



Exhibition: from the idealization to the nail. (Everything you would like to know about exhibitions and were afraid to ask)

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Abstract

The present article is about how one can prepare the arrangements and plan an exhibition, from the selection and requests in loans of artwork pieces to museums and collectors, respecting the requirements requested by the institutions responsible for the loan, to the transportation and its conditions, and the installment of the pieces in the exhibition room, which requires a mounting that must comply with several, and a few times contradictory, needs.

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About two months before the opening of the exposition “Casas del alma. Maquetas de arquitectura de la antigüedad” (“Houses of the soul. Templates of the Architecture of the Ancient Times”) at the Centro de Cultura Contemporânea (Center of the Contemporary Culture) in Barcelona, 1997, I was leaving the center and crossing the street La Paja, when suddenly, to my left, in the window of an antique shop (nowadays in the Consejo de Ciento street), I saw what could not only be an excellent architectonic template made of ancient terracotta, in perfect conditions: a template nor published or unknown. After hesitating for a while, I pushed the door. I explained why I was there and I asked information about the piece. It was from Syria, of the second millennium B. C. It was for sale and the antique shop did not appear excited about lending the piece for an exhibition, even after I told the owner that the value of the piece would increase if the object were exposed. Before I left, I asked the price. Ex-

pensive, but affordable if it were found by an interested collector: around four hundred thousand pesetas. I had a conversation about the subject with a friend, who is an architect and visited the antique shop on the following day, and, distractedly, asked the price of the piece. Its price had increased twice. My comment was understood by the owner, a good listener, after all.

I came back after a few days to try to get the loan of the piece. The list of the artworks to be exposed at the exhibition was concluded, but the piece was outstanding, and it was just a few meters from the place where the exposition would open. The responsible, however, after a while, ended up explaining that the template had left Syria illegally recently. Undoubtedly, exposing it to the public would raise suspicion, and endanger the contact that the owner had in the East, who were able to bribe the police of the borders to allow the antiques to leave Syria. The famous

Roman mosaics, which had arrived from Syria recently, showed that the business had not decreased. The antiques arrived in Spain as craftsmanship, got the license of importation and, from Madrid, they were distributed in several cities. I was shocked with the information.

It was explained to me, after a few days, that the Catalan autonomous government (the *Generalitat*) was behind this business for months, but with no results.

I contacted the Department of Oriental Antiquities of the Louvre Museum, in Paris, and some experts on this kind of piece. All of them recommended that I should try getting a photography, in order to study the piece of work and classify it, before it was too late. According to the description that it offered, I had concluded that it was a unique Mesopotamic template.

I did not want to know anything more about the matter. I let the time pass by. The exhibition was opened. A few months later, I remembered the words of an art curator from the Louvre Museum. I came back to the antique shop. The owner was not there, but his son was. I did not see the template. I asked for it. I was said that it had been sold in London and that the antique shop did not know anything about the subject anymore. Nor trace or photo was left behind.

Years later, in 2011, I went to Geneva in order to document an exhibition about Mesopotamic

Art. Geneva is a city where the illegal traffic of antiques is very active. Some antique shops, wanted by Interpol, and with warrants of arrest issued, keep the stores opened downtown, and they do not hide. A curator from the Museum of Geneva, who works in the search of stolen artworks or pieces that were illegally removed from their archeologic sites, has spoken about the famous case of the Greek ceramic, with a painted scene and it shows the death of the Greek hero Sarpedon, in the doors of Troy, painted by Euphronios, the first ceramic painter that signed his productions, in the V B.C. century.

In 1972, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Nova York, paid a million dollars for a huge crater [a vase used for mixing wine and water], in perfect conditions, signed by the mythic Euphronios. It was the first time that an archeologic piece reached this price. The artwork was reproduced in the main weekly newspapers' covers in the city. Until last year, it was one of the masterpieces in the collection of the Museum. A journalist asked about its origin. Recklessly, it was said that it came from Zurich. Had the Greek ceramic traveled so far? The version previously told was corrected immediately. It had belonged to a Lebanese corrector. An urgent phone call warned the antique shop that a journalist was allowed to ask about the ceramic. He was advised to say that the collector's father, now deceased, found it in a grave, and had sold it because his collection was more targeted at Phoenician Art [than at the



Figure 1. Showcase of the exhibition *Antes del Diluvio. Mesopotamia 3500-2100 a.C* (Before the Flood. Mesopotamia 3500-2100 BC). *Obra Social de La Caixa*, Barcelona and Madrid (2012 and 2013), dedicated to the world of the ancient Sumerians. Curated by Pedro Azara. Source: author's collection.

