



8.

Critique of practice
and understanding of museums

- A century or two of institutional tradition obliges to nothing
- Institutions are practical solutions to the specific problems pertinent to time, place and protagonists
- Static institutions are either misunderstanding, manipulation or monuments to the circumstances that created them
- Good institutions have mission driven “open authority” mentality (cure against bureaucracy and social isolation)

**In this place
seek and look for
what can be seen no more
hear voices
that can be heard no more
understand
what is beyond all understanding**

The epigram on the entrance wall of “Museum Yad Mordechai”,
Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, Israel

A brief history of museum sins

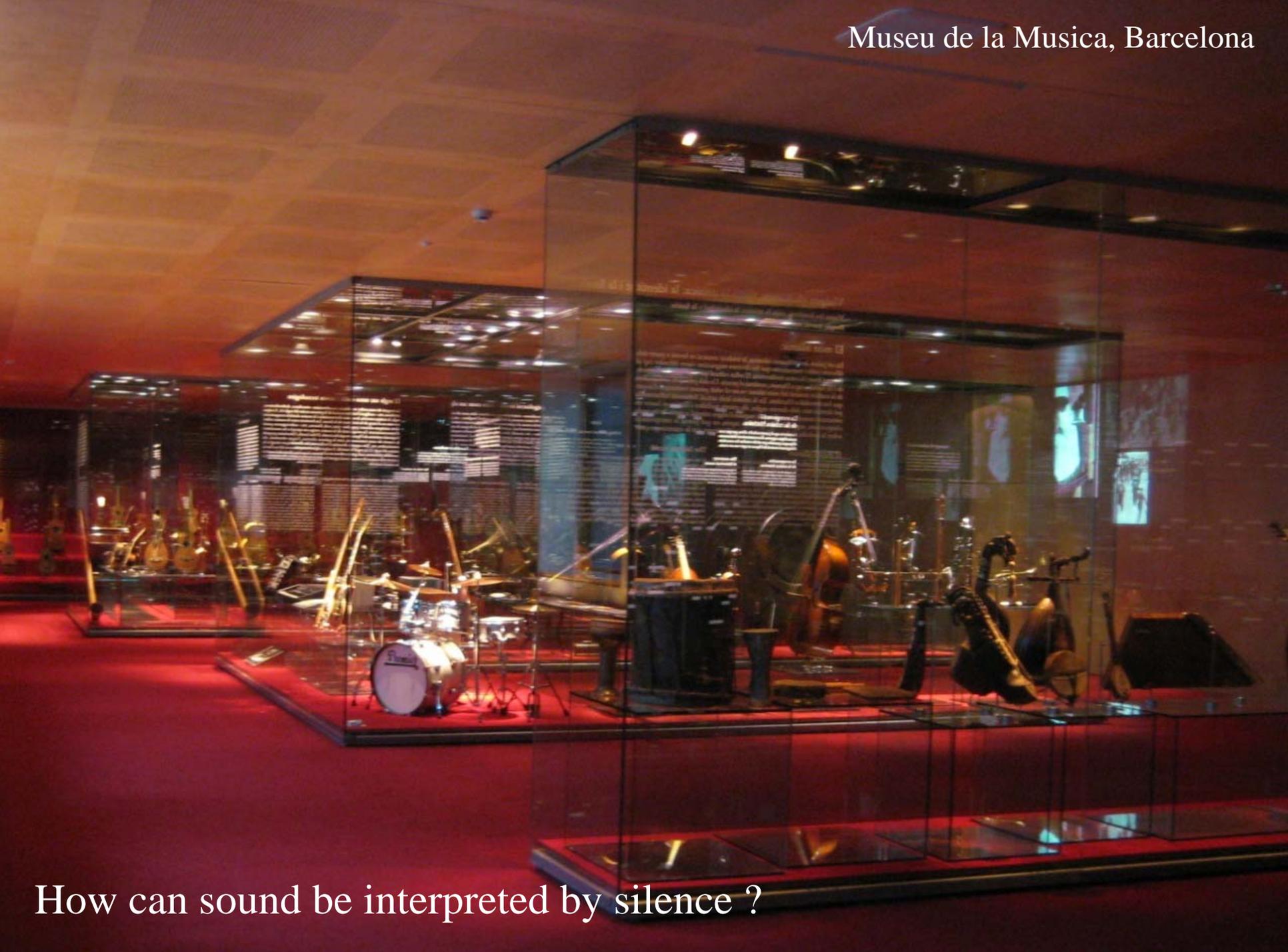
- Boredom/Fatigue
- Dependency on own public
- Defect theory
- Elitism
- Entropy
- Escapism
- Euphoria
- Eurocentrism (cultural colonialism)
- Fetishism
- Fragmentation/de-contextualisation
- Gigantism
- Hyper-activity
- Hypermnesia & Possessiveness
- Hyper-realism
- Imago mortis

- Institutionalism
- Literariness & Information-overload
- Medusa's glance
- Mercantilism & Monetarisisation
- Non-professionalism
- Nostalgism & Paseotropism
- Over-design
- Over-specialisation
- Scientifism
- Servility/Opportunism/Social manipulation
- Superlativism & Sensationalism
- Technologism
- Vanity

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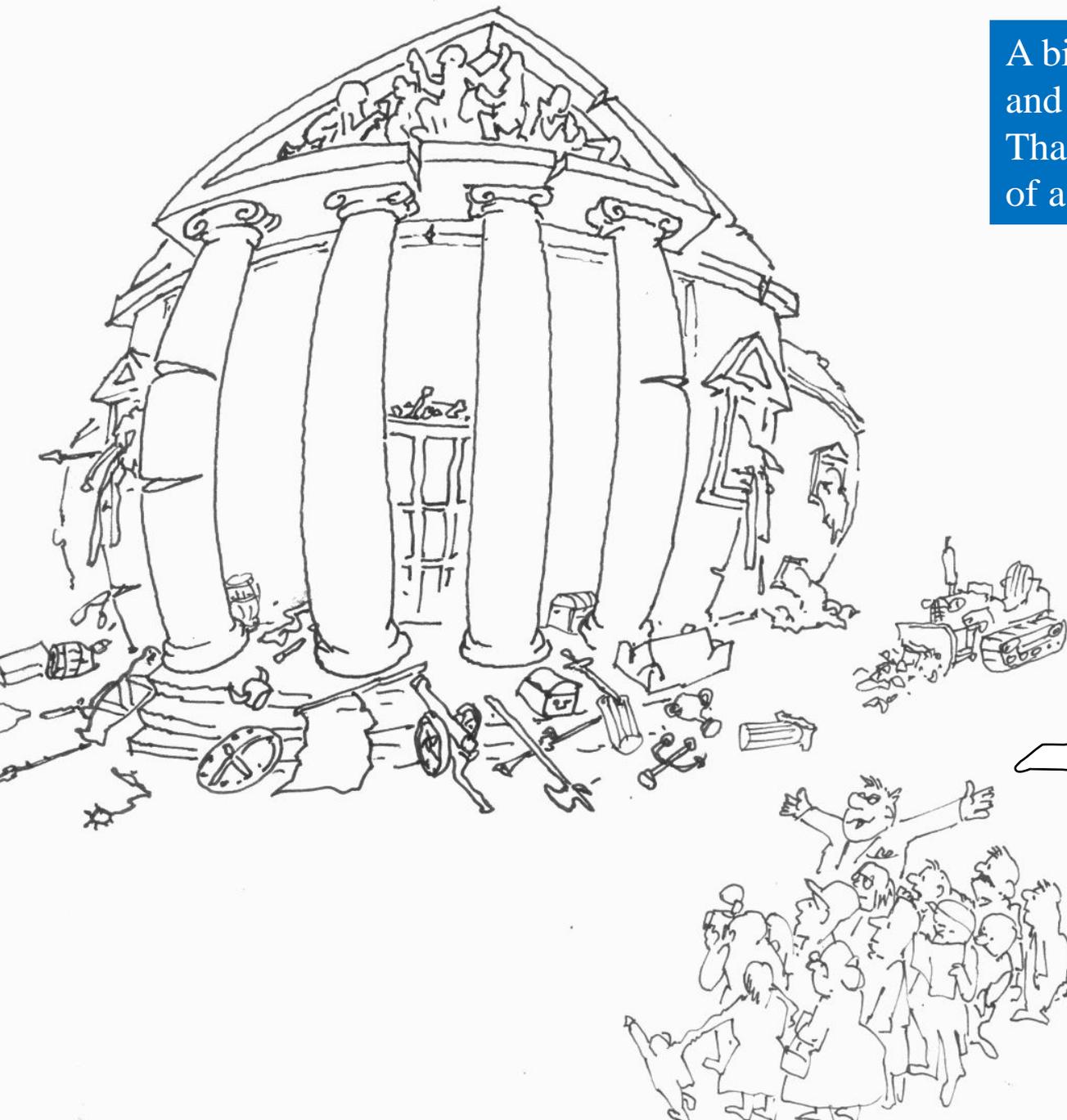


