

Museumsinsel (Germany)

No 896

Identification

<i>Nomination</i>	Museumsinsel (Museum Island)
<i>Location</i>	Land Berlin
<i>State Party</i>	German Federal Republic
<i>Date</i>	25 June 1998

Justification by State Party

The Berlin Museumsinsel is a complex of buildings composed of individual museums of outstanding historical and artistic importance located in the heart of the city, and as such meets the World Heritage Convention's criteria for a cultural property.

The individual buildings erected in the course of the 19th century by the most renowned German architects form a unique complex that serves purely museological purposes and constitutes a town-planning highlight in the fabric of the city in the shape of a kind of city crown.

The Museumsinsel visibly documents the changing human values mentioned in the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* because it bears outstanding architectural testimony to the new institution of the art museum that began to emerge in Europe following the French Revolution as an important institution of middle-class self-perception. The Museumsinsel illustrates in addition – as seen from the chronological order of its individual museums – the change that the institution of the art museum underwent from the beginning of the 19th century up to the 20th century, being first the central place of middle-class educational aspirations, then becoming a place of national identity, and ultimately allying itself with the gesture of imperial power.

Criterion ii

At the same time the Museumsinsel is an outstanding architectural example of a type of building that testifies to an important stage in the development of human history. The different designs of the Museumsinsel's individual museum buildings illustrate in a confined space the typological development of the European art museum from a middle-class temple of education (Altes Museum, Nationalgalerie) and from there to the exhibit building of plain design which gives pride of place to the work of art exhibited (interior of the Pergamonmuseum). Furthermore, the individual museum buildings harmonize so well with each other in design terms that the Museumsinsel presents the art museum as a building type in a unique architectural and urban design manner.

Criterion iv

The Museumsinsel with its collections of works of art of world renown and its prominent buildings is a place of outstanding artistic significance.

Criterion vi

Category of property

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings*.

History and Description

History

Development of the part of the Spreeinsel now known as the Museumsinsel began when the pleasure garden (Lustgarten) for the Stadtschloß (palace) in the 16th century. However, its present importance began when the Altes Museum was built to the designs of Karl Friedrich Schinkel in 1824-28.

A plan to develop the part of the island behind this museum, hitherto used for commercial purposes as a "sanctuary for the arts and sciences," was drawn up in 1841 by the court architect, Friedrich August Stüler, on the orders of Friedrich Wilhelm IV. The first element of this plan to be built was the Neues Museum (1843-47). The next step did not take place until 1866, when the Nationalgalerie, the work of Johann Heinrich Strack, was built.

Another two decades passed before the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum (now the Bodemuseum) was built in 1897-1904 to the designs of Ernst von Ihne, and Stüler's plan was completed in 1909-30 with the construction of Alfred Messel's Pergamonmuseum.

Description

The complex of the Museumsinsel consists of five museum buildings.

- The Altes Museum

This is a two-storey structure with a rectangular ground plan on a high base with its exhibition rooms ranged round two inner courts and a central two-storey domed rotunda with skylight. The side and rear elevations are relatively plain, but that facing the site of the former Schloß is a high portico supported on eighteen sandstone Ionic columns and two corner pilasters. Access is by means of a seven-bay wide stairway with broad stringers.

- The Neues Museum

The layout of the Neues Museum is comparable with that of the Altes Museum, but the rotunda of the latter is replaced by the monumental main staircase. Unlike the Altes Museum, to which it was originally linked by a passageway, it is a relatively plain structure, more in the style of the Schinkel school. Its articulation comes from a high profile parapet with corner sculptures, plain window frames with the mullions decorated with figures of children, cornices, and corner pilasters. Much of the decorative sculpture was destroyed by wartime bombardment, but some elements have been restored and replaced.

The richly decorated interior contrasts with the plain exterior. Much of the original ornamentation was destroyed, but the furnishings around the second inner courtyard (the "Greek

Courtyard”), including the monumental frieze depicting the destruction of Pompeii, have survived virtually intact.

There is an interesting innovative structural feature. The traditional low-vaulted ceilings of timber beams and masonry are replaced on the third floor by an arch-cord construction using cast-iron arches and pairs of wrought-iron chords. This lightweight form of construction was necessitated by the poor foundation parameters.

- The Nationalgalerie

A high ashlar block-like base with rectangular windows is surmounted by a Corinthian pseudo-dipteral temple of *in antis* type with an open portico. There are also high rectangular windows in the exterior wall set back behind the columns. The rear is in the form of a semi-circular conch. A double-winged open staircase with five flights of steps leads up to the pedimented portico with its Corinthian columns. The building is clad throughout with Nebra sandstone.

