

SCIENCE DO IT YOURSELF— WITH A DIFFERENCE

Art and Science
Blend in Vancouver

By JAN RAY

Currently, at the Vancouver Centennial Museum, located in the beautiful Planetarium, people of all ages are having the time of their lives laying hands on a fascinating preview exhibit of art and science called "The Extended i." This remarkable 48 piece ensemble presents a tantalizing foretaste of Vancouver's future Arts and Sciences Centre, still in the planning stages, but well on its way to becoming a reality.

If the impressions gained by this reviewer are any indication, the Centre can only be a huge success. I have never seen a better example of ambitious ideas translated into reality. Significantly, the attitude of the large crowds regularly attending "The Extended i" speaks for itself. There is little aimless wandering around going on in the gallery, for the exhibit provides the kind of immediate appeal to the senses needed to invite participation.

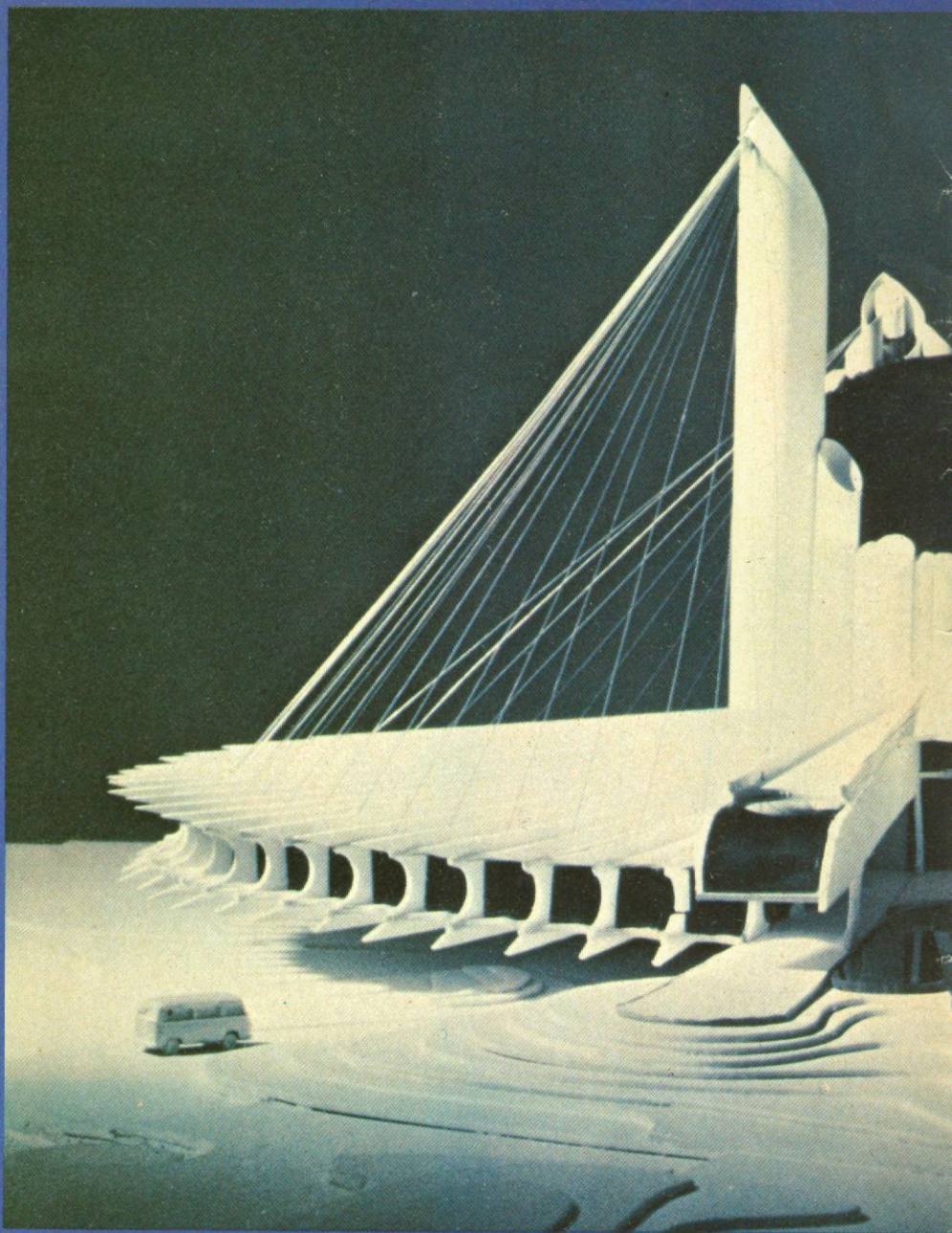
And taking part is the key concept. Children and adults alike may (and do!) experience enthusiastically what it means to build scientific instruments, operate a crawl-in harp, modulate and create colour images in movement and sound, view three-dimensional aerial photographs, and manipulate a large assortment of other exciting exhibits in which, indeed, the personal "i" comprehends the effects of the union between artistic creation and scientific principles. Clear and informative placards — themselves often works of art — help any hesitant novice to better understand some of the elusive mysteries behind effects he himself can produce. It's a new frontier, and an exciting one.