Can too much be less ?



How can sound be interpreted by silence ?

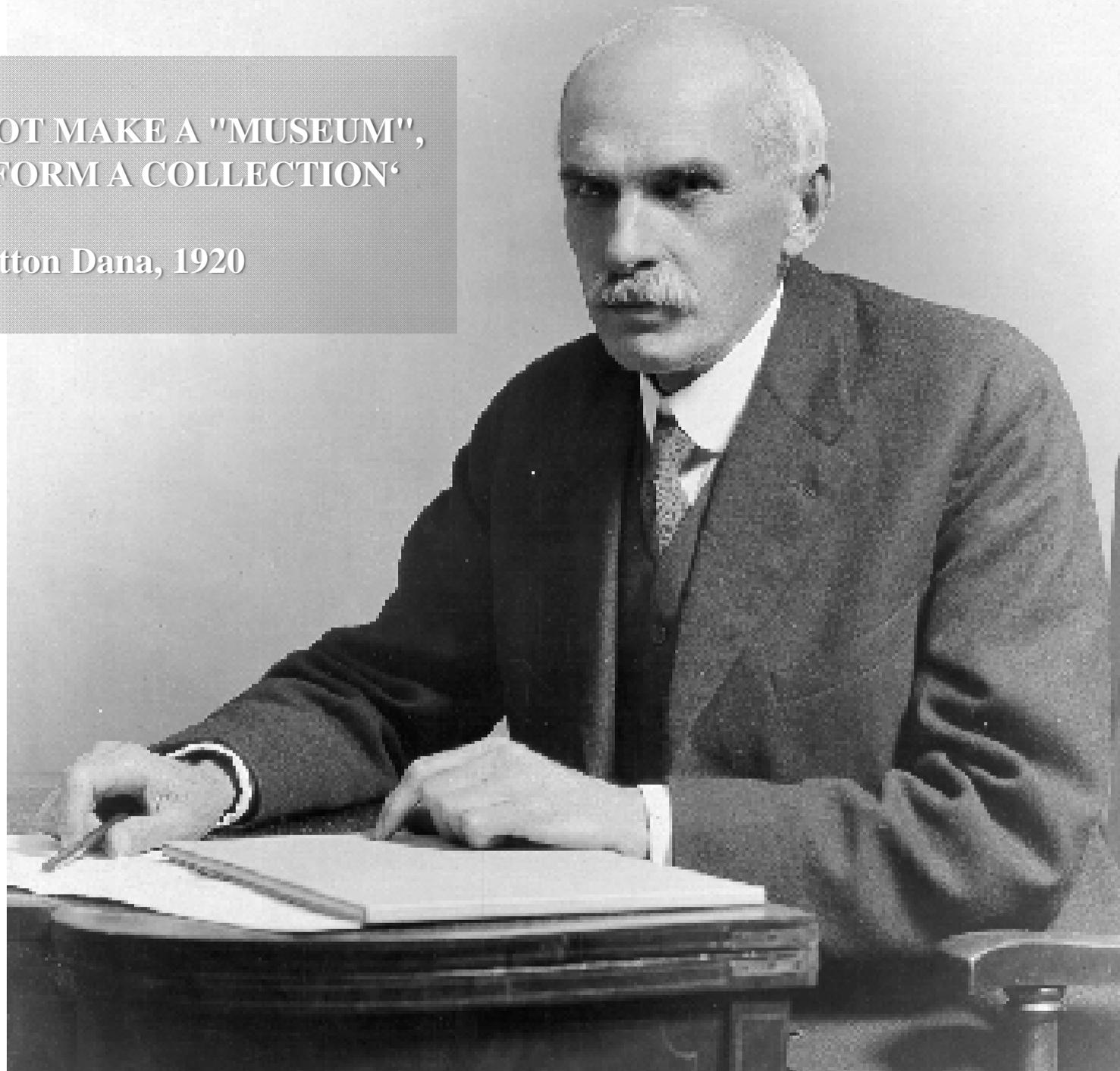
A big collection
and empty storage?
That might be a sign
of a good museum.



Our collection is
the biggest,
therefore our
museum is the
best

'...OBJECTS DO NOT MAKE A "MUSEUM",
THEY MERELY FORM A COLLECTION'

John Cotton Dana, 1920





TO ATTAIN KNOWLEDGE,
ADD THINGS EVERY DAY.

TO ATTAIN WISDOM,
REMOVE THINGS EVERY DAY.

Lao Tse

OMNE NIMIUM
NOCET

(All that is superfluous
is harmful)
Latin proverb

© drawing by

Ivica Kiš, 2000



Whose past ?



**Do we care for
their wishes or
their needs?**

An aerial photograph showing a vast, dense crowd of people from a high angle. The individuals are packed closely together, filling the entire frame. They are wearing a variety of colorful clothing, including red, blue, green, and white. The overall scene conveys a sense of a large-scale gathering or event.

Or, do we care for them at all?

Which Past ?





Peter Dinklage

Should museums change?

Depends upon the answer:

Do we want better past?

(using museums to make more of it)

or

Do we want better present?

(using past for the quality development)



Our reality is often
a result of our wants
and phantasies

Rene Magritte
Attempting the impossible

If you see life in a museum,
You must be facing
the window.



Which Past ?



Portrait Bust of Caligula, 40c

Which Past ?



017
CALIGULA
ROMAN, 1ST C. AD. 37-41

Portrait Bust of Caligula, 40c



The originally painted Greek sculpture



The clay army once painted

“The past is what you
remember,
imagine
you remember,
convince yourself
you remember,
or pretend
to remember.”

