

Gerald Bast, Rector University of Applied Arts Vienna

The term “museum” derives from the Greek “museion.” The most important institution of this type was the Museion of Alexandria. In stark contrast to many of today’s museums, however, this institution was not primarily a place for the veneration of science and art, but rather a place where art and science—supported by knowledge stored in its library—were developed. The Museion was a site of art development, not art worship. And this Museion was also a center for interdisciplinary networking, as one might call it today. Viewed in this light, the concepts of “university” and “museum” have—or rather had—quite a bit to do with each other. And now more than ever, museums and universities of the arts have arrived at a crossroads:

Both types of institution—arts universities and museums—must take on the challenge of communicating and interacting with the public if they are to be successful. The question in doing so, though, is whether the main focus is to be on quantitative or qualitative effects. This dilemma of our fast-paced times is owed to the unfortunate fact that quantitative effects are more easily measured and more quickly verified than qualitative effects.

If museums desire to be more than quantitatively successful tourist attractions, more than institutions of public display serving cultural tourists, they must seek out contact to arts universities.

If universities of the arts, in their function as aesthetic developmental laboratories, are to have an effect beyond the confines of their own walls, in society and in the overall system of art, and if contemporary art, architecture and design are once again to be given a stronger presence in society, then these universities must build close relationships with museums and other exhibitors. Only in this way, an effect can be achieved in our world, subject as it is to rules associated with the economies of change and attention.

Via concrete projects, the MAK and the University of Applied Arts Vienna intend to embark upon a path of synergistic cooperation, thereby further potentiating the respective strengths of these two important Austrian arts institutions of international standing.