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Visitors

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CONTENTS

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Editorial

Museums, it is said, are booming. Attendance is mounting and in some cases breaking all records. In France, 70 million visits a year are recorded, three times the rate in the 1950's. In Australia, in the twelve months spanning 1989 and 1990, 17 million visitors called on 187 museums; during the same period, the twenty-eight museums of New Zealand welcomed 3 million visitors. And in Canada it appears that more people attend museums than sports events. Visitors have thus become a major force on the museum scene and their needs and requirements play an increasingly preponderant role in the way museums function.

Learning what these needs are is no longer simply a matter of flair and intuition; the growing field of visitor studies has brought to bear upon this question a host of research tools, methods and attitudes aimed at making museums an educational environment where communication with the public is a top priority. The very term 'visitor studies' has evolved over the years from the gathering of basic statistical data to the development of fully fledged behavioural profiles.

To shed light on how this area of study came to be and its impact on contemporary museum life, *Museum International* called upon one of the leading figures in the field to co-ordinate this issue's thematic dossier, Dr C. G. Screven, Director of the International Laboratory for Visitor Studies at the University of Wisconsin (Milwaukee) in the United States. In his introduction and in the article that follows, Dr Screven reports on the state-of-the-art in this rapidly expanding discipline and provides detailed guidelines to assist museums in embarking upon research and evaluation projects. We are very grateful to him for sharing his vast experience with our readers.

A description of the Musée Grevin in Paris completes the dossier with a glimpse of some unusual visitor reactions. Finally, we have accompanied the articles with photographs showing a highly personal vision of visitors. They are the work of Gilma Suárez, a Colombian photographer who has had a long-standing fascination with museum look-alikes.

M.L.

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Visitor studies: an introduction

C. G. Screven

Over the years, considerable progress has been made by museums throughout the world in designing the scholarly, aesthetic and physical aspects of exhibition spaces. Less understood by museum managers and exhibition planners are the motivations, preconceptions, attitudes and learning capabilities of visitors (and potential visitors) – especially unguided visitors, the main audience, who view exhibits without the benefit of teachers, docents or others to explain or interpret what they see. Museums are comfortable places free of pressure where one can learn about art, science, history and culture at one's own pace. Unlike schools, they have no grades, no 'top-down' control and no reasons to pay attention or expand effort on a topic except for its own sake. While museums have more educational potential for independent, self-directed learning than is generally realized, limited knowledge about the needs of the public for understanding exhibit content has led to exhibits that mislead and confuse the majority of visitors.

However, evidence indicates that exhibitions for unguided casual visitors can be educationally effective. But this requires that planners have reliable knowledge about the interests, preconceptions, and limitations of the public and about how fun, challenge, mystery and social activities can be used to create the conditions for learning in museum settings. Unfortunately, museum directors and exhibit planners seldom possess such knowledge; on the contrary, they often approach decisions about exhibit content and format with many misconceptions about the public who will eventually view them. This is mainly because directors and planners have limited direct experience and background concerning the actual public or with the museum as a teaching – learning environment.

Motivating and communicating in meaningful ways to unguided visitors under the leisure-oriented conditions of museums requires a different perspective than would be appropriate in classrooms. Over the past twenty years, encouraging progress has been made in research with museum visitors, their use of exhibits, and their responses. It is now possible to identify some of the factors that affect the productive/non-productive use of exhibits by the public and some of the characteristics of the visitor – exhibit relationship that enhance (or inhibit) the quality of attention and what visitors learn.

With growing competition from other leisure-time activities and the need to remain financially viable, many museums now recognize that the voluntary, self-directed nature of museum visitors requires exhibits to be 'entertaining'. But, this poses a dilemma: museums are not amusement arcades, and some kind of educational or cultural enrichment is the primary purpose, not entertainment. So the question is how to survive in a competitive world and still remain fundamentally educational. Fortunately, much educational research in recent years strongly suggests that entertainment need not be at the expense of education if it is used as a means to an end and not as an end in itself. 'Fun' aspects of exhibits can be made to stimulate visitors to become involved with their content so that new information can be acquired. The challenge is combining these elements with those which communicate useful information and ideas.

Unfortunately, some museums that have attempted to do this have produced entertaining exhibitions that do not require focused attention on the exhibit's content. Unless great care is taken, dazzling media and electronics can defeat an exhibit's communication purpose by overpowering

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the message and reducing the concentrated attention essential to learning. The primary purpose of any exhibit design or strategy is to *communicate*, not to *impress*. If educational impact is the consequence of visitor involvement with the content of an exhibit, then entertainment must be designed to motivate this involvement.

There is still much to be learned about how exhibits can both stimulate interest and facilitate learning. But principles are emerging that can be applied to what unguided visitors are likely to do during a visit, how they will move through exhibit spaces, how much time they spend reading text, viewing a display, remaining in an exhibit hall, and even choosing what exhibit halls to visit. These principles are described in the articles that follow and form the context in which educational exhibits for the general public must function. Positive and negative impressions that visitors experience affect whether they come back, bring friends or encourage others to visit (or not to visit). Exhibit characteristics such as the density of new information, logical organization, crowded text, placement, entrances/exits, media, active/passive exhibit elements and museum services, all play a part in what these impressions will be.

Interest in such matters has led to a relatively new discipline which, in the United States and Canada, is being called 'visitor studies'. Most readers are familiar with audience research in terms of socio-economic surveys, which provide data on demographic attributes of visitors, visitation habits and attitudes. Although this data may be useful, there are other aspects that have been generally ignored by museum planners but which should have a more direct effect on decisions about specific exhibit elements. Examples would include how visitors react to, and are motivated by, exhibits, their reading level, entering knowledge, biases and misconceptions about exhibit topics, time constraints, perceptions and activities/events likely to be 'rewarding' to particular visitor groups. Such information helps exhibit planners make more realistic decisions about the content and style of labels, choice of artefacts, illustrations, colours, placements, the design of instructions and signposting, marketing, and content organization. These go far beyond the familiar visitor surveys and broaden the meaning of the term 'visitor studies'.

The most extensive and long-term systematic efforts to develop and apply visitor-studies research have been in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, the result of which has stimulated similar efforts in France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, Holland and India, etc. Systematic efforts in France have grown rapidly in recent years and there should soon be good examples of educational exhibits from other countries that are utilizing evaluation and visitor-centred approaches.

This special issue of *Museum International* describes this new perspective in some of the countries active in this field. Included here are reports from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France and Germany. Both time and space have limited the number of articles that would otherwise have been included from, for example, India, Spain, Sweden, Australia, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Russia and Greece. Many other countries are currently encouraging museum professionals to read the published literature in the field; attend international conferences and invite specialists to their countries. In short, there are exciting plans going on 'behind the scenes' that should, in the next few years, produce demonstrable results in new exhibit installations all over the world. ■

United States: a science in the making

C. G. Screven

The United States has led the way in defining and refining the body of knowledge that has come to be known as 'visitor studies'. Based on the postulate that museums have a dynamic social role and responsibilities to the general, non-specialist public, research methods and procedures have been devised to produce practical results which can be integrated into everyday museum operations. These are described in this article.

The term 'visitor studies' has undergone important changes over the past twenty-five years. Its original association was with visitor surveys conducted to help administrators justify expenditure, predict attendance or improve efforts to cater to larger audiences. Today, visitor studies encompass not only demographics and attendance data, but such activities and topics as:

The 'psychology' and 'personality' of visitors, for example, learning styles, attitudes, knowledge about exhibit topics, language skills and time frames.

Observable behaviour patterns of visitors in museum environments, such as where they go, whom they come with, time spent, label reading, fatigue, family and social behaviour, return visits, use of services and preferences for hands-on and interactive devices or other exhibit formats.

Poster by Dimitris Mytaras.

The ability of visitors to understand exhibit messages and the impact of exhibit information on visitor attitudes, behaviour, misconceptions, interest, etc.

How the design and presentation format of signposting, labels, objects, layout, media, noise, information density, etc., affect reading behaviour, comprehension, way-finding, attention, the ability to follow directions, time spent, attitudes and other reactions.

The development and improvement of measurement and evaluation methods for assessing visitor learning, short- and long-term impact of exhibit experiences, involvement, effort, social-behaviour patterns, attendance and post-visit interests.

Evaluation in visitor studies involves the systematic effort to obtain data about museum audiences that contribute to planning educational exhibits (visitor demographics, knowledge, pre-conceptions, interest, attitudes). Evaluation seeks information on whether an exhibition is successful or not, how early versions of exhibit ideas (mock-ups) appeal to visitors so that potential problems can be anticipated or improvements suggested. The use of evaluation in visitor studies is not the same as formal research. It simply provides concrete information to help improve decisions about exhibits such as the placing of labels or other practical matters. Today, evaluation in American museums mainly seeks cost-effective solutions to immediate questions that arise during the planning and design process.

Evaluation tools in use during different stages of exhibition development include:

Surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, observations providing basic informa-

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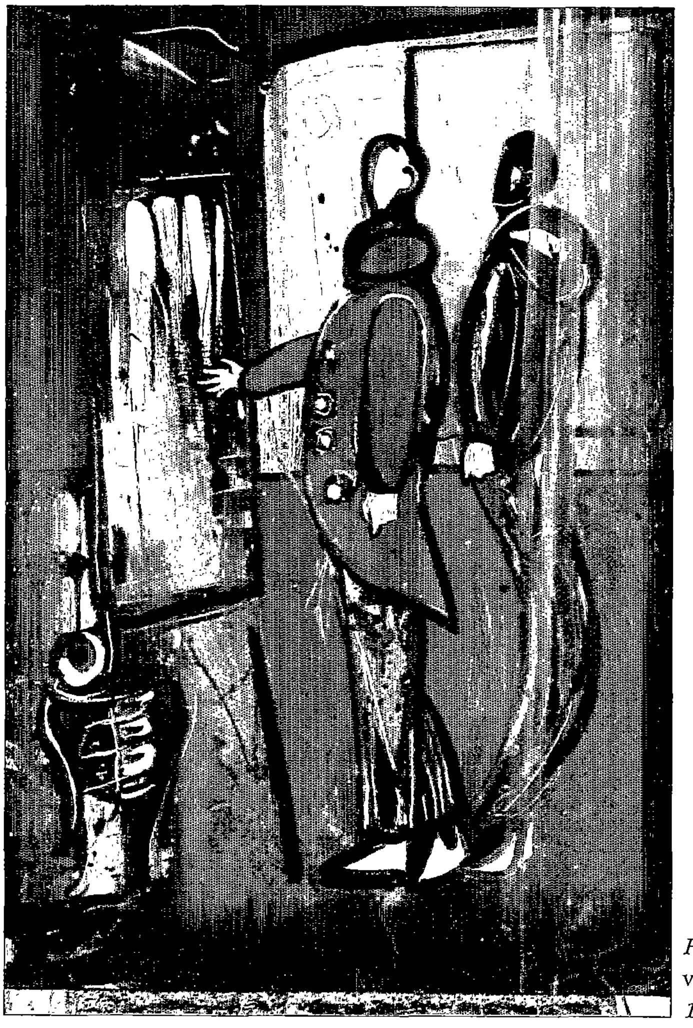


Hervé Half, La visite à l'atelier, *1992.*

tion about targeted audiences, tasks and goals used during the planning stage of exhibit development (*front-end* evaluation).

Observations and testing visitor reactions to quickly made mock-ups of exhibit ideas during early stages of their design (*formative* evaluation).

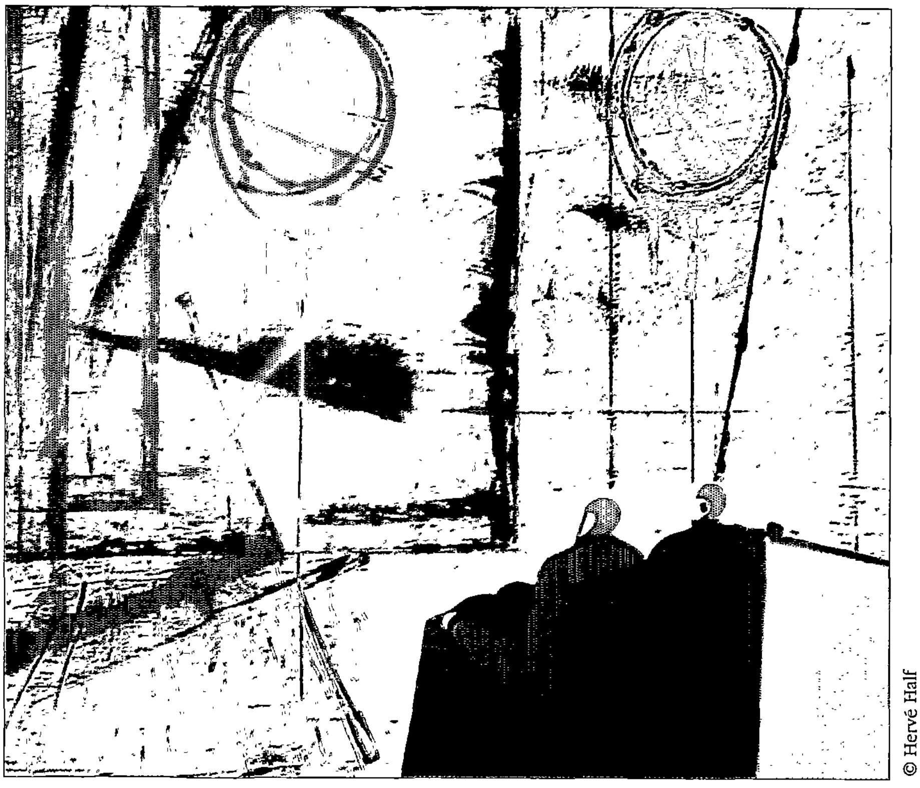
Observations, testing and evaluation of the overall impact of the exhibit after it is installed and occupied (*summative* evaluation).

Using formative evaluation to improve installed exhibits (*remedial* evaluation).

The different kinds of information provided here form a basis for exhibit developers to make more informed decisions about exhibit goals, to avoid problems and, in general, to increase the chances for success both educationally and motivationally.

A little history

In 1916, Benjamin Gillman, a museologist, wrote an article in *Scientific Monthly* on museum fatigue. He photographed visitors to test the idea that visitor fatigue resulted from the poor designs of exhibit cases. His photos showed the physical efforts visitors had to make (kneeling, twisting, stretching, etc.) to examine objects on display. He concluded that this encouraged superficial viewing and suggested that designers should take the physical and psychological aspects of visitors into account when designing display cases. He predicted that this would improve the quality of visitor attention. During this early period, there was lively criticism of museums in which they were characterized as 'places of gloom', 'cemeteries of bric-à-brac' which were gen-



Hervé Half, La visite au musée, *1992.*

erally insensitive to visitors' needs, boring and difficult to understand. Gilman's concerns and study anticipated the visitor-studies viewpoint of the 1980s.

In the 1920s, the first evidence of a visitor-oriented methodology was applied by Otto Neurath to an educational exhibition on social change in the Social and Economic Museum in Vienna. Each exhibit's 'message' was first analysed, graphics and other features were then developed and, finally, efforts to improve their quality were made through trial and error. Known as the Isotype method (International System of Typographic Picture Education), the process began with visitors' needs and communication goals and proceeded to designs that best served these goals – a 'bottom-up' model for exhibit development–anticipating what later would be regarded as a visitor-studies approach to exhibit planning and development.

Between 1928 and 1931, Edward S. Robinson and Arthur Melton, with help from the American Association of Museums and the Carnegie Foundation, conducted a series of classic empirical studies of visitors as they moved freely through galleries and at choice points, recording the number and location of stops, and their use of exits and other aspects of behaviour. Their data yielded reliable behaviour patterns, distribution of visitor attention within galleries and other information which revealed orderly behaviour patterns in response to architecture, fatigue, exhibit layout and interpretive labels.

In the 1940s, various studies gathered data on ways exhibit designs affected participatory behaviour, traffic flow, label usage, the role of story lines in enhancing visitor interest, the effects of live demonstrations, light and colour, and how the ratings of exhibits by museum experts compared with those by ordinary visitors. Although this shift towards the psychology of lay visitors developed slowly, several significant and sophisticated evaluations were conducted which paved the way to what was to come in the 1970s. Most notable among these were pioneering studies by Harris Shettel, which were the first to use mock-ups systematically to pre-test viewers' reactions and revise text and illustrations prior to final production. Shettel also employed an array of measurement strategies: unobtrusive observation, photography, closed-circuit TV, interviews, objective tests, as well as pre-testing experimental mock-ups.

By 1970, interest in experimentation and evaluation research in the United States had gathered momentum. An increasing body of knowledge on museums as learning environments took shape, and included pioneering work on visitor and family behaviour patterns, visitor movement, attitudes and learning, testing the attention capabilities of interactive response devices, criteria for evaluating exhibit effectiveness, applying naturalistic evaluation methods and comparing the effectiveness of visitor orientation strategies.

This emerging knowledge base supported the idea that information obtained from and about visitors should improve the ability to design exhibits and programmes that more effectively communicated to lay audiences. The burst of interest and activity in the 1970s was facilitated by a series of national forums initiated by the Smithsonian Institution on museums as educational environments that brought together and helped focus the field toward multi-disciplinary approaches to the educational aspects of museums.

In the 1980s, growing interest in informal education and visitor studies spread to more museums and zoological and botanic gardens. Private funding also increased. The Kellogg Foundation took an interest in and funded a national series of training programmes for museum directors, educators and curators aimed at increasing their awareness of the potential for visitor-centred exhibits. The American Association of Museums' publication *Museum News* ran a series of articles on visitor learning, evaluation and educational programming. In 1990, the AAM gave Standing Committee status to the Committee on Visitor Research and Evaluation and a new national organization, the Visitor Studies Association, was formed in 1991.

But, in spite of all this attention in the name of education, museum planners were still not employing visitor methods en masse. Most exhibit decisions remained 'top-down' and design features were determined mainly by artistic and subject-matter specialists with little or no information on how lay visitors might respond. By the beginning of the 1990s, exhibit planning and design were promoted in the name of education, but remained, in practice, more or less isolated from the public.

Museums and education

Traditionally, the educational role of museums has taken the form of school programmes, guided tours, outreach programmes, interpretive kits and publications aimed at helping different age-groups and kinds of visitors to make sense of exhibitions. Before the mid-1980s, education staff were seldom concerned with planning exhibitions that, later, they were expected to interpret to the public. In developing their own programmes and materials, their background and daily contact with real visitors have given them the advantage of knowing something about the general public and the educational process. These programmes have generally been more educationally productive than exhibitions for unguided visitors.

Like museums elsewhere, those in the United States began as places for the care and study of collections by scholars. Museum mission statements have long asserted that 'educating and informing the public at large' was a major mission. In practice, however, priorities usually have been on collections and scholarly research in which the focus is the exhibit's value for knowledgeable rather than lay audiences. Objects were said to 'speak for themselves' and it was the visitor's responsibility to derive meaning from them. Exhibits simply provided the opportunity for learning by those with the interests and background to benefit rather than the general public. Only recently have museums begun to give priority to exhibitions as an educational medium for general and non-traditional audiences. The great assets of museums – their expertise and collections – are being redirected to provide the needed support for the role of the exhibition as a teaching medium.

This new priority, however, has not resulted in a new influx of understandable exhibits. While exhibitions have become more entertaining, their educational substance, despite the best of intentions, is rarely getting through to most visitors. One reason for this is that their planners are designers, curators and copy-writers who have had no formal course-work in educational psychology, tests and measurement, or communication. Their view of the 'public' has been formed mostly by their experience with graduate students, peers and other knowledgeable people. This means that their well-intentioned efforts to design educationally effective exhibits are handicapped by their isolation from the public

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Painting by Mark Rothko, Rothko Chapel, Houston, Texas.

and their unrealistic views about the exhibit medium.

The scholarly focus of exhibits and 'top-down' decision-making processes have probably been the chief contributors to the poor track record of would-be educational exhibits. From a visitor-studies point of view, the problem is a systemic one that requires shifting responsibilities from curators/specialists and exhibit/graphics-designers to educators, instructional designers and evaluators. In other words, exhibit planning, design and installation would start by identifying the message, or messages, and work backwards to the objects, layout, presentation media and formats most likely to convey the message. Subject-matter specialists (curators) would have prime responsibility for identifying exhibit content and communications specialists would translate messages and shape presentation formats to attract visitors. Samples of target visitors would become a part of the 'editing' process at various planning stages through responses to questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. The critical stages for visitor involvement would be prior to and during stages of exhibit design, after installation to assess overall performance and after a period of public visits to correct or adjust interpretive signposting. An evaluator would be on the exhibition team with responsibility for maintaining linkage between exhibit messages (or purposes) and visitor reactions, attitudes and learning. The evaluator would (a) collect front-end data on visitor knowledge, attitudes and preconceptions and reactions to mock-ups of visuals, text and presentation formats; (b) co-ordinate summative and remedial evaluation; and (c) report results to the exhibition team with recommendations. Each team would be led by a 'team director', responsible for guiding the exhibit through planning and installation to post-installation adjustments, and maintaining communication between members. A 'summary protocol' covering all exhibit elements and evaluations would serve as the co-ordinating document to keep the team informed of progress.

