

Duchampiana

An experience by Lilian Hess



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produced by

TCHIKI
BOUM

myndstorm productions

with the support of



medienboard
BerlinBrandenburg

FFF Bayern

in partnership with

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Introduction

A boundary pushing artistic VR experience which uses body movement as the mechanism that drives the story forward.

Questioning the perpetually objectifying representation of women across the ages, this artistic VR installation enlivens Duchamp's famous "Nude Descending A Staircase No. 2" and enables its protagonist to drastically change her course. A story about a woman reclaiming her body, which culminates in a sensory celebration of sisterhood and allyship.

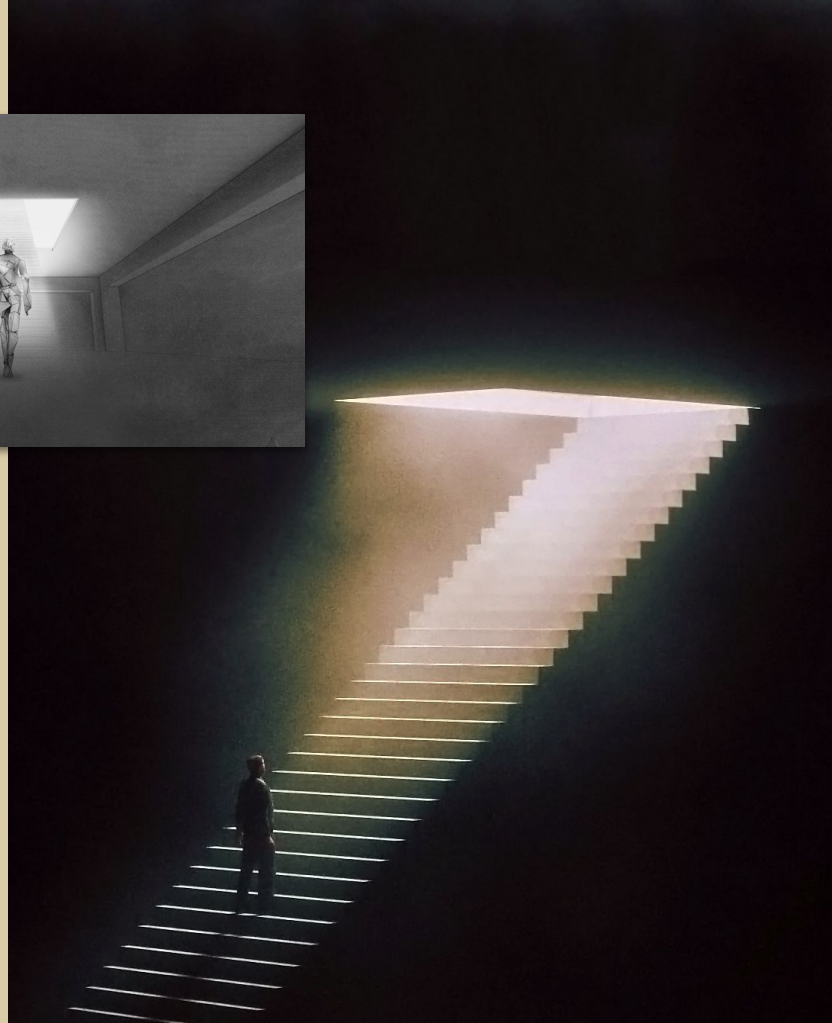


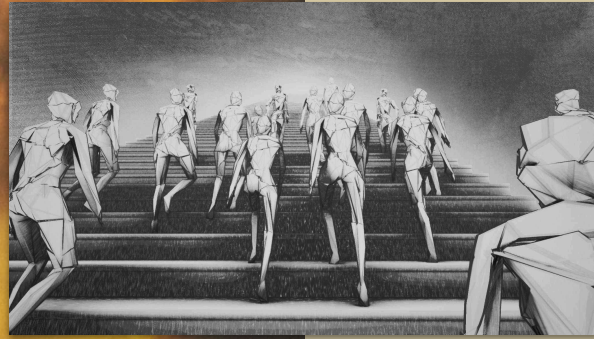


The Journey

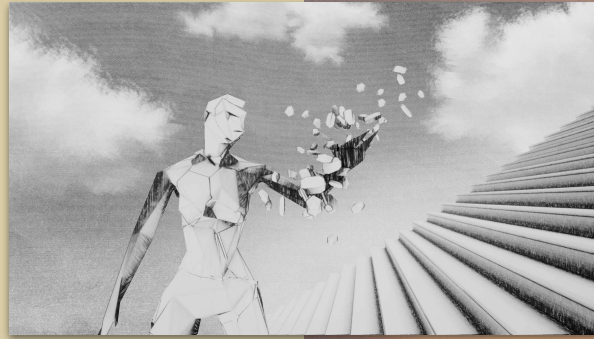


We encounter the majestic figure of Duchampiana inside a dim concrete cube, humming with mysterious whispers. Her limbs are an assembly of geometrical shapes: cylinders, cones, spheres, crowned with a trapeze-like head. An infinite staircase leads up through an opening in the ceiling, the only source of light in the space. After a moment of reckoning, Duchampiana invites us to join her on her daunting journey into the unknown.

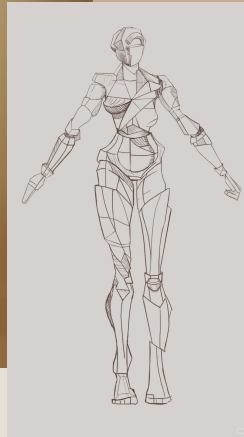




Our progression up the infinite staircase is marked by cathartic changes in light and weather, which shift the emotional tone of the piece from a dark disposition to an ever more positive state of mind. As we follow Duchampiana we are increasingly enveloped by a growing crowd of bodies. An eclectic drumming partition accentuates our stride. A powerful feeling of community arises between our many limbs and legs as we climb together, marching to the rhythm of the drums.



