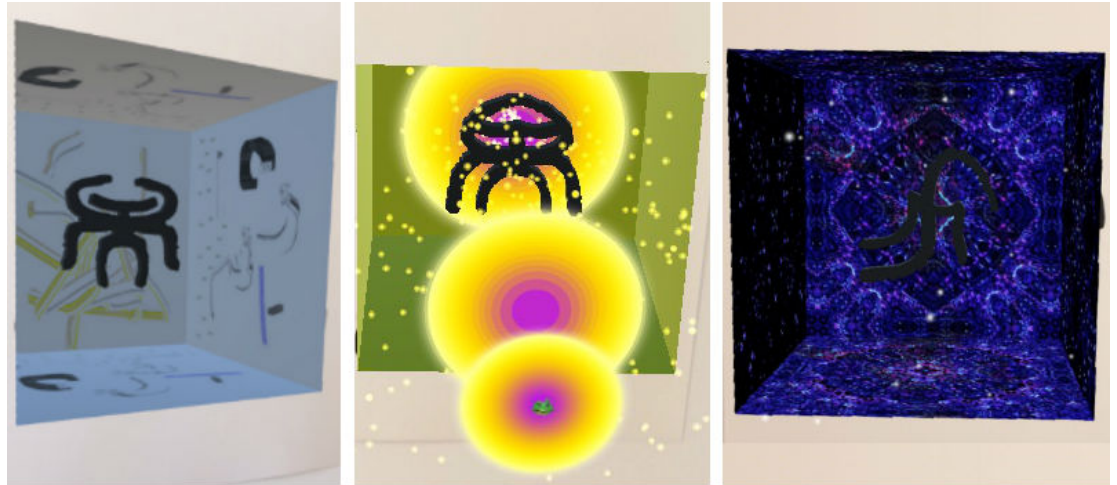# Deep in the Mix: REMIX & ReMIXED Reality at Ann Arbor Art Center

by **Elizabeth Smith** (http://pulp.aadl.org/taxonomy/term/113409)
Tue, 06/27/2017 - 9:30am

Andrew Rosinski and ICON Interactive created these virtual-reality works that are only viewable through a phone app.

REMIX (http://www.annarborartcenter.org/exhibitions/remix), an exhibition at the Ann Arbor Art Center's 117 Gallery, contains two exhibitions: one in the physical space of the gallery and one virtual. Described as an "augmented reality experience (http://www.annarborartcenter.org/exhibitions/remix)," *ReMIXED Reality* was created by Andrew Rosinski and ICON Interactive (http://www.iconinteractive.com).

In addition to the works of art hanging on the walls, visitors can download the custom virtual reality app, which can be found in your phone's app store. The app creates a virtual gallery that is "superimposed" over the physical artworks on the gallery walls and can be viewed on your phone. Throughout the gallery are small symbols on the wall that can be scanned by the *ReMIXED* application to bring up an array of virtual works of art.

The virtual gallery includes imagery ranging from digitally made virtual paintings to photographs and kaleidoscopic views. Some of the pieces move with you as you move through the gallery space. Other symbols create a perspectival virtual space that extends behind the square, black symbol, or projects in front of it.

The inclusion of virtual reality works in art institutions is a trend being embraced more broadly in recent years. Two examples of highly praised virtual reality experiences are the Smithsonian's *WONDER, 360 (http://americanart.si.edu/multimedia/wonder360)* and the Detroit Institute of Arts' *Lumin (https://www.dia.org/about/press/news/detroit-institute-arts-wins-2017-muse-gold-awar)*. Virtual reality has been implemented at numerous renowned museums, including

Somerset House in London, and MoMA, with a current project developed by artist Martine Syms (https://www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/3665) . (If you are interested in further reading about the history of virtual reality, beginning with the first stereoscope in 1838, the Franklin Institute gives an overview of the topic on their website (https://www.fi.edu/virtual-reality/history-of-virtual-reality) .)

Left to right: Joshua Littlefield's *Overtake* and Art Vandenberg's *Running Man*

Though many of the works in *REMIX* embrace traditional media, they employ "new media" and virtuality in varying capacities. For example, Joshua Littlefield's *Overtake* was created using manipulated negatives. In the photographic collage, the female subject's body reclines. The inclusion of a cut-out image imposed over her face, however, disrupts the experience of viewing a photograph as a document of reality. The circular cut-out has a green hue that contrasts with the warm colors of the girl's dress, while the continuity of the photograph is further unsettled by the inclusion of a strip of green film in the bottom quarter of the image.

Art Vandenberg's (https://artvandenberg.com/statement) *Running Man* is a series of images taken on the artist's iPhone. This is part of a "walkabout" series in which the artist sought to gain inspiration from the moment, from NOW, as he writes in his artist statement. He asks, "If a symmetry in my life is walking, what value is conserved?" and then answers by stating, "What is conserved in my life is NOW, this intersection of past and future possibilities." Concerned with symmetry and the scientific ideas surrounding conservation of information, patterns, and geometry, Vandenberg explores what it means to make art with the awareness of the seemingly "inconsequential in the vastness of time space." On his website, he describes this project as the Nth Derivative, defining it as such:

> Nth-Derivatives seeks higher order derivatives of the function of being.
> Art-making is a first derivative of the function of being.
> Photo-documentation of art is a second derivative.
> Processing photo-documentation into a photo montage explores higher order Nth derivatives.

Running Man depicts a structure of driftwood in the sand, repeated from slightly different perspectives in 30 frames, stacked on top of one another in a digital photo montage. This seemingly mundane composition is a commentary, then, on the documentation of art, which is, according to Vandenberg, a second derivative of the function of being.