There appears to be a growing consensus in the United States that preparing and co-ordinating such activities should not be the job of curators or other subject-matter specialists whose role should be confined to tasks for which they are uniquely qualified: that is, elaborating the messages to be delivered by an exhibit or programme. Planning for the delivery of these messages would be left to persons experienced in educational communication and evaluation processes.

Some working principles

A few of the working principles that have emerged from the accumulated experiences of the past thirty years would include the following.

Audience information should be available to planners before decisions are made concerning exhibit content and presentation. Such information would include data on the knowledge, attitudes, expectations and misconceptions that visitors have about prospective exhibit topics, objects and artists and on the kinds of questions they might pose, their special interests, personal experiences, beliefs and preferences. This could be obtained from the visitors themselves and from published literature. The most important educational goals of the exhibit – primary messages, what visitors are expected to do, feel and learn – need to be carefully identified beforehand using this information.

Just as much attention should be given to ways to motivate visitor involvement with the content of key exhibits. There must be a fun element in the experience or visitors will ignore the exhibit.

Rewarding features of exhibits must be designed to encourage visitors to give focused attention to exhibit content, visuals and text, which are keys to the learning that should take place (for example, asking visitors to make comparisons, discovering answers to leading questions, solving a problem) and to discourage random, unfocused attention. Lots of activity at popular exhibits does not necessarily mean that useful ideas are being conveyed.

Exhibitions that require visitors to follow a specific path should be avoided or minimized. Orientation panels can provide a 'menu' of approaches, sequences and structures that visitors can then adapt to their interests, personal learning styles and time-frames. These measures can reduce visitor fatigue and encourage more efficient use of the visit.

Visitors should be able to skip from one panel to another without becoming 'lost' or confused. Whenever possible, understanding a display should not depend on immediately understanding it or interacting with another display.

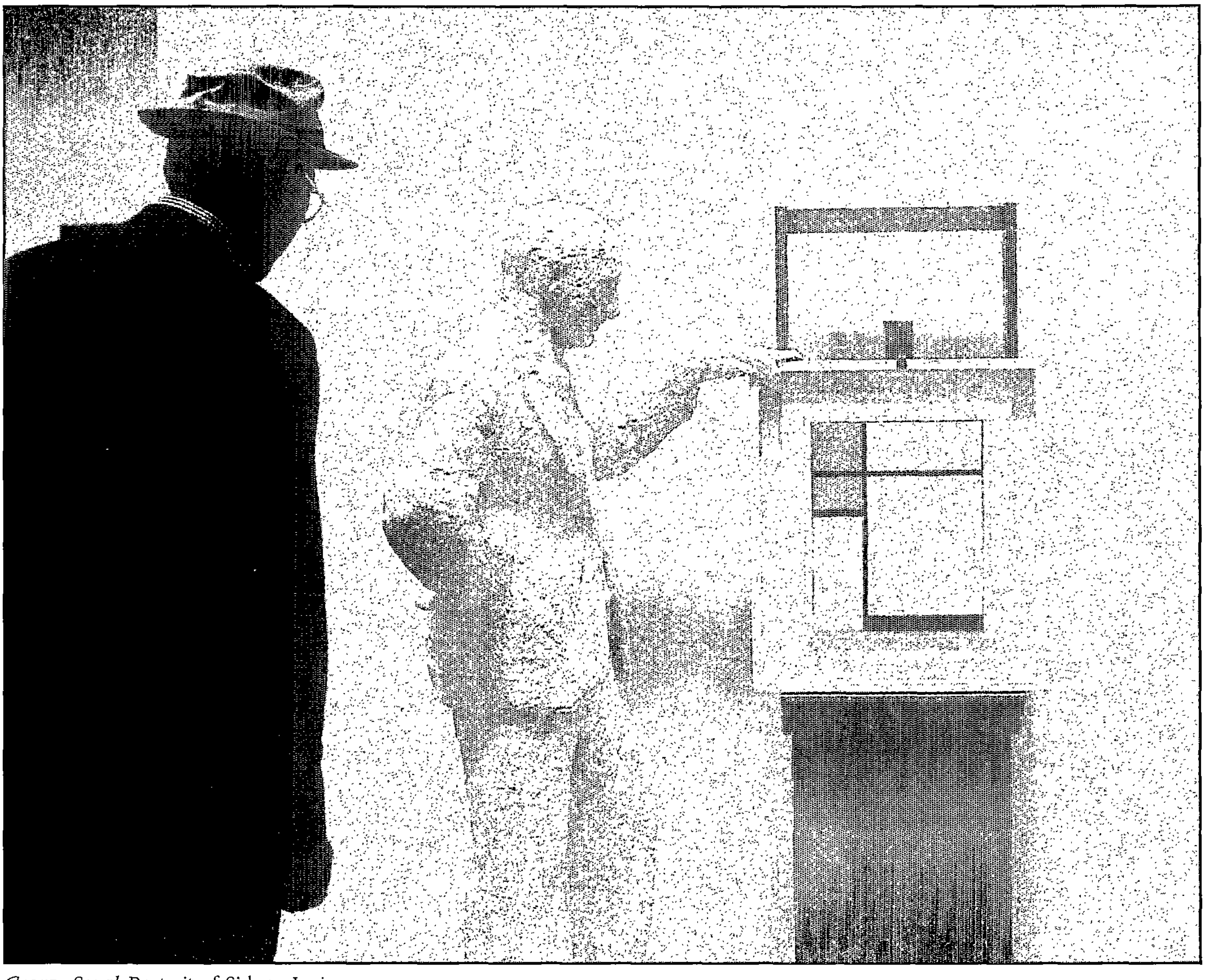
Most visitors notice objects, pictures, movement and manipulative/action elements more than they do text. Such elements can generate enough interest to encourage visitors to seek more information from text, graphics or other materials. However, they are likely to do so only if the text is *easily* and *quickly* found, as close to the object as possible, well illuminated, using large print and having high contrast. Avoid placing text too far away from the exhibit or on an opposite wall, numbering labels to be matched to exhibit objects, or see-through mountings on glass. Text should require minimal time for comprehension; however, it must not be too short. Visitors prefer more text when explanation is needed and they resent shortened text that does not answer a question. Length, positioning and other features should always be pre-tested with visitors.

Objects, illustrations, text, headings, questions and processes must use familiar, active language and visual formats whenever possible.

Time is crucial to most visitors. The less time required to decipher an exhibit's message the better. Pursuing the content of an otherwise interesting exhibit is influenced by the amount of time visitors believe will be needed to get an answer to a question or to find desired information.

Noise, crowds, sight-lines and unfamiliarity often distract attention from individual panels or confuse visitors. They can be corrected only with observations made after public occupancy. A portion of the exhibit budget (commonly 10 per cent) should be set aside to make adjustments to interpretive components after public occupancy (remedial evaluation). Signposting, headings, text and graphics are the components that most often require remedial adjustments.

The potential of museums as places for alternative educational enrichment will require some time before it can be fully achieved. However, it seems clear that museums today have reached a stage where their benefits as real educational institutions are beginning to be realized. There



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George Segal, Portrait of Sidney Janis with Mondrian Painting, *1967.*

are good reasons for optimism that there will be rapid changes in the next few years. Many museum planners are convinced that visitor studies can play a useful role in making exhibits more effective educationally. Large and small museums of all kinds are already sending key staff to pre-conference workshops on visitor studies methods despite tight budgets and are re-assessing priorities so they can, at least, try to incorporate some aspects of visitor studies and evaluation into staff operations, schedules and budgets. Some are holding back portions of exhibit budgets to make adjustments to exhibits after installation and are reporting dramatic improvements in increased attention and self-directed learning of children and adults as a result. Eventually, these successes should lead others to follow the same path. ■

Note

Space does not permit publication of a complete bibliography that reflects the recent explosion of articles and books devoted to visitor studies in the United States. The author has drawn up a basic reference list of books, bibliographies, journals, periodicals, articles and organizations concerned with visitor studies, which readers may obtain from *Museum International* upon request. – Ed.

France: rapid development and public support

Hana Gottesdiener, Lucien Mironer and Jean Davallon

Visitor studies in France, though of recent origin, are now a permanent feature on the cultural landscape. In this article, Hana Gottesdiener, editor of Publics et musées, *traces the development of research, Lucien Mironer, director of a social-survey unit in Paris, describes a permanent visitor-observation project and Jean Davallon, well-known museologist and professor at the Université Jean Monnet in Saint-Etienne, explains why evaluation has become indispensable.*

Research

In France, evaluations were rare before the 1980s but were to develop rapidly thereafter. The importance that national authorities placed on the dissemination of culture (in particular scientific and technical culture) coupled with the creation or renovation of museums and exhibition centres for both the sciences and the arts, encouraged the conducting of visitor surveys. Departments devoted to evaluation, studies and research were set up in certain major institutions, as in the case of the Georges Pompidou Centre and the Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie. Studies have occasionally been conducted or commissioned by the cultural reception and communication departments of numerous arts centres and museums such as the Orsay and Louvre museums, and research programmes have been launched at ministerial level with support provided by local initiatives.

In parallel with the publication of studies and research work, dissemination and training bodies have been set up. A preliminary series of three symposia on exhibition media and evaluation was organized in 1982 by Peuple et Culture and was followed by other symposia. A number of works were published on the initiative of Expo Média, including evaluation reports, theoretical examinations of the exhibition media and bibliographies. A periodical (*Publics et musées*) was founded in 1991, focusing on relations with the general public. Various French papers began to be submitted at symposia abroad and teaching curricula were set up (training courses and post-graduate specializations).

The development of visitor evaluation in France has benefited from earlier research work, particularly in the English-speaking countries. At first glance, there would seem to be a considerable diversity in the types of approach, content and methods involved. The evaluations fall into three categories: preliminary (during the programming phase), educational (during the exhibition phase) or synoptic (after the exhibition has been opened to the general public). The studies deal mainly with the various types of visitors, their motivations, methods of representation, visiting habits and initiation aspects. The data have been collected through polls among national sample groups, questionnaires for visitors, in-depth interviews and observation of behaviour.

Attendance, motivations and preferences

There has been no shortage of attendance studies dealing with the socio-demographic features of visitors as well as the visiting conditions or methods, motivations and preferences.

Among the most recent surveys are the ones conducted among visitors to the Cité des Sciences, the Palais de la Découverte, the Louvre, the Musée d'Orsay, the Saint-Etienne Museum, the Fountainebleau Museum, the National Museum of Modern Art, the Georges Pompidou Centre and the Château and Park of Versailles. In a number of cases the results produced have been compared with those of earlier surveys, which makes such research on attendance all the more valuable.

In addition to surveys conducted among visitors in museums themselves, there have also been national surveys which have focused on specific institutions or which relate to cultural habits in general. Since 1987, an opinion poll has been conducted each year, among the French population as a whole, with the aim of assessing the popularity and attractiveness of the Cité des Sciences. Since 1988, this survey has

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Musée de la Préhistoire, Tautavel, France.

been extended to other cultural institutions in Paris. This constitutes an interesting example of co-operation between different institutions, which makes possible the joint use of resources and results.

If we are to understand and provide for certain trends in public response to exhibitions, we must be able to assess visits to museums and exhibitions as part of a whole range of cultural habits and to identify the attitudes which the French public have with regard to various cultural activities. It is also important to work on the basis of certain representation concepts when devising the form an exhibition will take. Finding out who are and who are not museum visitors and attempting to define the target public makes it easier to fulfil the tasks that have been defined for a particular museum. It is not a matter of adapting the institution to any particular public at any cost but rather to have something to offer visitors which takes account of the real profile of the general public.

Perception and interpretation

When an exhibition is completed, educational evaluations can be conducted with the aim of checking the effectiveness of certain components. Use is therefore made of more or less simplified prototypes and models, often in the form of written documents.

With synoptic evaluations based on a qualitative approach mainly involving interview and observation procedures, research focuses on the different types of visit, a comparison between the methods of appropriation of museological presentations according to various types of media (for example, display cabinets, notice boards, hands-on objects, audio-visual documents, computer games and live attractions) or preferences for various museological accessories. These studies indicate, to varying degrees, modifications that could be usefully made.

Collecting data from visitors is not the only approach. In certain cases, where the expertise of evaluation staff is explicitly called for, analysis criteria are proposed either for describing the objects or for drawing up an inventory of their impact on visitors.

Some of the theoretical approaches and methodological contributions to be found in these reports are quite specific to studies in France. An illustration of this is the way linguistic problems are dealt with in producing and identifying description cards for scientific and technical exhibitions, and in the semio-linguistic analysis of display panels or the integration of didactic diagnosis throughout the conception phase of a museum. Also worth noting is the study of socio-professional categories and the attempts to go beyond the mere utilization of socio-demographic features for defining classes of visitors. Some evaluation experts have emphasized the need to go further than the analysis of particular elements of the exhibition in order to focus attention on its overall structure and the significance it may have as perceived by visitors. They have also explored ways in which the integration of elements within a structure, or their non-integration in certain cases, can convey a particular meaning.

It was also considered useful to compare the effect of the meaning the designer

© Di Rosa RL, Lintas, Paris

Poster by Hervé Di Rosa.

intended to convey with that actually perceived by the visitor. Such an analysis, coupled with the semiotic analysis of the exhibition and observation of visitors' habits reveals whether the museum's aims have or have not been achieved.

Although obviously building upon the research tradition in the English-speaking countries, there is reason to observe that French surveys have their own specific identity. In particular, didactic, semiotic and linguistic approaches are strongly developed and reflection on the exhibition media has highlighted the visitor as an agent of meaning.

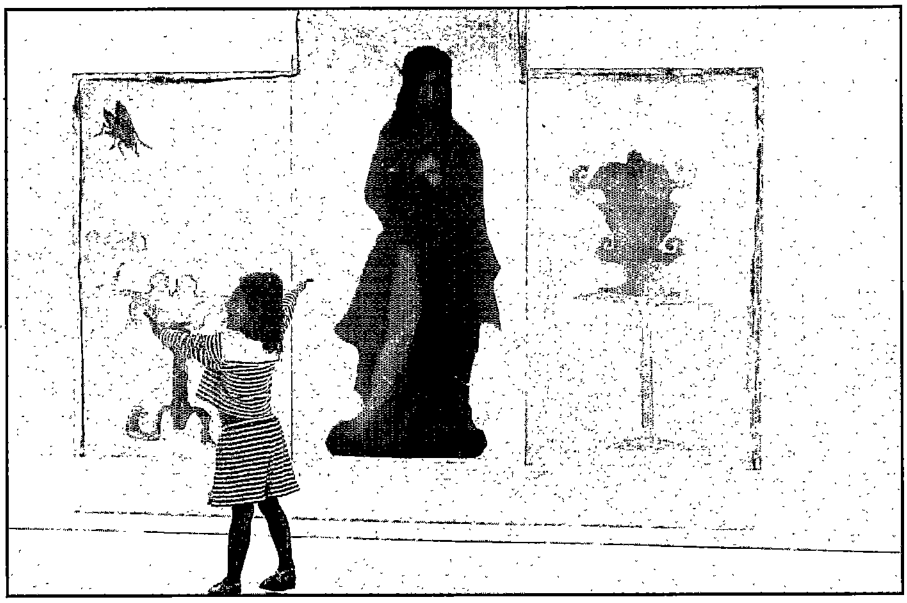
Observation

In 1991, the Direction des Musées de France undertook to set up a permanent visitor-survey unit in a number of museums (approximately forty institutions today). This initiative on the part of the Bureau d'Action Culturelle had been devised and tested the previous year in some ten institutions.

The Observatoire Permanent des Publics (OPP) comprises a permanent survey process through an opinion poll conducted among visitors to a museum on a given day with the aid of a do-it-yourself questionnaire. This survey involves all visitors, with the exception of school parties (whose motivations and practical arrangements make individual consultation inappropriate) and those who are unable to take part for linguistic reasons (in the near future, the questionnaire will be provided in English and, in certain museums, in other languages).

The questionnaire deals with six major themes: (a) antecedents of the visit (experience of the museum visited, information of all kinds in the visitor's possession); (b) circumstances and motivation of the visit; (c) appreciation of the various parts of the museum visited; (d) degree of satisfaction and expectations; (e) readiness to return and possible reasons for doing so; and (f) socio-demographic features and geographical origin of the visitor.

The survey is conducted on a permanent basis so as to reflect the changes and developments that affect what museums have to offer, as well as their attendance from year to year or from season to season. Data collected at a given time may be out of date a few months later as temporary exhibitions occur in succession and often



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Musée de la Préhistoire, Tautavel, France.

bear little resemblance to each other. The museums themselves adapt in order to meet more adequately public expectations, fulfil new duties and attract new visitors. Museums undergo constant change, and reality as recorded by surveys is constantly subject to modification. By comparing at regular intervals the data recorded by OPP, it is possible to monitor these developments and also to assess, at any time, the effectiveness of action taken by those in charge of cultural and communication policies.

Thanks to OPP, the administrators of the museums concerned have permanent access to a 'scientific' method of identifying their visitors more clearly and of establishing a dialogue with them. Short-term surveys on specific problems of management, organization, communication and display, etc., may be conducted among visitors or a particular category of them in parallel with the permanent survey and according to the same method.

It should also be noted that the OPP is considerably less costly than periodic surveys involving interviews. In addition to keeping down costs, it has the advantage of providing a national overview of the problem (though the questionnaire is adapted to each specific institution) and the centralized utilization of the answers to the questionnaire.

A methodology adapted to the context

In any survey, the reliability of the results depends on the validity of the methods used, the rigour with which they are applied, the relevance of the questions and the sincerity of the answers. A survey using a 'do-it-yourself' questionnaire is undoubtedly more likely than any other to be exposed to certain influences which can affect the answers in so far as it gives far greater latitude to the people questioned. If, however, the visitor's co-operation is secured, the questions are well understood and the practical arrangements are up to scratch, there is no valid reason for questioning the value of the information collected in this manner. For all that, the influences inherent in the OPP method (which may themselves be evaluated) are a constant, which means that changes in the results over time and comparisons between different institutions can be accurately monitored.

As in any survey, OPP strikes a compromise between ideal statistical rigour and the more or less favourable reality of local circumstances; by encouraging greater awareness among administrators, by training reception staff and involving and motivating the visitors being questioned, every effort is made to create the most positive conditions for the successful outcome of the approach adopted.

The visitors in the survey are selected on a random basis according to the number on their admission ticket. Do these visitors actually respond? Around 80 per cent of them do. It is an accepted fact that the participation rate of people questioned is usually much lower in a conventional survey with a face-to-face interview. This high degree of participation is by no means automatic; it is obtained when many favourable conditions are met, first and foremost, by the form and content of the questionnaire which, in this instance, plays a fundamental role.

The questionnaire normally includes no more than four pages. Special care is taken to make it attractive (structure, typography, colour, clarity, etc.). Its content, however, is just as important from the visitors' point of view. The questions are not only of interest to the museum administrators but also enable visitors to assess their own experience through the evaluation process; they can dwell on what their tastes, habits and expectations actually are and what they have seen and appreciated during their visit, and what may have been a source of satisfaction or disappointment.

Visitors are therefore encouraged to assess the situation, become more aware of what is at stake and answer questions which they had never asked themselves and, in the process, discover a number of things about themselves. In this way, the questionnaire emphasizes and reveals what the visit means to them, by showing them what they have come to do in the museum and what they have learnt on this occasion.

When visitors are asked to complete the questionnaire, at the entrance, they are promised that they will be presented with a small gift as a souvenir when they return the completed questionnaire on leaving the museum. This small gift, whose value is mainly symbolic (postcards, a poster, a badge, a brochure on the various collections, etc.) is psychologically indispensable. It is not merely a gesture of thanks but adds a convivial note to the way visitors were welcomed to the museum and the pleasure they derived from the visit. In every way the visitors' co-operation with the Observatoire Permanent des Publics is far from being an inconvenience but rather a significant part of the experience of visiting the museum.

Evaluation

Gone are the days when it was thought out of place to mention the financial, administrative or economic aspects of museum activities, exhibitions and the evaluation of the heritage as a whole. Today, the opposite seems to be the case. Museums and exhibitions appear to be following in the footsteps of the cultural industries (publishing, the cinema, the record industry, etc.) in that far greater importance is being given to those for whom these activities are organized, namely, the general public. In this light, evaluation is seen as a valuable tool for optimizing the relationship with the public, and in France, it is no longer perceived as a marginal activity of secondary importance.

