

PRESS KIT



MUSEUM OF SYMMETRY

Paloma Dawkins

2018 | 20 min

Virtual Reality



Selections and Awards



One-liner

An absurdist mind-and-body romp through the highest clouds to the ocean deep, ***Museum of Symmetry*** is the explosive feel-good alter-universe of cartoonist and animator Paloma Dawkins—a room-scale VR experience with 2D animation in a 3D playground.

Synopsis

“There are no rules here. Just enjoy.”

Part invitation, part dare, an impish game mistress welcomes you into a delightfully disorienting pleasure dome inspired by geometry and nature—and wired with infectious dance beats. What happens next feels like swimming through poetic rainbow juice.

An absurdist mind-and-body romp through the highest clouds to the ocean deep, ***Museum of Symmetry*** is the explosive feel-good alter-universe of cartoonist and animator Paloma Dawkins, produced by the National Film Board of Canada and brought to life by pioneer VR studio Casa Rara. A room-scale VR metaphor for life, it takes the player through landscapes of earth, fire, wind and water, where vivacious 2D characters live in a 3D playground. ***Museum of Symmetry*** disrupts conventional game storytelling to create an unexpected pleasure-positive trip in VR as never experienced before.

Gameplay

Grab your Vive headset and take a trip on a kaleidoscopic interactive joyride!

The game begins in a virtual museum. As you explore your surroundings, a gentle “psst” grabs your attention. You look around to see a pair of wild but friendly eyes peering out of the dark. You’re invited to follow and leave your fear behind...

A refreshing and uplifting burst of artistic expression that takes the player through earth, fire, wind and water, ***Museum of Symmetry*** disrupts conventional game storytelling to create an unexpected pleasure-positive trip through nature and self.

There are no time limits or dead ends, only possibilities and room for reflection. You can explore at your own pace—with some gentle nudging along the way.

Perhaps the biggest surprise is not what happens during the gameplay itself, but how you feel once you return to the real world.

About the Technology

***Museum of Symmetry** is the NFB Animation Studio's first foray into interactive VR. It sets out to test assumptions about "reality" versus "believability" in this powerful new medium. The goal was to offer the player a fantastical journey that is both emotional and physical, and to test the possibilities for suspending disbelief in VR. The decision to use hand-drawn 2D animation, which had never been seen previously in VR, was a conscious extension of this goal—to embrace a stylized reality from the imagination and pen of a talented artist. Here's a brief look at the key technology that brought this magic to life.*

The project was first developed as a 2D desktop game, using hand-drawn animation to take the player on a playful journey inspired by patterns and symmetry in nature. As the environments and characters took shape, it became increasingly apparent that, to have a cathartic experience, the player must embody the simulated environments. The NFB teamed up with then-budding VR upstart Casa Rara, a studio with expertise in AAA and empathic games and a desire to branch out into more unusual immersive experiences. The core concept was adapted for HTC Vive, which allowed the player to walk, hold and explore at their own pace. Immediately, Paloma's intuitive artistic language clicked with the form. Unnecessary game mechanics were trashed and the story was unburdened from typical narrative tropes.

The biggest challenge was figuring out how to make VR convincing with flat 2D animation. This had never been done before and posed fundamental hurdles, creatively and technologically. To respect Dawkins' unconventional stylistic choice, Casa Rara turned to the Unity game engine, widely used in creating 2D and 3D games. The team used the engine's VR Toolkit plugin; its quasi plug-and-play pre-built VR tools eliminated a sizeable chunk of the coding needed in order to incorporate specific elements into the gameplay.

Next was finding a way to bring depth to Dawkins' 2D cartoons, created with TVPaint animation software. This was largely done inside the Unity engine with script that turned the 2D sprite images into camera-facing billboards. This meant that no matter how the player moves around a 2D object in the 3D space, the object always faces the player. This creates the impression of being immersed in 2D decor without ever seeing objects from the side, which would break the illusion, like looking at the edge of a piece of paper. Casa Rara also experimented heavily with Shaders to adapt how 2D material would be rendered in the 3D environment. The result is a surprisingly seamless and beautiful design.

Museum of Symmetry runs on the HTC Vive VR headset and was launched in April 2018 at the A MAZE. 7th International Games and Playful Media Festival in Berlin.

