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## **The Musealisation of the Artist's House as Architectural Project**

«Architectural creation leans on the rejection of established typology. But we must acknowledge that not every building is an occasion for integral creation»  
Alfonso Corona Martínez

### **Introduction**

To design a museum seems one of the most desirable commissions for an architect today. Not only is it a commission where a signature design is really desired, museums are also amongst the most published buildings. In stark contrast stands the task of turning an artist's house into a museum. Such conversions are lacking in the numerous overviews of museum architecture, save Renzo Piano's shelter for Brancusi's studio interior in Paris, or Carlo Scarpa's extension of the Gipsoteca Canoviana in Possagno. The fact that these musealisation projects are absent from the architectural field of vision will surprise no one. For, is it not true that the main idea of such musealisations is to freeze what exists and to open it to the public? Accordingly, if not considered a work of art by the artist in its own right, the artist's house is at least considered a valuable historical document to be treated with care, making concrete the topos of the artist's house as mirror of the artist's personality. It is a site upon which the status of monument is conferred. *Respect* for this heritage seems diametrically opposed to the possibility of architectural *creation*: the artist's authorship seems to prevent a new architect's authorship. Consequently, the position of the architect could only be that of the restorer-architect under supervision of historians and preservationists - architecture reduced to its *zero degree*.

The house-museums of Constant Permeke in Jabbeke near Bruges, of Peter Paul Rubens in Antwerp and of Luc Peire in Knokke proffer three cases of house-to-museum conversions in Belgium, with which the clear theoretical dichotomic opposition sketched above can be questioned. I will proceed in three steps. First I will map the actual interventions that constitute the process of musealisation, unearthing any possible architectural projects. Next, I will investigate whether such musealisations can be understood as architectural conversions constituting a proper architectural typology. And in a final step I will investigate the conditions under which architectural authorship appears to get a chance.

### **Musealisation as an elusive process**

Even if the fundamental coming about of a house-museum consists of making a historic house accessible to the public, the opening of a house as a museum always constitutes a much less straightforward process. I wish to illustrate this with the case of the Constant Permeke Museum (figs.1-4), whose chronology is already a tough issue. 1929 might be considered a possible beginning, as the year when the expressionist artist Permeke (1886-1952) designed his villa De Vier Winden, whose execution plans were drawn by architect Vandevooort. But also the year of the artist's death in 1952 could be advanced, since later that year Permeke's

family opened the house as a museum for the art Permeke had assembled there, following the artist's will. But only in 1960 the museum really opened as a public museum, after it was purchased by the provincial authorities the year before. Over the course of the following fifty years, a number of alterations, designs, and reconstructions were made in the museum. Take for instance Permeke's former sculpture studio, housed in a detached building behind the villa and consisting of one large space with a smaller annex attached to it. In 1960, an interior door between the studio space turned into a gallery and the annex was bricked up, probably to hide the prosaic space from view. This intervention was undone in the 1970s in order to better show «the original character» of the sculpture studio. The conservator motivated the re-inclusion of this annex in the exhibition circuit: «For the annex contains the soul of Constant Permeke's sculptural practice. There his concrete modelling table can be found, his clay bin and sink.»<sup>1</sup> Over the following decades, the sculpture studio would be remodelled several times, the entrance switching position, and an extra exhibition space and bathrooms for visitors being added behind the studio. Similarly, in the house itself at least three designs were made to organise and reorganise the counter and entrance area which were also relocated over the years. These and other designs were mainly made by the province's own building serv-

Fig. 1  
Constant Permeke Museum,  
Jabbeke, view from the  
street, current situation

Fig. 2  
Constant Permeke Museum,  
Jabbeke, the painting studio  
on the first floor, current  
situation

Fig. 3  
Constant Permeke Museum,  
Jabbeke, counter and  
reading tables in the  
reception room designed by  
Emiel Verannemann 1998

Fig. 4  
Constant Permeke Museum,  
Jabbeke, 1968 floor plan of  
the sculpture studio showing  
the re-opening of the annex  
to the studio gallery

ice on the initiative of the museum's conservator, but also partly by external designers such as the Phillips engineers who designed a new lighting system in 1968, or interior and furniture designer Emiel Veranneman who designed the current counter and entrance area. The mise-en-scène of the painting studio contains all the usual features of a musealized studio such as two unfinished works on easels, the drawing desk with the tools still in position, and the display of the palette and the paint brushes behind glass. As for this arrangement, further investigation would be necessary to find out when each element was given its current presentation, but historic photographs suggest that it was fixed early in time.

