Kim H Veltman

The Future of Public Galleries in the New Technological Age

This is an abstract report of an unpublished article with the same title.

PUBLIC: NEW MEANINGS, CHANGING GENERALITIES

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Eighty-six registrants gathered at the Design Exchange on May 29 for a focus session held in conjunction with OAAG's annual general meeting. Lisa Steele, a video artist and director of V Tape, moderated a provocative panel discussion on the topic *public: New Meanings, Changing Generalities.*

The panel was composed of Kim Henry Veltman of the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto, Rick Salutin, a writer whose columns appear weekly in the *Globe & Mail,* and Grant McCracken, a curator at the Royal Ontario Museum. Each panelist addressed a different facet of the changes occurring within the public sector and public galleries.

Kim Henry Veltman contributed a six-page paper entitled *The Future of Public Galleries in the New Technological Age.* He opened his presentation with the revelation that about 96% of the Royal Ontario Museum's collection is in its basement, as is 99% of the Canadian Museum of Civilization's. He pointed out that "When we talk about public galleries, one of the ironies is that the great majority of what we have is not accessible to the public." Veltman reported on some of the latest technological innovations occurring today which could redress this problem of inaccessibility, including an experiment by IBM to scan the whole of the Vatican Library, as well as the holdings of other major institutions, into an electronic database.

He also emphasized the benefits of this new technology which makes it possible to put works of art on-line: "Most of us have never been able to compare a Group of Seven painting at the McMichael with one at Ottawa or the AGO. To do that systematic comparison has never been possible." Veltman also further described the frontiers of computer research, including holographic image storage, as well as the advent of programming now possible at the DNA level.

Veltman reported that the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN) - founded 22 years ago and seen as a model in this field - is subject to major budgetary cuts, and is relinquishing its national mandate to some degree. If CHIN has to abdicate its central role, there's the possibility that each gallery will do its own computer collections

management in its own way. Veltman expressed that working with CHIN to develop common standards would be an important challenge, "...so that your records can 'talk to each other,' and allow you to see the patterns..., whether in Whitby, Sault Ste. Marie or around the world."

Veltman described two opposing responses to technological change: one that maintains cultural resources in trust for the public, and the other which would make everything a business proposition. He illustrated the latter with an amusing tale of Microsoft owner Bill Gates offering President Mitterand of France two billion dollars for the rights to all images of French culture - a proposition which was firmly declined.