Harold Pinter



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:HaroldPinter.jpg>



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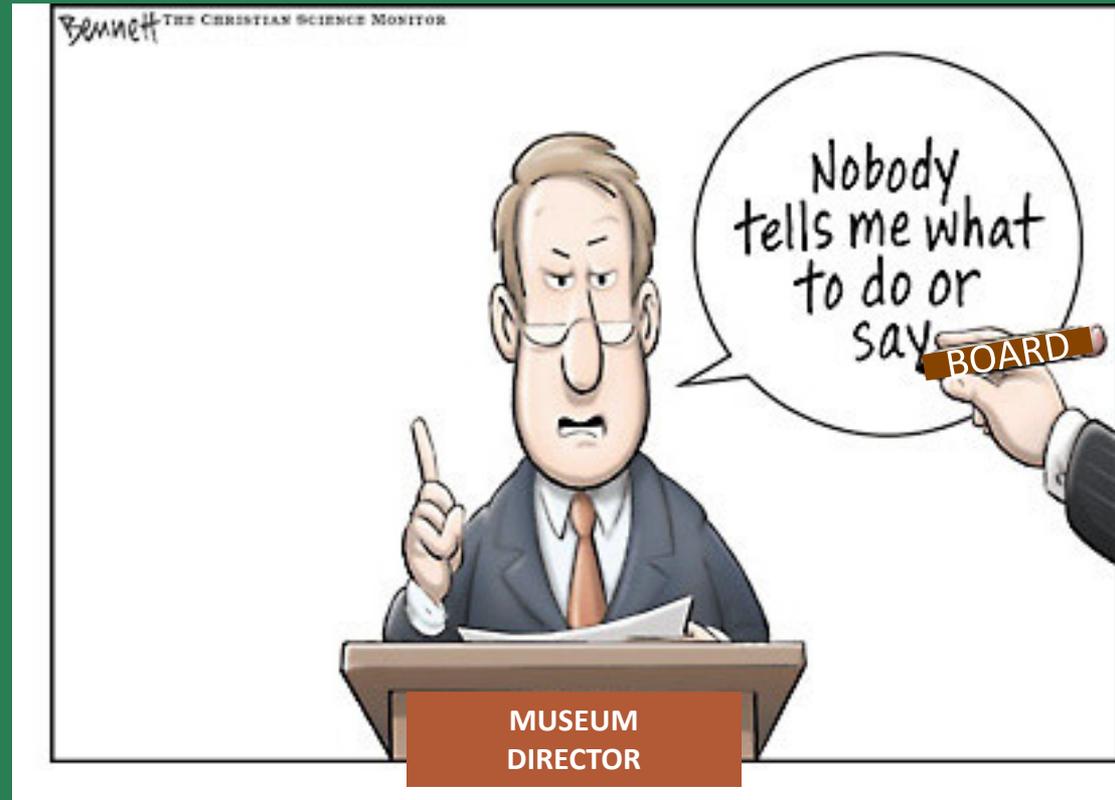
Generalized history is a branch of speculation,
connected (often rather arbitrarily and uneasily)
with certain facts about the past.

Aldous Huxley

Why is it that museum autonomy stays a theory?

Because museums strive ...

- to assure support from politicians, and stakeholders
- to please corporporate sector
- to assure beneficial budgets and subventions
- to stick to the themes and interpretations that keep the public mind dormant and apologetic
- to assume legitimacy for *a posteriori*, scribe- attitude



... or is it just a lack of professionalism?



Is museum “profession” psychotic ?

Psychosis is a severe mental disorder in which thought and emotions are so impaired that **contact is lost with external reality.**

Are heritage institutions part of the problem ?

Shouldn't they be part of the solution ?

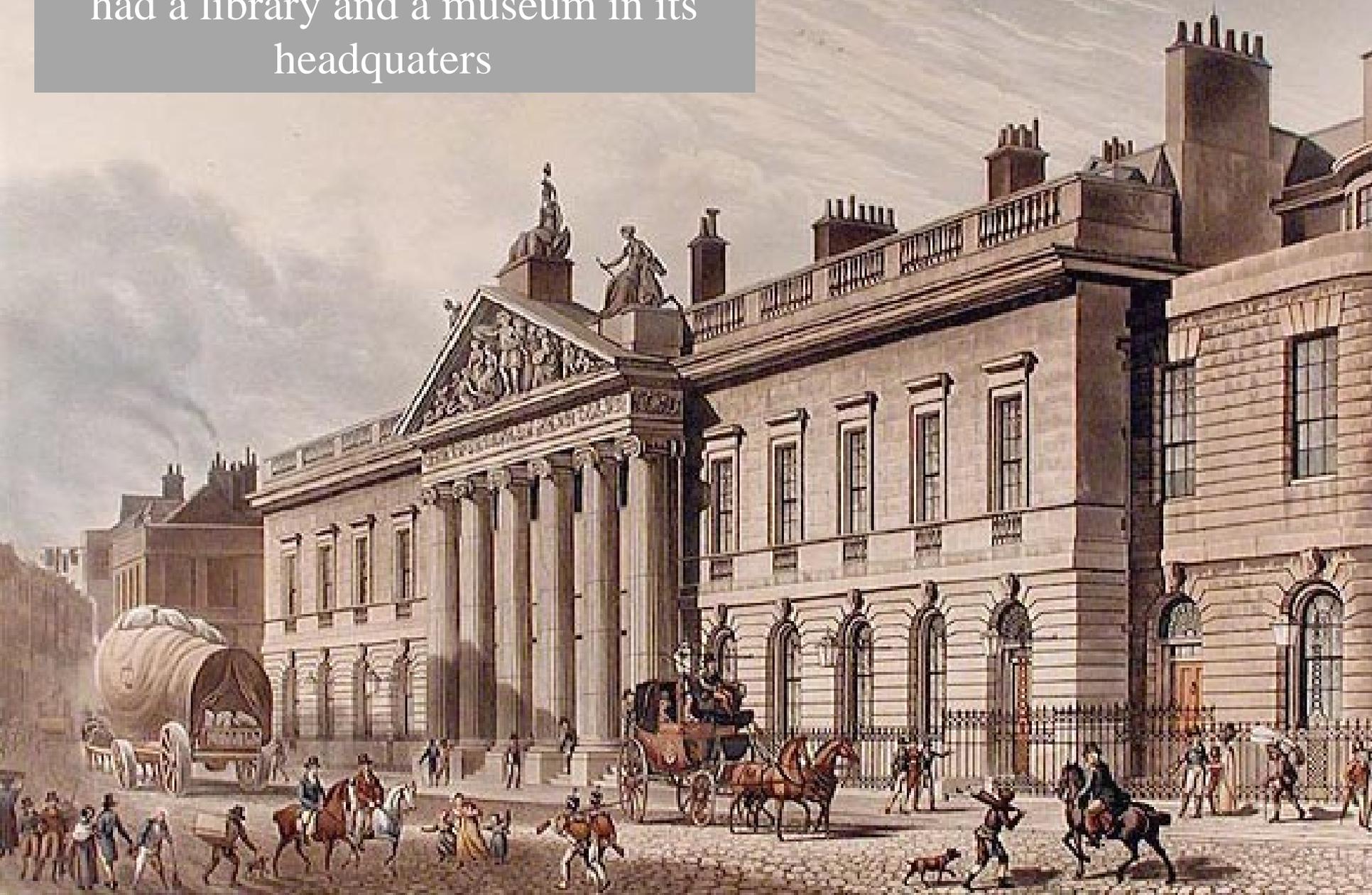


Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA)

A woman in a black dress and high heels is lying face down on a floor completely covered with stacks of books. The scene is dimly lit, with a bright light source in the upper right corner. The woman's head is resting on a stack of books, and her arms are outstretched. The books are piled high, creating a dense, chaotic environment. A blue rectangular box is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image, containing the text "Decadence of public intellectuals".

