AU-DELÀ DU PORTABLE
L'art réalité augmentée

Augmented Reality
Through the Mobile Looking Glass

If the Web is dead, as announced by “Wired” magazine in summer 2010, Augmented Reality (AR) is quickly rising from its ashes. Merging real and virtual worlds, engaging our senses and enhancing our perception in real time based on real space, AR offers a spectacular window into the nebulous Internet of Things.

The concept of Augmented Reality, a term coined by Boeing researcher Tom Caudell in 1992, may still conjure up science-fiction images of Terminator vision, Iron Man engineering, head-mounted displays and holograms. But today’s mainstream AR is of the more intuitive point-and-shoot type, accessible to anyone with a high-end smartphone equipped with video camera, accelerometer, compass and GPS.

To experience augmented reality, first download a mobile AR app, select your augmented overlay, and point your handset in the desired direction. Then position it accordingly to find the nearest subway station, consult the market price of the apartment for sale across the street, look at a map without taking your eyes off the road, see where your friends are, study constellations over a cloudy sky, or shoot intangible zombies standing in your path.

But sometimes it takes Art to question the true validity of the medium. While William Gibson predicted that the dematerialization of GPS coordinates would soon give way to civilian “geohacking,” at 4 pm on October 9, 2010, artists Mark Sloaneck and Sander Veenhof collaboratively staged an AR “invasion” of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

The real buzz began with a tweet: MuseumModernArt “Nice, looks like we’re having an ‘uninvited AR exhibition tomorrow!’ Part of ‘Documenta’.” MoMA’s message was subsequently retweeted a total of 326,000 times within half an hour: We AR in MoMA challenges the museum’s curatorial authority by hijacking its physical exhibition space to display open-sourced artwork. Through the Layer app, the now-permanent virtual exhibition displays works by more than 20 artists. So, to the question “But is it art?” participating artists can proudly reply “We AR in MoMA” which...
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À gauche : « Pod » de Patrick Lichy, à Bushwick, New York. (photomontage réalisé par l’artiste)
À droite : « Eddie Murphy and Mac West - Return to Bushwick » de Tamiko Thiel, hommage au « Golconda » de René Magritte (photomontage réalisé par l’artiste).

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« V enon’s wandering spirit of British street artist Banksy hanging his own framed painting on the wall prompted visitors to “break all the rules” of viewing artworks only on their assigned floors. Instead, they positioned Banksy at select off-the-wall angles in order to get the best contextual snapshot of him in action. »

Bruce Sterling’s avatar lives and tweets in the lobby.

The proverbial elephant in the museum is Will Pappenheimer and John Craig Freeman’s giant Virtua-Flaneurage Bush Road, a potential trigger for virtual psychotropic hallucinatory travel experiences. “A bus is also known as a pest that was introduced to control insect populations in Australia and Florida, it is also a pest in MoMA, reminding museumgoers that artwork might not just be physical,” explains Pappenheimer.

One month later, Skowarsz curated the Bushwick Augmented Reality Intervention, another ongoing exhibition, which includes some 30 artworks spread out over several outdoor locations in the eponymous Brooklyn neighborhood.


Le défi est de convaincre les visiteurs que l’art peut être vivant, et non qu’une pierre est une pierre. Le musée, en effet, est une expérience sensorielle, et l’art est là pour nous rappeler que le monde est plein de merveilles à découvrir.

James Fung, New York