equirements:

LC II and higher

3.5 MB RAM available for application

My choice was about to become abundantly clear. I had phoned Hyacinth, my travel agent, and she left me with the following information: Return Airfare from Toronto, Canada to Paris, France - $819 (Canadian), one week in a four-star hotel - $1,428, entrance fees to the Louvre Museum - $100. The total cost was approximately - $2,347. A quick check with the accountant, my wife Georgia, left me with little doubt. There would be no air journey leading to daytime museum trips and certainly no wild Parisian night life. I would be purchasing the CD-ROM "Le Louvre, The Palace & its Paintings" as its price was within my limited budget!

"Le Louvre..." is a deceptive multimedia CD-ROM adventure. The initial interface screen offers the user the option of examining either the architectural development of "The Palace" or the artistic creations contained within "The Collection." In actuality, the two initial contexts end up interweaving in a rather complex and sophisticated manner. As you follow any of the particular path choices, you will find that your level of exploration can range from either viewing a painting directly, viewing the paintings position within the installation room, or viewing the painting within the context of the Museum in its entirety. Each move throughout this well choreographed production is accompanied by an appropriate musical selection associated with the character of the period and the cultural background of the art selection.

"The Palace" path documents the evolution of the building from its days as a fortress in the early 12th Century through its transformation into a residence for Royalty and to its final conversion to a complete museum in 1993. Each of the eight evolutionary architectural stages allow for four interrelated approaches to exploration. An

"Insight" selection offers a rendered

model of the building at each

chronological stage with a narrated

history explaining the use, changes and

personalities involved in the

commissioning and construction of the

palace. The user moves from the

"Evolution" selection, which simply

indicates where you are with respect to

the entire 'finished' plan, to "Key

 Sites" which build upon these previous two selections by indicating the rooms and locations of interest within that evolutionary stage. Don't give up yet! At this level you are offered a series of 'thumbnail' photographic images or paintings which enlarge to full screen, high quality images with accompanying narration of the significance of each particular space.

At this point, I was reminded of my experience with "The Journeyman Project 2 - Buried In Time™". Yes, even educators mess about with those sorts of 'projects'! Not only is there a news announcement of an auction at the Louvre Art Museum in that CD game by Presto Studios, but the assistance of Arthur, the artificial intelligence (read 'Cheat' for old timers!), gives an interesting historical narration of French mediaeval history as your player moves

through Chateau Gaillard. Once you play the game you might better appreciate a tour through real history in "Le Louvre" and gain more appreciation for the research that goes into a project like BIT. The final selection, "History," is a brief textual summary of the stage.

I was disappointed that the reading did not include a bibliography of suggested readings and that the text could not be copied or printed. The text sections throughout the entire CD do make use of minimal hypertext links to a few definitions and to most of the personalities mentioned in the histories. To an extent, the biographies of the patrons, collectors and architects involved in the evolution of the Louvre become an interesting third level of study buried underneath "The Palace" and "The Collection." Their stories lend some credibility to the concept of 'palace intrigue' and to the clashes of artistic taste and personalities which Hollywood movies have encouraged us to believe existed in France. When you view the portraits of the characters involved either directly or behind the scenes, examine their facial expressions, poses and fashions. It is not hard to believe that you are being given just a hint of a magnificent soap opera that would put television's "Dynasty" or "Melrose Place" to shame! (But then that's not difficult. Is it?) The 'conclusion' of "The Palace" offers the viewer a very sharp contrast between the initial stone Castle of the Middle Ages and the diamond-shaped glass panels of the Pyramid-shaped structure designed by the Chinese architect, I. M. Pei. At this stage, you are offered a complete overview of the site with some fabulous interior and exterior views narrated in a manner which makes the educational experience of the CD so positive.

