

The ■
Virtual
Environment
Artwork

of

Jacquelyn Ford Morie



Pre-Virtual Environment Art

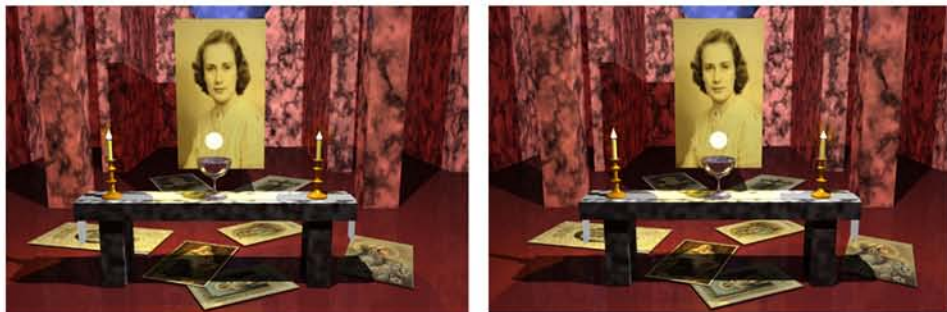


Statement

*I can take you to places
wonderous and serene
places
warmed by
a
sacred fire.*

Come within.

*Experience
intangible
memories that
may become yours.*



Altars of My Childhood 1990.

3D computer modeled environment shown as a stereo pair.
Predecessor of my virtual environments.

Pre-Virtual Environment Art

■ *From my beginnings as an artist, my work has always been created with the goal of evoking strong emotional responses from those who experience it.*

I wanted to wrap my work around the viewer, have it encompass them completely.

When virtual reality came along, I knew I had found my true medium. I could design the space, bring people inside and see what they did there.

I was always excited to see what the work would mean to them, what they brought to it, what I added, and what they took away.



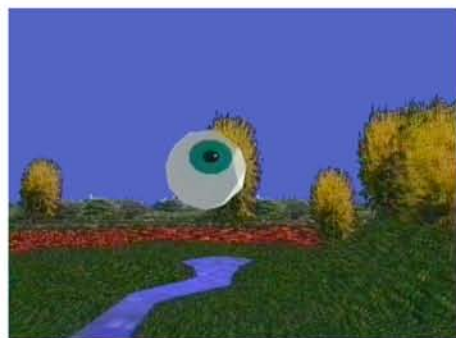
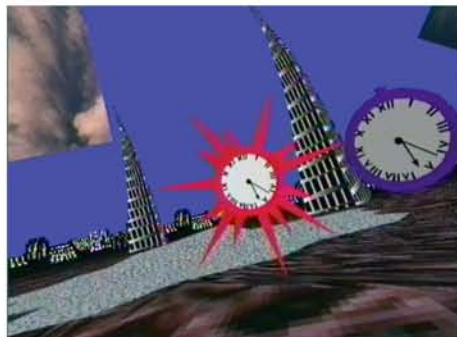
Forgotten Room 1987



Provincia Deanna 1996.

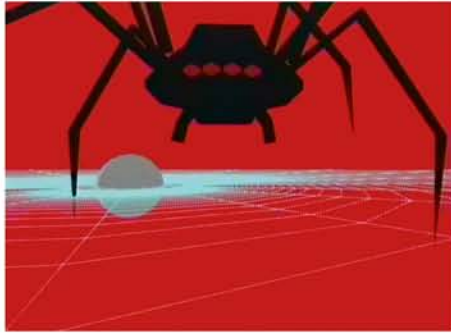
3D assemblages designed to bring one into the created environments.

Virtopia 1992–1994



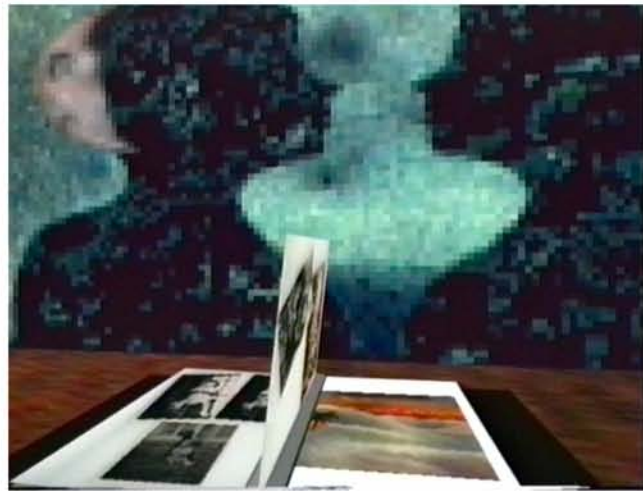
Virtopia consisted of several worlds one could visit.
Over a dozen were designed; five were fully implemented.
An endless desert interface connected them all,
Oases with colourful pools were portals to bedlam or peace.
In *Fang City* clocks clanged and buildings tore through the earth..
The eerie eyeball was the only way out.
The Endless Forest was filled with wraiths
singing in doleful chorus. They all fled when approached.