Decadence of public intellectuals

East India Company
had a library and a museum in its
headquarters



Europe is still struggling
to come to terms with the violent legacy



“Zilong”, 3000 years, returned



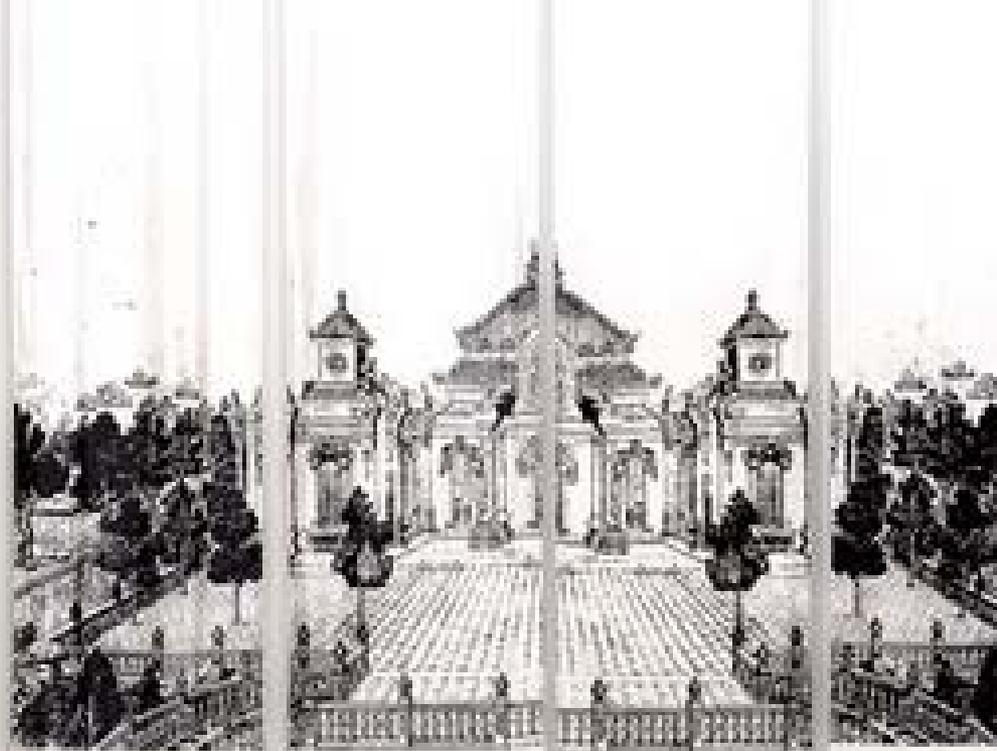


A Buddhist ceremony was held in Phnom Penh on 12 May, to celebrate the return of Hanuman, the Hindu monkey-god, handed over to the national museum by the director of the Cleveland Museum of Art, William Griswold.

...the museum had signed an agreement "to hand over the relics free of charge as part of a cultural exchange programme". ...

Double destiny: 1860 and 2015

國
明
園





Why change the world when you can change architecture and the exhibition design?



Professionals may be unwilling to give, to deliver.....



Why, otherwise, would the architect hide this spectacular view ?

Museums are the only institutions
with their own, official, - disease

Museum fatigue!



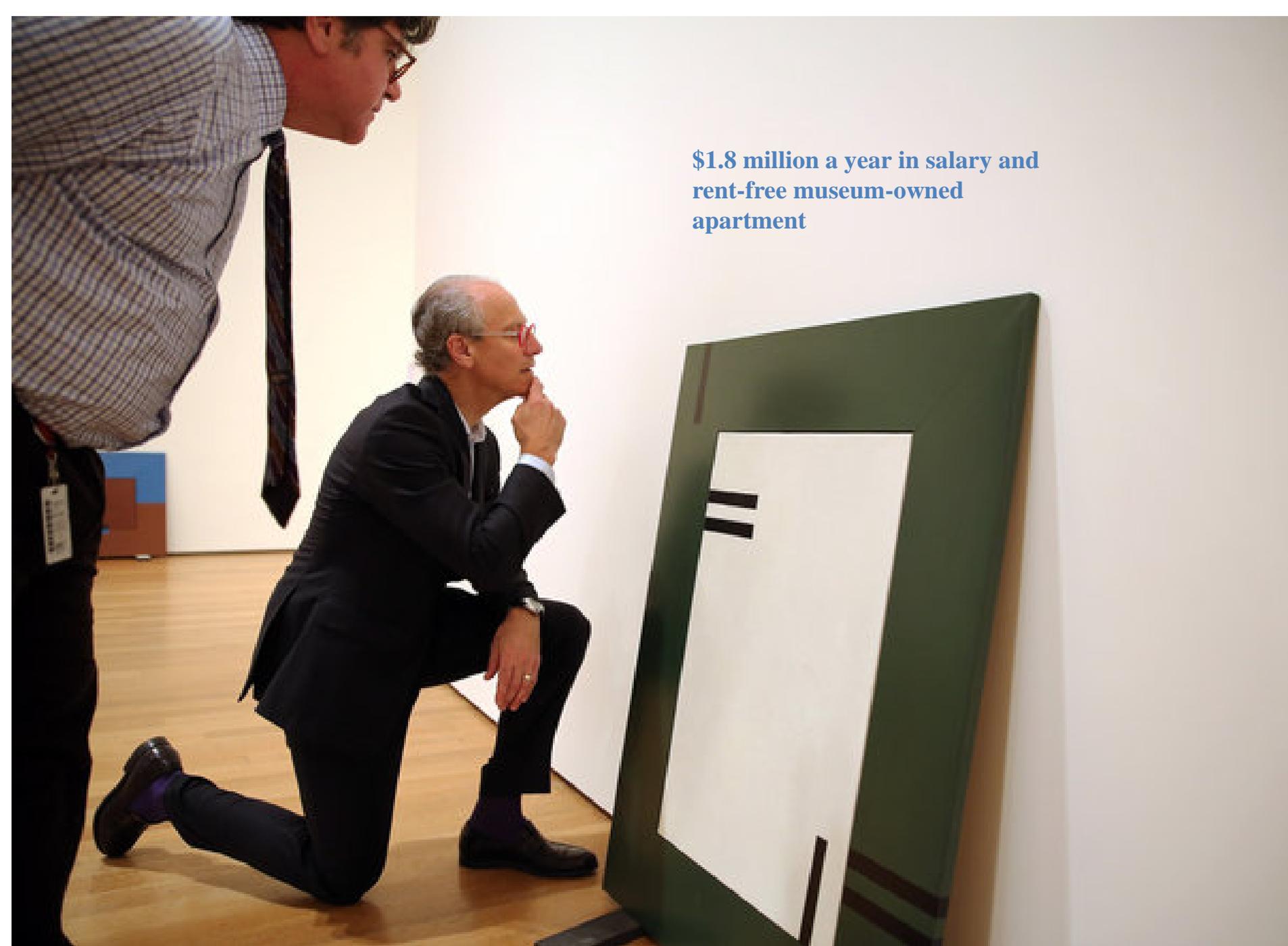
....oversized,
dull,
pretentious,
inapprehensible,
foreign

\$65 million David H. Koch Plaza





**\$1.8 million a year in salary and
rent-free museum-owned
apartment**



Vilnius, Lithuania, 2008





Vertical penetrations

Hanging balconies

Long flights of steps

Squeezed passages



Not many knew.....
The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation
is renewing its agreement with the Basque
museum until 2034.



