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Visual Culture of Bourgeois Salons in the Bay of Kotor during the 19th Century

This dissertation project focuses on the visual culture of bourgeois salons in the Bay of Kotor (now Montenegro) in the 19th century. These salons were established in private bourgeois homes and included artistic, literary, musical and diplomatic gatherings. Their design had the potential to reflect not only private/family roles and values of the host, but also the local culture, social climate and communal relations of the time. This thesis explores the visual decoration of particular salons and the performative aspects of their designs. The research includes wall paintings, portraits, religious and landscape paintings, photographs, furniture and decorative objects.

The proposed presentation will focus on aspects of the research that relate to the potential of salons to reflect and advocate certain political agendas in the Bay of Kotor. In spite of being predominantly Mediterranean territory through centuries (as Venetian *terra ferma*) the Bay of Kotor was, due to its proximity to Montenegrin and Ottoman zones, also a melting point of heterogeneous ethnical, religious and national identities. During the 19th century strong national, pan-slavic, and south-slavic sentiments spread throughout the Bay of Kotor and reinforced further cultural identification with other later Yugoslav provinces. These sentiments were provoked by the multiple occupations of the Bay of Kotor at the beginning of the 19th century (by French, Russian and Austrian governments), and manifested in the salon culture of the bourgeoisie.

This research aspires to explain the ways in which different social and political agendas were expressed through the art of these salons. It aims to answer questions related to salon activity in the Bay of Kotor, where salons operated as places of revealed privacy (representative private zone); places of ideal privacy (that reflected the individual/collective ideals of private/family life); centres for education and networking (cultural and ideological exchange); spaces of synthetic aesthetic experience (due to the presence of different mediums of art).

The methodology of this thesis is centred around art historical methods, based on the research of primary sources about interior design and local perception of salon culture (artefacts, photographs, letters, wills, manuals with instructions on salon decoration, etc.)

but is complemented by an interdisciplinary approach. The research aims to map essential salon objects and to explain why they were chosen and what their function was. This includes the analysis of individual salon objects and particular salons as a whole using formal analysis, iconology, comparative approaches, and semiotic analysis. In order to map the social context the research will borrow knowledge and methodologies from other disciplines such as gender studies, cultural and historical anthropology, reception history, philosophy, musicology, and the history literature.

Two of the main obstacles this research faces are the fragmentation of the visual sources (due to the ephemeral nature of salon performances, the frequent transformations of interior designs, etc.) and the presence of different mediums of art that require specialised knowledge in each artistic field. Furthermore, this interdisciplinary approach presents the challenge of requiring specialised knowledge in each respective field.