Pamela Bianchi

The Origins of the Exhibition Space (1450-1750)

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Spatial Imageries in Historical Perspective

This series is looking for interdisciplinary contributions that focus on the historical study of the imagined space, or of spaces and places as sensorial, experiential or intellectual images, from the interior to the landscape, in written, visual or material sources. From (closed) gardens and parks to cabinets, from the odd room to the train compartment, from the façade to the prison cell, from the reliquary to the desk, a variety of spaces in the shape of imageries and images unveils historical attitudes to history, to the object, to the other and the self and presents a subject that experiences, acts, imagines and knows. Spatial imageries and images in this sense constitute a prominent theme in various fields within the Humanities, from museum studies, intellectual history and literature to material culture studies, to name but a few.

Spatial Imageries in Historical Perspective therefore addresses a broad audience of scholars that engage in the historical study of space in this sense, from the Early Middle Ages to the Recent Past in literature, art, in material culture, in scholarly and other discourses, from either cultural and contextual or more theoretical angles.

Series editor
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"Car l'histoire ne s'apprend pas seulement dans les livres"
(Pomian, 1987, 99)
mais
"Il faut recourir aux pièces qui la justifient"
(Patin, 1695, 12)

1. Introduction

Abstract: The introduction presents the topic and the historical and geographical contexts, and traces the two main interconnected themes (the representation of architecture and the history of exhibitions). From the very beginning, it defines the study perspective and the resulting scientific filter – that is, the intention to study those early places, practices, events and habits that have shaped the idea of exhibiting and the imagery of the exhibition space in the early modern period (1450–1750). It sets the methodology and outlines the primary aim of the study: to foster connections between art history, exhibition studies and architectural history, to explore micro-histories and long-term changes, to open new study perspectives and to enhance interdisciplinary historiography.

Keywords: exhibition space, visual imagery, early modern period, methodology

1.1 Reasons for the Research

Most essential places for museology are outside the museum. Thus, I would have tried to read the city as a space with a powerful museological connotation associating galleries and supermarkets, factories and churches, streets and underpasses, walls of industrial estates and freight cars, installations of street vendors and parks with statues. I would also have tried to develop the intuition that the principal cultural places are today, as yesterday, of the order of the interstitial, the alternative, the field displacement, the semantic shift rather than that of the institutional, the regulated, the squared and the normed.[1]

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1   "La plupart des lieux importants pour la muséologie se situent hors du périmètre muséal. J'aurais ainsi tenté de lire la ville comme un espace à forte connotation muséologique associant galeries et supermarchés, usines et églises, rues et passages souterrains, murs de zones industrielles et wagons de marchandises, installations de vendeurs à la sauvette et parcs à statues. J'aurais tenté également de développer l'intuition que les lieux culturels majeurs sont

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The Origins of the Exhibition Space seeks to trace the birth of the idea of exhibition space by studying its visual and written imagery in the early modern period (from the Renaissance to the early eighteenth century). It aims to define a new epistemological characterisation of the exhibition space, free of any institutional and museum logic, but permeable to the social and cultural conditions of the time.

This book is the culmination of a research project stemming from my earlier work on the concept of the exhibition space in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[2] This previous research has thoroughly explored this topic and the different connotations and forms it has taken over time. The study has highlighted the need for a new understanding and redefinition of the term "exhibition space", especially in light of the emerging history of exhibitions and the current interdisciplinary methodology which intersects art history, exhibition studies and architecture theories. Therefore, the present book is an attempt to provide a sequel to this early research by fostering the heuristic potential of an interdisciplinary approach and then pursuing the ambitious desire to trace the history of the exhibition space before the opening of the first public museums.

Following this intent, the research, while inscribed within the theoretical context of the early modern period, starts from a contemporary assumption. Indeed, the current museum field is now expanding within a complex constellation of exhibition contexts like "the social space, the street, the flea market, the natural or built landscape",[3] and this proliferation emphasises the difficulty that the museum institution is now experiencing in trying to distinguish itself from the increasing multitude of non-museum venues and exhibition opportunities. Also, while museology is now confronted with curatorship and exhibition-making approaches, in turn, museum contexts invade hybrid spaces "in terms of a real decentralisation of museology, with the result of a temporary conversion, sometimes also definitive, of new, disparate places, most often open."[4]

