

# Museums Without A Territory. A Typology Of Museum Without A Building

Los museos sin territorio.  
Una tipología de museo sin edificio

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Museums have been reconsidered and criticised from artworks themselves and from instituting practice, questioning their role and positing other types of creations or interventions as museums. Some of the new museum typologies are in the limits between which is regarded as a museum and which is not. They are useful for suggesting how museums could become in the future. Museums that may occur in broader territories, museums that may be both material and immaterial, mobile or nomad museums, ephemeral or temporary museums, museums that do not require large infrastructures nor astounding buildings to fulfil their duties.

El museo ha sido replanteado y criticado desde las propias obras de arte y desde la práctica instituyente, cuestionando el papel de los museos y planteando como museos otro tipo de creaciones o intervenciones. Algunas de las nuevas tipologías museísticas están en los límites entre lo que se considera museo y lo que no es considerado museo. Nos sirven para plantear cómo podrían llegar a ser los museos del futuro. Museos que puedan darse en territorios más amplios, museos que puedan ser tanto materiales como inmateriales, museos móviles o nómadas, museos efímeros o temporales, museos que no requieran de grandes infraestructuras ni de asombrosos edificios para realizar sus funciones.

**Key words**

Museum, without building,  
portable, mobile, nomad

**Palabras clave**

Museo, sin edificio, portátil,  
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Some museum institutions have been renouncing to the traditional museum structure, step by step, while it seems, to us, that the most notable change in the manner of viewing this structure has often come from marginal areas of the institution. The museum has been reviewed and criticised in every way, from the works of art and from the institutional practice, questioning its role and proposed other types of creations and interventions as museums. These interventions surge and become the boundaries between what is instituted and what is institutional. We consider,

Some museum institutions have begun to renounce the traditional structure of the museum, while in our opinion, the most notable change in the way of seeing the structure has often come from the fringes of the institution. The museum has been reviewed and criticised in the works of art themselves and from the institutional practice. Its role has been questioned and another type of creations or interventions proposed as museums. These interventions appear and become the borders between what is instituted and what is institutional. We consider, as Silverio Barriga states, that “the institution is within the dynamics of the instituted and the institutional; it is that tension of what is normalised and what is creative in the individual.”<sup>1</sup>

Besides, “what is instituted does not explain the institution as a whole. The possibility of changing, of adapting the change within the institution, comes from its relationship with the institutional.”<sup>2</sup>

A great number of the works of art that are proposed as museums were, in their day, taken as unique museum proposals stemming from other museum models, often questioning the existing ones. These works, which we could call museum-works or work-museums, have been absorbed by the art system as artistic works, ignoring their museum interest, since the art system has the capacity of absorbing any type of artistic manifestation, even those that are on the borders and even those that question the art system itself. The act of recognition in many cases a way of domesticating or defusing the capacity of criticism or questioning of these work-museums or museum-works.

The types of museums without buildings<sup>3</sup> are many, and for this reason we will consider only the museums

without territory. The museums without territory are those museums that have physical materiality but that do not occupy a territory; in general, they are small and can change their location easily. The museums without territory can be mobile (moving from one place to another, transporting their works) or nomadic (the works remain in the place where they were created and the museums “moves” to them).

### The mobile museum

The mobile museum is that which is mobile and easy to transport, does not occupy a territory since its essence is moving from place to place. This type of museum has happened many times. In the history of art there are different cases in which the idea of a mobile museum is used. Attending to the characteristics of mobility of this type of museums we can establish two great groups: the portable museum and that of a museum automobile or vehicle - both move from one place to another carrying their works.

### The portable museum

Within the mobile museum we find the portable museum, whose main characteristic is that to be moved from one place to another, it needs to be transported.

