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From Augmented Reality to Immersive Experiences, Technology Is Rewiring Museums

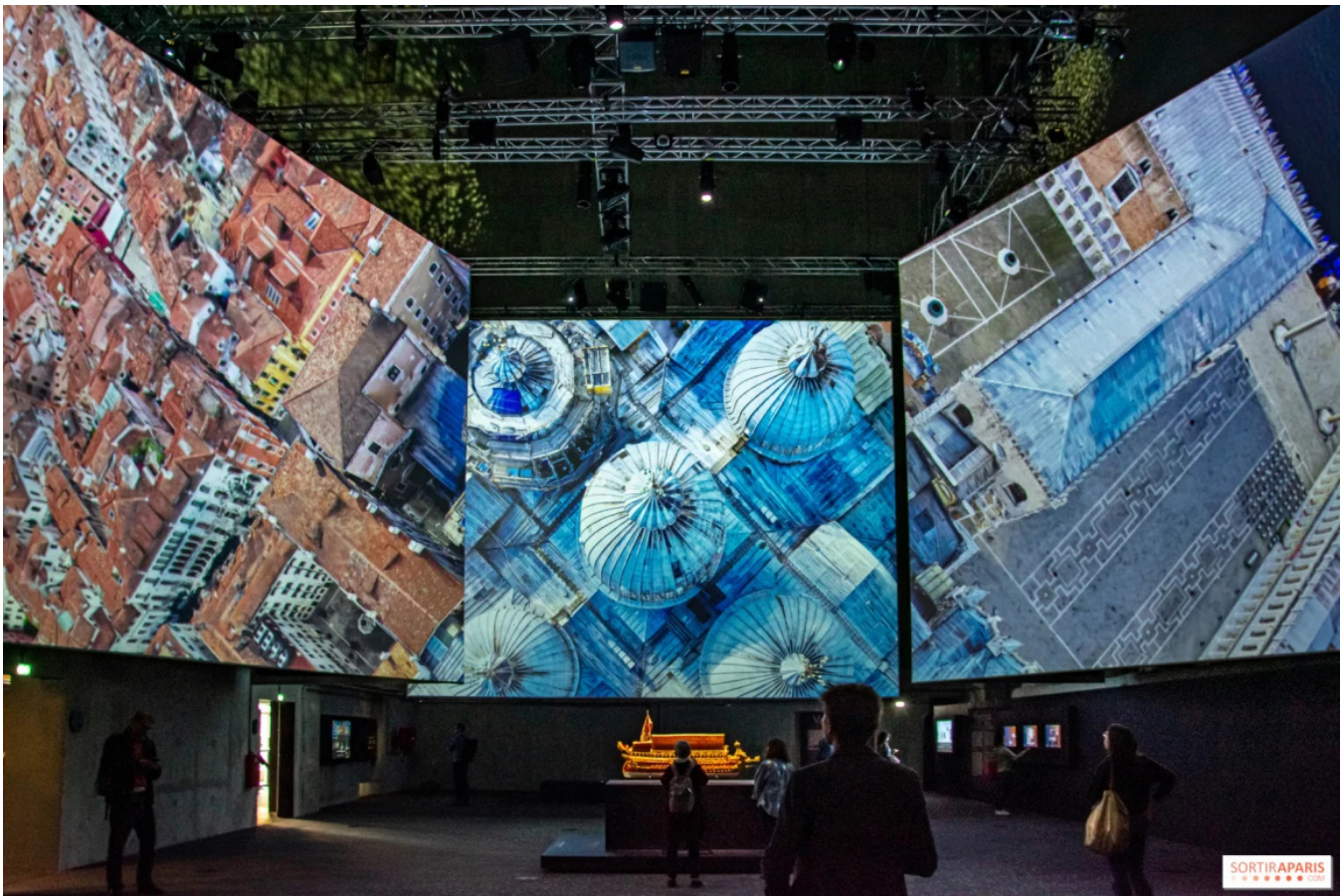
BY ALLYSSIA ALLEYNE | DEC 13, 2022

Art and technology writer Allyssia Alleyne explores the latest technology experiments taking place in the museum sector.

This past summer, visitors to London's Oxford Street Apple store saw 19th-century artist William Blake's creatures, such as the eagle-headed St John the Evangelist from his Dante drawings, appear in 3D in front of their eyes. It was part of an augmented reality (AR) project launched by LA's Getty Museum, Apple and the Australian artist and technologist duo Tin & Ed to generate buzz for the museum's 2023 Blake retrospective. Tin & Ed created the figures, applied them to motion capture, and choreographed their movements around a soundtrack by hip-hop producer Just Blaze, which was layered with Blake's poetry.

This project is one of the latest examples of museums growing their ambitions when it comes to embracing new technologies in their work. As in the case of Blake, technology can be used to make historical artists feel immediately relevant to our time. It is also creating opportunities to draw in entirely new types of visitor. Immersive art has been a growing trend with purpose-built museums such as L'Atelier de Lumières in Paris. Established public institutions have been experimenting for a while, too – for example, building video technology into their exhibitions, but recent openings suggest a turning point. When it reopens next year, the Grand Palais will be home to the Grand Palais Immersif, a space dedicated to immersive digital exhibitions,

speaking to a rising generation of digital natives in their mother tongue. (The museum held an early show on Mona Lisa at Marseille's Palais de la Bourse, for example, and its Venice Revealed exhibition – a 3D modelling of Venice – is currently on view at the Opéra Bastille.)



GRAND PALAIS IMMERSIF'S EXHIBITION VENICE REVEALED. © MAXIME CHERMAT POUR ICONEM-GPI, 2022

The pandemic proved a turning point for these developments in museums, accelerating digital archiving efforts and sparking a wave of online exhibitions, but even before then, digital experiments were on the rise. At its 2016 Pierre Chateau exhibition, for example, the Jewish Museum transported visitors to the French designer's historic Maison de Verre in Paris with virtual reality (VR) headsets.

Today, the potential of VR continues to grow, allowing for entirely new museums to be imagined where histories that have traditionally been excluded from institutional spaces can be shared. Such is the case with the newly launched [LGBTQ+ VR Museum](#), where visitors can walk through virtual halls filled with scans of donated personal artefacts and renderings of artworks, including a version of Patricia Cronin's marble marriage equality monument, *Memorial to a Marriage*, 2002.

Rather than diminishing the real-world experience, these tools are a means to enhance how we interact with works of art and the stories they represent. And, for the adventurous – museums and visitors alike – to forge new paths into unfamiliar territory.

MARQUEE IMAGE: UNITED VISIONS AT LONDON'S APPLE STORE. PHOTO COURTESY OF APPLE

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Allyssia Alleyne is a London-based writer and editor covering art, culture, tech and fashion. She writes for CNN, Wired UK, Vogue and more.

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