

Hello. My name's Vincent Poussou. I work at the Centre Pompidou in Paris as director of the public outreach and educational activities department. I would like to start by thanking the prestigious Museum of Kanazawa, and particularly its director, Monsieur Akimoto and his chief curator, Madame Fudo, for their invitation.

We do not often spend time thinking about our professions and practices, and to do so here where everything seems designed to show art to its best advantage and at the same time make it accessible, is, I think, a rare privilege indeed.

The theme of this symposium is rendered with concision in its English title *Museum education 21*, a title that opens many prospects. *Twenty one*, is a temporal horizon, at once wide-open and precise. It indicates that our talks here are based on the dynamics of our practices today at the start of the century, but that we are looking toward the future and that we are seeking to define modalities of work that will be in phase with a future that is emerging but that mainly remains to be written.

Before delving into this future that I would like to present to you since I titled my presentation "New public(s), new project(s)", I would like to introduce you to the Centre Pompidou and the main lines of our youth-oriented activities. (*at the conference, photos*

of the Centre Pompidou and these activities were shown during the presentation).

The Centre Pompidou is an ensemble. Obviously, it includes the Musée national d'art moderne. This means that it is the venue where the French national art collection from the beginning of the 20th century to today is exhibited. This is a very diverse collection of about 55,000 artworks in a wide variety of forms: visual arts, sculpture, architecture and design, but also multimedia, film, etc.

The Centre also comprises several temporary exhibition galleries where we mount about twenty exhibitions a year. It also has four spaces for movies, shows, and conferences, since our objective is to showcase all fields of contemporary creation. It also has a very big public reference library that can accommodate 2,000 people. Lastly, it is a music composition research institute, since we believe that contemporary music creation is a fundamental element of the arts today.

The main areas of youth-oriented activities are the following:

- Sensorial visual arts workshops for ages 3 to 12, some led by young artists
- Exhibitions for children in a gallery space dedicated to young museum-goers
- Large free workshops for families – no reservation required – on the first Sunday of every month when the permanent collections are open to the public free of charge

- An annual weekend international art festival designed for families

In showing you this illustrated presentation, I was hoping to call to mind the idea that the "museum" and the "education" that we are discussing here today are what I would call our *playing field*, as museum education professionals. I will base this presentation then on the idea that may seem somewhat eccentric, and that is that we are players. Of course, we are professionals. And I'm not saying that we are not serious. We play the game of our profession. But I'm interested in being a player in another sense, in the sense of risk-taking and enjoyment, because I think that pleasure and fun are not alien to our profession. And more profoundly, I think that it is important to realize the extent to which play is one of the fundamental modalities of human development.

So, if you don't mind, I will be proposing as a thread throughout this talk to *play* with the two words "museum education".

Can we begin otherwise than by the idea of "educating about the Museum"? This is done very well here at the Kanazawa Museum, especially with the Museum Cruise. "Educating about the Museum" means showing what a museum is, what purpose it serves, the difference between a real visit in a museum and a virtual visit. Of course,

Symposium: Museum Education 21

Talk Session: Current Trends in Museum Education

Vincent Poussou (Centre Pompidou)

everything seems crystal clear to some people: a museum serves to preserve artworks and show them to visitors. But what about the “non-visitors”, what about the people who don’t come, what we call in France the “non-public”?

We know from studies that museums in France have a prestigious image. Even people who are not museum-goers think it is good that the government supports museums. But museums also have the image of being pretentious and old-fashioned places. People often see them as places where they will be bored, where they will feel ill-at-ease, and where they will most likely not understand what’s around them.

To change this image, many museums today are striving to be different. Stéphanie (Airaud) will be speaking later about the MAC/VAL, but I think that one of the most beautiful examples of this endeavour in the entire world is right here at the Museum of Kanazawa, with all the effort that is being put into introducing the city’s population to the museum, but also with the way in which the very architecture of the museum is transparent and open onto the city. In its initial utopian ambitions, the Centre Pompidou was also meant to be very open to the city by its architecture and its many entrances. And also by the fact that, from the beginning 30 years ago, it had specific dedicated spaces for young visitors.

