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Reality goes virtual at Portland Art Museum

Jason Vondersmith Friday, August 21, 2020



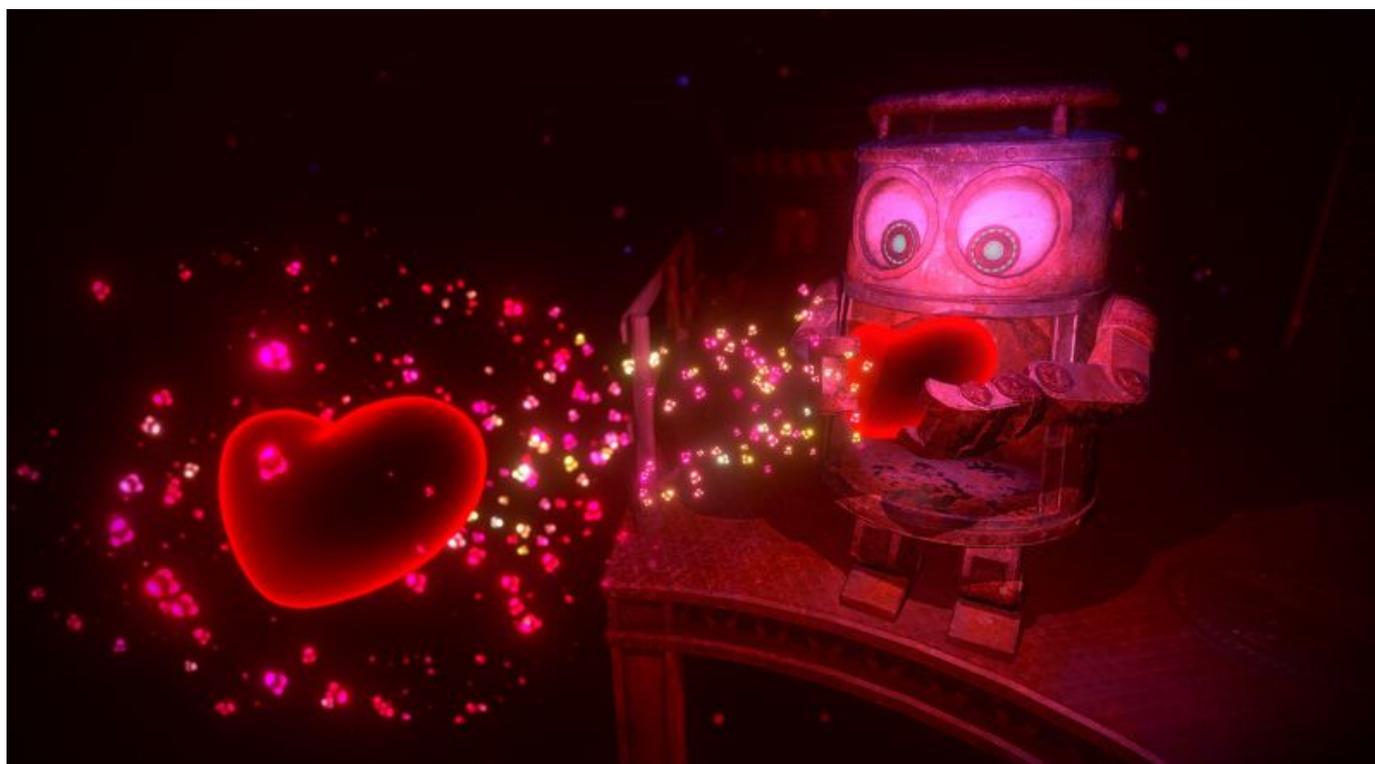
Museum and Northwest Film Center chosen as U.S. host of Venice Biennale VR programming



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COURTESY PHOTO: PORTLAND ART MUSEUM - Animated works such as 'Beat' are part of the Venice VR Expanded 2020 virtual reality competition at Portland Art Museum.

entertainment. Now add the famed La Biennale di Venezia — the Venice Biennale — to the list.

For the first time in its 125-year history, Italy's Venice Biennale has reached out to partners around the world to put on its programming, and the only U.S. venue to host its new virtual reality works will be the Portland Art Museum.

