

(English only
extract by
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AU-DELÀ DU PORTABLE L'art réalité augmentée

Augmented Reality Through the Mobile Looking Glass

If the Web is dead, as announced by "Wired" magazine in summer 2010, Augmented Reality (AR) is quickly rising from its ashes. Merging real and virtual worlds, engaging our senses and enhancing our perception in real time based on real space, AR offers a spectacular window into the nebulous Internet of Things.

The concept of Augmented Reality, a term coined by Boeing researcher Tom Caudell in 1992, may still conjure up science-fiction images of *Terminator* vision, *Iron Man* engineering, head-mounted displays and holograms. But today's mainstream AR is of the more intuitive point-and-shoot type, accessible to anyone with a high-end smartphone equipped with video camera, accelerometer, compass and GPS.

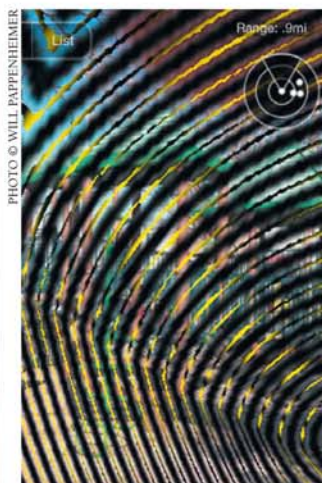
To experience augmented reality, first download a mobile AR app, select your augmented overlay, and point your handset in the desired direction. Then position it accordingly to find the nearest subway station, consult the market price of the apartment for sale across the street, look at a map without taking your eyes off the road, see where your friends are, study constellations over a cloudy sky, or shoot intangible zombies standing in your path.

INTERNET DES OBJETS' INTERNET OF THINGS

But sometimes it takes Art to question the true validity of the medium. While William Gibson predicted that the demilitarization of GPS coordinates would soon give way to civilian "geohacking", at 4pm on October 9, 2010, artists Mark Skwarek and Sander Veenhof collaboratively staged an AR "invasion" of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

The real buzz began with a tweet: MuseumModernArt "Nice, looks like we're having an 'uninvited' AR exhibition tomorrow! Part of @confluxfestival." MoMA's message was subsequently retweeted a total of 326,000 times within half an hour. *We AR in MoMA* challenges the museum's curatorial authority by hijacking its physical exhibition space to display open-sourced artwork. Through the Layar app, the now-permanent virtual exhibition displays works by more than 20 artists. So, to the question "But is it fine art?" participating artists can proudly reply: "We AR in MoMA" which, >>>

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De g. à dr.: Banksy « reconstruit » à New York par Sander Veenhof dans le cadre de l'intervention guerrilla en réalité augmentée « We AR in MoMA ». A Bushwick cet automne, « Hypnospiral » et « Farmville Swirl », de Will Pappenheimer.

From left to right: Banksy "re-enacted" by Sander Veenhof in New York during AR guerrilla intervention "We AR in MoMA". In Bushwick last autumn, "Hypnospiral" and "Farmville Swirl", by Will Pappenheimer.





PHOTO © PATRICK LICHTY



PHOTO © TAMIKO THIEL

A gauche : « Pod » de Patrick Lichty, à Bushwick, New York. (photomontage réalisé par l'artiste)
 A droite : « Eddie Murphy and Mae West - Return to Bushwick » de Tamiko Thiel, hommage au « Golconda » de René Magritte (photomontage réalisé par l'artiste).
 Left: "Pod", Patrick Lichty, in Bushwick, New York. (composite picture made by the artist).
 Right: "Eddie Murphy and Mae West - Return to Bushwick", Tamiko Thiel, tribute to René Magritte's "Golconda".

» in the insular art world proper, would confirm the answer to be an institutionally correct "Yes".

Among the highlights of the virtual show is Tamiko Thiel's *Art Critic Face Matrix*, a floating array of white faces with open mouths, which is opportunely juxtaposed with live screaming interpretations of Yoko Ono's 1961 *Voice piece for soprano* in the mezzanine.

Bruce Sterling's avatar lives and tweets in the lobby.

Veenhof's wandering sprite of British street artist Banksy hanging his own framed painting on the wall prompted visitors to "break all the rules" of viewing artworks only on their assigned floors. Instead, they positioned Banksy at resolutely off-the-wall angles in order to get the best contextual snapshot of him in action.

The proverbial elephant in the museum is Will Pappenheimer and John Craig Freeman's giant *Virta-Flaneurazine Bufo Toad*, a potential trigger for virtual psychotropic hallucinatory travel experiences.

"As the *Bufo toad* is also known as a pest that was introduced to control insect populations in Australia and Florida, it is also a pest in MoMA, reminding museum-goers that artwork might not just be physical," explains Pappenheimer.

One month later, Skwarek curated the *Bushwick Augmented Reality Intervention*, another ongoing exhibition, which includes some 30 artworks spread

out over several outdoor locations in the eponymous Brooklyn neighborhood.