Alongside the idea of gentrification and travelling museology,[5] the contemporary museum system thus appears *boundless*. Yet, the diversity (alternativeness) of the current venues of art is not an innovation in the exegesis of the exhibition space. Over the years, especially before the museum institution became an academic dogma (when the concept of exhibition had not yet been fully established), those places that today are often defined as alternative (independent) exhibition spaces were rather temporarily used as ideal venues to stage ephemeral *exhibiting* events. Indeed, before the appearance of the first painting exhibitions and the spaces specially designed to present collections and fine arts (for which the case of the Parisian Salon is a decisive moment), the idea of showing art was mainly related to the habit of dressing up spaces for political commemorations, religious festivals, and marketing strategies. From the house to the street, passing through alleys, stairways, up to the entire city, these places were temporary and privileged platforms of showing, where the idea of exhibiting developed. Then, only when the museum was instituted, these places became outsiders, acquiring the connotation of alternative, non-institutional spaces for art. In short, the current proliferation of other exhibition venues would be a conceptual involution: a return to the origins of the idea of exhibition space.

However, the study does not propose a difference between pre-museum and museum exhibitions. This distancing from museum history (and the consequent study approach) is due to various factors. First, because, throughout the period considered, the concept of the art exhibition had not yet been fully established. Then, because the analysed circumstances were for the most part of a social and religious nature, and had completely different objectives and locations from museum intents and contexts. And finally, because the ontological status of artefacts on display on these occasions was ambiguous. Indeed, depending on the nature of the event, they could be perceived as fine arts – that is, as autonomous cultural artefacts with their own inner meaning and logic – or, on the other hand, as goods intimately bound still to the religious, political or social event. Precisely for these reasons, the study of these displays did not require a comparative analysis but a contextualisation and a problematisation that took into account the origin of these same events. Furthermore, the purpose of the research was

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5   In the past decades, neoliberal strategies, cultural entrepreneurship and market economies have especially reshaped the museum context. Increasingly, demands for marketability and financial competitiveness influence exhibition design and exhibition-making practices, by affecting public experience, comprehension and commitment. This condition has undeniably influenced the choice of exhibition spaces, which are often picked for their capability to attract an ever broader and more diversified audience.

not to reinscribe the issues of the exhibition space and exhibiting within museum history, but rather to show precisely how the origins of exhibitions and their places can be disjointed from that.

That said, what were those places and events? What aesthetic, cultural, social and political discourses intersected with the early idea of exhibition space? How did showing art shape a new vocabulary within these events and, conversely, how have these occasions conditioned exhibiting practices? Have these places to some extent shaped the gaze of the modern viewer? Did they model the aesthetic consciousness of modern spectatorship? Who were the producers, actors and spectators of these processes, devices and spaces? Which kinds of sources (treatises, depictions) are involved?

With these questions in mind, the book studies those early places, practices, events, and habits that have shaped the idea of exhibiting and the imagery of the exhibition space in the early modern period (1450–1750). Thus, by fostering connections between art history, exhibition studies and architectural history, and by exploring micro-histories and long-term changes, the research finally seeks to open new study perspectives and foster interdisciplinary historiography.

1.2   Topics, Frames and Methodology

How do spatial imageries, in painting and literature, allow us to think of the history of the exhibition space? How has such imagery shaped the idea of exhibiting? Is this history related to the history of societies? How can we relate early exhibition logic with art history and exhibition design theories? What does it mean to expand the early history of the exhibition and its space beyond (and before) museum history?

Over the years, despite increased interest in the spatial issue, little attention has been paid to the "category" of the exhibition space. The latter (and the related imaginary) has too often been associated with interdisciplinary studies[6] on pictorial practices, exhibition design, architecture, museum

