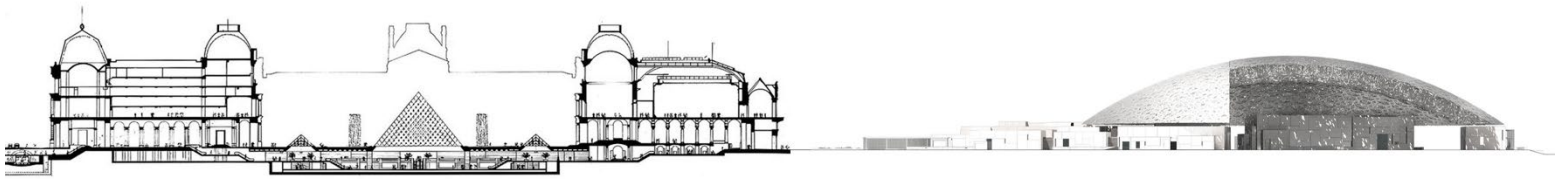


Architecture of universal truth?

The universal museum, expressed in the architecture of
the Musée de Louvre and Louvre Abu Dhabi



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15 April 2021

AR2A011 Architectural History Thesis

MSc Architecture, TU Delft

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15-04-2021

Cover images (edited by author)

Left: Section of the Louvre Pyramid (Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, n.d.-a)

Right: Section of Louvre Abu Dhabi (Ateliers Jean Nouvel, n.d.-a)

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my special thanks to my tutor, Dr. Rachel Lee, for guiding me throughout the extensive 20-week process of writing this thesis. Your encouragement and patience in answering all my questions have greatly helped me in successfully executing the research and writing for my thesis. I am happy to have learned so much during this course!

Thank you to my work group, Rebecca, Loek, Yannick, Gan, and Wan-Yu, for the enjoyable discussions we had during the first part of the course, which greatly informed and inspired my thinking.

Finally, I want to extend sincere gratitude to my friends for so patiently proofreading my thesis and supporting me throughout the semester: Pieter, Nienke, Ginger, and Rebecca. It is really appreciated.

Abstract

This thesis discusses the Musée de Louvre and Louvre Abu Dhabi with regards to the concept of the universal museum, expressed through their architecture. The study of the historical context and architectural language has shown that these legitimize the Enlightenment ideology behind the universal museum. The universal museum of the Louvre was established as a tangible display of power to justify the collecting of objects of different times and cultures, including those acquired during imperial conquest. This is manifested within the architecture. Notably, the definition of the universal museum has changed in the 21st century from not only representing culture, to also attracting it. The establishment of the Louvre Abu Dhabi validates the globalization of French culture, as the United Arab Emirates uses a Western model in order to construct its own identity to adhere to global standards. The thesis expresses concern on the insertion of this Western value system within the Middle East, and advocates in favor of the restitution of cultural objects. It is suggested that a new model of the universal museum may help shape a more local and authentic identity for places like Abu Dhabi.

Keywords: universal museum, museum architecture, Musée de Louvre, Louvre Abu Dhabi, globalization, culture, repatriation

1. Introduction

Can museums be places of universal truth? In 2002, the Universal Museum Declaration was signed by a group of major museums in Europe and the USA, including the Musée de Louvre, with their statement on the ideology of the universal museum sparking controversy. The Declaration defines the universal museum, which originated from the Enlightenment in the 18th century, as a museum that collects and displays objects from all over the world. Many of these collections also contain objects that were acquired during imperial conquest. In particular, the Declaration advocates for the universal museum as a global phenomenon and thereby defends the museums against the repatriation of these cultural objects. Nearly two decades after its publication, these notions remain upheld in contemporary museum development. Consider the Louvre Abu Dhabi, initiated in 2007 and opened in 2017, envisioned to be the first universal museum of the Middle East. It was designed by the renowned office of French architect Jean Nouvel. Its association with the Musée de Louvre, the largest and most influential of the universal museums, prompts debate on what it means to be a universal museum in a contemporary and transcultural age. Specifically, the architectural relation between the Musée de Louvre and Louvre Abu Dhabi reveal how the ideology of the universal museum is embodied within museum spaces throughout time.

Subsequently, this thesis studies the research question: *How is the concept of the universal museum expressed through the architecture of the Musée de Louvre and the Louvre Abu Dhabi?* It reflects on the universal museum as a lens through which to interpret the architectural history of the Musée de Louvre and Louvre Abu Dhabi. Tracing through history how the ideology of the universal museum has been manifested in the architectural language uncovers what has changed over a time period of almost a millennium: from the construction of the Louvre Palace in 1202, to the establishment of Musée de Louvre in 1793, to the founding of Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017. Furthermore, the thesis relates these developments to the ethical question of the universal museum's contemporary relevance and what it means to display objects of culture in an age of globalization.

The thesis will draw on critical examination of the architecture of both museums to reflect on the design in relation to the ideology of the universal museum. By studying the buildings, such as their shape and construction, and the contexts in which they were established, similarities and differences will be revealed. The history of the Musée de Louvre – from birth to rebirth in the Louvre Abu Dhabi – is investigated in parallel with the concept of the universal museum. By

placing the thesis within the broader discourse of museum studies, globalization, and repatriation politics, a position can be taken towards the role of the universal museum today.

The structure of the thesis is as following. Chapter 2 builds a basis for understanding of the universal museum. It examines the concept of the universal museum by offering a theoretical overview of its history and discourse. Chapter 3 deals with the establishment of the Musée de Louvre by tracing its history from fort to palace to museum. It discusses ideas behind the founding of the Musée de Louvre as a universal museum and how this is invested within its architecture. In Chapter 4, the Grand Louvre project of 1981 is analysed with notice to how France used international architecture to solidify the Musée de Louvre as a universal museum, on a global scale. The architectural language of I.M. Pei conceived a modernist break from tradition that cemented the museum as the greatest of its kind. Consequently, based on trends of globalization, the museum capitalizes on the power of its brand to launch the Louvre Abu Dhabi. This is discussed in Chapter 5. The urban development of the area and the architecture by Jean Nouvel are interpreted in order to understand the ideology behind the first universal museum of the Middle East. In addition, it is placed into comparison with its parent museum to uncover the similarities and differences between the museums and underlying values. The final chapter provides a summary and discusses the analysis in order to answer the research question and come to a conclusion. In short, the thesis argues that the architectural expression of the Musée de Louvre and Louvre Abu Dhabi embodies the concept of the universal museum by legitimizing their underlying values. Throughout time the two museums demonstrate a change in meaning of the universal museum, not only representing culture but also attracting it, for socio-political purposes. The Western value system on which the model of the universal museum is based, is thereby inserted into the Middle East, which struggles to construct an identity on its own.

The universal museum has been written about extensively, especially after the publication of the Declaration of 2002. A critical document advocating for the repatriation of cultural heritage is the report by Savoy and Sarr (2018), commissioned by the French government, the first time a government has recognized the moral obligation of repatriation of heritage. This report emphasizes the need for restitution, which would allow the objects' legitimate owners to reappropriate their own stories and relations in the world to be rewritten. Many scholars agree to this from an ethical point of view, criticizing the universal museum as a Western construct rather than universal (Curtis, 2006; Gorman, 2011). Even far before the Declaration and repatriation politics, this was already a widely shared idea (Duncan & Wallach, 1980). While

there is no one size fits all solution, the general recommendation is that approach should be more collaborative, restoring the context and meaning of objects (Flynn, 2012; Gorman, 2011).

Within the field of architecture, museum architecture is a prevalent subject. After all, museum buildings encompass some of the most prestigious and well-known buildings globally. Contemporary, iconic architecture is widely commented on, often viewed as capitalist globalization (Sklair, 2006; 2012). The architecture of Musée de Louvre is seen as a traditionally ceremonial museum, possessing an architectural ritual which still most strongly embodies universal museum values (Duncan & Wallach, 1980). It has been extensively described in books such as *The Grand Louvre: A Museum Transfigured* (Biasini, 1989) and *The Grand Louvre and the Pyramid* (Coignard et al., 1990). The modernist architecture by I.M. Pei was subject to critical response because of its alien form but is now broadly positively regarded as a break from tradition into modernism and global appeal (Souza, 2010). Furthermore, the Louvre Abu Dhabi has been the subject of many studies, in particular with regards to museum partnerships and as a strategy of the construction of identity (Ajana, 2015; Gombault & Selles, 2018), but also much criticized as a cosmopolitan “agent of the West” (Marshall, 2017).