The development of activities related to exhibitions, public information, publications and lectures illustrates the museum's new circumstances and how it is required to communicate with the general public. This focus on communication has had a twofold impact. First, even in the most traditional and long-established museums, there has been a growth in 'mediation' and managerial functions. A sign of this is the growing importance of programming activities in the form of 'events'. Secondly, the field of museum activity has tended to cover a vast area comprising an increasingly varied range of museums (of art, history, archaeology, ethnology, the natural and physical sciences, etc.) and which, furthermore, has extended to other cultural institutions such as archaeological or natural sites, science centres, historical monuments and even exhibitions. As a result, a new concept has emerged of the heritage, namely, that which is worth preserving and presenting to the public.

All these cultural institutions – the diversity of which has earned them the title of 'museum institutions' and not merely 'museums' – are now subject to the imperatives of an 'economic' approach. Admittedly, there is a wide consensus according to which culture belongs more to a symbolic rather than a purely economic domain. However, the cost of preserving the heritage and running these institutions, the investment allocated to the creation or renovation of museums, the increase in the number of institutions and the development of the professions which now have a part to play in them, are all factors which force us to think in terms of funding, management, resources and, inevitably, supply and demand.

Focused as they are today on responding to public needs and preoccupied with economic considerations, museum institutions are seeking and finding the means, through evaluation, of identifying their public more closely and responding more effectively to economic imperatives.

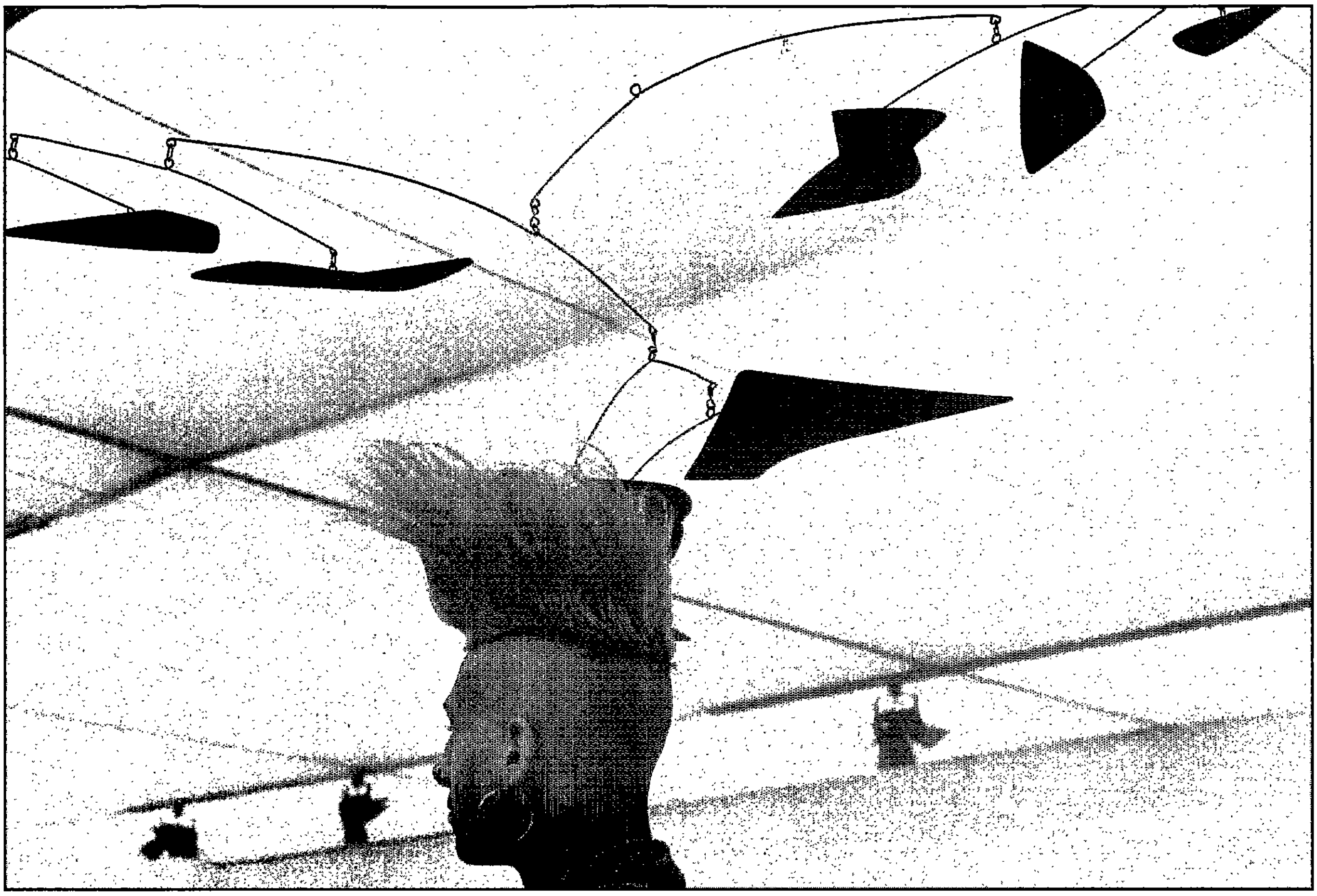
New approaches

In order to respond to the needs of the museum institutions, evaluation has provided them with a number of techniques but it now has to develop new tools. Evaluation in its most traditional forms furnishes information on visitors and the general public: for example, surveys on visitor attendance, their age and occupational characteristics, their expectations, motivations and behaviour. Obviously, all information of this kind is vital as a clearer identification of the public facilitates communication with visitors and ensures the management of these institutions according to general economic criteria.

What today is a carefully mastered traditional approach has been expanded in recent years by research and surveys on the way an exhibition or a museum actually operates. The focus has therefore shifted away from the visitor towards what the museum has to offer the visitor. It is no longer a matter of knowing whom the museum is for but of understanding how it meets this requirement. One of the striking examples of this shift has been the development of semiotic or mediatic approaches according to which the museum is, first and foremost, a context in which the public can have access to the objects and knowledge on display and in which meaning is produced.

The advantage of this shift is quite easy to appreciate: these approaches provide a better grasp of possible effects among visitors. For example, they involve understanding the impact of the spatial configuration of an exhibition, the drafting and composition of texts and the way in which a succession of various display units forms a thread that guides visitors in their discovery of the objects and their assimilation of information. Understanding this can help subsequently towards a sounder grasp of communication strategies. In other words, evaluation may be used to devise the visit scenarios which optimize the relationship between the visitor and the objects on display and knowledge of them.

There can be no doubt that preparing communication strategies in this way has a particularly determining effect for museums and exhibitions whose task is to reveal a sum of information or a scientific content to visitors. It is therefore hardly surprising that these museums, rather than art galleries, have contributed most to the development of such methods. It should be pointed out that making use of studies and research work for devising communication strategies requires that the results be available before the organization of the exhibitions even begins.



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Alexander Calder, Mobile.

However, the new communication and economic imperatives of museum institutions and, more generally, those that belong to the national heritage, have meant that the field of evaluation has had to be extended even further. This has led to a second shift in direction which we are witnessing today and which, after having moved from the visitor to the medium (exhibition or presentation), moves from the medium to the institution that produces, manages and operates it.

As regards the evaluation of the heritage, this second shift of emphasis has led to an increase in surveys aimed at providing a direct response to economic imperatives (e.g. feasibility and marketing studies). Nevertheless, it should be remembered that these surveys deal only with one aspect of the heritage or museum institution. It would hardly be plausible to tackle the economic dimension of museums and exhibitions without due regard for their cultural dimension. Operating needs cannot be dissociated from the aims and characteristics of the institution.

Consequently, new forms of studies and research work are now developing, focused on the conception and programming of museum institutions and museum products. The aim is a clearer understanding of how a coherent pattern can be built which will include the various constituent parts of the institution or object produced – a pattern that will serve objectives and contribute substantially to the success of the venture. What is required is a scheme that takes into account both symbolic specificity and economic imperatives. For a museum, this means developing a consistent relationship between the objectives and the functioning of the institution and the products or activities it provides. For the evaluation of the heritage, this implies that coherence between the monument itself, the concept of presentation and the way it is exploited should be a determining factor. It is clear that as conception and programming aids, these new studies and research work can have practical operating implications. ■

Note

Space does not permit publication of the detailed bibliography provided by the authors, which may be obtained from *Museum International* upon request. – Ed.

Canada: no going back

Ridgeley Williams and Rosalyn Rubenstein

Audience research is increasingly important in the development of museum policies and practices in Canada. The evolution of visitor studies and their future prospects are described by Ridgeley Williams of the Canadian Museum of Nature (Ottawa), Vice-President of the Visitor Studies Association and board member of the International Laboratory for Visitor Studies and Rosalyn Rubenstein, President of Rosalyn Rubenstein & Associates, Inc., museologists in Ottawa, and a recognized audience-research specialist.

Museums have committed themselves to change. In the past twenty-five years they have transformed themselves from mausoleums of dead objects, with static taxonomic displays based on secure, élitist academic traditions, into more democratic 'people places' incorporating interactive displays about ideas and concepts, designed according to principles of modern educational and communication theory. While the rate and degree of change has varied between institutions, clearly there is no going back. Instead, museums are faced with decisions of setting new limits. The question is complex for it is no longer a simple matter of improving the educational effectiveness of displays but of assessing the overall success and failure of museums as places of entertainment and leisure. In Canada, this is compounded by a new economic reality, because, in response to a decrease in the percentage of operating revenues from government, financial security is more and more dependent on success in the commercial marketplace.

The use of visitor studies and evaluation in the design of exhibitions has not followed a smooth evolutionary path; rather it has been characterized by forward progress followed by periods of inactivity and lost momentum. Advances made by one generation have been ignored by later museum workers, and the methods, models and systems of exhibit evaluation have had to be reinvented. While most museums would claim a strong commitment both to public education and to visitors, exhibit evaluation has existed through the insight and perseverance of individuals rather than institutional acceptance. Few museums have employed dedicated exhibit evaluators, and those few practitioners have enjoyed more precarious existences than curatorial or designer colleagues.

However, several Canadian contributions to the field of visitor studies have become milestones in the history of audience research. For instance, the first systematic visitor surveys undertaken in museums were by P. S. Abbey and D. F. Cameron from 1959 to 1961. The high quality of survey techniques and data analysis employed in this series of studies on the demographics and attitudes of visitors to the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, set visitor-survey standards rarely matched in the following thirty years.

New museums blossomed for Canada's Centennial in 1967. Museum growth continued through the 1970s with excellent new galleries, such as those at the Ontario Science Centre, Toronto, and the British Columbia Provincial Museum, Victoria (now known as the Royal British Columbia Museum), setting world standards for exhibit design. Exhibits built in the mid-1970s reflect the start of profound changes in exhibition design to meet better the needs of the visitor. Professional and creative designers were playing a more important role in the design of exhibitions and their contributions reflect the general trends in the design world towards customer values. Certainly, standards in graphic design, audio-visual techniques, signposting and space utilization established in the design of world fairs and shopping malls were profoundly influential.

Change principally resulted from an internal recognition by museums of the requirement to communicate effectively with the public. The impetus came from a need to demonstrate accountability for the expenditure of public funds (particularly as the costs of exhibit production escalated dramatically), and because of a genuine belief in the educational value of museums, though the question of what constituted an effective museum display continued to be

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contentious. Cameron debated the question from a visitor's perspective in a series of incisive articles in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In a controversial paper he recognized that, while educated middle-class visitors might possess the necessary knowledge to understand the cryptic exhibit messages of curators and designers, the majority of visitors were not able to decode museum exhibits and thus received a distorted message.

A methodology was required to define visitors' needs and to test the effectiveness of design ideas before and during the exhibit-production process. Methods based on measuring performance against defined behaviour objectives were being successfully employed in other fields, notably education. Several museums embraced, and sometimes reinvented, the exhibit-evaluation techniques based on these methods which were described by H. Shettel and C.G. Screven in the United States and by later workers at the Natural History Museum in London. Very important contributions to the development of a planning process and methodology for designing exhibits were published by the Royal Ontario Museum which endorsed audience survey techniques as necessary to the planning and design of both exhibition policies and displays.

Front-end analysis

Since then, audience research and evaluation have been considered by many to be essential to the design of museum exhibitions and education and interpretation programmes. Indeed, audience research has been conceived as an integral part of the overall institutional planning process. The past decade has seen a shift away from summative evaluations of existing exhibits to an emphasis on front-end analysis and formative evaluation during the early stages of exhibit development. Also, while a better understanding has emerged of how cognitive values are transmitted by individual displays, the importance of affective experiences of the entire exhibition and museum visit has been realized. Actual case-studies of exhibit evaluations by Canadian institutions exist mostly as unpublished reports and degree dissertations from museums and universities in Ottawa, Montreal, Victoria and Toronto.

Some of the implications and studies arising out of these evaluations are noteworthy in the debate over the communication or educational value of exhibits. Studies at

Canadian Museum of Nature

Viola McMillan Mineral Gallery, Gold Mine, Canadian Museum of Nature.

Canadian Museum of Nature

Viola McMillan Mineral Gallery, Gold Mine, Canadian Museum of Nature.

the Royal British Columbia Museum, for example, examined the attracting and attention-holding power of different kinds of displays and their relative effectiveness in producing knowledge gain and attitude change. It was found that while large natural-history dioramas were enjoyed by visitors – they captured and held attention – there was little knowledge gain and no significant change in attitude as a result of the experience. Furthermore, less attractive exhibits were equally effective in transmitting knowledge. This paradoxical situation suggested that museums would have to examine their motives for exhibits. Are they designed to increase attendance through casual visitor satisfaction or are they produced to realize valuable educational objectives?

At the Nova Scotia Museum in Halifax, similar questions were posed which focused on the impact of exhibits on elementary-school children. To date, Canadian studies have concentrated on adults, despite the fact that children are a majority audience at many institutions. However, children were the appropriate focus of the front-end research for the planning of the Children's Museum at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Hull.

The Canadian Museum of Nature (formerly the National Museum of Natural Sciences) in Ottawa, used a comprehensive front-end study with a range of audience groups, including casual visitors, teachers, specialists and donors, to plan a new mineral gallery. Visitor surveys showed that different audiences had different expectations of the subject-matter and expected different display techniques. Accordingly, the gallery was designed to accommodate distinct learning or visitor styles. It included: (a) an experiential section, which used environmental reconstructions and low density/complexity information to emphasize affective values; (b) an exploratory area which, adopting experimentation and psycho-motor learning, encouraged visitors to explore cause and effects using interactive displays and demonstrations; and (c) an analytical section designed for cognitive learning, where the subject can be explored in depth.

Innovative approaches

Evaluation methods, such as behavioural observations and sample group interviews, are derived from social-science research but innovations have increased their effectiveness within the museum environment. For example, the focus group method was modified for museum application and it has proved particularly effective in front-end evaluations. Other projects notable for their experimentation with methods include the use of open-ended questions with Bronze Age artefacts to plan a new Royal Ontario Museum exhibition, and a

Viola McMillan Mineral Gallery, Gold Mine, Canadian Museum of Nature.

front-end evaluation of a natural history gallery for the Manitoba Museum of Man and Nature, Winnipeg, that took evaluators on to the streets in towns across the province for community input.

Major research projects at the Art Gallery of Ontario employed empirical controls to correlate changes in visitor behaviour with changes in display techniques. In an elegant study of a contemporary art exhibition, visitor behaviour was first recorded when only traditional labels accompanied the objects. Later, behaviour was recorded after a variety of interactive display media (audio tapes, computers, flip labels) were added to the installation of exactly the same art works. Average viewing time increased by over 300 per cent consistently across all audience categories and a variety of other positive effects was documented. This laboratory-style study provides compelling reasons for the use of audience-research techniques to improve exhibitions. The importance of such research in challenging institutional structures, goals, and management systems cannot be overestimated.

Government policies relating to increased accessibility of museums to the public and better accountability for public spending have generated numerous audience surveys. At an institutional level, they have been routinely conducted by museums, parks and zoos throughout the country on a regular basis, but are mostly unpublished. Notable surveys include those by the Musée de la Civilisation in Quebec, museum marketing studies by the University of Montreal, regular surveys by various national museums (Canadian Museum of Nature, National Gallery of Canada, National Museum of Science and Technology and the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa and Hull) and, in Toronto, by the Audience Research Consortium.

In the most important national study of museum audiences, published in 1974, multistage sampling was used to select respondents representing 93 per cent of the population 14 years of age or older. Personal interviews with more than 7,000 individuals on their leisure activities were supplemented with questionnaires on attitudes, patterns of museum visiting, factors affecting attendance decisions, desirable improvements, and a wealth of other related facts. The survey noted that museum visitors (about half the population of the country visits museums each year) were well disposed towards museums and predicted a steady increase in attendance as the population grew older and became better educated. It suggested that museums could augment attendance by increasing repeat visits rather than by persuading non-goers to become first-time visitors, and proposed that museums achieve this by providing for the existing audience demands for interactive, participatory educational displays rather than by changing museums into entertainment centres.

Despite the proliferation of new museums in the 1970s and 1980s, it has been shown that expected attendance gains have not been realized. The need for a new national survey of similar scope to the 1974 report appears necessary as a basis for future government policies on museums. Expectations for such a survey are high given the 1991 completion by the Federal Government of feasibility studies for both an on-site survey of museum-goers and a national household survey on attitudes about museums.

An optimistic future

The Visitor Studies Association annual meeting was held in Ottawa in August 1991. Of the 215 participants in the week-long series of lectures and professional development workshops 60 per cent were from Canadian museums, universities, private consulting companies, aquariums, parks and other interpretive centres, representing more than sixty different organizations from all parts of the country. Just a few months earlier, the Canadian Museums Association's Annual Conference included evaluation as a major theme, while in Montreal, evaluation was an important theme of the symposium entitled *Faire voir, Faire savoir – La muséologie scientifique au present,* organized by CREST, Université du Québec in Montreal and the Musée de la Civilisation.

The level and quality of participation at such conferences indicate the considerable degree of acceptance of the importance of visitor information and feedback in the design of effective exhibitions and interpretive programmes. This suggests an optimistic future for visitor studies in Canada and not just another high point in the cyclical ebb and flow that seems to have characterized past acceptance of exhibit evaluation. However, it would be incorrect to imply that exhibit evaluation is standard practice, for it is true that few of the more than 1,200 museums in Canada employ objective exhibit-evaluation techniques. It is also true that, despite a body of knowledge about museum visitors and non-visitors in Canada and emerging principles of exhibit effectiveness, museums have failed to change what research continually reveals as the profile of the adult Canadian visitor – 20–44 years old, professional with post-secondary education and high income.

Traditional arguments against evaluation (that it is unable to record the essential but undefinable museum experience and that it is too costly given the competitive demands on fewer resources) fail in the absence of objective alternatives. Another problem of the past has been related to professionalism and the need to articulate a museological framework for audience research distinct from educational research, market research or polling. The acceptance of audience research by the museum community as an integral component of university training in museology (notably in Toronto, Montreal and Victoria), and the emergence of dedicated research associations (Visitor Studies Association and the International Laboratory for Visitor Studies) mean that the framework is in place and need not be reinvented by some future generation of museums.

