



UNESCO Creative Cities Co-Creation Programme:
City to City 2021: Play! (inc. Event Report/Interview)



City to City 2021's Theme: "Play!"

We are all hopeful for the return of those playful everyday interactions that were lost amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.



Could we use our creative talent to rebuild our cities, and the interactions and communities they generate, for the better? Could we envision a future that is more equal and sustainable than ever before? Could we use human technology to learn how to "play" once more?

Following an open call for proposals about pieces based on these questions, Miyuki Oka was selected as the artist representing Sapporo City in July 2021.



After a total of four workshops held over the summer, the 14 artists were divided into five teams. Oka teamed up with artist Mauricio Díaz from Cali (Colombia) and artist Yilin Wang from Changsha (China), their online collaboration beginning in September.

The AR programme & video production "The Portal" was completed in January 2022 after approximately four months of work.

Summary of Collaboration Piece “The Portal”

“Whilst respectively living in Cali, Changsha, and Sapporo, we created "The Portal" via the means of sharing our imagination in a social context where not being able to physically meet was a challenge. We broke up one virtual space into pieces by dispersing it into each city, and then made it virtual again through recordings.



Viewers can access the same Portal in the online exhibition. The virtual content leads to the ability to imagine different places.”

How to Enjoy “The Portal”

"The Portal" is listed on the UNESCO Cities of Media Arts shared website.

<https://mediaartscities.com/city-to-city-2021/portal/> (External link)

A web browser with internet connection is required in order to view the video production.



To experience the AR content, a device such as a smartphone or tablet with a camera and Chrome/Safari capability is required.

Miyuki Oka's Interview

Miyuki Oka is a current artist who works with machinery alongside natural materials.

The artist participated in the City to City 2021 programme for approximately seven months from the time she was selected as the artist representing Sapporo City until the unveiling of their completed work.

We interviewed Oka, who had just completed the lengthy programme, on her thoughts regarding her participation and anecdotes pertaining to the creation of their work.

First of all, we'd like to ask you how the teams were decided. In the second summer workshop, all 14 artists were divided into five teams. We heard you used the "ghost leg" system. How do you feel it went?

When it was suggested that the decision be made at random, everyone was a little surprised. However, since there were so many artists and not enough time to get to know each other to choose teams accordingly, everyone agreed to decide the teams at random. I think that many of the artists participating in the programme were willing to team up with anyone, as they were looking forward to collaborating with artists from other countries with various cultural backgrounds and new perspectives.

So, as a result of the "ghost leg" system, you were to form a three-person team with artists from Cali, Colombia, and Changsha, China.

That's right. Mauricio from Cali is an artist with skills and experience in projection mapping, and Yilin from Changsha is an artist with a high level of knowledge on sound, so I wondered what the three of us could do with our combined skills. It was fun to think about what we could do and how we could express ourselves on a wider scale than when working alone.



How was the idea for your co-creation piece “The Portal” brought to life?

Firstly, Mauricio proposed several projects, from which we chose AR, as it could be completed online and could bridge the gap between virtual and real life.

Since Yilin was most interested in cultural exchange and I myself liked the fusion of digital and non-digital (real) things, we decided on the concept of "seeing each other's cities through AR".

Communication in person and online communication are very different. For example, in person, we share the same time and space, but this isn't the case online. The concept of "The Portal" was developed through a series of exchanges of ideas, such as how we were going to bridge the gap using AR objects and how it would be interesting to see each other's cities.

What were your respective roles throughout the collaboration?

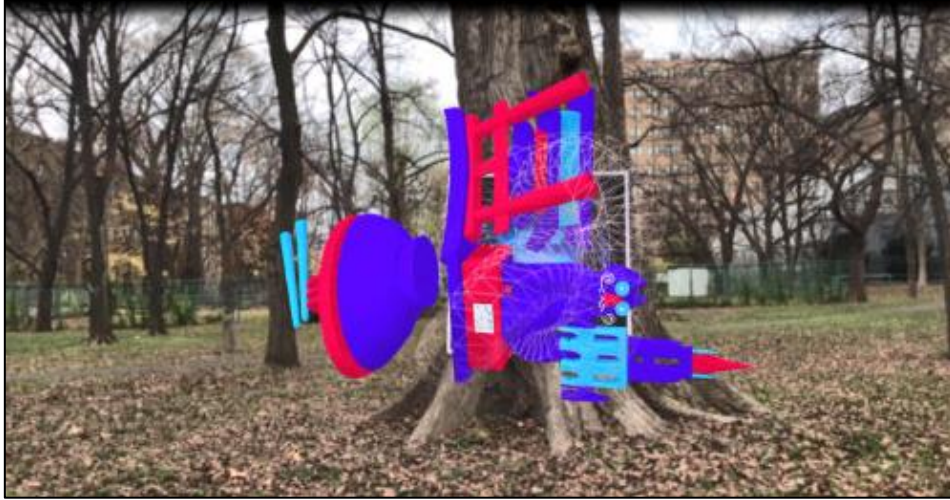
Mauricio designed the motifs visible in the AR space and the AR markers, and Yilin was in charge of the music for the AR function.