Breaking through a final layer of pink and orange clouds this company of many comes to a halt. The drumming stops and all we hear is the sound of a soft breeze caressing our bodies. An eerie, lo-fi score fills the vastness of the sky, as Duchampiana's cubist body disintegrates and enters our torso - the gift of her energy and spirit to carry on within ourselves.



The design

Characters

Duchampiana's appearance is reminiscent of an ancient spiritual warrior; an assemblage of individual pieces, integrated to serve a larger organism that is at once mechanical, yet organic. Operating within the colour palette of the original painting, her body parts will appear to be made from rusty steel, wood, copper, etc. The "army" of women surrounding the experiencer, as well as the experiencer's own body, will be designed in this same aesthetic - though stripped of complexity - to allow Duchampiana to visually stand out.



The design



Environment

In contrast to its abstractly artistic characters, the world of *Duchampiana* takes inspiration from the uncanny hyperrealism of a futuristic world, such as that of *Blade Runner 2049* and *Dune*. Stripped to its bare narrative necessities, the world features three visual elements: the concrete cube, the infinite staircase, and an ever evolving panoramic skyscape.

The infinite staircase is an impossible sight, revealed after a moment of rebirth as *Duchampiana* breaks out of the murky cube into an open sky. A narrow two metres in width, it is designed to induce the experimenter with the invigorating tingle of vertigo, excitement, and awe.



