

# The Museum Education Consortium

## A Profile

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### History

The Museum Education Consortium, formed in December 1986 through the administrative leadership of the education department of The Museum of Modern Art, originally set out to investigate potential uses of interactive video in museum education. Initially organized as a collaborative project led by the education directors of seven museums - The Art Institute of Chicago, The Brooklyn Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Musuem of Fine Arts, Boston, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, and The Philadelphia Museum of Art - by 1990 the Consortium became incorporated as a not-for-profit organization with an independent board of directors. Board memberships currently being expanded to include museum professionals from throughout the country.

### Research and Development of Prototype Programs

In the first year, Consortium members familiarized themselves with the technology of interactive, multimedia and with different ways in which such technology had been used in exhibits and education. A design team was engaged to develop a small-scale prototype, a pilot program focusing on Impressionist and Post-Impressionist Art. This experimental, first phase pilot was completed by the spring of 1988. An evaluation period followed in which the two-part program, made up of a mock-up of a teachers' program and a partial working model of an interactive program for museum visitors, was demonstrated and tested with museum audiences in each of the seven participating museums.

The next phase of the Consortium's experimentation began in the summer of the same year launching a two and a half-year research and development effort in which a new team designed and produced prototype programs, one for use by teachers and students in the classroom and the other for museum visitors. Designed to encourage learning by exploration, discovery and comparisons, as well as traditional information retrieval methods, the prototype programs affirm that there are many different levels on which people can appreciate works of art. Using a database of images (stored on a videodisc) drawn from over 147 collections worldwide the programs focus on Impressionism and Post-Impressionism, incorporating motion footage, audio source material and documentary images of the period, in addition to stills of works of art. Because one of the primary research goals was technical experimentation, the prototypes incorporated a variety of image capture and display techniques ranging from high definition television (filmed on site in museum galleries) to digitized images. Audience research with museum visitors, teachers, students, etc. has also been a central goal in prototype development. Through formative research valuable insights are being gained to inform future stages of interactive media design.

## International Conference on Hypermedia & Interactivity in Museums

### **Next Steps: Tools for Multicultural Education**

Since 1989 plans and research have been underway to enable the Consortium to create multicultural education programs for use in schools. Drawing on the resources of numerous museum and private collections throughout the United States, image banks will be assembled to represent the range and diversity of arts and artists shaping our dynamic and pluralistic cultural heritage. Interactive, multimedia programs on art are being developed by the Consortium with other educational partners to generate new curriculum materials for teachers and students.

Currently, the Consortium is being expanded by the addition of new board members - museum professionals and educators from throughout the United States. The restructuring of our organization reflects a renewed commitment to making museum collections more widely accessible to audiences by creating educational tools for the classroom. Interactive, multimedia products designed to be directly useful in multicultural curricula will be created for distribution to schools nationally.