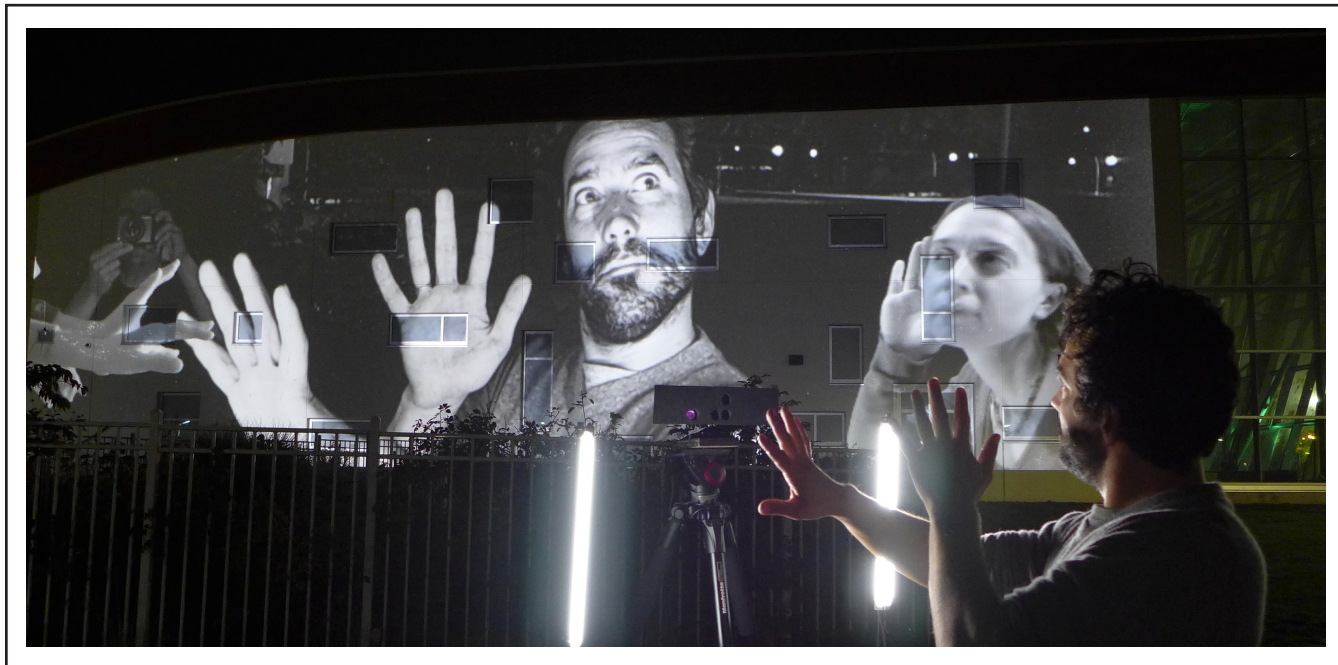


SURREY ART GALLERY PRESENTS

Scenocosme

RENCONTRES IMAGINAIRES



Screen Tearing: Imaginary Encounters in the Real World RHYS EDWARDS

Exhibition Statement

GRÉGORY LASSERRE
ANAÏS MET DEN ANCXT
ALISON RAJAH

Biographies

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Scenocosme
Rencontres Imaginaires, 2016

Above: testing video interactivity
with kinect camera live interface at
UrbanScreen.

Photograph by Grégory Lasserre

Screen Tearing: Imaginary Encounters in the Real World

Rhys Edwards

Foregrounded within the work of artists Grégory Lasserre and Anaïs met den Ancxt, who collaborate under the name Scenocosme, is technological innovation. However, whereas for other artists technology becomes a principle unto itself, for Scenocosme technology is never more than a means to realize an idea that originates in a dream. In this way, technological innovation is not mere novelty, but required to experience the art.

Scenocosme's practice is always oriented toward the public realm. This is not because of a sense of duty

to involve the public in all art-making, which many artists subscribe to, but because the public is itself the perfect medium for artistic experimentation. Scenocosme works for the public because this mode of creation allows for the greatest degree of unpredictability and dynamism in the manifestation of their art.

Many of Scenocosme's previous installations feature formal and experiential elements that only appear upon interacting with the artwork or with other people in its presence. In *SphèrAléas* (2004), for example, a series of hand-operated sensors control a light and sound-emitting half-spherical structure inside of a tent. Groups of people can interact with the sensors to produce a magnificent sensory experience, composed by mutual collaboration. In *Al/sos* (2006),

a garden immersed in black lighting produces music when a flashlight is shone upon individual plants and flowers, thereby creating an organic symphony of sound.

