Interactive Multimedia in the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum

Nick Riker, 2012

The Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum is about to open a new exhibit featuring Inuit prints and sculptures from the collection of Robert and Judith Toll. This exhibit is a new venture for the Arctic Museum because there has never been an art exhibition there. Usually, the museum showcases artifacts and items of anthropological interest. The museum staff was worried about whether the new exhibit would appeal to people coming to the museum in search of historical knowledge. They were also worried about whether the new exhibition would engage children as well as past exhibits have. In order to attract kids to the museum, the staff decided to grant a fellowship to a student to develop a multimedia tour for the exhibit.

What I have done this summer can be divided into two parts. The first half of my fellowship consisted of research. I learned about Inuit art and the origins behind it. The Inuit have been carving figurines for centuries, but not until the mid-1900s did the art become a profitable enterprise. Inuit art today is made for commercial sale, but much of it is based on the old ways of life that helped the Inuit survive in the harsh Arctic climate. I also researched the state of mobile technology and what other museums have been working on. I found many good examples of multimedia tours on iPods and iPhones, and even some on iPads. From this research, I was able to come up with ideas about what we could do at the Arctic Museum. We finally decided to design for the iPad, of which we will have two available in the museum. We also decided to make the application available for download for both iPod touches and iPhones so people can use their own devices if they choose.

My original idea was to come up with some sort of game that led the visitor through the exhibit while allowing them to have the feeling of accomplishment that comes from advancing in a game. Then, my idea changed to using a story to lead the visitor through the museum. Through brainstorming sessions with the museum staff, I modified my idea to fit a legend from the Inuit culture, that of Kiviuq. Kiviuq is a folk hero in Inuit society, with many myths circling about him. I adapted the most famous of these myths to lead the visitor through the exhibit. Finally, I incorporated my original idea back in, so now it is both a story and a game. The player reads through the tour like a storybook, and is asked to pause at certain pieces. At these stops, the player is asked a question, which they have to answer correctly in order to move on to the next stop. The information for these questions is found within the story, so the visitor has to read carefully and absorb the information. The information will also be available as an audio file, so even children who cannot read will be able to participate. To add to the effect of a storybook, the tour will include pictures and have the ability to turn pages. Another added benefit of the technology is the ability to include other sound clips, so children can hear Inuktitut (the Inuit language) and other Arctic sounds.

This multimedia tour will hopefully attract more children to the museum. The application is not fully designed, but I will continue to work on it through the fall and will have it finished before the new exhibit opens in November.

Faculty Mentor: Genevieve LeMoine, Curator of the Peary-MacMillan Arctic Museum

Funded by the Gibbons Summer Research Internship