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6   Regarding contemporary debate, and just to mention a few, see Jean Davallon (ed.), *Claque-murer pour ainsi dire tout l'univers; la mise en exposition* (Paris: Éd. du Centre G. Pompidou, 1986); Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Notes on Site Specificity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Erika Suderburg, *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Anne Cauquelin, *Le site et le Paysage* (2002) (Paris: PUF, 2007). Regarding the early modern period: Donatella Calabi and Elena Svalduz, *Il rinascimento italiano e l'Europa. Luoghi, spazi, architetture*, Vol. VI (Vicenza: Angelo Colla editore,

history, which have consequently obscured its ontological meaning. In most cases, the analysis ends up considering it as mere background, more as a means to study other critical issues than as a pure research subject. Similarly, when the exhibition space is the main theme, studies are almost always dedicated to the political, social and cultural dimensions of space,[7] spatial archetypes (the *studiolo* and the gallery)[8] or specific institutional venues.[9] For the present study, on the contrary, the exhibition space is the main research question. Not in an attempt to compare, but rather to reread and reinterpret, this research considers the *place of art* (in which to experience an event) and the *exhibition space* (which is designed by a creative set of items) as terms of a "conceptual structure [...] that can be activated from many different angles".[10] Indeed, while the question of the *exhibition space* arises as soon as an exhibiting proposal is updated, the understanding of the *place of art* and its heuristic potential in the process of creation, develops instead in the rereading of its historical and contextual relations. Such an approach extends the study over an interdisciplinary field of research involving: the understanding of works of art, apparatus and artefacts within their historical and social context; cross-study with the history of exhibitions; and finally the analysis of exhibiting layouts and architectural settings-up. That means mobilising the epistemological status of specific notions, such as space, place, work of art and exhibition.

Besides, this research stems from the relationship between two fundamental topics studied through the light of contemporary vocabulary. The

2010). Consider also the seminar *Architetture del sapere: edifici per il collezionismo nell'Europa moderna* (*XVI–XVIII secolo*), organised by Gristiano Guarneri, at the IUAV University in Venice, November 22, 2012. The related publication brings together a series of essays dedicated to the architecture of the spaces of knowledge. Among these, there are some papers that, although lucid and relevant, explore traditional exhibition spaces: the cabinet, the *studiolo* and the gallery.

7   See the research programme "Collezionismo e spazi del collezionismo aristocratico nel XVII e nel XVIII secolo: fonti, scelte artistiche, contesti architettonico-decorativi nella Repubblica di Genova, nello stato di Milano e nel Mezzogiorno d'Italia", directed by the Ministry of Education, University and Scientific Research, in Italy (2008). Cf. Andrea Spiriti (ed.), *Lo spazio del collezionismo nello stato di Milano – secoli XVII–XVIII* (Rome: Viella, 2013).

8   See Wolfram Prinz, *Die Entstehung der Galerie in Frankreich und Italien* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1977); Wolfgang Liebenwein, *Studiolo: Die Entstehung eines Raumtyps und seine Entwicklung bis um 1600* (Frankfort: Gebr. Mann, 1977).

9   Giuseppe Olmi, *L'inventario del mondo: catalogazione della natura e luoghi del sapere nella prima età moderna* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992); Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1996).

10   See W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

first refers to the concept of *architectura picta*[11] (painted architecture) and, basically, to the pictorial and literary representations of space, place and landscape.[12] The second focuses on the exhibition system and its historical, formal and social evolution. The articulation of these two issues, combined with an iconographic and iconological study related to the narrative power of images, has provided the opportunity to reread the first practices of exhibiting through the filter of the most significant theoretical articulations in the history of art. That is, to probe the history of exhibitions,[13] its system and underlying logic, examining different exhibiting dynamics (marginal, ephemeral, alternative, public or private), understanding its multiple appearances and crossing directly connected critical concepts, such as the exhibit, the collection, the artist and the public.

Regarding the exhibition space as well as art exhibitions, contemporary literature and research programmes show an imbalance in relation to the methodology and scientific approach. In particular, although today the subject of exhibiting art is an increasingly privileged topic for modern and contemporary art studies, its long-term history has received relatively little scientific attention. However, Francis Haskell, Georg Friedrich Koch and Thomas Crow,[14] among others, have recognised numerous historical moments, expanding the idea of exhibiting to various contexts of public life. These studies have suggested the genealogical link between an art

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11   See Sabine Frommel and Gerhard Wolf, *Architectura Picta* (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2016).

