of the building, but also as a system of spatial relations with galleries, objects and visitors. Drawing on the conceptualisation of space and place through a relational mechanism (Massey, 2005), the in-between has the potential to generate meeting and conversational ground.

Aldo van Eyck and Hertzberger pursued this condition in their school designs, where the in-between realm establishes a spatial gradation from private to public with numerous transitional spaces (threshold, entrance, interior street, gallery, stairs, etc.). Their ideas can be seen as applications of the theoretical framework elaborated by geographer Doreen Massey, and especially her elaboration of throwntogetherness and meeting places as ongoing opportunities for engaging with the accidental neighbour (Massey, 2005). Transposing the same elements to the museum, these liminal spaces are still overlooked, if not neglected, in most museums' programs (Schall, 2015). Liminal spaces become meeting places for the community if managed correctly. The former head of the Museum of World Culture, Göteborg, Sweden, declared that "the huge staircase is as we know a meeting-place and it is a wonderful place for the informal learning where we have different groups coming here, discussions, debates, we have a lot of groups hiring space which we try to incorporate in the museum activities, but the staircase is central" (Fors, 2012: 134).

Let us now examine the condition of liminality concerning museum architecture. Viv Szekeres (1995) examined how a museum can be a 'place for all of us.' When museums started to rethink their image from representation of power to outposts where communities could express civic involvement (Witcomb, 2002), the issue of democratisation came to the fore (Russell-Ciardi, 2008; Watson, 2007). Among the many aspects of such interaction, the public space, in combination with the reception of the museum architecture design, are departing points for the success of a liminal museum (Barrett, 2011; Lindsay, 2020). Hence, it should be emphasised the importance to analyse how flagship architectures position the image of public institutions (Patterson, 2012), whose symbolic/aesthetic quality is also the manifestation of an unprecedented historical shift towards the capitalist system, as has been argued by Sklair (2006). Macgregor (2020) maintains that while the exterior of such contemporary buildings captures media attention in the first phase, implying a rapid consumption and expiration of the so-called 'Bilbao Effect' (Patterson, 2022; Plaza, 2008), the content of the artistic program is what grants a long-term horizon to the institution with prolonged audience engagement. The adoption of this trenchant dichotomy, interior versus exterior, private versus public, visitor versus citizen, is here challenged with the idea of museum threshold (Parry, Page and Moseley, 2018; Schall, 2015) with a specific focus on the façade and the semi-public space that is managed by the cultural institution. Bonnin (2000) systematised how the threshold also has a symbolic function, a phantasmagorical value linked to the idea of crossing, ritual and metamorphosis, which also brings the threshold closer to the notion of liminality and back to Musil's lines. Shall (2015) explained how this liminal space is overlooked, if not neglected, in most museums' programmes. In literature, only some of these cases, such as the Kunsthaus Graz, Denver Art Museum, and the Guggenheim Bilbao, have been analysed (Lindsay, 2020).

With the intention to embrace Suzanne Macleod's (2013) challenge to move beyond 'the obfuscating focus on surface and the genius of the architect,' the treatment of the body of the architecture should be devised with a multidisciplinary perspective.

Living Labs as a case study for public artistic interventions

Regarding the co-habitation of museum institutions with surrounding neighbourhoods, directors have increasingly implemented strategies to involve long-term citizens beyond the sole scope of the visit. One prominent example is the formation of Living Labs, where artists and curators establish a dialogue with multiple stakeholders.

The format of 'live' research and pedagogy has being especially adopted by architecture schools in the UK (Denicke-Polcher, 2020, Butterworth and Care, 2020), although live projects are not being experimented with the same consistency in other countries with more homogeneous teaching structures (Harriss and Widder, 2014). The participatory nature of co-design and co-creation defies the assumption of the author/professional as the only maker of change, and in relation to art installation this is especially important for the acceptance of the artwork as it is related to public space. Sharing the creative process with the community needs both a positive disposition from the public and a proper legal framework already established by the governing body (Resta, 2021). The increased emphasis on co-design at the institutional level is demonstrated by the recently kick-started New European Bauhaus (European Commission, 2021b), the transdisciplinary initiative funded by the European Commission in order to link the European Green Deal to living spaces. Its mission is specifically aimed at "innovative solutions to complex societal problems together through co-creation" (European Commission, 2021a). Theodore Zamenopoulos et al. (2021) discussed the notion of empowerment in co-design through three main interrelated aspects: the loci of empowerment, the conditions of empowerment, and the different manifestations of empowerment. When enacted, empowerment implies a gain of power by individuals, a community, or a certain institution (Speer, 2008, Resta, 2021).

