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Abstract

THE HOUSE, THE ATELIER, THE MUSEUM
The museographic valorization of the artist's place:
the Bourdelle Museum in Paris

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In the 19th century Paris is the cradle of European art and it welcomes artists looking for fame and fortune from all over the world. What happens to their houses and to their studios, containers of the collections and material manifestations of the abstract connection between the artist and the artwork, once they pass away? Where does the need for a museum come from? Just due to the need for new spaces or there are deeper reasons? How is it possible to keep alive the intrinsic link between the masterpiece and its creator? It is important that the identity of the place where the piece of art was conceived, the atelier, is not denied. The term itself derives from the French word «astelle», «piece of wood, shaving», which is what remains of the material once the work is concluded and taken away from the studio. It follows that in order not the denial takes place, a process of preservation and valorization of the house-studio should be engaged, which nowadays is object of continued investigations and shared activities, that involves national and international organizations.

Among the houses-studio-museum that there are in Paris, my research will be focused on the Bourdelle Museum, whose singularity is doubled by the fact this is not only a house-museum, but also a house-studio, dedicated to the sculptor Antoine Bourdelle, situated in the 15th arrondissement, in a narrow street once called impasse du Maine, but since the late 1940s, rue Antoine Bourdelle.

The research entirely took place in Paris and through three main archive resources: the Bourdelle Museum, the City records and the «Fonds Perret, Auguste et Perret frères», at the Centre d'archives d'architecture du XXe siècle.

The Bourdelle Museum has a long and winding story that involves characters like the architects Auguste Perret, Michel Dufet, Henri Gautruche, Christian de Portzamparc. This history leads to a museum that reflects the museography of many epochs from the post-mortem aim of the sculptor himself, through a first enlargement until a most recent extension.

The reason why this factory stands out for, being distinguished also from other museum institutions belonging to the same genre in the Parisienne territory, is the stratification of interventions within the same architectural system, dating different historical periods, in order to make it a composite site reflecting architectural concepts of more epochs.

In 1949, twenty years after Bourdelle death, the Ateliers d'Antoine Bourdelle open, structured around a composed nucleus of the ateliers and the gardens, still heart of the museum and keeper of the sculptor historical memory. The opening to the public indicates a deep change in the nature of the place, that varies from a space of creation and

conservation to a space for exhibition.

At the same time a specific architecture develops, linked to the preservation and transmission of the collections through their exhibition. The case of the Bourdelle Museum seems to be evolving at the same time as the museography itself: as well as it initially confers responsibility to protect and safeguarding the collection, in the same way the first intervention on the Museum is the realization, in 1961, of the Grand Hall, which is designed to collect the monumental assignments. The last intervention, in 1992, openly minimalist, provides for a series of further essential exhibition areas, according to the idea of musealization from a strictly museologic point of view.

The musealization of the house-museum or the house-studio-museum should therefore deal with the “genius loci” and, therefore, there are some restrictions related to the respect of the collection and the constant coherence between the pre-existence and the successive additions. Furthermore, it's properly the presence of the collection itself, as union and mutual correspondence of container and contained, what is so unique about the atelier-museum and insert it in a well defined category. On the contrary colossal contemporary museums are masterworks even when deprived of their collections, but they can be reproduced countless times.

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