Respectively, using the concept of the universal museum as a lens to consider the museum architecture offers a new and interdisciplinary perspective on the subject. While the fields of museum studies and museum architecture typically intersect, a new layer of ideological and ethical study is added by this thesis. The thesis studies the permanence of architecture in juxtaposition to the manifestation of ideologies and analyses the architecture to investigate the ethics of cultural heritage. In answering the research question, transitioning between these different areas of study give a multifaceted, synthesized result.

2. The Universal Museum

2.1 Introduction

While the universal museum has recently come into new focus with the Declaration of 2002, the concept has existed for much longer. This chapter provides a historical account of the ideologies behind the universal museum and offers a theoretical overview, as well as a critical account. It will first describe the general history of the museum and how this led to the universal museum. Next, it will present the contemporary universal museum as described in the *Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums* (2002). Finally, the chapter expands on the question of today's universal museum's relevance in relation to repatriation politics. Through this, the chapter establishes a foundation for understanding of the universal museum on which the rest of the thesis is built.

2.2 From Cabinets of Curiosities to Universal Museum

As international trade and conquests took off around the world, objects became increasingly available to royalty, nobles, and scholars. They displayed their elite status through eccentric displays of natural and manmade wonders. These became known as the *Wunderkammer* or cabinets of curiosities (Barrett, 2014). Scholars studied earthly items in order to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the world. The early museum was born here, in 16th century Renaissance palaces, where the small and private scholar's study was a place for intensive research. Countless natural, artistic, and anthropological items, such as animal parts, paintings, and coins, were part of an encyclopedic collection that concentrated the entire world in one room. It embodied a natural curiosity and an effort to create order within the chaos of the world (Mauriès, 2002). The complex relationships between the objects allowed "the whole world to be seen as one" (Barrett, 2014, p. 55).



Image 1. Engraving of a cabinet of curiosities By Ferrante Imperato (Imperato, 1599).

From the 18th century onwards, through the Age of Enlightenment in Europe, many of these private collections became public. This industrial and intellectual revolution led to the belief that accessibility to high knowledge and culture cultivated a proper society. Collections of art and cultural objects had a civic and academic purpose and were the possession of “world citizens” (McGregor, 2009). One of the most well-connected places in the world, where trade was especially prosperous, was London. In 1759, the expansive cabinet of curiosity of the physician Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753) became the British Museum, a place for all curious people (Barrett, 2014). Unlike other public museums in Europe at that time, it did not originate from a royal collection. This collection was encyclopedic, the first to name itself a universal museum – a place to display cultures and objects of the whole world under one roof. According to its director, the British Museum should be accessible for any visitor, both local and foreign, to understand the oneness of the world (McGregor, 2009). The Enlightenment ideology of a universal museum is embodied within this museum, where “through an empirical methodology, guided by the light of reason, one could arrive at knowledge and universal truths, providing liberation from ignorance and superstition that in turn would lead to progress, freedom and

happiness of mankind” (Burnett & Sloan, 2003, p. 12). Similar ideas were developed elsewhere in Europe, for example in France, where the Musée de Louvre was founded through the seizing of the royal collection by the new Republic in 1793, and soon became the most well-known and significant universal museum in Europe.

2.3 The 21st Century Universal Museum

Today, universal museums are some of the most famous worldwide, such as the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, and indeed, the Musée de Louvre in Paris. These major museums, among 20 in total, signed the *Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums* in October 2002. The Declaration can be found in the Appendix. This is a response to the increasing demands of repatriation of cultural objects by their source communities. According to the Declaration, the integrity of the universal museum is threatened by these demands. While it condemns the illegal traffic that was part of the acquisition of ethnic, archaeological objects, it also states that “objects acquired in earlier times must be viewed in the light of different sensitivities and values, reflective of that earlier era” (ICOM, 2004). The context that is referred to is the universal museum, accessible to a wide audience, although it does not specify in what way. This would allow ancient civilizations to be recognized and studied broadly. According to the Declaration, displaying such a diverse collection of objects in the universal museum is therefore a service to every human, regardless of their cultural background.

The Declaration was quite controversial, sparking a debate questioning the role and relevance of the universal museum in the 21st century. This discourse was not straightforwardly calling for all repatriation without any nuance, but rather the interpretation and deconstruction of these ideals. According to Flynn (2004), the Declaration implicitly states that the 18th century European Enlightenment ideals of the universal museum can conform to new studies in postcolonialism, postmodernism and the ‘new museology’ of the 21st century. However, Flynn questions to what extent this is realistic, as the group adopting this position is comprised of only European and North American museum directors. Furthermore, the revival of the universal museum demonstrates the contrasting positions between “backward-glancing museology with its roots in nineteenth-century imperialism and an accelerating trend towards greater cross-cultural awareness in a pluralist society” (Flynn, 2004, p. 32). The birth of universal museums is parallel to the emergence of the modern nation state, reflecting a change from private to public ownership of equity. The universal museum’s dedication to collect the whole world underneath

one roof and to control, process, and narrate these stories is still evermore present today, for instance demonstrated by the recent opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi in 2017.

2.4 Contemporary discourse

One of the most well-known cases of repatriation demands is that of the Parthenon Marbles, sculptures taken from Greece and displayed in the British Museum. Neil McGregor, the director at the time, stated that these objects cannot just be returned as they are now part of another story (Flynn, 2004). McGregor describes that displaying the marbles and surrounding them with stories of other civilizations in the British Museum, contextualizes them in the narrative of world history. He argues that these collections should be seen by the whole world, where in different places they obtain different meanings, in order for people to truly become citizens of the world (McGregor, 2009).

Gorman (2011) questions this truth of to what extent museums represent certain cultures and voices, and which they do not. He raises concerns on what gives universal museums the right to represent culture, and the construction of knowledge and authority to control it. These museums, situated in Western financial and political centres, suggest they are accessible to all people, but this is debatable. According to Gorman, this is a case of Western arrogance. Curtis (2006) agrees to this, stating that the Declaration is based on a Western perspective. Negotiations on repatriation are on the museum's terms, which use Western definitions of objects. This does not consider the way source communities may define them. Universal truth does not exist and the universal museum is a Western construct. What is needed is a new and deeper understanding of how we define museum objects.

In 2018, the *Restitution of African Cultural Heritage. Toward a New Relational Ethics* by the Senegalese academic writer Sarr and French art historian Savoy was commissioned by the French President, Emmanuel Macron. The report emphasizes the need of restitution, which would allow the objects' legitimate owners to reappropriate their own histories. This will create new relationships within the world. Relationships with others are based on the past, which is why it needs to be rewritten in the present. Revolutionary, it was the first time a government has recognized the ethical rights of repatriation. The report may be indicative of where universal museums are headed in the future.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the history of the museum as it was born within the 16th century palaces. The European Enlightenment belief of the 18th century led to the concept of the universal museum, where the whole world was to be displayed underneath one roof in order to make knowledge and culture widely accessible. As private or royal collections turned public, the institutional founding of museums became widespread. Recently, with the controversial Declaration of 2002, the universal museum came back into focus as its appropriateness in the 21st was questioned with regards to the repatriation of cultural heritage. The Declaration states that these objects must be viewed as part of a new story within the universal museum, placed in a context of world history. However, the universal museum is subject to much criticism with scholars agreeing that it is a Western construct that projects outdated imperial ideals, unfitting for today's society. The progressive report for restitution as commissioned by the French government in 2018 may signify the first institutional change towards this. In the coming chapters, the universal museum in France is further discussed with regards to the universal museum of the Musée de Louvre.

