



## Building Bridges: Imagining Science exhibition Dr. Peter Hackett

> November 14, 2008

> Location: ART GALLERY of ALBERTA

Good evening everyone. It's great to be here among some old friends and now some new friends. Welcome everyone.

It's a great time to be in Alberta with this powerful confluence of new ideas and opportunities flowing all around us. Thank you all for being here.

I would like to take a little of your time and tell you why Alberta Ingenuity is such a strong supporter of the Festival of Ideas – at the Platinum level – and of the exhibit – as the presenting sponsor. In short form it's because you the creative researchers and artists and the interested and engaged public are so important to our society, to our economy and to our progress.

Now I could have said that I was determined that to be a Platinum sponsor of the Festival of Ideas because our dear friends and neighbours Eric and Elexis Schloss became Gold level sponsors and are the ones responsible for bringing Salman Rushdie to Edmonton last night. Congratulations once again to Elexis and Erica for their generosity and leadership within our community.

Any of you who were there last night will remember Rushdie speaking about the essential characteristic of free societies - the freedom of the individual to question the very foundations of the society.

He is right - the interaction between creative individuals and a society that is capable of accepting new things - is the essential DNA of progress – the DNA of innovation if you will.

Just as the one strand of DNA patterns the other – and this in nature leads to growth, to reproduction and to evolution – so to creative individuals pattern an innovative society and an innovative society patterns creative individuals – and this too leads to growth, reproduction and evolution.

One strand is not enough. You need both.

After listening to Rushdie last night I went home and listened to a Nobel-Prize winner say “My work always begins with a question. And why is always a more powerful question than how.”

Well that Nobel Prize winner was not a scientist nor an engineer – the engineer would certainly have been asking how! No it was an Artist. The writer Toni Morrison interviewed on Charlie Rose.

And this was for me but the most recent demonstration of the similar points of view shared by creative people whether they come from the Arts or the Sciences. Both are driven to voyage, to explore and to come back and report on what they have seen.

In Leonard Cohen’s words, “We send them naked to the frontiers and they come back bleeding and tell us what it was like.”

It’s not an easy position to take whether you work in the Arts or the in Sciences. But there is no progress without those courageous enough to take that voyage.

I have long been passionate about both of these areas. In fact, I was honoured to be involved in the creation of the Artist-in-Residence for Research program in 2002, as a joint initiative between the NRC and the Canada Council for the Arts.

And I am thrilled to see that one of our first Artists-in-Residence is an exhibitor here tonight—Catherine Richards. It has been wonderful to visit with Catherine again.

And we have our own example in the Caulfield family, where we see Sean, an artist, and Tim, a scientist, working together to lead the Imagining Science exhibition.

We are lucky in this province to have thriving arts and science cultures. Alberta has managed to attract some of the best creative minds from around the globe to come here and work in the areas of fine arts, performing arts, science and engineering.

Alberta Ingenuity and the Art Gallery of Alberta are on similar courses: Ingenuity is nurturing the discovery of new knowledge and encouraging its application to benefit Albertans and the world.

The AGA is creating an environment in the province where people come to transform their understanding of the world by connecting with the visual arts.

It’s time for scientists to give full value and respect to a new perspective—from reductionism of the scientific method to the integrative perspective of the social sciences and the humanities.

Our desire to create has driven our evolution: our technological evolution, our cultural evolution and our natural evolution. What is happening now is that the rate of our technological evolution is constantly accelerating and it now challenges our culture and perhaps our future.

For creativity, while often fun, is also deadly serious.

Our play is not without risk. It is never without risk. It has never been without risk. Our play changes us. It changes our future.

Our creativity does not come without controversy. It requires knowledge, and discipline, and a tension between rules and exceptions.

And in the end it requires the triumph of hope over fear - the theme of this Festival of Ideas.

Let me close by bringing it back to Toni Morrison last night. As you know she writes about racism and the way this has shaped the psyche of Americans. And last night she talked about the presidential election not in terms of the extraordinary achievement of one extraordinary individual, but in terms of the astonishing achievement of 300 million people confronting their fears, one at a time, each from their own perspective and coming down finally and resoundingly on the side of hope.

Scientists and Artists working together, each from their own perspective, engaging our citizens each in their own language can bring about similar victories of hope over fear. And this - in the end - is the only reasonable way that our society can move forward.

That is why we support this. Simply because it is essential.

Thank you to the Art Gallery of Alberta for hosting this exhibit. It is an important step and hopefully it is but the first step in the beginning of a beautiful friendship.

Finally, I went to the far corner of the exhibit Art in Hockey and stood in the middle of the video installation Hockey 2004. As I stood there I thought "You know I should start playing hockey again" - another small triumph of hope over fear!