

Working With Our Communities

David Goa, Program Coordinator

In the June-July issue of *Museogramme*, we announced the names of the 15 recipients who were awarded grants within the framework of two CMA programs, Cultural Diversity and Museums II and the Canadian Image Project. Starting in this issue, we will be featuring some of the projects in order to give CMA members a sense of the range of the initiatives undertaken, and of the work being done both to develop new and fruitful partnerships with cultural communities and to broaden the museum-based sources of knowledge (photographs, audio and artifact material) on all Canadian peoples.

Now that the projects are under way, the Steering Committee of CDMII has been engaged in various site visits. Our discussions with the participants involved have deepened our thinking on the different issues facing museums working with community partners. In a number of cases, members of the committee have raised issues and suggested approaches which the museums have found useful as they take their initial steps in the work.

At the Matsqui Sumas Abbotsford Museum Society, in Abbotsford, B.C., we discussed the art of the recorded interview and of documenting photographic materials. Led by Lynne Wright with the help of Niricksa Chand, who was brought on as intern this summer, the museum's project involves video interviews of the oldest Sikh community in Canada. Conversation is always an art and, at its best, one is invited on a Journey into the landscape of meaning of a person's life and of the experience of the community. This project will provide a rich glimpse of both Sikh community life and the remarkable place they have made for themselves in Abbotsford. It will also explore the interrelationship between the Sikh and Hindu way of life and everyday life in Abbotsford, as well as the significance of pilgrimage and temple for Sikhs as they field the challenges of the twentieth century.

The committee also had the opportunity to meet some of the project participants during the CMA annual conference in Vancouver, one of whom was Angela Wood, who coordinated the Macedonian textile exhibition *Baba's Hope Chest* at the Textile Museum in Toronto. This discussion ranged over a number of issues, including how a community-based exhibition team marshals the expertise to do first-class work, what diplomatic skills are necessary to mediate culturally and politically sensitive issues, and how to remain receptive to the needs of the host museum. The community-based model of working with a host museum that Angela is writing about will be read with keen interest by many of our colleagues throughout Canada.

On another front, a Community Mapping Project has been launched to address issues of equity as well as museum staff and board training, the two categories of CDMII for which we received no applications. This project is being led by consultant Reva Joshee, and will involve five museums of various sizes in Alberta. Each museum will learn how to assess and build contacts with the full range of communities that make up the area they serve and also to identify the resources available for doing significant work on their behalf. We will be working to see that this opportunity to acquire a new set of skills be given to museums throughout Canada following this pilot project in Alberta.

We invite our colleagues across Canada to contact members of the CMDII committee to discuss all aspects of the work currently being done and how we may work together to increase the capacity of our museums to work effectively with all cultural communities that make up our country. The members of the committee are David Goa, Andrée Gendreau, Montserrat Gonzalez, Sandra Massey, John G. McAvity and Lillian Petroff.