

## MUSEUMS AS MEMORY THEATRE A VISIT TO THE SALAR JUNG MUSEUM IN HYDERABAD

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### **ABSTRACT**

"The Kunstkammer was regarded as a microcosm or theatre of the world, and a memory theatre. The Kunstkammer conveyed symbolically the patron's control of the world through its indoor, microscopic reproduction."

Francesaco Fiorani in his above quote makes it very clear that the founders of the Kunstkammer museum (the first museum of Russia) had one thing clear in their mind: the space of the museum is one of performance, where the visitor comes to have a history being performed in front of his eyes. But he does not stop there. The story that the visitor is told is a testimony not of its times alone, but of the 'patron's control of the world through its indoor, microscopic reproduction'. The reproduction of the patron's desire, then brings together, to the visitor, a commemorative history. Museums then, can be said, to borrow a phrase from Barthes (1984), "mechanically represent what (otherwise) could never be repeated existentially". It is a memory theatre. And memories associated with it always facilitate other memories. In this respect, I intend to read how the theme of memory-play can be read along the corridors of the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad. Quite literally, the corridors of Salar Jung contain an odd twenty-something number of mirrors. As one journeys from one room to the other, from one 'performative space' to the next, it is these king size mirrors placed along the liminal corridors that bring up an existential question. I use 'liminal' as the space of the corridor seems to be the space of the present that separates each room and therefore each performative space. Contra-punctually weaves in all these performative space to produce the net 'museum experience'. Within the geographical boundary of the museum, what happens to the subject of the museum? These mirrors reflect (in between two performative spaces i.e. the rooms) the visitor's immediate 'bare' position when seen out of the museum context. He has come out of one room and thus no longer a part of that memory, and has yet not entered the next room and thus not a part of it too. Within his immediate space (the corridor), the practical reality of the world, outside the museum, seems too inconsequential, between the two worlds of grandeur. The subject is made to feel a crisis for which he has to search for his space in the next performative space: the next room.

**KEYWORDS:** Museums and Museumizing, Commodity and Culture, Commemorative History