A tree planted in cyberspace grows in real life

Naziha Mestaoui

Naziha Mestaoui is an Architect, urbanist and multimedia designer. She is co-founder of Electronic Shadow, a hybrid design platform. Her work are related to architecture and urbanism and digital technologies

"One Man One Tree" is an art installation, constructed from 15 kilometers of taut elastic wire meant to emulate a 3-D forest of light. When a user steps up, motion sensors follow them planting a tree in this forest, and it becomes a larger-than-life experience full of satisfying, glowing hyperbole. But once this tree is planted in the "game," a real tree is planted in real life, in a reforestation project.

"One Man One Tree" is an interactive installation by the artist duo Mestaoui Naziha and Yacine Aït Kaci, who under the name Electronic Shadow, multiplied since 2000 exhibitions, performances and innovative projects and received numerous international awards. This installation features several main concepts of the artists, the dreamlike beauty of nature, immersion in an imaginary, relationship between material and immaterial, combining them in an original approach for real interaction with society through concrete actions.

Indeed, the century that is started is under the sign of the responsibility of everyone with the legacy of threatened nature. Every bit helps to change behavior and attitudes and that is precisely what the art installation intends to stage by offering its audience to participate in collective virtual and real reforestation action.

The installation takes the form of an abstract volume of a forest of wires, whose shape plays with the perception of spectators that turn around. On this medium are projected images that change the appearance and plunge us into an imaginary world and poetic, a forest. Given this wide window on a parallel reality, Three white spots on the ground invite the public to enter the artwork.

By positioning itself for some time on one of the white dots in front of the installation, the visitor donated a few of his being the echo of which is a seed planted on the edge of the
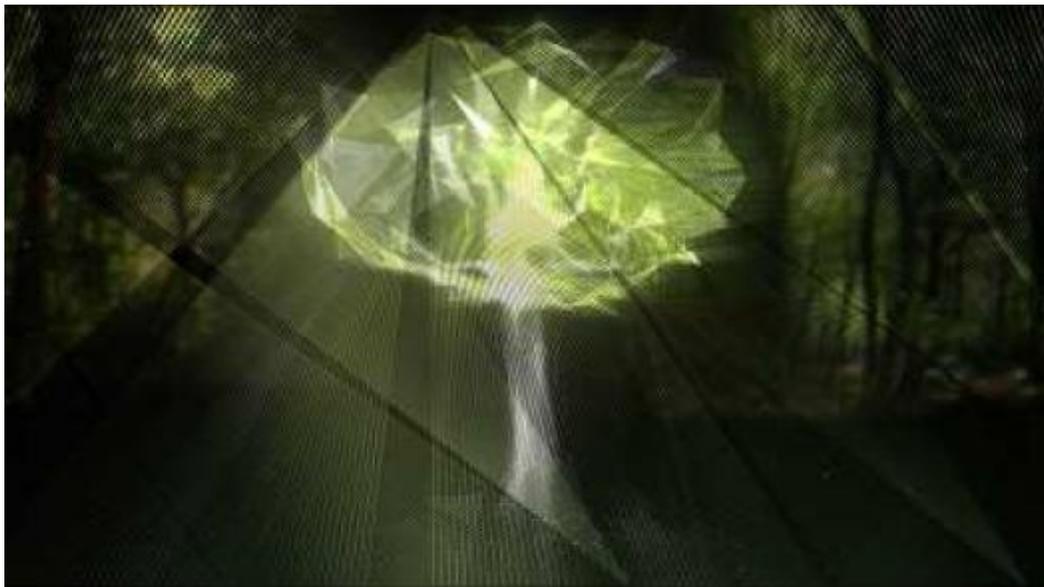
forest. A seed of light falls, a digital tree grows in front of its eyes, totally unique, time and place are recorded, a birth certificate. The tree takes a few minutes to grow out of the ground and is added to the population of the forest. Each visitor can make a tree out of the ground, his unique tree. This gradually growing forest can be seen by the public when no one interacts. The seed planted in the virtual universe is the beginning of a long journey since for each virtual tree generated a very real tree will be planted in the context of a reforestation project in Amazonia with the indigenous association *Apiwutxa* and the European foundation NatureRights.