But the question I would like to raise is

the following: Shouldn’t we be going out in search of the people who don’t come to museums, going to them where they live? And we know that the sectors of the population that do not visit cultural institutions, and that did not have the chance to be put into contact with culture by their families, rarely leave the places where they live. This is one of the reasons for the museum in the close suburb of Paris that Stéphanie (Airaud) will be talking about later.

For those of us who are working at the Centre Pompidou, we tried just such an experience a few years ago with the Museum Précaire Albinet, the Albinet Precarious Museum. This was in fact a work of art, produced by the artist you see on this photo, whose name is Thomas Hirschhorn. Thomas Hirschhorn lives in Aubervilliers, one of Paris’s poorest suburbs. He wanted one of his works to involve the young people of this suburb in building and running a precarious museum, at the foot of their building in a district called Albinet. We had the young people for internships at the Centre Pompidou.

First they built the museum.

They threw parties. And they received training from the Centre Pompidou in various professional facets of museum work: artwork management, security, conducting workshops, etc.

Clearly it was important for success of this precarious museum that there be original

masterpieces from the Centre Pompidou collection. As you can see here, Dalí, Léger, Warhol, Le Corbusier, Boyce, Malevich, Duchamp, and Mondrian were among the artists whose works were exhibited.

This experience was highly successful and extremely moving for those involved: the young people and the staff at the Centre Pompidou. We are now planning on expanding the project and creating a real nomadic structure. The architectural design of this “mobile Centre Pompidou” has been confided to Patrick Bouchain. It would be set up in town squares, with the ease of a sideshow at a funfair. A dozen masterpieces would be on display and actors would tell a story in relation to the theme being presented.

The architect based his design of the tents on the origami principle to create structures that can be combined in different ways to house the artworks and accommodate the public. This then is a museum that is mobile and that pops up where it is not expected. It changes the idea of the museum as a necessarily stationary building, a sedentary structure. And its form can be changed at each stage. The tents (one reception tent and three tents for displaying the artworks with different configurations) can be arranged differently in different places.

The first year, we thought of showing works around the theme of Colour – not a very original topic when addressing children

but we really want to reach audiences that never go to the museum in places where there are no cultural venues. So we thought it would be better to concentrate on a fairly simple theme rather than on the work of a single artist.

We can speak, for instance, about primary colours and about black and white in this painting by Henri Matisse *La Nature morte au magnolia*, in Picasso's *La Femme en bleu*, Kupka's *La Gamme jaune* and Soulages, who is being presented currently in a major exhibition at the Centre Pompidou and Dubuffet. We can also speak of the colours that are used in Braque's *L'Estaque*, Agam's *La Double métamorphose III*, Albers's *Hommage au carré*, and Yves Klein's *Le Monochrome orange*. And then colours in motion with Fernand Léger's *Les grands plongeurs noirs*, Calder's *Le Grand mobile*, Delaunay's *Le Rythme*, and Olafur Eliasson, whose work *Your Concentric Welcome* will be presented in the CP Mobile.

All of these artworks are obviously in the collections of the Centre Pompidou. Martial Raysse's *Une Forme en liberté*, Bruce Nauman's *Art maker* and *La Vague dans la prairie* by Niki de Saint-Phalle. We would end with this big installation by Claude Lévêque: *Valstar Barbie*.

The idea is to concentrate mainly on reaching school groups from kindergarten to secondary school. They will be met by these actor-educators. And weekends will be devoted to families. Our foremost aim with this

museum is, of course, to make the collection accessible to the widest public possible by going where the audiences are rather than trying to bring them to the centre of Paris. And it is to get across the idea that a museum is a place where you are in contact with original works and that the encounter with the original work of art becomes meaningful only if you devote some time to it. That is the interest of presenting only a dozen works, but real masterpieces.

Now, in the second part of this talk, I'd like to continue playing on the words "museum education" by returning to their meaning. And maybe most commonly "museum education" is used to refer to "education in the museum", meaning the educational function inside the museum. It is common to say, especially in the Anglo-Saxon work, maybe a little less in France, that the museum's primary mission is educational. But we who work in museums know, because we live with this reality everyday, that things are more complex than that. Depending on the context and the moment, we could say just as legitimately that the museum's primary mission is political, or that it is economic, or that it is touristic. Obviously I'm deliberately being somewhat provocative.