Mesopotamic one]. As this last point was true, right after a journalist called, the version that was told to the person looked convincing. But, why was it mentioned, since the beginning, the city of Zurich? A journalist, Paul Watson, had left Lebanon and went to Switzerland. Finally, the Metropolitan had to reveal the origin and the history of the artwork: it was acquired, in fact, from a Swiss antique shop, which, in turn, had acquired it from a reseller. Where did the Ancient Greek masterpiece come from? The research on the matter took almost forty years.

Historians, archeologists, traders (among many, Giacomo Medici was the main one), curators of Swiss museums, and treasure hunters had helped, directly or indirectly, to steal an Etruscan grave, in Italy, since then preserved, that they had just found. Immediately, they realized the significance of the piece. They could get a fortune with it. But no Italian public museum could afford the price that the vase would cost – the amount that they would ask for it – and it was not allowed to leave the country illegally. The international right prohibits that cultural goods cross the borders of a country. The vase was carefully broken. The fragments were put in a suitcase. At the customs house, it was said that they were only some loose parts, which was evident to the customs officers, who accepted the explanation. The pieces did not have any value whatsoever. When it got to Switzerland, the loose pieces were put together precisely. The seams were attached and redone. The vase was whole again, outside Italy.

What has happened next is already known. The story finished last year. The Italian law imposed several American museums to give back some Ancient masterpieces, Greek, Etruscan and Roman, which are today the center of the attention of Florentine and Roman museums, under the penalty of forestalling any Italian piece of work to be included in exhibitions in the United States. Some curators ended up in prison.

This story reminded me that one I had lived some years ago. But here, in Barcelona, the story has ended with no conclusion.

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How is an exhibition set up and what is exposed in it? We are referring to, above all, exhibitions with archeological materials. (Figure 1)

The requests of pieces must be written. Only renowned institutions are allowed to execute them. Sometimes, museums receive official loan requests, in conjunction with the exhibition itinerary and documents about the organizing institution, its measures of solvency and safety, as well as its environment conditions (temperatures, moisture levels, light control) of the exposition rooms. They accept the loan request only to institutions that have a permanent art collection (museums, academies, certain institutes and universities, professional organizations, and so on.): It is like this because it is presumed that, in this case, the organizer has experts (curators) used to and al-



Figure 2. General view of the exhibition Ciudad del espejismo. Bagdad de Wright a Venturi (City of the mirage. Baghdad from Wright to Venturi). Colegio Oficial de Arquitectos de Murcia (nov. 2008 - fev. 2009). Curated by Pedro Azara. Source: author's collection.

lowed to handle masterpieces (or can hire this kind of professional with no difficulty), as well as proper and safe warehouses and rooms prepared to receive the artworks.

The loan requests must be sent with a minimum twelve-month gap before the opening, although some museums, such as the University of Philadelphia Museum (Penn Museum), request eighteen months, and the Ministry of Culture of Turkey, responsible for all the Turkish public museums, requests three years (reason why so many museums give up on asking pieces of work from this country). No Museum will respond if the request arrives three months prior the previously set opening date. Except if it is an exceptional request for one or a few pieces after the organizer faced some unexpected problem with a supplier, with whom he had a signed agreement, which was not respected.

The loan letters do not have to be sent with a long notice. The museums respond the requests according to the sequence, but always paying attention to the loan date, so the permanent requests are simply filed. Therefore, many times, some of them are lost or forgotten.