12   See W. J. T. Mitchell, "Introduction", in *Landscape and Power*, 1–4.

13   The history of exhibitions has only recently become an independent theme. The first studies date back to the 1950s and 1960s, with Kenneth Luckhurst's book, *The Story of Exhibitions* (London, New York: Studio Publishing, 1951), and Francis Haskell's research ("Art Exhibition in 18th Century Venice", *Venetian Art*, Vol. 12 (1958): 179–185; "Art Exhibition in 17th Century Rome", in C. Jannaco and U. Limentani (eds.), S*eventeenth-Century Studies*, Vol. 1 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1960), 107–121. In the 1960s, Georg Friedrich Koch's study marks the beginning of the first exhibition practices in the Greco-Roman era, *Die Kunstausstellung. Ihre Geschichte von den Anfangen bis zum Ausgang des 18* (Jahrhunderts, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1967). In the 1980s, the volume published by Francis Haskell focused on the *Saloni, gallerie, musei e loro influenza sullo sviluppo dell'arte dei secoli XIX e XX*, Atti del XXIV Congresso Internazionale di Storia dell'Arte, CIHA, Vol. 7 (Bologna: Clueb, 1981). Following, also see Francis Haskell, *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of the Art Exhibition* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2000); Bruce Altshuler, *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that Made Art History: 1863–1959* (London, New York: Phaidon, 2008); Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson, and Sandy Nairne (eds.), *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996); Jérôme Glicenstein, *L'art: une histoire d'expositions* (Paris: PUF, 2009).

14   Thomas Crow, *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-century Paris* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1985).

exhibition and the plurality of historical circumstances and venues in which one can identify an act of exhibiting: from palatial ceremonies to liturgical festivals, up to shop marketing strategies. But, most of all, these studies have underlined the need for a new methodology capable of offering other points of view from which to study the history of exhibitions. And this leads us to wonder: how do art exhibitions relate to these exhibiting circumstances? Did these events define a specific vocabulary? When and how did these circumstances start influencing and informing the idea of exhibition space? How does the act of exhibiting depend on its institutional framework? And on the other hand, is there a direct relationship between the early spaces for exhibiting and these exhibiting events?

The intersection between these questions and related disciplines permitted the examination of multiple aspects of the immanence of the concept of exhibition space, emphasising above all its social, historical and cultural dimensions. Nevertheless, dealing with such an extensive issue may leave some aspects unexplored, especially concerning contextual and historical coverage. In this perspective, the choice of the historical period (from the beginning of the Renaissance to the opening of the first public museums) is iconic. "Limiting" the research to the period preceding the idea of a fully public museum[15] (the mid-eighteenth century) concretely takes the research away from traditional museum history. Similarly, the initial period, the mid-fifteenth century, first of all, responded to the desire for non-encyclopaedic analysis. Also, it seemed pertinent to me to structure an in-depth study within a historical period supported by shared anthropological, geographical and sociological issues. Consequently, the study is mainly centred on the European context, where Italy stands out among the other fields analysed. There is nothing about Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia or colonial countries. Indeed, extending the study to these contexts would have required a different study approach concerning the specific anthropological and social issues of each context. Moreover, this precise and circumscribed geographical and historical context is critical, from iconographic, architectural and design points of view, as regards the diffusion and experimentation of display practices. Indeed, although the innovations studied in this book are not universally applicable, they nevertheless remain exemplary in their genre, having initiated, among other things, a mechanism of specificity (exhibiting

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and representative) that would find wide use in the following centuries. Eventually, the current study emphasises the contexts that have marked the histories of exhibiting and exhibition spaces, precisely because not only the issue has not yet been studied in depth but also because a thorough examination of it would bring to light a new meaning. Studying the same contexts and themes from a different viewpoint seemed to me the best way to foster a new historiographical approach disconnected from traditional museum history and to insist instead on interdisciplinary historiography grounded on the political and social context of the time. This choice, however, does not deny, but on the contrary, wants to highlight, the need to expand the study to other geographies and other pre-modern and medieval periods. Indeed, not by chance, early modern collectors and events were self-consciously modelling themselves in ancient Rome.

That said, the geographical and historical contexts chosen and the interdisciplinary approach taken have allowed me to expand the early history of the exhibition space beyond and before museum history and thus renew the methodology. The research thus integrates other stories (of exhibitions and displays) by pointing out a complex network of topics and structuring a historical gaze on specific categories of study. In this perspective, the book benefits from historical dynamism and considers both micro-histories and long-term changes; not rejecting synchronic conjunctions or diachronic fluxes, it proposes a cross-study on the history of art, architecture and exhibiting theories instead. For instance, because it records the radical change concerning the perception of space and place, the beginning of the Renaissance period offers here a firm basis for developing a reflection on the interaction between these two concepts in the broader scope of architecture. Besides, between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the significant turn concerning the ideas of collection and artwork allows me to draw parallels with the ways of displaying and experiencing them at that time.[16] Indeed, this change coincided with a statutory transformation for which the collection goes from being arbitrarily private to becoming public, which also echoes the passage from the *studioli*[17] to the galleries. In the early eighteenth

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16   William Stenhouse, "Visitors, Display, and Reception in the Antiquity Collections of Late-Renaissance Rome", *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (Summer 2005): 397–434, [398].