Virtopia



Spider World,
Crazy World,
anything can happen
through the portals.

Even a
Conversation Room
haunted by
sentences
spoken long ago.



Jacki Morie :: Mike Goslin
Creators

DarkCon 2001-2005



DarkCon was a virtual environment designed for cognitive realism. One was placed in a part of war-torn Eastern Europe and had to determine whether refugees or paramilitary forces had taken over a crumbling old mill complex along the river.

The countryside was sad and scarred, with landmines in every open field.



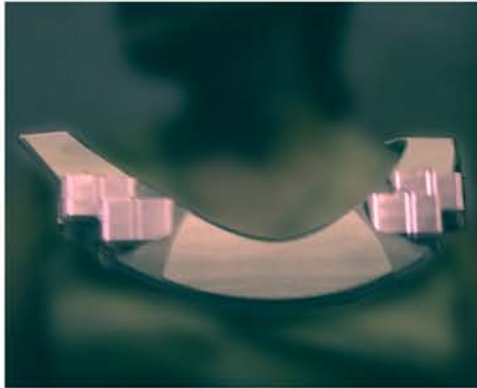
The journey started inside a dank culvert. Memories of a briefing, telling about the area and the mission, played on imaginary screens within the culvert tunnel.



DarkCon



DarkCon stimulated multiple senses with stereo images in a wide angle Head-Mounted Display, fully spatialized audio, scents from a custom-made scent collar, and passive haptics via a ten transducer infrasonic floor.



Scent collar prototype with four scent cartridges



Creating sounds for the environments with our own Foley stage



Rumble floor installed in the VR Theatre



Episodes in the environment were storyboarded before 3D modeling began.

SCENARIO DARKCON



DarkCon



Starting in the culvert, the experient makes her way to the outside and watches the traffic crossing the rickety bridge.



■ *DarkCon*

Inside



■ *DarkCon*

Outside



The Memory Stairs 2004-2007

The Memory Stairs' virtual environments allow experiencers to participate in the fragile spaces of remembrances. Stairs are a metaphor for life.

We rise up with each moment, each stage of a lived life.

The Memory Stairs experiences

The Embryonic Chamber

Just New

The Forgotten Rooms

Release



Memories are abstractions of real events.

Modified over time, remembered as we need them,
memories take on a life of their own.

They shift and evolve and often bear little resemblance
to the events that triggered them.

Memories are fragile, resilient, liquid and treasured,
not so much for what they are, but for what they represent—
idealized capsules of moments in space/time.

The Memory Stairs

The Embryonic Chamber



Noises and voices and dim shapes permeate the liquid world, but above all there is the constant beating of hearts, in synch with emotional influences of the external world passing wordlessly into the inner chamber.



The Memory Stairs

Just New



Your world is awash
with the scent of
baby powder.

Everyone smiles and
coos at you.



Your mother's face is soft, and she
smells like heaven.



The Memory Stairs

The Forgotten Rooms



The rooms are made of
memories,
old and still.
No one has walked these
floors in decades.



Even the smells are old.
Fires long extinguished
in the fireplace,
pipe tobacco, age.



Ghosts can be found,
playing,
watching,
remembering.



The clock ticks
so very slowly,
counting ages,
instead of seconds..

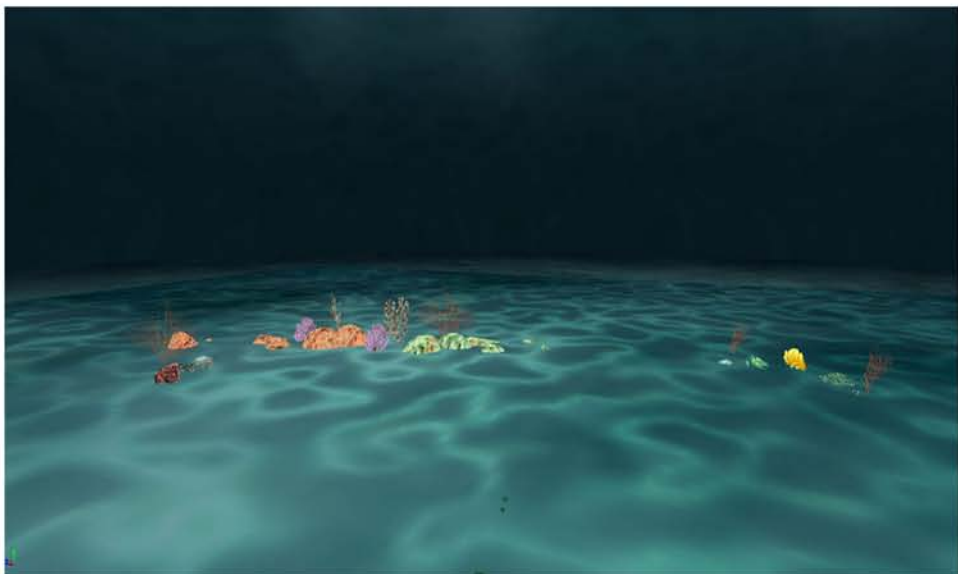
The Memory Stairs

■
Release

A vast bubble of dreams
A life written on the ocean floor
with delicate traceries of light.