Exhibit evaluation and audience research have partly provoked and partly responded to the past change in the public face of museums, but it is crucial that they be part of the future. The future positioning of any museum in the entertainment/academic-education matrix cannot rely on the ups and downs of institutional consensus between scholars, educators, designers or marketing staff, however well-meaning their opinions of the public, but must be based on objective data about visitors and visitor interaction. Evaluation is the only objective way of keeping in touch with museum audiences. The survival of the institutional structure of museums as we have come to know it may be at stake. ■

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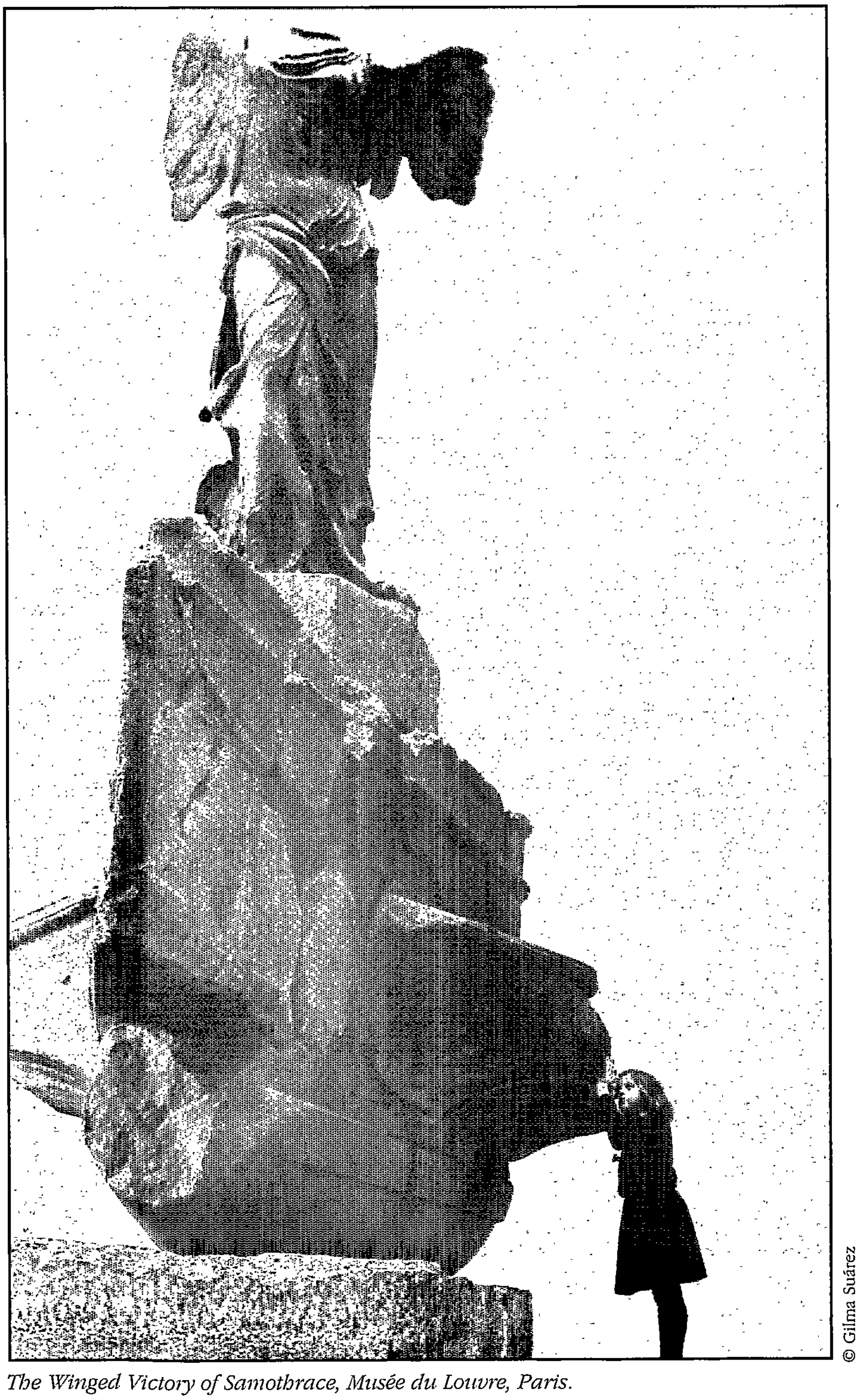

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The Winged Victory of Samothrace, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

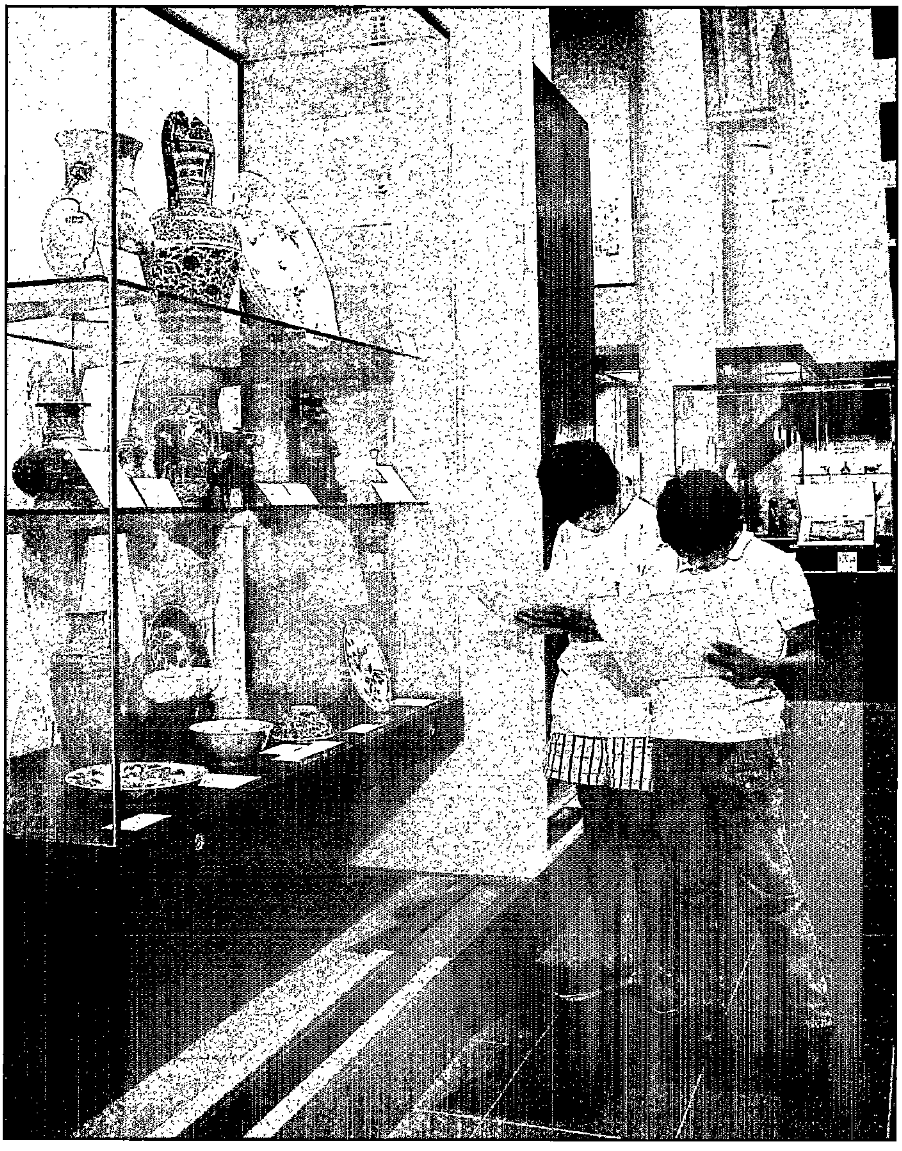
United Kingdom: focusing on the market

Paulette McManus and Roger Miles

After a long and somewhat chequered history, visitor research seems to have come of age in British museums. The authors look briefly at progress made before examining four case-studies of recent and current work. Paulette McManus is a consultant specializing in the relationship between museums and their public. Roger Miles is head of the Department of Public Services at the Natural History Museum in London and has been one of the pioneers in making museum exhibitions more responsive to the public.

Very little past research in the United Kingdom has been published, largely because it was intended only for internal circulation in institutions or for local consumption. This fact, coupled with the dubious quality of some surveys, too many of which have been undertaken by amateurs, no doubt with enthusiasm but without proper survey design and sampling methods, has resulted in a degree of scepticism of the findings. Curators have tended to rely on the advice and requirements of their specialist colleagues, rather than take heed of what they perceived as unreliable records of their visitors' expectations and needs.

Apart from a few notable papers, it was only in the 1980s, thanks to pioneering work by the Natural History Museum in London in particular, and the publication of methods and findings[1] that visitor studies began to



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A visitor study at the T. T. Tsui Gallery showed that labelling should be in both Chinese and English and that visitors would like to be able to touch the objects.

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gain credence and wider attention, both within and outside the museum profession. It was a time when people in various disciplines – educationists, sociologists, psychologists and museology students – began to show an interest in examining communication in the museum environment. The increasing availability of support from research funding bodies enabled high-quality studies to be completed, which led to an increasing acceptance of, and a greater demand for, such work.

In the present climate the effects of serious financial constraints, brought about by government funding policies, the economic recession in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and competition between the increasing number of museums, science centres and heritage sites, have brought a new focus to visitor-study efforts in the United Kingdom. Work is now more likely to be market-led and more aware of the need for accountability in the use of public funds.

A new kind of museum professional is emerging. Many museums have fully staffed marketing departments, and even museums without specially trained staff are likely to have marketing policies. The concerns of marketing people are in many ways similar to those of museum curators and educationists: none can afford to be boring or irrelevant, or to misjudge the visitors' aims and expectations. A more market-led approach to exhibition planning and design has resulted in an increasing use of preliminary assessments of visitors' opinions on contents and topics for new exhibitions.

The most recent code of conduct published by our Museums Association states that museum professionals should be prepared as a general management principle to participate in the evaluation of their work and take the results into account in their future plans. The guidelines encourage the analysis of feedback from visitors on the quality of, and the popular response to, exhibition work and other services.

Many museums must now demonstrate that public money is being wisely spent on exhibitions – a new cost-effective dimension to visitor-study work. The large national museums, which are funded by the government through the Office of Arts and Libraries, have mandatory performance indicators on which they must report. Gathering the required information involves considerable time, effort and cost, and while larger museums may have the resources to formalize the work, smaller museums will be hard-pressed if they are required to make similar reports in future. There is a danger, too, that more exploratory investigations over the whole range of national museum activities (not just those related to quantitative performance measures) will no longer be undertaken: there will be little time, money or attention available for such work.

Four case-studies follow, outlining work that has been completed recently or is still under way. The differing institutional and funding arrangements behind each study should be noted.[2]

The Tsui Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum

The Victoria and Albert Museum is a large national museum devoted to the decorative arts, funded partly from public funds and partly from corporate sponsorship. For many years the marketing department has commissioned work from a large public-opinion survey company.

In 1988, Mr T. T. Tsui gave the museum over $2 million to re-furbish and re-design its forty-year-old Chinese Gallery. The Far

© Derek Adams, Natural History Museum, London

These 'Stonehenge' monoliths carry the tale of life on land, from ice cap to tropical forest. Projected onto these stones, unique films tell how the rich diversity of life is adapted to extremes of temperature and available water.

Eastern Collections staff at the museum managed the project and the new gallery was opened in 1991. The arrangement of the material has been heavily influenced by preliminary studies undertaken by the public-opinion survey company and on a smaller scale by the Far Eastern Collections Department itself. Mr Tsui's generous donation meant that the costs of preliminary visitor surveys were included in the overall project budget from the outset.

The aims of the studies were to explore a range of new presentational ideas using information from the museum audience to help decide the layout of the new gallery and to provide greater insight into the preparation of exhibitions.

Two studies were undertaken, with the larger and more expensive survey conducted by the public-opinion survey company. It was designed to define the needs and preferences of the potential audience with regard to the presentation and explanation of the collections. The survey targeted groups which the museum hoped to attract, more strongly than in the past, to an exhibition on Chinese Art. These groups included senior-school students and teachers of art, design, religious studies and history, parents of 7-12-year-old children and adults and teachers from the Chinese community.

The key ingredients for a successful gallery which this potential audience identified were: (a) a wide variety of objects presented within themes; (b) large and legible labelling; (c) the provision of photographs and illustrations to provide a context for the objects displayed; (d) in-depth information presented on video; (e) the use of a minimum number of objects to display the range and depth of any particular category of items; (f) explanatory diagrams and information, which were regarded by the respondents as just as important as the accompanying objects; and (g) the labelling of exhibits in Chinese.

The second and smaller study was conducted by the staff of the Far Eastern Collections Department. The target audience consisted of the actual visitors to the old Chinese Gallery. The department staff sought advice from the Natural History Museum on the design of their questionnaire, and conducted and analysed the survey themselves.

The survey showed that the majority of visitors to the old gallery were not aware of the chronological order of the displays.

This finding reinforced the staff feeling that such a display was inappropriate. Further questions dealt with the interest in differing aspects of Chinese culture, and the use of supplementary information, video and audio guides. A large majority of the sample indicated that visitors would like to touch objects in the new gallery.

Information from both surveys, combined with a knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the collections, led the team to present the material around the question 'How are things used?', under the themes of burial, religion, living, eating and drinking, ruling and collecting. Videos and hands-on objects are provided and labelling is in Chinese and English.

Future plans include setting up an information desk in the gallery for an entire week. During that time staff will make observations of the movements and behaviour of visitors in order to formulate their ideas for a proposed evaluation of the finished exhibition.

© Colin Keates, Natural History Museum, London

Shrinking down to 8,000 times smaller, a young visitor enters a leaf in the new ecology exhibition.

The Natural History Museum

The Natural History Museum in London is a large national museum devoted to the promotion of understanding and enjoyment of the natural world through high-quality exhibitions, education and science. Funding is from both public and private sources. Visitor studies have been carried out there since the 1970s by marketing and public-services departments.

A major new ecology exhibition was opened in 1991. The work on the exhibition was based on the results of a qualitative focus-group study commissioned from an outside market-research company. The study set out to assess the potential audience's level of interest in ecology and their knowledge of the topic. It also tested the proposed story-line, identified accessible and obscure concepts and sought issues that would make the subject dramatic, relevant and involving.

A second project was set up by the Public Services Department to help plan a complete new exhibition programme for the Geological Museum, a division of the Natural History Museum since 1987. New exhibitions were required to halt a decline in the audience at the Geological Museum. The objectives of the project were to identify visitors' understanding of geology and the areas of greatest interest to them. The overall interest and appeal of nine ideas for new exhibitions were tested and the attractiveness of different methods of display was explored. The results were used to plan a series of exhibitions using interactive and high-technology display methods to make clear the relevance of geology to our everyday lives.

The National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside

The National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (NMGM) is an umbrella institution embracing seven museums: the Liverpool Museum, the Walker Art Gallery, the Museum of Labour History, the Sudley Art Gallery, the Large Objects Collection, the Merseyside Maritime Museum and the Lady Lever Art Gallery. By grouping themselves under one banner in 1986, the museums qualified for direct central-government funding. Interpretation and visitor-study work have been carried out since 1986, initially by the Education Department Evaluation Unit from Liverpool University, but in recent years under the direction of the Head of the Education and Public Programmes Department of the museum. The university team has become a part of the internal working group which reviews the visitor-study programme and policy. All work is planned centrally and funded from a combination of departmental budgets, the museum research fund, the museum training budget and exhibition budgets. Great care is taken to ensure that agreed recommendations are implemented, and staff have come to experience the solid benefit of their involvement in visitor studies, resulting in a remarkable team culture.

In 1990 the Maritime Museum installed a temporary *Dock Watch* display to inform visitors of the recent improvements in the marine conditions in the surrounding docks. The display included a full range of live marine species from the dock waters.

A questionnaire was used to gather information from 100 randomly selected visitors as they left the exhibition. The aim of the inquiry was to determine whether visitors leaving the exhibition were aware of the variety of marine life in the River Mersey and of the fact that its presence was a result of a recent clean-up campaign. Visitors were also asked questions about their use of a 'touch tank', a video microscope, a video programme, their contact with demonstrators and their opinions of the presentation and explanation of the exhibits.

It was found that, before visiting the exhibition, more than half of the visitors were of the opinion that there was no marine life in the Mersey or its docks. It was also revealed that specimen labels were needed for the tanks containing marine animals, that many visitors were not aware of the 'touch tank' and that the video was difficult to see. Improvements were made to the display and their effectiveness was tested later in the season using a questionnaire to seek information from randomly selected visitors as they left the display. The accumulated information from the investigations was used in planning a similar exhibition for the 1991 summer season.

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery

Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery is a large museum run by the Birmingham City Council. It houses a nationally important collection of Pre-Raphaelite art and a full range of exhibitions, including the decorative arts, natural history and ethnography. Visitor-study work has not been undertaken to any large extent in the museum.

In 1990, *Gallery 33: A Meeting Ground of Cultures* was opened, a permanent exhibition that looks at different cultures around the world through the themes of music, signs and symbols, food and drink, body

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Auguste Renoir, Bal du Moulin de la Galette, Montmartre, 1876. *Musée d'Orsay, Paris.*

decoration, identity, textiles, social customs and collecting. A wide range of interactive forms of presentation are used alongside more traditional displays.

The Keeper of the Archaeology and Ethnography Department decided to carry out evaluation and visitor-study work on the finished exhibition. The aims of the study were to assess the success of a relatively expensive interactive video-disc programme, to improve the exhibition where necessary, to investigate how exhibition project methods affect the way in which information is received by visitors, to increase understanding of their behaviour and to provide professional development in the commissioning, design and methodology of survey work.

The Keeper and a visitor-studies consultant planned nine critical and descriptive studies on the functioning of the exhibition, which were designed to provide maximum information for minimum time and money. Each study threw additional light on at least one topic covered by another study.

The studies included: (a) a gallery traffic-flow survey to determine the best data-collection times and to provide a general sample of visitors to the gallery against which individual studies could be compared; (b) a tracking study of fifty visitors to the exhibition; (c) an analysis of comments written by visitors at a purpose-built stand in the exhibition; (d) a visitor memories project using a postal survey; (e) two questionnaires filled in by 100 randomly selected visitors; (f) an analysis of the computer record showing how many visitors use the video-disc programme; (g) a survey of the use of an image-bank held on video-disc; and (h) staff-assessment reports of the experience of working on both video-disc projects.

Visit-duration data showed that user interest was well-maintained by the programme; visitors were able to identify the explicit and implicit messages of the exhibit and many were stimulated to form new thoughts about the various aspects of museum collection. A third of the sample would have liked more information and 10 per cent found the programme difficult to use.

The analysis of the computer record of the use of the video-disc programme looked at the choices of some 2,500 exhibit visitors. From this data it was possible to identify the most popular topics and programmes. An uneven response to some topics was shown to result from the fact that visitors had not accessed the information. Deeper analysis revealed that a detail of the architecture of the programme may have made it difficult for some users.

The information from the above two studies will be combined with the report of staff working on the project in order to formulate guidelines for future implementation of interactive-video projects.

Future prospects

There is still a need to build up and maintain an up-to-date body of theory combining descriptive, academic visitor-study research of broad application and smaller-scale studies around which future work can be based. To this end, publication of visitor-study research needs to be fostered.

Perhaps more important is the need to ensure that sufficient funding is made available to carry out the research to an appropriately high standard. There is a risk that some museum staff may be led to undertake badly designed, unreliable in-house studies because they cannot afford professional advice or training. The way forward is to make it common practice to include both visitor-study and exhibition-review costings as a set percentage of all exhibition budgets. ■

Notes

1. Space does not permit publication of the detailed bibliography provided by the authors, which may be obtained from *Museum International* upon request. – Ed.

2. The assistance of the following in the preparation of this paper is gratefully acknowledged: Rose Kerr, Curator, Far Eastern Collections, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Peter Reed, Head of Education and Public Programmes, National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Liverpool; Jane Peirson Jones, Keeper, Department of Archaeology and Ethnography, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham.

Berlin: putting theory into practice

Sigrid Heinze

The application of modern visitor-research methods to four local history museums is described in the this article. As the two-year project was completed in October 1990, before German reunification, it does not include museums from the former East Berlin. Sigrid Heinze, who conducted the research, is now an assistant in the Department of Visitor Studies of the Institut für Museumskunde in Berlin.

The tradition of small local history museums in Germany is more than 100 years old and there are vast numbers of them. Some deal with the history of a small town or the history of a region. In smaller cities these museums deal with the history of the entire city; however in larger cities, they deal only with a particular district. Local history museums were often founded as a reaction to regional or social change which created a need for a stronger historical orientation. Berlin's local history museums developed in various phases, beginning with the strengthening of local history organizations or the establishment of a district archive and augmented by additional collection efforts.

The latest wave of fundamental and innovative changes occurred in the 1980s when a broader approach to historical issues began. New approaches to history were discussed and tested, based on the 'new history' of everyday life and the spread of history workshops. Throughout this period, a series of large exhibitions made historical themes interesting to a wider public. Many museums were established from scratch or fundamentally reorganized according to a new thematic approach to local history and exhibition-presentation formats, while others attempted to utilize new themes within their traditional organization. This dynamic development encouraged the implementation of new concepts by some museum planners and increased public interest in the museum's work.

Concurrently, a new generation of museum staff entered the local history museums. Directors who had been heading the museum for many years were replaced by younger heads who had been influenced by the 'new history' movement. In other museums, younger staff members brought with them new ideas. As a result of these influences, a new thematic orientation for special exhibitions could be observed such as those which dealt with *Alltagsgeschichte*, or everyday life.

The results of these changes could also be seen in the new forms of research methods which utilized historical witnesses and lay people working together with trained scholars, graphic designers and exhibition planners. Moreover, close contacts with groups and working committees with different points of view were developed in the city district, thus fostering closer ties within the cultural fabric of the neighbourhood. This new relationship between the museums and their environment directly influenced the dialogue on the role and functions of a local history museum.

Planning the project

Reunified Berlin consists of twenty-three districts with a population of 3.4 million. At the time of the study, West Berlin was a city of 2 million people which was divided into twelve districts. In each of these districts, there are local history museums whose organization and structure vary greatly. Some contain everyday objects and household artefacts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries alongside prehistoric artefacts and natural history collections. Others include extensive nineteenth- and twentieth-century painting and photography collections. There are hardly any collection-management policies in the museums, though discussion on this topic has begun. Four museums were selected for the purposes of this research project: two traditionally run museums and two with an up-to-date conceptual approach.

