



## IMAGINATION AS SPACE FOR HOPE

by

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*"Species interdependence is the name of the worlding game on earth, and that game must be one of response and respect. That is the play of companion species learning to pay attention. Not much is excluded from the needed play, not technologies, commerce, organisms, landscapes, peoples, practices. I am not a posthumanist; I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind. Queer messmates in mortal play, indeed."*

Donna Haraway<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis and my artwork<sup>2</sup> explore the potential of the imagination to instill hope in a livable future, for both humans and animals, during a time when we face a planetary crisis. When it comes to respecting life and paying attention to animals, I consider imagination a useful tool to practice it. With imagination, it is possible to place oneself in a context different from the one we socially inhabit - which I will refer to as the virtual space, and the actual space/environment/context, shared by all.

Can imagination be a space for hope? For me, it is, as it helps me to rethink myself as a coexistent, unpredictable, and co-creating being.

The health of an ecosystem depends on the relationship between species, together they clean air, fertile soil, fresh water, and pollinated, among other benefits. However, human intervention, guided by an anthropocentric perspective that prioritizes human well-being over that of other species, has contributed to the degradation of these relationships. This confronts us with what Donna Haraway<sup>3</sup> calls "mortal play": a state in which the macro functions of ecosystems are disrupted by the loss of biodiversity and the extinction of numerous species. Persisting in this direction could mean human extinction, and as I understand human actions caused this imbalance, I have dared to think that maybe that would be for the best.

But perhaps it is not our human condition that makes us harmful to ecosystems, but rather the misguided ethical value systems we have adopted that measure the value of life by the economic benefit it can provide, leading humans to tend to want to appropriate, dominate, or exploit the human or non-human subjects with whom they interact.

The fact that we primarily interact with other humans in environments created by humans, and that many of us have a deeply ingrained technological and functional mindset attached to a capitalist system, can contribute to our actions not being oriented towards the preservation of life.

Repairing our capacity to relate requires dismantling anthropocentrism and developing models for relating to life that are not based on function or profitability. Therefore, balancing our relationship with animals also means constantly questioning what it means to be human.

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*, Posthumanities 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>2</sup> For details see page 27. *Appendix 1. Projects summary*

<sup>3</sup> Donna Haraway: Feminist theorist and scholar, known for her work in gender studies, science, technology, and cyberfeminism, her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" established her as a reference in posthumanist thought.

My strategy to achieve this, inspired by Donna Haraway, is to pay attention to our companion species, the animals<sup>4</sup>. I believe that human sympathy towards animals can help promote responsibility in their care and redefine humans in a relationship of coexistence, giving hope for a place fit for life.<sup>5</sup>

## CHAPTER 1. THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

The term "imagination" comes from the Latin verb "imaginari," which means "to picture oneself."<sup>6</sup> It involves having a mental representation of something or doing something, and it occurs in the personal sphere. It can be influenced by external factors but does not depend solely on them; to occur, it requires a personal creative process.

Projecting ourselves into another context using imagination as a tool allows us to think projectively and experience sensations without altering the actual space. I like to think that relationships are built because of imagination; when we encounter something (like a tree with fruits), what we do is: perceive external stimuli (shapes, smell, color, temperature), interpret them (I don't like that smell), and based on what the person imagines could happen (if I eat a fruit from that tree I could get sick), they initiate an action (I don't touch the fruits from the tree).

Imagination blends past experiences, the actual space information, and the anticipation of yet unrealized events to help us participate in the "mortal play", as Donna Haraway calls the species interdependence, and come out alive. Imagination and the instinct for survival seem to have much in common, but beyond surviving, I am interested in living; that's why I am interested in imagination as a facilitator for exploring alternatives of relational encounters with animals.

My approach to dealing with imaginary relational encounters involves presenting relational elements in a virtual space<sup>7</sup> that have associations to the participant's actual context, enabling interpretation and interaction. These elements are mixed with fictional components that challenge anthropocentric views. This allows for exploring more balanced possibilities in human-animal relationships without interfering with animal welfare.

In my practice, I use mediation tools to bring imagination from the personal level into a common space. With them, I create conditions for participants to share their imaginary encounters with non-human beings through drawings, verbal communication, or written language, among others. For me, discussing personal imaginary realms opens the possibility of constructing new shared realities. My projects *Wild Conversations* and *Dreamlike Place* serve as examples of how I employ mediation techniques to foster and share imaginary encounters.

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<sup>4</sup> I refer to non-human animals as animals. I am aware that humans are also animals, but I prefer to keep them differentiated. This is a practical approach for me. I don't consider them to be opposites, but rather different, and that's an aspect I want to keep in mind to foster humans' responsibility towards animal care. Mixing them could lead to the omission of responsibility.

<sup>5</sup> Disclaimer: This text was originally written in Spanish and assisted in translation to English by ChatGPT to facilitate my written expression.

<sup>6</sup> <https://csmt.uchicago.edu/glossary2004/imagination.htm> // The University of Chicago :: Theories of Media :: Keywords Glossary :: imagination

<sup>7</sup> I define Virtual Space as: Being in a different setting from the person actual space.



Figure 1 . Wild conversations kit<sup>8</sup>

## WILD CONVERSATIONS

*Wild Conversations* invites participants to connect with both living and non-living elements coexisting in urban spaces. It is a mediation game that uses a deck of 36 cards, suggesting encounters with your contextual companions and providing sample questions. The game invites participants to spend 10 minutes in an imaginative conversation – asking questions, sharing thoughts, or simply observing. After this time, they can start documenting their observations, discoveries, or new questions in the *Wild Conversation's* notebook.

These questions could be for example: *What do you do every day in your home? Do you enjoy being with other animals or having time all to yourself? How do you communicate with different creatures or animals around you? How old are you, and how long have you been growing in this spot?*

The project was conceived as a mediation tool between humans and non-humans. Although everyone can ask themselves these questions without the guide I created, I have observed that in daily life, the elements around us often become invisible. We tend to take another beings' presence for granted without questioning their importance to the health of the ecosystem.

Currently, with the help of this tool, I am keeping an illustrated journal of my experience. The process has led me to make some adjustments to the cards, so for now, I will not be testing it with more people.

<sup>8</sup> *Wild conversations* technical specifications · Title of the work: Wild Conversations · Materials: Digital printing on 300g paper. · Components and dimensions: Wild Conversations notebook (102mm x 75mm), Wild Conversations deck of cards (98mm x 38mm).