In contrast, Permeke's original modernist garden design was only restored in recent years, after it had first been gradually destroyed and even been used as an experimental dahlia garden. The outdoors installation of sculptures on plinths also came about in several subsequent steps.

The sketched course of events for the Permeke museum is typical for house-museums. In most cases, the musealisation seems to consist of a succession of interventions by various anonymous actors that extend, alter, undo or redo parts of the musealisation process. This could also be demonstrated for the Rubenshuis and the Luc Peire Foundation. Consequently, if there are architectural projects to be found, they will never cover the entire process of musealisation. Or else, if we consider the musealisation as one project, it is an unstable project with many but shadowy «fathers»: architects and museum curators, but also heirs of the

artist, engineers and official servants. The eclipse of their agency from authorial recognition is the reverse side of the medal which has the overdetermination of the artist-author-inhabitant at its front. I propose to conceive the aggregate of the various interventions as governed by a typology of the artist's house-museum, the concept of type being more related to convention and repetition than to invention.<sup>2</sup>

### **Towards a typology of the artist's house-museum**

While artist's house-museums seem to be understood as a distinct category of museum institutions, much less clear is their architectural status. If the artist's house-museum constitutes a building type, it will not be a commonly accepted one like the museum or the railway station. In Nicolaus Pevsner's survey *A History of Building Types* (1976) for instance, there is no trace of the artist's house-museum as a building type.<sup>3</sup> Pevsner's *History* makes a typological classification by purpose. The first of seventeen chapters «National monuments and monuments to genius» and the eighth chapter «Museums» come close to but do not cover the programme of the artist's house-museum. In fact, the inclusion of house-museums in this survey would have been in contradiction with Pevsner's a priori understanding of building types as defined by the purpose to which they were conceived. The term «house-museum» may characterise a certain *use* of buildings, but cannot designate a sort of buildings designed for the *purpose* of house-museum.<sup>4</sup> But instead of screening architectural history books and didactical typological atlases – these are the two traditional publication genres that use the idea of type – for mentions of the (artist) house-museum as building type, we ought to turn to theoretical conceptualizations of type to find out if we can legitimately speak of a typology of the (artist) house-museum.

An influential definition of the concept of type was formulated by the 18<sup>th</sup> C art and architecture theoretician Quatremère de Quincy who distinguished «type» from «model»: «The word [type] represents less the image of a thing to copy or imitate completely than the idea of an element which ought itself to serve as a rule for the model. [...] The model, as understood in the practical execution of the art, is an object that should be repeated as it is; the type on the contrary, is an object after which one may conceive works of art with no resemblance one to another at all. All is precise and given in the model; all is more or less vague in the type.»<sup>5</sup>

Concretely, in traditional architectural theory, two approaches to type have been current, one defining type through function, or rather *purpose* – Pevsner inscribed himself in this tradition; the other defining type *morphologically*, drawing up categories such as domed buildings.<sup>6</sup> Yet, the interest of typology lies in the nature of the (possible) correspondence of functionally and morphologically defined types. Thus, type's carrying over meaning in contrast with the functionalist project of emptying architecture from representation was one of the appealing aspects of type in the mainly Italian surge from the 1960s on, in thinking and writing about architecture through «type». Architects and architecture historians set out to project typologies, as the logics governing the development of building types. Essential to typology is that it investigates (1) the temporal/conditional concurrency of the programme of uses for which a building is designed, (2) the building's form and (3) the meaning of (typical) forms. For instance, the modern artist's house could be called a type since the painter's studio with the large windows oriented to the north distinguishes it formally and functionally from houses in general. A building type can then be «found» through an abstracting interpretation from a series of similar buildings for similar uses. For Giulio Carlo Argan such a formulation of building types is tied up with the nature of type: «It [type] is never formulated a priori but always deduced from a series of instances. [...] The birth of a "type" is therefore dependent on the existence of a series of buildings having between them an obvious formal and functional

analogy. [...] The “type” therefore is formed through a process of reducing a complex of formal variants to a common root form.»<sup>7</sup>