The purpose of the project was to focus on the evolution of local history museums and their current significance as cultural institu-

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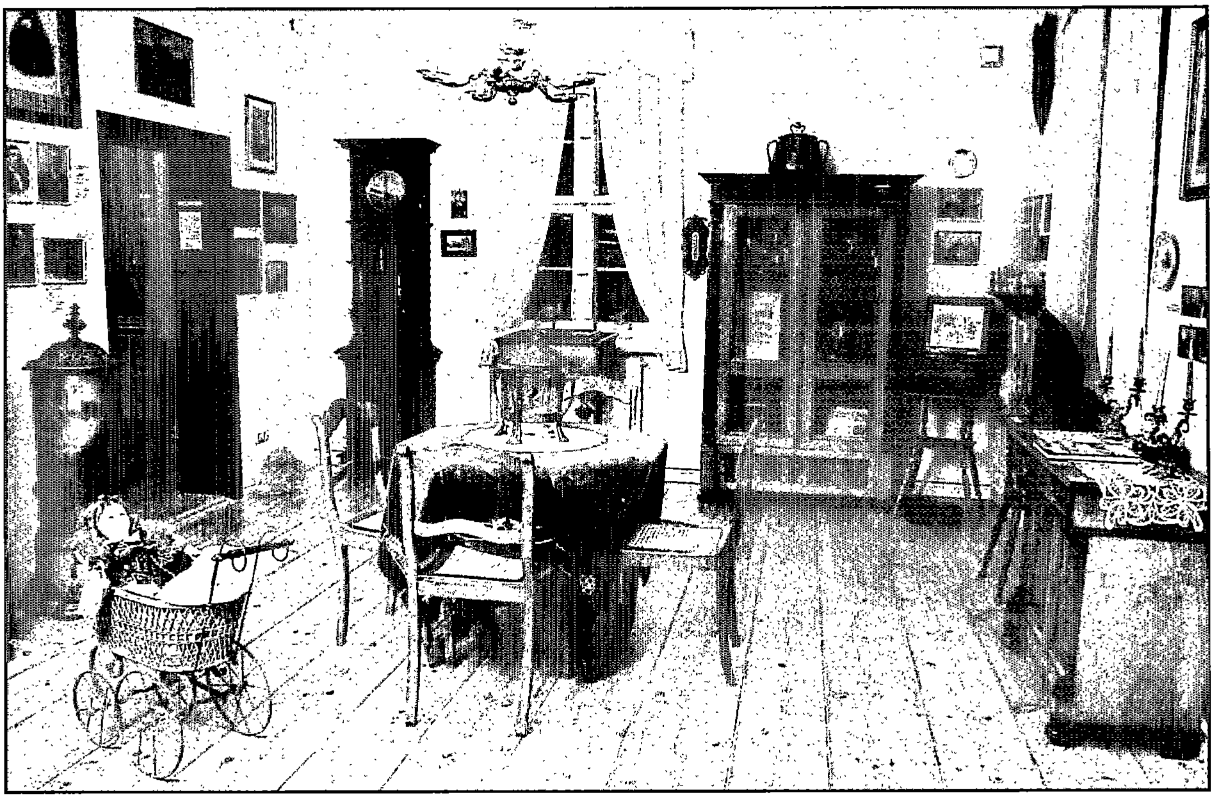


An exhibition room in the local history museum in Zehlendorf.

tions. The work of local history museums (especially exhibitions) is the result of a long process influenced by a variety of factors. This research attempts to analyse this process and its impact by utilizing a more comprehensive research approach and complex set of questions than previously used in this field and by going beyond the method of surveying visitors' views on the museum. It was not the goal of this study to influence, directly or indirectly, special exhibitions in the planning stages.

The study was undertaken by selecting a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods such as standardized questionnaires, partly standardized question-based interviews as well as open participant observation whereby the researcher observes a process (e.g. exhibit planning sessions or exhibition installation) in order to formulate more detailed descriptions of the work undertaken in a museum. Three distinct yet interrelated areas were singled out for analysis.

The first area concerned the politico-cultural, organizational, financial and technical constraints which influence the work of Berlin's local history museums, including their relationship with the unusual structure of the city's administration as well as the state of current politico-cultural planning and development.

The second area consisted of a field-study of the planning and implementation of special exhibitions on a historical theme. The study made use of open participant observation and museum-staff interviews so as to pinpoint the processes and factors which influence a museum's work. The question of which museum processes could be thus observed was the central issue of this research phase.

The third part provided information about the type of public attending a special exhibition. This data was gathered with the help of standardized questionnaires and complemented by the use of short interviews with museum visitors: the aim was to determine whether a local history museum attracted a particular kind of visitor. The questionnaire inquired about the frequency of visits to the museum, the context in which a visit took place and the public's overall interest in visiting a local history museum. Short interviews were made to determine the public's understanding of the exhibition *vis-à-vis* the original intentions of the exhibition planner.

Analysing the results

Local history museums in Berlin today range from the traditional documentary museums to neighbourhood museums that understand their goal as a politico-cultural contribution to the community and whose exhibitions create a critical reference point within the community. The survey of findings indicated that an understanding of the role of historical research and its interpretation in the neighbourhood was of prime importance. While some museums paid particular attention to the politico-historical dimension of their institutions, others regarded history more as a matter of pure information, presenting the history of the neighbourhood and its people in an almost anecdotal manner.

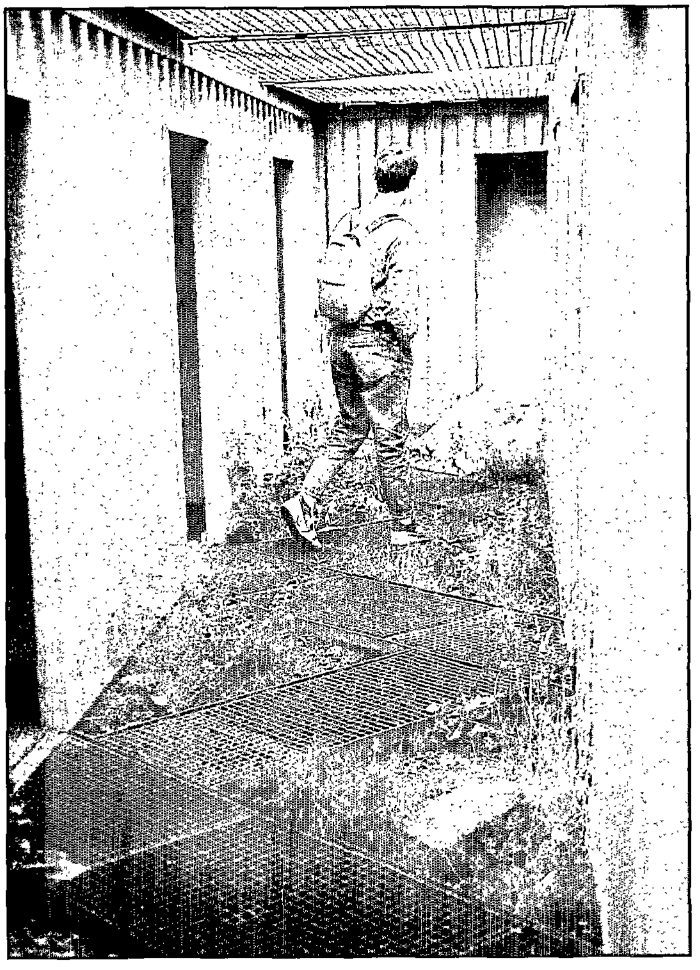
Notwithstanding the social influences on the museum, it was the museum director who most influenced the character and work of the institution. Because the tasks of a local history museum were always broadly defined, the director could undertake a wide variety of projects. In the 1980s new directors and a new generation of museum staff stepped into a vacuum which could be filled with a new conceptual approach. None the less, despite the new orientation and 'modernization' of local history museums there are some functions that have remained the same. There exists today a strong core of activists organized in associations that bring groups and interested individuals together around the local history museum as part of their community activities.

The museums surveyed may be classified in the following fashion: museums strongly integrated into the community's cultural structure; museums with a strong educational purpose; museums whose effect is felt outside the city; and museums that encourage positive integration of members within the community.

Along with the changes occurring on the local-history-museum scene, it should also be pointed out that there has been a shift in focus of the kind of work being done. Traditionally, these museums concerned themselves with collections, storage and exhibitions. Today, this emphasis has moved to the areas of research and interpretation, the latter having expanded to include a variety of cultural events such as group discussions, working committees, walking tours, etc. The special exhibition has gained importance as an interpretative tool and is seen as a flexible way of presenting the results of new research or commenting on developments in the neighbourhood. A considerable amount of the available financial and personnel resources of local history museums is allocated to special exhibitions. These exhibitions can raise interest in the museum's permanent collections as well as in the institution as a whole. By influencing the historical work being undertaken in the neighbourhood, local history museums can also develop a *raison d'être* for the institution's role in the community. These factors were evident in the museums surveyed.

Additional influential factors also emerged from the research, and in particular the cultural-political milieu of the museum: when the importance of the city's various cultural organizations or events is determined on a political level, the structural organization of the museum, its finances, location and personnel, are either positively supported or negatively affected. Despite media coverage of history exhibitions and the reaction of the general public it became clear from our research that the activities and the potential of local history museums were not at all understood by a large majority of politicians and administrative staff.

While outside influences determine the specific working conditions of the museum, it is the museum's 'inner character' that affects its work and thematic empha-



© R. Ludwig

The Maison de Santé *exhibition, which was installed in several containers. Schönenberg District.*

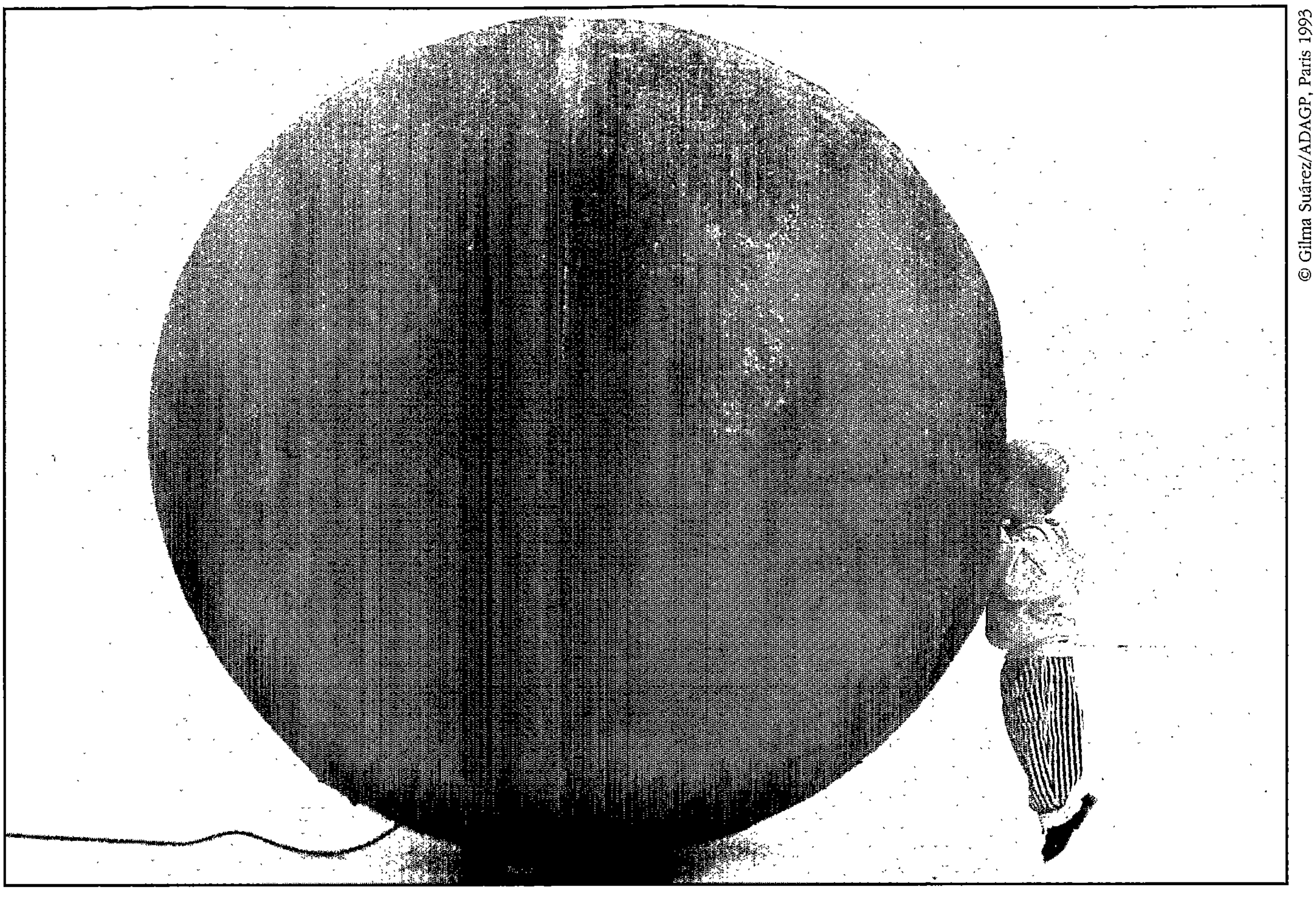
sis. This inner character can be the awareness of the local history museum's role, its decision-making processes and organizational structure (i.e. a 'one-man museum' or a team-run institution) as well as the composition and qualifications of the staff. The character of a museum's work is affected by the motivation of those involved in its conceptualization and content development. The research showed that in local history museums identification with the neighbourhood was particularly visible in the museum's exhibitions. This close relationship with the neighbourhood contributed to the intensity and scope of the historical references in the exhibitions.

That 'character' has the most lasting effect on a museum was determined from the individual histories of the museums surveyed. Some museums are traditionally orientated, while the character of others has been drastically revised as a result of a new generation of directors and their orientation towards the public aspects of their institutions.

Turning from the museum to its visitors, the survey examined how the local history museum's clientele had changed. A premiss of the research was that a museum would attract visitors through the specific character of its exhibitions. This was confirmed when it became evident that the different social approaches to history described earlier had resulted in a new public for the museum. Although this cannot be scientifically documented, the large number of younger visitors and neighbourhood activists indicates that the effect of this development has already penetrated the local history museum scene.

The interviews revealed that Berlin's local history museums are increasingly popular. The number of repeat visitors is rising and the number of younger visitors is extremely high. In addition, visitors to special exhibitions are culturally active and interested individuals, thus demonstrating that local history museums are not confined to schoolchildren and senior citizens but have a broader appeal. Their visits were planned in advance and lasted for the most part from thirty to sixty minutes which, considering the size of the museum, is a relatively long span. Their interest focused primarily on the presentation and explanation of neighbourhood history and it is particularly noteworthy that the importance of a local institution was made very clear.

In general the exhibitions surveyed were rated positively by their visiting public. The short interviews revealed a range of reactions from 'satisfied' to 'impressed' with regard to the exhibition themes, their content and presentation. The difficulty of visitors orienting themselves in the exhibition was criticized and a desire for better orientation devices was mentioned. In fact, a great deal of the information that the exhibition planner wanted to communicate to the visitor was lost. This gap between the planning of an exhibition and achieving the desired effect with museum visitors remains a problem even though



© Gilma Suárez/ADAGP, Paris 1993

Sculpture by Jaime Plensa.

the general goal of the exhibit planner was reached in all cases.

This research project provided for the first time an overview of the nature of the work, tasks, spectrum of activities and the possible effectiveness of the local history museum. It confirmed that local museums are ideal places to collect and preserve neighbourhood history due to their proximity to the visitors as well as their archival and collecting activities. These institutions can serve as the neighbourhood's 'memory' and by so doing are predestined to lead the efforts of researching Berlin's neighbourhood history. As a result, after more than ten years of restructuring and redesign, Berlin's local history museums have taken over the function of cultural initiators in their innovative and integrated neighbourhood projects. The significance of this evolution is that every local district has a contact person with whom historical matters can be discussed, an achievement which other large German cities cannot equal. It appears that several local history museums have outgrown the narrow definition of such institutions by offering the public the opportunity to participate not only in exhibitions but in a series of additional activities based on the institution's collection and archives.

A significant problem for local history museums at the present time seems to lie in their relationship with the responsible political bodies. Traditional, often narrow concepts about such museums and their role in the neighbourhood prevail. The interpretation of the local history museum as a type of second-class museum exists even within Berlin's museum community.

It is hoped that the results of the research described here can make a contribution to the discussion of the function and role of the local history museum as a dynamic neighbourhood institution. ■

Illusion or reality: unravelling the Musée Grévin

Mary Louise Kelly

Visitors' responses are perhaps nowhere quite so unusual as those registered at the Musée Grévin in Paris. Mary Louise Kelly, a Museum International *intern and senior editor of* The Harvard Crimson*, tells us why.*

When the director of the Musée Grévin awoke one morning in the spring of 1992 to discover one of his museum's most prized objects missing, he quickly called security guards and the press. Soon dozens of reporters descended on the museum, snapping photos and jostling for quotes in what was to become the season's best publicized art theft in Paris.

What exactly had the thieves taken – an irreplaceable Monet painting? An exquisitely carved Rodin sculpture? Far from it. The wily burglars weren't professionals at all, but a group of chefs from Lyons, France; their prey wasn't a famous Impressionist painting, but a wax statue of superchef Paul Bocuse. The story begins to fall into place when we learn that the Musée Grévin isn't a national repository of ancient, priceless works of art, but France's most celebrated wax museum and 'Palace of Mirages'.

© Musée Grévin, Paris

Paul Bocuse: true and false.

By mid-afternoon reporters had located the missing statue on a high-speed train to Lyons, and by evening all was revealed: the chef-'thieves' had collaborated with museum staff members to kidnap the statue and present the real Bocuse with his wax double as an April Fool's Day joke. Whether the kidnapping was intended as a hoax or a serious statement on gourmet cooking was unclear until after the pranksters revealed their plot; either way the chefs' action seemed more than a little weird. But then, the Grévin is no ordinary museum.

Founded in 1882 by cartoonist Alfred Grévin, the museum was designed to illustrate current world and French events, a sort of 'plastic newspaper' for the masses. Originally incorporating fifty-eight wax figures, the Musée Grévin today boasts over 450, including tableaux of leading politicians, heroes from French history, gruesome torture scenes, as well as gyrating rock stars. The museum's formula for success seems to be working: the Grévin draws 600,000 visitors annually, making it one of France's most popular museums, behind the Louvre and the Château of Versailles but far ahead of the Rodin and Picasso museums. Clearly the Grévin is a commercial triumph.

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the museum is the way its visitors respond to the figures. What enthrals visitors at most museums – the knowledge that what they are seeing is real, not a copy – is completely absent here. Museums are based on

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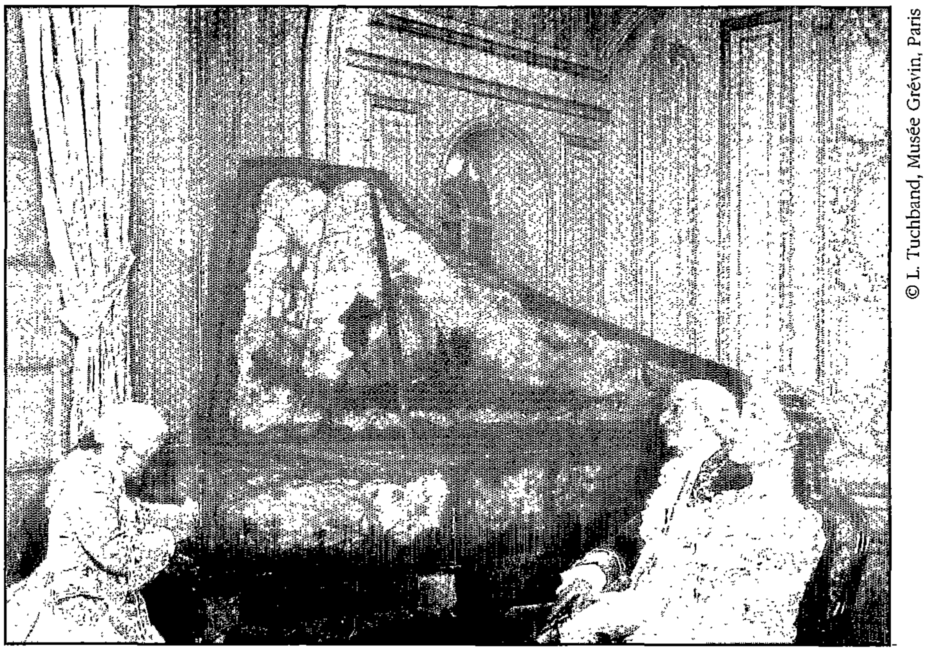
the idea that they preserve cultural objects that are worth saving: a real Michelangelo sculpture, the real jewels in a crown, a real 2,000-year-old mummy. Collections traditionally revolve around objects valued for their beauty or their rarity. By contrast, the wax figures at the Grévin could never be mistaken for 'art'. They are created for display in a museum and have no value outside this context. Thus everyone who enters the Musée Grévin tacitly agrees to play a game. Visitors must accept the mix of reality and fantasy that lies at the core of the Grévin; they must accept a museum based not on things worth preserving, but on figures that try to fool viewers into believing that they are real.