3. Musée de Louvre: The Model Universal Museum

3.1 Introduction

The archetype of the universal museum, and the most visited museum in the world, is the Musée de Louvre (hereafter shortened to the Louvre). Since its beginning, many architects have worked on the Louvre. This chapter will examine the history of the Louvre from its origin as a fort, to its development as a palace and transformation to museum. This history is analyzed in order to understand the context in which the universal museum came into being whilst placed in relation to the concept of the universal museum. Firstly, an historical overview is given of the development of the Louvre from fort to palace to art scene. Secondly, the development to the founding of the museum is described with regards to the related ideologies. Thirdly, the Louvre as a model universal museum in conjunction with the universal museum concept is analyzed. Altogether, this chapter discovers the creation of the universal museum within the Louvre and its embodiment in the architecture.

3.2 History: from Fort to Art Scene

Originally, the Louvre was a fortification north of Paris, built around 1190 by King Philippe Auguste to protect Paris. The fortress sat at the outskirts of the city until urban settlements developed around it. Its function as fort became less urgent as the kings of France started staying at the Louvre. Around 1360 the Louvre became a royal residence. After the Hundred Years War, in 1528, Francois I (1494-1547) decided to turn the Louvre into a proper palace. He commissioned the French architect Pierre Lescot to build a palace of Italian Renaissance grandeur, beginning with the west wing to house many ceremonial elements, such as a ballroom and a staircase. Lescot used classical forms inspired by the Italian masters, like a façade adorned with sculptures referring to the emperors of ancient Rome, that represent Henri II as the emperor's heir. Lescot also created the Cour Carrée, the main courtyard of the palace (Biasini, 1989; Coignard et al., 1990; Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.).

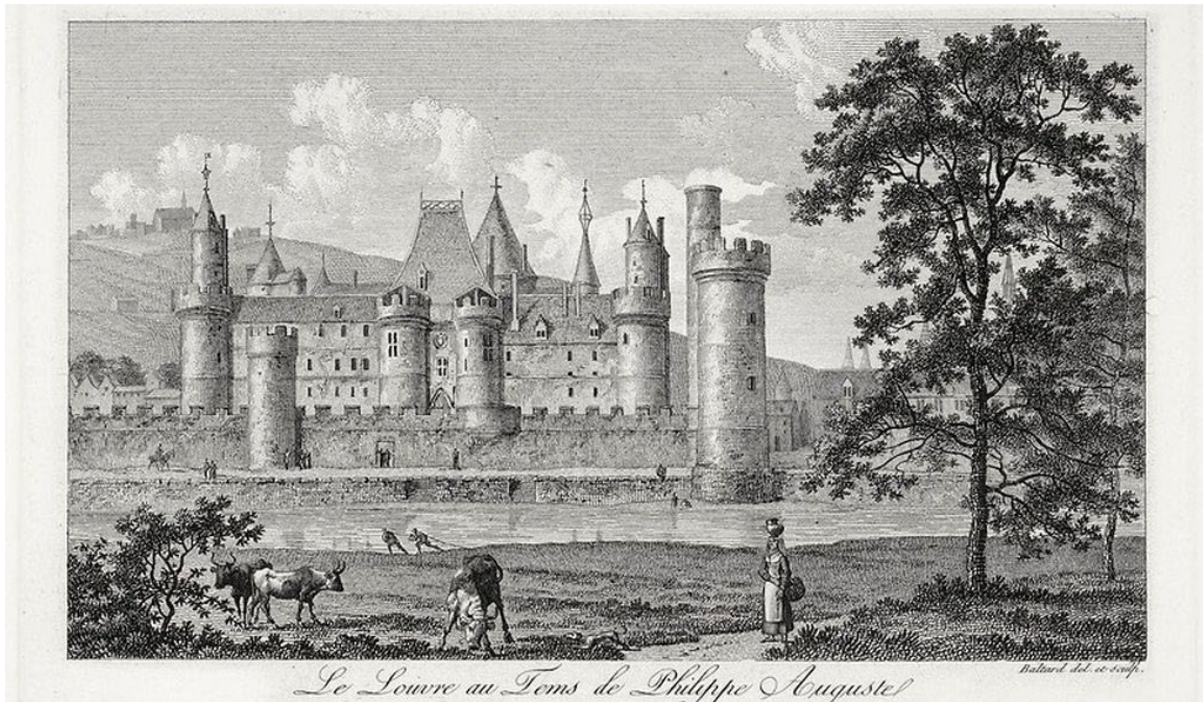


Image 2. Louvre Castle around 1200, engraving "Le Louvre au temps de Philippe-Auguste by Louis-Pierre Baltard (Baltard, 1800).

The Louvre was the only royal residence in Paris until the 1560s when Catherine de Medicis, decided to build a new palace and garden on the west side of the city: Les Tuileries. Henri IV connected it to the Louvre through a gallery named the Grande Galerie of nearly 500 meters long. The Louvre became a privileged place for the arts and culture to flourish as part of the "Grand Design" to turn the Louvre and Les Tuileries into the biggest palatial complex in Europe. In 1665, Claude Perrault designed the Colonnade in a classical style that became the next expansion, even winning over a Baroque design by the renowned Italian architect Bernini. The colonnade is characteristic of French architecture, which embodies the power of a temple. In 1676, Louis XIV moved the royal duties and government to the Versailles Palace. Thus the Louvre was abandoned. It became partly storage for the royal collection and partly the office for art academies such as the Painting and Sculpture Academy. The apartments were also taken over as artists set up their studios in the Grande Galerie. Slowly, the entire palace was flooded by painters, sculptors, and courtiers. The Louvre became well-known around Europe as the center of the art scene (Biasini, 1989; Coignard et al., 1990; Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.).

3.3 Temple for the Arts

In line with Enlightenment belief of the 18th century, in 1747 renowned art critic named Lafont de Saint-Yenne proposed that the Louvre should be transformed into an art gallery. It would be a sanctuary for art, to display the greatness of the nation. While no longer in use as a residence, the palace was still a symbol of the state (Duncan & Wallach, 1980). In 1776 the Grande Galerie officially became the Museum Français. When the royal properties were nationalized between 1792 and 1793, the new Republican state officially established the Louvre as a museum. The property of the King became property of the nation. The Grande Galerie housed paintings, while the ground floor contained antiquities (Biasini, 1989). The Minister of the Interior stated that “this will be a national monument” (Duncan & Wallach, 1980, p. 454). The opening of Musée de Louvre was the ultimate symbol of the Revolution. This visible, physical showcasing of power and the collective possession of the collection constituted the new Republican state of France.

The new Musée de Louvre became a public institution, but its access was still limited. For example, the general public could only visit the museum for three out the ten-day week. Visiting the museum was considered a privilege. Intentional gathering and display of objects from France and foreign lands, such as Italy and Egypt, were part of Napoléon’s strategy to use the Louvre collection to glorify France. “The pattern was set for state-sponsored acquisition on a global scale and stately display with universal pretence” (Fiskesjö, 2014). New works were acquired during this stage, including the famous Venus de Milo in 1820 (Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.-b). Napoleon’s powerful army collected treasures all over Europe. The ability of the universal museum to display the world’s cultures and history showcased the global power and influence of the French state. Through exhibiting the royal collections and newly acquired objects, from past civilizations of the Romans and Egyptians, a narrative is constructed in which France is the next pinnacle of civilization in the entirety of human history (Fiskesjö, 2014).



Image 3. The Grand Gallery of the Louvre by Hubert Robert, oil on canvas, c. 1801–1805, collection of the Musée du Louvre, Paris (Robert, 1801).

The ceremonial architecture of the palace remained present, as collections were housed in galleries that used to function as reception rooms. The grandeur of its décor was meant to impress visitors as well as envelop them to the halls that contained amazing works of art (Duncan & Wallach, 1980; Skluzacek, 2010). Architects Percier and Fontaine continued to expand the museum, designing in a neoclassical aesthetic that fit with the Renaissance art collections. Innovative engineering methods were used, for example in the Grande Galerie where they made the first overhead lighting with huge columns bearing arches covering the space. This allowed for a gallery without any obstruction in its 430-meter length, filled with seemingly infinite pieces of art (Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.-b). The architectural language, drawing inspiration from the Roman temples, portrays the Louvre as quite literally a temple for the arts, where the French Republic plays the role of God – showing the world as they see it.