The *Atlas Mnemosyne* (Atlas of images) by Aby Warburg could be considered a mobile museum. This art historian began to work on the atlas in 1924 and his sudden death in 1929 left the work unfinished. The *Atlas Mnemosyne* is made up of a collection of images - with very little text - with which Warburg sought to relate the history of the memory of the European civilization. Fernando Checa expresses it in the first Spanish language edition as follows: “*Mnemosyne* means to be, thus, a visual atlas showing, through comparative consideration, an inventory of ancient precedents conserved in memory, which served to represent in the Renaissance the subject of life in motion.”<sup>4</sup>

The supposed function of the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, according to Checa, is to “explain through a vast repertory of images, and a lesser one of words, the historical processes of artistic creation in what we call today Modern Age.”<sup>5</sup>

The Warburg atlas has been used on several occasions as a precedent of the new museum conceptions. An example is the exhibition *ATLAS How to carry the world on one's back? It took place*

1. BARRIGA, Silverio: «El análisis institucional y la institución del poder», en *Quaderns de Psicologia*, n.º 2-3, Barcelona, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, Facultad de Psicología, Servicio de publicaciones, 1979, p. 25. [en línea] [Fecha de consulta: 07/09/2017]. Disponible en: <http://www.quadernsdepsicologia.cat/article/view/374/369>

2. *Ídem*

3. Para más información consultar el capítulo 5 «Museos sin edificio» de la tesis *Los museos sin edificio. Estudio de caso práctico: el Museo Ríojano de Arte Contemporáneo-MURAC de 2006 a 2013*. [en línea] [Fecha de consulta: 11/11/2017] Disponible en: <http://hdl.handle.net/11000/1873>

4. CHECA, Fernando: «La idea de imagen artística en Aby Warburg: *El Atlas Mnemosyne* (1924-1929)» en Warburg, Aby: *Atlas Mnemosyne*, Madrid, Akal, 2010, p. 139.

5. *Ibidem*, p. 138.



Davis Museum.  
Fotografía de Davis Lisboa.  
Cortesía de Davis Lisboa.



between November 16 2010 and March 27 2011 in the Reina Sofía Museum. An exhibition curated by Georges Didi-Huberman that materialised as a proposal of showing how, through the atlas, Warburg modified how the relations among the works themselves were conceived. According to Sandra Santana, Warburg's *Bilderatlas* becomes a metaphor of the museum understood as a manner that relates images dissolving borders "between individuals, periods of history and geography"<sup>6</sup>. The exhibition is materialised through the works of different artists that have a common concept based on knowledge which is transversal and not standardised in the world.

There have been multiple attempts to continue this project through homages or works based on this antecedent. In what refers to creation of works based on the concept of more or less museum archives, Isidor Regueda mentions some of them in his article, *Aby Warburg, inventor del Museo Virtual*<sup>7</sup>.

There are many examples of artistic works that use the idea of a transportable museum, *La boîte-en-valise*,

is one of them. This is a work dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp, made between 1935 and 1941, and it was a suitcase in which different reproductions of his work were included. It condensed nearly all of the work done by Duchamp between 1910 and 1937, his *ready-mades*, drawings, texts, paintings, etc.

Some of the works which are miniaturised in it are *The Fountain*, *L.H.O.O.Q.* - a postcard of the *Mona Lisa* on which Duchamp drew a mustache and a goatee with a pencil -, *The Great Glass* and *Nude Walking Down the Stairs*, among others. He explains his work himself:

Here a new manner of expression reappeared. Instead of painting something new, I wanted to reproduce paintings and objects I liked, bring them together in a space as small as possible. I did not know how to do it. First I thought of a book, but the idea did not satisfy me. Afterwards I thought it could be a box in which all my works would be collected, and mounted as if in a small museum, a portable museum, so to speak.<sup>8</sup>

With the first edition, in series, of this work, done between 1935 and 1940, twenty suitcases were created with various designs and contents. Between 1950 and 1960 he created six other series, these without

6. Didi-Huberman, Georges: *Atlas. ¿Cómo llevar el mundo a cuestas?*. Madrid, TF Editores/Museo Reina Sofía, 2010, p. 9 (citado por Santana, Sandra: «Museos ficticios, reales e imaginarios. De cómo el *Atlas Mnemosyne* de Aby Warburg acabó devorando el Museo Ficticio de Marcel Broodthaers». *Revista SONDA: Investigación y Docencia en las Artes y Letras*, n.º 1, 2012, p. 18). [en línea] [Fecha de consulta: 16/11/2017]. Disponible en: [http://issuu.com/revistasonda/docs/museo\\_imaginario\\_sandra\\_s\\_n\\_1.sonda](http://issuu.com/revistasonda/docs/museo_imaginario_sandra_s_n_1.sonda)

