

ViMM

Thematic Area 2: Directions

Working Group 2.2: Meaningful Content vs. The Real World

Topics: media, interactivity, storytelling, real world vs. digital world, media characteristics

Modigliani VR Experience: The Ochre Atelier

Keywords

User interface design, user experience, wayfinding technology, art museum, 3D model, HD image, augmented reality, interactive real-time mapping, AR navigation, interaction design, MS Windows, HTC VIVE headset, user interaction, multimedia installation, interactive installation, interior wayfinding, cultural heritage, intergenerational learning, education, art&design, narrative, documentary, digital storytelling.

Abstract

The *Modigliani VR: The Ochre Atelier* reimagines Modigliani's final Parisian studio, where he lived and worked in the final months of his life in 1919 and 1920. The experience is a digital recreation of Modigliani's studio, which uses the actual studio space as a template. A previously undocumented space, the artist's studio has been brought back to life through more than 60 objects, artworks and materials.

Almost 100 years since the artist's death, one can hear the words of those who knew him best, explore where the artist lived and worked, and examine two of his artworks up-close.

Introduction

Step into Modigliani's final Parisian studio. During his short and eventful life, the Italian painter and sculptor developed a bold and recognisable style. In 1906 Modigliani moved to Paris. There he painted friends, writers, artists and creatives. Although these works achieved little success during the artist's lifetime, today they are some of the most well-known portraits of the twentieth century.

Modigliani's final studio still exists, but almost 100 years after the artist's death, its appearance has changed significantly. Through study of documentary material and of Modigliani's works themselves, the environment in which the artist made his last works is reimagined. In this VR experience you can immerse yourself in a virtual reality recreation of Modigliani's final studio, which uses the actual studio space as a template.

While visitor at the Tate Modern's Modigliani exhibition can experience the real artworks, sculptures, paintings and drawings, Modigliani VR experience takes the visitor to a whole new level of immersive experience. Using VIVE headset, user gets a real sense of environment, a feeling for details and an overall experience of Modigliani's working studio with representation of all the objects in 3D environment.

Developed by [Preloaded](#) for the Tate in partnership with Vive Studios, The Modigliani VR: The Ochre Atelier was experienced as part of the Modigliani exhibition at Tate Modern until 2

April 2018. The Modigliani VR is since December 2017 also available for download (payable app, price 2,54 EUR).

Description

Main objective

The *Modigliani VR: The Ochre Atelier digitaly* re-creates Modigliani's final Parisian studio. The interface (December 2017) is clean and intuitive and the way-finding map is highly responsive. Created in partnership with HTC Vive as part of its [Vive Arts programme](#), the Ochre Atelier transports visitors to artists final studio in Paris. Visitors can look around the studio – examining paintings, sketches and even Modigliani’s bed – while listening to audio commentary from experts at Tate and first-hand accounts from people who knew the artist. The experience aims to capture the feeling of being in the studio in 1919 (Modigliani died of tubercular meningitis aged 35 the following year).

There are no room-scale sensors or controllers, because *The Ochre Atelier*, as the experience is called, is designed to be accessible to everyone regardless of computing expertise. And at roughly 6-7 minutes long, it's also bite-size enough that every visitor to the exhibition can take a turn. Its length and complexity don't make it any less immersive though. The experience itself is, superficially, a tour of Modigliani's last studio space in Paris: a small, thin rectangular room a few floors above street level. “We wanted it to feel as if he had just left the room,” says Phil Stuart, Creative Director at Preloaded.

Description of the example

Characters:

- Lusia Czechowska, a close friend of Modigliani’s
- Hanka Zborowska, partner of Modigliani’s dealer Francis Carco, author, poet, journalist
- Paulette Jourdain, who sat for Modigliani as a teenager Nina Hamnett, artist, friend of Modigliani Charles-Albert Cingria, writer
- Thora Klinckowstrom, artist and sitter Nancy Ireson, Tate Curator
- Annette King, Tate Conservator

SETTING

- Paris, 1919–1920, Modigliani’s final studio, 8 rue de la Grande-Chaumière

Drawing directly on the work Modigliani made in this studio, archive records, and historical research, Modigliani VR brings this hitherto unseen, and unphotographed space meticulously back to life through 60+ objects, materials and artworks. Production team used archive materials, artefacts and photography to model Modigliani’s furniture, possessions and art materials in meticulous detail. It includes first-hand accounts from Modigliani’s friends, peers and sitters and incorporates them into the experience, offering visitors an immediate and intimate connection to the artist, almost 100 years after his death.