3.4 The Model Universal Museum

Like a place of worship, where belief is central to its being, the temple-like architecture of the Louvre suggests a place of universal truth. The Enlightenment belief was that secular truth and science superseded religious authority (Skluzacek, 2010). Through the display of culture, science, and nature, ideas of human development are shown as truth, based on these values. The French commitment to collecting and preserving these objects can be considered as an effort to validate their series of conquests and looting. As an institution, the Louvre presents itself as qualified to protect humanity's greatest treasures (McClellan, 1999). By opening as a museum to the public it reinforces the Republican idea of collective ownership. Still, this publicization remained limited to a select privileged few, who were able to understand it at all because they were literate. "The success of the Louvre as outward symbol of Republican culture required the adoption of display conventions and value hierarchies recognized by connoisseurs throughout Europe" (McClellan, 1999, p. 11). Consequently, the universal museum is based on these values. Thus, as the largest museum of its kind the Louvre has set the tone as the model universal museum.

In the 19th century art increasingly became the symbol for great cultural achievement. Being able to collect objects of cultural heritage was a tangible display of the power of the state. In the Louvre as a universal museum, the history of these objects is shown in parallel to the history of the nation. A certain idea of civilization is shown through national and international schools and masters, which demonstrate the 'genius' of the artists (Duncan & Wallach, 1980). Renowned pieces of art line the walls of the Louvre, having been stripped away from their original context. In this new context of an ideal civilization, the collection is made high value by existing within the Louvre. The Louvre embodies the concept of the universal museum through the ideology of the state, using individual genius in the form of art. As a monument to the idea of France as heir to the classical civilizations, the universal is manifested in the state.

From King Francois I to Napoleon: all of them made use of the Louvre and its 'universal' collection to glorify France. This was strengthened through the Louvre's architecture. Spatial gestures, such as grand staircases and galleries, communicate a degree of importance. The decorated, ceremonial style of the museum literally celebrates the contents, reserved for the elite. The museum frames contents through architectural language as a method of ascribing its own value systems, which brings together Enlightenment culture and the new Republican state of France. In the case of the Louvre, France's source of national and international pride, the universal museum validates looted objects in its framing. There is nothing neutral about a

constructed display. The Louvre is a universal museum by all means in the way it manifests national power through a universal collection. It follows the universal museum concept of the cabinets of curiosities, housed in architecture which legitimizes its being.

3.5 Conclusion

To conclude, the Musée de Louvre was established in 1793 during the Enlightenment after undergoing several transformations throughout the centuries. Its origin as a fort, transition to palace, and subsequently founding as art museum have shown the underlying ideologies of the universal museum within the Louvre. The establishment of a universal museum is France's method of presenting a tangible display of national power and legitimizing the acquisition of looted objects of different cultures. Although these private collections were opened to the public, it was still only truly accessible to the privileged. This Republican display of cultural objects from foreign places creates a narrative of world history which declares France as the heir of classical civilization, based on elite Enlightenment values of the 18th century. Built on this value system, the collection is given meaning by only existing in the Louvre. The temple-like building enshrines its contents, and therefore attributes its ideology upon it. The spectacular, palatial architecture imposes a sense of privilege and power on the museum visitors. As a result, the Louvre is the model universal museum in Europe due to its rich history, strengthened by its architectural language. Nearly two centuries later, the Louvre extends this power to the rest of the world when it introduces the Grand Louvre project.

4. The Grand Louvre: Consolidating France's Universal Museum through International Architecture

4.1 Introduction

Late 1981, the president of France launched a project that became known as the Grand Louvre, in order to renovate and reorganize the historical palace to a modern museum fit for a global audience. Following the prior chapter on how the Louvre was established as a universal museum, this chapter will discuss its expansion in the name of the Grand Louvre. Firstly, it will discuss the socio-political context in which this project came to being and expands on I.M. Pei's initial ideas for the architectural design. Secondly, the architectural language is analysed in more detail with regards to the concept of the universal museum. Thirdly, the way this notable project develops the Louvre's ideology of universality to an international scale is examined.

4.2 France's New Renaissance

In 1981, François Mitterrand was elected as the new president of France, with which conservative rule came to an end after 23 years. Mitterrand quickly set a socialist reform into motion, by increasing minimum wages and welfare, shortening the workweek, and dramatically increasing the budget for the arts, based on his idea that a "cultural awakening" had to go hand in hand with economic recovery for France's 'New Renaissance' (Cannell, 1995). He envisioned the artistic refinement of the French revolution and launched a series of *grands projets*, including a plan called the Grand Louvre to turn the Louvre into the world's biggest museum (Coignard et al., 1990).

From the beginning, Mitterrand wanted to commission the Chinese-American architect Ieoh Ming Pei. Mitterrand was thoroughly impressed by Pei's earlier works, such as the acclaimed East Building of the National Gallery in Washington D.C. At Mitterrand's first presidential press conference he declared he would restore the Louvre to its glory, by evicting the governmental functions and adding new galleries in order to accommodate the increasing number of visitors and bring the museum to modern standards. The museum had grown to a state of despair, despite its imposing palatial exterior, as the program was disorienting for visitors and the interior did not allow for proper exhibitions (Cannell, 1995). Thus, reorganization was needed.

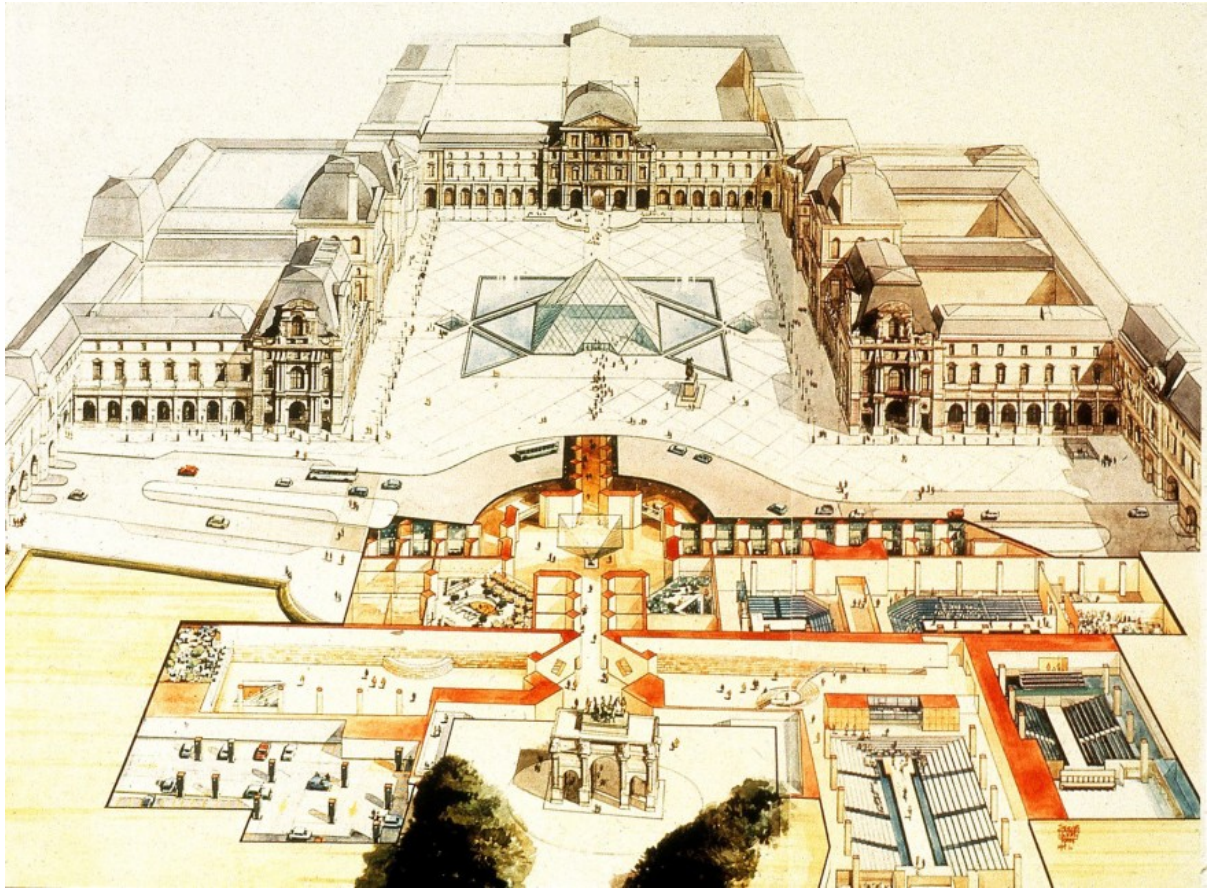


Image 4. Design of the Pyramid and underground extension (Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, n.d.).

