fruitful; in either case it is highly instructive in terms of the arguments of this essay. If the exhibit and its container, the gallery, are both the result of non-verbal thinking, then how do these visually understood artefacts relate?

Museums, subsuming galleries in that term, are media of communication which are sensed by a moving observer seeing images in sequence. They differ thus from film or television, for instance, where a stationary observer watches moving images. As in architecture, we are involved in a kinaesthetic experience. This is certainly the case at the scale of even the smallest museum. It would seem, moreover, that the moving eye also comes into play when looking at a single picture. The notion, suggested by Leonardo that we take in a picture at a glance, and that therefore painting has greater merit than poetry, is erroneous.

> 'When looking at a picture we fixate upon one area, move our eyes and then fixate upon another, but we do not scan the picture evenly, centimetre by centimetre; instead our eyes seek out and concentrate on particular areas. One mechanism in which, during each fixation, we select the next area to be fixated upon, is not fully understood, but is a process controlled (consciously or unconsciously) by ourselves. We fixate on those areas that contain most "information", often completely ignoring areas we judge unimportant.'
> (Sturgis, 2000, p.64)

It could be argued that the way the painter thinks/creates the work is very analogous to the way the observer thinks/sees the painting. The initial sketch indicating the general arrangement corresponds to the visitor's first glance of the picture as a whole. The artist will then work on small areas just as the viewer will concentrate on selected areas in order to understand and enjoy the painting.

The reason for such concentration is largely physiological. Our foveal vision, the fact that we only see in sharp focus a very small area in the centre of the field of vision, demands rapid scanning in order to accumulate full information. If one looks at a picture from two metres away, a circular area of only about 50 mm (2 in) will be seen sharp and clear. Visual acuity drops off markedly away from this small area. The same problem occurs when looking at architecture and the implications have already been discussed in a previous section in connection with two-dimensional representations and scale models of buildings.

The rate of museum building has been unprecedentedly high in the past fifty years. The museum has become a hugely popular public building. In England in the year 2000 the number of visitors to the British Museum was 5.7 million, the National Gallery 4.65 million, the Victoria & Albert Museum 1.33 million and the newly-opened Tate Modern 5 million. There has been a corresponding increase in the literature on museums and museum building, particularly in Europe and the USA (which I have been partly responsible in swelling). Some of the discussion dealt with the question of lighting and particularly its frequent conflict with the stringent requirements of conservation demanded by many museum objects. It is, in a sense, a moral debate about the degree to which we are the custodians of the past with a responsibility to future generations. Other parts of the literature analysed circulation systems and their impact on the sequential viewing characteristic of the museum experience.

Most of the discussion, however, concentrated on the appropriate visual relation between object and display, between foreground and background; on to what extent 'noise', in information terms, needs to be eliminated or how much additional information it is permissible to add. Are differences in the display of markedly different artefacts necessary or justified? To take three examples from my own experience, should one exhibit neo-classical European paintings, the arts of Islam and the constructivist art of post-revolutionary Russia in similar or