

Exhibitionist is published twice a year and features news, information, and thoughts on the profession from the National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME), recognized by the American Association of Museums as the Standing Professional Committee on Exhibition of the American Association of Museums.

EXHIBITIONIST

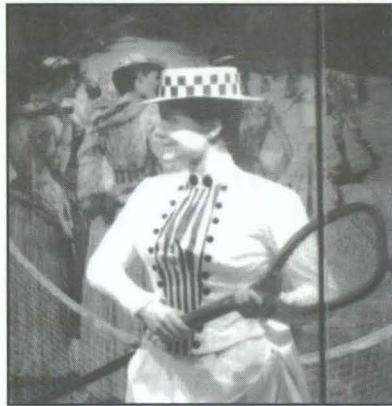
NAME

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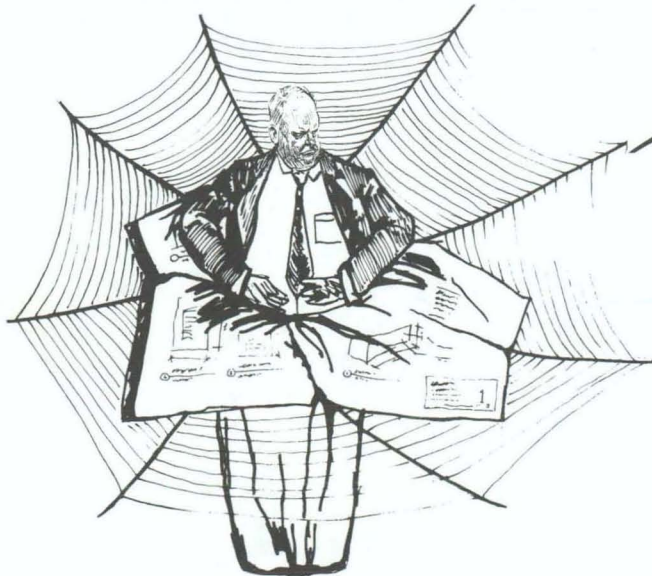
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From the President

As any organization grows and evolves, it arrives at thresholds which present dilemma—paths in which the future is unclear. NAME has usually embraced such change and has survived, arguably for the better. We now face such a threshold which certainly will have a profound impact. NAME is recognized by the American Association of Museums (AAM) as the Standing Professional Committee (SPC) on Exhibition. As an SPC we benefit considerably from influence and representation within the AAM. The AAM provides administrative services, such as book-keeping and referrals, that facilitate the operation of NAME. We all enjoy the forum that AAM provides in its annual conference—bringing together museum professionals from all disciplines. NAME has always encouraged its members to become members of the AAM. Movement has begun within the AAM to require all members of NAME to also be members of the AAM.

To crystalize what an impact this poses for NAME... approximately two-thirds of NAME members are not AAM members. NAME members who are resistant to join the AAM, usually offer that NAME fills specific needs that the AAM does not. Also, the membership rate of NAME is within their budget and that of the AAM is not. Current annual individual AAM membership dues (\$35-\$140) are based on income.

I expect that the AAM will allow for a gradual transition period. Perhaps they will consider a grandfather-clause, allowing existing NAME members to continue their membership for a specific duration.

I need to know how you feel about this. The AAM needs to

know how you feel about this. Please speak up now! Please address your concerns to the following individuals and me:

Edward Able, Jr., President and CEO and Robert P. Bergman, Chair of the Board
American Association of Museums
1575 Eye St, NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005
202.289.1818
Fax: 202.289.6578

Janice Klein, Chair, SPC Council
Field Museum of Natural History
Dept. of Anthropology
Roosevelt Rd. at Lake Shore Dr.
Chicago, IL 60605
312.922.9410 ext: 442
Fax: 312.427.7269

You may also address your concerns to any of the NAME Board members or representatives listed in this publication.

This issue closes a chapter for the *Exhibitionist*. Diana Cohen, Editor of this publication since 1991, will be passing the baton. Diana has nurtured this publication from a newsletter to the status of a full blown journal. Thank you Diana, for your selfless contribution to the best thing that NAME has going for it!

Also, Serena Furman, serving this organization as its Secretary since 1994 has made a career change. Thanks Serena, for handling the mountains of details and keeping us on-course.

As I complete my term as NAME's President, I appreciate those that have given their most precious commodity—their time—to projects won and lost. The relationships made and lessons learned here, will be remembered forever. Thank you. To the incoming Board Members of NAME—Godspeed.

MICHAEL

Michael Pierce
President, NAME

From the Editor

Is there a theme to this issue of the *Exhibitionist*, as there generally is to the magazine's spring editions?

Well—to demonstrate that it's usually possible to construe a theme in most of our issues—the focus of this one would have to be The Disparate Nature of *Exhibitionist* Concerns. That is, there's a touch of philosophy, a bit of "our design challenge," a suggestion from outside the field about our visitors, and hints about the nuts and bolts of exhibit budgeting.

In the years that I've been the editor of the *Exhibitionist*, I've been fortunate to work with a tremendous range of authors on an amazing range of topics. I've never felt at a loss for topics or themes or authors. If anything, I have felt frustrated that there just aren't the resources to follow up on all of the important themes affecting *Exhibitionist* types.

This is my last issue of *Exhibitionist*. I want to thank everyone with whom I have worked over the years. For their work on this issue, I would especially like to thank Mary Wiedeman Quinn, our designer; Jennie Alwood Zehmer, our art editor; and Ann Carper, our managing editor. Thanks also to Sharyn Horowitz for her years of service as a regional editor. To Phyllis Rabineau for her wonderful "Exhibits Newsline" column. And to Mark Driscoll, our immediate past designer, who was instrumental in shaping the magazine. Of course thanks to everyone not listed who have lent articles, constructive advice, ideas, support, and such.

I hope my new "freedom" will afford the opportunity to pursue an enterprise in which I am interested—exhibit criticism. To be as specific as I can: I would like to explore how museum folks de-

scribe and assess, using extant examples, the ways in which exhibits succeed and fail. If you are interested in working with me, as a writer, editor, collaborator . . . please be in touch.

With best regards and thanks for everything,

Diana

Diana Cohen Altman
Editor-in-Chief

Bulletin Board

Museum Premieres Now on CD-ROM

A CD-ROM is now available for *Museum Premieres* (reviewed *Exhibitionist* spring 1997), which features 800+ pages of 12,000+ exhibitions and events from major US museums. The 1998/1999 CD-ROM sells for \$299.50/ \$7 shipping. (The book price is \$49.50/ \$4 shipping.)

To order, call toll-free 888-GoMuseums (888-466-8738) or e-mail gomuseums@com.juno.

Netting Visitors: Casino Bounces Back

by Edward Malouf

Dramatizing the US love affair with tennis tests museum-exhibit designers' imagination and skills. What to show? How? Courtesy Krent/Paffett Associates



Adjacent to Rhode Island's famous Breakers and amid the largest concentration of mansion-museums in the east lies the Newport Casino, built in the 1880s. This gilded-age recreational center and clubhouse also features the International Tennis Hall of Fame, which was added more than 70 years ago.

What's the Attraction?

A highlight of gilded-age Newport, R.I., the Newport Casino was designed about 1880 by renowned architect Stanford White in the Arts and Crafts style. The recreational center and clubhouse had all the expected amenities: steeplechase horse grounds, a court tennis gallery, a theater, billiards facilities, card rooms, and a grand lounge. Here neighbors of the Astors, the Vanderbilts, or J.P. Morgan could catch up on the latest gossip emanating from the resort community's imposing "cottages."

After a few years in operation, the steeplechase grounds were re-landscaped and prepared to accommodate Newport's newest craze: lawn tennis. Thus began a century-long association between the Newport Casino and the new sport of tennis. While no longer the

host of the US Open, the Casino is still an active recreational and professional tennis center, with the only public grass courts in the nation. In 1954, shortly after the International Tennis Hall of Fame was founded, dedicated board members created the Casino's first exhibit displays. These early exhibits featured wall-mounted historical rackets and huge trophy cases trimmed in moulding that matched the building interior. Several of the rackets had slowly warped into non-regulation shape by the time our team had its first walk-through. Hence the team faced something of a delay before strategizing about the overall interpretive plan.

Developing the Newport Casino and the Tennis Hall of Fame into an exciting visitor experience that would please both traditionalists and modern museumgoers required the best in exhibit development and design know-how. Krent/Paffett Associates was hired for the job, and I was pleased to be a part of the team that faced the challenge.

While tennis is a dramatic sport, its artifacts are not, in and of themselves. Clothing, sneakers, rackets and trophies form a large part of the collection; they needed a context to be placed in to be relevant. More exciting are the historic images and film footage. The Casino history itself would be part of the content of the new Hall of Fame, but it could not be at the expense of creating a compelling visitor environment. Elements needed to make the Tennis Hall of Fame a viable attraction on busy Bellevue Avenue would require a omise between historic exactness and dramatic display.

What Was the Plan?

In the early 1990s, Krent/Paffett Associates was charged with preparing an interpretive and curatorial master plan, to be followed by a phased annual implementation program. Exterior building restoration was already complete, and work had started on the interior, so the Krent/Paffett team needed to move quickly to coordinate exhibit requirements with the architectural work. Without a curator, an artifact accession system, or gallery climate control, the team moved first to provide the restoration architect, the Vitetta Group

Newport Casino visitors may feel transported to the age of lawn tennis. Photograph by Greg Premru



of Philadelphia, specifications on climate control standards. Recommendations were made as to how to properly store the endless boxes of rackets in the new climate-controlled storage vaults being constructed in the attic space.

