

The Blossom Process

The process of transforming a storage collection into a documentation center.

The case of the Costa Rican Art Museum.

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During the period of January 2013 to January 2014, I carried out an external consultancy for the Costa Rican Art Museum's collection, that included inventory, registration, cataloging and classification of approximately 7000 pieces; both pictorial and sculptural. The collection was not cataloged as a whole, and from that experience I realized that it was necessary to make a complete change in the way that the collection was handled.

The conditions in which I found the collection were linked to old strategies of collection management, that in the past were successful but, unfortunately now they had lost validity. The collection was deeply rooted in an old vision. I realized that a process of re-organization was important but a real purification was extremely urgent.

Mainly I noted that the management model applied over the years in the collection and documentation of works resulted in an inactive and inaccessible collection, in a space that does not permit a complete access and understanding. This limits the possibilities of museum activities and even counters its own reason for being.

From that experience I started to think on a proposal that allow a complete access and understanding of collections with a similar issue. The Blossom Process is a collection management proposal that shows the process of transforming an art collection storage into a documentation center. This concept attempts to express the need to socialize art. Like flowers that spread through a process of budding, this proposal seeks to spread art through the interaction of people with the collection.

This paper considers the following approach: a collection of art constitutes a system of representation and symbolic contents that can be interpreted as links of multiple discursive and cultural relations. It is clarified that this methodology is not being implemented in the Costa Rican Art Museum, and wasn't presented as a proposal for the collection, but until now, as a theoretical model to apply in different collections.

THE COSTA RICAN ART MUSEUM

Costa Rica had around the 50% of the population living in San José, which is the urban capital of Costa Rica. The city center has the main museums of the country -- the Golden and Jade Museums, which between them have one of the greatest pre-Columbian Art collections of Central America; the National Museum; the Museum of Contemporary Art and Design; and the Costa Rican Art Museum.

The Costa Rican Art Museum was the first art museum founded in May, 1978. Within the law that created the museum, purports in part to enable collect and display the most important works of the Costa Rican visual arts, methodically, systematically and continuously. Also supervise the art collections of the State.

Despite of being the most important museum in the country, with a good art collection representation, the development and growth of this collection was displayed as storage, without consistent policies towards growing process. So, while the collection grew, their storage stagnated. On the other hand, the building that houses the museum was small compared to the growth of the collection. Both the collection and the museum itself ceased to be functional for the collection.

THE COLLECTION

The collection of the Costa Rican Art Museum is the most valuable and representative of the history of Costa Rican art statewide. This collection gathers around 7,000 pieces, both paintings and sculpture, as well as a significant percentage of international art from countries such as Venezuela, Cuba, Russia, Japan, among others. It is purely a collection of modern art, but although on a smaller scale has pieces of academic art of the nineteenth century and contemporary art.

The history of the Costa Rican art is characterized by a great tradition on the production of engraving and drawing. The Museum wanted to represent this by having nearly 50% of the collection consisting of paper pieces created through these techniques. The other percentage includes techniques, such as painting, assembly, drawing, printmaking, and sculpture, among others.

Through the collections highlights we can appreciated art pieces by Priscilla Monge, Manuel de la Cruz González, Juan Luis Rodríguez, José Miguel Rojas, Harold Fonseca, Marisel Jiménez and Juan Manuel Sánchez, among others.

Until 2013, the registry, cataloguing, inventory and planning lacked the structure to support the control system and coordinated management of the collection that would be accessible and properly documented. The information was scattered, outdated and in many cases with incomplete data, reducing the opportunity to be in service of the public.

These kinds of situations are common in other museums and collections, including private ones. The weaknesses of this particular stock have limited progress on this area. It is necessary to reverse the damage and allow a more dynamic handling of the collection.

It challenges the contemporary museums, to goes from a gathering conception, reunion and care of works, to a vision of socialization of the art, which at the end grows and multiplies.