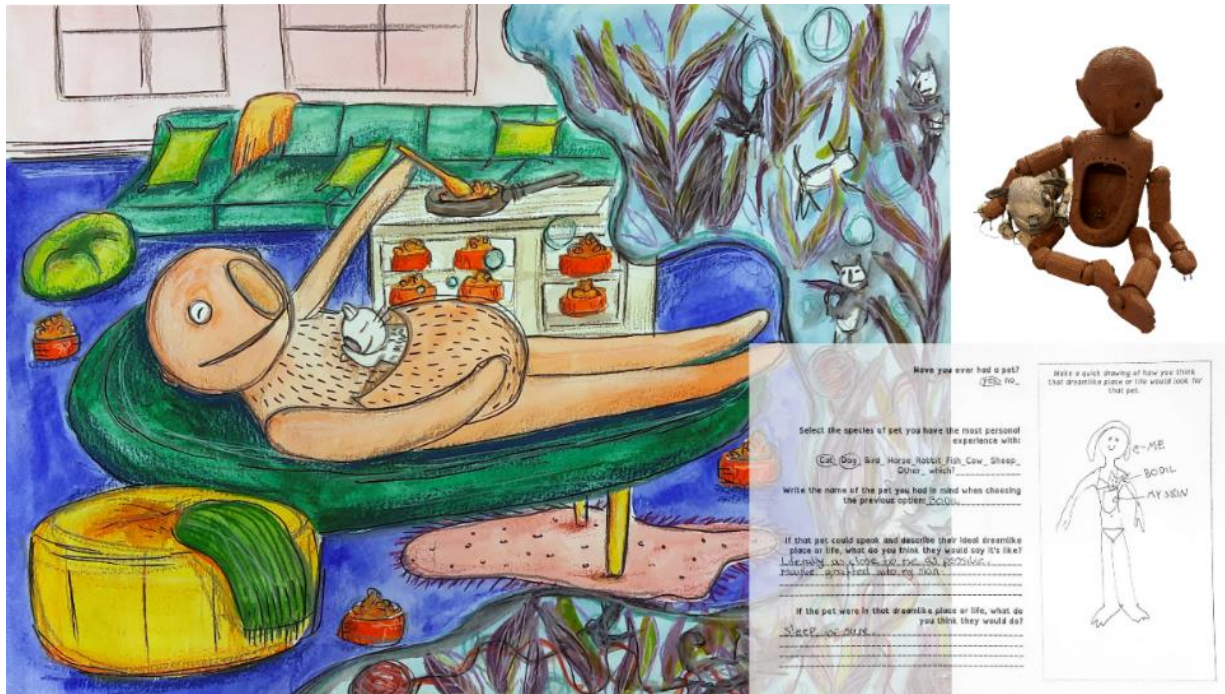


Figure 2. Dreamlike Place exploration example

## DREAMLIKE PLACE

Interested in understanding the relationship that some people I met in Oslo people in Norway had with their pets<sup>9</sup>, I created a questionnaire to ask people about their pet's dreamlike place<sup>10</sup> - *Have you ever had a pet? If that pet could speak and describe their ideal dreamlike place, what do you think they would say it's like? If the pet were in the dreamlike place or life, what do you think they would do? Make a quick drawing of how you think that dreamlike place or life would look for that pet* -. I approached people at different locations including Deichmann Bjørvika Oslo, the National Academy of Arts in Oslo, and Møllergata skole, gathering over 60 participants.<sup>11</sup>

The responses reflected human subjectivity, describing their pets'<sup>12</sup> ideals as resembling their own desires. Their ideas included living in nature with shelter, food, care, ample play opportunities reminiscent of childhood, and often, a sense of being loved and attended to by humans or other animals. Their descriptions also hinted at a nuanced connection to their instincts and depicted hunting as a game, as food was served in bowls.

After collecting the information, I created illustrations to assimilate these contributions<sup>13</sup>. These actions helped me reflect on pet care, which, when done respecting their well-being, serves as an example of how humans can relate with animals in a positive, mutual, and more balanced relationship. The responses I

<sup>9</sup> I used the term 'pets' instead of 'companion species', which is the term Donna Haraway uses and with which I agree. However, for approaching people, 'pet' was more practical.

<sup>10</sup> The ideal place where they imagine their pets would like to live if they were able to go and live there.

<sup>11</sup> To approach the participants, I introduced myself as an artist and express my interest in pets-human's relationship. Then, I presented the 5' anonymous form and explained that I will use the insights for an art project I was developing.

<sup>12</sup> The pets that showed up were dogs, cats, fish, horses, sheep, guinea pigs, hamsters, pigs, cows, turtles, and two people brought humans as pets.

<sup>13</sup> *Dreamlike Place* Technical specifications · Medium: Illustration and ceramics in printed and digital format.

had were interesting, but they were leading to predictable answers for me, so I stopped the investigation at that stage.

## CHAPTER 2. THE IMAGINATION AS A VIRTUAL AND PUBLIC SPACE

Imagination resides in a virtual space. The main characteristics I am interested in, and how I define what a virtual space is, are as follows: They have the capacity to be unlimited in dimension and interactivity. They do not adhere to the physical laws of the Earth, nor do they have to conform to human standards. They can be accessed from anywhere and at any time. While they can be inhabited as physical/actual spaces, accessing virtual ones requires mentally transporting oneself to a place that differs from one's actual<sup>14</sup> environment. Furthermore, they must be personally experienced to be understood and interpreted.

Despite being imaginary and diverging from the actual context, virtual spaces have the potential to be real for those who experience them. Books, movies, art installations, and virtual reality (VR) experiences/environments, among others, are examples of virtual spaces. Ceramic installations alongside virtual reality experiences is a mixed media, my main media, that I developed to create virtual spaces.

My practice relates with public space through: (1) The creation of virtual spaces that materialize imagination and are participatory, and through (2) Public Spaces *\_Public libraries*, where I contextualize my artistic projects and as meeting points where I reach my audience.

*Participatory virtual spaces* (1), I have found that mediation tools such as VR<sup>15</sup>- that use headsets to access a computational space, that can overlay the actual space- help me contextualize more effectively the imaginary world I create to initiate a transformative conversation with the audience (later participants). VR allows participants to interact and therefore has the potential to enable them to be co-creators of narratives rather than mere observers.

VR mediating participatory virtual spaces allow participants, for example, to inhabit the virtual space and have an active role there, where their presence signifies changes in the virtual environment. However, participants' contribution can also occur during the interaction when, with their ideas, they complete the meaning of the encounter in the virtual space or create the route to the continuation of the story. VR technology allows for the creation of immersive<sup>16</sup> experiences for relational encounters; therefore, the medium can contribute to longer-lasting impressions in the participants.

Imagination, as a virtual space, serves as a space of hope in the human-animals "mortal play". It has the potential to allow us to explore affirmative capacities for relationships in humans that transcend

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<sup>14</sup> Actual space/environment: It is the validated reality at a social level and consists of the relationships occurring within a specific context. It integrates temporality, space, and physical objects or things that people can agree on in meaning.

<sup>15</sup> I go along with the VR technologies definition: "the term virtual reality (VR) is used to " refer to a small family of technologies that aim to simulate three dimensional environments, place their subjects within those environments, and which serve as the vehicles to deliver immersive experiences". Erick Jose Ramirez, Miles Elliott, and Per-Erik Milam, "What It's like to Be a \_\_\_\_: Why It's (Often) Unethical to Use VR as an Empathy Nudging Tool," *Ethics and Information Technology* 23, no. 3 (September 2021): 527–42, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10676-021-09594-y>.

<sup>16</sup> Immersion refers to how much a person disconnects from their actual context to inhabit the virtual space, according to my understanding of the concept.

anthropocentric circumstances and to foster the nurturing of sympathy and compassion towards all living beings.

Through the fusion of VR technology and crafts, I have discovered a powerful means to express my imaginative worlds and address my concerns. By creating immersive and tangible environments, I aim to engage with people to explore possibilities of balanced relationships between humans and animals. VR enables me to venture into alternate realities, while ceramic crafts provide a tactile outlet for creativity, allowing me to materialize my ideas and open them as public spaces.

I have explored virtual spaces as public spaces; imaginary spaces that can be accessible for the public; facilitated by VR for immersive experiences in projects such as *The Last Elephant in Moss* and *Nesting*:



Figure 3. *The Last Elephant in Moss*<sup>17</sup> components.

<sup>17</sup> *The Last Elephant in Moss* Technical specifications · (1) Virtual reality · Code: Unity · Timing: 3 minutes · Audience: Recommended for individuals aged 12 and above · (2)(3) Installation · Mixed media (ceramics, research notebooks and printings, mediation notebooks) · Project team: Main Artist: Carolina Vásquez. MA Art and Public Space, KHiO, Noruega/ Coding: Christian Díaz de León, Interactive Design, Universidad Eafit, Colombia. · Exhibited in Moss, Norway · Collaboration with The House of Foundation



## THE LAST ELEPHANT IN MOSS

*The Last Elephant in Moss* is a visual and auditory narrative accessed through a virtual reality headset. The story begins when the Indian elephant Baba, from a distant dimension, recounts how she came to perform at the Merano Circus in Norway and how, when the winter cold froze her, it turned her into a misplaced commercial object in Moss Public Space.