Sifting through the entangled layers of fact and fantasy that make up the Musée Grévin is no easy task for any visitor, for the true soul of the museum lies somewhere between the two poles. If we are to believe the testimonies of its founder, the Grévin was not intended to be a fictional fantasy at all. Alfred Grévin planned his museum as 'a type of flexible newspaper where the public will encounter personalities who have captured its attention, copied with scrupulous attention to their true essence'.[1] The cartoonist believed that wax dioramas would function like grand-scale picture journals, bringing world news to the masses in a better way than written text because they were more 'real'.

Authenticity and fantasy

The Musée Grévin does more than just promise authenticity – it delivers. In the basement panorama of scenes from the French Revolution, Marat's wax look-alike bleeds to death in the very bathtub in which the journalist was really murdered. The museum went to great pains to obtain the black leather tub, rescuing it first from



© L. Tuchband, Musée Grévin, Paris

Mozart at Versailles.

a church exhibition and later from a British minister. And the appeal to authenticity doesn't stop there: the exhibit also features the actual knife which Charlotte Corday allegedly used to stab Marat, as well as a map of France which the Revolutionary statesman was supposedly studying at the time of his demise.[2]

Great care is taken to ensure that the wax duplicates are not only portrayed in the clothes and with the props that they might have actually used, but that even their mannerisms are perfectly staged. In one scene, for example, a gathering of artists including Dali, Picasso and the novelist Georges Simenon are shown in a box at the Paris Opéra. Simenon, who was evidently never seen in public without a lighted pipe in his hand, is shown in the scene without his pipe, because smoking was forbidden at the Opéra.

But all pretensions of accuracy and of being a realistic newspaper aside, the Musée Grévin's appeal to visitors is undeniably its magical, fantastic side. The Grévin offers an escape into a world that is more fairy-tale than fact. Of course, the museum's surroundings are mundane enough. The grey street scene of the Boulevard Montmartre smacks of the responsibilities of ordinary life: commuters pour in and out of the Métro, car horns blare, and a gritty wind blasts down the cracked sidewalk. But behind the faded golden doors at No. 10, soft strains of music float out onto the late afternoon air, inviting passers-by to step in for a unique experience. Walking from today's dusty street scene into the sumptuous palace of mystery is a luscious, strangely decadent experience. The Musée Grévin, replete with lavish costumes and intriguing sets, represents not fact or even art so much as fantasy.

The interior of the Grévin is suggestive of a mirage. The damp, narrow-walled entrance corridor opens onto a huge emerald-green and gold chamber flecked with pink. Small mini-dioramas, separated by columns and set off from the main space, depict outrageous scenarios such as a conversation between state leaders Margaret Thatcher, François Mitterrand, George Bush, Deng Xiao Ping and movie star Raquel Welch. Woody Allen, posing in a silver bodysuit as an 'electrician in space', flies above the group. Back in the centre of the main chamber, Michael Jackson – decked out in characteristic white gloves and silver studs – stands on a pedestal above the room, belting out his hit song 'Thriller'. Upstairs on the second floor, the Théâtre Grévin hosts a regular travelling drama corps and children's magic shows. Mirrors adorn nearly every inch of wall and ceiling space in the auditorium, producing a disorienting, ethereal atmosphere. The Palace of Mirrors next door uses pulsating red lights, jungle noises, and magically growing and disappearing vines to create a surreal effect.

The most common visitor's response to the Musée Grévin is not a clear-cut pronouncement of fantasy or reality, falsehood or truth, black or white. Another level of response exists, on which the border between fantasy and reality becomes blurred, and spheres of illusion and truth become entangled. Take the case of Dante Ephyhoni, an Italian engineer from Turin, who in 1938 committed suicide in the Musée Grévin in front of the wax likeness of Mussolini. Ephyhoni had written to the ambassador of his country, saying he wanted to die in front of the statue of the man he held responsible for all his unhappiness. Nearly every newspaper in Paris, from *Le Figaro* to *Le Matin*, from *Paris-Soir* to *Le Petit Parisien*, blazed juicy headlines of the incident across their front pages on 28 June 1938.

But beyond the tragic tabloid-interest factor of the story, the more intriguing issue is that of Ephyhoni's response to Mussolini's likeness. His letter to the Italian ambassador, as reported by *Le Figaro*, did refer to the figure as a 'statue'; thus on the literal level, at least, Ephyhoni acknowledged that the figure was an imitation. So why did he choose the Musée Grévin to make his political statement, when he could have done so in dozens of more public spaces? We can only guess that, somewhere beyond his rational acceptance of Mussolini's figure as a wax effigy, Ephyhoni responded to it on another level as well. The statue, with its apparently incredible resemblance to the dictator, had assumed an aura of the 'real'.

Before the Second World War exploded across the European continent, the Musée Grévin's effigy of Hitler drew equally mystifying responses. A reporter from *L'Œuvre*, assigned in 1933 to monitor responses to the statue, observed several fascinating episodes. Early one morning an elegantly dressed young woman with several friends in tow entered the museum and suddenly cried out, 'It's him!' Jumping in front of the statue, she looked the Führer square in the eyes and methodically crossed herself three times. A few hours later, a portly middle-aged man stopped to stare at the Hitler effigy for a few moments, then turned to examine himself in a mirror. After a quick glance around to verify no one was watching, he turned back to the mirror and raised his arm in a Heil Hitler salute.[3] The sophisticated young woman and portly man both responded to the wax effigy much as if they had found themselves face to face with Hitler himself. Perhaps for a fleeting moment, they forgot real life and actually believed in the vitality of the wax figure.

It is on this level of response that the curious intertwining of truth and fiction in the Grévin becomes most interesting. The young woman, the middle-aged man and Ephyhoni all agreed to play the game which the Grévin asks of its visitors – they accepted the 'apparent authenticity' of a copy. By swallowing the mix of fantasy and reality that is the Grévin, they allowed themselves to be fooled – at least for a little while – into believing that the wax figures were real.

And for that matter, how do we know that the art in the Musée Grévin is pure fantasy? Perhaps all the fact and fiction and reality and fantasy that we imagine to be so clearly divided are a little bit more mixed up than we would like to believe. ■

© Gilma Suárez/ADAGP, Paris, 1993

Alberto Giacometti Table (La Table Surrealiste)*, 1947. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.*

Notes

1. Albert Wolff, 'Preface', *Catalogue du Musée Grévin*, p. 4, Paris, 1883.

2. Claude Cezan, *Le Musée Grévin*, pp. 105–6, Paris, Editions Rombaldi, 1947.

3. 'Noël avec Hitler et Mussolini . . . au Musée Grévin', *L'Œuvre* (Paris), 1933.

Archaeology and community: a village museum in Ecuador

Colin McEwan, Chris Hudson and Maria-Isabel Silva

In 1987, we published an article devoted to the archaeological site of Agua Blanca in Ecuador whose residents had joined with archaeologists in uncovering and preserving a host of pre-Columbian artefacts.[1] *The active participation of the villagers had resulted in the creation of a community archaeological exhibit which was inaugurated in 1986. Today Agua Blanca boasts a genuine site museum cum cultural centre entirely built by the villagers. The Casa Cultural, as it has come to be known, is the result of ten years' collaboration between 'heritage' professionals, villagers and national institutions. Underpinning this work is the view that local people, when aware of the meaning and value of their past, can play an important part in its recovery and protection. The story is told by three key figures: Colin McEwan, director of the Agua Blanca Archaeology Project and specialist in the prehistory of the Americas; Chris Hudson, who designed the museum; and Maria-Isabel Silva, former head of the Department of Archaeology and History in the Ecuadorian National Institute of Cultural Patrimony and co-director of the project.*

As a result of several seasons of fieldwork by the Agua Blanca Archaeological Project the site is now recognized as one of the major pre-Columbian centres in the northern Andes, and is visited by over 10,000 people each year.

The exhibit organized by the village of Agua Blanca in 1986 was a tangible expression of the community's links with its past. It also showed that it was prepared to assume responsibility for caretaking that past. The national authorities, however, had different ideas, planning to locate visitor facilities well away from the village. The creation of the new archaeological exhibit challenged all their assumptions. It was nurtured by the active and enthusiastic participation of the whole *comuna*. Its inauguration drew a crowd from all over the province: *campesinos* from neighbouring hamlets and villages, schoolteachers from nearby towns, family and friends. Members of the archaeological team explained in their own words their experience of discovering the past as they guided visitors through the site and this has now grown into the annual *encuentro cultural* (cultural festival) in which villagers celebrate their experience with people from all parts of the country.

As the excavation progressed in the following months the *casa comunal* became the venue for evening classes for the archaeological team dealing with all aspects of Manteño culture. Visiting specialists collaborating with the project, such as geologist Dr Ramón Vera of the National Polytechnic Institute in Quito, contributed with lectures and field excursions to explain their work. The project director took members of the team with him on visits to other projects and archaeological sites all over the country. This provided the chance to learn about the scope and variety of archaeological investigation and to see how other sites were being managed, mismanaged or even completely neglected. They could appreciate that the participatory approach to archaeology in Agua Blanca was something new. In addition to setting up the field laboratory, Maria-Isabel Silva arranged meetings with national institutions in Quito. Where would the support come from to sustain the efforts that were being made at the site to conserve Ecuador's cultural heritage? Why was it so difficult to find a modest sum to help in the task of upkeep and maintenance?

Slowly, backing was found for the task of building up site infrastructure. The British Council responded to a request for funds to install two relief models and rest shelters, to better accommodate and inform visitors to the site. The National Forestry Service released funds to build a boundary fence around the site, consolidate footpaths and construct stairways. In due course the Central Bank Museum in Guayaquil recognized the need for year-round maintenance of the site and provided a budget to make this possible.[2]

One idea that arose from discussions between the project directors and village leaders was to create a cultural centre – a building that would display finds from the excavation and extend facilities available to both the Archaeological Project and visitors. Chris Hudson, designing a museum for the neighbouring village of Salango, was asked to think about the design, and sketches as well as possible locations were discussed. Right from the start it was decided to use local materials, to create a structure that would fit into the village and landscape and that would also be inexpensive to build. It was hoped that by successfully using natural materials and local techniques, others would be encouraged to do the same, rather than construct buildings that did not blend into the area.

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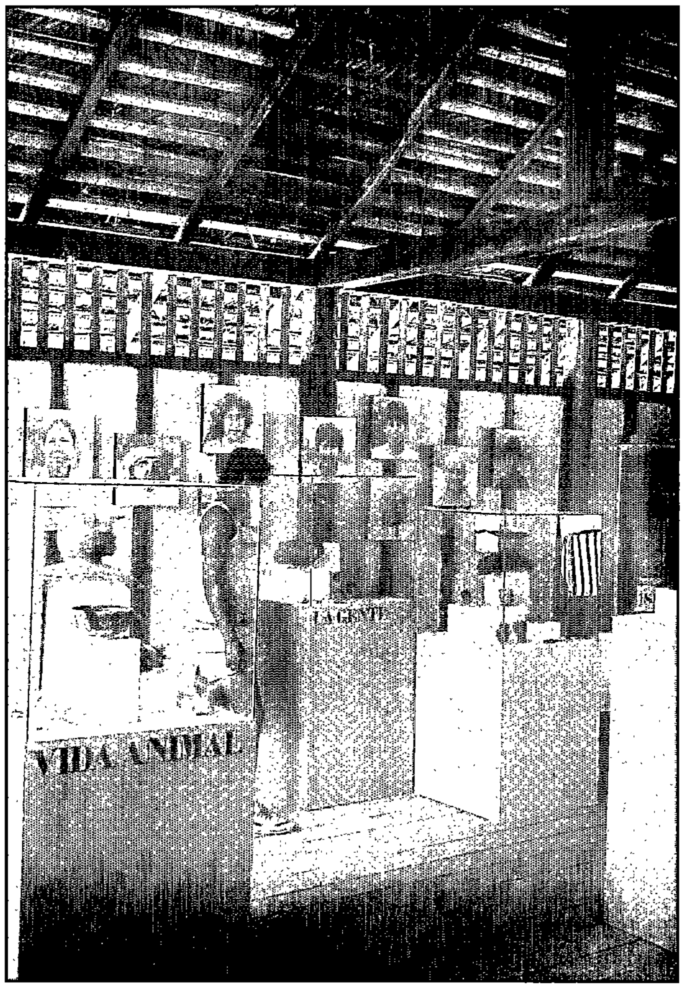


By courtesy of the authors

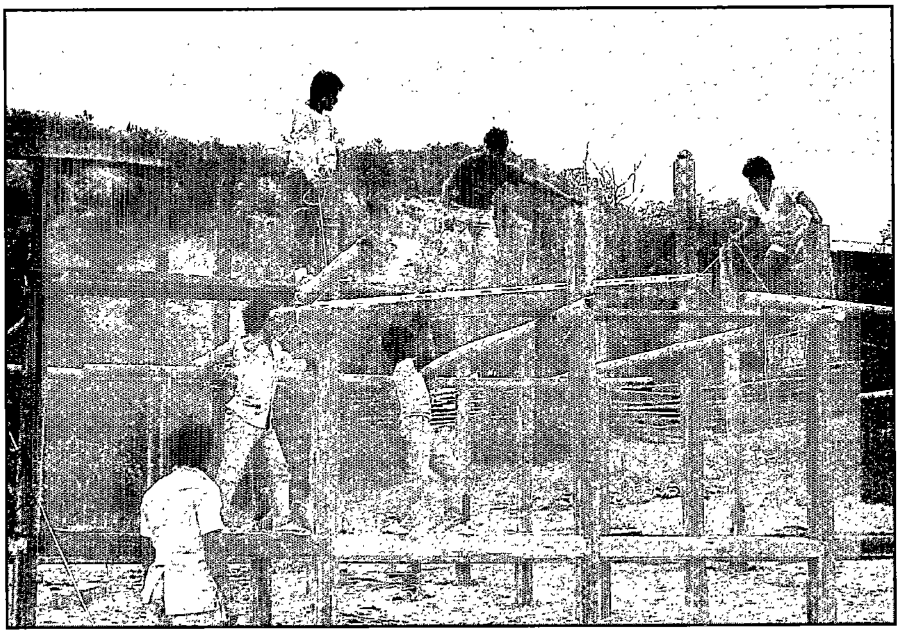
Casa Cultural *exhibition: photos of today's villagers are juxtaposed with images of pre-Columbian objects, to say 'continuity'. Grills let in ambient light and welcome ventilation.*

In 1988 funding was obtained from the Ecuadorian Oil Corporation's fund for community development, and a British Council travel grant enabled Chris to return to the village to supervise construction, which began in July 1989. Labour for the project was entirely drawn from the village itself and in addition three *mingas* (an Andean tradition entailing communal labour on public projects) were organized to get things going. One of these, at the suggestion of the village president, Samuel Martinez, was made up of schoolchildren who enthusiastically collected stones for the foundations. The idea was to involve as many people from the village as possible, so that even the children could be able to say that they had helped to build the *casa cultural.*

The building is of timber, split bamboo, palm thatch and *quincha* – a mixture of manure, earth, straw and water. It comprises a generous porch with a shop, plus an exhibition hall on the first level. An office, store-room and living accommodation for the Archaeological Project are on the second level. The entrance porch and balcony afford a magnificent panorama of the valley and welcome shade to sit and rest.

Nearly every one of the thirty-five foundation holes yielded pre-Columbian remains – floor levels, potsherds, hearths and animal bones; in two places stone walls were uncovered, which were excavated, mapped and photographed by the archaeological team. One of them was later cleaned up and roped off to become an exhibit at the entrance to the museum. A balsa-wood scale model was made of the structure and this proved to be an invaluable tool for refining the design and explaining it to the carpenters.

The display in the 8 × 8 metre exhibition hall is modest, due to limited resources, but aims to be bright and informative. The purpose of the exhibition is to orient visitors concerning the extent and significance of the prehistoric town before they tour the archaeological site on foot. Simple glass modules on plywood bases protect the exhibits and larger pieces, such as stone seats, are on open display, including a 'please touch' table. Information is provided by text, photos, maps and a simple time-chart incorporating real potsherds. The display will be upgraded to include new finds as resources become available, and funds are currently being sought to produce a ten-minute audio-visual introduction.



Builders at work.

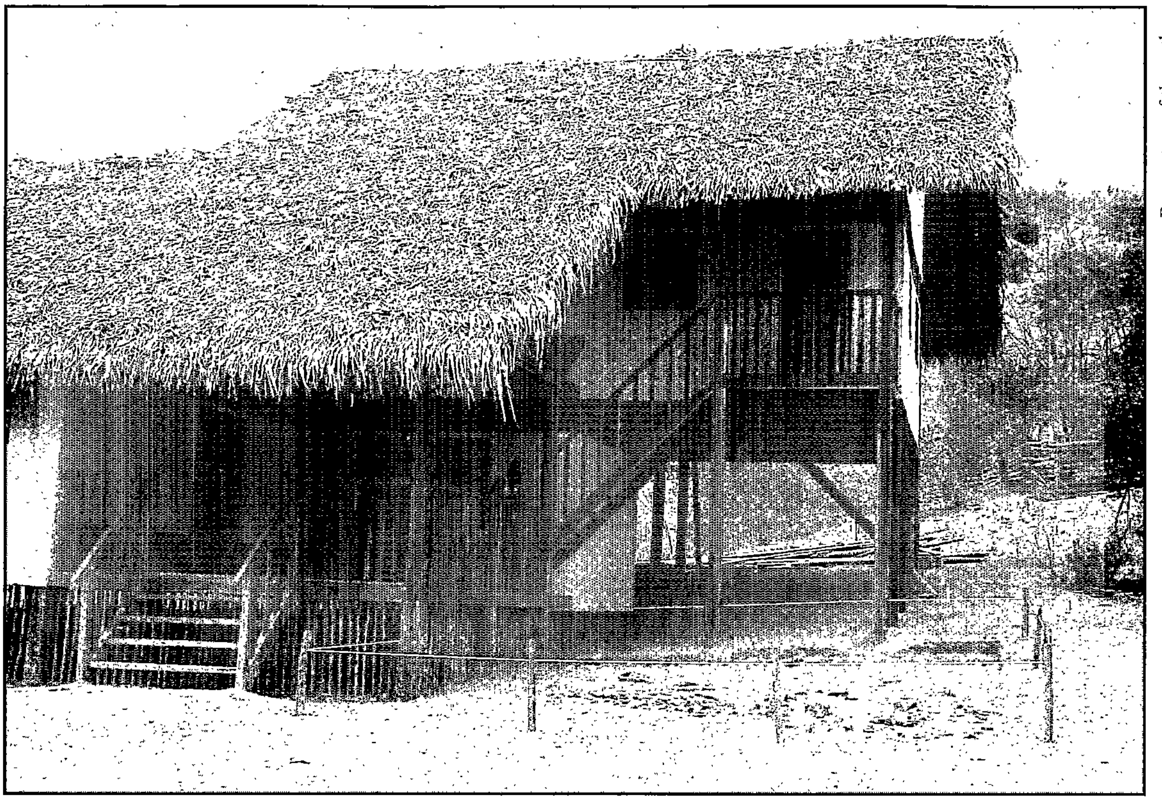
Living, learning and celebrating

Reviewing the story of the last decade in Agua Blanca gives pause for reflection. Are there things that could be improved? Could it have been done differently? The answer is almost always in the affirmative. Nevertheless some valuable lessons have been learned about how and why things have worked.

The overwhelming reality facing the *comuna* has been that of limited material and financial resources. However, this has also had its positive side. Nearly everything that has been attempted by the *comuna* and the Archaeological Project working together has had to be based on careful deliberation and discussion. Much thought has gone into asking what the *comuna*'s real needs are and, equally important, what is feasible. This community-based approach poses an alternative to the top-down development strategies that are normally applied. Preconceived development models imposed by government and international agencies run the risk of excluding or deliberately overriding the creative contribution that a local population can make towards solving problems of environmental and cultural resource management.

The Agua Blanca Archaeological Project instead adopted an approach of building from the grass roots up. This was based on the recognition of the necessity to work from the expressed needs of local people. A respect for, and a willingness to work with, the existing *comuna* organization went hand in hand with a recognition of the pressing economic realities of a community whose natural environment is in jeopardy because of progressive deforestation. The advent of the Archaeological Project and its close involvement with the village opened up new possibilities in the cultural life of the community which have proved to be a tool for education in the broadest sense.

