**The Forms: Four Worlds**

**Overview**

*The Forms: Four Worlds* is an immersive digital exhibition, an orchestrated set of 70 animations that trace the evolution of human image and symbol making from the Lower Paleolithic period through the late Middle Ages, spanning four major culture areas: Mesoamerica, Europe, the Middle East and Indian Asia.

The animations explore iconographic subjects portrayed by artists since humans first created images on bone, stone and the walls of caves - representations of our bodies, of the visible world around us and of the invisible worlds of belief and cosmology. They will be accompanied by interactive displays and contextual materials examining a broad range of humanities themes.

**The Animations**

The animations at the heart of *Four Worlds* are created from thousands of digital still images of artifacts, art objects and architectural details, photographed in museums, churches, temples and archaeological sites. The focus is on highly codified motifs, culturally central enough to be repeated hundreds or thousands of times, and on the ways in which artists work within these constraints to produce constant liveliness and variety.

To create each animation, we photograph dozens of examples of the given motif, from consistent angles and with consistent lighting. These photographs are arranged into series, precisely aligned and animated through techniques ranging from slow, meditative morphing to rapid, almost hallucinatory cascades of coherent images.

The animations allow the viewer, in a completely non-verbal way, to quickly gain insight into the nature of each motif, to see which features are invariant over many examples, which evolve over time, and which variations might result from the creativity of the individual artist. Viewers will enter the world of the original artists with an uncommon intensity and intimacy, seeing it with new eyes.

**Exhibition Design**

*The Forms: Four Worlds* exhibition will include over 5 hours of digital animations on displays ranging from small flat screens to large screen arrays and immersive wall-high projected environments. The animations will be arranged on a time-space grid, from 1 million BC to 1500/1700 AD on one axis, and from Mesoamerica to Indian Asia on the other. As visitors travel forward through the exhibition, they move forward in time. As they move laterally, they journey from “West” to “East” across four cultures’ art created during the same period.
The Forms: Four Worlds will be a garden of forking paths, a labyrinth of glowing and ever-changing forms through which the visitor will trace the evolution of image-making on a journey that begins with humanity’s early shaping of tools and fans out, as cultures rise and fall, across the ancient worlds of Mesoamerica, Europe, the Middle East and Indian Asia. The journey culminates with the intricate temples, cathedrals and mosques of the late Middle Ages.

The sense of moving through a realm of heightened experience will be accentuated by sound. Each time period and each culture area will have distinctive timbres and harmonies, and each individual piece will have its own local sound layer. The sound, like the visuals, will be designed as a coherent tapestry, designed to evolve harmoniously as the visitor makes his or her own path through the animation-filled spaces.

Interactive displays in a dedicated Exploration and Context Area will allow visitors to explore broader patterns and links between the four cultures: What are the motifs that each culture chooses to repeat or explore obsessively? How are they similar, how do they differ, and how do they change over time? What do they have to tell us about each culture’s distinctive development, and about our shared humanity?

Maps and other visual devices will help place each object in context and will encourage visitors to explore questions such as: What are these objects? Where do they come from? How were they found? Where are they now? What do we know, or what has been speculated, about their original meaning and purpose?

Project Status
This project is being undertaken by Night Fire Films, producers of numerous award-winning documentary and animated films exploring art, religion, anthropology and the history of science, including the feature films Proteus (2004), Breaking the Maya Code (2008) and Dance of the Maize God (2014). Project Director David Lebrun, Producer Rosey Guthrie and Producer/Lighting Designer Amy Halpern are developing the project in consultation with interactive, audio and video professionals as well as with our Board of Advisors:

Naman Ahuja - Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University  
Adolph H. Borbein - Professor Emeritus, Freie Universität Berlin  
Kerry Brougher - Founding Director, Academy Museum of Motion Pictures  
Gudrun Bühl - Director, Dumbarton Oaks Museum  
Michael D. Coe - Charles J. McCurdy Professor Emeritus, Yale University  
Linda Duke - Director, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art  
Viola König - Director, Ethnology Museum of Berlin  
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Colin Renfrew - Senior Fellow, McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, Univ. of Cambridge  
Alexa Sekyra - Head, Scholars Program, Getty Research Institute  
Karl Taube - Professor University of California, Riverside  
Margarete van Ess - Scientific Director, Orient Department, German Archaeological Institute

Photography began in 2009 and has taken place at approximately 150 locations in Greece, France, India, Ireland, Canada, Berlin, Budapest, London, Tehran, Mexico City, Guatemala City and at museums around the U.S. Over 30,000 images have been organized into a database and classified using more than 800 keywords, allowing advanced searches by time period, culture, location, material, subject, photographic angle and other criteria. Additional photography is planned at approximately 150 locations in 30 countries. This database will be adapted as a tool for users in the Exploration and Context Room and as a major resource on The Forms: Four Worlds project web site.

Eleven digital animation sample pieces have been completed, which can be viewed upon request, along with a 20-minute presentation that includes a virtual tour of the exhibition.

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