17   Yet, cabinets and *studioli* cannot be summed up as simple private spaces, indeed their relationship with the ideas of publicness, sociability and social engagement was more complex. See Leah R. Clark, "Collecting, Exchange, and Sociability in the Renaissance *Studiolo*", *Journal of the History of Collections*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (2013): 171–184. For an in-depth study of the relationship between and the evolution of the *studiolo* and the gallery, see Arthur MacGregor, "The Cabinet and the Gallery: Introspection and Ostentation in Early Collection History", *Engramme*, No. 126

century, then, this growing accessibility to artworks leading to the eve of the opening of the first museums enabled me to analyse the resulting problems related to the display of the works and the satisfaction of the public.

Such a study also required me to arrange my thoughts dynamically through a specific temporal and contextual logic. At the same time, it demanded an expanded glance at the main concepts. The notions of *space*, *artwork*, *exhibition*, *collection*, *artist* and *display* have been progressively contextualised regarding their etymological evolution and use over time. In particular, they have been defined according to their respective historical meanings. In other words, the research has tried to account for an evolutionary path, both practical and theoretical, by insisting on how modes of perception and presentation have crossed the visual culture and habits of a specific historical period. Thus, in this study, various displaying forms intersect with social, sacred or political functions of spaces, showing how this relationship has impacted the ontology of these same notions. Besides, it was also necessary to consider the evolution of the figurative language of the various contexts and historical periods, considering the links that these artistic modes had with the contemporary ideas of collection, production and with the various protagonists. It was a matter of outlining the constantly evolving idea of exhibition, by recognising the fundamental role that early collections and their several rearrangements had in defining the concept of exhibition space. It was then a matter of accepting the permeability of these terms and studying the issue of the exhibition space in the light of related historical circumstances.

Therefore, I decided to organise the book so as to show the complex intertwining of and the influences between spaces, habits and societies. I defined, first, the spatial categories (domestic interiors, public exteriors) within which I then traced specific spaces (the palace, the atrium, the *bottega*, the church, the square, the façade, among others) and for which, finally, I structured an evolutionary history. In this sense, the study was structured above all based on each specific case study, without binding it to a progressive historical analysis. Thus, the book comprises three parts. The first one deals with the theoretical definition of the principal concepts mobilised in the research and provides the appropriate reading keys. It analyses dichotomies such as space/place, institutional/alternative, as well as the primary notions of exhibition and setup, and it provides a study dedicated to the original resources of the time (mainly treatises), in order

(April 2015): 37–54. Just to mention some depictions of *studioli*, see: Imperato, *Historia naturale*, 1599; Besler, *Continuatio*, 1616; Ceruti, Chiocco, *Musaeum*, 1622; Worm, *Museum wormianum*, 1655; Legati, *Museo Cospiano*, 1677; Mercati, Lancisi, *Metallotheca*, 1717.

to offer a first theoretical contextualisation of the topics developed in the book. The second part deals with the category of (domestic) interiors and the third with the category of (public) exteriors. However, although the distinction between inner and outer spaces has served to sort out precise themes, that between domestic and public has not always been easy to trace. And this is because, at the time, some internal spaces opened to the outside, bringing their decorative setup to the façades, at other times, the external spaces were dressed as internal rooms.