When I visited Moss and encountered a shiny metallic elephant in full scale, the sculpture *Elefanten og Moss* made by Linda Bakke in 2020, I was struck by its monumental presence, its shine (resembling a trophy), and by the fact that it has a laid-down column in front, which made me think it was a slave elephant. Upon researching, I found that the sculpture was donated by a paper company that used to have its factory in Moss, and its logo was the elephant, which became an emblem of the city. Simultaneously, I discovered the story of Baba, the Indian elephant that last performed in Moss at the Merano circus in 2013.

*The last elephant in Moss* has a narrative that I created around the *Elefanten og Moss* sculpture, reflecting on how some human actions, driven by a search for hospitality and entertainment, result in hostility and imbalance in its relationship with other species. This narrative consists of: (1) access to Baba's fictional biography through a VR headset, (2) a compilation of news from the time when animal rights activists managed to ban elephants from circuses, and (3) mediation notebooks where people shared their reflections on the symbolism of the sculpture after interacting with the artwork. The VR experience can be accessed at Møllebrua, in front of the elephant sculpture, while the research and mediation notebooks are available in an exhibition space at the House of Foundation - an artist collective and literature house established in the premises of the old Mølla Art School in Møllebyen, Moss, in the autumn of 2009.



Figure 4. House of foundation library/bookstore  
Imagine from <https://www.house-of-foundation.no/>

Seeking deeper immersion, I investigated how virtual spaces accessible with VR headsets can integrate tangible bodily sensations and interactivity (both digital and physical). This hybridization of visualization and physicality is known as expanded reality, as exemplified in my project *Nesting*.



To see the video of *The last elephant in Moss*, Scan the QR code.

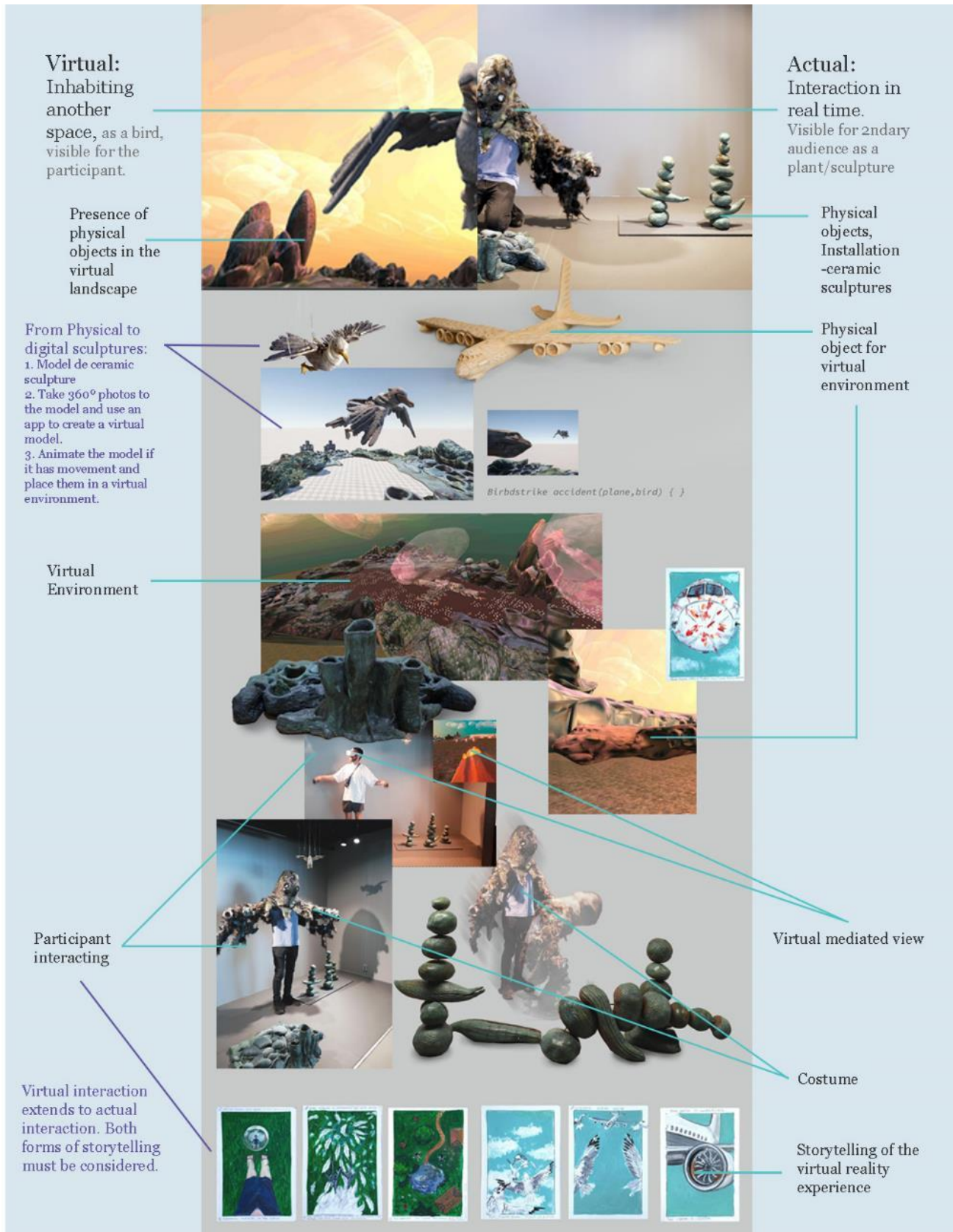


Figure 5. Nesting components, process, and integration between the actual and virtual reality.

## ARTWORK NESTING<sup>18</sup>

Nesting is an immersive experience of an airplane-bird encounter from the perspective of a bird, facilitated by a participatory installation that blends ceramics and virtual reality. It is also an inadvertent performance, starring the participant immersed in virtual reality, who dresses as a kind of creature from the plant kingdom and interacts with the installation space while being observed by the audience passing through.

In the virtual space, Nesting depicts a bird that collides with an airplane while flying, whereas in the physical space, Nesting portrays a plant-human hybrid searching for a place to take root.



Figure 6. Storyboard Virtual Space, VR, *Nesting*

The participatory installation consists of a series of ceramic sculptures that the participants interact with, one at a time, both in physical and virtual space while using a virtual reality headset. When viewed through VR, these sculptures appear as part of the environment, retaining their organic and artisanal characteristics but reconfigured into a monumental landscape format complemented by additional

<sup>18</sup> *Nesting* Technical specifications · Participatory Installation · Mixed Media (Ceramics, textile) · Dimensions: variable // Virtual Reality · Code: Unity · Timing: 4-6 minutes · Audience: Recommended for individuals aged 12 and above.

Project Team: Main Artist: Carolina Vásquez, MA Art and Public Space, KHiO · Coding: Christian Díaz de León, Interactive Design, Universidad Eafit, Colombia · Costume: Magdalena Mikaelson, Master in Costume Design, KHiO



To see the video of *Nesting* Scan the QR code.

elements such as an airport and airplanes. Furthermore, in the VR environment, the ceramic seagull comes to life, appearing in a first-person perspective as the virtual body of the participant.



Figure 7. Ceramic sculptures and costume installed in the actual space.