The museums lend pieces of work with certain difficulty. But, the responsible people of museums are aware that without the loans, no institution would be able to organize an exhibition. The loans allow that some pieces are disseminated, which

increases its worth and price; employ curators that studied the required works – at times, artworks that never were exhibited before, kept stored in warehouses, and never left them – and can, consequently, be published in catalogs. In that sense, the exhibitions allow the detailed study of forgotten or depreciated pieces of work or correct the attributions or erroneous or even questioned interpretations. The exhibitions facilitate a new look at pieces of art that are less known. (Figure 2)

Except to the most famous international museums that have great permanent collections – and, among them, exchange pieces –, the masterpieces are not generally lent to other museums. It is considered that if a famous artwork is missing, its lack will be noticed and mourned by tourists. Some museums affirm that some of their pieces cannot be lent. Although, It is also true that, in exchange for great amounts of money (because museums also need funds) anyone can get awesome loans. So, for instance, the loan of the mythic Sumerian ensign of Ur [Ensign of The Battle of Ur], of the British Museum, is not negotiable, but an exception was made to the monarchies of the Persian Gulf. The royal family of Saudi Arabia financed the unknown Kentucky Horse Museum, in the United States, and this small museum gets unthinkable loans. Despite the international known museums, just a few ones are the providers that logically do not accept financial compensations (that allow restoring rooms, the buying of new pieces, and so on) for the loan of the pieces.

The great international exhibitions, which attract hundreds of thousands of visitors, and spawn huge economic benefits, generally are organized by three or four big museums that gather their collections. Those ones compose the body of the exhibition, complete with specific loans. This policy allows the exhibition to travel to several cities for a period of more than six months, which is the time that the museums and collections accept loan their works. Logically, museums, collections, and smaller institutions cannot access the tours.

Big museums, however, have collections whose pieces are exhibited regularly. The majority of artworks stays in the backups. It does not mean that these artworks are necessarily less relevant than others. The outstanding Sumerian twenty-thousand-piece collection of Field Museum, in Chicago, is permanently stored. The museum does not have enough space to exhibit a few pieces, whose relevance to the public, in general, is smaller than the Pharaonic Egyptian Art.

The pieces that are kept in reserved rooms are generally lent easier. Therefore, a museum can reveal an unseen inheritance, that can allow us to discover, suddenly, relevant works that were once hidden.

But, artworks in reserve in big museums are not necessary caves of unexplored and unknown treasures. For instance, the ones in Prado Museum are poor, and the paintings in storage are feeble; however, the works in reserve at some de-

partments of the British Museum would make a fortune of less known museums. The New Assyrians bas-relief paintings stored there are gorgeous. However, they do not enter the narrow rooms of the permanent collections – again, for being a collection less attractive than the Egyptian one.

There are exhibitions of different kinds. Let's concentrate on the ones with original artworks of art and archeology. The responsible people for museums thank the organizers of expositions, before sending the official loan requests, visit the institutions, participate on informal meetings, where the itinerary and the goals of the exhibition are explained, and which artworks would be the most appropriate ones is discussed. It is suitable that the museum that lends the pieces does not have the impression that it is required only for the loan. The museum has to feel comfortable enough to influence somehow on the exhibition, suggesting pieces, that maybe not taken into consideration for the curator, sometimes due to the unawareness of such works are a part of the collection of the institution. This major implication of the supplier on the project can facilitate some difficult loans.

The thematic exhibitions, which do not deal with excessively commercial or repetitive themes (the Impressionism is a recurrent theme, and maybe already drained) are preferred by loaning museums. In general, the request of masterpieces without an explicit confirmation of the need of such artwork being exposed, or determining the role that they

will play in a narrative of an exhibition, is denied many times. The works can suffer while the transfer, so, the transportation is allowed only if it will result in a new approach on the matter already known or on the discovery of a new innovative topic. And there are still many new topics. The demand of a number of visitors, both on the private and public museums parts, obliges certain caution on the part of the institutions, almost on the edge of a conservative attitude, in front of unknown themes that cannot call the general attention or, even, raise some kind of rejection.

Each museum has its own criteria for the approval of loans. Museums in countries like Turkey or Greece do not have the liberty to decide on their own what pieces they can lend. It is the respective ministries of culture, sometimes after a not-required query with the required museum, which approves or not the request for a loan. In Italy, the museums also are limited by an upper entity, which rules several provincial museums or the ones from the same city, called *Soprintendenza* – some museums have their own Superintendency – although until the Italian Ministry of Culture does not approve the loan, the artworks cannot be exported. In the United States, on the other hand, where the museums are private, the Government almost does not intervene, and it is the patrons that approve or deny the loans, according to technicians' and curators' reports. According to the relevance of the museum, the meetings of the group of patrons can take place once or

several times a year. The “when” of a loan request can interfere with the answer. It may take almost a year before an answer is obtained, positive or not, and, only then, the legal procedures for the exportation of the artworks can start.