This exhibition honored the following works with first through third place titles, as well as two honorable mentions:

Left to right: Melis Agabigum's *The More I Step Into the Sun, the More You Step Out of the Light* and Andreas Luescher's *Fort Ancient*

Best in show: Melis Agabigum (http://melisbanu.virb.com) **,** *The More I Step Into the Sun, the More You Step Out of the Light*, **copper, 24K gold**

This piece is a large sculpture that snakes around the floor of the gallery. Admittedly, I almost stepped on the work as I attempted to immerse myself in the virtual gallery. I then noticed the piece: a dark twisting metal, with a gold piece separating the hanging portion of the work from the circular space it consumes on the floor. On the artist's website, her work is described as "[exploring] the unseen tether of the physical and emotional weights that affect individuals in how they perceive their connection to others, their bodies, and space."

This sculpture is tethered to the wall but winds itself into the floor space in a way that almost feels uncomfortable, making the viewer pause to consider why it is there and what it means, in addition to the relationship between the viewer's body and the piece. The 24-karat-gold piece that disrupts the dark metal and leads to the circular portion resembles a heart, further emphasizing the connection of the work to physical and emotional themes. This piece is part of a body of work called *Gaslight* referencing the phenomenon of "gaslighting (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaslighting) " and the impact this behavior has on recipients in abusive relationships. The installation employs shadows to urge the viewer to inspect the object, questioning where the sculpture ends and the shadows begin.

Second place: Ann Arbor artist Andreas Luescher (https://www.bgsu.edu/technology-architecture-and-applied-engineering/faculty-and-staff-directory/andreas-luescher.html) **,** *Fort Ancient*, **acrylic glass**

Luescher is an architectural design instructor at Bowling Green State University and has authored numerous books in addition to his work as a conceptual artist. He specializes in "design processes in architecture, design and urban design from an aesthetic, social, public policy, sustainability and visual cultural perspective." In his artist statement, Luescher states that his sculptural drawing mixes heterogeneous materials and techniques, a commentary on the "obsessive orderliness and sublime inventiveness" of his Swiss culture. This work examines "the structural, poetic and temporal classifications of the cultural hypothesis known as conceptual art." Luescher often uses sketching and sculptural drawing to form the basis for larger projects, but these methods of creation simultaneously influence his process in creating conceptual art.

Left to right: Kenneth Batista's *Falling Water* and *Cliffs of Moher*

Third place: <u>Kenneth Batista</u> (http://kbatista.com/Welcome.html) , *Falling Water*, acrylic on canvas

Kenneth Batista's *Falling Water* is a painted derivative of a photograph, which the artist put into Photoshop to pixelate. Then, the Photoshopped image serves as inspiration for the painted piece. Batista said his painting is influenced by Impressionism, and through his work, he hopes to push the boundaries between realism and abstraction.

Batista also has a second work in the gallery, *Cliffs of Moher*. Each of these paintings is clearly based on a landscape, but if viewed from a close range, the individual squares of color become abstract. Then, if the viewer walks away from the painting, a representational image comes into view. These paintings, though they appear analog, are created with the assistance of technology. Additionally, the idea of the "pixelated" image relies on technology. Though artists such as <u>Chuck Close</u> (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chuck_Close) have long employed the technique of painting abstract squares that come together in a whole image, Batista's work does not include any additional imagery. Instead, it stays true to the idea of pixelation: a multitude of single-squared display elements that comprise a bitmap.

Left to right: Andy Mattern's *Standard Size #7743* and Shaina Kasztelan's *My Little Sleepover at the Gates of Hell*

Honorable mention: Andy Mattern (http://www.andymattern.com) **,** *Standard Size #7743***, archival pigment print**

Andy Mattern's *Standard Size* is a series of photographic prints, each depicting boxes of analog and digital photo paper. The artist has removed all text and image from the compositions as a way of "neutralizing corporate examples of art." Mattern's work critiques and celebrates the medium of photography through this neutralization of the corporate aspect of photographic creation.

Honorable mention: Detroit-based artist Shaina Kasztelan (http://www.shainakasztelan.com) **,** *My Little Sleepover at the Gates of Hell***, mixed media**

Shaina Kasztelan's work is colorful, busy, and self-described as a "maximalist conglomeration of used children's toys" that were procured from second-hand shops, commercially mass-produced items, beauty products, and manufactured fabric. These elements are combined in her large collages that address themes of consumerism and mass production, particularly in relation to objects marketed toward women. Her work explores internet youth culture, feminism and identity, and consumer capitalism.

Also included in the exhibition are works by artists Joseph Bergman, Debbie Bogart, Dominique Chastenet de Gery, Alayna Coverly, Donald Cronkhite, Nicole Czapinski, Jason Ferguson, Sean Hottois, Douglas LaFerle, Paho Mann, Andy Malone, Stephen Proski, Thomas Stella, Jodi Stuart, and Xi Zhang.

Elizabeth Smith is an AADL staff member and is interested in art history and visual culture.

REMIX (http://www.annarborartcenter.org/exhibitions/remix) is on display at the Ann Arbor Art Center, 117 W Liberty St., through July 22. The gallery is open Monday through Friday 10-7 pm, Saturdays 10-6 pm, and Sundays 12-5 pm. Free. See photos from the opening reception here (http://www.annarborartcenter.org/exhibitions/remix/remix-opening-reception) . Click here (http://www.annarborartcenter.org/remix-art-sale) to see which pieces are for sale.

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