Two key pieces of artwork, including Modigliani's final self-portrait, were recreated in great detail by 3D modellers. This was done using Tate's technical research, in partnership with other galleries and lenders, and informed every detail, down to the layering of paint, and the specularly of the model and canvas stretcher.

The VR show is rich in detail, and it manages to convey a sense of biographical context for the artist by letting visitor inhabit his workshop for six or so minutes. It's a tad slight, however, and gestures towards Modigliani tumultuous life without going anywhere near the darker parts of that story. There are few traces, for example, of Jeanne Hébuterne – who threw herself from the fifth-floor window of her parent's home, a day after Modigliani's death, killing herself and her unborn child.

As a way of encouraging a new perspective on looking at the artist's' work – not only in terms of context but also in terms of peering close to the surface of his canvases – it is a big success. The experience does a good job of unhooking some preconceptions that come from seeing expensive works of art on plinths, like the damp ceiling or the empty sardine cans.

The experience is filled with evocative details. Smoke rises from a cigarette resting in an ashtray, water drips from a roof into a bucket on the floor and a fire gently burns in a furnace in the corner of the room. Users can also hear a neighbour playing music in the flat below. The aim is to create an experience that would appeal to the broadest possible audience – from teenagers who are familiar with apps and games to people who might never have tried VR before. There is no narrative as such – instead, the experience offers “a snapshot” of Modigliani's life at the time.

Interaction is limited – visitors are sat in a chair and can glance around the room to look at paintings or objects but they cannot touch things or walk around the space. This removed many of the complications that people often encounter when trying VR for the first time such as bumping into things or getting stuck in the corner of a room. Visitors are given clear instructions before the experience begins: a voiceover explains how to trigger audio by looking at objects and sets out what will happen next.

With thousands of people visiting the Tate each day and limited number of headsets available (9), Tate needed to create a brief experience that people could complete quickly – rather than one they might get lost in for 20 or 30 minutes. The experience is six minutes long and there is no way of getting stuck.

With additional availability through Viveport (<https://www.viveport.com/apps/64a94f1a-09eb-41b3-b251-d8de2b73b339>) users can now (and after the exhibition at Tate Modern closes) download Modigliani VR experience directly from internet (small fee applies) and experience the digital storytelling from the comfort of their homes.

It's an interesting example of how VR can be used in a gallery space and one of a series of projects funded by HTC Vive through Vive Arts.

How it was created

VR technology can take user back to a certain place or it can make you feel a certain way by putting you into almost the perspective of a person. What Tate and Preloaded wanted was to go back to Modigliani's specific moment in time (1919), create empathy with the artist and give context to his paintings by showing the physical location he was in.

Preloaded designed Modigliani's studio using first-hand accounts and photographs of the space. It was created to scale using measurements of the building (it is now a B&B that runs Modigliani-themed supper clubs). There are no photographs of the studio from the 1910s. Using the actual space as a template, as well as first-hand accounts, historical and technical research, Preloaded reconstructed the studio to accurately reflect the artist's living environment. Every object in the space – from a wine bottle to a matchbox and window fittings – was meticulously researched. Each object included in the experience has been carefully researched, validated by art historians and modelled authentically by the team at Preloaded. This includes the cans of sardines, the cigarette packet and even the way the windows would have opened to let the light in.

Production team also recreated two Modigliani paintings in VR using technical research compiled by three museums (Tate, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sao Paulo). This research provided a detailed analysis of paint thickness, brush patterns and colours used in the original paintings and allowed Preloaded to recreate both artworks – Jeanne Hebuterne 1919 and Self-Portrait 1919 – in great detail. (Visitors can see the real paintings up close in an adjoining room.)

