

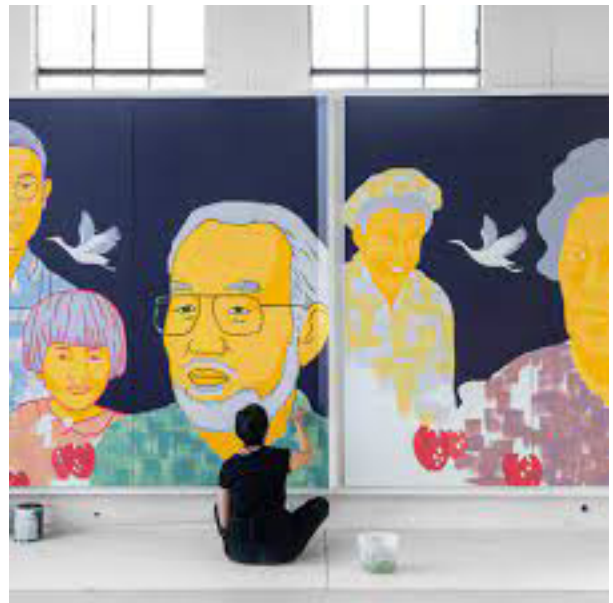
Tribeca Film Festival 2022 - “Immersive Exhibition” - Part II (Wendy Moscow)

Posted by unpaidfilmcritic

June 16, 2022. In our intro to **Tribeca Immersives (part 1)**, we spoke about how the immersive exhibition at the festival is one of our favorite things to cover. Here are three more immersives that are definitely worth your attention.

“Emerging Radiance: Honoring the Nikkei Farmers of Bellevue, WA”

Tani Ikeda and Michelle Kumata have created a lovely and moving tribute to a Japanese-American community in Bellevue, Washington whose members were forcibly taken from their homes during WWII by the U.S. government and incarcerated in concentration camps. After having transformed seemingly inarable land into thriving farms (land that had been clear-cut and abandoned by European settlers), everything they owned and worked for was lost. They had lived in Bellevue from 1920 to 1942.



A hand-painted AR mural comes to life as viewers aim their phones at individual portraits within the mural. The stories they tell (taken from digitally collected interviews) are heartbreaking but told with dignity and grace. Actual background footage from that place and time appears behind the drawn characters, and flying cranes provide final punctuation that beautifully raises up the narrative. Adding insult to injury, very few of the farmers were able to return after they were released, due to prejudice and racism.

As we were leaving, we were given packets of dwarf sugar peas, legacy seeds from those farmers who were displaced. Though most of us are aware of the shameful history of the internment camps, this project tells an important story within the story — helping us to see the human faces behind this very American tragedy.

“Zanzibar: Trouble in Paradise”

“Zanzibar...” is a holographic video that tells an inspiring, tragic, feminist story featuring two women, Blessyn Kure and Cynthia Kimora, who are full of joy, even though life had dealt them some losing cards. Searching for ways to become economically independent after stifling, patriarchal marriages in which they had no say, the women team up with others to collect and sell seaweed. Not wanting to spoil the narrative for those who want to see this presentation, suffice it to say that this project is a real-life ecological fable with consequences for both people and the environment. As directors Ashraki Mussa Machano and Steven-Charles Jaffe point out, the impact of both pollution and climate change have a disproportionate effect on those who did the least to cause them.

Though the story is compelling, the women wonderful, and the video beautifully shot (I love that drone sequence of the women walking in the seaweed “field”) the holographic technology did not seem to work that well. I stood where I was told to stand to be in the “sweet spot,” but I just barely saw the 3-D effect. Instead, I saw colorful rays emanating from the women’s bodies, which was an interesting effect in itself. Nevertheless, the presentation was eye-opening and insightful, and a story that needs to be told.

“The LGBTQ+ VR Museum”

The virtual environment that’s created in “The LGBTQ+ VR Museum” is so “real” that I felt as if I was examining objects and artwork in a modern architectural space, with an indoor gallery and an explorable exterior courtyard.

After settling in, I set about discovering the artifacts, paintings, photos and the narratives that give them context (we are given the choice of spoken word or text). The “visitor” learns about how leaving a copy of “Giovanni’s Room” by James Baldwin around the house was an attempt by one participant to come out to his family. A bowl of buttons with preferred pronouns speaks to the importance of one’s self-identity being acknowledged. A portrait in body paint and headdress expresses both queer and African pride. A VR headset, owned by director Antonia Forster, is emblematic of the path she has taken. In her narrative, she speaks about being estranged from members of her family. And this is just a small sample of what this virtual museum has to offer. While the prohibitions in an actual museum would forbid us from touching the exhibits, here we are invited to pick up these objects and turn them to see all sides. Not quite used to the operation of my virtual “hands,” I was continually dropping the essential artifacts of people’s lives, but magically, they would find their way back to their podiums.



For me, a highlight of “The LGBTQ+ VR Museum” was an enormous sculpture (the original is three tons of carved marble) of two embracing women in repose that is both peaceful and powerful. The first and only marriage equality monument, it was created by Patricia Cronin (of her and her now wife) years before marriage equality was law.

Museum visitors are hooked up to biometric sensors before they enter, and the color of their images on a screen change in response to what they are feeling — an interesting addition to the project. I was so excited by both the technology and the content that my stay was actually timed-out!

This project gives voice to the fierceness of pride, gently cradles stories that have not yet been heard and need to be lifted up, and embodies LGBTQ+ joy.

The Tribeca Immersive Exhibition is available until June 19th. For tickets, go to tribecafilm.com.