7. Reguera, Isidoro: «Aby Warburg, inventor del Museo Virtual», *El País*, Madrid, 01/05/2010. [en línea] [Fecha de consulta: 27/09/2017]. Disponible en:

[http://elpais.com/diario/2010/05/01/babelia/1272672757\\_850215.html](http://elpais.com/diario/2010/05/01/babelia/1272672757_850215.html)

8. Declaraciones hechas en la entrevista de Marcel Duchamp con J.J. Sweeney reproducida en el artículo de Benjamin H. D. Buchloh: «Los museos ficticios de Marcel Broodthaers». *Revista de Occidente*, n.º 177, febrero de 1996, p. 47.

the luggage case and changing the number of works reproduced. This work is one of the first productions of the portable museum and another example of how Duchamp questioned the relative importance of the original work of art.

Continuing with the use of suitcases as a museum we find some of the most representative works of Joseph Cornell. These consists in objects and engravings contained in wooden boxes, many of which have a glass front. With these boxes Cornell evoked the glass exhibit windows of the museums, but they also have a peculiar characteristic: many of them are interactive, and were conceived to be manipulated by the spectator.

One of the most representative boxes is the Museum Series, done at the end of the 1940s. It is comprised of twenty glass flasks that contain, apparently, everything in the universe. Each of them is named after its content. These are some of the names: "The Speed of Light", "Thousand and One Nights", "Juggling Act", "White Landscape", etc. The intent of containing, in this case, all things of the universe is a recurrent theme in what respects museums.

An example of itinerant exhibition without a building is the work *Galerie Légitime* (1962-1963) by Robert Filliou. This gallery was a top hat full of small objects created by him or by other artists, such as Benjamin Patterson and Georges Maciunas, whom Filliou presented to the public directly on the street. Another example of gallery that fulfills these characteristics is the project *Nasubi Gallery* by Tsuyoshi Ozawa. In this work Ozawa uses as exhibition space a number of a type of post boxes which in Japan are used for milkmen to leave the full bottles and take away the empty ones. Ozawa invites artists of different nationalities to exhibit their works in his portable gallery. The project began in 1993 in Tokyo and has travelled along different spaces, theatres, bookshops, stores and museums throughout the world.

There are also some more recent creations that span the scope of the mobile museum, such as the *HoMu Homeless Museum*. This museum materialises in different way, the most original being a small stand inspired by "Lucy's Psychiatric Help" booth of the comic strip *Snoopy*, that becomes the portable headquarters of the museum, together with a web page, a collection of objects and different events. The HoMu criticises the art market, the power of the institutions, the star architects, the real estate business, etc.

The book by plastic artist, Keri Smith, *How to be an Explorer of the World, Museum of Art/Portable Life*, originally published in English in 2008, proposes 59 explorations that lead the reader to observe and



Centro Portátil de Arte Contemporáneo-CPAC.  
Fotografía de Tomás Ruiz-Rivas.  
Cortesía de Tomás Ruiz-Rivas.