"The Collection," on disk, consists of a selection of approximately 100 paintings from the Museum's holdings of over 6,000 works. You may wonder what happened to the other 5,000 plus images? Well, the total CD-ROM experience is contained in 628.4 MB on the disk. There's just no more room! Besides, after viewing the CD's offerings of works of art you'll want to start saving for the airfare and hotel in order to see all the originals. Within the period ranging from the early 1300's to the middle of the 19th Century, the French and Italian Schools of painting are best represented, and complimented by a brief look at works from Holland, Flanders, Germany and England. In a manner of navigation similar to that used for "The Palace," a click on any of the 'Schools' generates a narration concerning that section, a "History" button which reveals a written summary and expansion on the narrated commentary. Additionally, the major "Collector" and his biography is part of the third level of interest as previously mentioned. Clicking a 'thumbnail' of the painting you wish to examine from the interface screen generates a high quality, full screen image complete with relevant narration concerning the style, artist, period, and so forth. The "Biography" of the artist, often with his portrait, has an end list of other works, not illustrated on this CD, that the Museum has by that person. Those with an art history background can play a minor game of deciding whether or not you would rather have seen another choice to be illustrated rather than that selected for the final production. The range of button choices allowing or further analysis of each painting is quite satisfying.

You can view the work against a wall scale to get a feeling
for its relationship to human scale. It is often possible to
view the work in its interior setting through architectural photographs. A "Timeline" choice
allows one to place the individual painting in an historic and chronological sequence.

Saving the best for last, the "Composition"
button returns the viewer to the full
creen image where voice over narration
 accompanies the graphic overlays which
 demonstrate design elements. The
"Zoom" button (my favourite) takes
one through a series of narrated 'clips'
of the symbolic significance of enlarged
details of the image. What excursion into
the art field would be complete without
a 'gossip' button? Well, in a sophisticat-
eded manner the "Apropos" button will
occasionally offer an interesting tidbit of
'information'; not quite 'National
Enquirer' material, but sometimes quite
 intriguing.

nce more I found an interesting

connection to a Mac CD-ROM that

everyone must have in their library:

"Myst™" by Broderbund and Cyan©. If

you have played this sumptuously

artistic game, you may remember that in

'The Mechanical Age' Sirrus's Room had a

wall covered with magnificence works of

art! Wasn't that a painting by J. D. Ingre

I saw? I could have sworn that the lad had made off with several pieces from the Louvre! Congratulations to the Miller brothers for having an interest in the arts! Maybe some of you players of Myst will want to take a peak at "Le Louvre" once you realize the connections between the two productions.

"Le Louvre" is not without some flaws. At various points, it is not possible to listen to the narration a second time without restarting the entire program from scratch. This is unfortunate in instances where there is just one minor fact or feature you wanted to hear once more for reference purposes. On occasion, selecting the "Room" view in order to see the painting in its setting leaves one squinting at the photography in an attempt to decipher which of ten or twelve small fuzzy framed images on the wall you are looking for. At one point, I even managed to 'invoke' a text component written completely in French! (Opps, back to grade twelve for a language refresher course.) For those who might wish to listen to the beautiful musical selections in their entirety, there is no documentation allowing you to track the piece down. The navigation can sometimes become unwieldy, forcing you to retrace your steps through several levels of information to reach the spot you really want.

Although the Curators of the National Gallery in London, England might contest the assertion made by the producers of "Le Louvre" that their site is the "greatest museum" in the world, that contest would be a close call. (In 1993 Microsoft® produced a CD-ROM entitled "Microsoft® Art Gallery" documenting the art collection of the National Gallery with works ranging from da Vinci to van Gogh with a similar claim of art world importance.) After viewing the entire production of "Le Louvre," I must say that an extremely 'artful' use of Macromedia™ software has been used in the production of this spectacular educational offering by Montparnasse Multimédia. "Le Louvre" will please art lovers and perhaps even win over a few people who don't always find art to be accessible in a comfortable fashion.

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You may also wish to check out the Louvre Web Site - http://www.Louvre.fr/