A large underground space was designed that contained storage rooms, information centres, conference spaces, cafés, and a central meeting point from which visitors could easily depart to one of the three museum wings (Cannell, 1995). Something was missing: a welcoming, straightforward entrance to this underground world. At first, it was agreed that nothing should be built above ground. However, Pei decided that the underground architecture should still communicate with the outside world, for two reasons: to bring in light, and establish vertical contact between the old and the new (Biasini, 1989). Pei knew from the beginning that the Cour Napoléon had to be the centre of gravity of the Louvre. His solution was a 21-metre-tall glass pyramid, less than half compared to the surrounding palace of 45 meters. He based its proportions on the pyramids of Giza. To Pei, this was architecture that respects the existing architecture, a piece of its own time. It “constitutes the ultimate visible gesture of a “buried architecture”” as stated by Pei (Biasini, 1989, p. 24). When visitors enter this entrance, they also enter the history of the palace. It has a clear internal logic and is a symbol for modern architecture that breaks with traditions of the past. The contrast between the modern structure and the old palace is a homage to the Louvre that embodies the cultural zeitgeist of the modern

time (Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, n.d.-a). Through this architectural expression, Mitterrand achieved exactly what he wanted: a new age in which the Louvre truly became Grand.



Image 5. Pei's Grand Louvre (Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, n.d.-a).

4.3 A Ritual of Triumph

The pyramid was subject to much criticism, especially on the overload of architectural styles in one place. Pei ensured that the pyramid was perfectly engineered to be as light and transparent as possible in its structure and materiality (Biasini, 1989; Coignard et al., 1990). The perfected classic, minimal detailing a simple elegance, where the transparency indicates a clear vision on the museum's collection. This aesthetic is continued in the interior, where the materials were designed to express a monumental power, from the cream-colored stone to the concrete white ceiling and stainless steel and lacquered aluminum of the supporting structure. The perfect clarity and purity of the material expression display a "majestic palatial environment" (Biasini, 1989, p. 45).



Image 6 & 7. Transparency of the glass and interior view of the entrance (Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, n.d.-b).

The new space created underground functions as a central meeting point, where light enters through the stunningly clear glass. The monumental spiral staircase, another technological feat, leads visitors from the entrance down to the interior. As underground spaces can be quite disorienting Pei wanted the visitors to be constantly aware of the presence of the palace above, using “topographical consciousness” (Biasini, 1989, p. 29). The vertical communication between the upper and lower worlds and the transition from old to new showcase a nation that knows how to look at the past and towards the future. France in all its triumph and civilization lies embedded within this architecture.

The architectural script as described by Duncan & Wallach (1980) is a ritual performed by each visitor as they move through the museum, in which iconographic language exemplifies the universal museum within the Louvre. For instance, in all directions, within a few turns, the visitor is led from Renaissance art to French masters in an iconographic route. The collection of French painting is displayed chronologically and continues from the Salon Carré to the Grand Gallery. The grand finale of the route is the Winged Victory, displayed on top of a monumental staircase, where “ancient sculpture meets modern architecture in one of the most emblematic spots of the museum” (Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.-a). The program dramatically puts the French painters in juxtaposition with the classical civilizations of the Greeks and Romans. It

suggests that the France can be seen in parallel to these great moments of the past. The glory of the French is continuously repeated through this architectural route. The Louvre thereby emphasizes that France is the “true heir of classical civilization”, through an programmatic language that celebrates the triumph of the French (Duncan & Wallach, 1980, p. 459).



Image 8. The Winged Victory of Samothrace (Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.).

Mitterrand’s decision to choose Pei for such a prestigious project, was surprising to many, as the choice for a foreign architect seemed to contradict the idea of a national monument. However, Mitterrand thought Pei’s American spirit, Chinese background, and extensive experience would be able to revive the Louvre up to international standards and rebuild France’s position in the art world (Cannell, 1995). This transition towards a new cultural and economic position on a world scale is amplified by Pei’s design, signalling a new era for the Louvre where not only the collection is universal but the museum as a whole is. While previously the universal museum was concerned with bringing the world to its visitors, the world is now brought to the Louvre by the means of a global audience.

4.4 International Architecture for a Universal Museum

The combination of a prestigious collection and the use of international architecture as a visible manifestation of power truly cemented the Louvre's position as a universal museum. Towards the end of the 20th century, the meaning of the universal museum began to change. Where previously this implied a global collection that represented different cultures and times, in a contemporary setting the universal museum is more occupied with a global audience of various cultures (Skluzacek, 2010). Pei is an architect with thorough experience and can be considered a symbol of cross-cultural exchange through his Chinese American background. By commissioning an international architect of stature, the Louvre consolidates its position as a universal museum on a global scale. The definition of the universal museum has changed, now not only representing worldly cultures but also attracting it. This transition is illustrated by the Grand Louvre transformation, where the dual nature of the palace and the museum harmoniously merge at the hands of Pei.

Moreover, the Louvre carries a great symbolic weight in its architecture and collection, as its history is closely tied up to that of France as a nation. The evolution of the Louvre through the centuries embodies '*l'esprit francais*' (Cannell, 1995). The universal museum is an expression of the state. The high technology used in this development displays a level of technical advancement, as France moves towards the post-industrial age. The collection in this universal museum shows what they consider humanity's highest achievements, embodied in works of art, of every culture and time period. But is the value of art truly universal, and who decided this? After an object becomes part of a museum collection, it is interpreted by the institution as it constructs an environment for display. This judgement is never objective (Skluzacek, 2010). If these objects are considered important within their own context, then why are they stripped from this very context and displayed in a museum far from home?

The expansion and architectural language of the Grand Louvre validate the Louvre's capability of making such judgements. The name of the project is self-explanatory. The constant consciousness of the palace above from within the museum, continuously refers to the Louvre's long and rich history, which has shown a certain expertise. As the biggest, oldest, and most well-known museum of the world, the Louvre capitalizes on its assets to assign these universal values. In doing so, it justifies the collecting and displaying of the looted objects. This also explains the Louvre's position with regards to the Declaration of 2002. As one of the signatories, it defends the museum's legitimacy. Additionally, the Louvre is of great symbolic meaning and national identity for the nation and history of France. Certainly, it wishes to hold that position.

4.5 Conclusion

To conclude, with the Grand Louvre project François Mitterrand established a global and universal scale for the museum, as well as propelling France towards a new age of cultural and economic revival – the ‘New Renaissance’. The language and central placement of the pyramid pay respect to high French culture, while international architecture of a cosmopolitan designer like Pei appeals to a global audience. It declares that the Louvre is not only French but is able to transcend borders: a ‘universal’ museum. Such a prestigious and budget-breaking project like the Grand Louvre further legitimizes the universal museum concept and the holding of objects obtained in conquest. It reinforces France’s cultural, political, and economic position within the world and its validity in making ‘universal’ claims. Until today, the Louvre continues to embody the Enlightenment beliefs of the universal museum and maintains its relevance.

