

Venture into the metaverse on Venice Immersive Island

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This image released by Venice Immersive, the official immersive competition category of the Venice International Film Festival, shows an image from "Rencontre(s)," by Mathias Chelbourg. The program curated by Liz Rosenthal and Michel Reilhac runs from Sept. 1 through Sept. 10 and provides a hands-on glimpse into the future of storytelling. Credit: Venice Immersive via AP

At the Venice International Film Festival, virtual reality is only a small part of the immersive experience. On a small island just a short water shuttle ride from the main festival headquarters on the Lido,

festivalgoers can step into the metaverse. They can play games, or "world hop" with a tour guide, dress up in costume with background dancers, or even help Coco Chanel develop her Chanel No. 5 perfume.

The program curated by Liz Rosenthal and Michel Reilhac runs from Sept. 1 through Sept. 10 and provides a hands-on glimpse into the future of storytelling.

"It's the biggest edition we have ever done," Rosenthal said.

The forms have also evolved in the past two years when the Venice virtual program had to go virtual itself. So for this grand return to the Lazzaretto Vecchio, they've also given the program a new, more inclusive name: Venice Immersive.

"We wanted to refocus on how quickly the field is diversifying," Reilhac said. "We did not want to focus on one technology like VR, but to try to represent all kinds of different ways of offering an [immersive experience](#)."

Of the 43 projects, only some require a VR headset. Some are massive 360-degree installations and others offer a hybrid "mixed reality."

One of their most ambitious undertakings has been committing to giving tours of virtual worlds to small groups. Worlds is a general term that essentially means a space where people can gather virtually—it can be a beach, a forest, a fantastical science fiction space. In the worlds, you can just hang out, or do activities like play mini golf or even train dogs, Reilhac explained. Like many things in Venice Immersive, the worlds, and world-hopping is something best experienced.

"Framerate: Pulse of the Earth," is one of the multi-screen installations on display that the curators said show the potential of this art form. The

project is focused on changing landscapes and made with 3D scanning technology.



This image released by Venice Immersive, the official immersive competition category of the Venice International Film Festival, shows an image from "Framerate: Pulse of the Earth" by Matthew Shaw and William Trossell. The program curated by Liz Rosenthal and Michel Reilhac runs from Sept. 1 through Sept. 10 and provides a hands-on glimpse into the future of storytelling. Credit: Venice Immersive via AP

"We're aiming to reveal alterations to the planet that are caused by nature and that are also caused by human centered industries," said "Framerate" director Matthew Shaw. "We see sites of destruction, extraction, habitation, we see harvests, we see growth, and we see erosion."

To experience "Framerate," audiences enter a dark room where they're surrounded by screens that act as "holographic portals" into vast scenes, like a 200-foot cliff eroding and crumbling into the sea over a year or a forest transforming across 12 months. You can stand anywhere in the room, move about and choose what to focus on, whether it's the cliff or a single pebble.

The team working on the project captured these scenes in Norfolk and Glasgow, where they filmed daily for a year. It wasn't, Shaw said, just someone setting up a camera and tripod and leaving it to film. And it required a fair amount of R&D and innovation to make it happen.

"We don't just make art works," Shaw said. "We build the tools to make them work as well. It wasn't just can we 3D scan something on the scale of the landscape, but can we scan it while it moves?"

Shaw is just one of the pioneers of the new immersive art forms on display at the festival. Another high-profile project is Mathias Chelebourg's "Rencontre(s)," featuring the voice of Marion Cotillard. The "multi-sensory haptic experience" invites you to step into the perfumer's shoes in 1921 when Gabrielle Chanel met Ernest Beaux and they created Chanel No. 5. There's also an interactive VR game set in 1920s England inspired by the [television show](#) "Peaky Blinders" called "Peaky Blinders: The King's Ransom" that features Cillian Murphy's voice as well. Others are more serious, like "Stay Alive My Son," in which the player steps into the shoes of a Cambodian genocide survivor.

Both Reilhac and Rosenthal hope that cinema lovers at the festival venture over to Immersive Island to try out some of the experiences.

"There's no other A-list festival in the world that has committed so much to representing immersive as a new art form," Reilhac said. "By juxtaposing immersive arts with prestigious feature films, we elevate the

perception of immersive arts as a true art form and not just a technological gimmick."

At the moment, "there is no real market for immersive arts," Reilhac said. The creators at Venice are doing it out of passion and curiosity. But he thinks that could change.

"It's the birth of a new art form and possibly a new industry," he said.

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