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Can Bilsel
University of San Diego

Displacement and Context in Bernard Tschumi's New Acropolis Museum

One of the goals of the Hellenic Government in constructing the New Acropolis Museum in Athens was to help secure the return of the "Elgin Marbles" from London, and create a gallery for the reunification of the Parthenon sculptures. In his design of the Parthenon Gallery Bernard Tschumi experimented with a museum reconstruction that restores neither the original Parthenon, nor the fragmentary state of the ruins, but a new aesthetic context. This paper examines the conflict between the aesthetic context of the museum (one that depends on the visual reciprocity of the Parthenon Gallery with the Parthenon, some 300 meters away), and the political, historical and urban context of the museum's actual site. Despite the Hellenic Government's hopes that the new museum would help rally the people of Athens around a patriotic cause, the choice of Markriyani, a residential neighborhood on the southern foot of the Acropolis, triggered a series of controversies. Describing the shifting contexts of the Parthenon sculptures, and the transformations of the architecture of the museum, I show how the museum has become a series of "transparent" frames for crowds in motion. By construing and authenticating a context optically, and by neutralizing the social challenges posed by Athens' urban setting, the New Acropolis Museum exemplifies a new type: a "world heritage" museum that is both site-specific and deterritorialized.

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FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE
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