Rencontres Imaginaires, installed at Surrey UrbanScreen over the fall and winter of 2016, invites visitors to play in a virtual world with a variety of eccentric characters. The artwork utilizes a newly-built digital kiosk system to capture live video footage of its users, and project them onto one of the largest outdoor screens in North America. Their hand movements can then be used to manipulate characters (performed by Surrey residents, whom were previously recorded by the artists in production sessions at the Surrey Art Gallery) that appear upon both lateral edges of the screen. This interaction



Several participants (Clockwise: Mandeep Wirk, Charis Au, Harry Singh, and Karen Cancino) perform during a production session at the Surrey Art Gallery. Photograph by Glen Chua.

occurs spontaneously, and different performers are dynamically generated by the artwork's software.

Although the way in which a visitor to the UrbanScreen site can directly manipulate the movement of the on-screen characters is limited either to "pushing" them away with their hands, or to making them appear and disappear by moving to and away from the kiosk, these elementary gestures permit endless variations to the artwork. The software that powers *Rencontres Imaginaires* complements the basically human tendency to play, and it is playing itself that fosters enduring fascination with the work — both for those who observe it and those who participate in it.

The simplicity of the technology underlying *Rencontres Imaginaires* ensures that clearly defined parameters for play-making are instantly apparent to anyone who approaches it, regardless of their familiarity with technology. This ease-of-access affects the experience of the work in two ways: first, there is a sort of identity loss, wherein participants adopt universal and playful mannerisms in order to respond to the characters they are presented with, dispensing with the self-consciousness that otherwise characterizes our personal life; second, the simplicity of the work sets us up for surprise. In those moments where our own being and the character we are faced with happen to have a perfectly harmonious interaction — when a frown, a wave, or a smile is met with an immediate and intuitively correct response — we are brought briefly out of ourselves and into the virtual world that we have created. This form of interaction is intrinsically enjoyable and empowering because it happens in a space outside of our own life. We are literally able to witness ourselves — not an avatar — have an impact on another. Such an experience would not

be possible if the range of interaction parameters were expanded, since the basic pleasure of playing — playing with no objective in mind — would be lost in the search for the apparently correct way to play.

The sense of universal childhood, and the possibility of surprise, are both united in a state of play. The British psychotherapist Donald Winnicott famously articulated the importance of playing, both for children and adults, by suggesting that it occurs in a world that is halfway between the inner reality of our own selves and the outer reality of the objective world; and that in the process of development, playing is a way to gain control over the world.¹ Critically, for this sense of control to emerge, it must be facilitated by others, whether by a mother or by one's friends. When a subject finds an other entering into their play space and responding to it affirmatively, they are surprised by the recognition of their own agency. In this way, the subject is empowered by play.

Winnicott even goes so far as to suggest that playing is essential to becoming a complete person: "It is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self."² Individuals who are unable to create in any way are, in one sense, not truly alive.

Opportunities to play are widely available in our current era. They are present not only in the multi-billion dollar gaming industries, or in the fields of sports; they may be witnessed in the widespread gamification of culture, which progressively invokes child-like language and points-based systems to reward travel and consumption,³ and utilizes graphic design motifs derived from games to market virtually any service or product. Much of this playing occurs at a virtual level, via a screen interface. Access to

games is widespread and instantaneous. Although screen technology has firmly cemented the place of social networks in everyday life, the artists of Scenocosme note that screens are also a means of alienating users from one another, as they promote interpersonal engagement at a superficial level while discouraging interaction within physical space.

The ethos of *Rencontres Imaginaires* is, in part, remedial — it is an attempt to reframe virtual interface technology as a means of encouraging interpersonal connection. The type of play which this interface enables is not mediated via graphics, avatars, or points. It is direct, manifesting only through the imagination of users, and rewarding them through the use of their imagination. In this way, it is more demonstrative of the variety of play that Winnicott discusses in his work, wherein playing is an extension of an individual's imagination into the tangible world, rather than a foray into a pre-arranged, determinate system. Further, playing within *Rencontres Imaginaires* transcends age, gender, or ethnicity, invoking the most simple and universal user interface in the world: touch. As such, the interactions that transpire during an experience of the artwork permit the generation of connections between individuals who might otherwise never communicate with each other.

Rencontres Imaginaires presents an alternative model of socialization, in which technology complements the natural compulsion to play. The latent desire to see oneself communicate, share, and learn from others is universally inherited; the artwork of Scenocosme provides a creative avenue for this desire to express itself, while enhancing the dimensions of this expression through virtual space. While virtual reality is in most contexts a means of

escapism, it is here a means of connecting to an embodied, real world.

Notes

1. Donald Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*. (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2005), 55.
2. *Ibid*, 72.
3. For example, the widespread popularity of the apps FourSquare and its follow-up Swarm, as well as the colossal ascension of *Pokémon Go*.

Exhibition Statement

Grégory Lasserre

Anaïs met den Ancxt

Alison Rajah

Rencontres Imaginaires is a series of interactive behavioural video works, on display at Surrey UrbanScreen from September 29, 2016, to May 7, 2017. Viewers onsite at UrbanScreen are invited to insert themselves into the frame to engage in imaginary encounters with “virtual friends” in real-time through a large-scale projection and interactive kiosk. The pre-recorded videos of virtual friends prompt the viewer to react to their gestures. Referencing and recalling the first tricks of early cinema by filmmakers like Georges Méliès over a hundred years ago, this artwork uses techniques of illusion to encourage play in public space.

