



CHARADE

A love experience in a surrealist city

an immersive project by Xavier de la Vega
written with Julie Desmet Weaver / 3D concept : Benjamin Vedrenne

OUTLINE

Concept

Charade is a virtual reality 3X3 room scale experience where you are invited to hang out in a Paris of wonders and surprises, challenged by a mysterious woman.

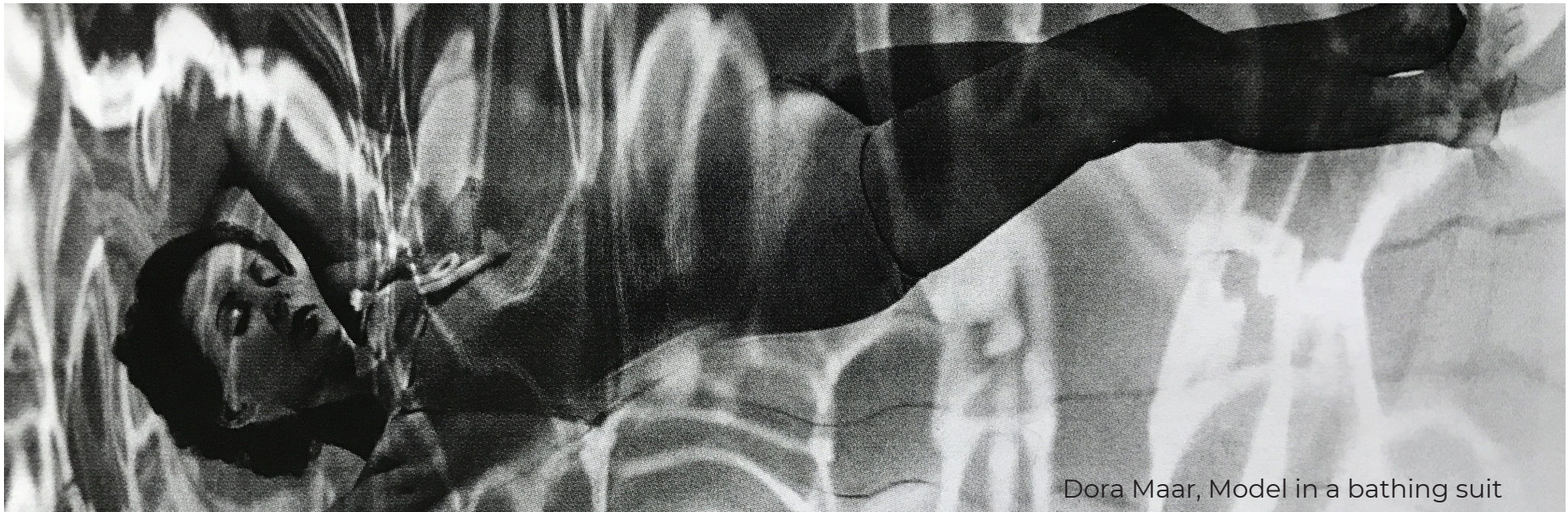
As you learn to look around and fetch awkward objects and secret hide-outs, you trigger bits of narrative and open concealed doors to new places. You end up travelling into a dream city ruled by desire and fear.

Platform : Oculus Quest, Oculus Quest, HTC Vive

Duration : 30 minutes

Synopsis

As you are hanging around in a lonely backstreet, a mysterious woman calls you. Sybil – that's her name – challenges you until you find her, hidden in an unusual radiance. This unsettling apparition is the beginning of a journey into a city of wonder. Sybil challenges your perception. She induces you to look beyond reality and find the concealed keys and passages that will take you to the secret life of the city. This underworld is a place to desire, love and play. It is also a place ruled by fear. You soon understand that Sybil is in danger. Her reckless playfulness has taken her too close to a dark soul. Sybil needs you.



Dora Maar, Model in a bathing suit



Atget, Hotel de Sens

Interactivity

Charade uses the bodily possibilities of a 3x3 room scale experience, as the user must hang around, move her body and shift her perspective in order to explore the environment, fetch unusual details and open secret places.

Thanks to HDM hand tracking, the user is then able to use her bare hands to trigger changes in the environment : opening awkward windows, bizarre stones and hide-outs. At the end of every chapter, as the user touches «transition objects» she will trigger progressive scene changes and «travel» from one place to another.

This interactive journey will be accompanied by the Muse, an AI character which reacts with words and body language to the user's actions.