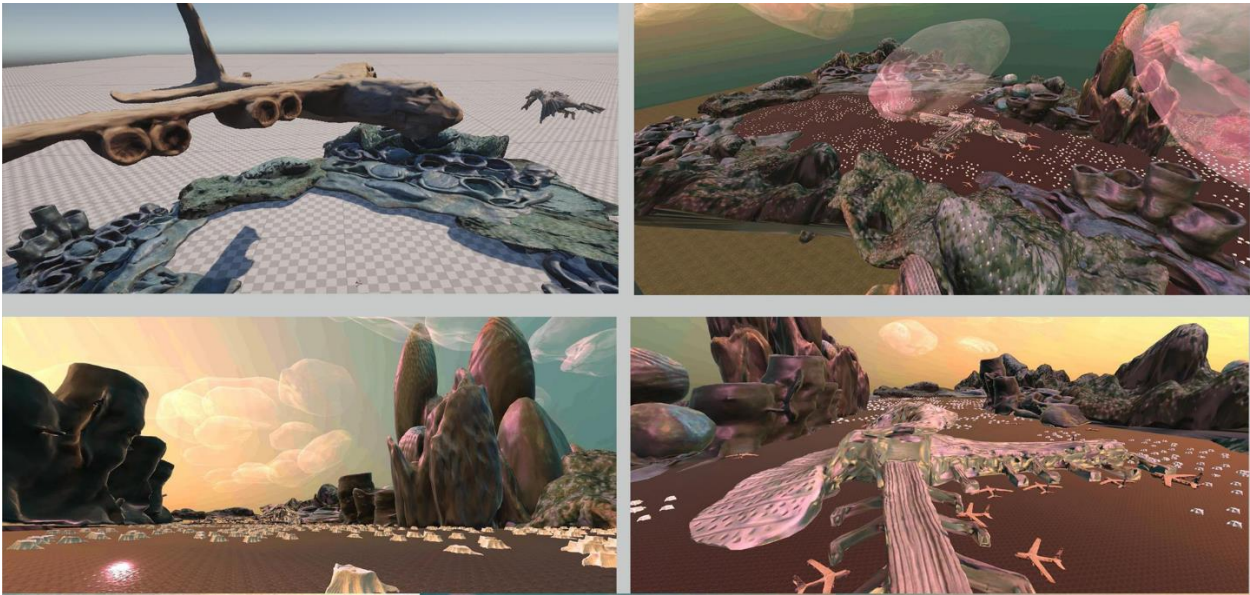


Figure 8. Virtual reality environment.

The *Nesting* experience begins when an audience member decides to participate and wear a costume displayed in the installation as a sculpture. It is a hoodie-like mask with long sleeves that cover the participant's upper body and head, made of green-toned wool crafted onto a flexible textile base and fitted onto a custom-sized VR headset.



Figure 9. Participatory installation\_ inadvertent performance in the Actual Space, Nesting

In the virtual space, the participant, with a virtual bird body, is positioned near an airport, experiencing noise and a fish-eye view. The bird-participant perceives traces that suggest how to navigate the space, walking and eventually flying by mimicking the movements of a bird. As they fly, a plane appears, and the experience concludes with a strong impact sound as the participant collides with the turbine. Meanwhile, in the actual space, the corporeality of the participant appears as a performance for the secondary audience who lacks visibility of the virtual space.

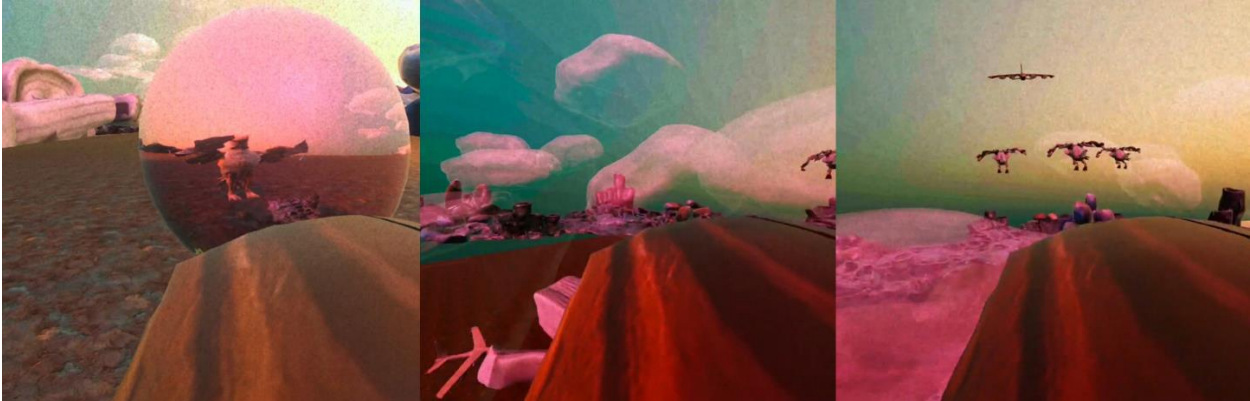


Figure 10. Virtual reality participant perspective.

*Nesting* explores perspectives beyond human-centric vision to reflect on the tension between life and death in interspecies relationships. Its main media are VR, ceramic sculpture (present in both actual and virtual spaces), and drawing. Its method is storytelling. The arena was a Public Library<sup>19</sup>.

The main reasons for choosing these mediums are that ceramics, for me, represent intuitive creative freedom, and they respond to tactility. It's a natural material that, for me, provides warmth and closeness. Drawing compels me to refine information and get to the essence of the message I want to convey. Virtual reality, as a virtual space, enables interactivity; it's scalable and impermanent.

Moreover, the relationship between technology and ceramic sculpture, as craftsmanship, involves a material interdependence. The relationship between ceramic sculpture and a digital 3D model is inseparable, as the materiality of the original sculptures remains present in the virtual space through their appearance and visual tactility. In my process of creating virtual spaces, I start with ceramic modeling, then I take photos of the sculpture from all angles, and using a tool that converts them into computational vectors, I create digital 3D models which I use as elements/assets in the virtual space. So, when people access the VR space, the ceramics are present visually but also through tactility when expanded reality interaction occurs.

The virtual space linking the actual space through the ceramic sculptures, speaks to me of how imagination can be expressed to create tangible and accessible spaces for all, and speaks about their potential to create new shared realities.

Storytelling as the method, serves to engage in conversations with people. Additionally, in the contexts of the mentioned mediums, it allows me to bring multiple perspectives and acknowledge multiple coexisting realities.

*Nesting* uses storytelling, as the story is framed and presents a closed end. However, I am eager to evolve it into storybuilding in future projects, which means I want participants to be able to add, change, or imagine the conclusion of the narrative introduced by my artwork. Keeping the narrative open should allow more freedom for the participant to show their personal perspective and have a more meaningful experience.

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<sup>19</sup> For information about the project placement go to the page 16.

Development/Exhibition:



Figure 11. 1st trial with audience: Oslo Open 2023, Location: KHiO working space.

*Outcome: I was able to evaluate whether the narrative thread was understandable, the helmet's- see the cardboard prototype in the right image- ergonomics for different sizes, assess if the experience caused motion sickness, and determine if participants considered the materiality safe. Additionally, I received feedback regarding the moment of crash in the experience, with participants expressing their anticipation for a greater impression.*



Figure 12. 2nd trial with Audience: DKS Oslo Laboratories 2023

*Outcome: I assessed the suitability of the Nesting content for children and its potential to spark discussions about the incidental relationships within human-animals. Furthermore, I evaluated the effectiveness of the tools used to mediate the content. The receptiveness of educational environments to explore human-animal relationships was notable, fostering an atmosphere conducive to collaborative creative ideation with children.*



Figure 13. Exhibition of Nesting in Deichman Bjørvika, Oslo, Norway.

June 2023- 10 days

*Outcome: I had the opportunity to test it with both children and adults and gather feedback on their perceptions of the experience. As a result, adjustments were made to enhance the clarity of certain visual elements within the VR and refine the impact of the collision experience.*

*I evaluated the need for a liability waiver form from the participants, in which they were informed about the risk of using a virtual reality headset, instructed on what to do in case of discomfort, and asked to sign to assume responsibility for any adverse effects of the virtual reality experience. In the context in which I presented the project, this form proved unnecessary and overly burdensome; however, it is something that should be assessed with each institution when undertaking a project of this nature.*

*Additionally, I had persistent concerns about the shyness and reluctance that individuals might exhibit in donning a costume and being observed. Nevertheless, this posed no issue for the participants and actually enhanced the immersion of the participant.*

*Public Spaces\_Public libraries* (2), and reading spaces alike, serve not only as the place where I prefer to situate my art projects and engage with participants and audiences but also as a message in themselves. I see them as meeting points for multiple virtual realms, an embodiment of diverse realities coexisting, not solely through the accessible content they provide but also through the dynamic interaction and participation of individuals within those spaces.