Originating from the Rhône-Alpes region of France, Grégory Lasserre and Anaïs met den Ancxt collaborate under the name Scenocosme. During a residency at the Gallery, Scenocosme created new video works

here in Surrey. The public was invited to participate in filming sessions between September 12 and 15, 2016, and become a virtual friend—creating new virtual hand and face behaviours for someone to interact with at UrbanScreen. Participants included: Thomas Anfield, Charis Au, Karen Cancino, Elizabeth Carefoot, Clarissa Chupik, Amelia Davies, April Davies, Chris Dawson-Murphy, Amelia Epp, Rhys Edwards, Polly Faminow, Janis Foster, Polly Gibbons, Zoe Gibbons, Sean Kenny, Simran Kang, Anthony Mojuly, Ravneet Sandhu, Harry Singh, Amanda Thompson, Jennifer Uy, Tony Uy, Lyn Verra-Lay, and Mandeep Wirk.

Surrey Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges Creative BC, the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council, and French Consulate Vancouver/Consulat général de France à Vancouver for their support of this project.



When not in use, the projection encourages participation through messages in both English and French. Photograph by Surrey Art Gallery

About the Artists

For artist duo Grégory Lasserre and Anaïs met den Ancxt, interaction in their artworks emerges from using multiple kinds of expression, mixing art and digital technology in order to find substances of dreams, poeties, sensitivities, and delicacies. Their works come from possible hybridizations between the living world and technology. They design interactive artworks and choreographed collective performances in which spectators share extraordinary sensory experiences.

Their artworks are exhibited in museums, contemporary art centres, and digital art festivals across the world. They have exhibited their interactive installation artworks at ZKM Karlsruhe Centre for Art and Media (Germany), Daejeon Museum of Art (Korea), Museum Art Gallery of Nova Scotia (Canada), National Centre for Contemporary Arts (Moscow), Contemporary Art Museum Raleigh (USA), and Bòlit Centre d'Art Contemporani (Girona). They have also presented these artworks in many international biennales and festivals: Art Center Nabi / INDAF (Seoul), BIACS3 / Biennial International of Contemporary Art of Seville (Spain), Biennial Experimenta (Australia), NAMOC / National Art Museum of China / TransLife / Triennial of Media Art (Beijing), Futuresonic (UK), WRO (Poland), FILE (São-Paulo), ISEA / International Symposium on Electronic Art (2009 Belfast, 2011 Istanbul, 2012 Albuquerque, 2013 Sydney), and EXIT, VIA, Lille3000, Ososphere, Scopitone, Seconde nature (France); during important events: World Expo (Shanghai), Nuits Blanches (Toronto, Halifax, Singapore, Brussels, Brighton, Amiens, Segovia, Bucharest), Fête des lumières (Lyon); and in various art centres: MONA (Australia), MUDAC, Fondation Claude Verdan (Lausanne),

Musée Ianchelevici (Belgium), Kibla (Slovenia), Banff Centre (Canada), Villa Romana (Firenze), Utsikten Kunstsenter (Norway), Watermans (UK), and Centre des arts d'Enghien-les-Bains, Gaîté Lyrique (Paris).

About the Writer

Rhys Edwards is a critic, artist, and curator. He has written for *The Capilano Review* and *BC Studies*, along with multiple Vancouver-based art blogs. In 2014 he won the *C Magazine* New Critics prize. In 2015, he co-founded the Agent C Gallery with artist Debbie Tuepah in the Newton region of Surrey. As a curatorial assistant at the Surrey Art Gallery, he has helped coordinate several exhibitions, and contributed texts and design elements to many others. He also co-authored the City of Surrey's 2015 Surrey Operations and Civic Infrastructure Art Plan with artist Alan Storey, and has published several essays about the City of Surrey's Public Art collection.



About UrbanScreen

Imagined by artists and built by the City, Surrey's UrbanScreen is Canada's largest non-commercial outdoor urban screen dedicated to presenting digital and interactive art. UrbanScreen is an offsite venue of the Surrey Art Gallery and is located on the west wall of Chuck Bailey Recreation Centre in City Centre. The venue can be viewed from SkyTrain, between Gateway and Surrey Central stations. Exhibitions begin 30 minutes after sunset, and end at midnight.

UrbanScreen was made possible by the City of Surrey Public Art Program, with support from the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Surrey Art Gallery Association, and the BC Arts Council Unique Opportunities Program, and is a legacy of the Vancouver 2010 Cultural Olympiad project CODE. Surrey Art Gallery gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Province of BC through the BC Arts Council for its ongoing programming. UrbanScreen's 2015 equipment renewal was made possible by the Canada Cultural Spaces Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage / Government of Canada and the City of Surrey.

Surrey Art Gallery Presents

a series of publications on exhibitions and projects

ISSN 1918-1302 ISBN 978-1-926573-43-4 Published 2016

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