



The Museum of Man gets jab in the gender

Scott LaFee Staff Writer

PUBLICATION: San Diego Union, The (CA)

SECTION: LIFESTYLE

DATE: April 30, 1991

EDITION: 1,2,3,4,5,6

Page: D-1

In a word, the **Museum of Man** has a problem.

It's the last word actually, the one that's supposed to suggest all **of** us, every **man**, woman and child. Some folks say the word doesn't cut it -- not by half.

"The message in '**Museum of Man**' is that men are the first consideration. Men are primary. It makes women into second-class citizens," says Kris Anderson.

A post-graduate student at SDSU, Anderson and a friend complained to **museum** officials last October that the "**man**" in the anthropology **museum's** title was sexist.

"It's a legitimate issue," concedes **museum** director Douglas Sharon. "We've looked at changing it twice but both times the trustees thought it wasn't a big enough problem."

Nonetheless, the **museum** is reconsidering its name one more time. Sharon says the process began before Anderson and her friend, Michele Lyn, complained. "It's an issue that comes up every time the **museum's** charter is reviewed."

A committee **of** five men and one woman head the review.

"If you were going to name a **museum**, you'd want to consider the issue **of** sexism," says Mary Dawe, a lawyer and the committee's female member. "The name doesn't offend me."

It doesn't offend Mason Freeman, the committee's, uh, chairperson. He's been involved in all three reviews: in 1980, 1988 and now.

"It's a problem with the English language. There is no third-person singular word that corresponds to he and she," says Freeman, a retired admiral. And knowing that, Freeman thinks it's much ado about nothing.

"If you were to poll our membership, they would overwhelmingly say just stay where you are. It's a political issue with female groups who just don't like seeing a sexist word used. I don't disagree with them. It's just the way it is."

To which Anderson responds: "I thought we changed this thinking in the 1970s when it was proven how sexist language negatively affects people. The **museum's** name is a blatant anachronism."

Originally, the word **man** in Old English meant "humanity." According to Webster's Word Histories, there were other terms for a single **man** and woman: **wer** for a **man**, **wif** for a woman.

Over time, **wer** fell into disfavor. By 1000, **man** took on the double meaning **of** a single male and humanity. In 1841, the British Parliament adopted a resolution saying **man** meant mankind. The "Oxford English Dictionary" declared the term to be "the human creature regarded abstractly."

"It's a very old meaning that still has legitimacy today," said Orrin Seright, an SDSU professor **of** linguistics. "My feeling is that these objections to it come from a rather strident minority."

Perhaps, says Ernest Miranda, co-president **of** the **San Diego** chapter **of** the National Organization for Women, "but even if only a few people perceive the **museum's** title (to mean **man** the singular), it's a case **of** too many."

The problem in all this, says **museum** director Sharon, is that there don't seem to be any obviously suitable alternatives.

Anderson and Miranda have suggestions: the **Museum of Human History**, the **Museum of Humanity**, the **Museum of Men and Women**. A **museum** in Canada, they note, changed its name to the **Museum of Civilization**.

Freeman accepts the suggestions but wonders about donors who like the current name, about whether a name change would affect the **museum's** standing and image in the scientific community, about tradition.

On the other hand, Michele Lyn, who wrote the letter to the **museum** with Anderson, says the **museum** may be missing out. "They could have more benefactors if they were more inclusive. I know people who would give to the **museum** if the name was different."

Whatever happens, it's not likely to happen soon. There is no timetable for making a decision. Evidence suggests the **museum** will not act rashly.

Take its current name. For 75 years, it has been known as the **Museum of Man**. Technically, however, that wasn't its name. Until 1979, when **museum** officials finally changed state records, the place carried the bland, but non-sexist, moniker **of Museum Association**.

Caption: Michele Lyn, left, and Kris Anderson at the Museum of Man.