The design

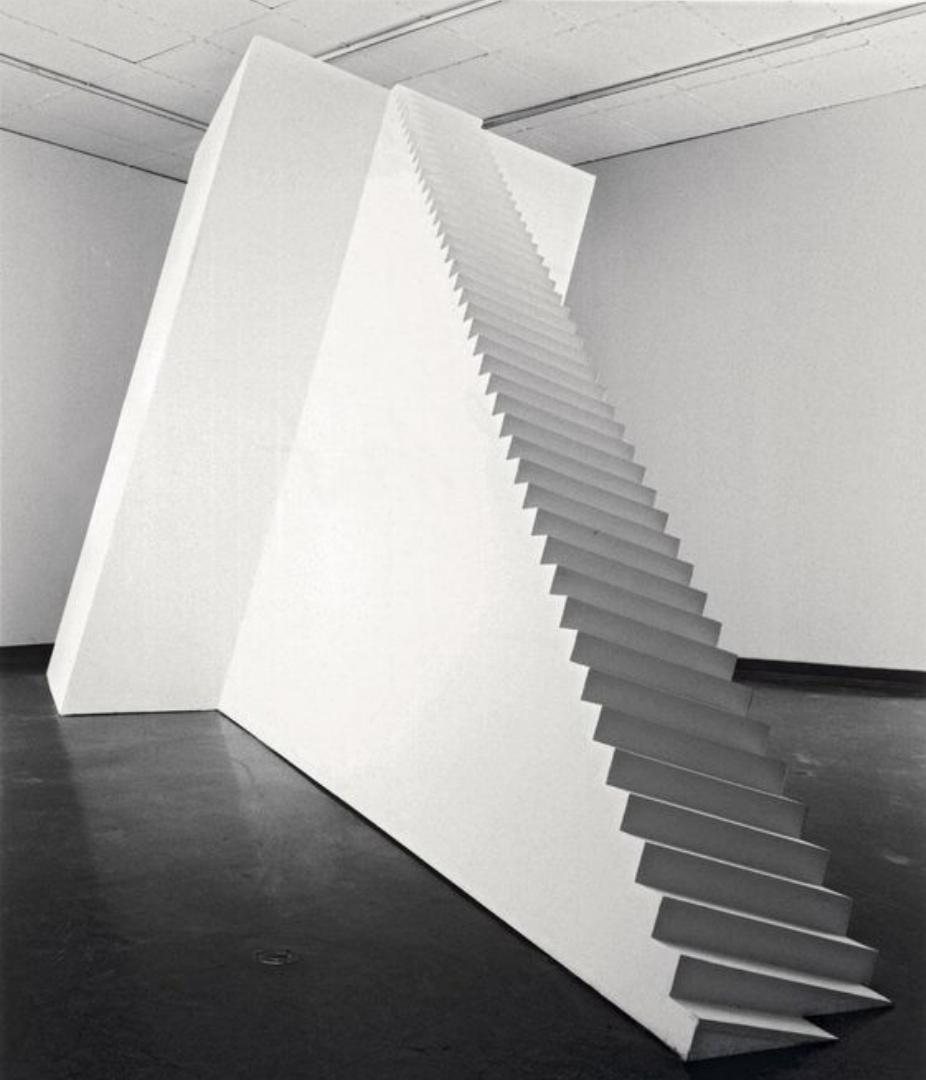
... Sound

The defining feature of the *Duchampiana* soundscape is an ever evolving complex drum partition. In the beginning of the piece, it appears as if the drums occur only to punctuate Duchampiana's walk. Further up the infinite staircase, along with the growing presence of the crowd, the drumming occurs more frequently and eventually develops into an invigorating rhythm. Towards the end of the experience, an electronically produced symphonic melody trails off into the vast open skyscape, concluding the experience on a dreamy note. The melancholic yet hopeful sound of an imagined future. Foley sound, being the interactive part of the soundscape, will focus on weather, ambient sound effects, footsteps and bodies in motion.

[Inspirational Playlist](#)

“A story based on movement.”

Mentor, Biennale VR College, 2021



Director's Statement

Descending and ascending are poetically charged motions. While the descent bears the symbolism of retreat, a journey into the unconscious, or to hell, the ascent is associated with awakening, rebirth, a journey towards light, and freedom.

I am fascinated with how the spaces framing and guiding our movement carry meaning, and how this meaning in return impacts our movement, and the way we inhabit space. It's a dynamic which is being revisited repeatedly in feminist discourse, for Woman's place is not a given, but requires to be laboriously claimed ever anew.

While reversing Duchampiana's journey down the infinite staircase is my commentary on Woman reclaiming her body, it is in the realm of poetics that the audience experiences this story. Thriving on the visceral power of light, sound and movement, I intend to create an emotional experience that leaves the viewer in a state of reflection; confronted with questions, the answering of which may change them irreversibly.

User Experience

Movement is the core driver of this experience, both in terms of its narrative and the user interaction. The LBE features an electric stair climber on which the user is on and off boarded, and which facilitates the key interaction: the climb.

Presented within the context of a multi-media art installation, the visitor can choose their own journey depending on their level of comfort and familiarity with VR. The fully interactive version features the stair climber, while an alternative version offers interaction with controllers in either a seated or standing mode.

The physical art installation features a built stair structure housing the climber, while offering visitors a space to sit and immerse themselves within the artist's projection art and an accompanying print publication, both ruminating on the core motif of Women Descending Stairs.