Venice VR Expanded 2020 is the creative virtual reality competition of the 77th Venice International Film Festival. It will take place Sept. 2-12, locally in the museum's Fields Ballroom, courtesy of the museum and the Northwest Film Center.

Venice won't be able to welcome visitors because of COVID-19, so Venice comes to the visitors. Tickets (\$25) have gone on sale at www.portlandartmuseum.org. (<http://www.portlandartmuseum.org>) Hourlong segments are limited to 14 people, which means about 100 people can take part each day.



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There will be 39 immersive VR projects from 24 countries available to view through virtual reality headsets in socially distanced spaces. Portland is joined by venues in Amsterdam, Berlin, Moscow, Montreal, Taipei and elsewhere in putting on the programming.

"It's a really big deal," said Amy Dotson, Northwest Film Center director and PAM's curator of film and new media. "It is a perfect fit with the museum and film center's recent Cinema Unbound programming and our ongoing dedication to finding new ways of seeing, accessing and experiencing art."



COURTESY PHOTO: PORTLAND ART MUSEUM - 'Kinshasa Now' is one of the entries from Africa in the Venice VR Expanded 2020.

The selection of the Portland Art Museum as the U.S. venue for the Venice VR Expanded 2020 came about through a previous collaboration between Dotson and Michel Reilhac, the founder and head of the Venice Biennale's virtual reality competition. Reilhac was honored earlier this year with the Northwest Film Center's 2020 Cinema Unbound Award.

"Amy and I have been collaborating on projects for years, and her vision is far-reaching," Reilhac said. "As soon as I shared with her our idea for bringing Venice VR Expanded to Portland, she immediately said, 'We are in!'"

Said Dotson: "He very much saw that it would be great for Portland. It's a city full of artists who don't define as one thing, and who look at things through a curious and creative lens."

Artists, animators, nonfiction artists and even a Hollywood director (Jon Favreau) produced works for the virtual reality competition. Some works are as short as 7 minutes, while Favreau has made a two-hour-long movie, "Gnomes and Goblins."

"Maybe you're laying on a beach in Bali, maybe somebody likes ghosts who bump in the night," Dotson said, of the variety of works.



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COURTESY PHOTO: PORTLAND ART MUSEUM - Participants can help figure out a crime in 'Sha Si Da Ming Xing (Killing a Superstar).'

participant. Some of it's interactive.

"If you've been to the movies or watch Netflix, ease of use is about the same," Dotson said. "It shouldn't be intimidating. I liken it to turning on your television with a handset, and you have a lot of choices with your hour timeframe.

"You're actually in (the show), rather than watching it from afar. ... You see art, and wish you were in the artist's brain, and now with VR you can be."

She added: "It's a new way of seeing. At this particular time, when people can't travel or leave homes or they're not able to interact, VR is interesting because it taps into empathy sensors — like you are right there in the world. Sometimes you're a character yourself. It's all 360 (degrees) and 360 immersive."

Before visiting, Dotson encourages participants to look at the Venice VR Expanded 2020 lineup to prepare. See the complete lineup at www.portlandartmuseum.org. (<http://www.portlandartmuseum.org>)



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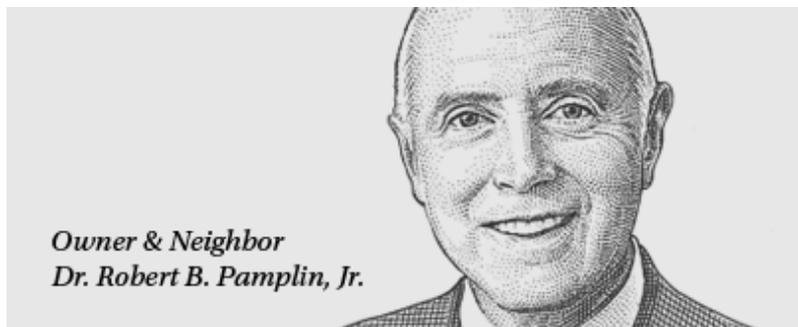
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