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DeVos Institute to Examine Implications of 21st-century Technologies for Cultural Sector

“Generation Elsewhere: Art in the Age of Distraction” gathers experts in technology, culture, neuro-science, and marketing to debate the future of the arts in the wake of 21st-century technologies

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The DeVos Institute of Arts Management at the University of Maryland, a global leader in training and consultation for cultural organizations, will investigate the impact of 21st-century technologies on artists, arts institutions, and arts audiences through a series of four debates from October to December, 2016. The project culminates in a white paper to be released in 2017.

Technology presents profound opportunities—and challenges—for the global cultural sector. While artists and administrators have more tools than ever to create, distribute, and market their content, they also face a tidal wave of digital surrogates for that content. The debate series, conceived by DeVos Institute President **Brett Egan**, will ask artists, arts administrators, and thought leaders to consider:

- What are the implications of these forces today? How might these forces accelerate, or change direction, in the years and decades to come?
- How will audiences’ usage of technology to understand, navigate, and produce meaning from 9-to-5 affect their appetite for traditional art forms and institutions?
- What action must artists, managers, architects, and arts funders take to keep pace with decreasing attention spans and ever-more sensational, inexpensive virtual content?
- Which cultural producers and institutions will flourish in this new environment? Which will falter?

The investigation is advised and co-curated by **Tod Machover**, composer, inventor, professor and head of the Opera of the Future group at the MIT Media Lab, and **Sydney Skybetter**, technologist, choreographer, writer, and founding partner of Edwards & Skybetter Change Agency.

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Additional Context

Four debates will frame the discussion, featuring thought leaders from the fields of culture, neuro-science, technology, and marketing. The series is designed to benefit arts managers, arts funders, artists, policy-makers, marketers, students, and academics.

1. **Technology, the Brain, and Audience Expectation: Vying for Attention in “Generation Elsewhere.” October 17, 2016, at The Phillips Collection (Washington, D.C.).** As new technologies have dramatically altered modes of communication, work, and leisure, have they also changed—consciously or unconsciously—what today’s audiences expect from encounters with art? This debate explores how the brain is changing in response to new technologies, and how these changes can be addressed—even manipulated by—administrators and artists.
2. **Virtual Realities and the Public Sphere: The Future of Cultural Architecture. October 27, 2016, at the Granoff Center for the Creative Arts, Brown University (Providence, Rhode Island).** What impact will an infinite supply of low-cost, high-quality, on-demand digital surrogates for art—available without leaving home—have on today’s cultural institutions? Which cultural institutions will compete with most success in this environment? This debate investigates how tomorrow’s museums, concert halls, and arts centers will fare in a world changed by virtual and augmented reality.
3. **The Emerging Means of Production: Anticipating the Next Digital Divide. November 15, 2016, location to be determined.** As more cultural content moves online and into the digital realm, will organizations that can acquire and monetize these new “means of production” capture market share before others even enter the market? This debate will investigate the economic and representational complications that may result from this gap.
4. **The Artist: Form, Means, and Meaning in the 21st Century. December 9, 2016, at the MIT Media Lab, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Cambridge, Massachusetts).** What new stories can be told—and new experiences created—that are maximally synergistic and complementary with evolving tools and techniques? How will artists map their work on to the changing contemporary brain? Can artistic practice somehow evade—or perhaps benefit from—the changes affecting audiences in virtually every other aspect of their lives? What must managers and theater architects know about artistic practice in the digital age in order to ready their institutions for new modes of creation and distribution? How can technology enhance and extend—rather than inhibit or replace—human potential for expression, connection, and collaboration?

“Anyone who’s seen a toddler ‘swipe right’ or has awakened to an iPhone on their pillow understands that as tech changes, so do we,” states **Brett Egan**. “Our debates respond to this new era—one we might call ‘Generation Elsewhere’—marked by tech that relentlessly distracts focus from the here-and-now. In a business that has, for centuries, relied on the attentive presence of paying audiences, we can’t ignore the depth and speed of this change. We are staging this series out of concern that, as a sector, we simply have not kept pace with its effects.”

“Over the past 30 years, technology in the arts has gone from being experimental, edgy, and exciting to seeming ubiquitous, app-like, and utilitarian,” says **Tod Machover**. “This investigation will serve to identify the truly significant value that technology has brought to the arts, and to re-ignite the explosive excitement of technological thinking. Truly inventive technology—hardware and especially software—is our era’s most vital and powerful creative medium for translating radical imagination into transformative artistic experience, for practitioner and public alike.”

“Emerging technologies, from the proscenium stage to the light-emitting diode, have always affected the ways and means of the arts. Change is nothing new. Yet the arts face disruption in the form of emerging media platforms such as virtual reality, most of which are far cheaper than and more accessible than going to a theater,” says **Sydney Skybetter**. “Ultimately, the question we are wrestling with through this programming is, ‘Do we in the arts mimic and encompass other forms of media, thus ceding what has defined us for centuries, or do we stick to our proverbial guns on the gambit that there has always been an audience for the arts, and thus, presumably, always will?’”

More information on “Generation Elsewhere: Art in the Age of Distraction” and how to register is available at www.DeVosInstitute.net. Attendance at each debate is limited and will be restricted to a registered audience. Segments of each debate will be carried via the web.

The series is made possible with the support of the University of Maryland.

About the DeVos Institute of Arts Management

The DeVos Institute of Arts Management at the University of Maryland provides training, consultation, and implementation support for arts managers and their boards.

It operates on the premise that while much is spent to train artists, too little is spent to support the managers and boards who keep those artists at work.

At the same time, rapid changes in technology, demographics, government policy, and the economy have complicated the job of the manager and volunteer trustees. These changes continue to accelerate.

Organizations that have mastered these trends are flourishing—even leveraging them to their advantage.

For those that have not, however, the sense that “something’s not quite right” can seem unshakable. For too many, these changes have led to less art, decreased visibility, diminished relevance—even financial collapse.

These challenges inform our approach. Never has the need to balance best practices and new approaches been so urgent.

Institute leadership and consultants—all arts managers themselves— understand that, in today’s environment, there is no time or resource to waste. Therefore, Institute services are lean, direct, and practical.

The DeVos Institute has served more than 1,000 organizations from over 80 countries since Michael M. Kaiser founded it during his tenure as President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. While environments, objectives, and disciplines vary, each of our clients shares the desire to create, market, and sustain exemplary cultural programs.

The DeVos Institute has designed its services to assist a wide range of institutions, from traditional performing and presenting organizations, museums, galleries, art schools, and libraries, to botanical gardens, glass-making studios, public art trusts, and nonprofit cinemas, to name a few.

In 2014, the DeVos Institute transitioned to the University of Maryland, where it continues to offer support to individuals and organizations around the world.

For more information about the DeVos Institute, visit www.DeVosInstitute.net.

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