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## MUSEIKON – A NEW ROMANIAN MUSEUM OF RELIGIOUS ART



Born officially in 2014, the moment the documentation for obtaining the funding from the Norwegian Grants was submitted, project *'Museikon. A new museum of the icon revitalizes a restored historical monument building in Alba Iulia'* is the result of the joint effort of the Alba County Council, the Union Museum of Alba Iulia, the Orthodox Archdiocese of Alba Iulia and the University Museum of Bergen (Norway), in an attempt to capitalize, at today's standards, on one of the most important collections of icons and old books in Transylvania (Romania). The project involved the restoration of an old building, the digitizing of the whole collection (over 5600 objects) and making it available to the general public via a database accessible on the sites [www.museikon.ro](http://www.museikon.ro) and [www.europeana.eu](http://www.europeana.eu), the establishment of new warehouses and of a restoration laboratory for icons, the restoration of 52 icons and 15 old books, the temporary exhibition of 30 icons at the University Museum in Bergen, and the setting up of a permanent exhibition to best bring to light the historical, documentary and artistic value of the joint collection, including the oldest dated icons kept in Transylvania (*'The Mother of God with the Infant flanked by Prophets'* and *'St. Nicholas with scenes of life'*, 1539) and the oldest preserved printed text in Romanian, the only copy available in Romania (*'Slavonian-Romanian Tetraevangelion'*, Sibiu, 1551-1553).

The new cultural offer, which functions as a department of the Union Museum, was opened to the public on November 30 2017 and includes a permanent exhibition area, two temporary exhibition areas and a route of archaeological vestiges, whose interior and exterior path restores the bi-millennial history of the building and the town of Alba Iulia.

The intersection of the building's history with the theme of the new museum required the search for

museo-technical solutions that would allow both the preservation of the architectural elements, so important through their historical message, and the restoration of the significance of the exhibits by presenting them in the context for which they were created. The light, the translucency, the distortions determined by the reverse perspective, were the paths chosen by the two designers, Silvia and Ștefan Barutcieff, to emphasize not only the sacred universe bounded by the edges of the icons selected for exhibition, their importance in a history of redemption or of the culture on the Romanian territory, but also the traces left by the kisses and the flame of the candle burned generation after generation by those who prayed before them, the spirit that animated the donor and those who painted them and the responsibility for those who continue today to paint icons. Thus, retaking their primordial role, the Museikon icons avoid becoming mere pieces of art belonging in a museum, they refuse to remain locked in the gears designed to protect them, but visually and mentally communicate with the force of an animated presence, invite to experiences, disclose discrete information, depending on the level of education and the emotional need of the viewer, addressing said viewer through empathic, affective and ceremonial means with the same cognitive force with which these pieces of art act in the didactic, scientific and educational field.

As a participatory museum, Museikon is also a venue for contemporary iconographers, as well as a scientific debate arena through the conferences it hosts and through the two magazines it publishes: *Museikon. A Journal of Religious Art and Culture* (<http://www.museikon.ro/revista-museikon.html>) and *Museik-online* (<http://www.museikon.ro/museik-online.html>).