The team focused next on its most significant challenge: how to configure what was essentially a historic house—one that happened to house a museum—into a first-class visitor experience. A previous exhibit plan had proposed gutting the interior and creating a seamless zigzag visitor path from one end of the horseshoe-shaped plan to the other. While that plan kept the exterior of the building intact to meet with historic registry requirements, it was rejected by the Casino board. Many members had fond memories of the Casino in its glory days and aimed to have the final plan respect the original interior layout and finishes.

Others, on the other hand, felt the Casino needed to join other halls of fame in exhibit sophistication and technology so as to capture its share of the summertime Newport crowds.

If left in their existing form, the interior paths formed by the many rooms and unaligned corridors would cause visitors to find themselves wandering in and out of unconnected rooms and squeezing through standard doorways. Such a scenario might be appropriate to an historic house, where the house itself and the history it evokes are the main attraction. But this was not our mandate. Our solution was to use an existing part of the restoration vocabulary—the six-ft.-wide transomed entrance portal—to enlarge existing doorways, and, more radically, to replace sections of wall at strategic locations. This part of our proposal prompted at least one awkward pause during the conference-call review by the director and architect. But because we used an existing and historically correct element, we all eventually came to consensus on a plan that created a visitor flow without cul-de-sacs.

The next museum-wide recommendation made in

respect to allowing the richly detailed interior to complement the planned exhibitry and immersion environments was to paint all the walls and ceilings a neutral gray. This would allow for the continuum of surface texture and moulding styles the visitor sees in the other fully restored areas. It would also act as an effective backdrop for the colorful box-framed borderless color photos, gold-framed lithographs, and the colorful Grand Slam Room. At least three combinations of wall and a slightly lighter ceiling paint were tried and re-viewed before a decision was finally made.

Our master plan used the linear plan of the building by conceiving of the galleries as being an unfolding timeline from tennis' origins in medieval England as court tennis to today's power tennis. An important conceptual shift would occur when the visitor went from the 19th-century and Golden-Era galleries to those of the Open Era, 1968 to the present. Prior to 1968 paid professional tennis players were not ranked or allowed in the national tournaments. Significant structural changes occurred at this time in the ranking systems and admissions policies of the big national matches. We aimed to mirror this important transition in our timeline.

Phase One: Showing the Open Era

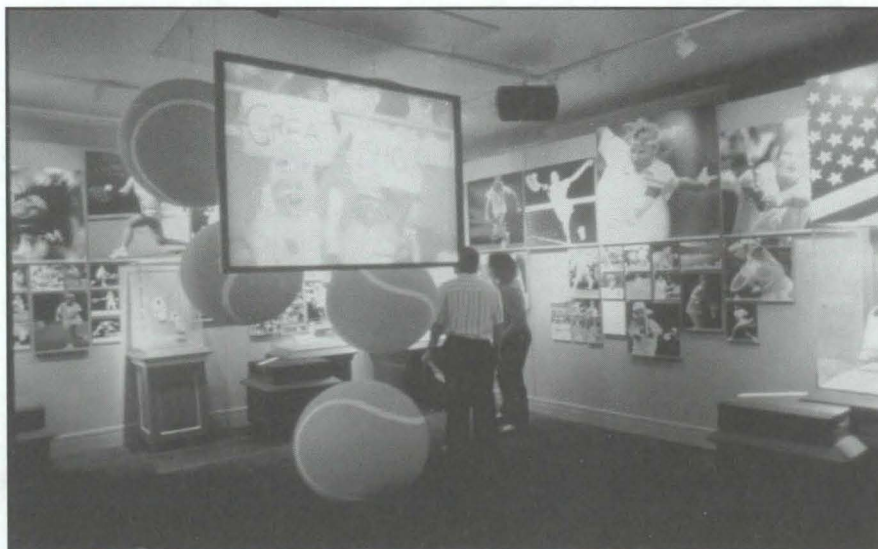
The 3,000-sq.-ft. Open Era environment required partition walls to signify the physical and curatorial transition. Extensive video (six projector locations) and numerous photographs, as well as several fireplaces, lattice wall moldings, and jogs in the plan, dictated the decision to create more wall area. Thus perfectly restored areas were soon to be closed in by the partition walls.

A frantic call came in from the site during installation. Several board members were in shock after seeing the first few newly installed partition walls. Although everything had been approved, and arrangements had been to photograph the restored fireplaces before installation, apparently these particular folks were

unaware of the plan. The fact that the walls were removable with no damage to the original walls alleviated their concerns, at least for the time being.

Perhaps the site's most dynamic experience is the virtual tennis theater.

Visitors proceed right into the middle of a life-size split-video projection of a vintage match featuring the famous Jensen brothers. The theater's scaled-court setting is complete with an actual net and regulation tennis



surface. Visitors have been seen to instinctively duck when caught in the middle of the special post-production effects that make a spinning optic yellow ball fill the screen. The surround-sound system reproduces every nuance of the match, from the players' grunts to the squeaking of their sneakers.

Phase Two: Evoking Tennis' Beginnings

The second work phase, which we completed in 1995, involved tennis' early era, up to the Open Era. This treatment was more reverential to the building details; no fireplaces were covered up! Using the same gray wall finish, we displayed the content in gold wood frames with caption blocks cut out of the double-



framed mattes. We stained and topcoated the casework to harmonize with the walls.

In one area of the Casino, life-cast figures finish up a card game within a restored setting. Elsewhere, an actual 1940s truck section evokes a then-renowned player and his time on the road setting up matches wherever he could find competition and sink net posts. The exhibit fabricator said that there were inches to spare in squeezing the truck into the space. The many life-cast figures in this area were finished in translucent colored finishes, appearing much as black-and-white photographs do when hand-colored.

Balancing Old and New

The US Tennis Association wing presented the design team with some unique challenges in the effort toward combining old and new. Rebuilt in a contemporary manner after a fire earlier in the century, the hall now doubles as the museum's rented-function hall. Apparently, the people who rent the hall do not want to feel that they are in a tennis museum. So, to establish compatibility with the restored appearance of the rest of the museum, the team redesigned the moulding and reconfigured the wall transitions. But to meet the needs of both "audiences" using the space, the team employed more contemporary techniques.

We created a system of pivot-hinged graphic panels that when closed into the wall look just like a paneled

wall. We also casted all the casework to facilitate removal to a special closet. One difficult-to-move case was kept in place and fitted with a bonnet that disappeared into the base as well as a replaceable top that enabled the unit to function as a serving or gift area.

The Interactive Challenge

All the work put into balancing architectural integrity with interpretation needs took the spotlight away from the possibilities for interactive exhibits, although we did create some elements. In addition to a virtual tennis unit, there is a racket-technology comparison station, a rules-of-the-game interactive, and a moments-in-history video monitor. Generally speaking, tennis interactive ideas—such as court-surface-ball-reaction comparison units or ball-speed-indication stations—seem to lend themselves better to the outdoors or in larger areas where a racket can be swung.

Visitor Response

No formal visitor evaluation has been conducted on the new Newport Casino, but visitorship has significantly increased since the project began. Many messages in the large unlined sign-in book are enthusiastic. They seem to suggest that the institution is indeed fulfilling its role as, in the words of board member and former Philadelphia tournament co-director Marilyn Fernberger, the "keeper of the flame" for tennis. But visitors have also requested more interactive elements in the elegant gallery spaces. As the new Hall of Fame moves on, new forms of interactive exhibitry may be required to attract the next generation of visitors.

Edward Malouf is an exhibition designer who works with Krent/Paffett Associates, Inc., in Boston.

Vintage rackets tell only part of the story of the International Tennis Hall of Fame. Carefully grouped artifacts bring to life the tennis types who may have passed through the Newport Casino in its heyday.
Photograph by Greg Premru

Exhibit Design Meets the Web

by Diana Cohen Altman

Experience teaches that a graphic designer is not necessarily an exhibit designer. Certainly a magazine writer is not often an effective exhibit script writer. At the same time, exhibit professionals know the dangers of approaching a planned exhibition—no matter how innovative it is intended to be—without calling upon a sense of familiar patterns and frameworks.

As on-line “museum exhibits” proliferate and evolve,

those charged with creating these new “visitor experiences” will be tempted to look both toward and away from traditional, “physical” museum exhibits. This seems like an ideal time to pool the wisdom of exhibit designers and others who have spent many years not only creating “user-friendly” physical exhibits but also taking stock of how exhibits are created.

“Making It Real Compared to What?: Physical Exhibits and On-line Exhibits,” a session presented at the American Association of Museums (AAM) 1997 Annual Meeting, was created to permit seasoned physical-museum-exhibit designers to share their approaches in the context of on-line exhibits.

The session was cosponsored by NAME and AAM’s Committee on Education and Committee on Media and Technology. Marc Pachter, Counselor to the Secretary for Electronic Affairs, Smithsonian Institution, moderated. The panel included exhibit designers Mark Driscoll, Principal Designer, Mark Driscoll Design, Inc.; Beth Miles, Principal Partner, Miles, Fridberg, Molinaroli, Inc.; and Don Hughes, Director of Exhibitions and Visitor

Programs, Monterey Bay Aquarium. Judy Gradwohl, a pioneer of on-line museum exhibitry at the Smithsonian

Institution, provided some background and demonstrated some of her work-in-progress. I was the session chair.

What follows are excerpts from the moderator and designer discussion portions of “Making It Real Compared to What?: Physical Exhibits and On-line Exhibits.”