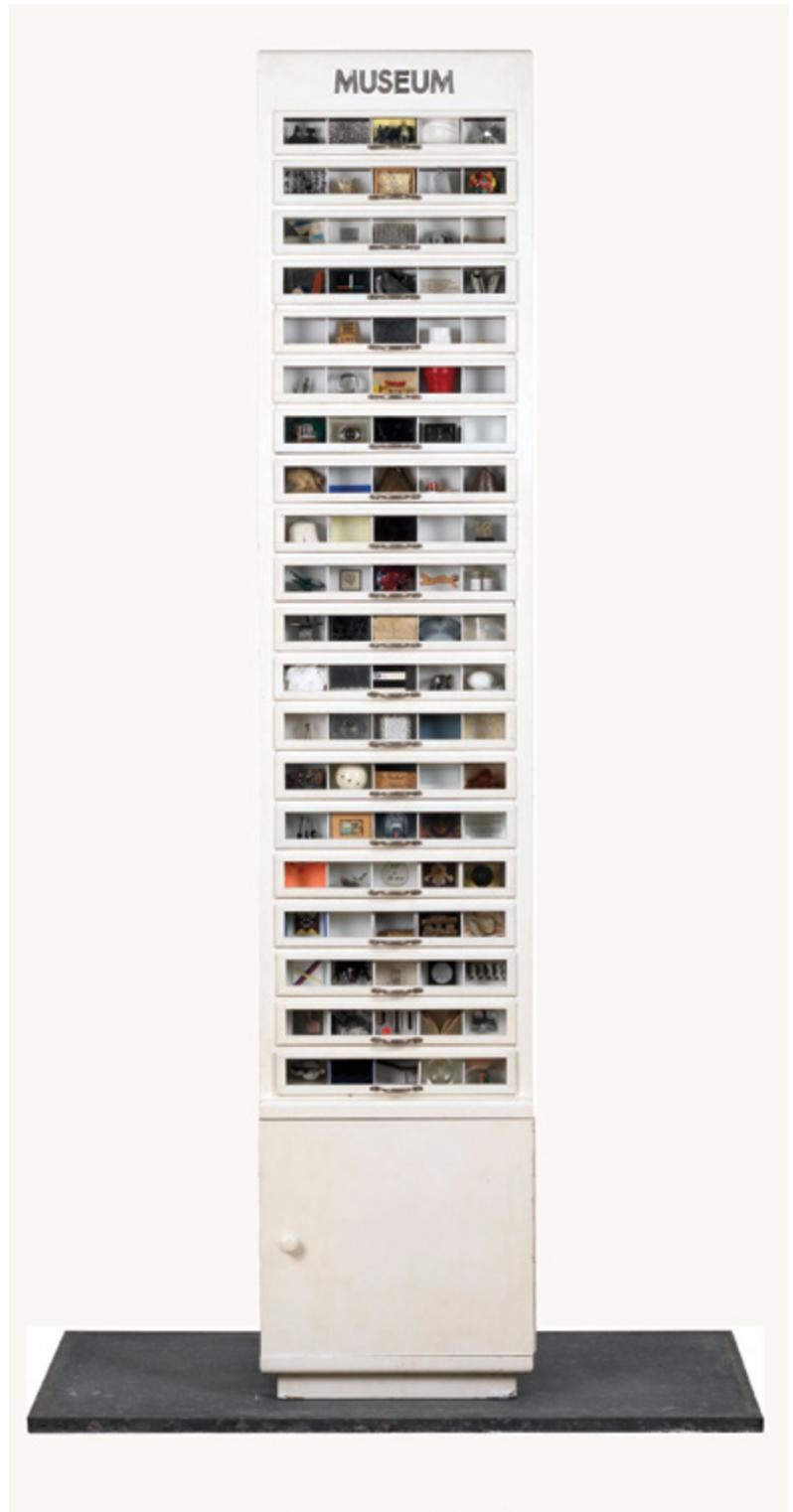
interact with the physical world that surrounds them and experiment the depth of aesthetics with which it can be perceived. The author states:

This book can be your metaphoric suitcase: a place in which to collect and register your discoveries. How do you observe? It is also a museum, your own museum with your personal vision of the world. It will be quite different to any other museum because you are unique. You can enrich it at any time and touch all it contains. Everything is free, but the best thing is that it is portable, so you can take it when you travel, and can even organise spontaneous exhibits wherever you are and sell or not entrance tickets. This museum changes with your point of view, you can visit it when you need ideas or when you want to see the images you have in mind.<sup>9</sup>

The project, *Retando a la suerte*, carried out in 2013, is a materialisation of the current concept of a portable museum. Although more than a museum it is a portable exhibition. To carry this project out, thirteen curator approached an exhibition with the twelve members of the NOPHOTO collective. The result takes on a single form: "Thirteen boxes meant as thirteen portable photography exhibitions. Thirteen views of the same collective, twelve photographers and a curator"<sup>10</sup>.