On the other hand, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions defines a public library<sup>20</sup> as "an organization established, supported, and funded by the community, either through local, regional, or national government or through some other form of community organization. It provides access to knowledge, information, and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community." From this definition, one can identify libraries

<sup>20</sup> "In Norway, the purpose of libraries is to promote information, education, and other cultural activities and serve as independent meeting places and arenas for discussion and debate; thus, the law can be seen as primarily focusing on the fostering of an inclusive and informed public discourse or sphere. Furthermore, it is stated in the Norwegian Public Library Act (2013) that library materials should be free to anyone living in the country, which can be interpreted as the promotion of equality and equal opportunity".

Ragnar Audunson et al., eds., *Libraries, Archives and Museums as Democratic Spaces in a Digital Age* (De Gruyter, 2020), 26, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110636628>.



as a place to access works of the imagination open to all members of the community, that is also characterized by an incremental participative culture due to the digital era<sup>21</sup>.

The virtual spaces I create are not only displayed in public spaces; they are public spaces<sup>22</sup> themselves. They are accessible, open for participation and interaction, and foster public dialogue, characteristics that correspond with my understanding of public spaces. In them, people can contribute their personal experiences and virtually appropriate them. They are spaces to build relationships and are open to host multiple coexisting realities. For me, public space, as something common to all, exists and is redefined with people's participation; it is a dialogue between the virtual space, which is personal and imaginative and therefore proactive, and the actual space contextualized within a human-animal "mortal play".

My interest in participating/facilitating conversations in public spaces as an artist arises from observing that humans often act (myself included) destructively towards animals; I am especially concerned when this happens by prioritizing human well-being and comfort with elements that are not vital. I believe that the imbalance caused by human action threatens our existence, but taking responsibility for caring for animals can help restore balance. Also, I believe that hope for a new common reality, with more balanced relationships between humans and animals, can be found through reflections and conversations on imaginary encounters in public virtual spaces.

### CHAPTER 3. FOR HOPE, SYMPATHY OR EMPATHY?

"Sympathy is a feeling of sincere concern for someone who is experiencing something difficult or painful. Empathy involves actively sharing in the person's emotional experience. Sympathy has been in use since the 16th century. It comes ultimately from the Greek *sympathēs*, meaning 'having common feelings, sympathetic,' which was formed from *syn-* ('with, together with') and *páthos*, 'experience, misfortune, emotion, condition.' Empathy was modeled on sympathy; it was coined in the early 20th century as a translation of the German *Einfühlung* ("feeling-in" or "feeling into"), and was first applied in contexts of philosophy, aesthetics, and psychology."<sup>23</sup> I consider sympathy better for instilling hope for a livable place because, as I understand it, it allows one to be aware of someone else's issues but maintains the awareness that it is not a personal feeling. Therefore, the person can act with their capacities to care for someone. It also acknowledges the differences between individuals and can help in recognizing and valuing animals' special characteristics.

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<sup>21</sup> "According to the American media scholar Henry Jenkins (2005), the development of the social media has been a major driver in participatory culture, because the barriers for artistic expression and civic engagement have been lowered. Today, it is easier to produce, share, remix, and comment on artistic expressions and other kinds of content. This tendency is not only identifiable on civic sites on the Internet, but there is also a participatory turn in western cultural policy (Bonet and Négrier 2018), which also appears within the LAM field. Participation has been a buzzword for more than a decade (Huvila 2008; Simon 2010; Lankes, Silverstein, and Nicholson 2007)".

*Audunson et al., Libraries, Archives and Museums as Democratic Spaces in a Digital Age.*

<sup>22</sup> Jürgen Habermas (German philosopher and sociologist known for his theory of communicative action and his defense of deliberative democracy and the public sphere) proposed the public space as the area where contemporary citizens express themselves; it is a communicative platform accessible physically or virtually. On the other hand, Hannah Arendt (Political philosopher of the 20th century, known for her studies on the nature of power, political action, and the human condition) brings together the concepts of the public sphere and public space under the term Public Realm, defined as the place for appearance and a common space for all. For Arendt, face-to-face interaction and action are necessary in the public sphere/public realm; it requires the private individual to bring their spontaneity and express it publicly from a political perspective.

<sup>23</sup> Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sympathy>.

The myth of human supremacy and the self-attributed right to exploit its cohabitants perhaps fractured human connections with animals. However, in my opinion, humans remain part of the body of nature; the severing of ties with animals is a kind of amputation that causes discomfort in humans (due to the impact on ecosystems caused by biodiversity loss), similar to phantom limb syndrome<sup>24</sup>. I think that this discomfort can be treated with sympathy towards animals, and VR as medium can contribute to it.

In my projects involving virtual reality, I have created virtual spaces for relational encounters between humans and animals from a non-human perspective experienced in first person, using a narrative where I imagine how animals might experience encounters with hostile anthropocentric human actions.

However, encountering the article *What it's like to be a \_\_\_\_\_: Why it's (often) unethical to use VR as an empathy nudging tool* from Erick Jose Ramirez<sup>25</sup>, Miles Elliott<sup>26</sup> and Per-Erik Milam<sup>27</sup>, made me reflect on my creative decisions. In this article, the authors consider the use of virtual reality as an empathy machine - that is, a technology promising to embody another person's experience and understand it as one's own - problematic because they do not consider it possible, and if it were, it would be ethically questionable due to the biased and manipulated perspective it presents. Therefore, the authors suggest that virtual reality could be more constructive if approached from a perspective of sympathy and present involving the participant as a witnessing spectator as a better practice. Regarding educational projects, the authors assert that they can only be considered ethical if they present truthful<sup>28</sup> information.

I agree that having an experience in first person in an environment created from a specific perspective cannot be interpreted as having embodied someone else's experience, as it is presented from a subjective perspective. However, I believe that participatory involvement in first person is more effective and therefore offers a greater possibility of leaving a lasting impression, something desired in my projects. I also do not believe that being in first person necessarily confuses sympathy and empathy, as in my case, the aesthetic and material decisions make the difference with the actual context evident.

Furthermore, limiting participation in a VR experience to being a passive observer who has no direct interaction is something that I consider a misuse of the tool's potential for interaction and for allowing the participant to contribute to the narrative. Like the authors, I share an awareness of the impact that a trigger in a VR experience can have on a participant even after the experience ends. Highly immersive experiences can be interpreted as real and create memories. Therefore, I considered important to inform the VR participants about possible triggers.

Regarding the strictness with information for educational projects, I have a different perspective. In my projects, I draw inspiration from encounters I observe between humans and animals. From there, I create imaginative stories where I emphasize the moments that capture my attention the most. However, I consider that my projects have educational components because they present cases about which we, as

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<sup>24</sup> Phantom limb syndrome: a condition characterized by sensations, pain, itching, abnormal sensations (such as tingling or burning), and temperature sensations felt by some individuals in an amputated limb, which persist despite the limb's absence.

<sup>25</sup> Erick Jose Ramirez : <https://www.routledge.com/authors/i24196-erick-ramirez>  
Areas of research: Philosophy of Technology; Moral Psychology; Extended Reality; Embodiment. Education: University of California San Diego Ph D

<sup>26</sup> Miles Elliott: a philosophy major, helped recreate thought experiments in virtual reality environments. BA of arts, Philosophy , Santa Monica University.

<sup>27</sup> Per-Erik Milam: <http://www.pererikmilam.com/> . Researcher in Practical Philosophy, University of Gothenburg - Areas of research: moral responsibility, blame, apology, forgiveness

<sup>28</sup> I assume they refer to a scientific framework to support it.

humans, can generate curiosity in ourselves to contribute to balancing the human-animal relationship. Additionally, my interest in relational encounters lies in exploring possibilities of relationships that go beyond the human-centric perspective, and presenting information in a structured and fixed manner would not allow space for that.