It is nonetheless true that the educational function of the museum remains primal, because we dare not imagine a museum without visitors and every visitor faced with a

work of art is meant to learn something. The question is obviously more complex when we ask ourselves what the visitors are going to learn and how.

To be very schematic, we know there are several schools. The school that emphasizes the spontaneity of the encounter with the work of art: "you look and you're touched", you recognize your emotion and through that emotion you approach the artwork. And there's the school that emphasizes the importance of prior knowledge of the artist and the context to foster a deeper encounter with the work. Ann-Sofi (Noring) spoke of this earlier. When you work professionally in the field of education you tend to subscribe to the second school, even if we try to integrate the first into many of our practices and always leaving time to an initial non-mediated contact with the artwork. And we can say that visitors (when we observe them) reinforce us in our choices since they can be divided into two basic currents, that can be defined, also in a highly schematic manner, by using what neurophysiologists called (some time back) "right brain" "left brain": the more rational brain and the more intuitive brain, more on the creative side.

We saw this to be true a few years ago when we presented our collections in a non-chronological thematic show called the "Big Bang". We conducted a study based on the close monitoring of visitor reactions and found that visitors were basically divided into

two groups: those who did not appreciate this type of presentation because they did not have the chronological bearings of art history to which they were accustomed; and those who preferred it because gave them more of a chance to freely wander around in a “bohemian” sort of way.

Whatever the preference of the visitor, when we speak of education, we cannot avoid thinking about the tools, be they technological tools like the new multimedia guides that can be downloaded on the Web or the more traditional tools. Why are there texts in some rooms and not in others? Are there too many? Are they too long? What do they talk about? And what about the educational documents and the educational staff, the speakers who Ann-Sofi (Noring) was talking about who convey their passion orally through words. What prevails when we think about these tools, is a discourse, which is the discourse of art history. It is a discourse of constructed knowledge that provides bearings at the risk of imposing a reading grid on visitors.

So I think that one of the major challenges of the 21st century is related to the diversity of visitors, the diversity of their needs and of their expectations. We know that we don't have “a visitor”, an “audience” or “a public” but rather “visitors”, “audiences” and “publics”.

We are still working with setups planned

for several months or several years to address the “average” expectation of an “average” visitor who doesn't exist, since every visitor has particular needs. Some need more specialized information, others are looking for more in-depth talks, or simpler presentations. Some would like to know the biography of an artist, others are interesting in finding out more about a movement. And I think that in the future every visitor will have the possibility of finding the information that particularly suits them if they have access to digital resources as they are visiting the collections and exhibitions, as they stand in front of the works, via the devices that we are using today, which would be connected to ergonomically configured databases.

With this in mind, we have begun to develop what we call the “virtual Centre Pompidou”. This is not a virtual presentation of our collections and exhibitions, but rather an ergonomic access to the digital resources that we will be developing on the artworks, the collections and, more broadly, on all of our activities. The limit we are imposing on ourselves for the time being is precisely not to give a virtual representation, not to allow a virtual visit that would replace a real visit. For it is our profound belief that the museum is distinguished from the world of the Internet because it permits contact with the original artworks. But I think that we are already and will be increasingly outstripped by initiatives that allow people to download multimedia

modules that make it possible to see the works of art, or rather digital reproductions of the works. These will serve as educational tools to introduce people to art history and let them enjoy the image of the works without having to visit the museum. Paradoxically, we may very well see the *Mona Lisa* better on an HD screen than we can behind its bullet-proof glass shield in the middle of a crowd of visitors at the Louvre.

The second challenge in relation to “education inside the museum” is related to school groups. School groups are generally the first to benefit from our educational services. And they offer a great advantage, insofar as they reflect all the diversity of the population groups around us and, as a result, they take us out of our close circle of well-to-do, cultivated art lovers that form the core of our regular visitors.

When it comes to these school groups, it would surely be presumptuous to imagine that a simple visit to the museum (even if it's well done, like the Museum Cruise one I saw yesterday) can give these young people a taste for art. In France, a recent study has even indicated that there is a risk that a “mandatory” visit in a class setting can reinforce prejudices against modern and contemporary art, and even negative ideas about the museum. This risk compels us to examine our practices and be more attentive to the factors that could make a class visit

to the museum a real success. One of the key factors, as we know, is the quality of the preparation in the classroom by the teacher.