Explore Tate Britain after dark: Scheme lets art lovers remotely drive robots around the museum once everyone has gone home





London's Tate Britain Museum "After dark"



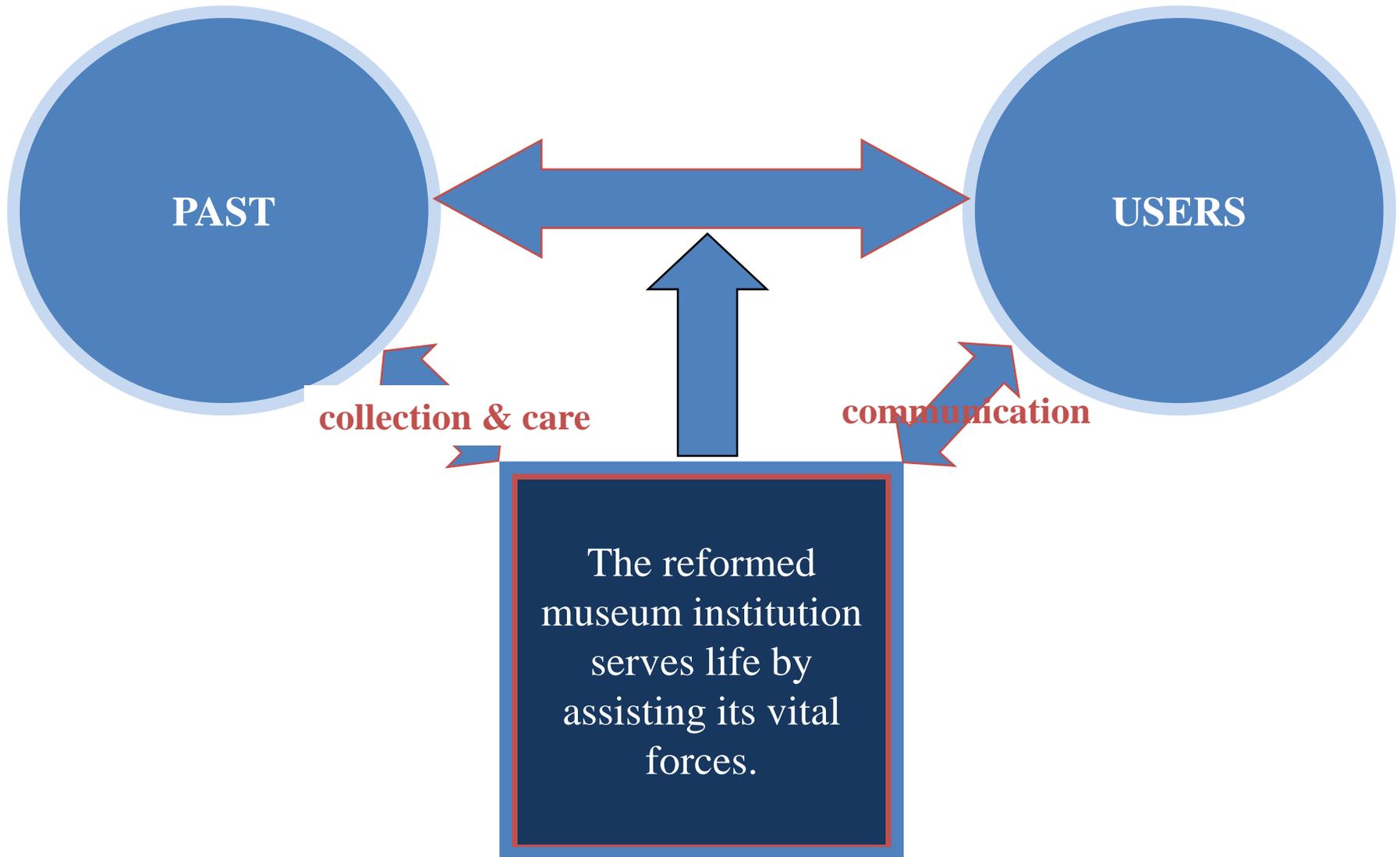
Museum of Natural History to host adult slumber party

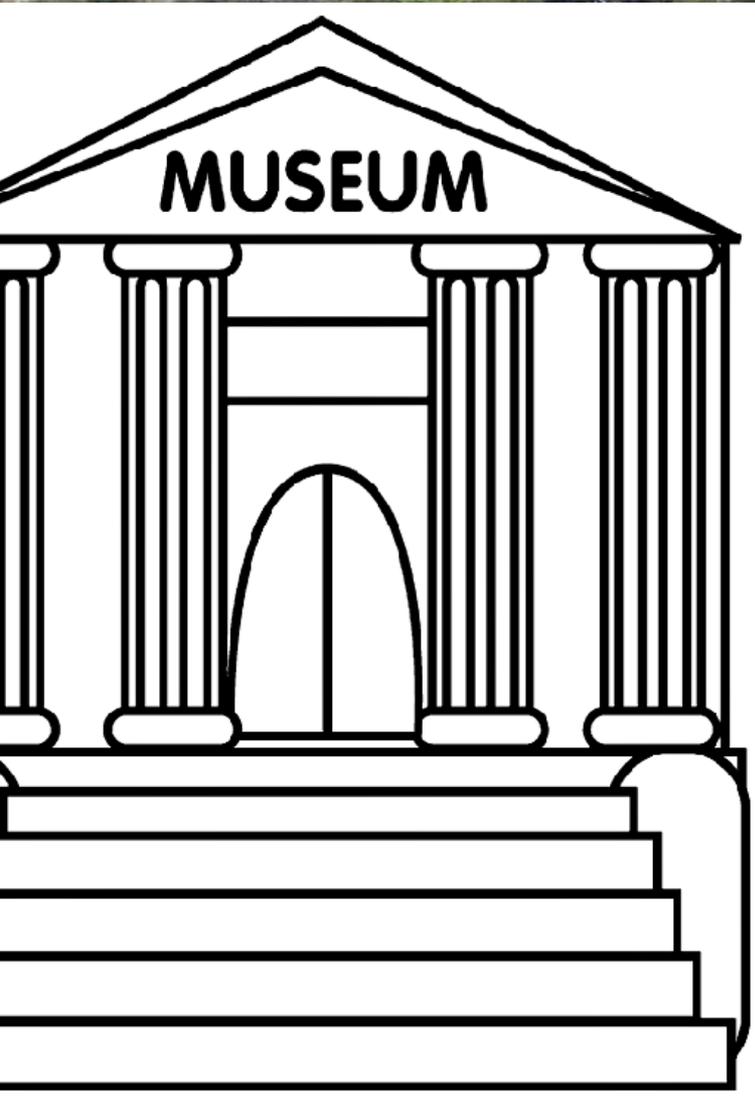


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London lonelyhearts look for love in a bag: speed dating in London Science Museum