Among them, Patrick Lichty's egg-shaped, Godzilla-like *Pod* dominates the rooftops; Nathan Shafer's *Aurora Borealis* (hosted by The Virtual Public Art Project) recreates the celestial greenish electrical phenomenon on the urban horizon; Skwarek's *Unicorns* populate the park; and Lily & Honglei's *flaming Great Firewall of China*, originally modelled for Second Life, suggests more potent statements about the invisible side effects of China's economic power in the real world.

Yet it's the playful floating works inspired by the simple pleasure of visual juxtaposition, such as Tamiko Thiel's ad hoc *Eddie Murphy and Mae West - Return to Bushwick* (itself an homage to Magritte's *Golconda*) and Will Pappenheimer's whimsical *Black Bats and Red Bats*, that remind us of the magic. When the ghosts are all around us, AR lets us see them, confirming their presence and validating their existence.

Even if these iPhone-framed hallucinations are still technically limited to static sprites for now, you can nonetheless approach the 3D renderings from a number of challenging angles as you move around them with your handset, and in some cases step through and inside them for a perhaps tinted, if not impishly twisted, view of your immediate environment. As with all the works, the images themselves may be little more than virtual icons of the concepts to which

they aspire. In reality, the Augmented Reality experience through a cell phone is still teething, as objects are often approximately lined up with architecture and topography, importing data into a live video feed drains battery life, and waiting for the AR browser to identify, render and update objects over a saturated wireless network is like waiting for an image-heavy Web page to load via dial-up connection in 1995.

However as AR technology improves, within a few more years we can expect specs that will include shape and face recognition, live media feeds, surround sound, floating video, dynamic objects positioned according to the time of day, and holograms that interact with us in real time.

Once AR is a household name, it won't be long before air-tagers and ad-spammers alike invade the space around us. Just as the creative, commercial and criminal potentials of the Internet exploded into the mainstream with the graphical interface of the Web browser on our personal computer, we now stand at the dawning enlightenment of Augmented Reality through the looking glass of our mobile phone.

Cherise Fong, New York

We AR in MoMA:
 <<http://www.sndrv.nl/moma/>>
 Bushwick Augmented Reality Intervention:
 <<http://bushwickarintervention.wordpress.com>>

• « Art Critic Face Matrix », de Tamiko Thiel, installation RA au MoMA à New York (ci-dessous et à gauche). "Art Critic Face Matrix", from Tamiko Thiel, AR installation in MoMA, New York (below and left).

« Chauves-souris noires et chauves-souris rouges », de Will Pappenheimer, à Bushwick. "Black Bats and Red Bats", by Will Pappenheimer, in Bushwick.

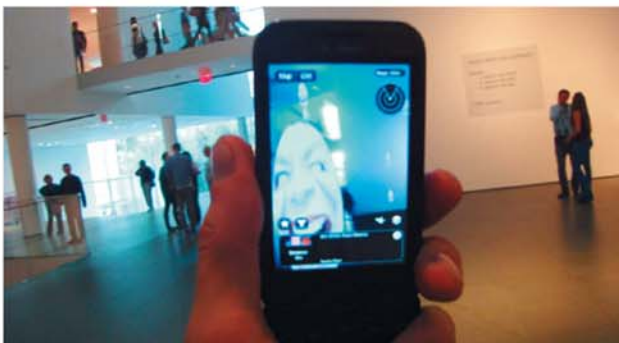


PHOTO © SANDER VEENHOF

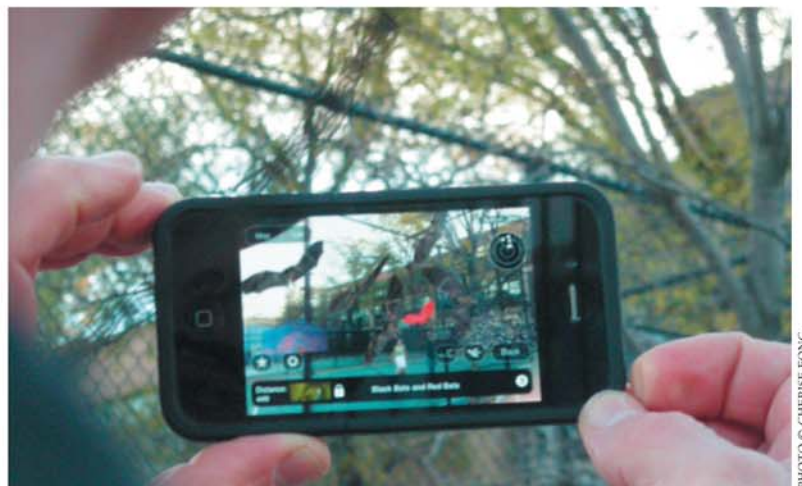


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