This hybridisation is one of the characteristics of the study and has yielded inspiring results. In this sense, the book does not propose rigid categories but rather sheds light on the habits of the time, in which the concepts of *public* and *domestic* place were often unforeseeable and ephemeral or, nevertheless, dependent on specific social constructs. In this sense, in addition to the sections dedicated to indoor and outdoor spaces, I have devoted a central part to the idea of "intermedial spaces". There, I analyse a series of cases (from the tent intended as an ephemeral pavilion to tapestries to dress fictional exhibition spaces) to explore the ontological meaning of furniture and its role in shaping exhibition spaces. Among the cases, I examined the transformation of the places of antiquities collections during the sixteenth century by analysing, for instance, the *loggia* – that is, the space between the gallery and the garden – and the Venetian *portego*. These spaces and events that took place there often led to exhibiting solutions that have changed the fate of the market and art criticism, as well as suggesting new forms of setting up. Besides, I focused on the ephemeral Italian apparatuses of the late seventeenth century, such as the setup for Pope Innocent XII's visit in Carroceto, depicted in two prints by Alessandro Specchi's *Prospetto del Casale di Carroceto* and *Spaccato del Palazzo di Tavole*. I then went on to study the role of tapestries in defining ephemeral architectures and in transforming internal places into external ones. Indeed, intended as mobile soft furniture, tapestries displayed micro-spaces, temporary environments linked to the celebration of rituals or recurring events. Among the cases, Filippo Lauri and Filippo Gagliardi's oil painting *Festival at the Palazzo Barberini in Honor of Christina of Sweden* (1659), or Filippo Vasconi's engraving, *Cortile del Palazzo Altemps* (1729) [Courtyard of Palazzo Altemps], led to an insistence on how "textiles temporarily transformed the courtyard of the palace into an interior for staging a festival, even roofing it with a scrim painted as an allegory-filled sky".[18]

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18   Gail Feigenbaum, "Preface and Acknowledgements", in Gail Feigenbaum (ed.), *Display of Art in the Roman Palace: 1550–1750* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2014), 12.

Figure 1 Filippo Vasconi (Italian, Rome 1687 – 1730 Rome), *Cortile del Palazzo Altemps* (1729), etching, 45.6 × 67.3 cm, J. Paul Getty Trust, Getty Research Institute, Special Collections, Los Angeles.

However, besides analysing these transient spaces, I constructed the main distinction between interior and exterior spaces, following the social events connected. Thus, while I studied the idea of the house as a place to exhibit first the collector's symbolic image and then artefacts and furniture, I explored public spaces by considering them as places in which artists, collectors and merchants could exhibit, sell, buy and contemplate arts.

The second part explores the origins of the idea of exhibiting and considers the house as a metaphorical image of the owner's need for self-representation – a sort of architectural self-portrait. The study progresses alongside an analysis of several related subjects highlighting various exhibiting practices and exhibition spaces inside Renaissance and Baroque palaces and burghers' dwellings, and also humble people's houses in main European cities. Intended as the palaces' clothing,[19] paintings and tapestries structured the display in such a way that, as Gail Feigenbaum[20] points out, it was not a static figure-and-ground problem but was conditioned by a multitude of factors. At the same time, the idea of a house emerges as an exhibition

19   See Alessandro Tassoni, "Pensieri", in Pietro Puliatti (ed.), *Pensieri e scritti preparatori* (Modena: Edizioni Panini, 1986).
20   Gail Feigenbaum, "Preface and Acknowledgments", in *Display of Art in the Roman Palace*, xiii.

space apt to catalyse interactions between sculptures, paintings, furniture, decorative arts and architecture. In this sense, from the Italian sixteenth century, I studied the complex interplay that took place between the form, the function and the use of early modern dwellings, their interiors, their architecture and decoration, and the history of collections and collectors. I explored theoretical concepts by crossing them with the analysis of various and diversified cases, such as the *Celeste Galleria* at the Ducal Palace in Mantua.

The third part, in turn, investigates exterior exhibition spaces. I focused on the squares, cloisters and streets in which recurring sacred or profane events staged exhibitions by hanging paintings from windows or displaying sculptures outside buildings. Among others, I studied the annual commemoration organised by the Parisian goldsmiths' guild (the Confraternity of St Anne) from 1639 to 1707, the *Festa della Sensa* in Venice or the exhibition in Antwerp organised in 1540 by the local corporation of painters. Focusing on sixteenth and seventeenth-century religious ceremonies in Europe, the analysis sought to investigate the relationship between the display of artworks, the dynamism of the performative events and the features of the places. Finally, the third part also deals with other public spaces (shops, fairs and other circumstances of the art market) that connect the first exhibiting forms to the advertising needs of dealers and artists. In terms of substance, this tripartition allows me to draw parallels between the analysed spaces. Indeed, for instance, in the case of the seventeenth-century Roman *botteghe* and merchants and artists' apartments, the display of works did not have a decorative intent but respected specific hierarchies. Pictures were often selected and stocked by size more than by subject. In shops, the display emphasised the repetition of the same genre instead. Moreover, while in shops merchants were used to putting on display the very act of painting, in private houses, the relationship with the positioning of the work was much more intimate and calculated based on the refinement of the work.

