

„The museum”, ladies and gentlemen, “is a colossal mirror in which man contemplates himself, in short, in all his aspects.“ This mirror, of which George Bataille spoke, is not an ordinary one, that shows simply what humankind is, but also – in a visionary sense – what it could be – in the context of history, nature, beauty and the ethics. The latter is particularly true under circumstances encountered here on Lesbos. But let’s not be hypocritical: Museums cannot feed people with food in times of crisis. And museums are seldom capable of sheltering people that are under existential threat, like refugees.

However, what museums can do is to provide the cultural means to reflect what a humanitarian society is all about. Museums can help to fight nationalistic views that often go hand in hand with a cynical xenophobia that is aiming to destroy a just society instead of creating it. Museums can be precious venues of a European notion of society that is inclusive rather than exclusive. It is our task as museum representatives to support the materialization of a society worth living – a society that allows a cultural diversity that is not arbitrary, but essential for our living together. If museums are understood this way, they could be not merely safe houses of the past, but harbingers of the future.

In order to provide this kind of a vital source for our society museums have to meet the challenges of our time. Museums have to keep up with what is required today to open up the door to tomorrow.

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