## ARTISTIC INSPIRATION<sup>29</sup>



Figure 14. Interview med Laure Prouvost – Above Front Tears Oui Float. [https://youtu.be/huw4dFf0vPU?si=eXrI0Q\\_7qqaY8Dex](https://youtu.be/huw4dFf0vPU?si=eXrI0Q_7qqaY8Dex)

### LAURE PROUVOST, ABOVE TEARS OUI FLOAT.

I find very inspiring, moving, and educational the Laure Prouvost's<sup>30</sup> exhibition *Above Front Tears Oui Float* presented at the National Museum in Oslo in 2022. Through multiple virtual spaces, the artist combined dystopian scenarios that evoke the environmental crisis with dreamlike spaces that create hope.

Upon entering the room, I was struck by its monumentality. There were bridges, garbage, pipes, remnants of sewage, a woman flying on the screen, naked and with leaf wings, mutations of birds and fish, and the melody "*together...together*" resonated throughout the space. Beneath the bridges and in the corners, mirrors were used to create depth in the space and convey encouraging messages amidst what seemed like mere garbage. There was also a cave that, upon entering, turned out to be a nest where I have some memories of a woman incubating an egg. The nest was human-made, but nowadays it's common to find

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<sup>29</sup> Go to the Appendix 2. Artist Inspirations in page 28, to see more artistic referents I have followed.

<sup>30</sup> Laure Prouvost: (1978, Croix, France) is a French artist who lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium. Laure is known for her captivating installations involving film, sound, performance, sculpture, textiles, and text that stimulate the senses. In her work, the boundary between fiction and reality is blurred. She incorporates elements of Dadaism and Surrealism, embracing lawlessness and the irrational. Prouvost's art also references art-historical and religious motifs, such as ancient fountains, archetypal grottos, birds, and fish.

<https://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/exhibitions-and-events/national-museum/exhibitions/2022/laure-prouvost/>

bird nests mixed with human activity residues, which creates a familiar mutation and intersection within the animal-human realm that deeply moved me.



Figure 15. Laure Provoust , Above Front Tears Oui Float. Dystopian room

At the end of the room, a strange basket hung from the ceiling, concealing a VR headset. When I put it on, I found myself back in the same room, but this time a group of naked women with wings made of plants and long nails surrounded me, singing the melody "together... together" even louder, as if trying to hypnotize me. It was immersive and scary, but I remember it vividly. Then, a sign indicating the way to another room said "Birds fly a lot by night to be guided by stars. Most birds travel alone".



Figure 16. Laure Provoust , Above Front Tears Oui Float. Dystopian room

Leaving the dystopian area where garbage seemed to reign, I found a tunnel with walls covered in women's breasts. It was possible to write on the walls, so I wrote "together." Upon crossing it, I entered an illuminated room that seemed more dreamlike, with fog or clouds. There were sculptures of mutations of fish and birds that were whimsical and colorful. In the middle, there was a sort of rock formation with binoculars resting on them. Taking the binoculars allowed me to see up close some mobiles, made of garbage, hanging from a dome located on the ceiling. Looking through the binoculars while laying down on that soft rock formation, the floating objects moving around gave me the sensation of being underwater and moving with the current.

How could something emerging from garbage bring me so much tranquility? How could these mutations be another form of life that managed to clean the water by reaching the clouds? What L. Provoust achieved with this exhibition is the closest reference to what I would like to achieve with my practice. While I may not delve into the monumental installations to create my imaginary worlds, I find the interactivity and playful spirit it evokes wonderful, prompting reflection. The blend of media, narrative, the fantastical, and the seriousness of the theme is captivating.

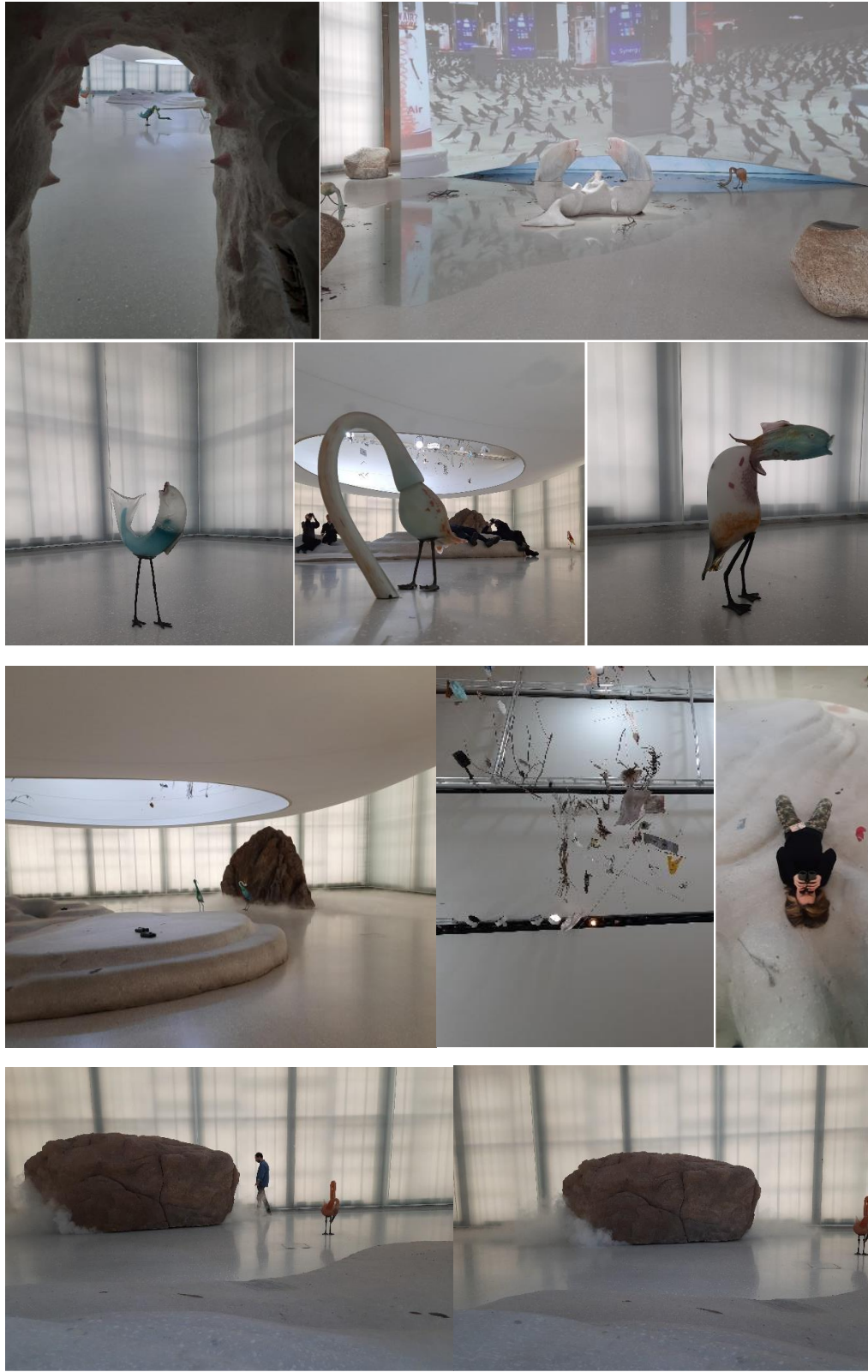


Figure 17. Laure Provoust , Above Front Tears Oui Float.