Target audience

Charade is primarily designed to be displayed in Digital culture centers and museums. There it will meet :

- an adult audience (young and mature) interested in art
- young audiences interested in living digital experiences.

We are confident that the intuitive mechanics together with the liveliness of the female character will satisfy both a gaming savvy audience and mature newbies.

DIRECTOR'S INTENTIONS

For Surrealist poets, the daily quest for wonder was the ultimate experience. Wonder is that sparkle, that surprise, that hallucination that can change reality to get it closer to our inspirations, that can help us reach our deepest desires, love and freedom.

Wonder is a key, a door, a threshold, a keyhole. It opens a passage towards a new reality, towards fantasy inner landscapes that we must learn to conquer, letting speak the unknown who live within us.

Surrealist poets thought that in the modern world, wonder took new shapes and had to be searched in a whole new playing field, the City : a labyrinth full of unexpected temples and bizarre worshipers; a new territory with secret codes known only to the initiated. Poets needed a guide, and they could luckily find one among the wandering women of the metropolis.

André Breton (Nadja) and Philippe Soupault (Last nights of Paris), describe a city, Paris, whose secrets and poetry are revealed through the amorous encounter with a mysterious woman. This is also the starting point of Charade.

Charade tells the story of a street woman whose secret charm consists in initiating the passersby to city wonders. She takes you into a «miraculous chase» for unusual objects and bizarre hide-outs. She incites you to enter an underworld which is ruled by sensuality and desire, although it is also the playing field of hustlers. The Muse seems to fly away from them. But what if all this was some sort of game? A game of life and death.

We have chosen to set the action in a 1920s Paris. We invite you to hang out in an underworld city where public parks, heardres-

sers and bathhouses are modern altars to love and pleasure. Together with a backstreet and a bourgeois living room, you will travel to a total of five settings. To conceive them we have chosen a stylized esthetics, preferring strong color options and careful lightning over texture richness. We think this choice is the best option to dive the user into dreamy mindscapes filled by puzzles and enigma.

The objects you will find during your journey play a decisive role in the experience. Because of their unexpected, hybrid nature they are hints, tipping points between worlds, the very terms of a visual poem. This will culminate in a climatic scene where you will be able to express all the power of your imagination to combine objets and create ever-changing landscapes. The Muse will be proud of you.

Xavier de la Vega and Julie Desmet Weaver

« **Wonder is a key, a door, a threshold, a keyhole. It opens a passage towards a new reality, towards fantasy inner landscapes** »