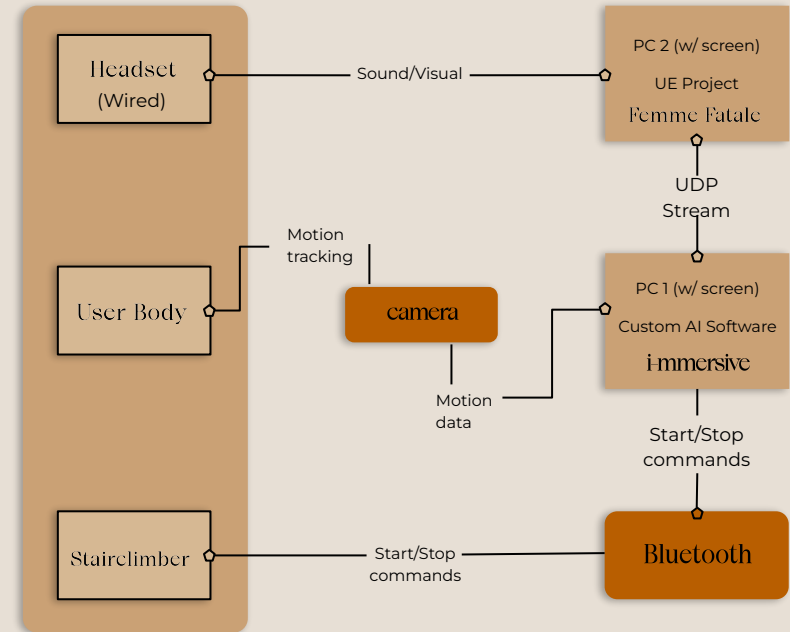


Tech Set-Up

To fulfil the director's artistic ambitions for the visuals inside the *Duchampiana* experience, the piece will be developed within Unreal Engine, which is known for its superior visual rendering quality. For the piece's key interaction on the stair climber, it is necessary to track the visitor's movement as they climb. To facilitate this, we have gathered a team of talented programmers and creative technologists who have come up with a highly innovative tech concept.

In our current set up, the user's body will be tracked via a camera, both to visualise their virtual body in the headset, as well as track their walking behaviour. A custom AI-based Software - developed by our partners at i-mmersive - then translates the data captured by the camera and sends it to Unreal Engine. This means that it is possible to determine when the user stops or starts to walk, and stop or start the visual progression within the headset accordingly. In order to create a truly seamless experience, we are currently researching a communication toolkit to start and stop the stairclimber directly from the setup as well, e.g. via Bluetooth Fitness Machine Profile 1.0. We would like to exchange further with Technogym's technology department on this possibility.

Ultimately, this technological set up will open up a large range of other possibilities to develop immersive applications and games for Technogym fitness devices.





Note on Production

Duchampiana is positioned as a location-based VR experience in the art space. Tchikiboum (FR) brings aboard artistically established studio Femme Fatale (*Cenotaph for Newton, Notes On Blindness*), while mYndstorm productions (DE) has been able to establish a collaboration with technical solutions experts i-mmersive. The fact that both production companies are specialised in artistic location based experiences, and both hold close connections to relevant high profile venues, is an invaluable asset to the project and streamlines its distribution process.

Duchampiana has already made waves across the XR industry and beyond. The piece was selected for two prestigious workshops (Biennale VR College 2021, Berlinale Talents Short Form Station 2022), has been nominated for the first edition of the [Immersive Creators Catalyst](#) (WIIT x Meta), has been invited to pitch at five international markets (Venice Production Bridge, IFM VR Days, IFFR Cinemart, EFM Berlin, New Images), was awarded the [4DR Studios Award](#), and has received a mention in [VARIETY](#). This attention has allowed us to remain in close contact with select venues where we envision *Duchampiana* to be exhibited after its initial festival run. We hold LOIs from the Phi Centre in Montreal, the EYE in Amsterdam, and the Institute for Scalalogy in Regensburg.



The Infinite, Phi Centre, photo by Sean Mollitt



References for the *Duchampiana* installation design

Distribution

Presented as an elegantly designed art installation, *Duchampiana* attracts an audience of art and design lovers, new tech enthusiasts, and those with an appetite for stories with a positive and motivational message. The intention is to build an early social media following throughout the Beta testing phase, at which stage we also consider to involve celebrity ambassadors such as Caster Semenya, Malaika Mihambo, or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

The piece will reach the public via international film and art festivals such as Venice Immersive or Tribeca, and will be showcased in museums and art venues such as the Phi Centre Montreal, EYE institute Amsterdam, Ars Electronica Linz, and the Barbican London - some of which we are in close contact with already.