Yet, even if typology can demonstrate «typical» phenomena of the going together of form and use, this does not exclude other forms from being developed for existing programmes, and either that existing buildings be used for other uses than those they were designed for – the concurrency of programme, form and meaning is only conventional. Think of the subsequent uses of historical palazzi. Sometimes, such «second» and «improper» uses of buildings can be understood, together with the accompanying architectural alterations, as constituting new building types. The loft apartment is an example, or the warehouse converted to museum. It is such a *secondary typology* that I would like to trace down for musealised artist’s houses.

Consequently, in order to point out the typology of the artist’s housemuseum, we ought to be able to find a typical programme of situations of use, a number of recurring formal traits, and a signifying linkage of programme and form. Central to the *programme* would be the conservation, exhibition, and study of the historic house and the entire site as valuable artistic and biographic artefacts, complemented with permanent or temporary exhibitions of a collection of memorabilia, archives, works of art and preparatory works of the artist and with other temporary ex-hibitions. A key characteristic of the programme is that it is divided into a public part and an organisational part «behind the screens» with admi-nistration, depot, a housekeeper’s apartment, etc. Besides the museum galleries, the public programme typically consists of a reception, a bookshop, a reading room, bathrooms, lockers, etc. The building’s appearance as a house, both outside and inside would be essential to an outline of the *formal characteristics* of the artist’s housemuseum.

This house image even holds when the museum activities require a number of architectural alterations, like when a clear visitor’s routing is to be organised. Outside, logos, panels, and busts indicate the museum function of the building. Sometimes these small signs grow into contemporary architectural annexes that signal the museum’s public entrance, or its public status in general. Inside, the contemporary design of the reception desk or bookshop functions likewise. A counterpart to this desire for contemporaneity is the selection of what are considered the historically most significant interiors which are exhibited as «historical interiors», in particular the studio. Sometimes these interiors overtly appear as symbolic (conventional) stagings, representations merely referring to the historical configurations they represent. Yet usually, lighting, air treatment, safety equipment and explanatory panels are given a *discrete* presence in order not to disturb the immersive experience of contact with the historical setting. In contrast stand the conventionally «neutral» exhibition galleries, situated in the original house or in extensions to it. And the backstage functions of administration, archive and depot are often invisible, located in basement and upper floor rooms. However, contrasting with the clarity of the programmatic divide between public and supporting organisational activities, the articulation of the spatial divide between *stage* and *backstage* is typically ambiguous in house-museums: it often depends on signs («private», «staff only») or on cords blocking off a staircase.

Finally, in order to speak of a type, *form and programme* should appear connected so that the form starts to *signify* the programme. Here we have the specificity that the building, besides a container of the museum, is essentially also a main exhibit, and this specificity is responsible for a potential confusion about the identity of the building – is it a house or a museum? – but precisely this ambiguity in meaning is characteristic of house-museums. As a matter of fact the conversion installs a new programme part of which is nothing else than a showing of and looking at the particularities of the previous programme – the artist living and

working in the house – the spatial manifestation of which must remain visible. And this requires that the new exhibition apparatus be as thin, as absent as possible from the house as exhibit. At the same time though, the actual museum activity has to be represented.

Let's now turn back to the cases to verify this account of the typical artist's house-museum. In the illustration above the ground floor plans of the three cases are compared; a colour code indicates how each space is used (fig. 5). The ground floor plan of the Permeke museum, with the house, the extended sculpture studio and the surrounding sculpture garden, shows that almost the entire ground floor is used as exhibition gallery; the annexe to the former sculpture studio with the original modelling table and clay bin is the only space presented as a historical interior. (The former painting studio, the only accessible space on the house's first floor further entirely used as housekeeper's house, has a historical arrangement as well.) The Rubenshuis consists mainly of a 1946 reconstruction of the 17<sup>th</sup> C urban palazzo owned by Peter Paul Rubens (figs. 6-7). Following this reconstruction, an art and furniture collection approximating the historical content of the house has been gathered. Consequently, in the plan of the Rubens House-Museum the historical arrangements prevail. In plan the left wing housed the artist's house, but also his art gallery, with the renowned semi-rotunda for his classical sculptures. The right wing was designed by Rubens himself and contains his and his collaborators' studio. In between both wings Rubens designed a central courtyard, separated from the garden by a monumental porch. Porch and studio