Marc Pachter:

We are discussing today something that is basically still unknown. I’m not sure “unknowable.” That remains to be seen. . . . No one is an expert in the question of what an on-line exhibition is yet. What is particularly valuable . . . is to go back to the basics before you talk about what happens on-line. . . . What is an exhibit? What is a museum experience? And while that philosophizing could go on forever, we need to think about it. To begin to wonder whether even the term “exhibit” applies in cyberspace. . . .

I think that not to think that the on-line is radical in the life of museums is to look at it exactly wrong. When we do think about it non-radically, we tend to think about it basically as a brochure in another form, for museums. We all know that; that’s a no-brainer. We know that it’s a way to get out information about who we are. To access more quickly to our information around the world. Of course. The question is, Does the medium dictate, or even confront and undermine some of the basic things that we do and believe in. . . . I leave that as an open question. . . .

I’ve been trying to think . . . with colleagues . . . about what the attributes are that are fundamental in the life of exhibits as we know them. The question as I pose it is far deeper than any of the answers I’m going to give, I’m afraid. But it has made me wonder . . . as to whether the term “exhibit” is even applicable in the on-line world. I say that by way of background because I and my colleague Judy Gradwohl have been working together on a project called *Smithsonian without Walls* . . . in which we began to talk about ourselves about creating experimentally a fundamentally on-line exhibit using the attributes of cyberspace. And we used the word very comfortably until a first session we convened to talk about what exhibits were. And by the end of it, we became very uncomfortable with the term “on-line exhibit”—as though it were a contradiction in terms.

That does not mean that we believe that there is no way that museums can function in cyberspace, but that the metaphor itself is somewhat shaky because of what an exhibit may be. I think that when we think of what an exhibit may be, historically we have to locate it in space and time—not just space. Because what we construct, and what visitors encounter, happens in the here and now. It’s a basic principle, but it is fundamental to how they negotiate the world we have presented to them.

Also, we have to think about, in general . . . as

Is there a point to itemizing what we know about good exhibit design in order to create the best possible Web exhibits? Or are such reports—to borrow a possibly arcane expression—as useful as yesterday’s newspapers? Should we approach Web exhibits with fresh eyes?

What has happened vis à vis Web exhibits since spring 1997, when the “Making It Real Compared to What: Physical Exhibits and On-line Exhibits” panel discussion occurred at the AAM Annual Meeting?

always our confusion about what the visitor experience is. Both what we plan it to be and what many of us think it actually is. And, boy, that's really a way to get a discussion going. Because lots of us have theories and hopes about what will happen, but we also have sneaking suspicions about really what does happen when visitors encounter an exhibit. And I think that needs to come into our consideration of both what exhibits are in the classic sense and what may be on line, in this new form, without the use of the metaphor.

I think also, the whole process of planning an exhibit is, again, attributes of time and space. We have certain notions of what we hope to achieve; what we need to do and know. And I think that has to be part of our discussion about what happens when we transfer ourselves into another medium. I think that one of the fundamental elements of any intellectual product—I mean nothing more than something constructed to transmit meaning—is connections. I think that's what happens. Now this could be a book, a talk, an exhibit. But to go to the most fundamental thing that's happening, one assumes it is not a random encounter.

There are connections being made and implied by what we do. And if we think about that, then certainly, an exhibit is just one aspect of connections. But an exhibit is connections, historically, in the physical

environment. And it has the attributes, values, and limitations of the physical environment. So how we come to something—how we negotiate it—what we can do and cannot do in making connections has to do with using objects in space, historically.

And a lot of people who are—and I will say it right out loud—from my point of view, bad curators, are people who cannot transfer the experience of working out a series of connections in their head from books to physical space. That's the trick. I don't think anybody should ever be hired as a curator unless they know they are now dealing with a new medium; one in which connections have to happen based on the physical, historically.

So that's how we have to think. . . at least how I think about exhibits: connections as a construct made in physical space. Also, I think all constructs in our head should have two attributes: a structure and flexibility. And degrees of both have to do with, again, the medium in which we operate. You can see that I'm using some generalizations here because they might transfer to an on-line universe. But when we're dealing with them in physical time and space, something else

happens. And we've got to realize that.

There are things that are fixed, and things that are fluid in a physical exhibit. Because a physical exhibit is physical, it is at some point "fixed." A few of us fantasize about a world of endlessly changing physical exhibitions. This could be based on our notions of educators, of learning from our public and then changing it to adapt to and respond to their needs. It could be a designer's perpetual need to discover anew the possibilities, and with all the money and time and good will in the world changing it. I mean, who doesn't have a fantasy of changing a physical exhibit over time? But the realities are, basically, once it's up, it's fixed. Which also means that there's a lot longer lead time in a physical exhibit, given the fact that once it's there, it's there. We worry it out longer, I think, than we would in another context if we knew we could fix it. . . .

Now the question about the materiality and

physicality of it. I think when we say that, very often, particularly curators, think about that as the material quality of the object—the stuff; the things. Of course, designers know that the physicality of it has to do with the place, the space. And that is just as hard to reproduce on-line as the objects.

Every time I hear discussions in museums about things, and the

electronic world is a challenge to things, which is what museums exist to provide, according to many people, or at least present, they almost never talk about the physical aspect of space, and placement, and the being in a place, and what happens to lighting and so forth in a place, and the impact of encountering something by negotiating an environment. These are as physical as considerations as the things themselves.

So when we speak about museums as physical places of presentation, we mean that in the comprehensive way. And, again, we have to know then what is lost when we don't have the physical space to play with.

Now, as I've done some reading in how people are thinking about the on-line world, and how it relates to exhibits or not, I found one designer who argued that, from her point of view, the fundamental elements of exhibit design are color scheme, lighting, ambiance, and ease of navigation. . . . And she said that not one of those things are not useful in designing a Web site, as well.

So, from her point of view, yes, you deal with . . . designing in a physical environment, but the principle

“How much of it is space? How much of it is an event? How much of it is the way they go to a place and experience it that way? And what is lost when they don't have it?”

**— Marc Pachter, Counselor
for Electronic Affairs,
Smithsonian Institution**

of designing and impact and negotiation still exist in an on-line world; it's just in a different form. So you should hold to your notions of what happens in a physical world of design and apply it in the circumstances of cyberspace. . . . So she says . . . the principles of design are fixed, but the materials of design the designer has to work with is different. I think she underestimates the difference. But I think it's an . . . interesting principle. Then, when we think about the visitor experience in a physical place, I think we have to wonder about how much of that experience is linked to the experience of place and time. How much of it is space? How much of it is an event? How much of it is the way they go to a place and experience it that way? And what is lost when they don't have it?

Now part of what may be lost in authority. . . . Authority is something that museums are, in my experience, nervous about asserting as one of the things that they do. I think early on it was why they existed, for many people. And very often the discrepancy between visitors, who really come to museums I think very often still in hopes of receiving something fixed and meaningful, is challenged by those in museums who are more and more unwilling to say that the museum is asserting authority may be opening a question. But the physicality of authority is something I don't think we talk about enough.

Museums were certainly built historically to be a place you entered into in a way that was something like a temple or church of meaning. And they still have those attributes, even in modern reinterpretations, they're there. . . . We go to them in a certain mood. And that of course doesn't happen in cyberspace. So museums give that up for better or worse—and some would say for better—they give up that sense of authority.

I also think that the other attribute of the visitor experience we always speak about as valuable in museums is the social aspect of it. People come together to go to museums, more often than not. Single

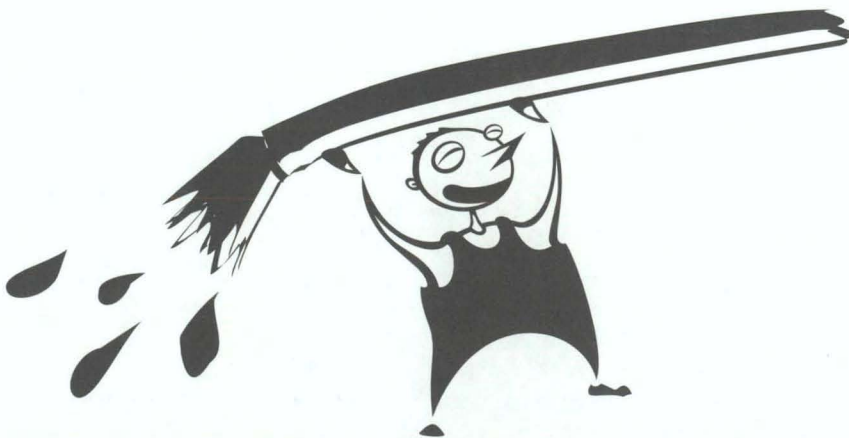
visitors are not, I think, the dominant mode of visiting. And even the way parents feel that learning happens when they bring their children—it's very social; very much being there together. It goes without saying that something socially is transformed in a cyberspace environment. . . . Then there's the question of passivity. How much of a visit to a museum and a museum exhibit is passive? How much of it is active? It certainly is active in a physical sense. There's one of the ironies. Because very often we think about on-line being an active, interactive environment. But the interesting thing is that when we go to a museum we are physically active in the process as well. Whether we're active in learning or not I don't know. . . . So all of these questions about what happens when we go to a museum—the authority of it, the physicality of it, the reality—what we think is real that isn't real. We go to gape, we go to wonder, and so forth. All of these things, I think, are aspects that may not be transferable to the on-line world. . . . That's it for a series of speculations. Now let's go to a series of practitioners who are also thinking of these things in terms of their own experiences.