Living labs frame an ecosystem for the participation of the stakeholders with iterative cycles of analysis and synthesis. Activities are split into three building blocks: exploration-current state vs. future state; experimentation-real life testing; Evaluation-impact of the experiment (Evans et al., 2017; Cerreta and Panaro, 2017; Guzmán et al., 2013). Based on the Quadruple Helix Innovation Model, living labs have been successfully tested in policy and research up to significant scale interventions (Lupp et al., 2021). When living labs are applied to museums, institutional activities take a participatory shift that fortifies their social role in society. Nina Simon (2010) analysed this dynamic, in which visitor and institution find common ground, by addressing three main strands in literature: the audience-centred institution that is as accessible as possible, the self-construction of the cultural experience by the visitor, the collection of users' feedback to improve projects and programs.

Programs such as Artcity at Stoke-on-Trent, UK (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2020) and Arte Pollino program in Basilicata, IT (Arte Pollino, 2008) demonstrate how to build a community-wide momentum led by artists' interventions and spread across urban space and landscape. The long-lasting art program Fuori Uso in Pescara, has shown the possibility of attracting international artists and curators, such as Nicolas Bourriaud and Achille Bonito Oliva, to minor centres and stimulate a debate on remoteness and abandonment (Scuderi, 2019). Manifattura Tabacchi in Florence is an example of how

large devitalised areas can be converted into a cultural hub (Franzoia, 2020), as well as the unused Halle Freyssinet in Paris provided new spaces for the creative industry (Calace and Resta, 2020). While none of the programs mentioned above were materially attached to museums, the curation of a temporary artistic event on abandoned or repurposed buildings shows that it is possible to generate what we have labelled as liminal museum, namely an exhibition venue with an ephemeral character at the threshold of the public realm.

The liminality of museums: the façade as exhibition space

After the onset of COVID-19 restrictions, several museums have planned exhibitions or installations in proximity to their building, in transition spaces, staircases, or the façade of the building itself. One well-known example is Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, Italy, where JR has installed Wound (2021), which is 28 metres tall and 33 metres wide monumental photographic collage installation that covers the main façade of the Palazzo creating the illusion of a laceration that would allow to see inside the building. On the same Palazzo, Ai Weiwei had previously installed rubber lifeboats, in replacement of the existing fenestration, for his solo show Libero (2016).

An alternative strategy is that adopted by the Archaeological Museum of Naples (MANN), which has commissioned artwork to be installed in galleries, passages, and shop windows, with a series of exhibitions under the name Fuga dal Museo (2019–20). In this case, the cultural institution would spread such art pieces in other buildings, creating an alternative itinerary in the city that the visitor can experience in different spots. Similarly, the Museo Nacional del Prado has dispersed full-scale reproductions of their collection in all neighbourhoods of Madrid within the initiative A la vuelta de la esquina (2021), literally "around the corner."

The façade has always been treated as an interface between the interior of a building and the urban scene. One exemplary case is the so-called Tempio Malatestiano, namely the church of San Francesco in Rimini. Architect and Theorist Leon Battista Alberti laid out a new design that enclosed an existing building whose construction started in the 13th century. The articulation of the exterior resulted in a hybrid architecture adapted to an older construction. The exterior had very little to do with a church and instead borrowed features from Roman antiquity, such as the triumphal arch. Alberti planned the outer wall to have niches with sarcophagi of the patrons who commissioned the work, Sigismondo di Malatesta and his wife Isotta, and other uomini illustri on the side niches (Wittkower, 1940). San Francesco was then a pantheon outside, and a gothic church in its interior, making it a public monument and a private shrine at the same time (North, 1983). In an attempt to classify the different artistic approaches to the skin of architecture, we have identified three typologies: juxtaposed façade, ephemeral façade, and media-animated façade.

Juxtaposed façade

The architecture of the façade of a monument, whether historical or contemporary, can allow multiple artistic interventions in line with how the museum wants

to communicate with the visitor. How the institution communicates. The relationship between the bi-dimensional space of the façade and the message to show creates exceptional contributions in the form of open-air installations.