The answers are conditioned by the importance of the requesting entity, the duration of the exhibition, the number of museums that can accommodate the exhibition, the interest on it, the forecast of an “academic” catalogue, the conditions of the rooms after the artworks are removed (a museum generally does not accept window displays or empty walls for months, such as the Louvre Museum in Paris, which discusses that its visitors demand that the majority of the works are permanently in exhibition), the importance and the number of artworks requested in a loan, their condition (what demands, before getting an answer, the analysis of the artworks by the conservators, who determine if they can be transferred without trouble), and, sometimes, on what the requesting entity offers in return.

Some national laws impede the exportation of pieces in good condition, whose transferring would not affect them. For instance, the American legislation prohibits the “commerce” – the trade of artworks, including the prehistoric ones, made of materials of endangered species (shells, ivory, and so on), independently the fact that the prehistoric species do not exist any longer or if the material does not come from slaughtered animals in present times. Due to this reason, no

piece of ivory, even if it is from three thousand years ago (such as the Assyrian ones), can be lent to other countries from the United States. What is valued, in this case, is not how old the work is, but its material. Only works made of organic materials of extinct species – such as mammoths, but not elephants – can transit freely.

The policy is not strange to the provider museum. The Greek government strongly impedes that works of Greek public museums are exposed together with private collections. Museums with donated works by individuals, such as the majority of the Swiss museums, are not well perceived by the Greek government. Not respecting this demand can mean that the exhibition will be confiscated by a court order.

Countries like Syria – before the civil war – demand (or demanded) that no work which comes from Israel can be included on an exhibition, even if such pieces do not share the same window display or even are not in the same room in which the Syrian works are exposed. The same word “Israel” cannot be mentioned in texts of the exhibition and in the catalog, which the Syrian government demands, or demanded in times of peace, to be reviewed. The United States found a solution to the problem invoking the expression “Ancient Israel” when there are archeological pieces from the range of the Eastern Mediterranean exposed.

The governments of George Bush (father), and son, on the other hand, impeded the loan of Mes-

opotamic pieces of American museums, because the Mesopotamia was located in the same place where Iraq is currently located, a country that was on their blacklist (the famous “The Axis of Evil”), an executive order that was annulled by President Obama. The impediment could sometimes overcome itself when it was explained that, in the third millennium B.C., Iraq did not exist.

In general, the governments of the majority of countries guarantee the return of the pieces to their respective public and private owners. But there were some cases that, suddenly, the owners met a detention order, as it happened to suspicious artworks that were ransacked while the Second World War or, today, in Iraq. The Spanish legislation, however, does not offer the warranties.

Meanwhile, countries like Mexico or Peru can withhold indefinitely pre-Columbian artworks of foreign collections included in these countries. In the face of this always present menace, international museums hesitate on lending pieces that can be fairly or unfairly requested or even absolutely denied of loan.

Sometimes, you must have “bites” [bribes] to get a piece of work – which is not spoken out loud: apparently, it is known that it was necessary to pay a certain amount of money to Mrs. Suzanne Mubarak, wife of the Egyptian former president if you wanted to dispose pieces from the Pharaoh of Egypt with no problems. The illegal payment

must be done without waiting that the request becomes explicit, as it happened to some works from Syria. I remember that I had to fly to Damascus on July of 1996 with an amount of money that could not be accounted – but it was not necessary to spend in the end – to try unblocking a loan of artworks that had been obtained previously verbally, but for which there was no written confirmation. The meeting with a senior military officer at a room in the Museum of Archeology of Damascus was tense. But, the loan was performed, in the last minute, and there were burdensome requests (trips, housing, and expenses of several Syrian conservators for weeks in Spain) that could not be denied because they threatened the receiving of very important works for the exhibition.

The policy is an important doer that determines the destiny of exhibitions. A mistake can result in conflict that can be severe, and bring a diplomatic trouble with unforeseeable consequences. Since 11th, September of 2001, the organization of exhibitions with pieces that come from abroad has changed a lot. The cost of insurance (1/1500 of the worth of the piece) has increased quickly. The pieces never travel alone, but with one or two “messengers” – people from the museum that is performing the loan must accompany the boxed works.