Previously, museums were used symbolically as national monuments. With advancing globalization, in the 21st century museum practice has to expand internationally in order to be successful. In a way, museums increasingly act like corporations, using the power of their brands to keep up with such trends. Therefore, nearly 40 years after the Grand Louvre, the museum began to work on its next chapter; this time not bringing the world to France but bringing France to the world, with the Louvre Abu Dhabi.

5. The Louvre Abu Dhabi: Ideology Beyond Borders

5.1 Introduction

In 2017, the Louvre Abu Dhabi officially opened to the public, 10 years after the signing of an intergovernmental agreement between France and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Established as the first universal museum in the Middle East, its goal is to build a collection that represents the global cultures and attracts visitors from all over the world. Following on the previous chapters on how the Musée de Louvre's became the universal museum of the world, this chapter discusses the Louvre Abu Dhabi as the final installment of this series: the first universal museum outside the Western world, as well as the largest art museum in the Gulf. The chapter will first introduce the context in which the museum was established. Next, the chapter will elaborate on the architectural design by the French architect Jean Nouvel. Conclusively, it will examine how the architecture and collection tie up with the image and brand of the first universal museum of the Middle East. The chapter elaborates on the relationship between the Louvre Abu Dhabi and its parent museum, the Musée de Louvre.

5.2 The First Universal Museum of the Middle East

Following in the footsteps of immensely successful projects like the expansion of the Guggenheim brand and the continuous growth of Musée de Louvre itself, the Louvre Abu Dhabi was first initiated in 2007. The UAE and France signed a partnership for cultural exchange, which brought together the UAE's vision of cultural development and French expertise in museums. Agence France-Muséums, a group of renowned cultural institutions in France, coordinates this agreement and manages the loans of artworks with a budget of 56 million dollars a year (Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.-b; Skluzacek, 2010). At first, the announcement was heavily criticized. Prominent art critics showed disapproval, alleging the government of exploiting art and culture for diplomacy and trade. In response, the Washington Post reports, the French Culture Minister stated that it is a globalization of French culture. Moreover, the museum will "help reinvigorate France's postcolonial stature in the Arab world" (Krane, 2007, para. 15). France's tourism relies heavily on its high culture, as was demonstrated by the Grand Louvre development. Exporting this to Abu Dhabi is an economically beneficial

move. Thus, the Louvre Abu Dhabi opened its doors on November 11, 2017. In the press release announcing the opening, the Louvre Abu Dhabi is described as “a universal museum that focuses on shared human stories across civilisations and cultures” (Louvre Abu Dhabi, 2017, p. 1). The Louvre Abu Dhabi will be a key player in the UAE’s strategy to transform into a cultural city on the level of places like London, New York, or Paris. By association, it connects Western and Arabic art histories (Ajana, 2015).



Image 9. Louvre Abu Dhabi by Atelier Jean Nouvel (Boegly & Grazia, 2017).

The Louvre Abu Dhabi is situated in Saadiyat Island, an upcoming cultural district in Abu Dhabi, which name translates to the ‘island of happiness’. In the planning of this new urban region, ‘pearls’ were identified as key projects for culture and tourism (Skruzacek, 2010). These projects are the Louvre Abu Dhabi, as well as the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi by Frank Gehry, the Zayed National Museum by Norman Foster, the Maritime Museum by Tadao Ando, and the Performing Arts Centre by Zaha Hadid. Prominent, international architects were strategically chosen in order to foster cultural relationships to their countries of origin, as these architects – European like Nouvel and Foster, or Asian like Tadao Ando – represent their countries. As Abu Dhabi relies on those countries for expertise and loans, it presents itself as welcoming global

ideas for culture and design, demonstrating the desire for a global reach (McClellan, 2012). Abu Dhabi aims emphasize its unique heritage towards an international appeal. Indeed, with this development it shows the changed definition of the universal museum, as was described in chapter 3.4.



Image 10-13. Top row: Guggenheim Abu Dhabi by Gehry; Zayed National Museum by Foster. Bottom row: Maritime Museum by Ando; Performing Arts Centre by Hadid (Frank Gehry, 2019; Foster+Partners, n.d.; Tadao Ando, 2007; Zaha Hadid Architects, n.d.).

In this series of museums on the idyllic Saadiyat Island, the Louvre Abu Dhabi is the more ‘classical’ museum – to express it in Western terms – that displays ‘traditional’ masterpieces showing the complete history of civilization. According to the press release, the museum will display the most significant artworks that “span the entirety of human existence” (Louvre Abu Dhabi, 2017, p. 1). It will acquire its own permanent collection of over 700 and borrow around 300 artworks from its partner museums, all French, including 100 from the Louvre itself (Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.-d). These items come from every civilization and time period, for example Buddha heads, Roman sculptures, Ottoman rugs, or Chinese porcelain (Louvre Abu Dhabi, n.d.). Clearly, like its parent museum, the Louvre Abu Dhabi also endorses the Universal Museums Declaration.

5.3 Architectural Language

Jean Nouvel, a renowned Pritzker-Prize winning French architect, was chosen to design the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Drawing inspiration from the site, he employed many traditional architectural elements from the Arab culture. For instance, Nouvel designed a museum city, or Arab *medina*, underneath a prominent silver dome from which visitors can view the sea. According to the artist statement, the Louvre Abu Dhabi is a welcoming world of light, shadow, reflection and calm that belongs to the country's history. It is "a contrast amongst a series of museums that cultivate their differences and their authenticities" (Nouvel, 2018).

The most prominent feature of the Louvre Abu Dhabi's architecture is the 180-meter-wide double dome with a geometrical structure of a woven material. It is the same size as the Louvre's Cour Carrée, covering two thirds of the museum while providing shade and reducing energy consumption (Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.-c). It was inspired by the *mashrabiya*, a traditional Arabic window which lets air through. The ever-changing light, which depends on the sun, was part of an extensive technological innovation to bring light inside while protecting the interior and collection. It acts as a sculpture to provoke an emotional response, like a piece of art by itself (Skruzacek, 2010). From underneath the dome, the visitor is constantly aware of its presence. Regarding the interior, also designed by Nouvel's team, the permanent galleries are in chronological order which take the visitor on a journey across different time periods of civilization. The entrance of the museum is designed in a palatial style, like the Musée de Louvre, using materials such as stone and glass. The design fosters an interaction between the in- and outside, inspired by the souq, the local market in the UAE (Louvre Museum Official Website, n.d.-c; Nouvel, 2018).