Preloaded spent almost five months working with Tate's research and conservation teams to create the experience, while Tate and HTC discussed a project for about a year looking at where they could utilise VR within the gallery experience.

Team also spent around 16 weeks building the experience and tested it on over 100 people of varying ages and demographics, starting with just a sketch of interactions and testing out things producers think are going to work. After that the experience was moved into an alpha and a beta version. The project has gone through several iterations based on user feedback, with Preloaded conducting user testing at each stage of the process.

One of the key challenges with the project was creating a compelling experience without a narrative. The biggest challenge was trying to re-make a kind of still life (studio environment) and still make it interesting. This was achieved through moments of surprise – for example the sound of an instrument playing or the moment when a cloth falls off an easel to reveal Modigliani's final self-portrait. User starts off on a chair and is looking at an easel and thinking 'what's on that?' - and the easel doesn't reveal itself until the very end. It's about using little visual cues to make things interesting and trying to build an experience that's enticing.

Future Prospects

VR experiences had been created by museums and galleries before but Modigliani VR was to be one of the first VR experiences that is fully integrated into a wider exhibition, and not simply a standalone add-on. On one hand, the in-gallery audience would be completely new to VR (on average 45-65-year-old traditional museum-visitors) but on the other, the

experience is also available on [VIVEPORT](#) for those those who use and are familiar with the HTC VIVE hardware. The experience is accessible and enjoyable for both the art newcomer and the art connoisseur alike, and not assume any prior understanding of either the subject matter, or the technology.

While technology does attract a younger set, other new audiences are appearing too. According to Tate Modern, people in the technology industries have come to see the Modigliani exhibition for the high-quality virtual reality experience rather than the art. Digital strategies also attract tech sponsors.

As the speed of technology can clash with the slower pace and need for permanence in museums, Tate's Modigliani VR atelier foresees a move towards more informal, pop-up spaces where the technology can feed into the permanent spaces and allow them to be flexible. There will always be a role for physical space; virtual reality and the other tools simply expand it.

Conclusions

The design and interactive user experience combined with the high quality technical solutions makes Modigliani VR: The Ochre Studio a best practice case and could represent the future possibilities for European museums going towards digitalisation of cultural heritage. A collaborative creation between Tate Modern, Vive and Preloaded, Modigliani VR combines the latest VR technology, innovative design and user experience solutions, provided by Vive and Preloaded, with the collaboration of Tate Modern team. Preloaded collaborated with Tate Curatorial, Digital, Conservation, Installation, and AV teams to establish the core principles for the experience.

Advantages of the Modigliani VR could be counted as follows:

- VR experience, although highly innovative, still remains low threshold, promoting comfort and accessibility to all
- It creates empathy with Modigliani as a man we might have known
- Upholds authenticity, conceptually, and in detail
- Meets Tate's standards for intellectual rigour and accuracy and
- Is an experience users can't get any other way

Guided by these principles and informed by extensive research, designers came up with the central concept for the experience: a meticulous VR reimagining of the Parisian studio, where Modigliani lived and worked in the final months of his life.

Preloaded and Tate designed Modigliani VR to be an integral part of the exhibition at Tate Modern, complementing the artworks. The experience successfully immerses visitors in the last studio where Modigliani lived and worked – and recreates a place that cannot be visited in person. The experience offers a new angle on the artworks and characters that the visitor might have seen earlier in the exhibition, and crucially, it provides powerful context when visitors emerge into the last room of the exhibition, which contains Modigliani's final *Self Portrait*. Preloaded created a VR experience that enhances, rather than detracts from the

exhibition by understanding the visitor's journey, and how the experience relates to the rest of the show.

References

Links:

<http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/modigliani/modigliani-vr-ochre-atelier>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJ_NFvL9wpY

<https://preloaded.com/work/modiglianivr/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdYLscE6kE0>

<https://www.viveport.com/apps/64a94f1a-09eb-41b3-b251-d8de2b73b339>