I was in charge of animating the AR system and motifs, building the website, and filming demonstrations of the AR in action.

So, that's the video that can be viewed on "The Portal" website. Where was this filmed? And why was this location chosen?

It's Hokkaido University.

The team had discussed the location of the shoot, saying that we wanted a place that displayed the characteristics of the city and was well known within that city. We also needed somewhere to place a huge 1.5m² AR marker during the shoot, so we chose a large, well-known location.



What were some of the particular points you focused on during the production process?

Since we were a team composed of three different cities (and countries), we decided to take advantage of this and integrate all three cultural backgrounds. We shared photos and recordings of our cities as inspiration for the motifs and music, developing images of these cities that we had never actually been to before.

The AR motifs used include *torii* gates amongst other things. Did you come up with these ideas individually?

The motifs were created by Mauricio based on the image he formed of each city using the photos and other materials we had shared. It was interesting to see how Mauricio, who lives in Colombia so far from Asia, created the motifs, and to see his realistic image of Japan and China.

However, since it was created solely based on his ideas whilst he was unable to visit and see for himself, Yilin sometimes commented that "There's nothing like that in China!" when he revealed the motifs to us in the meetings [laughs].

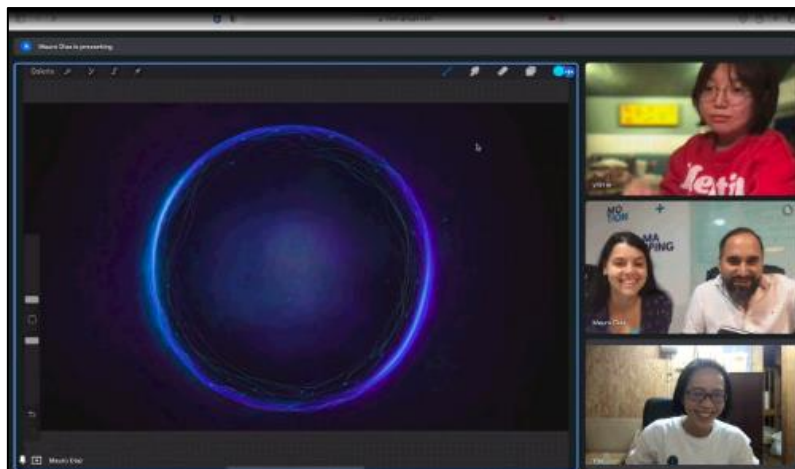


It must have been a unique experience for you to collaborate with artists from other countries. What was the most difficult aspect of the collaboration?

The time difference. The time difference with China is just one hour, but the time difference between Japan and Colombia is 14 hours, which made it difficult to keep in touch smoothly and to set the times for meetings.

So, it was especially difficult to share information with Mauricio, as there was a time difference of more than half a day between us, so the things we shared were no longer fresh by the time he got to see them.

It was also challenging that the workshops and progress meetings for all the participating groups were held in the middle of the night in Japan due to the time difference. On the other hand, I think it was also an advantage that I could participate in them because they were held at night when I wasn't working.



What were your general impressions from your time in City to City?

It's very difficult to co-create art online.

As such, I believe that this is a programme that couldn't have been created under different circumstances, and that it does make sense to do it in these times.

There were some challenges but it was a fun experience overall!



SAPPORO
City of Media Arts

Once more, thank you very much for participating in City to City 2021: Play!

In the midst of severe restrictions on international travel, Sapporo City of Media Arts together with the other member cities will explore different ways to carry out sustainable international cultural exchange. Do stay tuned!

Artist Introduction

Miyuki OKA



Oka is a Sapporo-born artist who creates installations and video productions that combine reality/recordings and data/fiction based on her speculations of environmental philosophy and science and technology. She graduated from Hokkaido University School of Agriculture and mastered in Information Experience Design at the Royal College of Art (London). Amongst the major awards she has received are the STRP Award for Creative Technology (2020), WIRED Creative Hack Award Grand Prix (2021), and exhibitions include Others at a Long Distance" (Sapporo Cultural Arts Community Centre (SCARTS), 2021).