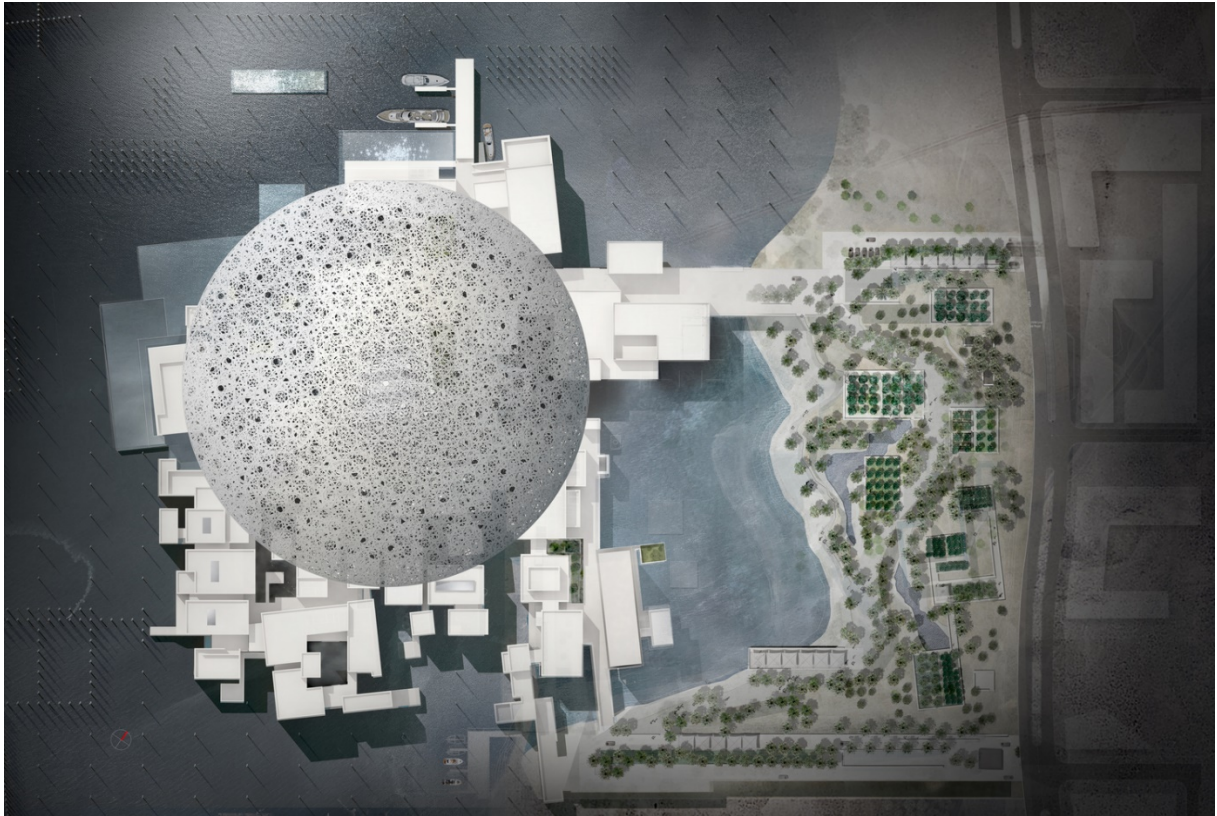


Image 14 & 15. Architectural language: Louvre Abu Dhabi's roof plan and interior (Ateliers Jean Nouvel, n.d.-b; Somji, n.d.).

In the same way as a souq, where different flavours can be found, the Louvre Abu Dhabi brings together various cultures as a universal museum; packaged in sophisticated technological achievement. The use of white stone and steel is a modern translation of the traditional sands and stones of the souq, now covered in luxurious and pure materials. Bringing to mind Pei's Grand Louvre, Jean Nouvel designed a modern gesture that pays its respects to its origins and departs from tradition. By employing both Western and Arabic motifs, the architecture attempts to be universally appealing. The most recognizable part of the building is arguably the exterior, also using classic and pure materials such as glass and steel. Indeed, when considering its parent museum Musée de Louvre, the Louvre Abu Dhabi draws many parallels – the architectural language, classic shapes of the pyramid and dome, pure material, and an opportunity for state-of-the-art engineering. In addition, the dome is dominating form that houses the entire collection under one roof; the same way the universal museum displays the whole world under one roof. With this gesture, the Louvre Abu Dhabi fully embodies this concept in its architecture: a universally appealing sight for a global audience.

5.4 A Strategy of Differentiation

With the Louvre Abu Dhabi, the UAE announces its arrival on the world stage. Spectacular architecture provokes visitors from all over the world, and the colossal size of the building seems almost unbuildable – but Abu Dhabi made it happen. The architecture is a strategy of differentiation and identity, manifested in its grandeur and the choice of an international star architect. "Museum architecture has become a critical element in the institution's campaign to legitimize its existence to its public as a unique social space by heightening its spectacular image" (Skruzacek, 2010, p. 15).

Furthermore, innovative architecture signals an exit from tradition, and welcomes new ideas (Skruzacek 2010). The Louvre Abu Dhabi is a new building. As an opportunity for new form, it makes sense to fully embody the universal museum within its architecture. The roof, as the most prominent and essential part of the façade, is the ultimate shape to express this. Like in the Louvre, the visitor is continuously aware of the roof's presence, the most complexly engineered part of the building that demonstrates a sense of power and innovation. By design, this universal museum is a place of transition, where one enters and exits as a different person, having learned about different cultures and questioning their personal views. A comparative environment is created in which objects are placed in juxtaposition to each other, a method to establish dialogue between different cultures (Skruzacek, 2010).

In preparation for the post-oil age the UAE wields French expertise in culture to build something of their own. The Saadiyat development attempts to balance the need for foreign investment and the construction of Emirati identity. Museums, especially art museums, have become symbolic developments for cities that want to grow tourism and culture (McClellan, 2012). In order to conform to that standard, upcoming nations build museums to display a status of independence. External validation is important, as could already be seen in the painting of the Grande Galerie (Image 3), where visitors visiting the Louvre viewed the collection in awe; the same way foreign tourists will do in the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Using art and architecture, cities like Abu Dhabi try to redefine their identities in order to move towards a modern society yet are bound to the limits of an Islamic culture.



Image 16. Woman visiting the Louvre Abu Dhabi (Boegly & Grazia, 2017).

For France, the art museum is an investment of cultural capital to gain economic and political power. Respectively, the Louvre Abu Dhabi is a tool of cultural imperialism by imposing Western values of the universal museum. The notion that the Louvre Abu Dhabi profiles itself as the first universal museum outside the Western world is interesting by itself, as it confirms the

Western model it is based on. Hence, it is rather controversial that Abu Dhabi embraces a Western model of the universal museum based on the Louvre, which attempts to represent liberal ideals in a non-liberal environment (Exell, 2016). The question remains whether such qualities are transferable at all. Globalization and the narrative of art history are driven by Western concepts, akin to the universal museum model which stems from Western ideals. Importing such narratives into a non-Western context shows a considerably arrogant presentation of what constitutes universal truth and its underlying value systems. According to its mission statement, the Louvre Abu Dhabi presents a universal 'essence' of humanity through its collection. The Louvre's expertise in collecting such objects as demonstrated throughout the span of its lifetime, validates their judgement of what objects can convey universality.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Louvre Abu Dhabi was established as an extension of the universal museum model of the Louvre. Its inherent values are shown through its architectural language, drawing many parallels with its parent museum, the Musée de Louvre. The Louvre Abu Dhabi leverages the international architecture of Jean Nouvel, high-tech, and a prominent exterior to embody the modern universal museum. It is a strategy of constituting Emirati identity in a globalized world, where innovative architecture displays a departure from tradition. Likewise, France capitalizes on the power of the Louvre brand and expertise in culture in order to export its value system into a visible manifestation of global power. This may result in a continuous imbalance in power dynamics around the world.

The Louvre Abu Dhabi is based on an inherently Western value system, as was demonstrated in the Declaration of 2002. It aligns with the Louvre's Enlightenment ideals of making knowledge accessible. It could be argued that the opening of another Louvre in the Middle East makes its universal collection accessible to a new region and audience. Nonetheless, this accessibility is based on a Western narrative of history and culture that attempts to insert itself in a non-Western context. Subsequently, the architecture of the Louvre Abu Dhabi presents itself as universal to associate with this narrative, illustrated by the very act of choosing a French architect for its design. Thus, the opening of the first universal museum in the Middle East is an instrument to justify the globalization of French culture, which is closely associated with power, based on an inherently Western value system. By being a universal museum, the Louvre Abu Dhabi validates this capitalization of culture, the construction of Emirati identity to adhere to Western standards, and the accessibility of culture to a wider public.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

This thesis discussed the research question: *How is the concept of the universal museum expressed through the architecture of the Musée de Louvre and the Louvre Abu Dhabi?* It has analysed the Musée de Louvre and Louvre Abu Dhabi with regards to the concept of the universal museum and its expression in the architecture. The following segment will first summarize the content, discuss the analysis, and conclude with an argument for the concept of the universal museum.

To summarize, in the 18th century, Enlightenment belief in Europe stimulated the accessibility of knowledge. Simultaneously, the Musée de Louvre opened in 1793 as its private collection became public with the new Republican state of France. Throughout history, it transformed from a fort to a palace to a universal museum, in which its temple-like architecture presents a physical manifestation of the power of the state in its ability to collect worldly objects. This display of objects of art and culture, including those as the result of imperial conquest, was justified through the universal museum of the Louvre as it imposes its value system. The architectural language strengthens these values through grand gestures and décor. Furthermore, at the end of the 20th century the prestigious Grand Louvre project was launched in order to accelerate France into a new age of cultural and economic revival. Through international architecture by I.M. Pei, the harmonious composition of the pyramid and the palace, and pure materials, the Louvre declares itself a universal museum on a global scale and further legitimizes its collection.

