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Editorial: Hedvig Jalhed and Margot Edström



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1, 2, 3 Playtime

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An interactive mixed reality artwork created for the biosphere reserve and the landscape around Lake Vombsjön in Skåne: An outdoor experience you see and hear via your mobile phone, about the movements in the landscape where asphalt meets meadow.



Med vind i håret (With the Wind in Our Hair)

Marika Hedemyr



Finding the site-specific

Med vind i håret was commissioned by Sjöbo Konsthall, with the aim to create a mixed reality experience for the Storkriket biosphere reserve. The reserve is located in central Skåne, a rural area around the lake, Vombsjön, and the development of Storkriket is a joint project between the Sjöbo, Lund and Eslöv municipalities. Working with art and culture is one of the strategies to invite locals and visitors to explore the natural and cultural landscape.

When I started the process, I was curious to find out how to create a site-specific work for such a large area, where it takes one hour to drive from one end to the other. After having spent time there and talking to people connected to the place, I was struck by all the movements that I constantly encountered: machines and tractors on the fields, vehicles on the roads, water passing through the landscape, horses and cows walking and running, the wind sweeping through the trees and grass. This biosphere became the site, and I aimed to create an experience where this constant speed and motion could be felt, with the ambition to make the audience part of the ongoingness.

Multi player & multi places

Together with the curator, we decided to create a work that could be placed at several different locations outdoors, and that the audience would be able to experience the work on their own mobile phones. For the distribution of the work, we used the XR-platform Meadow, developed by Untold Garden. Jakob Skote, who is co-founder of Untold Garden, participated in the project as creative technologist. In the early stages, Jakob and I explored different modes of multi-player functionality for the interactions, but in the end we did not include it, due to a combination of the outdoor conditions and the technical complexity of the multi-player aspect, which required extensive testing. To place the work in the landscape, we used GPS, and it is the same work that is placed at more than ten different locations.

The game mechanics – choreographic scores

The protocol for the work is a choreographic score with a number of characters that move around the individual audience member. The physical setup was a flat area of 8x8 metres, in which the audience could walk around freely. Via the phone, the audience would see and hear the characters appear, move across the space and disappear. The characters are always centred around the position of the individual audience member.

The characters, their sounds and aesthetics

The choice of characters was based on my impressions from the landscape, on the vehicles and animals I encountered most frequently in the area. In the early stages, we also had, for example an eagle, and a whole cow-family with a calf, and in the team we worked on the parameters, aesthetics, performative experience, and the capacity of the phones. We had to find a balance between enough activity to make it interesting, but not so much that the phone crashed for the user.

Water did not feature as a character in the work but was a constant inspiration for the aesthetics. The decision to let the shape of the figures be created through a particle cloud, like small floating dots and lines, and to allow the characters to 'walk through' the audience was inspired by the way water and wind flow through their surroundings. Sound artist Helena Persson contributed field recordings and we explored and tried out different sounds, for the environment as well as for each character. We strived to find a soundscape between a somewhat realistic sound, and a heightened experience of the performative world. Each character has their own sound, and you hear it when they get closer. In the experience, the sound was essential for locating the different characters. For example, you can hear the cow approaching you from behind, before you turn around and see it. The colour scheme for the work was also explored. I started with tones of rusty red but found that it at times it looked as if the characters were on fire, which gave a sense of catastrophe. That was not the intention. In the process, I worked closely with creative technologist Margot Edström to test different alternatives. In the end we used the colour scales of wild flowers that grow in meadows and next to the road in the area. These colours made the characters stand out from the background, and allowed for subtle variations.

Perspectives in critical art and game design practices

The 1, 2, 3 *Playtime* seminars opened up the question 'What if a mixed reality performance would be developed like a game is developed?' I was curious what a game design perspective could bring to the process. Lissa Holloway's seminar in November 2023 was a reminder of how feminist new materialist approaches and decolonial thinking are relevant positions for critical making, not only in art but also in games. To expand my working methods, I tried to apply a game design model presented by Thom Kiraly in April 2024, which describes the development process using the parts Mechanics, Game Play,

and Experience. In this model, you can never design the experience, only the setup and mechanics that create an experience, which is a view I share. However, while the term ‘mechanics’ was useful and brought clarity in our process, the concept of game play initially added confusion, and later made it clear that the work is not a game but an interactive immersive experience or even a sculpture. To discuss what is at stake in such a situation, I returned to the choreographic concepts of embodiment, relationality, site-specificity and choreographic scores, which enabled us to articulate what we were actually working on. It also highlighted that the framing and onboarding of the work is important, to set the expectations and sensibilities right from the start of the experience.

Onboarding

In preparation for finding the right tone for the onboarding, I read poetry by Karin Boye and Harry Martinsson. I wanted to find a tone that enabled the audience to enter the work with an expectation of sensorial visual poetry and interactive performance. In the work, the onboarding is a short voice-over that introduces the experience and how it works. Once it has started, the audience member doesn’t have to do anything on their phone, just watch, listen and walk around.

A new type of public art

Within us in the artistic team, and with the audience in mind, we had a lot of discussions about what to call this work, apart from ‘mixed reality’ and public art. It is not a game, and there are no levels to reach. But it is interactive, site-specific, and in the creation process we have combined composition strategies from performance, game design and digital art. The work is like a moving sculpture that never ends, it keeps on as long as you are in the experience. It is also a very choreographic mixed reality work. In the end, I described the work both as an interactive sculpture and as an interactive experience. This reminded me that even for new forms of public art, we could use established terms to describe the work.

3 min documentary film, produced by Sjöbo Konsthall: <https://vimeo.com/1011834809>

CREDITS

idea, concept and direction: Marika Hedemyr

creative technologist: Jakob Skote/Untold Garden

ass. creative technologist: Margot Edström/Inter Arts Center

sound: Helena Persson

technology developed by: Untold Garden

commissioned by: Sjöbo konsthall and Biosphere Reserve Storkriket

produced by: Sjöbo konsthall

curator: Kristina Buhrgard

presented at: Sjöbo Konsthall, Biosfärfestivalen, Sjöbo Kulturfest and Inter Arts Center (IAC) 2024.

length: 5–20 min. You can stay as long as you want in the experience.

premiere: 7 September 2024, at 10 locations in Skåne



Stanna så länge du vill

Med vind i håret (With the Wind in Our Hair), 2024. Mixed Reality. Screen view. Marika Hedemyr