Beth Miles:

Exhibits combine a lot of different media, and as exhibit designers we get the chance to use a lot of tools . . . to create exhibit experiences that are stimulating for visitors. Of course the way to show you what I do in any exhibit design . . . is to let you walk through the exhibit, let you feel the textures, the colors, the whole experience of entering a space. Be drawn into exploring the exhibit's content by what designers are able to do with the tools we have at our disposal. The trick is today . . . I can't take you on that experience. So we're going to use another medium, of slides . . .

I think that's part of our larger discussion: trying to tell stories, or communicate, to museum explorers, or Web site explorers, what it is we have to say. How to communicate with them. How to give them the tools they need to be stimulated and focus on the stories we have to communicate. I wanted to talk about the essential character of physical exhibits and what we can do when we have tools at our disposal.

Most important for us is having real material—whether it's artifacts or real material that comes from anywhere—to place it in context for visitors. In this case using something totally out of context in order to focus attention on what it is. This is a portal that we designed for a *Seeds of Change* exhibit. It has 14,000 ears of corn . . . to convey a sense of scale and the enormity of the breadth of the topic. It was inside an already impressive interior space, the rotunda of the Natural History Museum. . . . It's that sense of entering, becoming a part of a bigger experience, that we hoped to create. So that visitors have a sense of arrival; that the exhibit is a destination, and that once they enter that portal, they're now going to be for the



time that they're there, in a different world.

One of the other great advantages of exhibits of all kinds . . . is a chance for interaction. Between visitors, and also between visitors and interpreters. In this case, between visitors and performers and artists. And the chance to watch them at work, or ask them questions and learn about what they do. It's that human interaction that . . . in my view . . . is one of the greatest tools we have to work with. And . . . creating an environment for that to happen is part of what designers can do. We have a chance to use materials to stimulate all the senses. . . .

Most often objects don't speak for themselves. They need contexts, they need graphic support, enhancement—whatever tools we can give them to make a story that's meaningful out of sometimes disparate groups of artifacts. Seeing the real thing is what, I think, most of us still believe people come to museums for.

George Washington's last tooth in a case has an amazing power for visitors. But it's just an example of using an object to tell a story. And why people . . . continue to go to museums to look at real things and try to understand what they are. . . . The importance of making the journey to go to an exhibit . . . and to spend the time in the space

you've created for them . . . applies not only to [indoor] museum exhibits, but to all kinds of interpretive devices, whether they are destinations such as a monument or a battlefield, or . . . a historic house, or the artifacts themselves. It's the urge to come and see it for yourself. It's making the effort to be there that I think deserves the respect of exhibit designers.

And so our role is to try to stimulate them, and to let them focus on the content . . . in order to communicate a message that is uppermost in our minds. The tools that we have are considerable, but along with those come some real limitations. . . .

You have the considerable challenges of construction, budgets, collections being prepared for exhibit. It's usual for us as designers to be involved, at least in a large permanent exhibit, for a good two years before the exhibit opens. It's very labor-intensive; it requires a lot of commitment. . . .

In dealing with the physical aspects of design, we have to know that visitors are being constantly distracted by the other attractions, even in the same museum. With rubbing shoulders with other visitors. With the pressure of moving through a physical space. With the limitations of physical access; trying to create

exhibits that are accessible for all. Visitor fatigue is one of our biggest enemies: you never know how fresh or how stale someone is by the time they come to your exhibit. And you realize that your exhibit . . . is placing a demand on their time and on their travel budget. So those physical constraints are some of the design problems . . . that we're asked to solve.

Development of exhibits can be extremely expensive . . . as you get into prototyping models and mock-ups and developing interactives and audiovisual media for exhibits. . . . It's very expensive to go back and modify them. . . . Updating an exhibit if the information is old is also an elaborate process. . . .

There are some principles—especially in physics, the kinds of exhibits that are done most often at science centers and technology centers—that really lend themselves to models and devices and demonstrations

and physical hands-on activities. It's a lot more challenging for designers to try to . . . convey concepts like change or evolutionary process in history or in science without having to bring in many media. . . . Complex and abstract concepts in a physical setting that we have to devise.

Mark Driscoll:

What are [designers'] qualifications [to design on-line exhibits]? I think

especially in our formal training, we didn't start out with qualifications to design exhibits.

Most of us come into the process as graphic designers or architects or industrial designers or artists. Formal training in exhibition design is relatively young. So most of us aren't trained to do exhibits but we do them anyway. So what is it that we bring to the process? . . .

Rick Grefé, [Executive Director] of the American Institute of Graphic Arts, says, "Design is the intermediary between information and understanding." Design meant to convey information, which is what we're all about, must begin with the designer knowing or learning things about the market, about institutional objectives, about audience behavior and needs, about the key messages to be presented. These and other things that are needed for successful design I think are contained in a set of concerns that all people involve directly or indirectly in the exhibit process. And the exhibit designer brings the ability to integrate these concerns into the final product. I think he is also able to draw from what these people contribute to the process, that is, their special bits of knowledge, skills, and abilities.

"It's the urge to come and see . . . that I think deserves the respect of exhibit designers."

**— Beth Miles,
Exhibit Designer**

“Concerns about an actual exhibit also hold true for a virtual one. The only things that change are the media and the environment.”

**— Mark Driscoll,
Exhibit Designer**

I've identified 19 positions and/or roles for the purpose of this discussion. . . . The designer . . . accommodates the concerns and incorporates the contributions of the other participants in the process to turn an empty space into a tool for understanding. So what does all this have to do with virtual exhibits? I think that except for protecting objects, physical safety for visitors and staff, easy-to-find bathrooms, and a place for volunteers to hang their coats, all the other concerns about an actual exhibit also hold true for a virtual one. The only things that change are the media and the environment.

Don Hughes:

This morning as we've been discussing exhibits, I've been sitting here asking myself, Why—why would anyone want to copy a process as dysfunctional as our dear old exhibit-design-and-development process. It takes a long time, spends a large percentage of the budget, and it often puts one or more individual team members into psychotherapy. The process works, in its fashion, but why pollute future on-line exhibits with old approaches?

Albert Einstein said, “No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it.” We must learn to see the world anew. Film and television people know how to create two-dimensional virtual experiences, and maybe it would be productive to get them involved in the development of on-line exhibits. And even though exhibits departments or education departments are as close as many museums come to film and television, we shouldn't let ourselves believe that current exhibit development process is necessarily the best model for planning and delivering information on-line.

Of course realistically, while creative types are staying open to new possibilities, someone in the museum will simply add the task of creating a Web site to your job description. And their small, we-do-everything staff will then be charged with the creation.

This morning I'm conflicted about describing a process that may not be the most appropriate for developing on-line exhibits, yet realizing it's the only process most of us have. So, like Beth and Mark, I will lay out some ideas of what makes a good physical exhibit. . . .

The 3 Gs: Good topic, Great development team, and Generous budget. That's it. That's one version of what makes a great physical exhibit (which also, by the way, would make a great on-line exhibit). . . .

[Here's] a story about keeping computers out of a

museum's public space. It's a little embarrassing. But I admit I've been attracted to computer terminals in a museum exhibit. I'm not proud of it, but I've approached them because the promise of electronic communication is very seductive. I make excuses to my friends that terminals are cute and informational. But I'm really attracted by their latent potential. Usually after a flirtatious but disappointing affair, I end up not liking the computer and not respecting myself for the time I've wasted.

After years of these brief electronic encounters, I've come to believe that being openly digital in public places like museums may not be appropriate. Perhaps I should only meet the computer where we can both be comfortable. Meet it on-line and not in a museum. After all, in museums I share physical space and I interact with other human beings. Personally, I'm not there to gather a lot of information. It's a social experience. I want to relax. I want to enjoy myself. I want to enjoy the architectural environment, full of sounds and sights and objects.

Museums need their precious real estate to provide face-to-face encounters with real objects. And real objects distract me from computer-dispensed information. In museums, I'm willing to settle for inspiration and save the individual experience of cyberspace for the privacy of my home where on-line I can get down and digital dressed any way I want. . . .

I thought I should go to [the Museums and the Web Conference, sponsored by the Getty Information Institute and organized by Archives and Museum Informatics, Mar. 15-19, 1997] in L.A. to learn something more about being on-line. These seemed to be the four most-discussed topics at the L.A. conference: Technology. Currently there doesn't seem to be an accepted standard, so individuals are creating products in different forms that can't be used by everyone. The consensus was that no real progress can be made until everyone uses the same approach. Bandwidth. The size of the two-way electronic path between your computer and a source of information. . . . Everybody wants bigger and faster plumbing. . . . Access. The positive attributes of inexpensive and flexible access from a re-

**“The 3 Gs: Good topic,
Great development team,
and Generous budget.”**

**— Don Hughes,
Exhibit Designer**

mote location seem pretty clear. Revenue . . . That's what the owners of the images are concerned about losing. High-quality images can be easily used and perhaps abused by visitors, and it's complicating the development of on-line sites. A woman working at the Getty Museum reported that one department couldn't get permission from another department in the Getty to use the images on their own Getty Web site because of the concern with this unauthorized use.

But no one seemed to be talking about how the Web could complement the reason I go to museums. I visit to be told entertaining stories. This conference of librarians, scientists, and information managers seemed fixated on getting their collections digitized and on the Web. The activity of storytelling was virtually absent. It was as though they thought information and entertainment were mutually exclusive, and creating an appealing mix of the two, as any good physical exhibit must do, was not discussed.

For me, the goal of arranging physical and intellectual content to bring an audience to a particular conclusion—in other words, to tell a meaningful story—is as important as a goal as it is to put the entire collection on line. I'm sure it's worthwhile for museums to electronically open their collections to the public. But personally, as a visitor, I really don't care about access to every object in the collections. I'm glad there are curators paying attention to the entire collection, in much the same way as I'm glad there are cloisters of nuns praying for the soul of humanity. My soul included. It can't hurt. But it's not something that's important to my daily life.