The Director

Lilian Hess is an independent artist based between Berlin and London. A documentarist at heart and former scholar of Modern Literature and Surrealism, Lilian works across film, photography, audio and immersive formats. Her work predominantly explores the politics of the body and personal histories, and has been exhibited at festivals across Europe and the US. Having made a name for herself as an accomplished XR producer ([Cosmos Within Us](#), [Off The Record](#), [Haunted Hotel](#)), *Duchampiana* is her directorial debut in the immersive field. Her most recent feature documentary *Observations at 65° South* was acquired by Netflix in October 2022.

Relevant directorial work:

Movements, AR game, in development w/ [SWM](#) and [DC](#)

[Dreamdancer](#), immersive short film, 7', 2021

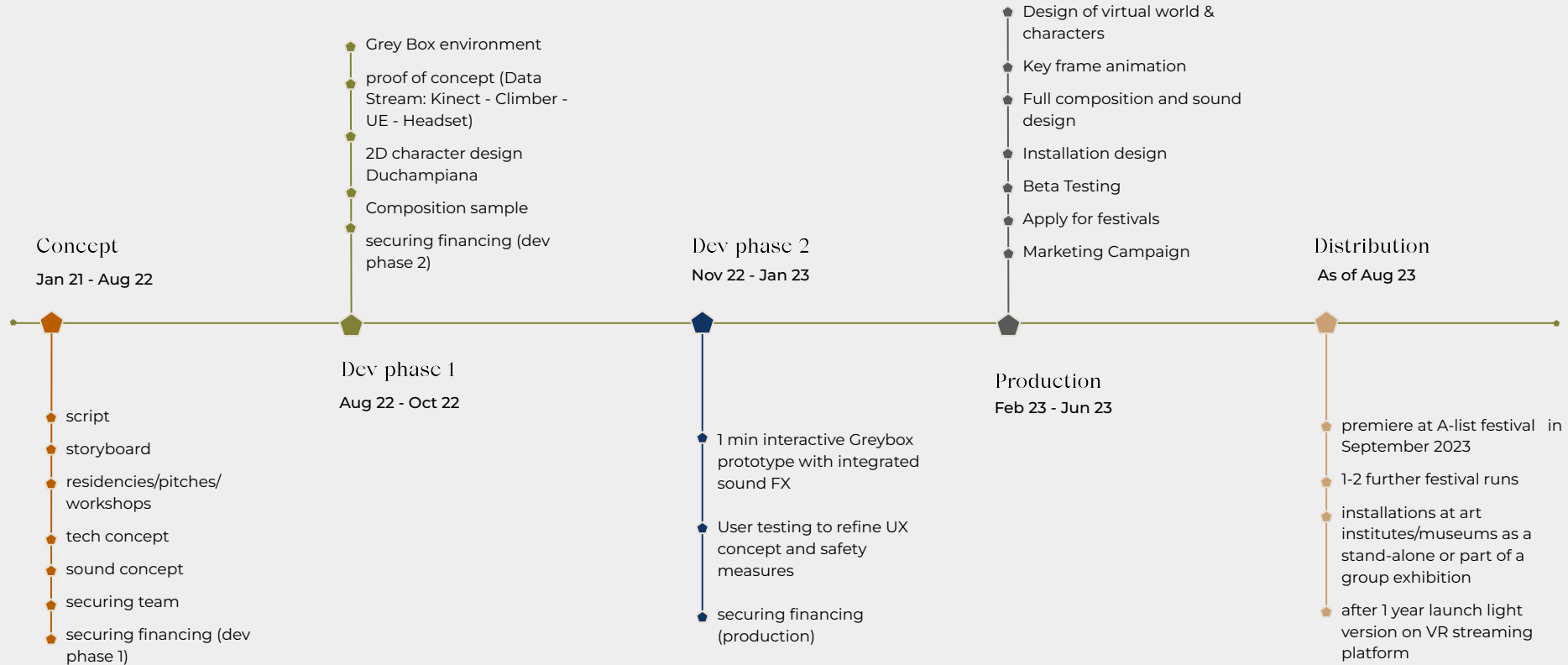
[Observations at 65° South](#), documentary feature, 68', 2021

[Lockdown 2 Lockdown](#), documentary short, 6', 2020

[Revising Anneliese](#), documentary short, 18', 2017



The Timeline



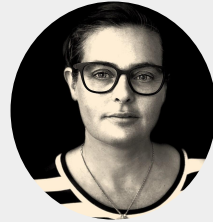
The Team



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Interaction Design and AI
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Thank you

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