Despite the fact that this late-Twentieth-Century profusion of blended


art and science must necessarily be "new," the concept behind it is at least as old as the Renaissance. After all, it was then that the ideas about interaction between beauty and mathematics, optics, colour, and sound first found their richest and most germinal expression for Western Man. However, it should be no surprise that Vancouver's recent effort to involve its residents in a new revival has behind it an inspiring story of dedication, hard work, and enthusiasm.

Valerie Vopni, a key figure in the Junior League of Vancouver, embodies the characteristics needed to instigate and carry through the sort of extraordinary project exemplified by the "Extended i"

exhibition, as is obvious by her statement, "We just saw no earthly reason why art and science should not be presented in this way." And Valerie is quick to give credit to a multitude of researchers, artists and scientists, volunteers (350 to date!) and institutions who continue to make the whole project possible. She points out that many important ideas, aesthetic and organizational, came from such sources as the Los Angeles Junior Art Centre, The Oregon Science Museum, the Pacific Science Centre in Seattle, the Ontario Science Fair, and the Exploratorium in San Francisco. Equally helpful have been Vancouver's own universities, UBC and Simon Fraser, as well as the Emily Carr



Edmonton's proposed Planetarium and Space Science Centre



EDMONTON LOOKS TO THE SKY

Finding Our Own Star

If Vancouver's projected Arts and Sciences Centre sounds exciting, the proposed Planetarium & Space Centre for Edmonton represents an inspired local concept.

The Edmonton Space Sciences Foundation, a non-profit group and registered charity, has made an impressive application for funding to the Municipal Alberta 75th Anniversary Committee. Set at a capital cost of \$6,700,000, the project includes two 236-seat theatres, an exhibition area, a restaurant and lounge, as well as administrative and support space. The design of the complex by Edmonton architect Douglas Cardinal, appears to be both aesthetically compelling and eminently functional.

Multi-use of space seems to underline each facet of the Centre. The Star Theatre, the centrepiece of Planetaria everywhere, serves two functions. In addition to the traditional astronomy-oriented presentation (spectators will experience the sensation of being in the sky with stars above and below), light and sound shows, theatrical productions, and recitals will also be staged. The other theatre will serve a variety of audio visual purposes, among

them films, film-screen presentations, and even some limited theatrical use. Expositions in the display area will address the subjects of astronomy and the space sciences through passive, participatory, and interpretive displays. An observatory and observation deck should do much for budding astronomers, as "hands-on" experience with various telescopes will introduce the sundry pleasures of the original spectator sport to visitors. Suggested educational activities cover extension, public, and school programming.

In 1960, Edmonton set a national precedent by opening the Queen Elizabeth Planetarium, the first such public facility in Canada. Since then, other cities have constructed first class complexes that have left the Queen E far behind. It is now the smallest, most outdated planetarium in the country.

With an innovative design, a river valley site, and a committed core of organizers, the Edmonton Planetarium & Space Sciences Centre sounds like the kind of project worthy of commemorating Alberta's 75th year. May it survive the labyrinth of desk tops it will undoubtedly cross before a decision is reached. □

College of Art.

In addition to the exemplary research and pre-planning of enthusiasts like Valerie Vopni and Carol Pulk, of the Arts and Sciences Centre, and of City Hall, the commendable response of organizational funding for this project should be given due credit. No endeavor of this magnitude can get off the ground without the fullest support from civic enterprise. And support was given. For example, the Vancouver Junior League came through with almost \$50,000. Also \$35,000 was contributed by each of the City of Vancouver, the Vancouver Foundation, the province's Year of the Child Fund, and the National Museums Board.

