

Gemaeldegalerie Alte Meister at Second Life

Andreas Henning

Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister @ Second Life

On 31st May 2007 the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden is opening a counterpart in the desert. But only in the virtual world, of course: the museum can be visited online in Second Life(r). The magnificent rooms of the museum have been reproduced in three dimensions and true to scale, and all 750 masterpieces in the exhibition are on display. The doors are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Visitors can view the art, chat with each other, access information about the works of art, participate in art education events, note their impressions in the guestbook or browse in the shop - all in real time.

The virtual clone of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister is located on the "Dresden Gallery" island, which has a surface area of more than 300,000 square metres. A homepage has been created specially for this project: www.dresdengallery.com. The homepage has a link whereby members of the Second Life community can beam themselves directly to the museum. To do this you have to have a persona, known as an avatar, in Second Life, (free of charge with the basic account).

The Zwinger, one of the most beautiful Baroque buildings in Dresden, has been reproduced in full on "Dresden Gallery". Part of the Zwinger is the large building of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, built in the mid-19th century in Neo-Renaissance style. It took six designers three weeks to reproduce this unique architectural ensemble in cyberspace. The whole of the gallery building is on view: the foyer, the staircases, all 54 halls and cabinets, and every one of the paintings, pastels and tapestries.

No previous reproductive medium has so far succeeded in providing such an effective spatial impression of a museum visit in real time, even though the history of museums has always been intimately bound up with the history of reproductive media. For example, in 1753, shortly after August III, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, had opened the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden, the "Königliches Galeriewerk" was published, presenting the highlights of the collection in the form of large-format engravings. Over the centuries, new media have constantly been used, from photography to the CD-ROM. Martin Roth, Director General of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, therefore considers it logical to keep pace with the latest developments in the

reproductive media: "It lies in the logic of the historical development of the media in relation to museums that we should now take on the challenge of experimenting with the possibilities presented by Web 2.0 technology, providing a worldwide community with access to a 3-D virtual reproduction of the museum."

Dresden's Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister is the first museum of international rank to have responded to the new challenges of the web by producing a genuine 1:1 clone of itself. This concept is therefore fundamentally different from the many purely fictitious museum creations on the web which have no counterpart in real life. Martin Roth expressly invites critical comments: "At the start of this year's Summer of Art, during which the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden are presenting numerous exhibitions of contemporary art, the virtual presentation of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister will raise crucial questions that will provoke discussion of how museums view their role in the 21st century. The reactions of the Second Life residents and of our visitors and the public in general are important to us, and controversial debate about the involvement of the Gemälde_galerie Alte Meister in the world of Second Life is highly desirable".

The concept behind Second Life differs from traditional online games in that the focus is on social interaction and the production of content. An exceptional feature of the community is therefore that its gender and age structure is completely different from that of other platforms. The average age of the Internet community is above 30, which is surprisingly high, and whereas most web games are dominated by young, almost exclusively male players, the gender distribution in Second Life is approximately equal. The members of Second Life therefore constitute an interesting clientele for museums.

The presentation of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden in Second Life is an experiment, and it remains to be seen how the residents of the artificial Internet world will react to this unique opportunity. The Institut für Kommunikations_wissenschaft (Institute of Media and Communications) at the Technische Universität Dresden will conduct a project under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Lutz M. Hagen in which they will chart the progress of this experiment. Dr. Andreas Henning, Project Leader and Conservator of Italian Painting, says, "The experiment is based on the working hypothesis that for the first time two key experiences characteristic of a museum visit can be reproduced on the new three-dimensional web: namely, space and interaction." The experience of the museum space is an essential aspect of any museum visit. Viewing a work of art from a distance, gradually approaching it, then focusing on details and finally comparing it with other works in the same room - all these movements affect the visitors' reception of the museum experience. Another core aspect of a museum visit is the social component. Whether explicitly or

simply in silence, the individual visitor is always involved in interaction with other visitors and experiences walking through the museum as a social activity.

Space and interaction, two fundamental aspects of a museum visit, can be replicated by the presentation of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Second Life, but that doesn't make a virtual visit a substitute for the real thing. The virtual Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister is intended to arouse curiosity and encourage people to visit the museum in real life. Criticism of all the reproductive techniques that have appeared on the market over the centuries has repeatedly shown that media presentations can only be allusions and must remain allusions. The virtual counterpart of the museum cannot replace the key feature of a museum visit, namely the sensual perception of the original. The virtual visitors are therefore explicitly asked in the Guestbook section what they consider to be the difference between viewing a work of art in real life and in Second Life.

Never before in the history of reproductive media has there been such a stark contrast between genuinely viewing art in a museum and seeing it in a form conveyed by media technology. As Roth points out, "The real Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister and its virtual clone constitute opposite poles: it is in this charged atmosphere that the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden is conducting this experiment with this new form of communications technology."

www.dresdengallery.com

Our cooperation partners:

- Institut für Kommunikationswissenschaft der Technischen Universität Dresden (Institute of Media and Communications, Dresden University of Technology).
- Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin (Federal Foreign Office, Berlin).
- Wissenschaftsjahr 2007. Die Geisteswissenschaften - ABC der Menschheit (Year of Science 2007. The Humanities - the ABC of the Human Race).

Events offered by the Museum Education department: "Art(ificial)"

3rd June 2007, 3 pm CEST (6 am PDT): "Two Heavenly Creatures" - Raphael's "Sistine Madonna" presented by Karina Peschel. In English

14th June 2007, 8 pm CEST (11 am PDT): "Love Letters" - Vermeer's "Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window" presented by Claudia Schmidt. In German

24th June 2007, 5 pm CEST (8 am PDT): "Caution! Hot!" - Liotard's "Chocolate Girl" presented by Dr. Carola Marx. In French

www.skd-dresden.de

Reference:

WWW: Gemaeldegalerie Alte Meister at Second Life. In: ArtHist.net, Jun 2, 2007 (accessed May 9, 2025),
<<https://arthist.net/archive/29390>>.