A basic goal of the Archaeological Project has been to try to ensure that everything attempted is brought to fruition and seen to


By courtesy of the authors

Entrance porch, stairs to office and 'doorstep' exhibit.

work. This often means a painful process of trial and error and the need to acknowledge where things have gone wrong. A conscious attempt has been made to involve a wide range of institutions and individuals and thereby avoid a monopoly by any one institution or interest group. This process has met with many obstacles, some stemming from ignorance, some from indifference and some from outright hostility to new ways of working. On the other hand, vital interest and support has sometimes come from unexpected quarters.

We believe that just this sort of change of consciousness in human working relationships is instrumental in determining the kind of future that can be created. While more challenges lie ahead, we are optimistic that these first steps forward have shown how a knowledge of the past and an identification with it can be catalysts for change in rural Latin America. ■

Notes

1. 'Focusing Pride in the Past', *Museum*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2 (154), 1987.

2. 'A Museum Viking in Ecuador', *Museum*, Vol. XLIV, No. 1 (173), 1992.

'A Tale of Two Cities'

Roger Smith

A new concept in museum management has invigorated the cultural life of a corner of rural New Zealand. Roger Smith, Executive Director of the Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust, explains how this came about.

Regional New Zealand is known for its rural lifestyle and dependence on the market fluctuations of the farming sector. Hawke's Bay, on the east cost of North Island is no exception and is regarded as the fruitbowl of New Zealand and a major wine-producing region.

This article focuses on a selection of Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust activities and achievements since its formation four years ago.

The two principal cities in the province – Napier and Hastings – would be regarded globally as sizeable towns with populations of 52,000 and 65,000 respectively. Hastings has always fulfilled the role of a rural service town whereas Napier with the region's only port and airport prides itself as the administrative centre. Both cities were extensively rebuilt after a devastating earthquake in 1931.

As might be expected there has been considerable rivalry between the two cities over the past century. Local parochialism is somewhat legendary; it is therefore even more remarkable that in 1988 the first moves were made to rationalize the cultural resources of the region. A report by museum consultant Ken Gorbey made several recommendations, among them the formation of a single management body to control the major art and history institutions. Extensive public consultation with local and national interested parties was undertaken and a report produced to brief the two councils. In April 1989, the Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust officially began the task of achieving what had been recommended by the Gorbey report and established as goals by the council and Friends' representative on the Cultural Trust Board. It was at this time that I had the pleasure of being appointed the first Executive Director.

A sizeable inheritance

The site of the Hawke's Bay Museum had been well used for cultural activities since 1865 when a Mechanics' Institute first occupied it. This later became the Napier Athenaeum, whose popularity as a lending institution threatened to outstrip its budget.

In 1936 the Athenaeum was replaced by the Hawke's Bay Art Gallery and Museum, which since its inception was operated by an enthusiastic and dedicated group of local patrons known collectively as the Friends. With the formation of the Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust, the Friends who had already handed over their assets to the Trust, became the official support organization and relinquished control of management. They have, however, retained a presence by being represented on the Board by three members, one of whom is also a representative of a technology grouping. The other representatives on the Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust guarantee a major presence for the local authorities as principal funders. Additional representation includes a member of the recently established Regional Council and a *kaumatua* (elder) of the local Maori tribe.

In Hastings the Trust inherited the local City Cultural Centre. Established in 1970 this multifunctional space had seen a variety of uses during its short history. Everything from local flower shows to art exhibitions were staged. None of these was particularly successful in terms of building structure and spatial requirements. Musical performances often competed with the shunting of diesel locomotives on a nearby railway track. Staff morale was poor and interaction with the public was at such a low ebb that at times the exhibition lighting and heating were only switched on when a visitor arrived at the door! Clearly here was a challenge in museum public rela-

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By courtesy of the author

Dem Bones exhibition, Hawke's Bay Museum.

tions that needed to be addressed with some urgency.

Structurally the building was sound, with clearly defined galleries. One of the first things the newly established Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust undertook was to embark on a major redevelopment for the Cultural Centre. First, a change of title to the Hawke's Bay Exhibition Centre clearly signalled the facility's mission – that of being the region's main venue for touring exhibitions of art and in some cases historical exhibits. A new entrance way and foyer were designed by local architect Morgan Flynn to make the entrance far more welcoming and to allow easy access for the physically handicapped. The walls of the exhibition galleries were clad in composition board, providing a suitable surface for exhibition hanging. The floor was carpeted and strict environmental controls were introduced. Guzzini track and fittings for the lighting were chosen, each track having the potential to be individually dimmed to the required lux levels; state-of-the-art air-conditioning was installed. With these environmental modifications the Exhibition Centre was now able to take international and major national exhibitions from the touring circuit, something that rarely happened prior to the alterations.

Fund-raising for any capital project is always a challenge but the Trust was fortunate to reach its target figure of NZ$442,000 for the first stage of the redevelopment relatively easily. The building was reopened in April 1991 by the Governor-General, Dame Catherine Tizard. Stage two has seen the construction of a café facility at a cost of NZ$150,000 in what had previously been an enclosed courtyard area resplendent with fish-pond. As fate would have it, a large wading bird swallowed most of the pond's occupants shortly before construction commenced so there were no major problems with relocation of aquatic life!

The Exhibition Centre's café provides an additional focus for the Centre and fulfils a visitor need identified in recent surveys. Many of our public travel substantial distances to visit the Exhibition Centre and they had often requested a café-style refreshment area.

Getting to know the audience

One of the first things the Trust did was to conduct comprehensive visitor surveys between November 1989 and February

1990. The survey documents were developed in-house and non-users of our facilities were canvassed by telephone. Leisure pursuits, perceptions of museums and media influence were all addressed and provided a valuable insight into the habits of those members of the local community not making use of our services. We discovered for instance that while 89 per cent of those surveyed knew the exact location of the Museum with its long-established community profile, only half those polled knew where the Exhibition Centre was. We resolved that all future promotion would reinforce the Exhibition Centre's location.

The in-house survey was a far more comprehensive exercise and was only able to be undertaken because of the support of volunteer researchers from the Friends' organization. From the results, we were able to determine our visitor profile; visitors' access to our facilities; a description of their museum visit; their perception of our facilities and exhibitions; what visitors planned to do with the rest of their visit to the cities; thoughts on our related benefits such as the museum shops; what other services visitors would like to see us provide; and what media influenced their decision to visit our facilities.

Results were compiled and cross-referenced so that we had an overall Trust view, an Exhibition Centre/Museum division and finally a breakdown of responses from local people, visitors from other areas of New Zealand and from overseas.

The results of these surveys are too detailed to define fully in this article but, suffice to say, they proved invaluable in helping us develop a marketing plan for our operations.

A more recent survey in December 1991 conducted by the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand gave us an update of our visitor profiles for both Museum and Exhibition Centre.

Using economic indicators

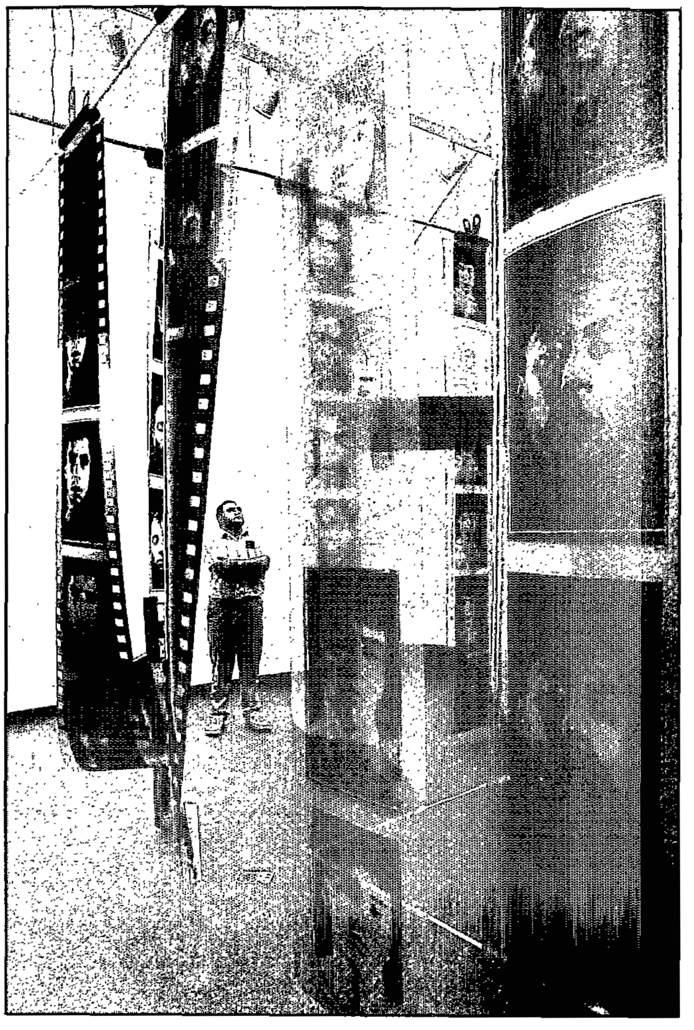
The Trust is an entrepreneurial non-profit organization, which prides itself on using a variety of techniques and complementary attractions to provide income.

As the Museum has the modern 330-seat Century Theatre attached, an effort has been made actively to promote the venue as a conference centre with an ambience unequalled in New Zealand. The Museum offers delegates the opportunity to sample local history and arts at their leisure and provides a welcome break from the pace of a conference agenda.

An art house cinema has been developed for the same theatre, screening two nights per week. The Century Cinema has revitalized movie-going in Napier and has developed a loyal and appreciative following. Profit from the Cinema (NZ$10,000 in its first year of operation) has been channelled into other Trust activities and into acquisitions for the collection. The value of the Cinema as a public-relations exercise for the Trust has been great as it brings yet another audience into the Museum and many stay to shop or return to see the current exhibitions.

Being a member of the Friends' organization also has the added benefit of discounts for the Cinema and the Museum shops and entitles one to free admission to the normal exhibition programme.

The Trust receives NZ$641,925 from local authorities in a financial year. This equates to NZ$4.89 per head of population in Hastings and NZ$6.33 per head in Napier.



By courtesy of the author

Installation. Hawke's Bay Exhibition Centre.

The national average of operational funding for provincial city museums and art galleries for the current financial year is NZ$9.65. Staff naturally look forward to some movement from its principal funders to bring it closer to the national average. A severe nationwide economic recession has not helped matters.

Undeterred by the inequality of ratepayer funding, the Trust has developed its own income sources to such an extent that the funding for capital and income sources from local authorities represented only 46.5 per cent of total income.

The Museum shops for instance generated a net surplus of NZ$22,824 and trends for the current year indicate a doubling of this figure. Other sources include the New Zealand Lottery Board, grants and bequests and contributions from Friends and volunteers.

Nevertheless, it appeared necessary to convince local councils that apart from patronage, public programmes, heritage preservation and public relations, they are getting good value for every dollar invested in our organization.

We recently calculated our effect upon the local economy in three different ways. First, we quantified visitor industry spending in our Museum and Exhibition Centre and using an accepted tourist multiplier, determined the total impact for a year at NZ$767,964. A similar principle was used for wages and salaries paid to our employees over the same period but using a lesser multiplier. This equated to an annual impact of NZ$679,268. Finally, direct spending with local merchants and industry was analysed and this figure came to NZ$772,500.

We have therefore determined that the total impact of Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust's operations upon the local economy came to the substantial figure of NZ$2,219,732, surely enough to convince even the most cynical council of an excellent return for their investment in our operations. These calculations do raise the issue that many museums undersell themselves and need to adopt to a greater degree the economic indicators and evaluation techniques of industries such as tourism.

Since its early beginnings the Trust has pursued a vigorous promotion policy. The Freedom Independent Travel segment has targeted the overseas visitor; a specially designed tee-shirt has been produced; special programmes and activities have been widely publicized. A new full-colour Trust brochure clearly spells out the education and entertainment values of our institutions and dispels once and for all the old association of museums being equated with dust and dead objects.

We have been fortunate in having an excellent rapport with the local press and so our media profile is high. The estimated advertising value of free publicity received in the local print media alone is calculated at NZ$26,000 per annum.

The Trust has a weekly newsletter on the local community radio station and has initiated a number of promotional arrangements with this station for exhibitions. A recent international craft exhibition from the United States saw us receiving NZ$13,000 worth of radio advertising for a small percentage of the door takings.

Exhibition openings and previews have always been a popular way for the Friends to meet, though we have noted that increasingly with both adults in most family groups working there has been a decline in numbers attending mid-week. We now have fewer general openings but make those we do have more of an event. This is helped by sponsorship from a national wine company which provides NZ$3,000 worth of wine each year to an appreciative art audience.

Other sponsorships have included IBM who provided computer hardware for the Trust's office management; local sponsorships for the two national touring exhibitions produced by the Trust and even an international air travel agreement with Canadian International Airlines.

It is not possible to detail every activity undertaken by the Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust. A local Science Centre is being developed, a regional Arts and Crafts Guide is at the design stage and many more schemes are afoot. One of the key indicators of our success has been the response from the public over the first three years. Our patronage has become one of the highest recorded for any provincial centre with 264,000 visitors being recorded in the Museum complex over the past year. The trend indicates a 4–5 per cent increase each year since 1990.

Since the redevelopment the previously little-used Cultural Centre has become the much-used Exhibition Centre, championed in the local press as 'the place to visit'. The recent international exhibition mentioned earlier saw 3,300 paid admissions over six weeks, a considerable achievement for the Hastings district. Since the redevelopment and the new café, numbers have continued to increase and current building totals suggest monthly increases of 200 to 300 per cent over the previous years.

The Hawke's Bay Cultural Trust was a new concept in museum management in New Zealand when formed in 1988. This short article gives some indication of its achievements since its inception. The impact at the local level has been immense thanks largely to the dedication of the twenty-seven staff members and the support of its 1,400-strong Friends' organization. Many exciting challenges lay ahead and we wouldn't have it any other way! ■

The anatomy of a loan

Marie C. Malaro

The increasing exchange of objects between museums calls for clear-cut policies and practices that place greater emphasis on the museum's true purpose and its responsibilities to the public and to its collections. These are emerging in the United States and are described by Marie C. Malaro, author of A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections, *a standard reference work. Ms Malaro is Director of the Graduate Programme in Museum Studies at the George Washington University in Washington, D.C., and has, in the past, served as a legal adviser to the Smithsonian Institution.*

In these times of specialization and mass communications we can find ourselves longing for the simple days when 'black was black and white was white', and a contract could take the form of a mere handshake. The simple days are certainly long gone for most of us, and this is true even in the relatively sheltered world of museums. Let us take, for example, the topic of loans. Here in the United States, museums are dissecting, debating and experimenting with loan situations to the point where lawyers and other specialists are regularly consulted to help address the list of rights and obligations now considered essential elements of a good loan agreement. The handshake has been replaced by thick legal documents. Why has this happened? Is it a sign of true progress? How might this more complex approach to lending affect future exchanges between museums?

What is a loan?

In the law a loan creates a bailment. The term 'bailment' is derived from the French word '*baillier*', to deliver. 'It imports a delivery of personal property by one person to another in trust for a specific purpose, with a contract, expressed or implied, that the trust shall be faithfully executed and the property returned or duly accounted for when the specific purpose is accomplished or kept until the bailor claims it.'[1]

When a loan is made the lender is the bailor (the one giving) and the borrower is the bailee (the one receiving). There is a transfer of custody (the right to have possession for certain purposes) but there is no transfer of title (the right ultimately to control the property). The law of a country invariably addresses bailment situations and, as a rule, it describes the standard of performance expected of bailors and bailees. The standard can vary depending on the particular circumstances. When the parties to the loan are considered to be trustees because they are dealing with property held 'in trust' for others, the standard of performance imposed by the law in a bailment situation is relatively high. Museums rightfully describe themselves as holding their collections 'in trust' for the public and, accordingly, they should expect to be held to a relatively high standard of care in bailment situations.[2]

Several decades ago American museums found themselves being prodded to be more accountable. An educated public was raising questions about the legal obligations of those who manage museums and museum procedures came under scrutiny. When more critical attention was given to loan practices there were causes for alarm. Museums found that their records were often in disarray. When loan records were available they were usually inadequate because they did not spell out the purpose of the loan, the obligations of the borrower, or the ways in which the lending museum could protect its interests. Frequently there was no monitoring of loans. In the worst situations there were no termination dates for the loans so there was no incentive for the lending museum to even check on the location and condition of its property. The adage 'out of sight, out of mind' rang very true. These conditions hardly comported with a legal standard that imposed a relatively high degree of care in loan situations. Museums in the United States began to worry about possible legal liability, and this fear provided the impetus for re-evaluation of loan practices. It was evident that more thoughtful loan policies had to be articulated which would describe when a museum would lend its objects and under what conditions so as to reflect the museum's mission. Lending is

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not an isolated activity, it is merely one possible means of achieving the purposes of the museum. By starting with the mission of the organization attention is focused on such important questions as:

What is the purpose of this museum?

What public is served?

How are the needs of the public considered when outside organizations seek the use of the collection?

What is the museum's obligation to protect its collection?

How is the obligation to protect factored into loan decisions?

What are the lines of authority in the museum and who should bear responsibility for approving loans and for overseeing the implementation of loans?

All these questions need to be kept in mind as a loan policy is drafted. It is very difficult to show that a museum is exercising due care in lending – the standard the law usually expects – if loan practices appear to be at variance with the organization's mission.

Turning policy into practice

As museums in the United States began to articulate loan policies that considered 'mission' and 'trust responsibilities', changes in practice were inevitable. One result was a more formal decision-making process on the issue of whether a loan request would be approved. Another was insistence on the consistent use of carefully drafted loan agreements. The loan agreement, normally issued by the lending organization, is the most visible evidence that the parties are exercising due care. It is the contract that sets forth the performance expected of both the bailor and the bailee, and to be effective the contract must be fairly explicit. This is why the average loan agreement issued by a United States museum now covers in appropriate detail the following points:

The parties to the agreement.

The purpose of the loan.

The term of the loan. (A definite term should be set and it is usually for a relatively short period of time. This forces the lending museum to monitor the well-being of its objects. The obligation of a museum to take care of its objects does not disappear just because the objects are on loan. While the term of a loan may be, for example, two years it could be understood that the lending museum will entertain a renewal of the loan if all appears in good order as the expiration date approaches.)

Clear descriptions of objects, their condition and their insurance values.

Detailed packing and shipping instructions.

Insurance requirements and any rights of the lender to adjust insurance values if the loan is for more than a brief period.

Costs to be assumed by the borrower.

Credit line to be used if objects are to be exhibited or published.

Clear articulation of any other uses the borrower may have of the objects.

Standards for handling and caring for the objects while they are in the custody of the borrower.

Reporting of damage and procedures for providing any needed restoration or repair.

The lender's right to cancel the loan.

Any procedures for extending the loan.

Return procedures.

Does the existence of formal loan policies and the resulting greater emphasis on procedure represent true progress? Because I am a lawyer I might be expected to answer with a resounding 'yes'. Instead my answer is a qualified one. These changes represent progress only if procedures are consistently interpreted in light of the museum's mission. When procedures become ends in themselves they can quickly be used to mask unwise decisions. Consider the following.

First, a lending museum routinely insists on a courier service and on-site installation of objects by its personnel without an objective evaluation of the risks involved in a particular loan. Its justification for always imposing these costs on a borrower is that one cannot be too careful. But the lending museum will, without doubt, one day wish to borrow. Can it then complain if it is asked to expend considerable sums to support precautions of questionable value? A museum that interprets its loan policy in light of its mission remembers that it is a borrowing as well as a lending institution, and makes its loan decisions with a more balanced outlook.

Second, a museum is in a position where it can demand high fees for the loan of certain objects from its collection – fees far exceeding the traditional sums charged. (Loan fees usually reflect actual loan costs.) The proposal to charge high fees for lending is presented as an easy way for the museum to raise needed income. Those proposing the plan quickly add that, of course, proper procedures will be followed. Strict loan agreements will be required and insurance coverage will be obtained. Who could complain? But what about the museum's mission? If the central concern of that museum is to preserve its objects, to encourage scholarly research and to make the collection available to its public how can this concern be given due consideration when the alternative is weighed with the assurance of large financial gain? It can be argued that by entertaining seriously the idea of lending for high fees the museum has relegated its mission to second place. Careful adherence to 'procedures' does not improve the situation. Thus, more formal loan practices represent progress only if they are consistently interpreted in the light of the museum's mission.