The four-storey building has a rectangular ground plan with apse-like terminal features. There is a cellar and an exhibition floor in the basement section and two exhibition halls in the superstructure. It is lavishly decorated with symbolic imagery in the form of sculptures, reliefs, and paintings. The upper exhibition floor was originally laid out as a vast banquet hall, but is now converted for displays.

- The Gardens

The gardens overlooked by the Nationalgalerie fill the space defined by the Neues Museum, the Bodestraße, and the embankment of the Spree. They are laid out in a simple formal design, replacing the original elaborate layout with colonnades and pavilions.

- The Bodemuseum

This Neo-Baroque structure is in a commanding position on the north-western tip of the island. Clad in sandstone and with a low stone base, it rises to two storeys, linked by Corinthian pilasters and crowned with a balustrade. The longitudinal elevations have two pedimented side projections with double Corinthian three-quarter columns. The rounded entrance frontage is decorated with the same columns and with rounded open arches.

The entrance with its impressive staircase is beneath the smaller of the two domes. It gives on to two lateral wings and a centre section which are linked by transverse sections so as to form five inner courtyards. The main room of the museum, the so-called Basilica, is modelled on the domed church of San Salvatore al Monte in Florence, and is embellished with works of art that give it the appearance of a Renaissance church interior.

- The Pergamonmuseum

This three-winged museum was built to exhibit the greatly expanded collections of antiquities resulting from German excavations at Pergamon and other Greek sites in Asia Minor as well as those from Mesopotamia formerly housed in the Vorderasiatisches Museum.

In style it is restrained, in the Schinkel tradition but in a modern idiom and also suggestive of classical architecture. It rises directly from the Spree, like the Bodemuseum, with which it is harmonized in scale and proportions. The centre block and the side wings are windowless, given structure by flat giant pilasters and steep pediments; there are archaic

features such as the Doric half-columns and the stepped central superstructure. Some changes to elements of the exterior design were imposed upon the architect, Alfred Messel, but the overall block-like modernity of his conception overcomes the increase in the eaves height, the flattening of the pediments, and the addition of a metope and triglyph frieze.

- The Bridges

The nominated area also includes the Montbijou Bridge, in front of the Bodemuseum, a two-arch structure in Baroque style, and the Iron Bridge at the end of the Bodestraße.

Management and Protection

Legal status

The nominated area has been protected since the beginning of this century (laws of 1907, 1909, and 1923). In 1977 the Museumsinsel was inscribed on the Central List of Monuments of the GDR as an exceptional group of monuments of national and international importance. The 1995 Law on the Protection of Monuments and Sites in Berlin makes provision for three levels of protection for the Museumsinsel: protection as a Listed Historic Monument-Group, covering the entire area, including buildings, the open spaces between them, and the bridges; protection as individual Listed Monuments (the buildings, the viaduct, the Iron Bridge, and the Montbijou Bridge as architectural monuments and the gardens as landscape monuments); and protection of a defined buffer zone around each individual monument.

The adjacent areas to the west, north, and east (partially) of the Museumsinsel are also statutorily protected as a Listed Historic Monument-Group. Part of this area is included in the nomination dossier as the buffer zone around the Museumsinsel.

The urban plans currently in force – the Land-Use Plan and the Management Plan – contain provisions relating to the protection of the urban fabric of protected groups in the Mitte district. Statutory measures in force allow the competent authorities of the *Land* (State) to act in all matters relating to the urban plans and to make use of building permits.

(For the buffer zone, see “ICOMOS recommendations” below for future actions.)

Management

Management of the Museumsinsel group, its buildings, and its collections is carried out by the Prussian Cultural Foundation (*Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz* – SPK), which ensures that its qualities are maintained and cooperates with other partners to whom it delegates specialized preservation activities. As responsible bodies at governmental level, the Federal Government and all the *Länder* participate in the work of the SPK, which is the source of substantial potential funding, of strength, and of flexible management.

The Federal Ministry of Regional Policy, Construction and Town Planning is responsible for professional control of building works, whilst the Federal Office of Public Works and Planning (*Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung* – BBR) deals with aspects of planning, conservation work, expert advice, design, technical proposals, etc, which the

SDK must submit to it. At *Land* level, the Department of Planning, Environment, and Technology of the Senate of Berlin oversees planning and works on the Museumsinsel, whilst the Berlin Monuments Office (*Landesdenkmalamt Berlin* – LDA) specifies all protection and conservation measures. In the Mitte District the local conservation authorities are concerned with the protected area outside the island.

