

## **Communicating the Past Museum Theatre & Live Interpretation**

Conference in Athens, 22-24 October 2021

**#Compast** will bring together people who want to share and extend their knowledge of how live interpretation and museum theatre are used to interpret the past in museums and at heritage sites. The Conference is organised by IMTAL-Europe, Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences/Dept. of Communication, Media and Culture & EXARC. It will last three full days (Fri-Sun), with an optional excursion day on Monday 25 October.

### **Call for Papers**

We invite proposals for presentations of all kinds: lectures, workshops, pecha-kuchas, etc. Proposals should fall into one of the themes listed below and abstracts should not exceed 300 words including title, author name(s) and affiliation. These should be in MS Word or .rtf format (not in PDF). Please do not include images or literature references. The conference language is English.

Send your abstract to [compast@exarc.net](mailto:compast@exarc.net). Deadline for abstracts: April 15, 2021. Notification of acceptance: May 15, 2021.

## **Conference themes**

### **The Basics**

It may sound obvious, but why should we have live interpretation and which forms are best? Why does museum theatre matter? What are the similarities and differences between museum theatre and live interpretation? What can go wrong? This thematic unit goes back to basics, discussing different forms, methodology, success stories and bad practices in museum theatre and live interpretation to find out what is still valid and why. Contributions concerning different forms of person-to-person engagement and their evaluation, are also welcome.

### **It is all about Content**

The world is turbulent and we are part of that. How do we best tackle sensitive issues and reflect on diversity? How can live interpretation best address stereotypes and serve public history? How do museums position themselves within contemporary issues and how should interpreters be part of this? What version of the past do we want to present? (Or is everything we do fake news?) Where is our self-criticism and does it undermine our authority? This thematic unit focuses on content - with an emphasis on "difficult" issues - and adopts a self-reflective view. Contributions on best and worst practices are welcome along with more theoretical presentations.

### **Crisis, Change and remaining Relevant**

Crisis means change. If 2020 taught us anything, it is that nothing is certain. Changes also bring chances: to reinvent interpretation, reinvent the *stage* upon which we act (museum, site, space...), and to reinvent ourselves. How do the working conditions for live interpretation differ

from country to country? Are there any formats that are robust and pandemic-safe? How do we continue to be relevant and offer relevance to our audiences? What challenges lie ahead of us over the coming years, and do we need to shift our focus or introduce new standards and practices? Can we use museum theater to put contemporary issues into an historical context? And how can we go about it?

This theme looks at live interpretation and museum theatre as vehicles for tackling change and uncertainty, and perhaps even as a way of enhancing visitor engagement in times of crises. It also focuses on how live interpretation and museum theatre may help museums and heritage sites remain relevant and be more actively involved in current socio-political issues.

For example:

*Post-crisis interpretation vs pre-crisis interpretation:*

About 30% of cultural institutions may permanently close because of the pandemic (<https://icom.museum/en/covid-19/surveys-and-data/survey-museums-and-museum-professionals/>). Those that survive will have found other avenues of income generation. What can we learn from this development? Which techniques have to evolve and which techniques may stay the same? Will we see a significant shift in content development as we move on from the pandemic?

### New Formats & Technologies

This theme examines the digital potential of museum theatre and live interpretation. If our audience has gone digital, where does that leave us? Should we keep offering in-person live interpretation, or are online virtual encounters the way forward? There are practical barriers as well as emotional ones (can a livestream be as good as the real thing - and anyway, how do I set one up?)... finally there are, of course, economic considerations (is there any money in this? If so, how do I install a pay-channel?). What's the latest? Virtual immersive storytelling? Are we ready for Cross Reality? We welcome your thoughts, methods and ideas.

### Why Greece now?

2021 marks the bicentenary of the 1821 Greek War of Independence, which resulted in the formation of the modern Greek state. The Greek Revolution was actively supported by major European powers, mainly Britain and France, where "Philhellenism" had, since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, gradually developed into a rigorous and influential movement. The charm of Greek antiquity attracted upper-class Europeans who traveled to Greece between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, wrote extensively about it and left precious testimonies (<http://eng.travelogues.gr/ergo.php?view=11>). The European gaze on Greece had a strong influence on the formation of Greek national identity, and its long-lasting repercussions are to a certain extent felt in the country even today. Can museum theatre and live interpretation shed some light on the complexity of the relationship between Greece and Europe, back then and now? This might be an opportunity for developing some museum theater performances and live interpretation on the subject, especially for the conference. We are keen to hear suggestions and open to discussing possible funding contributions and support.

<http://www.imtal-europe.net/> / <https://cmc.panteion.gr/> / <https://exarc.net/>