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Historic house museums as spaces of reenactment

In my presentation I would like to focus on historical house museums – houses that have been turned into museums, and in which things, which once were objects of everyday use have been turned into exhibits. These institutions often use interesting artistic strategies to shape their exhibitions and to reinforce the feeling of “going back in time”. Some of them are more traditional and try to reconstruct the home “as it was” in the time of its inhabitant (for example the house of Władysław Broniewski in Warsaw). Others are conscious of the constructed nature of their exhibitions and decide to include self-critical elements into their narrative (for example the Birthplace of Frédéric Chopin museum in Żelazowa Wola). Finally, some house museums, like the Mikhail Bulgakov Museum in Kiev, decide to radically change the classic exhibition model and instead blend facts and fiction, creating an entirely different experience for the visitor.

My main interest are the museums of celebrated artists (such as writers’ homes), in which the space itself can be seen as auratic. Drawing from the theories of Walter Benjamin, Rebecca Schneider and Robin Bernstein, I analyze the affective construction of historical house museums as places of historical reenactment, in which the only thing missing is the body of the performer. This missing body has been replaced by the body of the visitor, who is acting as a “guest” in someone’s home. The second person reenacting the past is the tour guide, who is always present to create a narrative story about the past transmitted through the body.



Bio: PhD student in the Institute of Polish Culture of the University of Warsaw. My thesis is about Polish historical house museums. Member of Holocaust Remembrance Research Team in the Institute of Polish Culture of the University of Warsaw. I'm also a guide in Zachęta - National Gallery of Art.