Fig. 5

Comparison of the ground floor plans. Three shades of grey indicate the current functions. Light grey indicates publicly accessible supporting functions; middle grey indicates the publicly accessible museum gallery; dark grey means inaccessible supporting functions. «H. 1». (historical interior) signals a period room arrangement

wing were lavishly decorated with an elaborate iconographic programme symbolizing Rubens' artistry and classical knowledge. In 1998 a freestanding entrance pavilion was erected in front of the historic house on the Wapper square, to house the visitor's accommodation.<sup>8</sup> The third case is represented by the Peire Foundation in the Belgian coastal town of Knokke (fig. 8). Here a new building of 2002 replaced the unassuming terraced house in which abstract painter Luc Peire (1916-1994) and his wife had lived for a few years. However, Peire's studio in the back of the garden – among the twenty-six studios Peire worked in during his career, this one served as a stable centre in use from 1946 to 1994 – and the modernist summer bungalow attached to it, were preserved as historical document. On the ground floor, the new building is almost entirely occupied by a single exhibition gallery and a corridor leading to the garden with its studio and bungalow. On the first floor is another exhibition gallery that also serves as a vault to store Peire's bequeathed oeuvre collection.

### Authorship as exception

My paper started with the thesis that the commemorated artist's authorship prohibits an authored intervention by an architect. The obscuring of architectural authorship in any occurring building activities then seemed inherent to the typology of artist's house-museums. Yet, this is only half of the truth. As my cases illustrate, the house-museum allows a *margin* within which authored design becomes possible. For instance, the Permeke museum is proud to mention that its entrance hall was redesigned by interior designer Emiel Veranneman in 1998. The new

entrance pavilion to the Rubens House was realised that same year by the prominent Belgian architect Stéphane Beel; and in 2003 De Bruycker - De Brok Architects were awarded several architecture prizes for their design for the Peire Foundation. This does not contradict my starting thesis. For, the *conditions* allowing such exceptional authored design can

Fig. 6

Rubenshuis, Antwerpen,  
with the entrance pavilion  
in front of it on the  
Wapper square

Fig. 7

Rubenshuis, Antwerpen,  
view on the central axis,  
through the entrance  
pavilion, the main entrance,  
courtyard and onto garden  
of the historical house

still be understood within the initially conceptualized confrontation between respect for the artist's authorship and architectural creation. A first condition on which architectural design gets a chance is when it concerns an *expansion* of the existing artist's house's contours and when the new parts are purposed to house that part of the programme which accompanies the mere exhibiting of the original house: the «expanded programme». New architecture is allowed and even desirable for the literally «marginal» but often representational parts of the museum programme. In the Permeke museum this is the case with Veranneman's new interior design for the reception. In the Rubenshuis, Stéphane Beel's entrance pavilion had to unburden the historic house from the secondary public activities of ticketing, lockers and bookshop so that the house would have more exhibition space and could get a better routing as well. But a more symbolic «unburdening» was also realised: thanks to the new pavilion the historic building could take on a clearer status as exhibit. At the same time Beel's design provides the historical and rather inwards oriented palace of Rubens with a contemporary outpost, whose contrasting transparency makes an inviting gesture and expresses the public

Fig. 8

Jenny and Luc Peire  
Foundation, Knokke, façade

nature of the site. As for the Peire Foundation, the museum and the architects successfully detected the possibilities that lay in the givens of the constellation of a banal terraced house which the Peires had only occupied for some years, and a studio-annex-bungalow that «Peire built» in the back of that house's garden. To demolish the terraced house was not a problematic profanation because the Peires themselves had already taken distance from the house by selling it in 1985, and the meaning of the artist's house was almost entirely carried by the studio-cum-bungalow at the back of the garden. On the contrary, the replacement of the terraced house makes the new volume appear as an extension to the modernist studio-annex-bungalow, effacing the bothersome presence of a second but characterless artist's house.

