

## **Whispering Shells: Echoes of Peoples, Cultures, Art**

Torino Musei Foundation (FTM) incorporates four city museums preserving a diverse heritage, ranging from ancient art from the Middle Ages to the nineteenth century (Palazzo Madama), to modern and contemporary art (GAM - Gallery of Modern and Contemporary Art), the medieval and renaissance world in Piedmont and the Aosta Valley as reconstructed on the occasion of the Universal Exposition of 1884 (Medieval Village), and Asian art (Museum of Oriental Art).

In 2007-2008 the Education Department of GAM and Palazzo Madama organised the training course “Intercultural dialogue and city collections of ancient and modern art,” addressed to museum operators, teachers of primary and secondary school, and CTP educators. The key idea underlying the *Whispering Shells* project – to use city museum collections in order to experiment with intercultural trails and activities to involve migrant communities – originated from this experience and the encounter with a group of motivated teachers.

### **Objectives**

- To adjust the educational mission of city museums to contemporary social changes;
- To promote the knowledge of the city and its cultural heritage to a new audience;
- To use heritage as a vehicle of interaction and exchange between individuals with different cultural backgrounds, and as an impulse for individual and collective creativity;
- To promote interpersonal dialogue and social inclusion through shared experiences and feelings.

### **Phases**

The project drew inspiration from the shells represented throughout the city collections: from Palazzo Madama’s Baroque decoration, to the still lives of Filippo De Pisis displayed at GAM, to the coat of arms placed on the façade of the Pilgrims’ Hostel in the Medieval Village.

Around this theme, the project team developed *ad hoc* guided tours of the museums, and started a reflection on the personal memories and points of view of participants. The exchange of personal biographies and narratives was developed through oral and written storytelling, participatory games, listening to music and creative workshops. The workshops focused on the direct relationship between people and art and included photographic compositions made up of objects of personal or sentimental value to the owner inspired by the still life genre, and the creation of polychrome paintings for a collective installation (see below). A particular emphasis was placed on the relational and interpersonal aspect of these activities.

The whole process (delivery of 43 meetings, 100 hours of activities overall), based on a multi-sensory stimulation and on the interaction between individuals and artworks, was documented through 1,500 pictures and 10 hours of video recordings. The individual experiences of participants were “channelled” into an impressive spiral installation, presented during the closing event of the project. A selection of images was carried out in order to create a photographic audiovisual which will be copied and used for dissemination purposes.

## **Results**

The most significant benefits for project participants were the discovery of the local heritage, active participation and involvement, and opportunities for collective and individual self-expression and creative cooperation.

*Whispering Shells* also had an important impact for the museum educators involved, who, thanks to the interaction with a highly diverse audience (often with an extra-European background), had an opportunity to experiment with new strategies for cultural mediation. The plurality of participants' perspectives was encouraged with a view to renegotiating the meaning of city collections and giving them a new vitality. Another strength of the project was the joint work carried out in partnership with secondary school and CTP teachers in terms of decision-making and process management.

As for the project's critical points, the initial intention to have adults and students from different groups working together was dropped due to the high number of participants, and the differences in national / cultural origin, literacy levels and social background. The project team opted instead for the well-tested patterns of school-museum partnerships, and postponed the interaction between different groups until the closing event.

## **Future perspectives**

In the short term, FTM is planning to promote the project's results by touring the collective installation; the Director of Palazzo Madama is willing to display it in the Museum of Ancient Art and to cooperate in future similar initiatives.

In the medium term, the Foundation hopes to ensure the legacy of the project by developing new opportunities of exchange and training aimed at securing a greater involvement of the museum staff as a whole.

## **Institution**

Torino Musei Foundation

[www.fondazionetorinomusei.it/](http://www.fondazionetorinomusei.it/)

## **Project Coordinator**

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## **Target groups**

Native and immigrant adult students of CTP "Drovetti" and "Braccini" (two local Centres for Adult Education and Training) and secondary school students. Overall, the project involved six heterogeneous groups, made up of 123 people from 20 countries