

# The Museum of Modern Art

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## MUSEUMS ANNOUNCE PROJECT FOR FIRST COMPUTERIZED ARCHIVE OF ART

Fifteen museums in New York City and one in Washington, D. C. have launched a project to plan the first central archive of our nation's principal art resources. To be known as the Museum Computer Network, the archive would be maintained in computerized form at a headquarters location from which stored information would be retrieved and distributed on request over a network of terminals placed in museums, libraries and other educational institutions. The archive will at first record the public collections of the New York City and Washington, D. C. areas, and eventually be extended to cover the entire country.

A year-long intensive study, financed by grants recently received from the Old Dominion Foundation and the New York State Council on the Arts, has been undertaken by a committee of museum representatives appointed to administer the project by the participating institutions. This research activity is a preliminary step to seeking funds for the capital investment of several million dollars which will be ultimately required to implement the Network.

Everett Ellin, formerly Assistant to the Director of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, has been named full-time Executive Director for the project, which will be housed during the period of the study in office space being provided by The Museum of Modern Art. William D. Wilkinson, Registrar of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, is serving as Chairman of the project's Administrative Committee. Ten months of preparatory meetings and planning work have already been undertaken by the Committee, working in close cooperation with the Institute for Computer Research in the Humanities at New York University and its director Dr. Jack Heller, who will continue to supervise the technical aspects of the proposed study.

During the coming year, the project will be concerned principally with the design and testing of techniques for gathering, classifying, storing and disseminating the basic data from which the archive is to be constructed, and an assessment

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of the resources that must eventually be committed to the Network by its members. These investigations will center upon the actual assembly in a computer of three carefully-defined, experimental data files which will be selected to simulate the problems and conditions to be anticipated in the formation of a comprehensive archiving system. Under consideration for this purpose is a file representing a single artist who has worked in a variety of media and about whom extensive bibliographic and subsidiary information is readily available; a file of ancient art (for example, Pre-Columbian Mexican stone sculpture); and a single file of all works in a particular medium, such as drawings, to be found in New York City museum collections without regard to period or origin.

According to Everett Ellin, "With the traditional cataloguing methods at their disposal, museums are finding it increasingly difficult to keep proper records of their own holdings, which continue to grow at an accelerating rate, or to serve the needs of others who require access to the data of art. The public art collections in New York City alone include some several million works. Lacking any central file of art resources, it is a prodigious effort to conduct even the simplest study of a given body of material. Comparative analysis of style based on the examination of a large number of objects is virtually impossible, while the process of locating art works for the assembly of an exhibition is already an overwhelming task. The computer, however, is admirably suited to the function of organizing, and storing in highly accessible form, vast amounts of information. As the computerized archive which we envision grows in size, its value as a tool of scholarship, education and research will increase dramatically. Even in its earlier stages -- as a cohesive source of information -- the archive would be of enormous help to the art professional in his daily work."

The institutions which participated in the discussions last spring leading to the organization of the project are: American Academy of Arts and Letters, American Geographical Society, The American Museum of Natural History, American Numismatic Society, Brooklyn Museum, Museum of Contemporary Crafts, The Frick Collection, The

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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Hispanic Society of America, The Jewish Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of the American Indian (Heye Foundation), The Museum of Modern Art, The Museum of Primitive Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art. Since then, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D. C. has joined this group in pursuit of the project. Most of these museums will be involved in some capacity in the experimental work to be conducted during the coming year.

The members of the project's Administrative Committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. Wilkinson are: Allan D. Chapman (The Museum of Primitive Art), Frederick J. Dockstader (Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation), Everett Ellin (formerly of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum), and Richard H. Koch (The Museum of Modern Art). Inquiries concerning the project should be directed to Everett Ellin, Museum Computer Network, 27 West 53 Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. Phone: 245-3413.

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