As a result of the continuous interaction between the main partners (SPK, BBR, and LDA), and also the participation of the other bodies involved, effective management is assured.

Conservation and Authenticity

Conservation history

During World War II the buildings on the Museumsinsel, and in particular the Altes Museum, the Neues Museum, and the Nationalgalerie, suffered damage, in places partial destruction. A series of conservation projects were undertaken after the war, in 1950, 1960, 1980, and 1990, with the object of making good the results of this damage. Interventions carried out to date cover conservation, restoration, reconstruction (to restore sections and features of buildings using old materials or new materials with surviving elements integrated into them, in accordance with precise documentation), consolidation of structural elements, maintenance, repair of deteriorated surfaces, and, to a limited extent, the addition of new elements (eg the windows between the colonnade of the Altes Museum, which it is planned to remove). Some conservation carried out soon after the war which showed the use of poor materials or workmanship of inferior quality has now come to the end of its life and is at the present time the subject of corrective actions.

A large-scale overall conservation strategy is currently being implemented, with guaranteed funding, professional expertise, and level of management. This has been developed as a result of detailed knowhow derived from each of the works that have been carried out. It provides the framework for designs, proposals, and plans at different levels for the future preservation and improvement both of the whole group and of its individual elements, in relation to the priorities, authenticity criteria, requirements for museum displays, etc.

Authenticity

Despite the wartime damage and the long series of conservation interventions that followed, the Museumsinsel has retained a high degree of authenticity in its historic buildings, in their functions, in their design, and in their context. Even the authenticity of the historical characteristics and of the development of the museum role has survived: the character, the style and thematic content of the collections on display, the organic link between the collections and the architectural spaces, etc. Conservation interventions at present being carried out respect the imperatives of authenticity to a high degree.

Evaluation

Action by ICOMOS

An ICOMOS expert mission visited the Museumsinsel in February 1999.

Qualities

The Museumsinsel of Berlin is a remarkable example of the urban and architectural realization of an urban public forum which has the symbolic value of the Acropolis for the city. It is appropriate to emphasize its rare planning and architectural continuity and the consistency with which for more than a century a concept has been realized, ensuring its integrity and its urban and architectural coherence at each stage in the creation of the ensemble.

The cultural value of the Museumsinsel is linked with its historic role in the conception and development of a certain type of building and ensemble, that of the art museum. In this respect the Berlin Museumsinsel is one of the significant and most impressive ensembles in the world.

Finally, the urban and architectural values of the Museumsinsel are inseparable from the important museum collections that they house, which bear witness to the evolution of civilization. The connection is a direct one, since the architectural spaces in each museum were designed in an organic relationship with the collections on display.

Comparative analysis

Comparisons between the Berlin Museumsinsel and other museum complexes around the world highlight here for the first time the urban and architectural identity of the museum as an institution that makes a claim for equality with the symbols of religion and monarchy. This characteristic of the Museumsinsel becomes apparent when it is compared with the many European museums installed in former royal palaces (the Louvre in Paris) or which do not have this compactness (the museums in London) or central position in the urban fabric.

The Museumsinsel is in itself unique urban and architectural testimony to the changes in the functions, types, style, and importance of museums in the 19th and 20th centuries as an extension of the ideas that appeared after the French Revolution, proclaiming the right of all people to free access to art.

ICOMOS recommendations for future action

The ICOMOS mission studied the boundaries of the buffer zone put forward in the nomination dossier with care. As a result, it recommends that the zone should be extended to the west and the north so as to include the associated areas which are already protected as Historic Monument-Groups. Proposals were also made for modification of the boundaries on the east and south. These proposals were accepted by the competent authorities of the *Land* of Berlin and a revised plan was provided which was completely in accordance with the ICOMOS proposals.

Brief description

The five museums on the Museumsinsel in Berlin, built between 1824 and 1930, represent the realization of a visionary project and the evolution of the approaches to museum design over this seminal century.

Recommendation

That this property be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of *criteria ii and iv*:

Criterion ii The Berlin Museumsinsel is a unique ensemble of museum buildings which illustrates the evolution of modern museum design over more than a century.

Criterion iv The art museum is a social phenomenon that owes its origins to the Age of Enlightenment and its extension to all people to the French Revolution. The Museumsinsel is the most outstanding example of this concept given material form and a symbolic central urban setting.

ICOMOS, September 1999