

KHOJ “Of-Games III”

Residency Report

Leo Castaneda

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Concept Note:

Initial note:

At the “Of Games III” Residency at Khoj I am exploring the dialogue of physical experience with a virtual reality simulation. Game mechanics are applied and distilled in the carrying and passing of an object resembling a small creature that merges with the body of the viewers/participants. The object has virtual reality goggles attached to its top and when attached, the viewer creates a symbiotic relationship with the object, as if holding another body. This object will be the controller of the embedded virtual “game” space, and in-game navigation will happen through an array of touch sensors. In addition to the core object, another sculpture in the room will provide feedback to the virtual reality unit but will be manipulated by other participants, creating a dynamic of visual access and auditory feedback. A set of paintings are also installed to question the origin of the virtual images. The viewers will feel like part of the exhibition space, part of the VR object and part of the painting interchangeably. Finally, an extension of the VR work will be accessible through an online exploration game where viewers will gain additional insight regarding the mixed reality relationships in the exhibition.

Updates after realization of project:

Through executive iteration elements within this first concept note were scrapped. For one, the tech behind the second sculpture didn't work out and I opted for a second gaming unit to give viewers an element of dialogue and attention while they waited for the VR sculpture. In the game set on the wall through a standard screen and controller, viewers had the experience of scrolling through a set of rooms viewed from an isometric perspective. The rooms showed spaces similar to the studio displaying the work, but arranged as alternate exhibition spaces. When viewers donned the headset, the same scenes inside the screen were available, but seen through the perspective of a standard camera inside the space. Through a hidden game-pad at the bottom of the sculpture, viewers through touch could access control over their perspective and essentially fly through the virtual space, seeing an arrangement of views where different humanoid beings held sculptures similar to that which they were using to see. It was as if the same room was multiplied in possibilities.

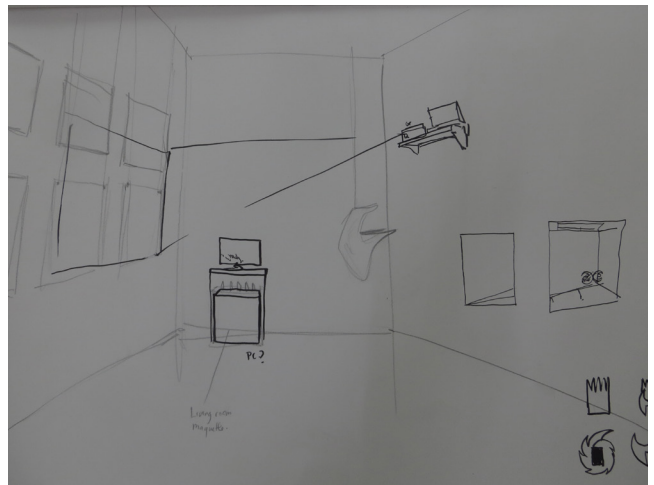
However, technical limitations led to some frustrating glitches in the execution of the piece, and much of the experience was limited when viewed live, such as the controller freezing in position, the virtual reality headset turning off sporadically through a spotty connection in the chord, and a computer overheating to an eventual restart. All parts of the learning process, and I am very thankful for Khoj's help in setting up and finding materials till the end. Regardless of shortcomings, the mere experience of virtual reality and of carrying such an alien object created interesting reactions and feedback. The act of passing it, of merging with it was an image of mystery, became almost a performance when viewers navigated the physical space to reconcile their virtual motion. A comfortable hug, a familiar pickup of a soft object of uncanny cute/creepiness. I was struck by children embracing it without fear and wanting to stay in the few instances where that happened. At the same time, I was struck by the process of creating the sculpture. While in production, seeking a tailor to sew the piece, the work was rejected three times by different tailors, of which I heard first were concerned the piece was black magic, later to learn they thought it was Ravana, the mythological being in Indian mythology. The intersection of mythology, the uncanny, the alien, the familiar(I), through a corporate technology- near magic – is fascinating to me. Definitely something I will continue to explore when seeking site specificity towards future works. How does the site influence the piece and the piece the site. Another thing I learned, was that using the Indian fabric pattern that I thought resembled images from my work as the interior area of my sculpture carried too much baggage and was distracting to those familiar with the design. A note taken towards the balance of subtle vs overt use of site specificity when working with primarily abstract, "in between" forms.

Overall, the experience in Khoj really helped to flesh out some ideas I had in regards to gaming, and the possibilities of integrating them into exhibition design are clearer and equally exiting.

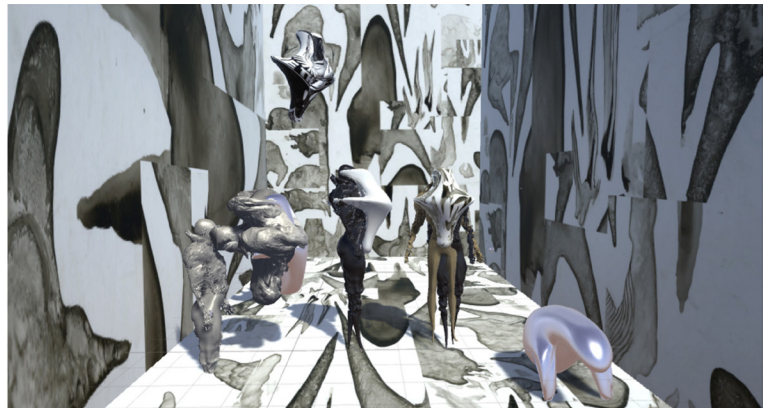
Images



Initial print for the installation, to merge painting and VR.
Drawing plans for the virtual reality sculpture.