Team

Paloma Dawkins

Writer, Director, Animator



Montreal-based Paloma Dawkins is a cartoonist and self-taught animator turned virtual-reality and video-game artist. Known for her fantastical landscapes inhabited by strange and lovable characters, Paloma strives to create games that are surreal and beautiful. Her past work includes the technicolour rainbow graphic novel *Summerland*, the minimalist and meditative rhythm game *ALEA*, and the psychedelic explorer game *Gardenarium*. She first came to work with the National Film Board of Canada through its Hothouse animation-mentorship program, which resulted in *Scientifq Piqniq*, an animated adventure through the cosmic unveiling of the beautiful and strange macro/micro structures that unite us with the Universe.

Paloma's most recent NFB project, *Museum of Symmetry*, is an "other-dimension" VR adventure game that disrupts conventional game storytelling to take players on an absurdist romp through the highest clouds and to the ocean deep.

Casa Rara Studio

Developer



Montreal-based Casa Rara studio creates meaningful VR experiences that attract wide audiences and make a positive impact. Its veteran team also lends its expertise to other creators working on their own VR projects. Over the years, the studio has worked on educational projects, interactive storytelling and VR game development, including the upcoming social simulation game *Earth 2*.

Led by co-founders Ruben Farris and Tali Goldstein, the Casa Rara team believes that the VR medium will change the world and the way society perceives videogames. Their games allow players to explore the complex aspects of the human experience from an inviting and fun perspective.

For *Museum of Symmetry*, the Casa Rara team drew from its collective VR know-how to achieve the complex task of bringing depth and realism to a 2D animated universe in a highly physical and immersive 3D environment.

Ashley Obscura

Co-writer

Photo : Tess Roby



Ashley Obscura is a Montreal-based Canadian-Mexican poet, editor and publisher whose work spans the spectrum from cosmic tweets and visually stimulating poetry to ambient sound art featuring her entrancing spoken word. She is the author of two poetry collections, *I Am Here* and the upcoming *Ambient Technology*, and the founder and managing editor of Metatron Press. Her poetry has been anthologized in Canada and the U.S. and translated and published in Spanish and Romanian. She has also has written four e-novellas: *How to Be a Rainbow*, *LIGHGHT*, *Aura Halo* and *Oh, Inverted Universe* (in collaboration with John Rogers). Her work values positivity and celebration, with a slight bent toward sexy metaphysics and pop mysticism.

Ashley co-wrote *Museum of Symmetry* with Paloma Dawkins.

Caila Thompson-Hannant

Composer



Caila Thompson-Hannant, a.k.a. Mozart's Sister, is a Montreal-based composer, musician and recording artist who largely credits her musical beginnings to being introduced to electropop by her uncle. After playing in offbeat art-rock bands like Shapes & Sizes, Miracle Fortress and Think About Life, Caila went solo as Mozart's Sister, an alt-pop project with aggressively bubbly synth-pop and unhinged vocals. She has performed at various festivals over the years, including SXSW and Pop Montreal.

Caila composed and performed the seductively hypnotic music in *Museum of Symmetry*.

Maral Mohammadian

Producer



Photo : NFB

Maral Mohammadian is a producer at the NFB's Animation Studio in Montreal, where she has made a number of award-winning shorts, including *I Am Here*, directed by internet sensation Eoin Duffy, and the innovative mixed-media film *The Weatherman and the Shadowboxer*, directed by Randall Okita. Through the NFB's internationally recognized Hothouse apprenticeship program, Maral has helped to develop some of Canada's top rising talents. In addition to animated films, she produces multimedia and interactive projects with a distinct artistic edge.

For *Museum of Symmetry*, Maral joined forces with Paloma Dawkins to capture the artist's wildly intuitive and visually stunning style in a fun and fully immersive VR experience.