Based on the learning obtained during the master's program and the reflections presented in this thesis, for my degree exhibition, I have decided to take my *Nesting* project and make some modifications to align it with my current artistic vision. My master project exhibition name is *The Flight's Echo*

## MASTER EXHIBITION PROJECT- *The Flight's Echo*

*... If I were a bird and there was an airport in my neighborhood, it might happen that while flying, I would encounter a plane... it would be a moment of fragility for both the plane and me, perhaps a life fracture, perhaps a lesson... perhaps a mortal game, perhaps the beginning of a new relationship... Sometimes the story of flight can also be the story of the fall. When multiple realities coexist interdependently, imagining other perspectives can save lives.*

*The Flight's Echo* is a participatory installation where ceramics and technology blend to create an encounter between humans and birds, set within a Public Library. The installation begins by acquainting the audience with a group of seagulls flying from the building's entrance towards the library. Following them, as if part of their flock, the audience will discover the place where they inhabit.

Upon entering the room, the bright sunlight streams in from the ceiling, filtering through a colored translucent mesh, casting an aura of artificial yet dreamy blue and reddish tones. Through the windows, you can see a kitebird flying, attempting to scare the seagulls, but they seem unbothered.

The room is divided by columns into two parts: on the right, a group of ceramic seagulls takes flight alongside a forest-like creature. In the background, a virtual landscape with an airport and a bird's beak moving around can be seen each time a participant wears the VR headset, which is located in the center of a ceramic landscape installation on the left side.

When using the VR headset, the participant sees themselves as a bird in an airport. Everything - the landscape, birds, clouds, airport, and planes - appears as ceramic sculptures similar to those in the library room. Guided by footprints and bubbles, the participant walks the space until they are led to fly by flapping their wings. During the flight, the calm is disrupted by an approaching airplane. Changing route is not possible, and the turbine hits the participant with a gust of wind. Then...

There is no bird, no body, just fragments navigating through a tunnel that the participant travels until encountering a bright light revealing the exhibition room hosting the installation.

As the room becomes visible to the participant, it is expected that they understand the experience is finished and remove the headset. Once back in the actual space, the participant will have the possibility to respond to an open-ended question: Where would you have liked the tunnel to take you? The format of this audience feedback are not decided at the time of the thesis deadline.

*The Flight's Echo* explores perspectives beyond human-centric vision to reflect on the tension between life and death in interspecies relationships, aiming to awaken curiosity and sympathy towards animals and perhaps foster more balanced relationships. Its main media are VR and ceramic sculpture (present in both actual and virtual spaces). Its method is storybuilding. Its arena is a Public Library, a meeting point where multiple realities can coexist and be created through works of the imagination.

NOTE: The following images are for reference; the artwork documentation will be ready after the thesis submission.

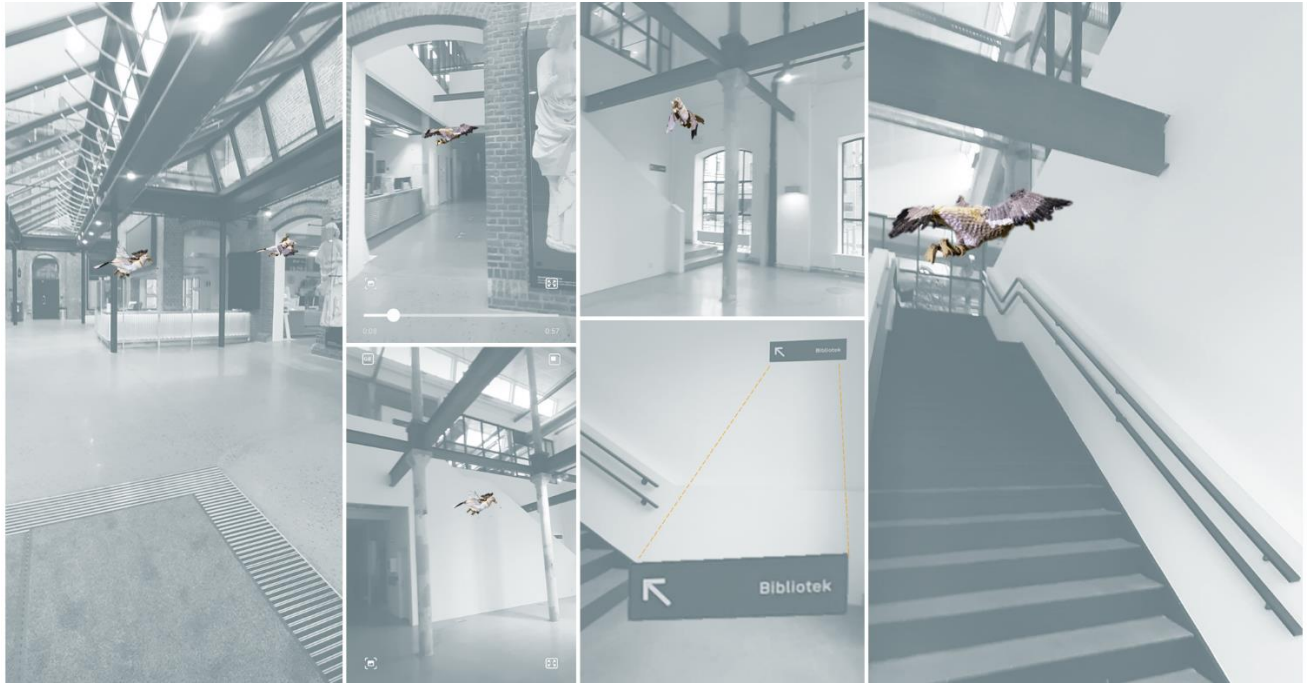


Figure 18. Seagulls guiding the way to the KHIO library.



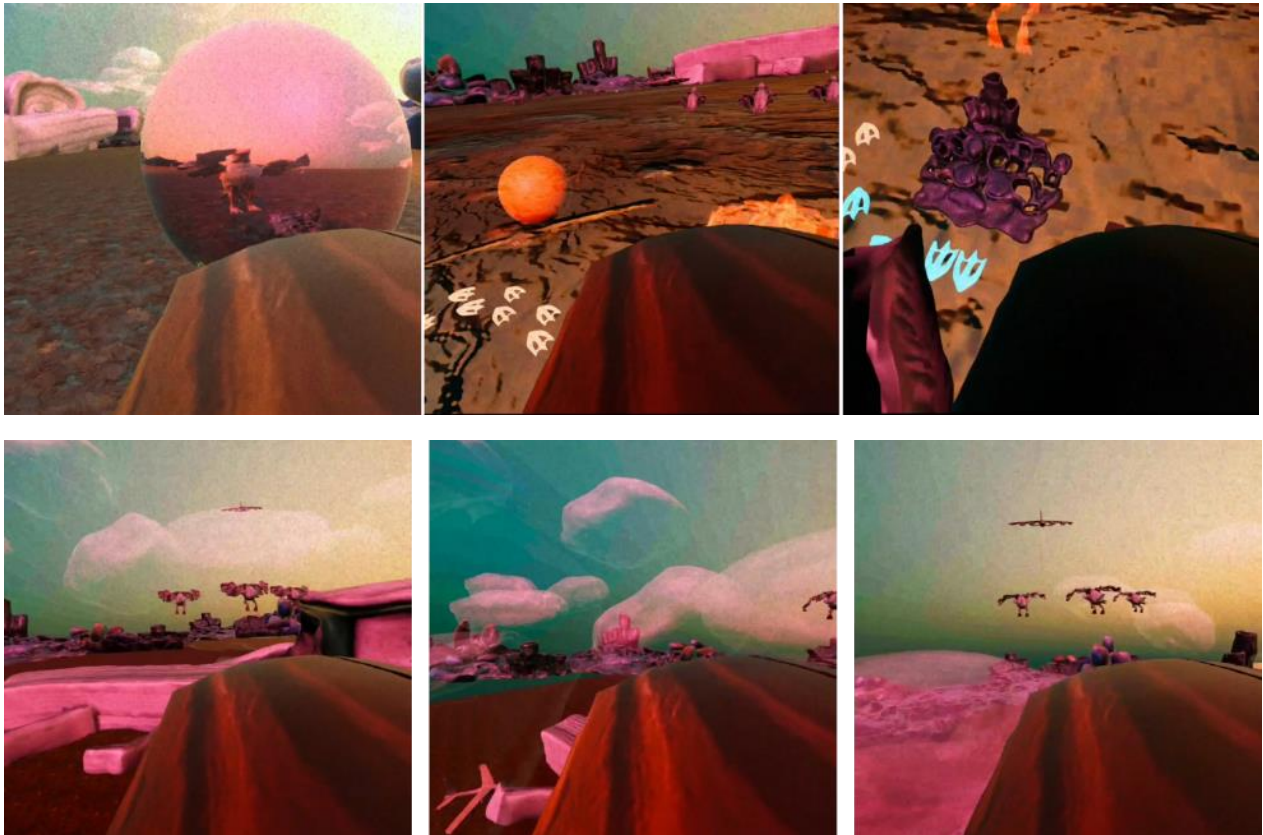
Figure 19. The Flight's Echo<sup>31</sup>- Library Installation sketch