As regards the methodological approach, the research made use of both original sources and secondary literature and examines various documents, written and visual, representing exhibition spaces that really existed or were simply imagined.[21] In this sense, paintings, drawings, treatises or texts are here considered as means to rethink the history of the exhibition space from a new angle, and end up playing the role of historical sources

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21   See Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior, 1400–1600* (New York: Abrams, 1991).

(indirect depicted evidence).[22] However, depending on the nature of the documents (literary descriptions or pictorial representations), I adjusted the analysis approach as I went along. Thus, lists, archives and inventories of collections and *guardaroba*, notes of *camerlenghi* for the organisation of feasts and the preparation of religious exhibitions, and also letters between collectors and artists, have been essential historical sources.[23] Not only do they record places (temporarily used as exhibition spaces) and their social dimension (as in the case of Ferdinando Gonzaga's inventory for the study of the Ducal Palace layout, discussed in the second part of the book), they also detail the placement of items in those spaces and provide more contextual and punctual information concerning the taste and habits of the time.[24] While for these documents, a critical and theoretical review has been enough to structure the study, for visual sources the approach required a closer look, related to the truthfulness of representations.[25] Indeed, although many represented contexts are documentary snapshots of a precise historical period (a "straightforward reportage"),[26] many other depicted spaces are mere landscapes that "stand for space in which history disappears".[27] Instead of being factual descriptions ("framing dimension"[28])

22   Between 1719 and 1724, the Benedictine Bernard de Montfaucon published in Paris the fifteen volumes of *L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures*. The work incorporates more than 1300 images reproducing works of art, coins, objects and monuments of antiquity. The abbot's objective was to record and illustrate the past as precisely as possible. This occasion was one of the first events where images were used as interpretative means. See Bernard de Montfaucon, *Antiquity Explained and Represented in Sculptures* (London: J. Tonson, J. Watts, 1725).

23   For further information, see Guido Rebecchini, "Evidence: Inventories", in Gail Feigenbaum (ed.), *Display of Art in the Roman Palace*, 27–28.

24   See Silvia Danesi Squarzina, *La collezione Giustiniani: Inventari*, Vol. 1 (Turin: Einaudi, 2003); Bertrand Jestaz (ed.), *Le Palais Farnèse III. L'inventaire du palais et des propriétés Farnèse à Rome en 1644* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1994).

25   Over the years, various studies have debated the historical truth of representations, see Francis Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1993); Luke Syson, "Representing Domestic Interiors", in Marta Ajmar-Wollheim and Flora Dennis (eds.), *At Home in Renaissance Italy* (London: V&A, 2006), 86–101.

26   Francis Haskell, *History and its Images*, 81.

27   Painters often preferred the imaginative and symbolic power of the pictorial gesture to historical truthfulness; they often depicted pictures for a specific reason indeed. Often, they were in the habit of eliminating real details to make room for a higher aesthetic and symbolic refinement of the depiction. Charles Harrison, "The Effects of Landscape", in W. J. T. Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 215. See also W. J. T. Mitchell, "Nature for Sale: Gombrich and the Rise of Landscape", in Ann Bermingham and John Brewer (eds.), *The Consumption of Culture in the Early Modern Period* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

28   David Herman, et al., *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts and Critical Debates* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 85–87.

of a real environment, painted (and even literary) scenes appear as "*loci* of *memory*",[29] an ahistorical background to fill with characters and scenes. "Paintings [...] fed the architectural imagination and visual culture of the period, often foreshadowing what was built by a decade or even a generation. Pictures were storehouses of architectural ideas."[30] In this sense, although they are visual quotations of specific and existing contexts (such as the paintings by Christian Reder, *Prospetto e Spaccato del Palazzo* [1697], which describe the prospectus and cross-section of the building in Carroceto), many other representations were the result of the creativity of the artists (such as Andrea Sacchi's painting *Festa al Gesù per l'apertura dell'anno secolare* [1639], which I study in the third part of the book).

