Local Binaries

Lauren Moffatt Exhibition curated by Linda Toivio
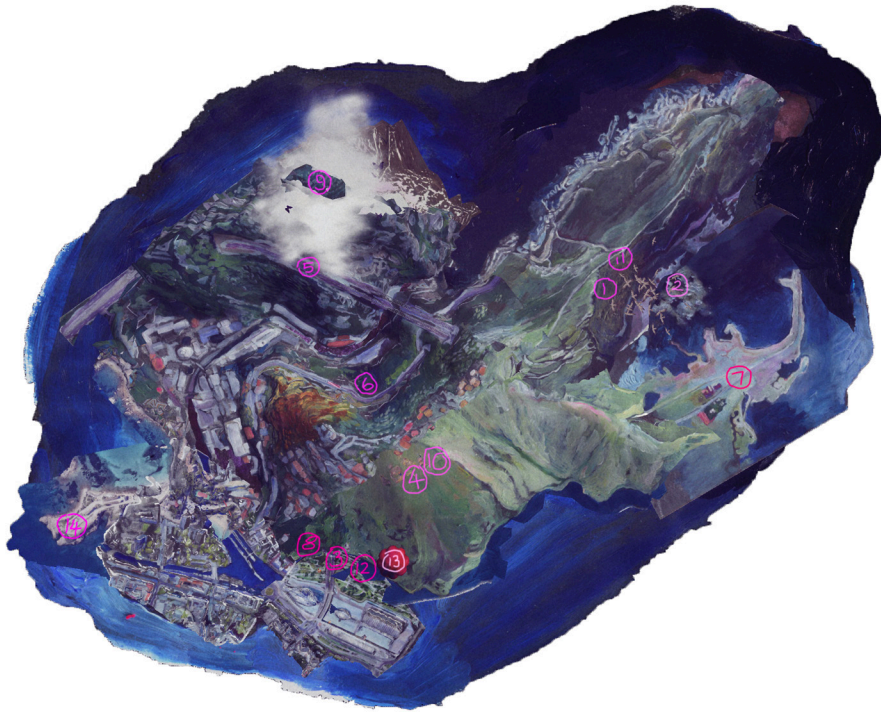
1. Nest
2. Crabs
3. Stingrays
4. Flower
5. Train
6. TrucksThatPass
7. Piles of stones
8. Restaurant
9. Butterflies
10. Grass Long
11. Hexagon Stones
12. Underwater
13. (Balloon) Meadows
14. BeachForest

Local Binaries, Augmented Reality Installation, 2022
Art and Development Lauren Moffatt // Interaction Coding by Mohsen Hazrati //
Sound Design by Mads Michelsen

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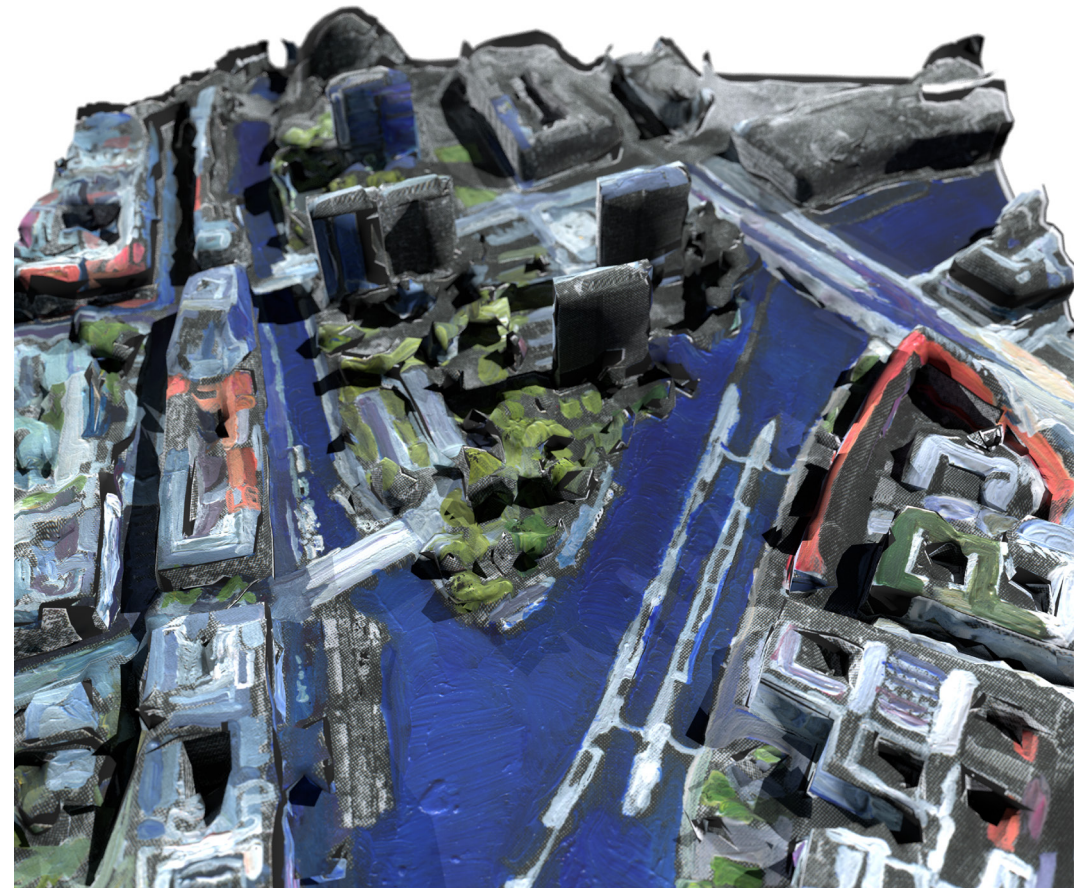
If your mindset was a landscape, what would it look like? An urban concrete jungle, a mountain range or a lush woodland? What kind of scenery would reflect your inner being? These are some of the principal questions that Australian artist Lauren Moffatt is addressing in the premiere of her augmented reality piece Local Binaries.