THE HONEST POSITION OF MUSEUMS





Part of the solution: dynamic quality

Heritage institutions and actions maintaining
static quality,

that retains the inherited values

(by recognizing, researching, caring for them, documenting and communicating them)

**fighting the threats of disintegration, decay,
distortion, missuse and monetarisation of values**

**But ALSO generating
dynamic quality,**

that

**helps, inspires, supports,
the production of the new values**

Simultaneously
**keeping a keen eye on the specificity
they are entrusted with**

The visible problem:

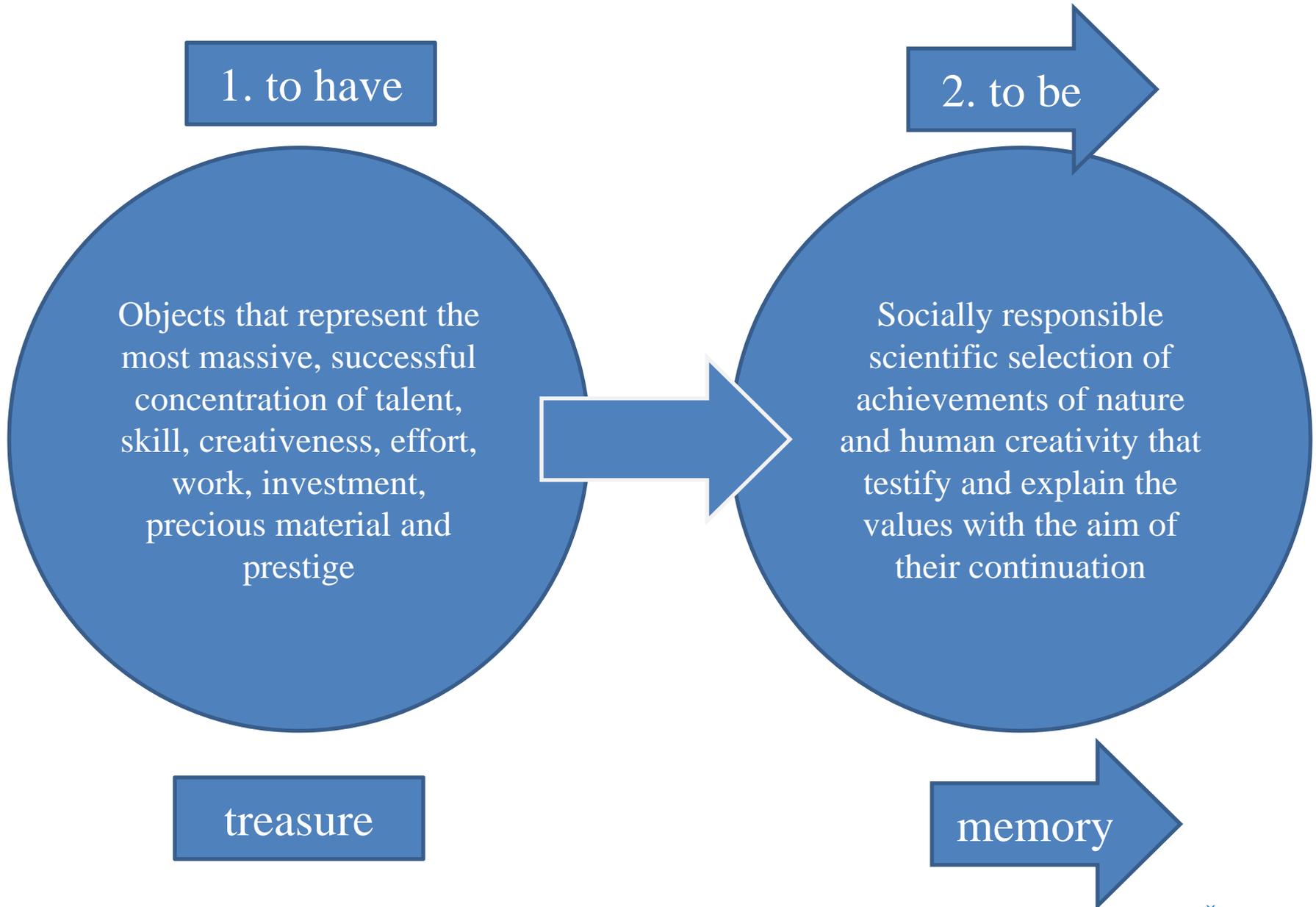
- heritage sector is heterogeneous, composed of several separate occupations
- no profession
- no autonomous science
- no obligatory education

The emerging understanding:

the world needs its memory as the source of solutions to manage challenges as well as threats of change

The obvious call: in a troubled world, we should be part of the solution

Ways to “eternity”



....from treasure to interpretive inventory....