Faced with such situation, this proposal is a methodology designed holistically and formulated so one can address the various problems, from their origins of the problem and propose solutions for collections that have similar situations.

AN ART COLLECTION

Over 40 years ago, the main purpose of art collection management has been to preserve and collect art works. The criterion of preservation was prevalent and was associated with the idea of National identity. Today it is necessary to apply a new concept for the management of the museum's collections. This new concept addresses the need to streamline, socialize, share and disseminate the value of this symbolic capital that contains every collection. We must move from a concept of gathering, to one of spreading, through both physical and digital mediums.

According to the art historian Gabriela Sáenz, "Collection management methodology, as a professional practice, has focused predominately in accumulated cultural heritage and collect from classificatory and descriptive aspects, but not from the relation with their symbolic content. Nowadays the contemporary perspectives had boarded the practice of collect objects of art as an anthropologic multidimensional phenomenon"

This is why, the perspective of Government collections, the patrimonial view has been fundamental, which have influenced the way these works are embrace and access.

For Sáenz, "today, according to Pierce, the nature of the act and will to collect, must be understood as an effort to construct representations of the world to make it intelligible, for modeling behaviors and generate changing tactics to construct the ways in which we relate to the material world and to build us identify ourselves as individuals"

For this proposal is essential to display a collection as a system of representation, since, according to Saenz, "art as a system of representation is linked to a site of enunciation and meanings connected to the culture in which it emerges". It is necessary to socialize and disseminate works collected and documented over the years.

The Blossom Process rethinks the concept of gathering, of where we store, so as to move to a new level of conceptualization of art collection opened to the outside that will demand other ways to manage and access.

A NETWORKING PLATFORM

The Blossom Process analyzes the way in which the information and knowledge is obtained by us, and considers that we can acquire the formula to articulate the handling of a collection to produce a more advanced level of understanding, use and management. The Blossom Process contemplates that a network structure puts us on a platform filled with multiple inputs and outputs that are always interconnected. This way of obtaining the knowledge makes it easier every day.

The multiple interactions that collections have cannot be understood in a static way, it should be seen as functional and dynamic. If we link this idea with the logic of a networking platform, we will obtain a formula to increase the knowledge of a collection. For example, young people on the web demand more: hypertexts are essential for them.

“The mere exposure to masterworks does not suffice. Too many persons visit museums and collect picture books without gaining access to art. The inborn capacity to understand through the eyes has been put to sleep and must be reawakened.” (Arnheim. 1954. P.1)

The browse actions in a networking platform, or a platform of cultural meanings that go beyond the representation of a heritage, allow to access and exploration of the links or meanings (mental concepts) and signifiers (the material aspects) and acquire a global knowledge from a subjective experience. This, as we will see later, will be associated with other ideas related to design, perception and urbanism.

ACCESS AND UNDERSTANDING: VISUAL PERCEPTION, VISUAL DESIGN, URBAN DESIGN

Applying these ideas to the context of an art collection, it is pertinent to ask: How is the storage area of a collection of art is perceived? What is your reading? And, how do users appropriate collection? A possible response is that there is no idea of space that allows us to understand and appreciate the contents of storage. By contrast, the stockpiles are usually inactive storage locations where objects are just stored.

Is essential to link this proposal to art and visual perception. According to Rudolf Arnheim: “if you want to access the presence of a piece of art [for this proposal an art collection], is very important in the first place, view it as a whole...Before we identify any single element, the total composition makes a statement that we should not lose. We seek a theme, a key to which all refer... (Arnheim, 1984, p. 21). Then, we can be firmly guided by the structure of an integral concept.

On the visual design, it must be considered to constitute a concentric and radial structure applied to the space, with an organic form, which differs from the square shape of a closed and static storage. A collection can flow in that structure, in order to energize and then synchronously emanate out smoothly and organically, like an interior that opens to the outside.