A virtual seed is planted

A virtual tree grows

for each virtual tree, a real tree is planted

this takes place in selected reforestation projects

An association tracks the progress of the planted trees, keeping tabs on the newly formed forest up to a year after interacting with the installation

A link is made between the virtual tree and the phyical tree planted, and each visitor will be linked to the physical tree they planted, as they'll receive information about the plantation project and its evolution.

Through this symbolic system, visitors are encouraged to become aware of their power to change and the linkage between virtual and reality brings a new look at reality.

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The Inspiration for this project came after a long trip to the Amazonia, living with different tribes, this voyage developed a desire to continue the artistic process developed for 12 years now, using sensorial experiences to share concepts and propose different perspectives to the audience, projecting it in his own future, but this time to move the viewer's role into a much clearer role of actor.

Planting a tree is an essential symbolic action, and doing it through technology creates a kind of inversion, generating life through an immaterial object.

Making the visitors active through technology allows us to show that actions, even the most intangible ones have consequences (positive or negative). Our technologies are not necessarily contributing to develop a cold and abstract environment, it is somehow an extension of our mind, and can thus generate nature.

The trees are really physically planted and the link is created between the virtual tree of light and the real tree. These trees are planted in a very specific agroforestal system, combined with educational systems.

A feedback information is integrated in this project through the association NatureRights, allowing us to keep a link for each visitor between his unique virtual tree and the planted tree. During one year, each participant will follow the evolution of their trees, and the forest they contributed to create.

The aim of this project is to give the audience the envy to be responsible for our collective future, knowing that our imagination is tomorrow's reality.

Installation description

"One man one tree" is a 9m long by 2,3m high and 1,5m deep structure made of 15 km of elastic wires tensed in space. On this 3d volume made of hyperboloids, projections create a forest of light, and the different trees that appear as volumes. Three presence sensors are placed in front of the wire structure. A directional sound is placed above each sensor, to create a individual experience for each person contributing to the creation of this collective forest of light.

The installation can be seen from both sides. From «behind» an abstract volume of green enligted wires projects on the audience rays of light, giving the impression of being in a forest. When the visitors come in front of the installation, they discover a clear image of the virtual forest.

"One Man One Tree" in 2012

"One Man One Tree" was created in april 2012 and was already presented in diverse contexts contributed to several reforestation projects.

In Paris

The artpiece was exhibited at the Halle Freyssinet. The tree plantation was made in collaboration with the INSTITUTO TERRA, based in Brasil. The Intitute plants Atlantic Forest in the Minas Gerais, and the installation contributed to the plantation of 0,7 ha of protected forest with several hundred of species.

In Rio de Janeiro

"One Man One tree" was exhibited during the UN Summit, Rio+20 in the Fundiçao Progresso and in the subway station Carioca in the context of the Art Festival *Luz na Cidade*. The plantation project was made withe the native Amazonian Association *APIWUTXA* in collaboration with the European foundation Nature Rights, in charge of the feedback information and tracking system.

The *Apiwutxa* associations does tree plantation in complex agroforestal systems, reforesting devastated zones of the Amazonian forest. They also share their knowledge with different occidental scientists ans farmers through meeting and conferences in their Centre Beija-Flor .

On stage with Milton Nascimento

"One Man One Tree" was projected on stage during one of the closing Festival of Rio+20, featuring Milton Nascimento. For this special occassion, the audience was invited to plant trees on stage. Benki Ashanika, responsible of the *Apiwutxa* Foundation was invited on stage to present his association and the project.

Description of the material

3 computers - Core 2 duo, with graphic card Nvida 512M . PC under Window 7

3 videoprojectors 4500 lumens (min)

3 interactive sensors

3 directionnal sound sytems 1 global sound system

Colored Led light

DMX controller

Setup

3 days od setup for 2 persons

Symbolic action

Planted trees corresponding to the virtual trees (abiut 5€ per tree)