Heritage is about values and quality



Value system
management
business

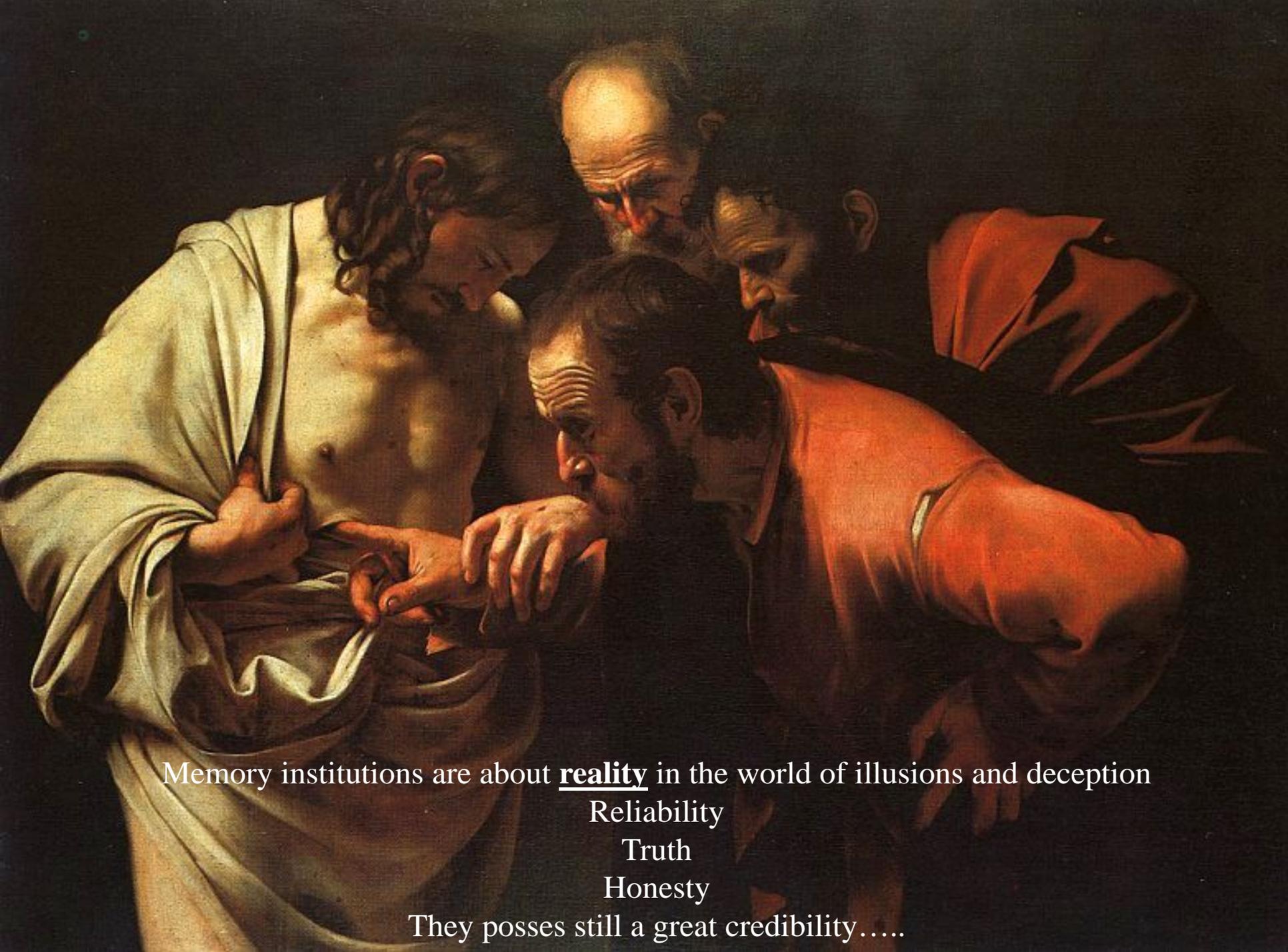
Heritage institutions should be like

wise grandfathers
experienced and noble friends
who help us re-gain control of our mind and senses.

They would tell us stories about the human nature
and its temptations,
about traps and perils,
about ways to freedom and harmony.

They have to teach us what is true and what is false,
what is beautiful and why,

in brief
how to recognize virtues,
how to possess them
and how to enjoy their blessing.



Memory institutions are about reality in the world of illusions and deception

Reliability

Truth

Honesty

They possess still a great credibility.....

A reminder again:

- Boredom/Fatigue
- Dependency on own public
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In brief,...

- There are dangers for public sector
- Curators are not professionally educated
- What is the role of society's memory?
- We need change in concepts and status
- Others are taking our functions

.....we must understand that nobody should do our mission: quality contribution to the societal project, to regain balance, quality and assure continuity.

SOME SLIDES MORE,
JUST IN CASE

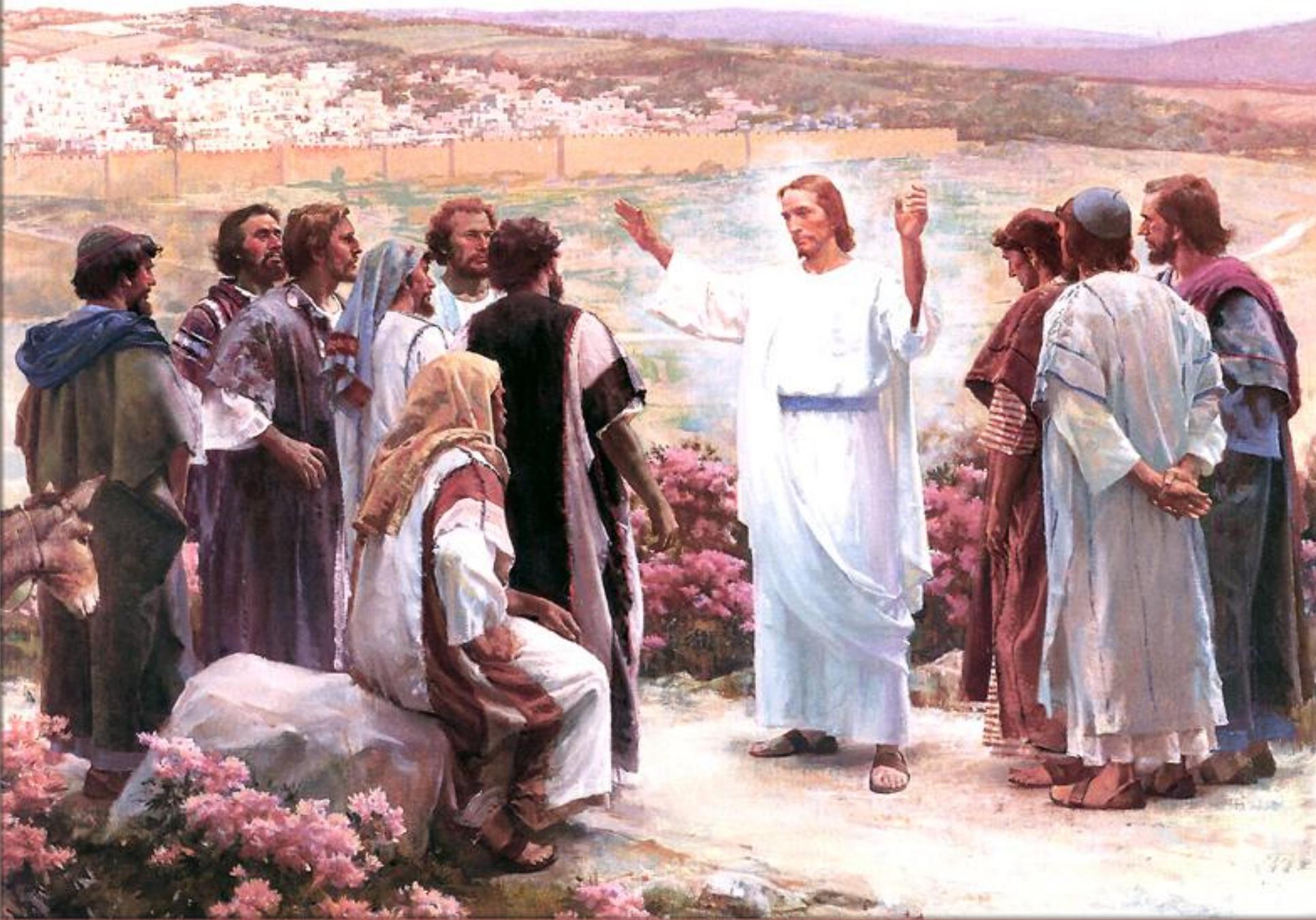
A COLLECTION IN MUSEUM IS "ALL IMPORTANT"
Heath, 1977.