In addition, authored architectural design always requires a certain *aligning* of the designer-author with the artist-author. The opposition between authorships is then resolved through a symbolic subordination of the architect to the artist, beyond the institutionalised position of the architect-restorer and resulting in a broadened authorship of the artist, similar to Michel Foucault's notion of a broadened authorship, exceeding the bounds of the body of works and the life span of the author-individual, described in *Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?*<sup>10</sup> Concretely, a designer can position himself in several ways in line with the artist's authorship. In the case of Permeke and Emiel Veranneman there is first of all *biographical* descent: Veranneman was Permeke's nephew and it was Permeke who had recommended the young Veranneman to enrol in Henry Van de Velde's Design school of La Cambre. Furthermore, it is commonplace to connect Veranneman's bold design idiom to the work

of his uncle.<sup>11</sup> The Permeke museum itself supported this bond when it invited Veranneman in 1982 to exhibit his furniture designs in dialogue with the oeuvre of Permeke, and when it awarded Veranneman the commission to remodel its entrance hall in 1997. According to the former museum conservator Willy Van den Bussche, Veranneman proved «that, starting from his emotional solidarity with the house of his famous uncle Constant Permeke he knew how to realize a symbiosis with its artistic experiences.»<sup>12</sup>

In this case the biographical alignment is beyond doubt, whereas the analogy of Permeke's art and Veranneman's design is rather proverbial and is at best a matter of sharing a certain «character». In contrast, the design by De Bruycker - De Brok Architects uses *formal reference* to align with the work of Luc Peire, coined as «abstract verticalism». This applies especially to the design of the façades with their predominant bluish and greyish tones of the unusual bricks, and with the preponderance of geometrical motifs. The motivation to award this design with a prize can be summarised as the evaluation of the new design as *to the point* in its response to the surroundings, to the site's history and to Peire's work. The jury finds «a humble reference to Peire's work» in the verticality of the entrance area.<sup>13</sup> This illustrates the expectation that the design legitimates itself through a certain «correspondence». Other «legitimizing correspondences» are the new volume's long corridor recalling the position of the deep garage between the street and the garden path leading to Peire's studio.

From the new entrance pavilion in Antwerp, at first sight, any aligning of the architect with the artist as author seems completely absent. The austere pavilion presents itself as a typical Beel design: two glazed boxes are set in between two concrete horizontal slabs. However, a number of particularities make the pavilion engage directly with the composition of Rubens's house design. For instance, the two glazed compartments of the pavilion, used as bookshop and ticketing space, have the same lengths as respectively Rubens's house wing and his workshop wing. And the open air corridor between bookshop and ticketing prolongs the organizing axis of Rubens's palace-with-garden design. The architect and the museum staff can thus state that the way the new pavilion organises the entrance to the historical complex and the way it stresses the perspectival composition restores the original brilliance of Rubens's design. Moreover, the distance between the new pavilion and the Rubens house is determined by the building lines of the buildings that disappeared when the Wapper square was created in the 1970s. The architect's rhetorical *servitude* thus seems to extend beyond the respect for the Rubens house as a *work of art* to some broader historical spatial context, subtly revealing that the interaction with Rubens's authority is but one of the interactions of the design with the various givens which are interpreted primarily as spatial givens. Yet, the casualness with which the new pavilion occupies its place in front of the Rubenshuis, partly hiding it from views from the Wapper square, suggests a radically different legitimizing mechanism. Instead of subordination, Beel, then a still young but promising architect, seemed to claim the right to creation only legitimised by the quality it exposes. The new pavilion ironically puts to the test the idea that there can be no objection to the meeting of two geniuses, since they have access to a creative capacity outside the reach and the judgement of mortals like you and me. Here, the design suddenly seems to suggest, it is not the new pavilion that needs legitimation, but the reverence for the old Rubenshuis.<sup>14</sup>

### **Conclusion**

A triple statement could serve as conclusion. The musealisation of an artist's house requires the intervention of architects but is not an established design assignment. However, the artist's house-museum makes up an architectural typology. Finally, the centrality of the artist-designer inhabitant to the institutional activity of artist's house-museums conditions

the authorship of any intervening architects.

