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Ubiquitous Musum (UM)

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UM stands for ubiquitous museum. The idea is simple: standing in one room one can look at paintings and museum objects elsewhere, examine works not on display, compare works in different provimces or even different countries. It is foreseen that UM will evolve in three stages: a test group for research; a test site for demonstration; and multiple sites for demonstration.

At a first stage a handful of institutions will be linked with the McLuhan Program through an extension of the Vis-a-Vis system to compare notes on file transfers, technical problems and problems of an acceptable front-end for users at different levels ranging from researchers and students to members of the general public. These institutions would initially include CHIN (Ottawa), CCA (Montreal), Narcisse (Paris), the Marburg Archive (Marburg) and the Ministero dei beni culturali (Rome) and possibly AHIP of the Getty Trust (Santa Monica) thus giving access to persons concerned with national standards in five countries.

This first stage will have three phases: sharing technology and know-how; making sample products and creation of a front end that serves as a complex search engine at different levels. In a first phase it is in the interests of IIS technologies to make available a handful of machines as seeds for a promising new market. CHIN is willing to pay for transmission costs during this first phase and each of the institutions will contribute some time to establishing practical solutions to the communication of images since this relates directly to their basic concerns[1]. Hence phase one requires a minimum of direct financial investment.

The goal is not only to transmit images such that they can be viewed but also to print them out in various formats, ranging from the traditional postcard and slide to a new type of custom selected series of images that can be bound in the form of coffee-table books or recorded on CD-ROMS. These images would be produced using a smart card which would automatically credit the museum which owns the original, thus avoiding copyright problems. Stage one, phase two will solve these technological problems and demonstrate that the principle works. This will require monies for research, the making of CD-ROMS and other sample products in which it is foreseen that Pixel Productions will play a

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[1] There is an added incentive to do so because private companies are buying photographs of images in public collections with a eye on profit alone. Hence unless museums develop their own methods for communicating images others with no interest in high standards will do so and contravene the mandates of public institutions which call for access to collections paid for by taxpayers' money.

central role. These requirements dovetail with recent developments in Photo-CD's and hence Kodak could well be a partner in this phase. Since this phase is intimately connected with the both the federal and provincial government's interests in new technologies, most of the monies for this phase could come through these sources.

The museums have databases and will soon have images both of which can be transmitted via Vis-a-Vis. Crucial to the question of access however is a front end that will serve a whole range of users. Phase three, which will begin concurrently with, but continue longer than phase one, will entail the creation of such a front-end. It is foreseen that Greenfield Projects working in conjunction with the McLuhan Program will play a central role in the development of this tool and separate research monies will be required for this project. Because this tool has potential applications beyond the world of museums and education, some of the funding for this project could come from industry.

A complicating factor in the construction of such a search engine is that it will access a whole range of materials which have never been previously available. It will therefore be useful to encourage research in the form of masters' and doctoral theses that will explore specific aspects of these new potentials. Insomuch as these findings entail practical applications these can then be integrated into the front end as new search strategies.

Stage two will again have three phases. A first phase will transport the technologies and products of stage one into the public space of one museum such as the Royal Ontario Museum (Toronto) or the Museum of Civilization (Ottawa) and perhaps in the other member countries. This public space would have several functions. The general public could use it informally as a kind of international yellow pages of museums in trying to track down paintings by a given painter or on a given theme. Museum guides could use it to illustrate hidden aspects of their collections. Lecturers could use it to give a new kind of cross cultural lecture.

Stage two, phase two will add print features to this system. It is foreseen that Optimation would work closely with both the host museum and the museum(s) whose images are being printed to arrive at an equitable distribution of the income acquired through smart cards. Stage two, phase three will expand the range of imaging facilities to include projection of images on all four walls thus producing the equivalent of a virtual reality. This would be achieved largely through a joint venture between IIS technologies and Optimation. The combined result of these six phases would be a new integrated solution for transmission and publication of museum images. This integrated solution would be jointly owned by the various partners: Greenfield Projects, IIS Technologies, McLuhan Program, Optimation and Pixel Productions and possibly others. Museums would buy this integrated solution to make collections more accessible and at the same time as a means of ensuring that they received proper re-imbursement for published images from their collections.

Stage three would extend the concept of UM from the confines of one or two test museums, into other museums and into classrooms at all levels of the educational system. At the university level the UM approach would offer new alternatives to traditional slide

collections, now faced with changes in copyright laws. At the secondary and primary school levels, UM offers a whole range of new possibilities in terms of visual literacy, media literacy and design education. At this stage the partners of the integrated solution would have two enormous new markets of which IIS technologies, as vendor of the Vis-a-Vis product would be a major beneficiary.

Minutes of a meeting on 4 December 1992 written by KHV.
Present: Michael Bookbinder, Gary MacGregor, Rachael McAfee, Jennifer Trant, Kim H. Veltman.
Apologies: John Bell, Eric Rask.