



Letter from the director

December 10, 1996

Chers collègues,
Beste collega,
My dear colleagues,

Let me get right to it: the looming era of digitization is a challenging time for an institution like ours, and one that – in my opinion, could have arrived a little bit gentler and softer. But well.

Today, we see the public demanding different modes of engagement than just a few years ago: visitors and scholars expect to access our catalogs remotely through the Internet / expect interactive CD-ROMs to take specific exhibitions home with them – to be able to show to friends, and perhaps in the classroom / expect VRML walkthroughs to experience the spatial dimensions of the creation of meaning in the museum context.

Within the museum, we have set up a working group to discuss how to react to these challenges. This working group was comprised of individuals representing the different stakeholders one typically finds in an institution like ours – curatorial staff, administrative, logistical, janitorial, infrastructural and so on.

The discussions within this working group, which among others was evaluating existing commercial offerings for digital workflows, made it clear to us what the museum is: a heterogeneous assembly of 20 collections, all with their differences in scope, histories and methodologies. Moreover: a range of professional departments, with their specific concerns, and embodied knowledge. And lastly, it is the multitude of links that exist, on a personal level, on both the museum inside and outside.

The information and relations that make up the museum are inscribed in the systems you yourself use on a daily basis – your spreadsheets, files, physical index cards, HyperCard stacks, correspondence, schedules, and other formats.

Rather than converging on a singular, normative narrative around singular objects – such as pre-supposed by the use of relational databases, that are at the core of most existing commercial offerings, we want to instead embrace the different perspectives, and specific modeling, as found in your individual files and records.

We believe that basing our publishing work around the diverse digital vernacular to be a bold proposition, but that will best capture our institution's rich embodied knowledge, as well as the unique position in terms of multi-linguality and colonial practices behind many of our objects.

Yours sincerely,

The Director