#### Notes

1

Cf. the memorandum «Nota voor de zitting van 11 april 1969 de bestendige deputatie van de provincie West-Vlaanderen» by museum conservator Willy Van den Bussche, kept in Provincial Archives of West-Vlaanderen.

2

Architectural authorship and typology have been conceptualized as being grasped within a particular dialectic. Originality, the conceptual link between genius and authorship, expects the transgression of typological conventions and the ability to conceive new forms for particular programs that can stand the test of use and that in their turn can be type-referents for subsequent designs. Cf. Alfonso Corona Martinez, «Typology», in *id.*, *The Architectural Project*, ed. by Malcolm Quantrill, College Station, 2003, pp. 79-98.

3

Nikolaus Pevsner, *A History of Building Types*, London, 1976.

4

Noteworthy here is that neither «artist house» is an entry in Pevsner's survey. Eduard Hüttinger understands this as exemplary for typology-based architectural historiography. Eduard Hüttinger, «Künstlerhaus und Künstlerkult», in *Künstlerhäuser von der Renaissance bis zur Gegenwart*, Zürich-München, 1985, pp. 9-48. According to Hüttinger, this absence is due to the fact that the artist house doesn't correspond to a set building type, a statement that needs to be nuanced. Sure enough, not all the houses once inhabited by artists point at one or a number of typologies of artist houses, but throughout history, a number of artist houses seem to have constituted a number of types of artist house. See for instance Hans-Peter Schwarz, Heike Lauer, Jürg Stabenow (eds.), *Künstlerhäuser. Eine Architekturgeschichte des Privaten*, exh. cat., Frankfurt a. M., 1989.

5

Antoine Quatremère de Quincy, in the entry «Type» (1825) in his *Encyclopédie Méthodique. Architecture*, Paris, 1788-1825, as cited in Adrian Forty, «Type», in *Words and Buildings. A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, London, 2000, pp. 304-311. This definition of type was dug up again by Giulio Carlo Argan in the 1950s.

6

Forty, «Type», *op. cit.*

7

Giulio Carlo Argan, «On the Typology of Architecture», in Kate Nesbitt (ed.), *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture. An Anthology of Architectural Theory 1965-1995*, New York, 1996, p. 242.

8

The two spaces in the entrance pavilion were originally destined to accommodate a room where visiting groups could be introduced (left) and a room for selling tickets and organising lockers. However, by now the first room is used as a bookshop.

9

In her autobiographical account, Peire's wife Jenny Verbruggen relates that «Luc builds the studio himself with the help from a team of workers which he leads, the workers working after their working hours. And

when possible, he extends a helping hand.» Marc Peire, as editor of Jenny Verbruggen's notes, added a footnote remarking that the Peire's made an appeal to architect Van der Moere from Bruges who was paid with the panel *Zuid Bevoland* as payment for his plan and supervision of the studio. Jenny Peire-Verbruggen, Marc Peire, *De ateliers van Luc Peire*, Gent-Amsterdam, 2001. This is a typical example of an usurping artistic authorship within biographical accounts.

10

Michel Foucault, «Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur? (1969)», in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988. 1, 1954-1969*, Paris, 1994.

11

«It are not only family ties that bring Emiel Veranneman and Constant Permeke together» is the opening sentence of the essay *Veranneman/Permeke* which critic Geert Bekaert devoted entirely to Veranneman's relation with Permeke, both biographically and artistically, at the occasion of an exhibition in 1998 in Mechelen of Veranneman's furniture together with Permeke's art. Geert Bekaert, «Veranneman/Permeke», in *id.*, *Verzamelde Opstellen. Schuilplaats 1996-2000*, ed. by Christophe Van Gerrewey, Mil De Kooning, Ghent, 2009, pp. 334-344.

12

Willy Van den Bussche, «Museum Constant Permeke, Jabbeke», in Emiel Veranneman [et al.] (eds.), *Veranneman. Visie & passie*, Tielt, 2002, p. 138.