On the environmental graphic-design it is considered that the materials should have some transparency that allows a glimpse of the content. The spatial structure must possess certain fragmentation and levels which can produce inputs and outputs of light and colors. So the feeling is that of a container exposed.

The design of the space, understood from the urbanism ideas of Kevin Lynch, those linked to the logic of functional relationships and comprehensive programming databases. Is essential to address each object in the collection as units or as components of a comprehensive platform that maintains relationships and synchronize both these components. Unity and variety.

Lynch’s approach functions to associate and understand this proposal: “A vivid and integrated physical setting, capable of generating a sharp image also has a social function. It can provide the raw material for the symbols and collective memories of group communication”. Then Lynch discusses the readability “...as a related pattern of recognizable symbols ... easily identifiable [that] are grouped in ... a global pattern” (Lynch, 2008, p.12).

Relating these approaches, in order to achieve a dynamic and efficient access to information, there is a need to understand that “... behind the physiological operations of perception, there is a kind of innate

intelligence that allows the sensory component to choose specific solutions with the goal to select, compare and filter information that ultimately reaches the brain to be classified, decoded and understood” (Seminary Graduation. Amphoras. p. 44).

By associating these approaches with The Blossom Process, the reading mechanisms, perception, design and shape, are important in this proposal. It involves the opening, of a collection, to the outside from multiple inputs and outputs, that allow understanding the meanings that it encloses and, at the same time, allows the public to create their own meanings and readings.

WHAT IS THE BLOSSOM PROCESS

The Blossom Process is a collection management proposal that shows the process of transforming an art collection storage into a documentation center. This concept attempts to express the need to socialize art. Like flowers that spread through a process of budding, this proposal seeks to spread art through the interaction of people with the collection.

Today, thanks to the strong technological growth, the way people relate to information is much more direct and dynamic. The new generations are accustomed to acquire information through networks. The concept of the Documentation Center is based on the principle of accessibility by multiple links, as a networking platform.

The importance of The Blossom Process is that it links spatial aspects, design, symbolism, functionality, aesthetics and socialization. Setting symbolic links from an organizational structure will allow qualifiers to remove ourselves from traditional disciplinary foundations of the objects in a collection. And it requires an interpretation of the objects collected by the team responsible for the collection.

The Blossom Process is a concept that requires a concentric and radial structure applied to the space in which the materials should have some transparency that allows a glimpse of the content and setting symbolic links. The spatial structure must possess certain fragmentation and levels which can produce inputs and outputs of light and colors. So the feeling is that of a container exposed. So the collection can flow in that structure, in order to energize and then synchronously emanate out smoothly and organically,

ART SHOULD FLOURISH, AND SPREAD

Art should flourish, spread. The action of collecting allows us to gather meanings that interact with different artistic discourses. This process is organic and requires a new approach that is not based exclusively on the fundamentals of collections management: inventory, register and catalog. Rather it is necessary to reformulate this condition to conceive a new stage of collections management that finally provides access to art collections.

A collection of art is an organic entity that feeds a multiple symbolic relations. It is not possible to understand the magnitude of observed relationships in collections of art from an inaccessible state; instead should be organic, fluid and open to the outside. This vision goes beyond registration and inventory.

As soon as a spatial conceptualization exists, allowing all possibilities of relationships and meanings, then it will change the way in which these are collected. The collection storage is where these relationships and meanings interact. This is the importance of this space.

These ideas let The Blossom Process be a management collection proposal that illustrate the practice of transforming art collection storages into a documentation center. This concept attempts to express the need to socialize art. Like flowers that spread through a process of budding, this proposal seeks to spread art through the interaction of people with the collection.

After my experience as an external consultant at the Costa Rican Art Museum I believed this proposal is functional because allows you to access and understand a global idea of the collection's contents. For instance, in this case of study, we can understand that there is a profile of the collection growing towards drawing and engraving. This allows us to reinforce the way we collect in a dynamic of space, access and understanding of the collection profile.

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