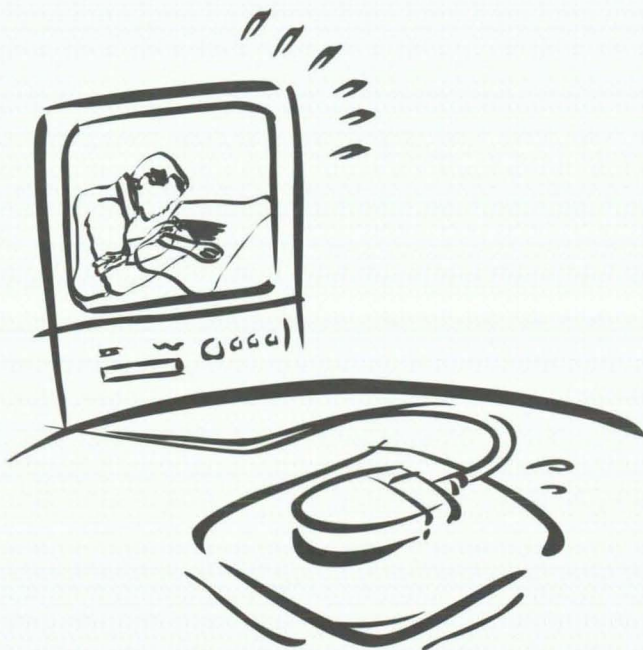
As a visitor, I personally am satisfied with the tip of the information iceberg. Just lead me to the collection's greatest hits and the interesting story the subject-matter experts can tell. I'm looking forward to on-line exhibits that will use the unique elements of being digital to continue the museum's tradition of storytelling as well as

present its collections.

I'll tell you a story of one cybersaleswoman I met in L.A., who was totally enthralled in the electronic world. She spends her days and many of her nights on the Web, and pays her electric bill by selling CDs and CD-ROMs from her hotel room. On the door of her room, she put up a sign: *Cybill's World of CDs*. . . . The exhibit has a clear title, topic, and even has a graphic representation of what's to follow. Architecture, environmental space, entry, and orientation. I opened the store and stepped into the room. I was engaged by the environment, and I knew intuitively how to move around in the space. Introduction: Organizes the ideas, places the objects and content, and presents the exhibit's important messages. On the bathroom door, she had attached a short written description about the history of digital information. How she traveled around the world seeking unusual discs. And how she felt that each CD she sells is a piece of the future. It also said she accepted all major credit cards. A "boom box" was playing a music CD, and the shades on the table were tipped up to light the collection. The room was filled with the sweet smell of warm polyvinyl shrinkwrap. Look and feel: Creates a physical context; an atmosphere. Visual appeal, color, form, shape, scale, sound acoustics, and lighting. On the bed, the CDs were categorized by type and arranged alphabetically by topic. Many of them had a short written description carefully printed on the hotel notepad. Labels: Graphics that expressed the important messages, and are easy to read and understand. A mobile constructed from used CDs and coat hangers hung from a fire sprinkler overhead, and the bed was pulled away from the wall to allow people to circle the collection without bumping into one another. Pacing, directional elements, sight line, and traffic flow. On the desk, a customer was running a demo CD on a laptop, while his child was on the floor using the used CDs as flying saucers. . . . Participatory activities, interactives, and multimedia. And as you exited the room, taped to the back of her suitcase was a sign thanking you for supporting her lifestyle, buying CDs, and inviting you to visit her Web site day or night. Conclusion: Take-home messages and encourage repeat visits.

Webster's *Ninth Collegiate* defines an exhibit as simply, "a public showing, as of a work of art, objects of manufacture, or athletic skills." I think an exhibit occurs when someone has taken thought in how objects and/or concepts are presented. And where there is a purpose behind their presentation.

Here's a suggestion for definition of a "museum-style" exhibition. I say "museum-style" just to fold in all possible museum types. "The purposeful arrangement and presentation of objects and/or information created to communicate through display or experience an intention to an audience." I think today's attempts at on-line exhibits are comparable to the early days of physical exhibits. We are in the "cabinet-of-curiosities"



or the “collecting-and-show-everything” phase of development. . . .

Each of us is shaped by our experience and concepts, and to create virtual exhibits today, we must use the real world as a frame of reference. We need familiar landmarks copied from the real world to guide us in a new, on-line virtual world.

Here are some landmarks from physical exhibits that may cross over to on-line exhibits: The topic must be interesting, relevant, and popular because the topic is an exhibit’s principal attraction. The architecture in a physical exhibit must be easy to understand and follow, just as a computer interface must be simple for visitors to use and easy for them to find their way around the information.

The design of a physical exhibit might be described as linear or non-linear, just as an on-line exhibit might be scripted or serendipitous. On-line or physical, the exhibit’s paths must be clearly indicated and organized to be comfortable and enjoyable for visitors. Visitors are here for the exhibit, so don’t put too much information or too many instructions between them and their first attraction.

Content. Any exhibit must have informative and entertaining content, but on-line, competition is particularly formidable. You must engage visitors, or they’ll keep surfing right past your site. You need to grab and keep visitors’ attention. In fact, your visitor’s attention is the most important element in any successful exhibit, physical or on-line.

Participatory. Taking action is an important step in learning. It’s important to appeal to different learning styles. It’s important to remember that visitors find learning entertaining, as long as it’s accessible. As for rewarding, visitors leaving your site should feel that their time was well spent, and a compelling, high-quality experience helps them feel that way.

Graphics. Keep your graphics clear and direct. In a physical exhibit, you want to keep the text brief and readable. On a monitor’s back-lit screen, being readable is particularly important. You should be able to present more text when visitors are at home sitting in front of their monitors, then when they are standing or moving through a physical space. Short interactive experiences appeal to more people and therefore get the message across to more people than reading pages of text.

Look and feel. Both physical and on-line exhibits are mostly visual. Both can use theater, drama, and fantasy to create surprise, the unexpected, and the unusual. Using different media in physical exhibits gives visitors several ways to understand the exhibit. Perhaps using a variety of approaches on-line will do the same. Maintenance is very important. Keep it up. Opening a physical exhibit is almost the last step in the production process. Opening an on-line site is only the beginning. Maintaining an on-line site will be—should be—a large ongoing effort. You want visitors to return, and

when they do they will expect up-to-date exhibits and new activities built up to the same high-quality standards that interested them when they first came to visit you.

Now is the time to get on-line. And if you’re waiting for the speeding world of computers to slow down so you can get onboard, here’s an interesting quote from 1949. . . . “It would appear we have reached the limits of what is possible to achieve with computer technology. Although one should be careful with such statements, because they tend to sound pretty silly in five years.” Today such statements tend to sound pretty silly in five weeks. . . . It’s probably safe to say it won’t be slowing down much in the near future.

So if you want to get involved, or realize that you must get involved, with on-line exhibits, the challenge is to try not to think of them in the same way we think of physical exhibits. Voltaire said a man is a creature of the age in which he lives. Very few are able to raise themselves above the ideas of the time.

Our challenge is not to contain new, on-line technology with our old way of thinking about physical exhibits.

Marc Pachter:

[That’s] exactly why we created the session. . . . It’s not just about technicalities; it has to be about the purpose, and the use of it. Sometimes people have asked me why I feel this so strongly at the Smithsonian, and I’ve said . . . there was never any notion of having a supreme leader of typewriters in the old days. So that having a Supreme Technological Whiz as driving the programmatic purpose of an institution is just as silly. It is about what we can do with it.

An exhibits editor at the Smithsonian Institution’s Office of Exhibits Central, Diana Cohen Altman has been editor-in-chief of the Exhibitionist for about eight years.

Five Ways from the Web

by Seth Frankel

As an exhibit designer and long-standing Webhead, I've seen my fair share of on-line museum exhibits. Some have consisted of little more than an on-line version of a physical exhibit's brochure. Others have featured a simple highlights tour of a museum staff's favorite objects. A few have been "freestanding" on-line exhibits, completely separate from physical exhibits.

What makes a good on-line exhibit? Ironically, much of what makes the Web exciting by its very nature detracts from on-line exhibits. It's fascinating to be one click away from exploring an entire universe, but how much of the universe are you prepared to embrace in a single session? And will you be able to navigate your way through the flotsam? Like reading a good book in a cozy chair in the living room, we want to feel "at home" with a good exhibit.

For the sake of discussion, I have come up with five categories of Web exhibits. Please consider the following as a variety-pack rather than as a "best of the Web." To find out about the creators, sponsors, and so forth behind each of the sites, please visit the site.

Technically, these sites run the gamut of Web exhibits; some require plug-ins (free software that adds functions to the browser) and faster modems, whereas others call for nothing more than a plain-vanilla browser at 28.8.

For your Web-browsing convenience, I've posted links to all of these Web sites on my own site. Go to <http://members.aol.com/NAMELINKS> and follow the links. (By the way, don't miss that link to my resumé . . .) I hope you'll see these exhibits as inspiration when trying to fit that square exhibit into a round Web. . . .