In this respect, contrary to drawings, sketches or architectural projects that acted here as technical records of setups and spaces, paintings (for the most part, *vedute*, landscapes and religious scenes) acted rather as representations having the twofold nature of "fictional universes" and "topological dimensions".[31] Moreover, for these literary descriptions or pictorial depictions, the exhibition space is not always the main subject, but often only the background of the main scene. Therefore, in such cases as in the chapter dedicated to art setups in Dutch burghers' dwellings and humble people's houses, it was necessary to contextualise the scene, the event, the period, to understand the framework of realisation, and to define the truthfulness and the boundaries of the act of painting. In any case, because none of these sources are totally credible for our methodology of reading, I managed with care the interpretational approach. Indeed, according to Krzysztof Pomian, "the border is sometimes difficult to draw between the representation of a cabinet and an allegorical painting [...]. But it is precisely this difficulty that seems important because it is due to the fact that, between the two cases, the realism—not to say illusionism—in the execution of details leads to an allegorical meaning of the whole, thanks to the choice and to the organisation of them."[32] Eventually, the reading of

29   Gail Feigenbaum, *Display of Art in the Roman Palace*, 311.

30   Amanda Lillie, "Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting" (London: The National Gallery, online 2014), http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/introduction (14/08/2022).

31   David Herman, et al., *Narrative Theory*.

32   "la frontière est parfois difficile à tracer entre la représentation d'un cabinet et un tableau allégorique [...]. Mais c'est cette difficulté justement qui semble importante car elle tient au fait que, entre les deux cas, un réalisme – pour ne pas dire illusionnisme – dans l'exécution des détails débouche, grâce au choix et à l'organisation de ceux-ci, sur une signification allégorique de l'ensemble." Krzysztof Pomian, *Collectionneurs, amateurs et curieux. Paris, Venise: XVIe–XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987), 68.

the image as a historical testimony first considered three levels implying the understanding of art: visual analysis, iconography and context.[33] Secondly, it recognised the two types of representations that permeate each narrative: "representations of actions and events, which constitute the narration properly speaking, and representations of objects or people, which make up the act of what we today call 'description'".[34] Finally, in order to take advantage of the mnemonic value of these works, it was necessary, first, to understand the artistic language of the painting (its genres, its commissioners, and the historical and social reasons that influenced its execution), and then to accept the connection between the fictitious nature of the representation and its condition of historical quotation. Two processes have stemmed from this consideration: the one that supports the imaginative power of reality within a fictional universe, and the second that emphasises the idea of a mimetic aspect of the representation instead.

Studying the representations of the exhibition space also implied considering space not just as a background housing the painted scene within an artificial, illusionary or allusive framework, but as a real narrative object. Therefore, no longer considered just as a "figurative object"[35] – that is, an archetypal cultural universe that does not refer to the real world – *space* turns here into a "theoretical object",[36] making it possible to think about the dimension of historicity which is distinctive of art. Because it invests the field of iconography in the recognition of semiotic signs, this research also considers images as exemplary devices facilitating the epistemic processes of historical reading. Besides, because it treats images as models producing new forms of knowledge, this research appears as an instrument for understanding the logic implying the complex structure of images and their framework of interpretation. Within the articulation between a historiographical rereading and an iconographic and iconological analysis of documents, the early imagery of places of art appears as a narrative exploring the multiple status (public and private, internal and external, peripheral and alternative) of the exhibition space.

Ultimately, from the understanding of the historical and geographical frame to the analysis of the specific spaces and places in which these

33   Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

34   Gérard Genette and Ann Levonas, "Boundaries of Narrative", *New Literary History*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Fall, 1976): 1–13, [5].

35   Pierre Francastel, *La figure et le lieu. L'ordre visuel du Quattrocento* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

36   Hubert Damisch, *Théorie du nuage: pour une histoire de la peinture* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1972); Hubert Damisch, Giovanni Careri and Bernard Vouilloux, "Hors cadre: entretien avec Hubert Damisch", *Perspective*, No. 1 (2013): 11–25.

social, artistic or religious events occur, from the study of the architectural dimension of the exhibition to the comprehension of the sources, the book proposes a kind of "anthology of contexts". Yet, this research is not a listing of exhibition sites, nor another reading on museum history. It rather tries to shape a sort of archaeology of display practices and a new geography of places of art that aims to understand what spaces did and still do to art.