In 2016 French artist JR created a large trompe-l'oeil on the façade of the pyramid of the Louvre. The work, commissioned by the French Embassy in Italy, absorbed the pyramid in a stunning illusion of the historical building behind it. Similar to Ai Weiwei's rubber lifeboats on Palazzo Strozzi, the Chinese visual artist installed in the same year, on the Minneapolis Museum entrance portico, life Jackets to send a powerful message about refugees. In 2019, the MET museum started to use its façade and great hall to showcase contemporary Art. The first artist to work on it was Wangechi Mutu, who displayed his sculptures in the niches of the façade of the museum. This is analogous to what happened to the San Francesco church after Alberti's design. In 2020, at the Tate Britain of London, Chila Kumari Singh Burman created a striking technicolour installation for Tate Britain's iconic façade. Her work referenced mythology, family memories, Bollywood, radical feminism, and political activism, all interpreted with coloured neon lights. At the Jewish Museum, artist Lawrence Weiner presented a temporary installation, All the Stars in the Sky Have the Same Face (2011–20), in the form of a large banner in red, white and blue that covers the museum's façade. This installation transformed an institutional building into a public artwork, bearing a message of the fight against xenophobia written in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. In the wide spectrum of cultural institutions, contemporary art museums are naturally suitable for this kind of intervention thanks to the contribution of contemporary artists in temporary shows. In the case of the Maxxi Museum of XXI Century Arts in Rome, different art installations have crossed the fluid and liminal space of the outside entrance of the museum and the different façades of the iconic building designed by Zaha Hadid. One of the most emblematic is the 2015 artwork More than meets the eye by Maurizio Nannucci, who encouraged visitors to immediately look at this museum as something more than just the contents shown inside.

Ephemeral façade

Interactivity is based on the recursiveness of messages that in turn trigger further communication exchanges, following the construct of communication-process-participant (Rafaeli, 1988). As Ergun and Aygenc (2018) pointed out, part of what is called digital art developed mechanisms of interaction between video projections and the objects that are exhibited, being those items artworks or a whole building. This intersection between what is projected and its support generates a physical illusion that, in the digital era, was first used in amusement parks such as Disneyland. Later, it started to be explored by artists. In 1980–84, Michael Naimark worked on his project Displacements, in which a pre-recorded video of a room full of objects was later projected on the same setting, after all contents were spray-painted white, so that visitors would participate in an immersive film installation. Physical objects, i.e., a bag, a computer, and a guitar, gave the illusion of interacting with filmed characters that lived that very domestic space (Naimark, 2005). The same principle has been widely used on facades of historical and contemporary buildings (Barchugova and Rochegova, 2016; Ergun and Aygenc, 2018).

Since the first years of the 21ˢᵗ century, projections have added an ephemeral touch to possible ways of re-interpreting the façade in collaboration with media artists. One of the most relevant cases is Jenny Holzer's temporary interventions on the façade of famous museums such as the Louvre Pyramid in Paris (2001), the Solomon R. Guggenheim (2008), the Portland Museum of Art (2011), and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (2019). Starting from traditional projection and moving to more advanced tools, video mapping has been growing as one of the most transformative devices used by museum in order to bring art outside the museum. This is the case of Commemorate & Celebrate Freedom, a video-display projected on the façade of the National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington in 2015. In the same year, the Royal Ontario Museum, also known as the ROM, announced the opening of the new Pompeii museum hosting dramatic digital projections on the sides of the building designed by Daniel Libeskind. During Vivid Sydney 2016, The Matter of Painting by Danny Rose was projected at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

For the Bucharest International Light Festival, various artists have transformed many façades of museums and historical buildings through video mapping. For instance, the artwork Star Tears created by Maxin10sity was shown on the façade of the National Museum of Art of Bucharest for Spotlight Festival 2017.

In 2018, the Prado Museum commissioned a 3D projection mapping video by Onionlab to celebrate its bicentenary. The façade was transformed into an organic surface, featuring an immersive visual journey made of lights, shadows, and optical illusions.

In the last years, projections on screens have been replaced by innovative devices and technologies that tend to involve the elements of architecture in the development of multiple scenarios.

Media-animated façade

A growing number of architectures tend to embed a multimedia façade in the design process already. What used to be applied or projected on façades after construction is instead part of the project ex-ante. Curators, artists, and architects are invited to transform the external image of the museum into a polyhedric device that mutates in real-time. The generative video for the LED media façade of Rockheim, Norway's national museum of pop and rock in Trondheim, Oslo, stresses the contrast between the static appearance of the existing building and the multifaceted addition. The latter is part of the extension designed by Pir II and Parallel World Labs on top of an old warehouse. Another extension, that of the Kunstmuseum in Basel, Switzerland, has received several awards and special mentions. The media façade comprises 40 horizontal grooves that generate a fine relief across the seven façade segments. White LEDs, mounted 22 millimetres apart, are mounted in the cavities in order to be seen from the street. Each horizontal groove contains over 1306 pixels, the resulting total resolution thus being 1306 x 40 pixels. The media façade communicates news to the broader public and is a crucial design feature of the new museum building, not only for installation but also for information to the public. Ars Electronica Centre in Linz, known as the museum of the future, defined its main mission in order to facilitate the encounter of the general public with new media and virtual reality using interactive forms of expression.