In this respect, there is an important change underway in France because last year it was decided that art history would be part of the school curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. It is a highly ambitious programme that covers all the arts, not only the visual arts, but also architecture, performing arts, music, etc. All of the arts in all periods. And here the question arises: Will this new required subject necessarily become another form of general knowledge, by which I mean a form of knowledge disconnected from the sensory discovery of artworks, which would overshadow direct contact with the original works. Clearly, teachers will be tempted to show reproductions of artworks, like those already found in textbooks. And when the children's parents suggest going to the museum, the children may very well say "I already saw the artworks in class!" when all they have seen are reproductions. So what is being presented as a way of enhancing the appreciation of art by the general public risks becoming an obstacle to the success of our activities. The question then is, "How can we avoid this pitfall?"

Maybe in the third "play" I'd like to make on the words "museum education", we can find some elements of an answer. Let us take the word "education" in the broader sense

of an accompaniment in the development of the individual, be it the physical growth and instruction of the young or the personal development of adults. And from the word "museum", let me isolate the word "muse", to speak of a space of inspiration, a space receptive to art and artists, a space of individual and collective freedom, a space where education can go hand in hand with creation. And firstly self-creation, the creation of one's own personality. This is why we feel that, after having developed workshops for children, it is important to create a space for teenagers.

In this regard, I'd like to quote the famous French psychoanalyst Françoise Dolto, who wrote in her book *La cause des adolescents*, that "By 8 years of age, parents have made a human being but not yet a citizen". Adolescence is a time of passage, a second birth, when childhood issues are played out again but this time to acquire an autonomous presence in the world. It's a time when groups of friends and peers become important, when sentimental and sensual emotions emerge for the first time; it's a time of decisive choices for one's destiny as an adult. It is often said that teenagers are not doing well, that they going through a crisis, or a least it used to be said. It was said that their relations with their parents and with the adult world were bad. But in fact the studies we have consulted show that this is generally not true. The majority of teenagers are doing well,

and while relations with their parents and teachers are no longer sufficient for them, they are far from being as bad as people say. Ultimately the relationship with the adult remains extremely important for teenagers, but what they need is to find other adults, aside from their teachers and parents, adults who can constitute references and open up prospects for them that will help them make the passage to adulthood, even if the teenager does not recognize it at the time.

There are many forces these days out to "conquer" teenagers and offer them pat answers to the search that is common at their age. In our societies, foremost among them are economic and marketing forces that often encourage gregariousness while giving the young the illusion of singularity. We believe that the relationship to art at this age, which is embodied in the relationship to artists, can be an essential support to the construction of the self. Why? Because the exchange with someone who develops a capacity of individual and social creation, and the dynamics of a process of expression as it is played out in a studio, makes teenagers feel that nothing is a foregone conclusion, that each destiny is singular, and that it is not a matter of finding one's place on an already plotted course, but of discovering oneself while creating one's own path.

We have decided therefore to take up this challenge, working from the values that we

have been developing for thirty years in our work with children. Firstly this meant having a place, a specific space dedicated to teenagers like the gallery we have dedicated to children. And in this specific space, to have specific programming that stimulates their desire to come to the Centre Pompidou on their own.

Of course we will also be proposing workshops for classes and school groups. But our objective is to get teenagers to come outside the school and family framework, to come individually or, as is generally the case at this age, with their friends. Note that all activities at the museum are free for the 13 to 18 year olds, and they can come without being accompanied by an adult. We want the Centre Pompidou to become a place where teenagers arrange to meet, rather than in a café or at the movies, after classes during the week or on weekends. Fortunately the Centre Pompidou is open until 10pm, so we can programme evening activities.

One of our recent studies shows that there are already 13 to 18 year olds who spend time at the centre. If most of the 13 year olds come to the museum with their families, there is a turning point at about 15, when they begin to come mainly with friends. We want our programming to accompany this passage in the lives of young people, so that they continue to come after their parents are no longer planning their activities for them.

This "Teen Gallery" will open in the last trimester of 2010. Its design was entrusted by competition to Mathieu Lehanneur.

