

## the reading wall

Throughout history—from cave-men to ancient Romans to contemporary hoodlums on the streets of New York—people have expressed themselves by applying ideas to walls. The Reading Wall, one of 11 exhibits in *XFR: eXperiments in the Future of Reading*, extends this ancient concept of wall-as-communication-vehicle into the future.

The Reading Wall is composed of three 16-foot walls that imposingly bisect the exhibition space in the TECH Museum of Innovation in San Jose, Calif. The installation, created by the Research in Experimental Documents (RED) group of Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (PARC), marries static walls with a dynamic digital interface that morphs text and graphics in tandem with reader movement. A “Magic Lens” display allows visitors to push a sliding cart along a track, chronicling the 25,000-year evolution of pictorial forms and the written word. A large, flat-

screen color plasma display, mounted on a roller track, can be pushed back and forth along the wall to display corresponding digital summaries of key events worth noting in the long history of reading.

Jurors found the scale of the exhibit monumentally gratifying and also praised its seamless blending of graphics and text. “This is a thoughtful, effective way to integrate a lot of information,” juror Anne Ellegood said.

But perhaps the real genius of The Reading Wall is found in its translation of a once static platform for mass, one-way communication into a mutable, subjective experience that’s both public and personal—in keeping with the zeitgeist of present-day existence. The days when words were set in stone have long since been replaced by an age in which readers manipulate media to shape their own learning experiences.

ROGER FRIEDMAN

**category** Kiosks/Installations

**design** RED (Research in Experimental Documents) at Xerox PARC, Palo Alto, Calif.: Rich Gold, manager; Maribeth Back, Anne Balsamo, Mark Chow, Matt Gorbet, Steve Harrison, Dale MacDonald, Scott Minneman, researchers. The Folio Group, New Castle, Del.: Terry Murphy. Jonathan Cohen, programmer, San Francisco

**hardware/software** AutoCAD LT 2000; Basic Stamp II, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, custom electronics, custom-authoring toolkit for XML interaction description language, Macro-media Director with custom plug-in for XML, image scaling, alpha channels