The more structured approach to lending reflects a greater awareness on the part of museums of their core responsibilities to the objects entrusted to their care. At the same time museums are experiencing other pressures that support the argument that loans should be granted more freely. Should not large museums share their wealth? Will not increased international exchange promote goodwill? Cannot some repatriation demands be resolved through loan arrangements? Is it not better to have an object on loan for use in another museum than have it tucked away in storage? These are all good questions and ones that museums are grappling with, but so far the thoughtful response to each seems to be 'Perhaps, but we must examine the individual circumstances.' The reality is that prudent lending is time-consuming and costly. When decision-makers realize this and then take into consideration their resources and overall responsibilities they are forced to make hard choices. Some museums, after examining their missions, may see fit to promote active loan programmes and budget accordingly. Other organizations may find that their missions dictate different priorities. I would argue that this is the way it should be and that this approach should be encouraged.[3] In years to come loan practices should sort themselves out quite nicely if each museum has its priorities firmly rooted in a clear interpretation of its charter responsibilities. ■

Notes

1. See M. C. Malaro, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*, Chapter VI, pp. 157 et seq., Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985.

2. The museum community's acknowledgement of a public trust status is usually found in professional codes of ethics as, for example, the Code of Ethics for Museums promulgated by the American Association of Museums (1991). [See *Museum International*, Vol. XLV, No. 1 (177), 1993. –Ed.]

3. The above-mentioned Code of Ethics for Museums of the American Association of Museums states that a museum should ensure that 'loan activities conform to its [the museum's] mission and public trust responsibilities'. The Code of Professional Ethics of ICOM is not quite as specific on the issue.

Books

Museos y colecciones de España

Accustomed as we were to the lack of interest shown by official institutions and organizations in the provision of publications with up-to-date information on the national cultural heritage, not to mention the air of indifference and neglect generally surrounding the cultural heritage itself, we were surprised to come across an excellent Spanish guide under the general title of *Museos y colecciones de España* (Museums and Collections in Spain), which has succeeded in encapsulating a legacy that, for many of us, brings us close to the historical, social, political and cultural evocation, not simply of Spain but of Europe, Africa and Latin America as well, reflecting centuries of complex and fruitful processes of transculturation that have extended beyond national boundaries.

The author, Ms Consuelo Sanz-Pastor y Fernández de Piérola (former director of the Cerralbo Museum and member of the Spanish Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), has adopted an original point of departure for studying the Spanish heritage, setting out the information in alphabetical order and by province, community, city and village, which makes the guide extremely easy to use. It is a real guide to 'places of interest', providing information in its 780 pages concerning some 1,056 museums and collections scattered all over the country.

There are six different sections in the general index which group museums by administrative categories and provide practical details (titles, addresses, telephone numbers, times of opening), a short history of the museum or collection and a description of its contents, plus a concise bibliography.

If we look under 'Madrid', for example, we see that there are eighty-four museums and collections in the capital, some as unusual as the Ángel Nieto Motorcycle Museum, or the Museum of the Romantic Period established by Benigno de la Vega-Inclán y Flaquer (second Marquis of Vega-Inclán) which displays nineteenth-century objects including furniture, paintings, furnishings, and books and engravings of rare beauty. Others, such as the Open-air Museum of Sculpture and the Temple of Debod (presented by the Egyptian Government to the Spanish people for their contribution to the International Campaign organized by UNESCO for the Safeguarding of the Temples of Nubia) are helping to refashion the appearance of the city in which modern office buildings seem to come under the scrutiny of age-old stones, and of bronze sculptures representing the most avant-garde trends. In other cities, such as Barcelona, the impressive number of museums and collections includes some quite unusual ones such as the Collection of Footwear through the Ages, the Perfume Museum, the Automata Museum and the Funeral Ceremony Museum.

The reference in one of the chapters of the guide to collections and museums that have vanished claims our attention. Detailed explanations are given of the circumstances and the course of events that led collections to be dispersed, merged with those of other centres and institutions, transferred to private hands (like the Madrid Collection of Paintings, seventeenth- to nineteenth-century works collected by Cesáreo de Aragón y Barreta Aldamar, fifth Marquis of Casa Torres; after the death of his children, the property went to his niece, Fabiola de Mora y Aragón, the present Queen of Belgium), or, again, put into store, made over to foundations, or never reconstituted because of bureaucratic problems or administrative and financing difficulties.

However, if we estimate the number of collections and museums that have vanished for one reason or another and compare this figure with the number of those recently created (1980–90), the

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result is encouraging and augurs well for the future of the cultural heritage, which is starting to emerge from its long period of lethargy and neglect.

One important aspect of this revival is, perhaps, the active involvement of private bodies which act as sponsors of cultural events and exhibitions or as patrons and promoters; sometimes they may form part of consortia in association with public institutions (e.g. the Prado Museum, consisting of a cultural consortium associating the Ministry of Culture (Fine Arts) with the Banco de Bilbao-Vizcaya). The involvement of large enterprises of this kind makes for a greater degree of autonomy in regard to the mobilization of human and economic resources, thus ensuring continuity in the work of dissemination vis-à-vis the public.

On 13 December 1986 a resolution adopted by Ministers of Culture relating to commercial sponsorship of cultural activities was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities. In that resolution the Ministers agreed to encourage:

The promotion of greater business sponsorship of cultural activities within the member states of the European Community, by calling attention to sponsorship as an activity providing benefits to both parties, as well as helping to enhance cultural and economic activity.

Consideration of the introduction within their own countries of measures to promote suitable sponsorship schemes.

The setting up of organizations to advise and help those businesses and arts institutions interested in sponsorship.

The development of links between the sponsorship organizations concerned.

The sharing of information on current sponsorship activities, thus permitting an assessment of the need for future initiatives.

If we compare Spain's budgetary provisions for 'cultural promotion' (in accordance with a future law on sponsorship) with those of other European Community countries, we see that our figures are substantially lower. (For example, Germany spends $71 million on cultural promotion; the United Kingdom, $53 million; France, $50 million; while Spain spends only $25 million.) This is because there is still a great deal of mistrust in political and economic circles, which prevents Spain from taking the great step that could place it – in view of the importance of its astonishing cultural heritage – among the countries that are the most active and effective in promoting the reappraisal of economic relations between businesses, artists, national museums, the art market and cultural industries.

To conclude, let us hope that the dissemination of this magnificent cultural guide, *Museos y colecciones de España*, will bring about more than one encounter, through works of a similar kind, between countries which, though far apart on the map, are linked through their common cultural heritage, the dimensions of which are indeed not confined to the community or its environment.

Museos y colecciones de España by Consuelo Sanz-Pastor y Fernández de Piérola. Madrid, Ministry of Culture. 780 pp.

Book review by Asdrúb Salsamendi and Antonio Merino

Professional news

The Getty Art History Information Program

Created in 1983, the Getty Art History Information Program (AHIP) aims at helping scholars and researchers to use fully the new possibilities offered by computer technologies.

It is intended to promote in particular consistency and compatibility among the ever-increasing number of data banks in art history and related disciplines. The different products it develops enable art historians to access information in the world's museums, archives and libraries.

AHIP has recently announced the release of the *Art and Architecture Thesaurus: Authority Reference Tool (TM) Edition*, the first comprehensive thesaurus of descriptive terminology used in these fields which should meet the needs of experts and scholars for a standardized art-history vocabulary.

Arranged both alphabetically and by concept, it is meant to facilitate the exchange of electronic information. Available in printed volumes and now on computer diskette, it demonstrates, together with other ongoing projects, the activity of AHIP in a newly emerging field: the automation of art-information resources.

For further information: The Getty Art History Information Program,
401 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1100,
Santa Monica, CA 90401-11455
(United States)
Tel: (1.310) 395 1025

Art at home

Joconde is the name of the new database created by the Direction des Musées de France (the authority responsible for French museums). It catalogues French collections of paintings, drawings, engravings and sculptures kept in over sixty museums, and can be consulted by Minitel (a small and very widely distributed terminal in French households which provides access to a vast range of services made available by the French telecommunications network, France Telecom).

It is designed for students, researchers and publishers, providing precise information and, very often, leading to the discovery of neglected works through the co-ordinated use of different research criteria (museum, artist, school, iconographic themes, etc.).

Having worked long and hard to standardize descriptive terms, the creators of *Joconde* can feel justified pride in having produced the world's largest art-history database: some 120,000 catalogued works, with co-ordination being facilitated by the centralized organization of French museums and their growing computerization.

Direct consultation of the *Joconde* database using the Minitel should enable all those interested in art history to gain access to knowledge which until now had all too often been reserved for a fortunate few.

For further information: Direction des Musées de France,
Bureau de l'Informatique et de la Recherche, 6 rue des Pyramides,
75041 Paris Cedex 013 (France)
Tel: (33.1) 40.15.35.37

Telemuseum

It is now possible to follow a lecture on Goya's 'black paintings' live, even though neither the paintings nor the lecturer are physically present, thanks to a method designed and distributed by Eurolearn: Telemuseum.

This new service concerns countries connected to Numéris/ISDN and to 'broadband' telecommunications networks, which means most countries in Europe as well as the United States, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia. Telemuseum, which at present functions mostly within France, is now ready to assume international status as is shown by the negotiations taking place with a view to the transmission of lectures from France to New York and Singapore, and from the Paul Getty Museum in California to France.

The audience can watch images of the subject being dealt with on one screen while the moving image of the lecturer is shown on another. The lecturer can see his or her group and carry out a dialogue with it. Most of the lectures concern the history of art (Champollion and hieroglyphics, Ingres's *The Turkish Bath*, the birth of the Louvre Museum, etc.), while some concern more scientific and technical subjects such as botany and astronomy. New subjects (including Lalique, Picasso's *Guernica* and the history of cartography) should shortly be included in the catalogue.

As an added advantage, the Telemuseum terminal can be easily installed in universities, libraries, museums and cinemas.

This system, which was created in partnership with the Direction des Musées de France and France Telecom in particular, should enable a wide audience to gain access to a means of transmitting knowledge which in the past was available only within the framework of the museum.

For further information: Eurolearn, 11 rue Castex, 75004 Paris (France) Tel: (33.1) 42.77.07.37

Micro Trace

Infallible memory protection is what the Micro Trace Company is proposing in order to enable the identification of stolen works of art and the showing of proof of ownership.

This recently designed technique, which makes use of advanced research in physics, consists in marking objects with microcrystals which take on a memory function. It involves putting a specific message inside the molecules of the microcrystals in different parts of the object. This inscribed code has the advantage that it cannot be falsified or damaged (even if the object is melted down in order to pass it on to a receiver!).

The field of application of Micro Trace technology is wide-ranging: paintings, sculptures, ceramics, jewels, tapestry, furniture and books, as well as luxury vehicles, yachts and computer materials can be marked.

Public bodies and owners of private property have already used Micro Trace to protect prestigious works such as the 'Princeps' Edition of *The Praise of Folly* by Erasmus. They are not the only ones to have shown interest in this new technique. International judicial authorities immediately realized its advantages, especially when passing through customs and investigations in groups suspected of receiving stolen objects. Moreover, Micro Trace is the first marking technique to be approved by the European Committee on Scientific Co-operation PACT (Council of Europe).

Micro Trace technology is reliable and acts as a deterrent. Coupled with the provision of assistance in case of theft, it should be welcomed by people who either own or are in charge of valuable objects.

For further information: Micro Trace S.A., Boulevard Wahis, 26-28/36, B-1030 Brussels (Belgium) Tel: (32.2) 216.33.10

WFFM Chronicle

World Federation of Friends of Museums, Via Goito 9, 20121 Milan, Italy

The eighth International Congress of the World Federation of Friends of Museums will be held at Treviso (Italy) from 1 to 6 June 1993. Its theme will be 'The Renaissance of Public Participation in the Conservation and Promotion of Cultural Works'.

Seminars and workshops will be organized on such subjects as how to form a Friends' society; the role and responsibilities of Friends in the museum world; fund-raising for museums; Friends and cultural tourism; training volunteers; and volunteers and educational programmes. International experts and Friends will provide the basic papers, and contributions and discussions by congress participants are also foreseen.

Why has the WFFM Council chosen Treviso as the site of its most important activity? The answer lies not only in the city's extraordinary but little-known charm but also in its active role as the centre of one of south-central Europe's most dynamic, productive and modern regions: the 'Marche trévigiane', once called the 'Garden of Venice'.

Ancient Treviso possesses a remarkable urban quality and is an exceptional city of art. Beautiful museums and medieval churches containing precious artistic treasures abound. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century frescos and paintings bear such names as Thomas of Modena, Lorenzo Lotto and Titian. Although the past thirty years have seen a quickening of the region's pace, the 'Garden of Venice' has been barely spoilt. The countryside, cut diagonally by the River Piave and protected on the north by the Dolomite mountains, is still dotted with Venetian villas, the most splendid having been constructed by Palladio, a reminder of a living landscape that was once one of the most beautiful and civilized in Europe.

Treviso eagerly awaits Friends from the twenty-three member countries of WFFM and all those who are interested in museum life in all its aspects.

For further information concerning the Congress: Mrs Angela Perraro, Associazione degli Amici dei Musei di Treviso, Borgo Cavour, 31100 Treviso (Italy).

Publications from the Museums Association

Museums Journal

Museums Journal is Europe's leading museum magazine. With news, views and comment, it provides facts and opinion on a rapidly changing museum community. Comprehensive coverage and incisive analysis make it a forum for debate on contemporary museum practice.

Future editions of the Journal will include major features on the following issues:

- the return of human remains from museum collections
- compulsory competitive tendering
- the educational role of museums
- museums and the public understanding of science
- technological and industrial museums
- museums of religion

Museums Journal reviews new gallery displays and books and regular columns discuss the latest develop-ments in products and services, training, legislation, disability provision, documentation and education.

Museums Journal is the most important source of information about job vacancies in museums and galleries. Subscription includes free copies of Museums Journal Recruitment Supplement, which appears between issues of Museums Journal carrying further recruitment advertising.

The Manual of Curatorship: A guide to museum practice

Edited by John M A Thompson

Using contributions from many of the world's leading specialists, the manual encompasses all the different aspects of curatorial work, from legislation to conservation, from finance to education, from interpretation to collections management. The manual surveys the range of theory and practice required in the management of museums.

'This is an essential purchase for the libraries of every museum, regardless of size, and anyone on a museum studies course'. Patrick Boylan, professor of arts policy and management, City University, London.

ORDER FORM

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Museums Journal comes free with membership of the Museums Association and substantial discounts are available on all other titles.

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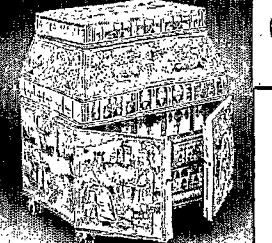
Is more theory needed in decorative art study, or should the subject be firmly object based? Should the decorative arts be more open to approaches used in other humanities disciplines? And are the decorative arts a subject at all, or simply a grouping of medium-specific disciplines? These are some of the questions raised by **`Re-thinking the Decorative Arts?'**, a conference to be held at the **University of Manchester, England,** on the **13-15 July 1993**.

This is to be a multi-disciplinary conference examining approaches to the decorative arts from a range of disciplines, including not only traditional object centred study but also social and economic history, material culture studies, psychoanalytical theory and design history. Speakers will come from a range of academic and museum backgrounds, presenting papers based on both academic projects and case studies.

Proposed speakers

Michael Berlin	University of London
Annette Carruthers	National Museums of Scotland and University of St Andrews
Philippa Glanville	Victoria and Albert Museum
Jane Graves	Central St Martins College
Jennifer Harris	Whitworth Art Gallery
Lesley Jackson	Manchester City Art Gallery
Nichola Johnson	University of East Anglia (formerly of the Museum of London)
Tim Putnam	Middlesex University
Catherine Ross	Tyne and Wear Museums
Charles Saumarez Smith	Victoria and Albert Museum
Rosalind Savill	Wallace Collection
Penny Sparke	Royal College of Art
Alex Werner	Museum of London
Ian Wolfenden	University of Manchester



Conference sessions will be held at the University's Whitworth Art Gallery. Bed and breakfast accommodation will be available at the University's Dalton Ellis Hall, a ten minute walk from the Whitworth Art Gallery. There will also be ample opportunity to visit Manchester's decorative art collections at the Whitworth Art Gallery and the Manchester City Art Galleries.

For further details and booking forms, please contact:

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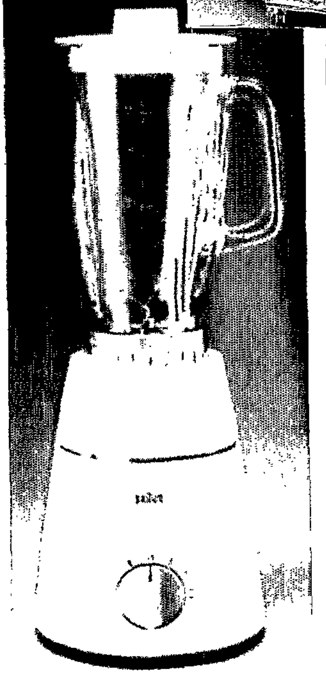
Fax 061-275 3331



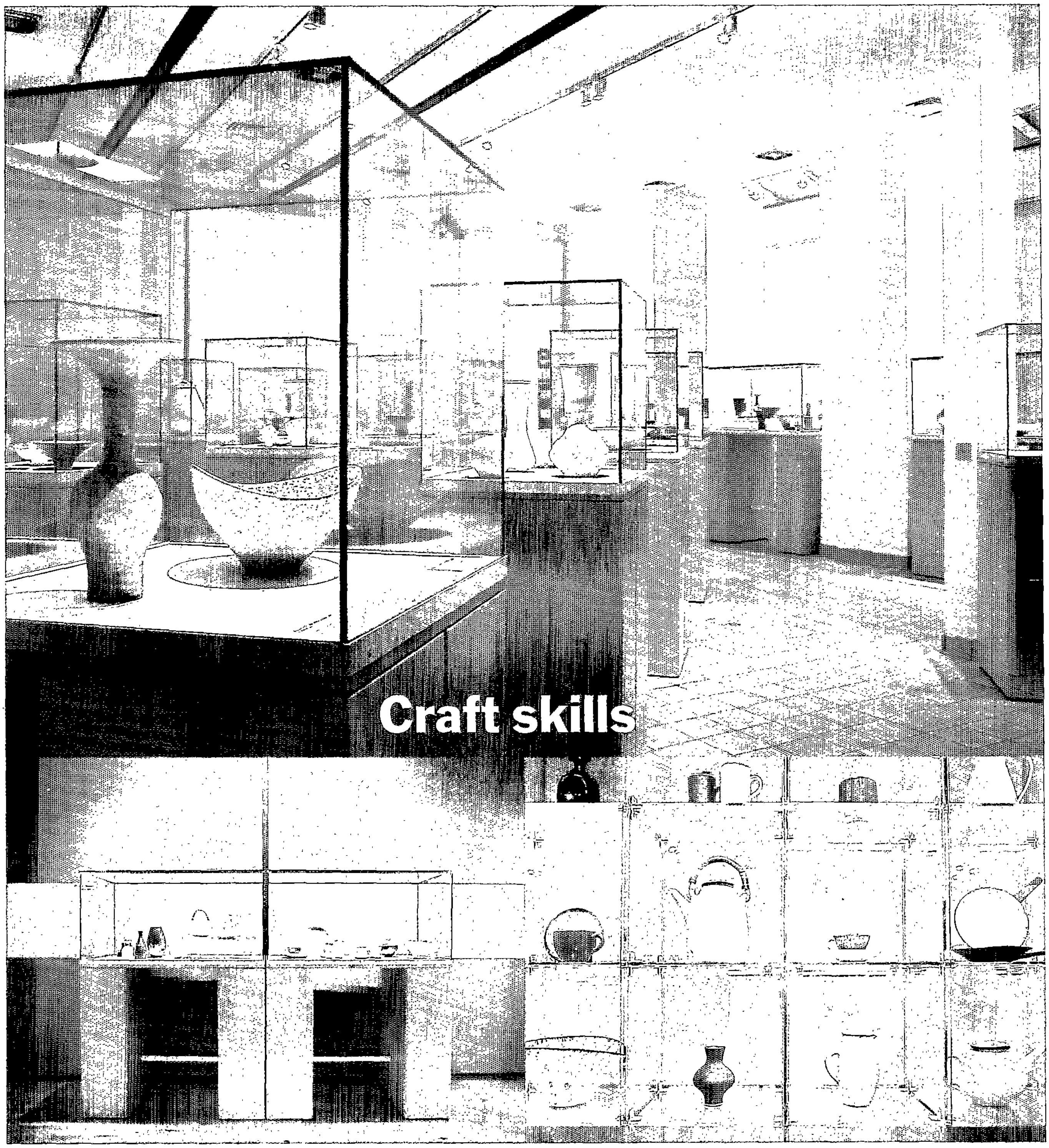
Re-thinking the Decorative Arts?

13-15 July 1993

Art Gallery and Museum Studies

History of Art Department

University of Manchester, England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