Courtesy The Tech Museum of Innovation

1. The Electronic Docent

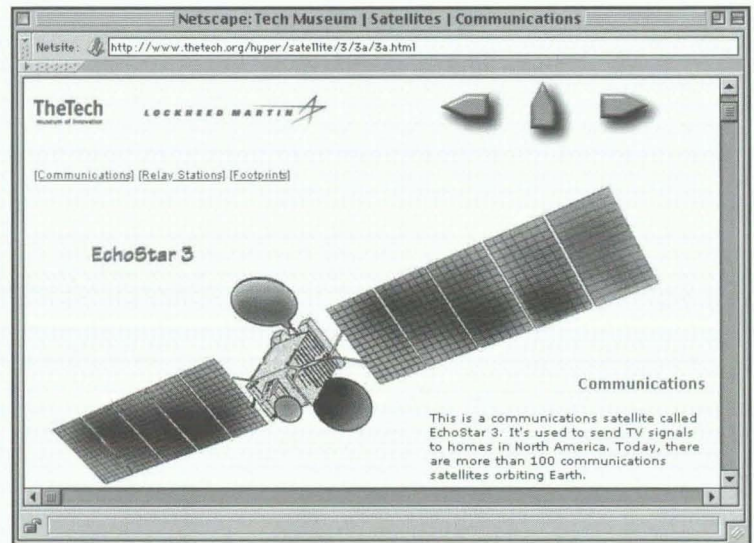
100 Highlights from the Koninklijke Bibliotheek
www.konbib.nl/100hoogte/hh-en.html

Without pomp, without hype, this site displays and describes a wide range of objects from the Dutch national library's vast collection. Objects can be viewed by type—e.g. bookbinding, papermaking, religious works—or in a comprehensive tour laid out by the curator. Thumbnail object images with descriptions link to large images for a more detailed view.

2. Satellites around the Main Idea

The Satellite Site
www.thetech.org/hyper/satellite/

What about satellites? As a theme and as an approach to on-line exhibits, that is. This site incorporates strong graphics and resources for a "hands-on" exploration around a central theme, implied, not stated as such, of What Is a Satellite? Its strength is incorporation of a variety of features that are simple to use and easily navigable by adults and children alike. An inter-



active program lets you build your own (this requires a Java-enabled browser) satellite. Animated pictures give you views of different orbit patterns. And when you're ready to see a real satellite in action, follow links to the Satellite of the Month.

3. Science and Technology at Your Fingertips

Vocal Vowels from the Exploratorium
www.exploratorium.edu/exhibits/vocal_vowels/vocal_vowels.html

Following visual and audio tracks, the visitor to this exhibit can begin to understand how controlled vibration of the vocal chords makes different sounds. (The audio tracks are in an AIFF format, which most computers with a fairly modern browser and sound capa-

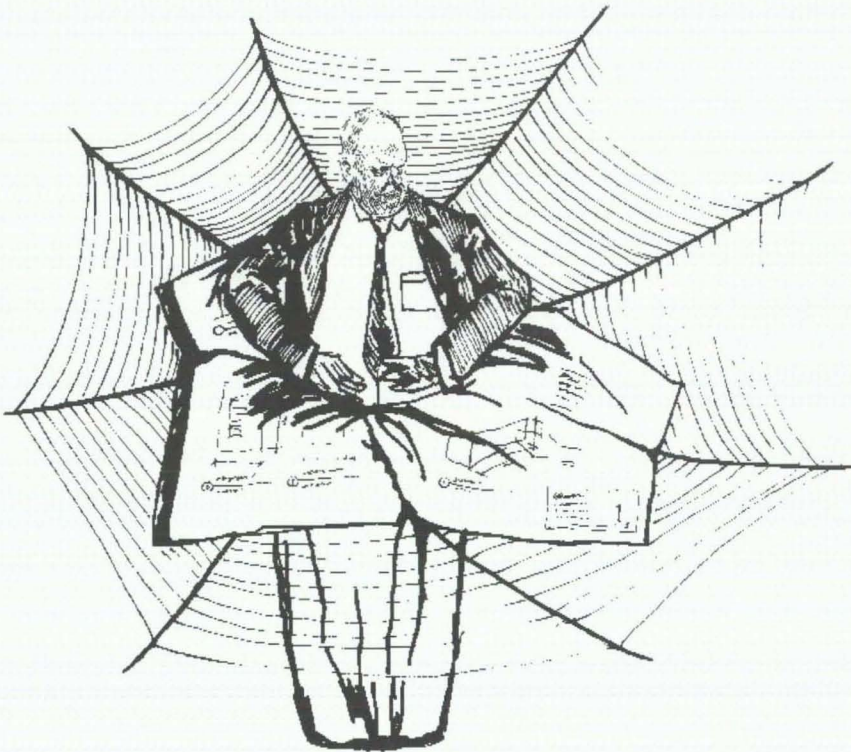


Illustration by Seth Frankel

bilities can process.) The site's design is very straightforward: See a picture, click on it, hear the sound of the pictured device, read the explanation. The site's graphic design is lacking. As in the case of many hands-on science and technology exhibits, the exhibit's function appears to be more important than its visual appeal. These "on-line-demonstration" sites seem to either look good and be confusing or be easy-to-understand and crude in appearance.

Technology note: Many "on-line-demo" Web sites require plug-ins (generally available free on-line) and/or the downloading of a separate file. Yes, this can be frustrating, particularly trying to wade through the instructions. It's a little like having to track down a custom-made screwdriver for each set of screws you use.

4. Exhibit's Great. Wish You Were Here!

Life in a Peranakan House
www.museum.org.sg/shm/present.html

As an on-line version of a current exhibition, this Web site takes the visitor on a room-by-room tour of the house of a Peranakan (i.e. a descendant of an intermarriage between a Chinese pioneer and local woman of the Malay Archipelago). A floorplan forms the foundation of the tour and describes and pictures key features of the Peranakan way of life.

The exhibit is text-dependent, and the images aren't as crisp as they might be. But the format is easy to follow and concise enough to keep the visitor from burning out. A list of related on-line resources would be nice.

5. The Compleat Exhibition

Mathew Brady's Portraits
www.npg.si.edu/exh/brady

This "freestanding" on-line exhibition offers seasoned exhibits people a rich blend of the familiar and the new. Well conceived and thorough, this site is easy to navigate, fun, and educationally rich. Slower modem users may suffer a bit, but no plug-ins are required to enjoy what feels like a jazzy experience within some cozy confines.

Seth Frankel is an exhibit designer at the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Exhibits Central. He is often found under cold compresses after long hours visiting Cyberville.

Mathew Brady's Portraits: A Study in Web Crafting

The National Portrait Gallery's *Mathew Brady's Portraits* (www.npg.si.edu/exh/brady) surveys the renowned 19th-century photographer's work and techniques. The exhibition—and this is more than a simple exhibit—manages to convey a good deal of “meat” through effective pacing and the imaginative and intelligent use of Web graphics, features, and functions. In addition to images of the “objects,” the exhibition includes a technical glossary, a lesson in photographic techniques, a timeline, and a biography. Just by virtue of the clarity of the presentation, the viewer can look at Brady's work from different perspectives, from the historical to the art historical to the purely aesthetic.

Visitors can locate individual photographs by three routes—an album with thumbnail photographs, an index of sitters organized by category, and a delightful virtual gallery set in a 19th-century parlor. This variety of means gives the visitor the opportunity to create a tailor-made experience within what is actually a carefully structured environment. Say you specifically want to see a portrait of Abraham Lincoln. Search through the index and you're one click away. Or if you feel like “strolling” through the galleries, simply pass your cursor over a thumbnail portrait and the sitter's name pops up along the bottom of your window. In the index, three-or-four word descriptions of the sitters' historical relevance may help draw unfamiliar visitors deeper in the exhibit.

In the Making a Photograph section, the visitor can follow visually concise demonstrations of photographic processes through a “slide-show” technique that appears like a short animation. You can watch a camera focus on a subject, see a glass plate develop—become

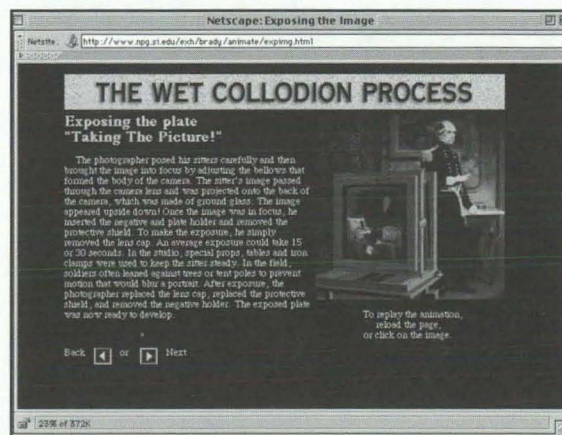
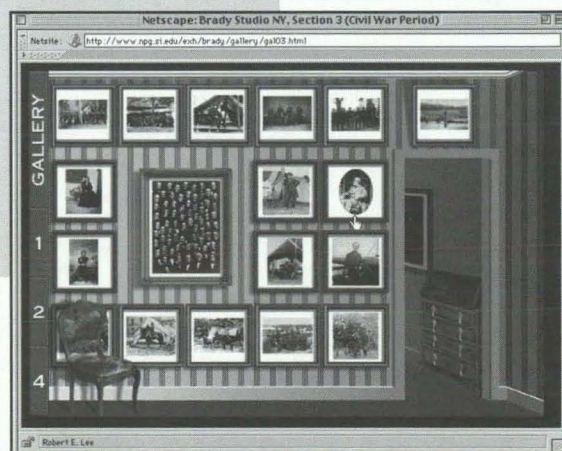
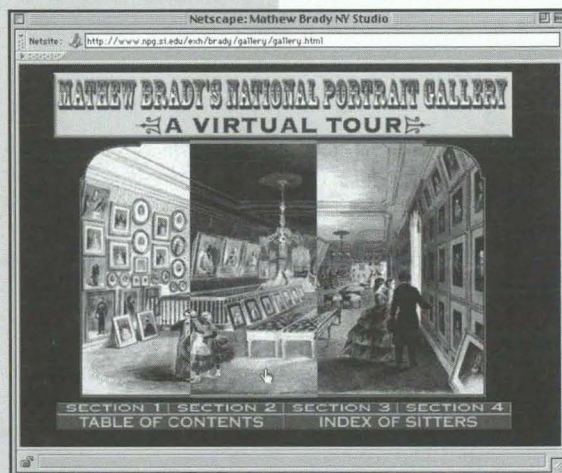
engaged in the behind-the-scenes of Brady's world.

