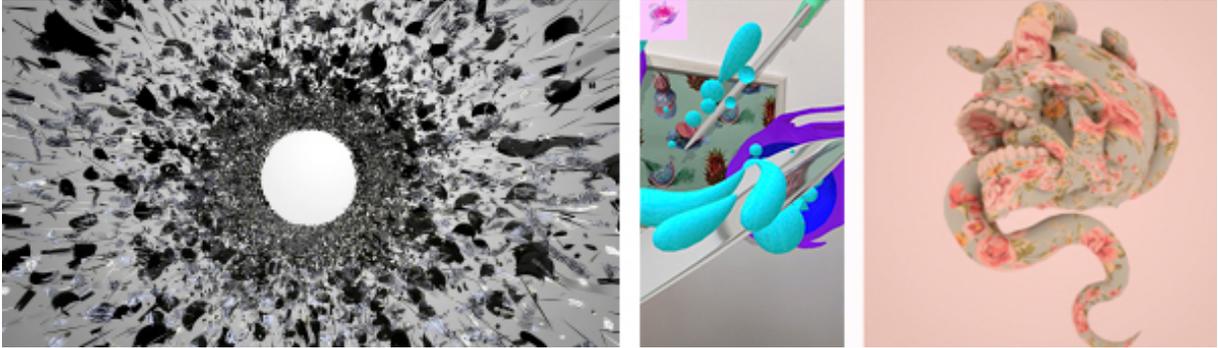


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*Spatial Reality: Artists Explore the Future of XR*  
Sp[a]ce Gallery at Ayzenberg  
October 12 – October 28, 2018

By Jody Zellen



Augmented and Virtual Reality are platforms that extend or transform expected viewing experiences. Although AR and VR works often require a high level of technical skill, artists (in addition to scientists and programmers) have begun to explore ways of creating or using AR and VR to create immersive artistic experiences. In an exhibition such as *Spatial Reality: Artists Explore the Future of XR* (that features more than 25 projects by artists including a.new reality, Kevin Mack, Blake Kathryn, Jenny Rodenhouse, Jorge R. Gutierrez, Nancy Baker Cahill, Trudy Elmore, Steve Teeps, Nicola Verlato, Pussykrew, Chris SooHoo and Maya Lila, Can Buyukberber, Drue Kataoka, Wesley Allsbrook, Bill Barminski) it is necessary to have an open mind, as well as plenty of time and patience to allow for the cumbersome VR headsets and downloading of AR applications to fade into the background in order to embrace the marvel of an extended viewing arena.

While AR and VR experiences are commonplace in the gaming as well as commercial worlds, there are a limited number of artists who have delved into this as a primary medium. In the 2017 Venice Biennial Paul McCarthy and Christian Lemmerz presented VR works at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini and Jordan Wolfson's VR installation was a shocker at the 2017 Whitney Biennial. Laurie Anderson also has two VR works (Chalkroom and Aloft) on view at MASS MoCA.

One of the frustrations of VR viewing is that it is an isolated experience. It is necessary to be fitted with a headset and often hand controls and many audiences are reluctant to don the equipment necessary to view the art. Viewing VR is a spectacle. While a person is experiencing the art, s/he is also being watched by those waiting their turn. It is necessary to suspend any self consciousness while immersed, as the knowledge that one might gesticulate wildly and spin in circles within a virtual world can inhibit some participants.

Aware of these limitations, Jesse Damiani has created an exhibition filled with AR and VR surprises that allow viewers to easily flow from headset to headset and room to room. The immersive as well as static artworks showcase a wide range of styles and ideas from the absurd and the abstract to the futuristic.

Bill Barminski's piece *Fulerton Florist (Triptych)* has an immediate appeal due to the fact that it can be seen without a device. Here, a video is projected atop three acrylic paintings to add another layer of fun to the triptych. The augmented comes into play in *Mystery Dog* as a small canvas becomes a collage of animations when seen through an AR application. Other intriguing AR works are by Blake Kathryn, Nicola Verlato, Charity Everett, Nancy Baker Cahill and Sutu. Because each augmented artwork requires a different application it becomes a bit of a chore to download the different viewers on the spot. Using the gallery iPad, which is preloaded with the different apps, makes the experience much easier. The way it works for most of the AR projects is that the viewer holds their mobile device in front of a static artwork and all of a sudden what appears in the space occupied by the artwork begins to change. AR can include sound as in Charity Everett's *Go Back Fetch It* where animated content appears over the the shape of Africa painted on the wall to tell the story of Eve as she completes milestones of human development. Sutu (Stuart Campbell) uses AR technology to overlay animations onto his cartoon-style narrative paintings. Nancy Baker Cahill creates both AR and VR experiences. Through her 4th Wall app, her drawings come to life filling with an array of digitally drawn lines and shapes.

Among the VR projects is Wesley Allsbrook's *cosmoramarama\_04\_9*. The users's field of view fills with abstract shapes that reference a walk through the natural landscape as one travels through an ever evolving world. Her VR project is presented in conjunction with a suite of stereo viewers in which her hand drawings are juxtaposed with the original images on the stereo viewing cards. Trudy Elmore also presents static and VR work, *Skull Flowers* in which two snakes, wrapped around a skull undulate and morph into different positions and relationships. Kevin Mack is represented by 2D, 3D and virtual works in which the viewer can be transported to wander, float or jet through his pulsating vividly colored imaginary landscape.

There is more than meets the eye In *Spatial Reality: Artists Explore the Future of XR* as the artworks engage on multiple levels. Because AR and VR have yet to be widely presented in traditional gallery settings, the exhibition is something of an anomaly. For those who are inclined to experience the new, the exhibition is full of satisfying surprises and for those who shy away from all things technological there is still plenty to see and think about.

In a small side gallery at the Institute of Contemporary, Art Los Angeles is an Augmented Reality project created in collaboration with Agency of Assets, Legacy LA and the artist Zenka. Each of the nine fellows: Jocelyn Benavides, Katelee Cervantes, Mitsy Cruz, Michelle Estrada, Gamaliel Lopez, Alejandro "Alex" Merino, Andie Morales, Susana Rodriguez, Damaris Velazquez has created an augmented portrait. When viewed through an AR application each image becomes a kaleidoscope of sounds, images and animations layering the original photograph with additional content. In this display, like in the AR projects on view in *Spatial Reality* viewers are presented artworks with two states. What is great about Augmented Reality is that it needs a trigger and that trigger is often a viable work of art.

<https://space.ayzenberg.com/spatial-reality/>

<https://artandcakela.com/2018/10/24/spatial-reality-artists-explore-the-future-of-xr/>