Therefore, "The Extended i" exhibition, and its future parent, Vancouver's proposed Arts and Sciences Centre, represent the best in civic cooperation. As for the individual exhibits themselves, they should be a visual encouragement to other cities interested in such a concept. It is indicative of the enterprising nature of this project that not one item has been borrowed from outside Vancouver!

The key organizational sponsors of this project, the Social Planning Department and the Junior League, intended from the start that "The Extended i" exhibition should offer residents a chance to experience what an arts and sciences centre is all about; equally important was

that visitors to the exhibition be encouraged to express their ideas about it. And the filled-to-the-brim "punch bowl" at the entrance to the gallery attests to the fact that visitors are not bashful about expressing their response. On several visits I've seen convincing evidence of just how enthusiastic are both young and old. Spilling out of the bowl on one occasion were the numerous "happy face" sketches of a group of school children. Other slips of paper bore largely scrawled remarks such as "terrific," "great idea," "amazing," and "tremendous fun."

Maybe the fact that this exhibit is tremendous fun speaks best for the success of the whole idea, and particularly for the

element of personal participation in "The Extended i." After all, few could disagree that what we experience ourselves is what we remember. And it's next to impossible not to stop at each separate exhibit and try one's hand at creating the effects inherent in artistic and scientific expression.

Over here a six or seven year old boy shares a turn with a white-haired lady in drawing a panoramic scene on a long strip of paper and then feeding it into the spinning Zoetrope. This device, also known as the "wheel of life," was invented almost 150 years ago, long before motion pictures, but is based on the same idea. "The illusion of motion arises from the persistence of vision" (we learn from the free program brochure handed out at the entrance). "When our eyes record an image, we continue to see it for a short time, even if the image disappears right away. Thus, when a succession of images is presented, the brain interprets the situation as one of smooth movement."

And over here, a man swings open an eight-foot door and steps inside the gigantic Kaleidoscope. Inside, his image is fractured and diffused into a million selves. The visual and technical aspects of music, painting and calligraphy and the wonders of holographs are offered in the same do-it-yourself spirit. Pythagoras' Puzzle becomes not less amazing, but a little less puzzling. The bevy of terminals and computers installed in the centre of the gallery seem in continuous use: a boy sits at one computer playing a game with the "mechanical genius" in front of him; others compete with each other in keying in the most provocative question for the computer to answer. If you like, you can choose to operate a Harmonograph, a mechanical device that draws repeating graphic designs — but you decide what

sort of pattern the huge pendulum will describe.

It should be remembered that "The Extended i" exhibition is an experiment, and many different ideas and approaches are being tried out. At any given period during the exhibit's run — it began February 15th and ends May 19th — only 30 of the 48 separate exhibits appear in the gallery. In other words, there is a continual variation in the presentation.

Another exciting feature of the experiment is the arrival each week of a resident musician, visual artist, scientist or magician, who sets up shop, so to speak, in the exhibition area. This aspect of the 'experiment' is particularly gratifying, as the visitor is able to work with scientific materials, or, for example, build a stringed instrument with an expert close by to encourage and explain.

Inevitably, some of the exhibits succeed better than others. I suspect that response, however, is a purely personal affair. Nonetheless, one of the plus-factors of "The Extended i" experiment is that each one of us has a hand in shaping, by criticism, a more perfect model for the proposed permanent Arts and Sciences Centre.

To this reviewer, one of the most significant features of "The Extended i" is the obvious pleasure visitors take in it. It is rare indeed these days to *feel* part of an atmosphere peopled with eager and contented participants. Yes, the portents are good for Vancouver's future Arts and Sciences Centre.

Meanwhile, in the midst of laser light patterning, undulating mirrors and periscope cameras, visitors to the Centennial Museum enjoy a treat that, I hope, will be available to others elsewhere. It's high time that the spirit of the Renaissance came to Vancouver, B.C. Other cities take note. □



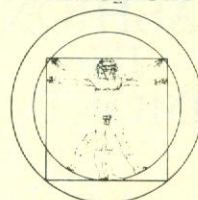
The Extended i, Vancouver's preview exhibition of its future Arts and Sciences Centre, is on view at the Centennial Museum in Vancouver until May 19. Participants can match wits with a computer, crawl through a sound sculpture, generate 300,000 volts of purple lightning, create a cartoon on a zoetrope, or operate a laser.



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