Michael Fukushima

Executive Producer

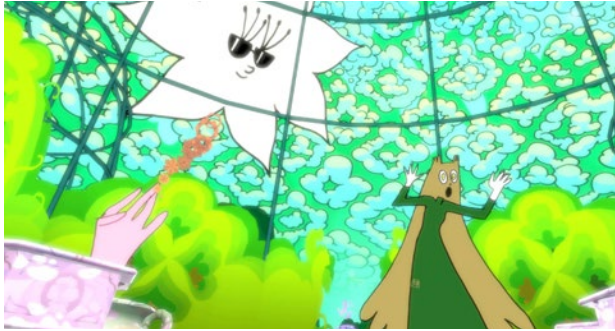


Photo : NFB

Michael Fukushima has been making films since 1984. He joined the NFB in 1990 to direct the animated documentary *Minoru: Memory of Exile* (1992), winner of the Hot Docs Best Short Documentary award. Michael became an NFB animation producer in 1997, co-founding the NFB's flagship emerging filmmaker program, Hothouse, in 2002 and was appointed executive producer of the NFB's fabled Animation Studio in 2013.

Some notable films in his filmography include Genie Award winner *cNote* (2004), by Chris Hinton; Shira Avni's animated documentary *Tying Your Own Shoes* (2009), which won the Golden Dove at DOK Leipzig and the prestigious NHK Japan Prize; *Muybridge's Strings* (2011), by Oscar®-nominated Japanese filmmaker Koji Yamamura; Oscar-nominated films *Sunday* (2011), by Patrick Doyon, and *Me and My Moulton* (2014), by Torill Kove; and, most recently, Cordell Barker's *If I Was God...* and Ann Marie Fleming's *Window Horses*. Michael now mostly produces the producers and offers up sagacity, but he continues to keep his hand in—this year, on the first short film in two decades by Oscar winners Alison Snowden and David Fine, and on Oscar winner Torill Kove's new film, *Threads*.

Images



Credits

Directed and Animated by
Paloma Dawkins

Written by
Ashley Obscura & Paloma Dawkins

Producer
Maral Mohammadian

Executive Producer
Michael Fukushima

Developer
CASA RARA STUDIO

Co-Creative Director
Ruben Farrus

Producer
Tali Goldstein

Lead Game Designer
Charlène Boutin

Technical Lead
Clement Linel

Lead 3D Artist
Eliott le Calvé

3D Artist Intern
Roomila Ramtuhol

Composer
Caila Thompson-Hannant

Sound Designer
Beatrix Moersch

Sound Effects Editor
Miguel Menchú

Voices

Desert of Dark
Sienna Mazzone as Peak

Cloud Forest
Alyson Leah as Dawn
Nicole Jones as Octa

Gaia's Garden
Kaoru Matsui as Gaia
Adam Capriolo as Torus
Valerie Mervis as Rococo

Metatron's Ocean
Adam Capriolo as Sappho

Voice Director
Simon Peacock

Voice-over Recordist
Geoffrey Mitchell

Technical Director
Eloi Champagne

Titles
Mélanie Bouchard

Quality Assurance
Keywords Studios

Administration
Victoire-Émilie Bessette
Rosalina Di Sario
Dominique Forget

Marketing
Tammy Peddle
Gabrielle Harvey

Marketing Coordinator
Stéphanie Quevillon

Thanks to
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Osman Zeki
Avalon Duhaime Pyott
Nicolas Barrière-Kucharski
Randall Finnerty

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Nabil Abdellouli
Saunier Alexandre
Louis Choinière
John Christou
Thomas Desrosiers
Leïla Essafi
Louis Fillion
Félix-Antoine Magnan
Raphaëlle Marcotte-Poulin
Jeanne Painchaud
Francis Sheridan Paré
Guillaume Perreault-Roy
Lily Polowin
Vincent Proulx
Avalon Duhaime Pyott
Philippe Roberge
Stefan Roman
Louis Sciannamblo
Tanya A. Short
Liron Stasyuk
Thomas Trepanier
Feliz Tupe

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and family that helped along the way.
Couldn't have done it without you.



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About the NFB

The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) produces groundbreaking animation at its studios in Montreal and at NFB centres across Canada, as well as via international co-productions with many of the world's leading auteur animators. The NFB is a leader in developing new approaches to stereoscopic 3D animation and animated content for new platforms. The NFB has created over 13,000 productions and won over 7,000 awards, with NFB animation accounting for 7 of the NFB's 12 Oscars, as well as 6 grand prizes at France's Annecy International Animated Film Festival, 4 Palmes d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and 2 Golden Bears at Berlinale. To access acclaimed NFB animation, visit **NFB.ca** or download its apps for mobile devices.

Electronic Documents

Press kit

Including promotional materials and trailer

<http://mediaspace.nfb.ca/epk/museumofsymmetry/>