<sup>31</sup> *The Flight's Echo* Technical specifications · Participatory Installation · Mixed Media (Ceramics, textile) · Dimensions: variable // Virtual Reality · Code: Unity · Timing: 4 minutes · Audience: Recommended for individuals aged 12 and above. Project Team: Main Artist: Carolina Vásquez, MA Art and Public Space, KHIO · Coding: Christian Díaz de León, Interactive Design, Universidad Eafit, Colombia · Costume: Magdalena Mikaelson, Master in Costume Design, KHIO





Figure 20. The Flight's Echo



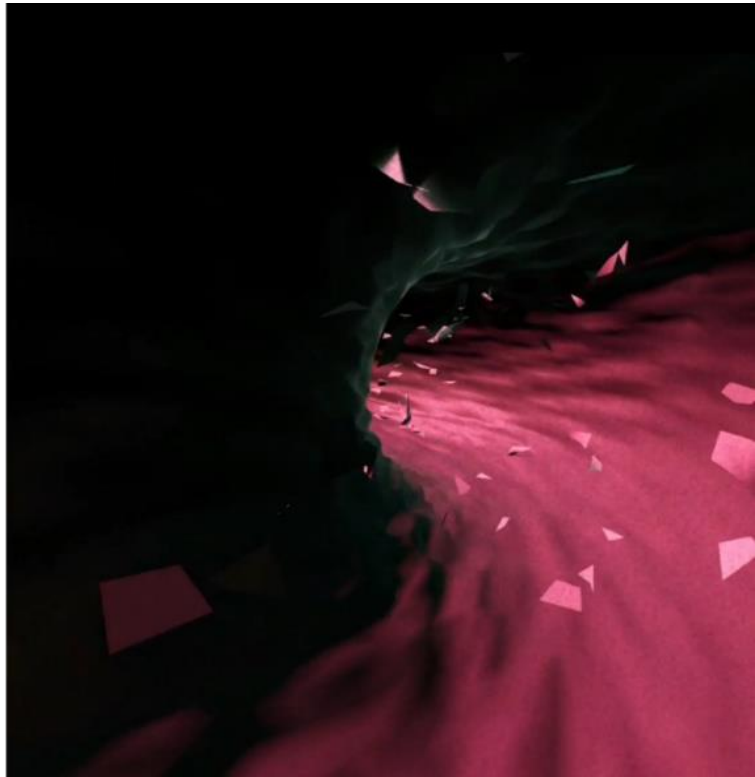
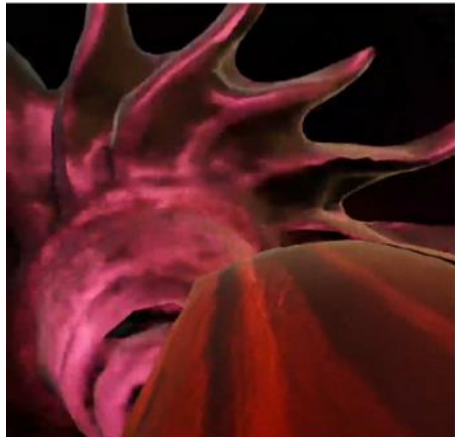


Figure 21. VR scenes\_The Flight's Echo



## Nesting

The airplane colliding with a bird in mid-air.

- Virtual Public Space: Airspace in the vicinity of an airport.
- Keywords: Hostility, hospitality- expansion, unexpected, encounter, anthropocentrism, perspective shift, air navigation, mortal play.
- Public Space: Deichman Bjørvika, Oslo

## ANTROPOCENTRISM



## The last elephant in Moss

The elephant is wild, belongs to India.

- Virtual Public Space: Forced migration of an elephant from India to Norway
- Keywords: Hostility, hospitality-entertainment, anthropocentrism, perspective shift, micronarrative, mortal play.
- Public Space: House of foundation and Møllebrua in Moss.



## Wild conversations

What/why/when/how does a human cohabitant experience living?

- Virtual Public Space: imaginary conversation
- Keywords: wild, conversation, imagination, curiosity, time, attention.
- Public Space: Urban Spaces.

## TRANSITION EXPLORATION



## DreamLike place

Caring in companion species.

- Virtual Public Space: dreamlike place for companion specie
- Keywords: caring, dependence, dreamlike, companion specie, domestication, mirroring, imagination.
- Public Space: Deichmann Bjørvika Oslo, the National Academy of Arts in Oslo, and Møllergata skole.

## POSTHUMANISM



## The Flight's Echo

What after colliding? *Where would you have liked the tunnel to take you?*

- Virtual Public Space: From Airspace crash in the vicinity of an airport to somewhere...
- Keywords: Posthumanism, perspective shift, storybuilding, cohabit, participatory, possibilities, collaborative play, imagination, future/hope.
- Public Space: KHIØ library.

Appendix 2. Artistic Inspiration

- Laure Provoust , Above Front Tears Oui Float (2022). <https://www.nasjonalnuseet.no/utstillinger-og-arrangementer/nasjonalnuseet/utstillinger/2022/laure-prouvost/>
- <http://intheeyesoftheanimal.com/>
- Rachel Rose <https://vimeo.com/305954066>
- Pierre Huyghes, Variants (2021). <https://www.kistefosmuseum.com/sculptur/variants>
- Ana Maria Velásquez, El tratado del gallinazo (2022). <https://artesvisuales.mincultura.gov.co/sna46/participantes/ana-maria-velasquez/>
- Lundahl & Seidl <http://www.lundahl-seidl.com/>
- Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YddOY4xyYxc>
- Ishtar Backlund Dakhil. <https://ishtarbacklund.art/VR>
- Ruby Rumié, La caída (The fall). <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/510208/ruby-rumithe-fall/>
- Maren Dagny Juel. <https://www.marenjk.net/lick-pick-kick.html>
- Marina Abramović. Rising (2018) <https://acuteart.com/artist/marina-abramovic/>
- Magnhild Oen Nordahl/ Cameron MacLeod. Two rocks do not make a duck. <https://www.magnhildnordahl.com/work/two-rocks-do-not-make-a-duck>
- Laurie Anderson. The Chalkroom, 2017 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHT016FbR30&list=RDLVzHT016FbR30&start\\_radio=1&rv=zHT016FbR30&t=69](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHT016FbR30&list=RDLVzHT016FbR30&start_radio=1&rv=zHT016FbR30&t=69)
- Jannet Cardiff & George Bures Miller. The Alter Bahnhof Video Walk. <https://cardiffmiller.com/walks/alter-bahnhof-video-walk/>
- Tori Wråres. <https://www.toriwraanes.com/>
- <https://www.oslomet.no/en/research/research-projects/felt>
- Carlos Casas and Filipa Ramos. Bestiary. <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/589447/carlos-casasbestiari/>
- Eva Kořátková. The heart of a giraffe in captivity is twelve kilos lighter. <https://www.labiennale.org/en/art/2024/czech-republic>
- Robert Zhao Renhui. Seeing Forest. <https://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/Art-Events/Exhibitions/Venice-Biennale-2024>