Claims of artworks in foreign museums by countries like Peru, Turkey, Iran or Iraq, recently, had considered that their heritage was illegally explored and exported in the Colonialism Period.

It had forced museums to monitor what they are lending and to whom. Greece also has become tougher. A museum that is lending something is risking “their” pieces, almost always archeologic, to be confiscated and, possibly, not returned.

The American museums, mainly, but also the Swiss ones – and, in general, in greater or lesser extent, almost all museums – are fed by – or include – donated parts by individuals in their permanent collection. When the donating collectors are the museums’ patrons, they are obliged to accept the donation and expose the artwork. Due to this law, the museums, especially the American ones, are forced to show artworks whose authenticity and, above all, their origin is not always clear. The “provenance” (the place where a work comes from) is a keyword that infuses fear in the curators. A conflicting origin can cause serious diplomatic conflicts.

The international laws established in 1985, endorsed by the majority of countries, prevent any work to leave the country to be acquired by another one. But not always is possible – or desired – to know in which year a work entered into a collection. For this reason, institutions like the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York, or the Louvre Museum, in Paris, do not accept that the works that are lent by them to take part in exhibitions that include other private collections – or, at least, certain collections, are many times, formed thank to rapidly acquired fortunes in the nineties.

The reason for this is simple: the desire to avoid the exhibition getting confiscated by claims of countries that suspects certain artworks has left their borders illegally. The situation gets complicated when, sometimes, those same countries facilitate the exportation – or have employees, or politicians, that close their eyes or “pull some strings” to make the illegal traffic of artworks easier – of pieces that will be claimed afterwards. The boundary line between suspicious of traffic countries and vigilant ones does not follow, by any means, the boundary that separates rich and poor countries, as we sometimes may think.

For these reasons, the museums’ curators study, not only the conditions of the pieces – pieces that are apparently beautiful might have internal and not detectable fissures that cannot be seen with unaided eyes or might be made of materials that are easily corroded, such as bronze, or copper. Corrosion that might appear suddenly and not always can be stopped in time, or knowing how to stop –, but also the “origin”: how and when they were acquired, to whom and for whom. The surprises are exceptional. It is found that remarkable works are fake or that they cannot be exhibited because they are possibly the result of robberies. Any mistake would imply in danger of confiscation and disbelief. Works from “conflicting” countries, such as Iran (to the United States), are given a lot of precaution.

A museum is more likely to lend pieces that exist at least two copies (archeological pieces, engrav-

ings, books, and so on). The works tend to travel supervised by messengers: curators, frequently young ones, or in training, whose task is not letting the lent pieces unwatched. The responsibility that they have to take, once that the destiny of the artworks is in their hands, sometimes, make them act with a severe and excessive attitude. They fear that any trouble might happen, and they do not trust the applicant institutions, as well as the employees, what can cause delays or shutdowns on the mounting of an exhibition. The boxes that carry the works cannot be opened at the customs house. It is a mandatory requirement. Any failure would annul the insurance efficacy. The works travel on specific means of transportation, or in a first-class seat – if the box is small, by airplane (or by ship), or by armoured carriage, followed by armed officers – what obliges the preparation of exchanging military staff on the borders, once the servicemen or the police from a country cannot enter in foreign territory, if the transportation occurs via highway. Some museums require armed officers to accompany the transferring of the lent pieces, landed by airplane, from the airport to the organizing museum.

The number of messengers is defined by the loans museum. The cost (transference, accommodation, and subsidy of subsistence) is undertaken by the organizing institute. The messenger must stay in the headquarters of the exhibition from the moment of the boxes’ arrival – those which he traveled with– to the installment of the pieces in

the window display from the final closure of the same ones. The messenger's stay may last several weeks. At big exhibitions, with countless works that came from different museums, placed in collective window displays, the messengers must be always present when the display is opened to the placement or removal of the artworks.

Some museums – such as, in general, the British Museum in London – demand that their pieces are exhibited at independent showcases, without sharing the same ones with other suppliers. Other ones do not accept that their artworks, once settled, be removed from the window display, even if their location will interfere with the installment of other pieces.