I inhale the scent of the sea.

This dream is done.



The Memory Stairs

Concepts and installations

Initial design concept called for a custom spiral staircase the experient would ascend, with multiple screens showing the others in the installation space. what was being experienced..

Actual experience settings ultimately had to be very basic. Participants sat or stood through their traversals of The MemoryStairs.



The Memory Stairs

Participant Reactions 1

After their time in *The Memory Stairs*, experiencers often wanted to comment on one or more of the experiences. Many experiencers had previously experienced an immersive virtual environment (a consequence of travelling in technological astute circles), but as one experiencer stated “None as richly detailed.” The emotions related by the participants were most enlightening from an artistic standpoint.

Descriptive words for the first memory *The Embryonic Chamber* included: mysterious, scary—especially during the fighting, curiosity, tinge of fear (of the shadows), unease with bursts of calm, wonder about the blob-shaped figures, and sympathy.

For the *Just New* memory, people mentioned that it was pleasant, secure, safe, happy, slightly embarrassing, comforting, and nostalgic.

The Forgotten Rooms elicited the following comments: curiosity, wonder, desire to explore, safety, pleasure, warmth, frustrated at being enclosed (there was no way out of the room), and joy at being able to move (the first two environments did not permit movement).

The feelings of the final memory, *Release*, were expressed with the following words: unclear, mysterious, scary but sublime, distancing, slight fear or anxiety, pretty but the music was bothersome.

When asked to name or briefly describe each memory. For *The Embryonic Chamber*, the following designations were offered: dream memory, between waking and sleeping; pre-mind experience in utero—visceral infancy; womb experience; pre-birth; first days; birth/subconscious; womb-like blob with lots of outside noise from people; a reach-in planet; and womb conversations. The *Just New* answers to this question included: emerging world; I am playing with a different world; baby being looked on by family members; in the crib; safe and peaceful; baby state; baby box; and mental model of infancy.

The Forgotten Rooms brought forth these descriptions: the adult world, a child’s eye view of the adult world; visiting someone’s old house in the USA; ghosts in the room; home; grandparent’s house; exploring a family’s house; and mother’s home. Labels for *Release* included: time to go back; swamp; confusion; going back to the regular world; being in an underwater videogame; towards death; water world; underwater coral; and bottom of the pool—being a child in an adult world. I was pleased, in these descriptions, to see that for the most part people read the environments in ways that were coincident with my designs.



The Memory Stairs

Participant Reactions 2

Would these experiences connect to participants' own deep seated memories? One respondent said there were no specific memories triggered, but that all the memories "felt voyeuristic, as if sorting through someone else's papers." Here are a few of the other comments people shared, per memory.

The Embryonic Chamber: "While not a complete map, I was reminded of the fear/joy split of affect I experienced when very young." "Feeling of being half asleep and hearing/seeing people around me talking." "The sensation of being central to a personal space, but marginal to action as shared by others." "It brought back the experience of having very poor vision as a child; the blobby shapes were how I actually saw people then."

Just New: "The scale of adult faces when I was a child, how they would loom into view. Also the powerlessness as a child, how one can't control one's personal space so much."

The Forgotten Rooms: "This reminded me of experiences when I babysat and was able to wander through rooms in other people's houses." "The rooms reminded me of the wall-paper in my grandparents' house when I was young." "This reminded me of my grandparents' house, especially the old Time magazines."

Curiously, there were no triggered memories reported from the final experience, *Release*. Most people either did not smell the scents used, or were not consciously aware of them. Only two people said they smelled scents in experiences two and three, though, having been in the room with these experiences, I know the scent collar was working. I can only suggest that the scent perception happened at a lower level of consciousness, subsumed into the overall experience.

A few of the memorable moments recounted by the experiences included: "Being delighted by and laughing at the grandmother's baby talk." "Everyone seemed to be smiling and mean well for me." "I gasped when I saw the ghost children. I wanted to talk with them, but they vanished." "Getting to explore the old rooms was wonderful and I was curious about everything. I was a voyeur enjoying myself." In the final world one person commented: "The world had edges I couldn't move past."

Finally, this response, from a young woman who was experiencing virtual environments for the first time, delighted me for the sense of empowerment and agency it evoked in her:

*"When I wear the head mounted display
and move the controller, it seems
I operate the whole virtual environment."*



Memories of the Memory Stairs *Matrix installation at UEL*

For the University of East London showing I devised a different type of immersive experience. Videos from The Memory Stairs were rear-projected on large white silk panels like memories. Sounds and music played and a fan sent gentle ripples shivering through the silk curtains.