Since 2015, the façade of Museion in Bolzano has functioned as a transparent membrane that at the same time divides and creates a point of contact between the urban space and the interior. It features screenings of videos, photos and animations that artists select to establish a dialogue with Museion's design. In Seoul, South Korea, the SmTown Coex Artium contains a digital billboard of 80.8 m by 20.1 m. The building, also hosting a museum of Entertainment, became viral for its public media art project Wave, which rendered a realistic wave crashing inside a vast aquarium. The ambitious project closed in 2020 after displaying K-pop videos alternated with digital experimentation on the screen for only six years. Finally, in 2021, the new Museum of Visual Culture M+ in Hong Kong by Herzog & De Meuron announced its opening with an illuminated billboard-like façade of LEDs that can be seen from afar. The wide dimension of this façade also collects the message of the museum, it is the structure of the message, and eventually becomes part of the city skyline as the "decorated shed" that Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour theorised in Learning from Las Vegas (1972).

Conclusions

Exhibition venues base a consistent part of their funding on ticketing. The unprecedented case of a worldwide pandemic compelled museums to seek alternative ways of fostering their engagement with visitors. On the one hand, many initiatives targeted online content (Resta et al., 2021); on the other hand, exteriors and public spaces have been adapted for installations and exhibitions. In this text, we have explored the latter, suggesting that the liminal museum has its own status and can be implemented on a regular basis beyond COVID-19 restrictions. Among the many loci of liminal museum, we have finally focused on the façade, and proposed a classification of different typologies. Expressive façades featuring art installations can engage a broad audience, including passers-by who do not regularly visit exhibition spaces. Additionally, this perspective opens a whole artistic field of installations that cannot be exhibited within the museum and relate their aesthetics to that of the architecture of the venue. Finally, we suggest that the liminal museum is also the threshold space where a cultural institution can interact with the neighbourhood as a safe place of expression and learning.

The authors have been experimenting with this topic through an ongoing curatorial project that tackles the issues discussed above: the curation of an installation on the threshold of public space and its relation with the neighbourhood. PROSPETTISSIMO is a project of urban art focused on the interaction of artists and photographers with the façade of the new cultural space Crocevia Stand-by, at the former Santa Croce monastery, Altamura, Italy. For PROSPETTISSIMO, a series of international artists have been re-elaborating the idea of trompe-l'oeil with drawings and photographs in dialogue with the formal and material qualities of the building. The project is divided into several visual chapters, each assigned to a different artist, with the intention of reflecting and discussing the presence of neglected historic buildings within the Puglia region. The reopening of the former monastery in Altamura is an opportunity to explore the interaction of contemporary art with the revitalisation of historic town

centres. The first exhibition was opened with the work of French artist Laure Catugier, in April 2022 (Figg.1–5). As an artist with a background in architecture, Catugier's work conveys the geometric language of modernism. Through diverse media such as photography, video or performance, she questioned the perception and representation of spatiality. In Altamura, she examined the functionality of modernist architecture and urban spaces and researched the global standardisation of construction through architectural elements of the façade.

This research is inevitably open-ended and has some possible developments. In the near future, after a few visual chapters of PROSPETTISSIMO are completed, we intend to verify the assumptions presented in the text, see if the notion of liminal museum is gradually forming around the building of Santa Croce, and study the impact that these installations have on the neighbourhood. All artists, together with the exhibition of their work, will coordinate artistic living labs with the community aiming at co-producing their creative outcome. In this way, the social role of a recently-created institution can grow, approach new segments of the population, and use liminal spaces as an interface with the citizens.

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Abstract

The concept of liminal museum looks at the potential of public art in the liminal space of exhibition venues, in between urban realm and the interior of public buildings, as an innovative locus of social engagement. More specifically, we study the status of artistic interventions that take place on the façade through the definition of three fields of investigation: juxtaposition, ephemerality, media. We present the case study of a curatorial project developed in Altamura, Italy, within the dimension of living labs used for citizens' engagement in art production and education. This leads to the issue of co-habitation of museum institutions with surrounding neighbourhoods, interpreting the façade as a symbolic interface that mediates values and languages of art.

Keywords: Liminal museum; façade; living labs; public art; Italy

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Fig. 1. Prospettissimo #1, installation by Laure Catugier, curated by Fabiana Dicuonzo and Giuseppe Resta, Altamura, Italy.

Fig. 2. Prospettissimo #1, installation by Laure Catugier, curated by Fabiana Dicuonzo and Giuseppe Resta, Altamura, Italy.

Fig. 3. Prospettissimo #1, installation by Laure Catugier, curated by Fabiana Dicuonzo and Giuseppe Resta, Altamura, Italy.