The Web design uses common Web features in unique and appropriate ways. In the 19th-century gallery, for example, you can select a room by clicking on one of four sections of the image. As your cursor passes over each section, the image switches from a black-and-white positive to a black-and-white negative, strengthening the impression of the photographic process at work.

The descriptions of the images—the “labels”—are succinct and engaging. Often links from one sitter offer the opportunity to create a specific path through the story based on a particular theme. For example, in the description of Gen. and Mrs. Tom Thumb, you can follow a link to P.T. Barnum to Jenny Lind, the Swedish Nightingale. Without planning it, you've explored an exhibit-within-an-exhibit about performers through the work of Brady.

Waiting for images to load at telephone modem speeds can be a drag, but unlike many other Web sites, *Mathew Brady's Portraits* rewards you for your patience. This exhibition is a clear case of a successful collaboration among a designer, a curator, other developers, and the Web format.

Courtesy National
Portrait Gallery,
Smithsonian Institution



The Nine-Ton Cat: Behind the Scenes at an Art Museum

by Barbara Altman

The *Nine-Ton Cat: Behind the Scenes at an Art Museum* documents the tremendous effort and range of activities that go on behind the scenes of the National Gallery of Art, making it the national treasure that it is. How else would the general public ever know such savory tidbits as the following? The museum sits on 6,800 piers driven into a tidewater swamp; 20th-century curators helped skeptical security officers understand the East Building's French impressionist paintings, now their most desired post; and the stairs in the East Building vacuum-clean visitors' shoes as we walk. The book is of interest to any museum or art lover. As an educator, it provides me with new information and new ideas.

The book opens by bringing to life the early hours when Washington's National Gallery is being prepared for the public. At about the same time, less than three miles away, I am on duty in the cafeteria of an elementary school, moving children along to class as they finish their breakfast. "I still have it!" a five-year old tells my colleague. "The kiss you put on my nose with your finger," she explains. The teacher had told her not to let it fall off, and the six-year-old had guarded it over the weekend at

Grandma's House, the place that she and other children facing life's most difficult challenges, including AIDS, call home. The school is in a largely African-American, partly Hispanic, urban neighborhood.

Despite their proximity, the distance between the museum and the neighborhood is seldom traveled. Art offers the possibility of lifting us beyond our circumstances, but how does an educator bridge the span between a painted matte in a frame and a hungry child? Titian and cartoons? A quiet world of European, American, and Far Eastern art, and the noise and violence of today's streets?

And, one might ask, when one becomes wary from trying, how important is it to do so?

In "The Triumphant Power of the Humanities" (*American Educator*, winter 1997/98), Earl Shorris, author of *New American Blues: A Journey through Poverty to Democracy*, asks a woman in Bedford Hills Correctional Facility, "Why do you think people are poor?" Her answer is unexpected. "You've got to teach the moral life of downtown to the children—by taking them downtown to plays, museums, concerts, lectures, where they can learn—a moral alternative to the street."

I believe this woman is right, but I also believe that this interaction must be a conversation, not a monologue. So how do sculptures and sketches respond to the children's concerns? How can Christina, a fifth-



The *Nine-Ton Cat: Behind the Scenes at an Art Museum*, by Peggy Thomson with Barbara Moore. Edited by Carol Eron. Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1997.

Illustrations by Jennie Alwood Zehmer

grader surrounded by untimely deaths, find beauty in the movement of Degas' *Seated Woman Wiping Her Hip*? Is refuge available for Jasmine, an eight-year-old distraught by her mother's arrest and imprisonment, in Rubens' *Daniel in the Lion's Den* or diversion in Thiebaud's *Cakes*? And can I help Cristian make the connection between his Salvadoran heritage and the Aztec-inspired jaguar referred to in the book title? *The Nine-Ton Cat: Behind the Scenes at an Art Museum* of-

fers possibilities.

Familiarity and access bring comfort. In preparation for visiting an art exhibition, another teacher and I showed a group of fifth-graders slides of some of the works we would see. I engaged their imaginations as we viewed the slides. “What do you think the children climbing on the man’s arm represent?” “Why are his eyes closed?” “Do you think the artist chose to use black and white for a purpose?” “What does the lizard make you think of?” The children had so many insightful and honest things to say, I myself saw the works with new clarity. When we actually went to the exhibition, I received many tugs on the sleeve and grasps of the hand by street-wise pre-adolescents excited about recognizing a piece of sculpture or remembering something meaningful about an artist.

What touched the children most, however, was having the opportunity to see a weaver at her craft and speak with her. One of the girls told me why that was the significant event of the day for her. Before seeing her at work—hearing about the nuts and flowers she used to make dyes, and the hours she would work before resting her hands—“it looked so easy,” Claudia said. “But I think it’s hard.” Speaking with the artist made real what adults take for granted—that a piece of art is the expression of a human being’s spirit, and it takes time, effort, and dedication to create. The weaving and the museum became more accessible to the children through human warmth.

If I were to use *The Nine-Ton Cat: Behind the Scenes at an Art Museum* directly as a teaching tool, I would start with the pictures of the people in the book. The students would look at the pictures and select a person to write about, giving them a fictitious but plausible name and identity. Through that person we would learn about their work and their connection to art and the museum.

Many of the students, no doubt, would choose to begin their journey through the eyes of those most familiar to them: the security guards, who are largely African-American. I would ask them also to explore the work of the curators, conservators, handlers, lampers, and architects. They would be delighted to see the designers’ work progress from maquettes to the exhibition itself. If, after creating these characters in their imaginations, they could meet the actual people who fill these roles, they would have a new appreciation for the art work that motivates so much energy, effort, dedication, and precision. It might open their eyes to new career possibilities, and to the value of the museums that are so close to them yet seem so inaccessible.

Having read this book, I can share with my students a more human dimension to two imposing buildings and suggest points of reference for an otherwise overwhelming museum visit. Like Claudia said of the artistic effort she witnessed, *The Nine-Ton Cat: Behind the Scenes at an Art Museum* shows the reader the ways in which running a museum is anything but simple,

though it may seem so to a child’s eye. It also gives texture to the finished product for an adult. I have gained a more-informed respect for the work of the people behind the scenes of the museum. I hope to pass it along.

Barbara Altman is a career development specialist and educator currently teaching language arts and English as a Second Language at Garrison Elementary School, a public school in Washington, D.C.

Book Review

Exhibition Budgeting Handbook

by John Coppola

Publication of the *Exhibition Budgeting Handbook* served as a focal point of the 1997 meeting of the International Committee on Exhibition Exchange (ICEE), a standing professional committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). The volume represents the first in ICOM's planned series of exhibit tools handbooks. It was underwritten by ICEE and the Canadian ICOM committee, with commercial sponsorship from Maertens International, Brussels; Béchar, Auclair International, Montreal; T.T.I. Transporte International, Madrid; and Nurminen Prima Oy, Finland.

"Open-ended budgets are a thing of the past. . . . There is substantial pressure to allocate a greater share of budgets to innovation in design and presentation. On the other hand, very specific requirements concerning security, conservation, and durability of exhibition furnishings tend to shift the balance to the 'intangible' portion of the budget."

—François Tremblay, editor, *Exhibition Budgeting*, and project manager, International Exhibitions Department, Musée de la Civilisation, Québec

Exhibition Budgeting contains contributions by François Tremblay, a project manager in the international exhibitions department at the Musée de la Civilisation in Québec; Allegra Wright, assistant director for finance and budget of the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) in Washington, D.C.; and Han Meeter, a lecturer in exhibition design at the Amsterdam School of the Arts and director of Projectburo Meeter &

Bremer, a consulting firm specializing in museum planning, exhibitions, and graphic design.

Wright, Tremblay, and Meeter offer three different approaches to accounting process. Wright's is based on work with a quasigovernmental traveling exhibition service that uses public, private, and donated funds, and designed to be used by a project team. Tremblay's is derived from his work in a publicly-supported museum and is intended to be used by the project manager. Meeter's philosophy originates in his work as a private contractor and focuses on the production pro-

Exhibition Budgeting, by Han Meeter, François Tremblay, and Allegra Wright. Québec: International Committee on Exhibition Exchange, International Council of Museums, 1997.

The handbook may be purchased through the following sources:

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cess. All three approaches are derived from attempts to define a) Whom does the budget serve? and b) What are the each participant's specific needs?

The Project Team Approach

In her chapter, 'Structure with Sensitivity: The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Services Budget Process,' Wright argues that "an exhibition budget is a collaborative effort [and that] input from various sources within the organization is vital if it is to be an effective tool." She asserts that one of the most serious obstacles to successful budgeting is when a project team does not use a shared vocabulary to identify and define line items. So, in addition to providing an example of one of SITES' exhibition budget spreadsheets, Wright includes an exhaustive glossary of what is included in each category.

The Project Manager Approach

Tremblay's chapter, "The Example of the Musée de la Civilisation," is a how-to guide to budgeting based on use of an Excel software program. Examples are included.