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer is confronted with an empty space, at first glance bare of any material objects. Yet unknowingly, one has already stepped into a new world as Local Binaries is all around us, but only visible through the screen of a tablet or mobile phone application. In her solo exhibition, Moffatt is creating an augmented reality world, where sea creatures roam and a green alpine view cuts through the city centre of Berlin.

Following interactions and interviews with nine female-identifying individuals from across the world, Moffatt is using artificial intelligence, a 3D technology called photogrammetry and a game engine to make an inner private world accessible to others. Inspired by art therapy techniques and mindfulness exercises based on meditation as well as body scanning and body mapping, the participants imagined their inner state as a landscape. Emotional and physiological sensations were translated to vegetation, sounds, meteorology, architectural elements and geological forms, in turn interpreted as an immersive digital painting.

The initial ambiance seems apocalyptic, as we are not accustomed to seeing an urban scenery with such little action and devoid of noise. At closer inspection, this imaginary universe is occupied by diverse characters, who can be seen walking, flying a hot air balloon or tranquilly swimming in the air in a world where nothing is as it seems, but where everything is just as it should be.

> "This collaged fantastical space reflects the panorama of human emotion as well as the eclectic nature of our accumulated experiences that colour our internal lives, full of contrasting textures, rhythms, and contradictory movements."
> – Lauren Moffatt

At first the characters appear distant, but after taking a few steps or by moving our device, we are able to approach them. Beyond their initially aloof or unresponsive demeanour, one can discover unique physical attributes and personalities. Some of the charac-

ters will acknowledge our presence and when getting nearer, one realises they are not silent; they each tell a story, explaining their inner landscape, visualised by the artist as an interpretation of their narration. During the creation process of Local Binaries, Moffatt collaborated with a team: the monologues were produced by sound designer Mads Michelsen, while Mohsen Mazrati was responsible for interaction coding, i.e. the interaction between the camera and the characters.

Local Binaries is formed through a collage of both real and imagined pieces. Familiar architectural elements from the neighbourhood of Fischerinsel, the gallery's location in Berlin, intersect with unexpected natural elements such as mountains and marine life. To attain new textures, the artist is combining digitally constructed features with handmade elements. Paradoxically, what gives Moffatt's VR art an organic feeling, is exactly this human touch; amongst the digital glitches and renderings, her paint strokes are visible here and there, drawing the utopian world closer to us.

Entering these mental landscapes is akin to piercing into another person's mindscape, a glimpse into a private visual diary, tapping into the emotions and experiences which influence one's inner vision and worldview. As a VR artist and film maker, Moffatt is able to transfer movement and physicality into virtual images, thus also providing an opportunity for safely exploring psychological and emotional states in a spatial manner. Within this parallel reality, it is possible to create a different and alternative narrative for oneself, a narrative which is truer and more authentic, and less concerned with societal expectations.

Since the external environment affects our self-image and similarly our self-perception alters the way we perceive, inhabit and take space in the outside world, it is necessary to examine how experiences of oppression and injustice shape the geography of the mind. How would more privileged individuals (for instance straight white cis-males) describe their inner world and landscape? Acknowledging the perpetuation of sexism and problems of underrepresentation in urban planning and architecture raises further questions: whose cities do we currently live in and could forms of AR serve as a blueprint for a more inclusive future?

Text © Linda Toivio