

A contemporary Trajan

The city of Rome conventionally represents a centre of the arts par excellence. Everybody would agree that in Rome each museum, monument or work of art “speaks for itself.” Even if this could represent a great quality, at the same time it could also be a hindrance: for example, experts encounter many difficulties in proposing or realizing cultural events with the goal of communicating to a contemporary audience. If the monuments speak for themselves, let’s ask ourselves which language they speak.

This is the approach adopted by a series of projects carried out in Trajan’s Markets-Imperial Roman Forum museum in Rome. “*Radiolivres meets Trajan*” was an event originating from a streaming radio broadcast which took place in the bookshop ‘*N’importe quoi*’ in Rome. The original format was used to present a writer’s new publication but it also can suit for other purposes. In Trajan’s Markets, instead of presenting a new writer, we spoke about the Roman Emperor Trajan.

The format included the choice of ten songs, each of them was linked to a subject which shaped the policy, personality, private life, artistic and military ventures of this Emperor. Everything followed through an informal interview like a radio broadcast. Those ten songs were not chosen from an obsolete and refined collection. Instead, Trajan was described through David Bowie, De Andrè, Vinicio Capossela, The Queen, the Doors and Led Zeppelin. Each song gave an excuse to speak about a particular event or aspect in his history. The game we played regarded the supposition that if Trajan existed nowadays, probably those ten songs would be contained in his iPod!

The event took place in the Garden of Militia at Trajan’s Markets during the European Heritage Days. For half an hour people could listen to music and the interview. The location was prepared as a living room or a familiar radio broadcast studio, with a couch, chairs for visitors, music console and microphones. The museum space, in this case an archaeological area, experienced an unexpected restyling.

The event’s promoters were young archaeologists and art historians. We wanted to describe the Emperor Trajan using a way of unconventional communication: not a boring conference, but a creative way to talk about Roman history. This moment brought about a comparison between the ancient past and our present, stressing the differences but above all the similarities. Everything was helped by the use of modern music: the songs became an easy key to understand a personality so distant from us.

For example, a song like “Immigrant song” by Led Zeppelin gave the opportunity to speak about the concept of immigration in Roman culture during Trajan’s domain. But also the chance to describe what it means immigration in our days and a comparison from ancient to the present situation. It wasn’t so important if the song’s text didn’t speak literally of the theme: it gave a good starting point to make this speech.

Trajan’s Markets were the venue of another interesting event, which had the same intention of creating an unusual and unconventional use of the museum’s spaces. Italian monuments conserve this aura of distance from its citizens and its public. What can be better than a picnic, with cushions, towels and music, and the opportunity for visitors to let their hair down?

The event “*Picnic at Trajan’s Markets*” offered a newer and less institutional approach to this archaeological area. The garden, which is situated next to the medieval tower, was prepared with towels

and cushions as at a typical picnic. Visitors were invited to sit on the ground and taste fruits and drinks. The experience consisted in poetry read by theatre actors and a jazz and swing performance by professional musicians. At the same time artists from the “Academy of Fine Arts” in Rome realized a painting exhibition, inspired by music and poetry. The general theme, influenced by the place, was the poetical and archaeological “fragments”. For one hour poetry, music and art, changed the perception of the surrounding space. Visitors were involved in something unexpected: an unusual way, far from what we think we can do or not do in a museum.

Why did we choose to realize this kind of events? When you experience the museum every day, you understand that the promotion of culture can be improved and increased. Museums have collections and spaces. They speak to visitors in their specific language, often deeply connected to their specific history. We worked in two directions: finding new ways to offer unconventional and captivating ways to live the museum’s spaces and the attempt to offer experiences, apparently, different from the typical activities of a monument. We said to visitors “*Welcome, take a seat, listen to this radio broadcast episode about the Emperor Trajan with us*” or “*Come here and have a picnic where you’ve never thought you could*”.

Cultural institutions may transmit notions and memories of our past. But today’s audience, more than ever before, is looking for interaction, participation and an appropriation of museum spaces. Monuments can stimulate curiosity, encourage to return another time, surprise with unexpected offers and gives more choices. In this way visiting museums became full of possibilities and visitors can feel the museum as a living space.



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