This 250 square meters space will be in the basement. There will be a showcase presenting information and the works. And the programming will be projected on the opposite wall.

The main equipment is a technical grid on the ceiling in the form of an upside-down roller-coaster, to which we can fix all sorts of devices for sound, music or projections.

This will be a user-friendly space, of course, where the adolescents can hang out. And there will be a closed-circuit television system based on this original idea: often video surveillance is used to monitor young people; here, it is the teenagers who can watch what is happening in the centre, as if they were monitoring what the grownups are doing!

The space can open onto what we call the "Forum -1" where numerous festivals are held, notably performing arts and video festivals.

We have begun work on a preliminary version of the programming with what we call "the new ambassadors" programme. The "new ambassadors" are young people in Paris and the suburbs who attend community centres. Such centres for arts, sports and leisure activities, which are found everywhere in France, often work with underprivileged children. We have proposed to them to work

with artists of our choosing to prepare "performances" at the Centre Pompidou in which the young people will be active participants (because studies have shown us that young people would be happy to spend time in a place like the Centre Pompidou, if they are offered activities in which they can actively participate). The aim is to encourage them to see other artistic approaches and gradually bring them to come to the museum to see exhibitions.

Our first attempt was rather modest. It consisted in organizing a "flashmob" of sorts, a kind of spontaneous gathering of young people in the spaces of the Centre Pompidou. The second attempt was more ambitious. It was called "Playground" (I'm coming back to the idea of play...). It brought together artists around the theme of the playground, either revisiting the idea or proposing a playground for the public. Here are the participating artists: Damien Aspe with *Le SIMON*, an interactive work that deconstructs some games of our times; Guillaume Poulain who proposed a kind of mural made by a tennis ball throwing machine; Samuel François who had the public make their own playground using patterns on the ground of different playing fields; Pierre Vanni, a designer, responsible for the signage of this event; and Nicolas Simarik, an artist who specializes in artistic-societal performances.

This programming was really experimental. It

is not necessarily what we will be doing in this space dedicated to adolescents. The idea was to get the Centre Pompidou accustomed to accommodating this type of public and at the same time to test a number of propositions. As you will see, this was not simply about the visual arts.

The biggest challenge was to get the teenagers to come when they were not with their families or classes, and for this purpose we turned to a specialized street marketing agency, which distributed flyers in places where teenagers gather in Paris. And we succeeded in getting about a thousand teens to come spend the entire evening at the Centre Pompidou.

As you see, the experimentation was wide open. We are currently working on the opening events. The first will be on the theme of “street art”, the second will revolve around clothing (which joins up with what Ann-Sofi (Noring) presented with *Fashionation*), and the third will be on manga, which is a very popular genre in France. We are looking for topics that teens can relate to, that sparks their desire to come. And we are looking for artists who are willing to work with them, converse with them, and get them to participate.

In conclusion, after this brief presentation of some of our latest projects, which situated the Centre Pompidou as a platform of

exchange between society and artistic creation, I would just like to insist on the fact that our role, to my mind, is to create ever new occasions for the public, the artworks, and the artists to come together.

Thank you for your attention.

Vincent Poussou

Born in 1961, Vincent Poussou graduated with a diploma in Business Administration. From the beginning of his career, he specialised in Public Relations with a focus on culture. Vincent worked successively for the French Embassy in Peru as Deputy Cultural Attaché, the French Ministry of Culture as a Consultant, and Ernst & Young Audit and Consultancy firm as Partnerships Manager. In 1992, he participated in the finalization of one of the large projects that brought Paris into the 21st century, the urban ‘Park of La Villette’, designed by Bernard Tschumi. At first as Head of Visitor Services and then as Director of the Communications and Public Services Department, from 1994 until 2004, Vincent dedicated his time to building and developing the audiences of this uniquely culturally focused park. In 2005, he was appointed Director of Visitor Resources and Educational Projects for Centre Pompidou. He joined this 30-year-old institution to contribute to a new phase of development as part of its mission to help contemporary creative works reach wider audiences. Vincent Poussou most notably participated in the conception of the Park of La Villette’s pedagogical gardens and workshops, and in the extension of Centre Pompidou’s programs to reach out to a younger audience, especially adolescents.