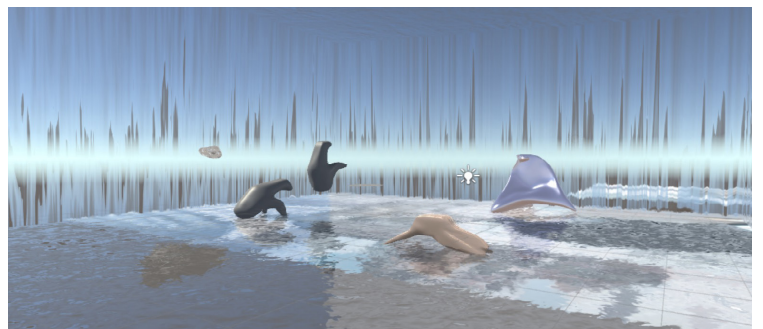
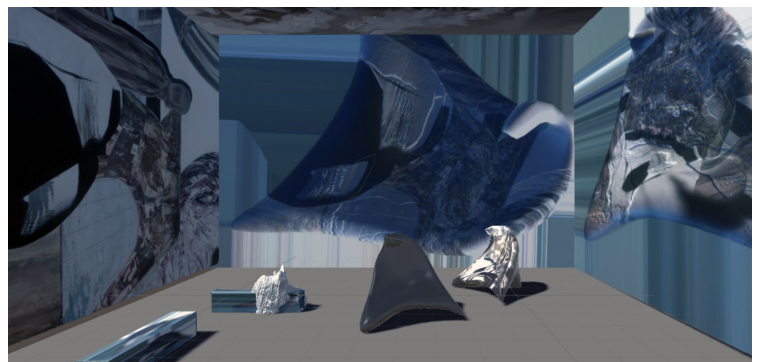
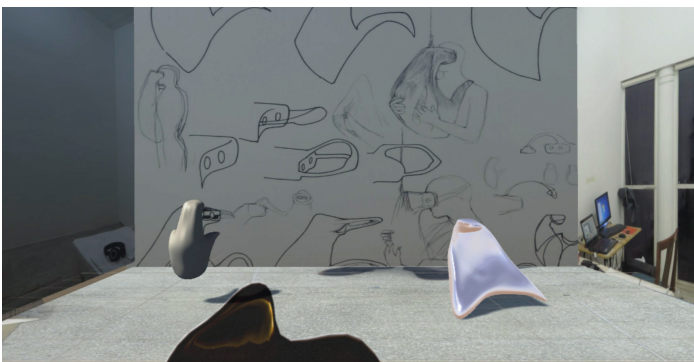
Drawing plans for installation and virtual reality sculpture.



Installation at Open day: "Showroom(s) of a Carried Item", game simulation, virtual reality sculpture, wallpaper.



Another sketch of the sculpture and exhibition views with different subjects.



Other interior virtual environments seen inside the VR headset and computer screen.

Program Feedback

I found the “Of Games III” residency to be incredibly eye opening in regards to the nature of games. Barath’s workshop at the beginning of the experience became a reference point in order to gauge the aspects of games that we wanted to approach. His technical analysis, for one working as loosely with the idea of games as I was, became extremely helpful. He was great at breaking down game-play elements, even in works of experiential structure such as that of my piece. There was a point too where he gave one on one feedback, a helpful highlight, which could be lengthened, even if one of his game tests is sacrificed for it.

Though it is great that the program provides plenty of time to make works with the very helpful weekly meetings, I think that introduction of another seminar or lecture to complement Barath’s could work. This seminar, highlighting the state of games in the larger context, games that are related to art, and Art made with games would be quite helpful. Also, one where issues such as gamer-gate/gender in games, the economy of gaming, the audience of gaming, the gamification of technological life, etc, can be explored. I am not sure if it is something or someone that is easily sought. An option is to have the residents present on the games’ related works they are looking at or admire and create a conversation around the subjects. We did have informal discussions about the subjects through casual dinner time conversations and such but it would be great to formalize it with images or audio-visual examples.

I think the Game day at the beginning of the experience worked great as well as. It allowed the Delhi audience to see our previous works or ideas of games. In a way it served much like my suggestion in my previous paragraph, though under a different format.

As far as the Khoj team, they/you guys did a fantastic job of making us feel welcome and keeping track of our works. The assistance and guidance at the end before open day was invaluable towards executing the projects, and an openness to give feedback was plentiful. If anything a bit more one on one coordination to work out logistics and budgeting could be helpful in the “in between” weeks; especially with the foreigners who might not know how much the items of production might cost in India. Just as a possibility, because I do understand that early in the residency it may be unclear what one wants to produce.

Thank you all, Pooja, Promona, Sitara, Suresh, Manoj, Paki, Radha, Manojar, Leah, Barath, and residents: Mario, Chinmayee, Sanket, Julius, Krishnaryun, Sumir, Jiten, and everyone else involved for an incredible experience. I hope to see you again on an eventual return to Khoj and India.

List of Contacts and Vendors

Premankan Seal, Maker's Assylum
premankan@makersasylum.com

Ranjita Chaney, Exhibit 320
ranjitaraphael@gmail.com