Within this type of museums there is the tendency toward minute museums which hold works of very small dimensions. This is the case of the *Museum of the Drawers (Das Schublaemuseum)*, a work by Herbert Distel made between 1970 and 1977. This museum is a representative collection of the art done between 1960 and 1970. The Drawer Museum is located in a cabinet made for thread spools which has twenty drawers, each of them divided into 25 compartments, which makes a total of 500 compartments. Each of these compartments is 57 millimeters wide by 48 millimeters deep and 43 millimeters high. The works it holds belong to recognised artists of prestige such as Nam June Paik, Vito Acconci, Robert Cottingham, Joseph Beuys, Carl Andre, Chuck Close, Eduard Ruscha, John Cage, etc.

The *John Erickson Museum of Art (JEMA)*, created in 2003 by John Erickson, is also a museum of reduced dimensions, an aluminum chest 40.5 x 30.5 x 23 centimetres approximately. It is a museum that carries out its functions in a portable and inexpensive manner both in space and in time - the duration of its exhibits is usually, for example, nine hours and fifteen minutes - the JEMA, in the words of its author, allows



9. SMITH, Keri: *Cómo ser un explorador del mundo. Museo de arte / vida portátil*, México, Fondo de cultura económica, 2012, p. 12.

10. PARDO, Tania: «Proyecto», *Retando a la suerte*. [en línea] [Fecha de consulta: 26/08/2017]. Disponible en: <http://retandoalasuerte.nophoto.org/proyecto/>

Museo de los Cajones. Fotografía de H.U. Siegenthaler. Cortesía de H.U. Siegenthaler.



Proyecto Retando a la suerte. Fotografía de colectivo nophoto. Cortesía de nophoto.

Segunda Caja Proyecto Retando a la suerte. Fotografía de colectivo nophoto. Cortesía de nophoto.



thinking in a different manner on nature, the nature of art and the artistic practice.

Another small-sized portable museum is the Collection of Great Works of Contemporary Art of the MURAC. With the creation of the Collection of Great Works of Contemporary Art, the MURAC meant to create a collection that would complement the art works the MURAC held and that would have its own distinctive features and identity. This collection includes different artistic media and languages and treasures work produced or created expressly for the unique space of Galería Minúscula<sup>11</sup>, a micro exhibition space 106 centimetres high, 85 centimetres wide and very deep.

The title of the exhibition emphasizes the importance of the works gathered in this collection and afforded the spectator the opportunity of contemplating a choice selection of key works in the development of art. The exhibition includes works by Félix González-Torres, Cai Guo-Qiang, Barbara Kruger,

Joseph Kosuth, Maurizio an, Sherrie Levine, Erwin Wurm, Louise Bourgeois, Urs Fischer and Yayoi Kusama.

The works are of reduced dimensions, the small size needed to be lodged in the Minute Gallery. The works of the Collection of Great Works of Contemporary Art are actually miniaturised appropriations, an ironic play comparing the adjective “great” of the name with the actual size of the works exhibited.

There is a museum that boasts being the smallest contemporary art museum in the world. It is Davis Lisboa’s *Davis Museum* whose dimensions are de 20 x 20 x 20 centimetres, and besides, it is portable. This museum was founded in Facebook in the year 2009 and it is the first and only contemporary art museum created in a ballot box. It has been defined as “a liquid museum in the web, but it is also a physical centre recognized by the Generalitat de Catalunya”<sup>12</sup>. The *Davis Museum* has a permanent collection of contemporary art including creations of artists such as Francesc

11. <http://www.galeriaminuscula.com>

12. BOSCO, Roberta / CALDANA, Stefano: «Un pequeño gran museo», *El País*, 16 de septiembre de 2013. [en línea] [Fecha de consulta: 11/08/2017]. Disponible



Colección de Grandes Obras de Arte Contemporáneo del Museo Riojano de Arte Contemporáneo MURAC. Fotografía de MURAC. Cortesía de MURAC

Torres and Yoko Ono. But it is also considered a subversive museum. Its shape reminds us of a ballot box, "it presents itself to society as a sort of "artistic political party". If the museum is a ballot box, then the work of art is a vote of confidence in favour of the Davis Museum", indicates Lisboa»<sup>13</sup>.