Consequently, the meaning of the universal museum has changed from representing cultures to also attracting visitors from all over the world. This led to the founding of the Louvre Abu Dhabi, as France capitalizes on its expertise in culture in order to build the first universal museum in the Middle East. Based on the Western model of the universal museum, the Louvre Abu Dhabi declares itself universal to attract a global audience and associates itself with a Western narrative of art history. As such, it identifies itself with a Western value system as a means to construct its own identity. This is embodied in the high profile, international architecture of Jean Nouvel. Ultimately, the definition of the universal museum has become twofold: it represents the homogeneity of culture, and the increased accessibility for a global audience.

The infamous Declaration of 2002 speaks in the language of ‘universal’ aesthetics and values, which have been defined by these universal museums. For example, it implicitly refers to the

Parthenon Marbles with an eye of universal admiration yet this is based on a Western value system, as the geographical impact of Greek civilization is limited to the Western world. It is a social construction, a cosmopolitan ideal of what is universal, which “privileges Western values as the ultimate good, part of the utopian myth of modernity” (Exell, 2016, p. 94). The universal museum assumes that humanity’s values, morality and philosophy are universally understood, and contains an underlying judgement of alternative value systems. The same can be found in the architectural language used in the projects.

The Arab culture of Abu Dhabi speaks a different language than the universal language as defined by Western standards, as its philosophy and laws are built on its own value system from a Muslim belief (Exell, 2016). One universal system, or universal truth, does not exist. It is an arrogant assumption that the elite, cosmopolitan Western model as expressed in the universal museum is indeed universal, as it is rather ignorant of the foreign – contrary to its claims. The narrative that is shown through the Louvre Abu Dhabi is that of a universally valid collection, but it is actually *because* it has been constructed from this perspective that they have *become* universally valid.

Throughout time, museums have become synonymous with the nation state. Cultural heritage can consist of language, clothing, or cuisine, but also objects of historical and cultural significance. These objects are typically shown in museums, which present a narrative of these histories. Western museums like the Musée de Louvre display their own idea of a successful civilization according to their own cultural achievements – in the form of objects collected through tradition and triumph (McClellan, 2012). The universal museum has the power to create this narrative. By importing the French expertise in doing so, the Louvre Abu Dhabi is a strategic move of the UAE to construct its own identity. The cost of this is the struggle between balancing its own value system against the inherent value system created through this Western model of the universal museum. Driven by cultural development and socio-political conditions, the partnering of developing regions with Western powers enables growth on local and global levels (Skruzacek, 2010). Arguably, Abu Dhabi will not be the last city to make use of this strategy and to chase after this kind of progress.

Altogether, the architecture of either museums demonstrates these underlying value systems. Spectacular, international architecture by renowned designers is able to embody a statement towards a broad public. Similarities between the Grand Louvre expansion by I.M. Pei and the Louvre Abu Dhabi by Jean Nouvel can be identified. It is shown in the choice of international architects and the architectural language of the pyramid and the dome, in addition to the prestigious high technology used in either project and the classical, elegant and minimal detailing and materialization. As such, it is clear that architecture has the power to embody ideologies and strengthen value systems.

In the past, the primary goals of the museum were to collect, display, and preserve objects. New museology is concerned with the purpose of the museum with regards to trends of globalization. The meaning of the universal museum is continuously developing. The universal museum not only represents the whole world under one roof, but also brings this world to itself. This dual meaning of the universal museum highlights two concepts: the representation of cultures and accessibility to visitors from all over the world. Yet the latter is still debatable, because not everyone can easily buy a ticket to Paris or Abu Dhabi. The increased capitalization on museum brands may form a barrier that completely contradicts this idea of the universal museum. In short, the meaning of universal, whether in collections, architecture, or truth, always depends on a value system within a context.

Lastly, a suggestion for further research is to look more deeply into which objects are loaned from the Musée de Louvre to the Louvre Abu Dhabi for display. The origin of these objects and the meaning it is given reveal another layer of the universal museum, as the collection is ultimately the museum's reason to exist. Moreover, another question of interest is that of the 'universal' accessibility of the museum. New museology is more concerned with attracting a global public, but who are they? It would be compelling to find out whether the Louvre Abu Dhabi's audience consists of certain kinds of tourists or locals. All things considered, the subject remains broad, with much room for additional investigation.

Thus, the universal museum as expressed in the architecture of the Louvre and Louvre Abu Dhabi embodies a cosmopolitan Western ideology as a visible manifestation of French power. By nature, it justifies the imperial acquisition of objects of culture. Keeping these objects away from their source communities is a constant reminder of the institutional acceptance of theft. Being on display in the universal museum did not make these objects more meaningful or valuable, they already were before being stripped of their context. The report by Sarr and Savoy (2018), as was commissioned by the French government, that emphasizes the need of restitution was a major turning point in the debate of repatriation. In fact, in November 2020, the French Senate approved a bill to return 27 objects to Africa (McGivern, 2020).

In light of the analysis, this thesis pledges for a more local approach towards architecture, as it has shown the plurality of 'universal' architecture. Accessible culture, as a Western construct, does little for a local population that wishes to stay true to its own value system. Moreover, the cultural homogenization is concerning. If Emirati culture were to capitalize on its own heritage, rather than relying on the French to do so, it could construct a more authentic, vernacular identity based on its own values. Otherwise, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, situated in Abu Dhabi but run by the French, could remain nothing more than a political and economic instrument that imperializes Western ideologies into the Middle East.

Perhaps it is time to redefine the universal museum once again – not as a justification of past traditions, but a place of restitution. The universal museum is an ample opportunity for objects not to just be broken fragments of local cultures or part of imperial history but used for comparative study and mutual understanding. A more holistic approach of universalism, in which local cultures are respected in their own rights, could constitute this new universal museum.

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Appendix: Declaration on the importance and value of universal museums

The international museum community shares the conviction that illegal traffic in archaeological, artistic, and ethnic objects must be firmly discouraged. We should, however, recognize that objects acquired in earlier times must be viewed in the light of different sensitivities and values, reflective of that earlier era. The objects and monumental works that were installed decades and even centuries ago in museums throughout Europe and America were acquired under conditions that are not comparable with current ones.

Over time, objects so acquired—whether by purchase, gift, or partage—have become part of the museums that have cared for them, and by extension part of the heritage of the nations which house them. Today we are especially sensitive to the subject of a work's original context, but we should not lose sight of the fact that museums too provide a valid and valuable context for objects that were long ago displaced from their original source.

The universal admiration for ancient civilizations would not be so deeply established today were it not for the influence exercised by the artifacts of these cultures, widely available to all international public in major museums. Indeed, the sculpture of classical Greece, to take but one example, is an excellent illustration of this point and of the importance of public collecting. The centuries-long history of appreciation of Greek art began in antiquity, was renewed in Renaissance Italy, and subsequently spread through the rest of Europe and to the Americas. Its accession into the collections of public museums throughout the world marked the significance of Greek sculpture for mankind as a whole and its enduring value for the contemporary world. Moreover, the distinctly Greek aesthetic of these works appears all the more strongly as the result of their being seen and studied in direct proximity to products of other great civilizations.

Calls to repatriate objects that have belonged to museum collections for many years have become an important issue for museums. Although each case has to be judged individually, we should acknowledge that museums serve not just the citizens of one nation but the people of every nation. Museums are agents in the development of culture, whose mission is to foster knowledge by a continuous process of reinterpretation. Each object contributes to that process. To narrow the focus of museums whose collections are diverse and multifaceted would therefore be a disservice to all visitors.

Signed by the Directors of:

The Art Institute of Chicago

Bavarian State Museum, Munich (Alte Pinakothek, Neue Pinakothek)

State Museums, Berlin

Cleveland Museum of Art

J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Louvre Museum, Paris

The Metropolitan Museum of Art New York

The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence

Philadelphia Museum of Art

Prado Museum, Madrid

Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg

Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid

Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

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