

The Manitoba Museum

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The Manitoba Museum is the FIRST Museum in Canada to Offer Cutting-Edge Animation Technology

Tank-like trilobites lumber towards you. Giant cephalopods lunge at their prey, while ancient eurypterids swim placidly by. Be magically transported to an underwater environment that existed over 450 million years ago—when the Churchill area was blanketed by a tropical sea.

Ancient Seas, a dramatic new animated exhibit that is the first of its kind in Canada, will be previewed to members of government, special guests, and the media next **Thursday, March 25th**, at **10:30 a.m.** in the Earth History Gallery.

The Manitoba Museum worked closely with Phlesch Bubble, an Australian digital production studio, to be the very **first** Canadian museum to offer this cutting-edge technology. Projected on three enormous screens spanning 7.5 meters, the installation of the *Ancient Seas* exhibit completes the recent renewal of the Museum's Earth History Gallery.

As more and more people become concerned about climate change, the *Ancient Seas* exhibit is of great relevance, says Dr. Graham Young, the curator in charge of the project.

"*Ancient Seas* is very clear evidence of global change—the world has certainly changed beyond recognition," explains Dr. Young, the Curator of Paleontology & Geology for The Manitoba Museum. "This exhibit enhances people's knowledge of the world that immediately surrounds us, so we can understand how we got to be where we are today."

Best Depiction of Ancient Life in the World

The *Ancient Seas* animation has well over a hundred separate layers sourced from an equal number of 3D animation files, all requiring compositing without a single error. This posed quite a challenge for its Australian creators.

"On some of the creatures, we went through model after model after model—what Phlesch Bubble sent us initially is nothing like what we ended up with," Dr. Young recalls. "Because we know the area so well, we were able to correct things as minute as the angle of the ripples on the seafloor sediment. The result is one of the best depictions of ancient life in the world."

Much More Than a Cartoon: The Experts Behind *Ancient Seas*

Although the exhibit features the very latest in digital animation technology, *Ancient Seas* is far from a cartoon.

Dr. Young used his own personal expertise, drawn from years of working at the Churchill site—where some of the original ancient shoreline is still preserved—plus the input of a team of experts to make the rendering as realistic as possible.

One of those experts was Dr. Randy Mooi, the Museum's Curator of Zoology. Dr. Mooi, who has worked for both the Smithsonian and Field museums in the United States, is an expert on coral reef fishes. Mooi studied underwater environments for over 15 years, and has completed several hundred research dives.

"I've been studying marine organisms for a long time, and the more you're immersed in an environment, the more experience you have," Dr. Mooi adds. "You learn how things move underwater."

Bringing the Prehistoric to Life

Lars Fields and Jillian Rose, the animation team from Phlesch Bubble, took a number of unusual steps to ensure realism, including adopting an aquarium of modern-day arthropods and spending hours watching pieces of ground meat in water to figure out how dead animal tissue would move under the sea.

"We particularly liked that this is a recreation of an actual preserved shoreline," says Fields. "The Churchill Formation is amazing because it's a snapshot of an entire Ordovician community, so Graham had immediate answers to some of the most challenging questions one must ask when building a virtual diorama."

Ancient Seas coincides with a number of steps the Museum is taking to make its exhibits more interactive and dynamic. They also launched a new website this week, available for viewing at www.manitobamuseum.ca.

Click here for a sample of *Ancient Seas* animation: http://www.manitobamuseum.ca/main/wpcontent/uploads/museum_screen_2.html

Ancient Seas will open to the public on Friday, March 26th at 10 a.m., and is a permanent part of the Earth History Gallery.

For more information, please contact:

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