13

Architecture critic Marc Dubois also writes that «Verticality is the central theme in the oeuvre of Peire. This aspiration to height is thematized in the Foundation's entrance area.» Marc Dubois, «Thuishaven», in *A+*, no. 186, 2004, pp. 20-21.

14

The ambiguity of Beel's gesture is well captured by critic Geert Bekaert: «A marvellous idea: in order to approach the house in front of us, we first have to take distance from it. The idea is evidence to respect just as much as to a slight ironic reflex.» Geert Baekert, «Leven met architectuur. Stéphane Beel», in *id.*, *Verzamelde Opstellen. Schuilplaats...*, *op. cit.*, p. 380 (translation by the author).

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fig. 8: photo Kristien Daem.

#### Summary

Artist's houses that are opened to the public as museums shift from a private and everyday to a semi-public and institutional functioning. This transformation of an artist's house into a house-museum might appear as a mere legal issue or as a matter of making previously secluded rooms and collections accessible to the public. But this musealisation of an artist's house always involves a set of museological and architectural interventions as well. Not only need the house and its content to be displayed as historical documents through a careful mise-en-scène and through the addition of a sub-text of labels or explanatory panels that disclose the meaning of these historical documents; there is also a need

for a logic and clear visitor's route in a house that was not intended for this. Often this already demands architectural design decisions, but it is mainly in the introduction of the supporting museum functions like the necessary office spaces and an entrance hall with reception desk, cloakroom and bathrooms that the musealisation comes down to an architectural design challenge.

The proposed paper wants to discuss the artist's house museum from an architect's point of view, on the basis of a selection of artist's houses that were recently transformed into museums, such as the Atelier-Museum Luc Peire in Knokke (B) or the renovations of the Permeke and Rubens house museums. I want to propose the artist's house museum as an architectural typology by mapping its various typical architectural and spatial characteristics. The first crucial point of interest here is how the spatial division is articulated between the historic interiors, the exhibition spaces and the museum's service spaces outside of the visitor's circuit. A second architectural question is how the museum as an active institution can be given an architectural 'face' while respecting and presenting the house and its collections as historical documents; how can both the 'authentic' private atmosphere and the contemporary public museum be given shape, and is there a place for authorial design in this mediating exercise?

### **Riassunto**

Trasformare in museo la casa di un artista implica il passaggio da una destinazione privata e domestica a una funzione semi-pubblica e istituzionale. Malgrado le apparenze, la musealizzazione non si riduce a un semplice atto burocratico né si limita a rendere accessibili al pubblico locali e collezioni riservati un tempo alla fruizione privata. La trasformazione in casa-museo, invece, comporta sempre una serie di interventi museologici e architettonici. Non solo l'edificio e ciò che esso contiene devono essere presentati come testimonianze storiche mediante un attento allestimento e l'aggiunta di un apparato testuale di targhette e pannelli esplicativi che ne esplicitino il significato; è pure necessario elaborare un percorso di visita coerente e praticabile in una struttura che in origine era destinata ad altri scopi. Nella maggior parte dei casi, già questo aspetto comporta scelte di design architettonico, anche se è soprattutto nell'inserimento di funzioni di supporto – gli indispensabili uffici amministrativi e l'ingresso con la cassa, il guardaroba e i servizi igienici – che la musealizzazione diventa un problema di design architettonico. L'intervento si propone di affrontare il tema della casa-museo dal punto di vista architettonico, sulla base di una selezione di case d'artista recentemente trasformate in museo, quali lo studio-museo di Luc Peire di Knokke (Belgio), o alcune case-museo recentemente ristrutturare, come quelle di Permeke e di Rubens. Propongo di considerare la casa-museo d'artista come tipologia architettonica, individuandone le caratteristiche architettoniche e spaziali tipiche. La prima questione, fondamentale, riguarda l'articolazione spaziale del museo, tra interni d'epoca, ambienti espositivi e locali di servizio esterni al circuito di visita. Un secondo problema è come conferire al museo, in quanto istituzione attiva, una veste architettonica, rispettandone al contempo la struttura e presentandola come testimonianza storica insieme alle sue collezioni; come ricreare l'atmosfera domestica e al tempo stesso dare forma a un museo pubblico contemporaneo? E in questo esercizio di mediazione quanto spazio è concesso al design d'autore?