Some of these portable museums have wheels to make moving easier, as is the case of the *Centro Portátil de Arte Contemporáneo-CPAC* (México, 2009), a project sponsored by *Antimuseo* (María María Acha-Kutscher and Tomás Ruiz-Rivas), Eder Castillo and Arturo Ortiz that consists of a low price transportable device for the exhibition of art which can be moved and mounted by a single person. It has portable audio-visual resources with enough autonomy for one intervention. Its performances are brief, lasting from two to four hours. Its performances are showing works of art and serve as supporting infrastructure for cultural activities (performances, lectures, concerts) and to "mark" the urban space generating public space. The CPAC seeks the connection between strategies of re-appropriation of the city by the collectives of social outcasts (minority races, wandering salesmen, prostitutes, immigrants, homosexuals in repressive contexts, determined feminine collectives, etc.) and the artistic practice that affect directly the urban fabric.

Notable among the rolling museums is *Museo de la Calle* (Street Museum) a project created by the Colombian collective *Cambalache* in 1999. The site of this museum was a car circulating around Bogotá with objects of different types which were obtained by exchange with passers-by. Thus its collection was never permanent, but temporal, and besides it was a limited, travelling museum. The museum moves to exhibit its collection and at the same time to exchange its contents. Carolina Cayceum, a member of the collective, comments: "exhibiting in the street is recognising a public, some of whom are illiterate, who are surprised by an exhibition that resembles more a flea market, a joke or a trinket shop. They find a museum when they had not planned on visiting one."<sup>14</sup>

### A vehicle museum or car

The museum-vehicles differ from the mobile museums in that these have an engine and do not need the strength of one or more people to be transported, but only one driver. This variety of

museum can use different types of vehicles such as a van, a bus, a lorry, a boat, etc. One of the first exhibition spaces of this type was the Liverpool mobile and travelling museum (1884), a subsidised museum to propagate knowledge of the patrimony in the schools.

In Spain the first case of a museum vehicle was that of the *Museo Circulante* (Circulating Museum) (1931), a touring truck sponsored by the Patrimony of Pedagogical Missions, dependent on the Ministry of Public Education and Fine Arts. According to Martí Perán, "the museum was comprised of two collections of fourteen copies of historical paintings deposited in the Museum del Prado. El Greco, Velázquez, Ribera, Murillo and Goya, reproduced by Ramón Gaya, Eduardo Vicente and Juan Bonafé"<sup>15</sup>.

Within the automobile type museums, one of the vehicles most used is the bus. The Museumbus is a bus which has the necessary facilities for the exhibition of works. The content is usually a small selection due to the reduced space if we compare it to a conventional museum. Aurora León is of the opinion that «the social function of this museum resource is incalculable due to the ease with which a circuit throughout the city can be established with fixed schedule, "transporting" the museum to the public instead of the inverse movement.»<sup>16</sup>. The concept of the museumbus is that the museum has to travel where the public is, instead of having the public travel to where the museum is. The first museumbus was built in Poland in 1949 by the National Museum of Warsaw. One of the most famous museumbuses was the Linder museumbus which began to circulate in France in 1972. This museum was created as a consequence of the increase of the price of oil in 1975, since it approached an easier manner in which the mobile museum could travel to the schools instead of having school buses taking students to the museum.

### Nomadic museum

Nomadic museum is understood to be that which goes from one place to another without establishing fixed residence and without transporting its works. Here the museum travels and its travels catalogues works of art which remain in their place, independently of that in which the museum or the device that acts as the museum is. In the case of the nomadic museum, what travels is not the work of art

en: <http://blogs.elpais.com/arte-en-la-edad-silicio/2013/09/un-pequeno-gran-museo.html>

13. *Idem*.

14. Extraído de la página web del Museo de la Calle: [http://museodelacalle.blogspot.com.es/2007\\_05\\_01\\_archive.html](http://museodelacalle.blogspot.com.es/2007_05_01_archive.html)

15. PERAN, Martí: «Del museo circulante al arte ambulante. Notas para una genealogía local de la portabilidad», [en línea] [Fecha de consulta: 09/10/2017]. Disponible en: <http://www.martiperan.net/print.php?id=53>

16. LEÓN, Aurora: *El Museo. Teoría, praxis y utopía*, Madrid, Cátedra, 1982, p. 232.

as in the portable museum, but the museum itself. The museum is wherever the work of art is.