**COLLECTION IS "THE PREDOMINANT REASON
FOR MANY A MUSEUM'S EXISTENCE"**
Alexander, 1979.

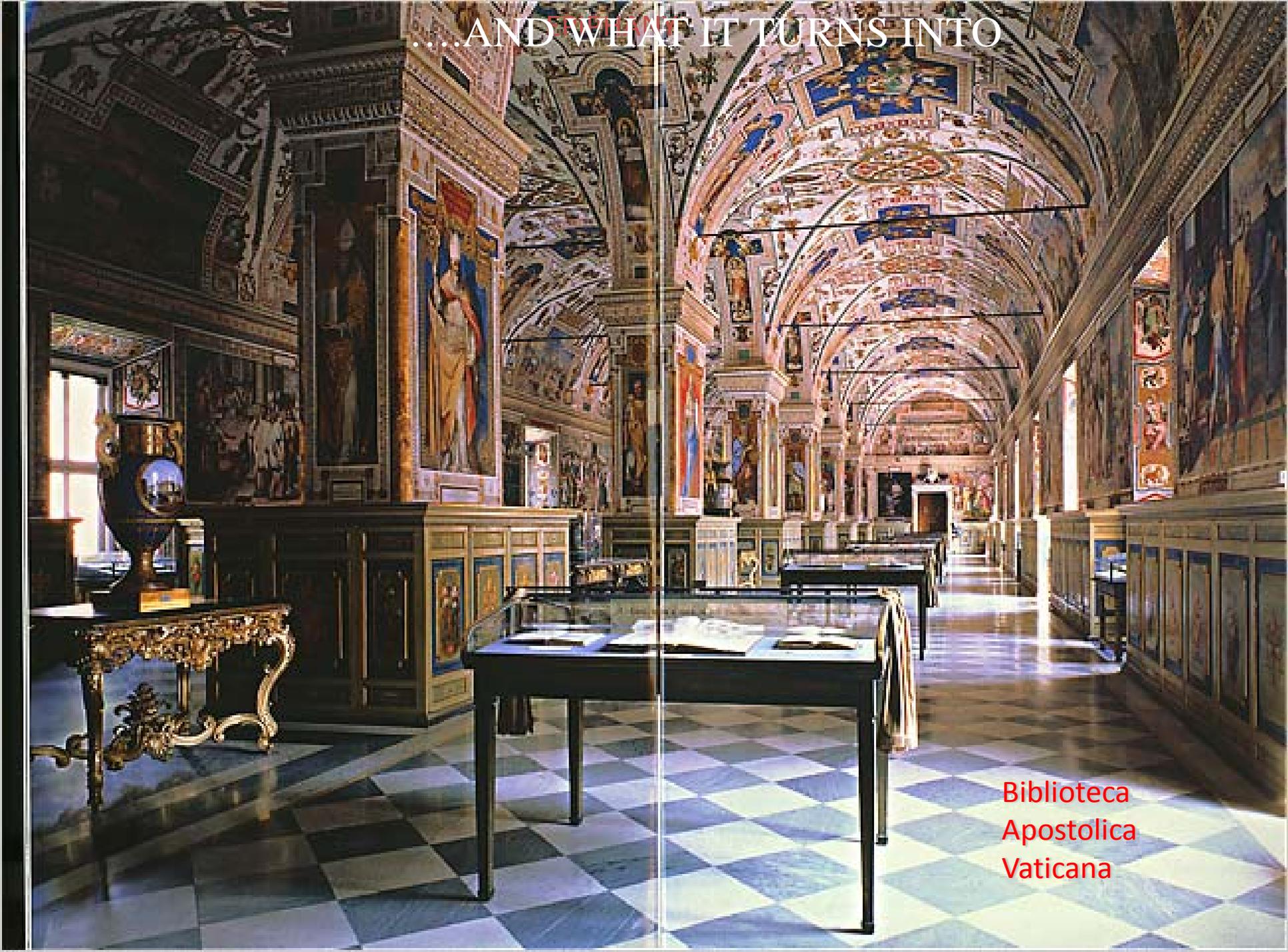
"MUSEUMS HAVE TO CONCENTRATE UPON COLLECTIONS"
Lewis, 1982(?)

**"THE LIFEBLOOD OF MUSEUMS IS IN THEIR COLLECTIONS.
THE MUSEUM, IF IT IS NOT A COLLECTION, IS NOTHING".**
Cossons, 1991.

EPIPHANY



...AND WHAT IT TURNS INTO

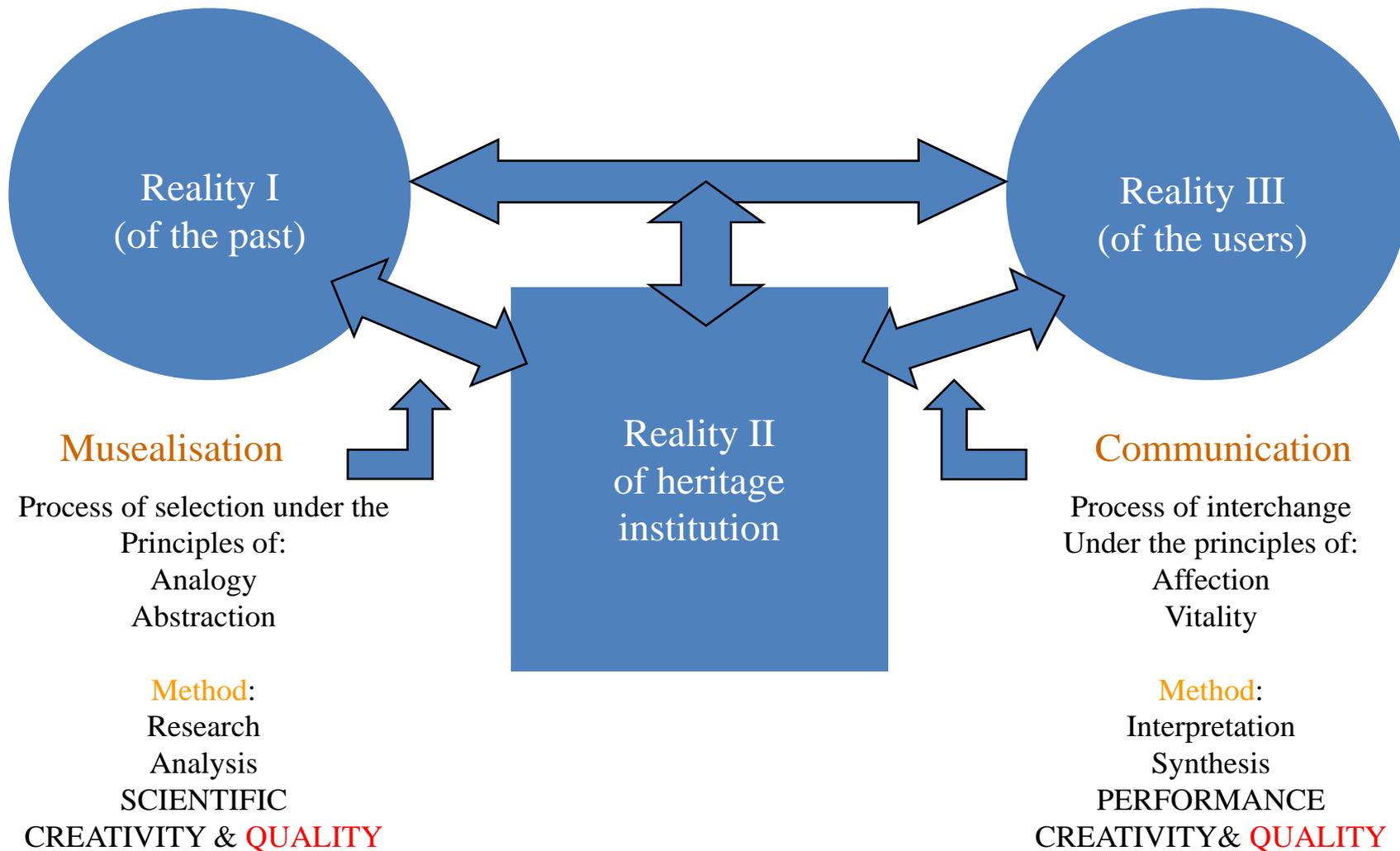


Biblioteca
Apostolica
Vaticana

Some shortcomings of the exclusive scientific discourse

- No proposals for firm, usable claims and assertions
- Lag behind the real-time context
- Unintelligible language
- Accent on knowledge
- Scientific, theoretical, "fach"-approach
- Informative discourse: no participation
- Abstract discourse: no links to individual and concrete
- Exclusion of life-like and emotional

Theory brings clear vision
of a reformed heritage institution



The reformed heritage institution serves life by assisting its vital forces.