The Project Model Approach

Meeter's article, "The Reinwardt Academy of Amsterdamse Hogeschool voor de Kunsten System," was developed by the museology department of that art school. Both students and his consulting firm have tested the theory in the production of more than 100 exhibitions. He writes that is based on three premises, as follows: 1) an exhibition project model can help structure the evolution of an exhibition and create a common working basis for all participants, 2) exhibitions are developed by multidisciplinary teams, and 3) a budgeting system should be efficient, simple, and practical.

Putting Models to Test

The authors acknowledge that none of the systems they outline is likely to exactly fit another institution's specific needs. All seem open to the prospect of modifying these models to fit or of creating one's own based on elements or research addressed in the handbook.

Effective project management will likely decide the success or failure of whichever approach used. Perhaps that can be the topic of a future workbook.

John Coppola is an independent exhibition developer and curator for US and Latin American museums. He is a former director of the Smithsonian's Office of Exhibits Central.

What Is ICEE?

The International Council of Museum's Committee on Exhibition Exchange is arguably the international counterpart to NAME. It was established in 1983 to provide a forum for the dissemination of knowledge and experience about exhibitions among museums and galleries in different countries.

ICEE annual meetings, usually held on an alternating basis in North America and Europe, feature discussions and networking opportunities for museum professionals involved with exhibitions. During its meetings, the committee has visited museums and galleries in host cities, partaken of tours and previews of exhibitions, and guest speakers with a variety of cultural interests and backgrounds have participated in panel discussions.

The 1997 meeting held in Barcelona had as its theme, 'Speaking the Same Language.' Featured sessions included "Business or Philanthropy," "Teamwork," and "Audience Development." Tours included visits to the National Museum of Catalunyan Art, which was newly reopened after a seven-year renovation, the Miro Foundation, and the medieval Monastery Museum of Pedralbes.

Sandra Lorimer, ICEE president and manager of the traveling exhibitions program at the Canadian Museum of Civilizations, noted that the committee

had for many years used its annual meetings, and the papers presented at them, to disseminate knowledge and experience about exhibitions. Indeed, at the November 1997 ICEE meeting held in Barcelona, Tremblay and Wright presented a panel, "Money Talk: Budgeting Methods, Procedures and Philosophy," based on their workbook (Meeter was unable to attend). Representatives of Maertens and T.T.I., both shipping agents handling exhibition tours, participated in another ICEE panel on sponsorship.

The publication of a series of workbooks on various aspects of exhibition development, circulation, and exchange marks a new direction for the group. Future volumes in the exhibition-tools series will include exhibition contracts and agreements, tentatively scheduled for publication in October 1998 to coincide with the ICOM Triennial Conference in Melbourne, Australia. The series is also due to cover planning frameworks, insurance options, packing guidelines, and transportation alternatives.

The 1998 ICEE meeting is scheduled to take place in Melbourne, Australia, concurrent with the ICOM triennial.

In addition to the series of exhibition-tool handbooks inaugurated in 1997, ICEE has published a *Directory of Sources for International Travelling Exhibitions* and a *Bibliography on Organizing Traveling Exhibitions*.

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What's in it for ME?

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Third, working with NAME folks is just fun! You can meet great people, develop lasting friendships and professional colleague networks in an enjoyable group dynamic. If you would like to get to know the nation's best exhibitors, this is a way to do it.

Last, do you yearn to know what issues the field is dealing with, want to be up-to-date on who's doing the best exhibit work, where it is being done, what it costs, and the philosophy behind this work? NAME is the group for you to get involved with beyond the standard membership level. So get involved already! You want to move ahead in your career? We all do, and this is a good way to ensure it. Sure, it requires a commitment, but so are most things worth doing. So if being more than a member of NAME is for you, contact Whitney Watson and get going.

There are lots of activities that need people to succeed. Many of these areas require minimal time, others are more involved. All can lead to increased responsibility, national recognition and important network relationships vital to your career growth. You don't need to have years of exhibit experience to get involved. In fact, those who are new to exhibits work have the most to gain and, in lots of cases, the most to offer too!

Each of the following descriptions could be filled by a energetic and organized exhibit pro looking for a way to stand out from the crowd.

Regional Representatives: If you would enjoy getting to know the exhibitors in your region and be an important component of their professional lives, being a regional rep may be the job for you. It is a shared job, that is, there are always two reps in a region. Reps take on the responsibility of recruiting members, organizing workshops and sessions at the regional meetings, helping members with concerns and connecting exhibit

people to talk about issues in that region. NAME needs reps in the Western, Midwest, Southeast, New England and Mid-Atlantic regions. Contact Linda Kulik if you are interested in this exciting opportunity.

State Coordinators: Here is a good place to start a career-long involvement in NAME. State coordinators work at the state association level to promote exhibit issues and networking. Being a state coordinator allows you to help the reps stay connected to the folks in each region. Contact Linda Kulik if you are interesting in this great opportunity.

Contributors to the Exhibitionist: OK, all you closet

technical authors, let's get moving. NAME's pride and joy, the *Exhibitionist*, needs contributing correspondents and writers. Each issue focuses on a different topic, so there is always something that folks are looking for information about. You may know a design trick, use a new kind of software or have visited a really great exhibit, or a really bad one. Keeping the *Exhibitionist* at the highest level requires contributions from the field. If writing is your thing, this may be your opportunity. Contact Diana Cohen Altman if you are interested.

Workshop leaders or faculty: Hey, we

always need teachers. NAME conducts lots of workshops and each needs good teachers to communicate what's going on in the field. Subjects vary, sometimes regarding interactive exhibits, computers, lighting, ADA or conservation techniques. Contact Whitney Watson if you are interesting in this exciting opportunity.

Membership associates: We have lots of members all across the country and even the globe. Staying in touch with them takes some doing. Membership associates help the second vice president to serve members well. This job requires

some database work, letter writing, calling and contacting. Contact Linda Kulik if you are interesting in this enriching opportunity.

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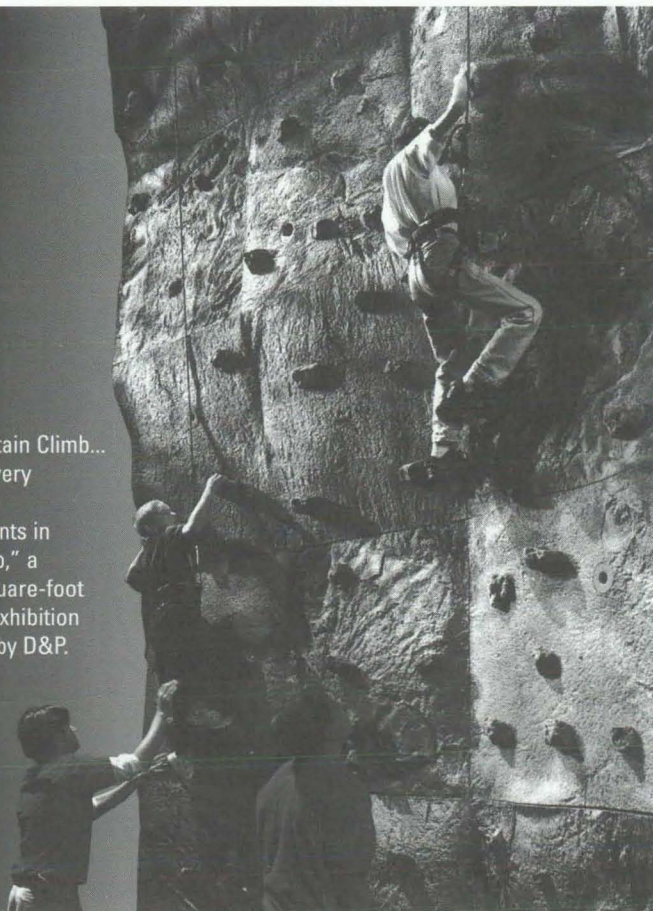
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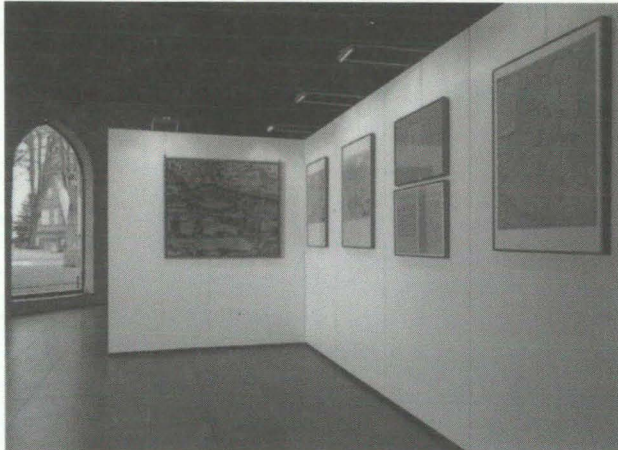
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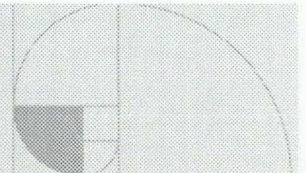
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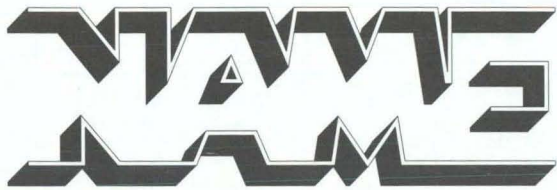
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Position vacant

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Position vacant

Indiana

Position vacant

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Position vacant

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Position vacant

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Position vacant

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Position vacant

Wisconsin

Position vacant

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