An example of the nomadic museum is the *Micromuseo* ("al fondo hay sitio")<sup>17</sup>, a project led by the art historian and curator Gustavo Buntinx. The project surged in 1983 as a response to the lack of a Museum of Modern or Contemporary Art in Lima, almost the only Latin American capital which did not have a museum of this type until recently, since the current MAC (Museum of Contemporary Art) was founded in 2013. The Micromuseum, developed a proposal that:

was not limited to collecting and exhibiting collections although the organisation of exhibitions and gathering knowledge were among its objectives. This museum does not accumulate objects: it makes them circulate. It does not consecrate nor sacralise: it places them in context. It does not have a single location, it travels and distributes itself according to each of its activities, using to advantage unusual or under-used spaces. Tombs, ruined palaces. Also some of the best galleries of the media, sporadically intervened for projects which are temporary.<sup>18</sup>

In the before mentioned type of nomadic museums, the MURAC Museo Riojano de Arte Contemporáneo. The MURAC is a nomadic museum of limited territory since the museum is wherever the work of art is found. In this sense the MURAC could be considered a ubiquitous museum since it can materialise itself anywhere. The MURAC stems from an apparent weakness that ended up becoming a strength: not having a building. Not having a building meant becoming a museum without limits. A museum in which the place of the work of art is not important since it could be found anywhere.

The nomadic museum can also be quite immaterial, as is the case of the *Musée du point de vue*<sup>19</sup> inaugurated by French artist Jean-Daniel Berclaz in 1997. This museum is immaterial since it is found in the point of view, and the point of view is always

ephemeral. During the exhibitions of his museum, Berclaz prepares a table with food and drink, as if it were a conventional inauguration of any exhibition in any other museum. The difference is that what this museum inaugurates is a manner of seeing the place, an outdoor place. Berclaz has the intention of examining how society relates with the landscape.

Occasionally the nomadic museum can be a single representation, as it happens with *Le musée c'est moi*, a work by Leonel Fernández Pinola, which consists of a T-shirt printed with the text "Le musée c'est moi", a phrase taken from Rafael Squirru, director of the Buenos Aires Museum of Modern Art, who said it every time someone asked where was the museum. This was because the Buenos Aires Museum of Modern Art did not have a site during its first four years, 1956 to 1960. During that time its director managed to carry out museum activities in all kinds of spaces. As we see, the Buenos Aires Museum of Modern Art was another example of a nomadic museum.

## Conclusions

As we have seen through the examples given in this article, the museum becomes mobile and limitless, dissolving its frontiers to intervene in the world. The museum building is not necessary for the existence of the museum. The museum institution is adapting slowly to a society ruled by mobility, both physically and mentally, and by immateriality; consequently the museum is becoming slowly a more immaterial entity. The museum is mutating towards an institution that is variable and even ephemeral.

Some of the characteristics set forth are on the borders of what is considered museum and what is not considered museum. The limits of the traditional museum began to blur many years ago; this helps us imagine how the museums of the future can be. Museums that could materialise in more extensive territories, museums that could be both material and immaterial, mobile museums or nomadic ones, ephemeral museums or temporary ones, museums that do not require great infrastructures nor astounding buildings to fulfill their functions.

17. Página web del proyecto Micromuseo: <http://micromuseo.org.pe>

18. Texto extraído de la página web del proyecto Micromuseo: <http://www.micromuseo.org.pe/rutas/loimpuro/alfondo.html>

19. Más información del *Musée du point de vue* en la página de Jean-Daniel Berclaz: <http://www.fiatlux.fr/musee/>



*Musée du point de vue.* Fotografía de Jean-Daniel Berclaz. Cortesía de Jean-Daniel Berclaz.



*Merchandising y papelería del Museo Riojano de Arte Contemporáneo MURAC.* Cortesía de MURAC.

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