Some countries (presidency, the council of ministers, ministries of culture, antiquities, and so on) or some museums demand that the messengers stay by the side of the pieces during all the time of its exhibition. The harsh rules of the Turkish Ministry of Culture are known, and feared by all the museums all over the world; only a few ones can afford the expenses of transferring and housing for two messengers that take place every fortnight (a two-week period). So, a three-month exhibition – an ordinary duration – requires the presence of six shifts of two messengers: twelve boarding passes and twelve accommodations and subsidies. Some countries, such as Egypt, before the revolution, also demanded ATM cards, with unlimited credit. The billing documents are very famous, and they are a result of the buying

of the most prestigious branded fashion clothes, or high couture houses, from capital cities of different European countries (Paris and Berlin, especially), that had arrived at the French government when a big exhibition about Egyptian Art happened in the decade of 1990.

These demands are sometimes understandable, because they come from countries with no great resources, so (or not much) honest as in the “first world”, they are not well paid and many times they cannot afford traveling abroad. That way, suppliers countries are able to make their employees travel and practice their craft. It is a way to reward the most conscious employees.

Paying the acquisition of pieces is not well seen in Europe and, in principle, no European museum asks any kind of financial compensation. This does not mean that the needed administrative tasks for the exportation of pieces must not be paid – an action performed by museums in difficulties, such as the British Museum (whose costs are surprisingly high and appear “suspiciously” interfere on how much the renting of pieces would cost) or that the European museums responsible for loans always deny the economical offers. The offers of the museums from the United Arab Emirates and from Japan, as well as the economical requests of the Russian museums, are well known.

It is known that it is necessary paying, under the covers, certain fees to get pieces of specific

countries, such as, in some occasion, from Syria. But, the transaction must be performed with caution and discretion, trying to find the perfect moment to not look like someone is bribing the employees. The payment, or the gift, of materials, restoration for instance, also facilitates the loans; this procedure happens, in part, logically, accordingly to the lacks of certain countries.

The artworks arrive downtown or at the museum where they will be displayed when the mounting (wood panels, window displays, stands) is concluded. The ink must be dry, the environment has to be controlled according to the international patterns, the environment must be controlled (protectors, alarms, cameras). Once the artworks are in the museum, no job which involves dust, smoke and vibration can be performed. Just finishing touches, drilling of access and fixation of ducts, and installment of placards and texts are allowed since they do not involve the displacement of the artworks.

The day of the installment of the artworks, the boxes are put in a room, one by one, always under the supervision of the messenger. The room is already properly prepared with one or several operation desks. Restaurateurs, conservators, and installers are waiting. The cleaning is performed as usual. You are not allowed to eat in the room, neither perform jobs that can cause vibrations and produce dust. The boxes must be opened very carefully. The artworks are unpacked

under the messenger's attention and sight. The restaurateurs or curators of the organizing institution perform this operation and they photograph every step of the way. The artwork is placed on a desk, or on a surface, and it is inspected. It is photographed in every corner and it is sometimes inspected with the use of ultraviolet light, in order to detect possible cracks or detachments caused by the transportation. The conditions of the piece are compared with the one presented in the previous days, in the moment of the packing in the lending institution. Thank the pictures taken in that moment, all the differences are pointed out, going from small alterations or details that the pictures given by the supplier do not show. The legal papers are finally signed.

The smallest particle detached from an artwork is collected. Sometimes, the reintegration of the separated material is performed, since its amount is not excessive, because, otherwise, the piece cannot be exposed due to the suffered alteration. The pieces made of not-baked clay are generally the most fragile ones and the hardest to handle. But the pieces made of bronze also can cause unforeseen surprises. The messenger watches the window display or the platform. The alarms that can have been solicited must be installed, crystals and surfaces must be clean. The messenger guarantees the stability of the displayer, as well as the desired foothold. The artworks can come with or without a displayer. In the case of the displayer must be set up in the room, the messenger has

to approve the fixation system that was planned. It is the messenger or an allowed conservator by him/her, that transfers the artwork and puts it on the platform after it is fixed. If the artwork is big or weights considerably, it is transported in a wheelbarrow or in a crane, which only the credentialed experts are allowed to handle.

Any manipulation requires the use of gloves, made of rubber or cloth, with a special treatment that facilitates the correct adherence to the artwork. Some messengers or conservators prefer to work without gloves to make sure that the piece is safe.

Certain artworks require small restorations: only the messenger can allow them. He/She represents, in the strong meaning of the word, the loaning institution, and this person has always the last saying. If this person feels that the expositors, the room or the location, are not meeting the previously set demands, he/she can have the artwork repacked and returned.

The window displays must respect the environment conditions established by the suppliers: light, temperature and moisture levels must meet the previously established parameters (the bronze, especially from archaic eras is an easy target of corrosion, which, when it starts, although invisible, is felt on the fragile and sensible material, the window displays that protect them must be according to the very precise conditions

regarding the moisture levels, which must be always under control). There are absorbing materials that control the moisture levels the whole time. The supplier institution also has to approve the conditions and systems proposed by the receiving institution.

The enlightenment is generally adapted or regulated once the window display is closed, except in the case of displays with recessed lighting, which cannot detach heat, and must have what is called of controlled lighting temperature, especially the registers of ultraviolet and soft infrared. The intensity of the lighting ("lux") answers certain peaks. Artworks on paper painted works in general, whose color did not go through cooking, such as the Greek ceramic, demand low light (50 lux). The supplier and the recipient must guarantee that the lighting intensity meets the established parameters.

An exhibition with about one hundred and fifty pieces (Figure 3), with many suppliers, can demand two weeks for installments. If some artworks take just an hour from the moment of unpacking and its placement in a window display or platform, others might take many days: the condition of each artwork, the requirements of the exhibition, may delay the process. Occasionally, the platforms, approved by the messenger, fitted to the piece, made of approved materials that do not release gases or are not in direct contact with the piece, are fabricated in the room and its preparation and adjust-



Figure 3. Assembly of the exhibition *Antes del Diluvio. Mesopotamia 3500-2100 a.C (Before the Flood. Mesopotamia 3500-2100 BC)* which received pieces from 32 museums and collectors from around the world. The exhibition brought together more than 400 pieces on Sumerian culture, coinciding with the fall of the III Dynasty of Ur. Curator of Pedro Azara. Source: author's collection.



Figure 4. General view of the exhibition *Antes del Diluvio. Mesopotamia 3500-2100 a.C (Before the Flood. Mesopotamia 3500-2100 BC)*. Curator: Pedro Azara. Source: author's collection.



Figure 5. Detail of the assembly of the exhibition *Sumeria y el paradigma moderno (Sumeria and the modern paradigm)*. Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, 28 Oct. 2017 - 21 Jan. 2018. Curator: Pedro Azara. Video frame of *Sumeria y el paradigma moderno*, available in: <<https://vimeo.com/242247313>>. Accessed on: 01 Jan. 2018.

ment can take many days. The pieces that, once they have been unpacked, were not exhibited in time, must be returned to the reservations, always under the supervision of a police officer or with the approved security systems.

Nobody is allowed to handle any piece. Nobody can enter the room, exception made if you are licensed. All the process must be performed under the maximum control, that always demand the messenger's approval. The requirements must be respected; it depends on the museum's criteria, their personality and the demands that were previously communicated by them.

Setting up an exhibition is the closest thing to a medical surgical procedure together with a police and investigative operation. Any mistake, indeed, can result in the cancellation of the exhibition and in the loss of the trust of the supplier and of the receiver. You may only breathe unworried when it is the opening day. From then on, you are only on the critics' mercy. (Figure 4)

The long process is repeated when the demounting occurs and the pieces are returned, as many times as it is necessary, in the case of mobile exhibitions: it is generally necessary a month of working between the mounting and demounting the exhibition in another museum. Although, certainly, the demounting requires less time than the mounting, unless a piece presents any alteration that appeared while the time of exhibition.

Some pieces "travel" only once, and they cannot be present in all the museums or centers that host mobile exhibitions. Artworks made of fragile materials, especially to the light (drawings, books) can only be exposed just for a few months, and they must stay at least a year in the dark.

Setting up an exhibition is living outside the time for a few weeks. It is the best thing – and the strangest one – that can happen. The artworks are like people, whose treatment, whose care requires all the attention and worries of everyone involved. A mistake and the loss are irreparable. (Figure 5)

Barcelona, 2017.