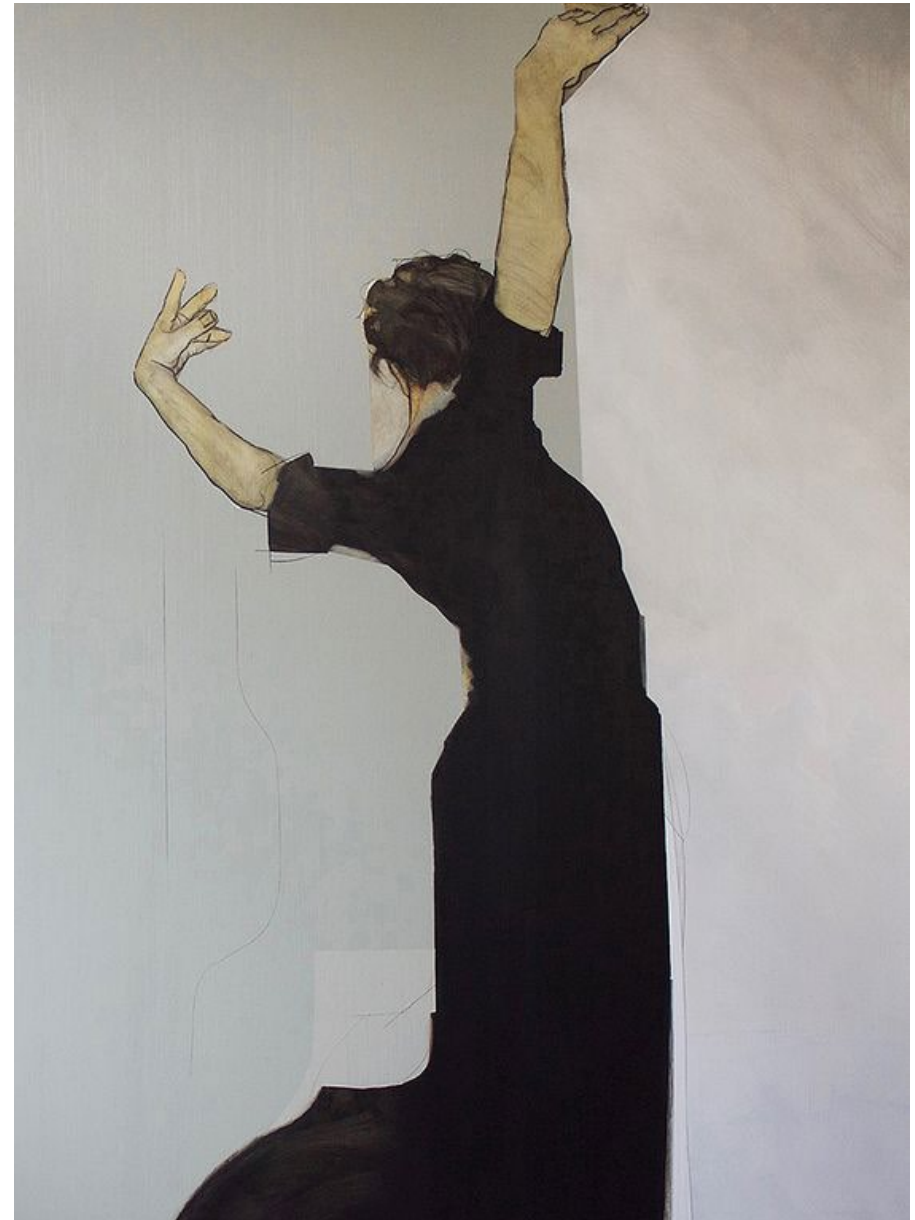
THE MUSE

Sybil is a playful and mysterious young woman. She hangs around day and night in the city, shamelessly approaching passersby.

Sybil possesses a precious gift : she can see wonder in the most unexpected corners of reality. Like a surrealist muse, she unveils the secrets of Paris.

Sybil is not fearful. She is always ready to play Russian roulette and... let it be. Who cares after all? All that matters is to live with intensity. ***Her favorite game is to disorient the man or woman who crosses her path***, to initiate them to desire and danger, dive them into vertigo, fantasy and wonder. She is arrogant enough to challenge reality and make it a playground where all moves are allowed. Her aim is to see further, higher, truer.

Like an oracle, a delusional visionary, Sybil stumbles between reason and folly, powerfulness and vulnerability. Like a moth she has come too close to a radiating light.



SYNOPSIS

The backstreet

You don't know exactly how you got to that backstreet. On one side, there are stairs and underneath it, a fountain with the bas-relief of a mermaid. On the other side, a small shop with a vitrine. The voice of a woman calls you, but you can't see anybody. The voice challenges you : *«I am disappointed. You looked less short-sighted than the others.»*. You end up noticing a strange light coming out from the stair railing. As you walk into the light you see that **a woman is sitting on the stairs and looking at you.**

The Muse : *«It's time to walk across the passage between day and sleep. Look around you ! A miraculous chase is waiting for us! I am sure you will make it. »*.

As you hang around, you notice strange details : a living room trinket and a lamp lie on the edge of a window and the window handle is on your side. As you move forward the handle shivers. The muse gets impatient : *«turn it !»* You notice you're wearing black leather gloves. Surprisingly, instead of opening inside the building, the window opens in some sort of garden. The sun filters through tree leaves. Further away in the backstreet, an old style spyhole and a blind both open from the street into a garden.

The muse looks satisfied : *«I know we'll meet again. There are many hidden passages in Paris. There is one key left here for you to find. I'll be waiting for you. Something of us must remain»*. The muse vanishes.

You examine all the details in the backstreet. You notice something unexpected in the shop's vitrine : one of the models has a rake head. As you approach your hand, the scenery metamorphoses : trees grow on the pavement, the building's facade fade out. You find yourself in a public garden, with long alleys and benches surrounding by trees and rocks.

**« As you approach
your hand, the scenery
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Parc des Buttes-Chaumont

The Muse is expecting you with a smile on her face. She sings naughty songs and invites you to snoop around and find the park lovers secret spots. In this park full of shams, **rocks have a peculiar look**. Some of them have a golden handle and you may open it like an old style travel bag. As soon as you do, fetiche-objects jump out and mime suggestive anecdotes. A pair of pumps and stockings run towards a tree, followed by an umbrella. Elsewhere a Stetson hat with gloves lights a cigarette holder.

As the muse has fun celebrating the park's secret desires, one of the rocks frees a long wooden cane with a dog head knob. It freezes just in front of you, bearing an invisible body. You perceive his breath. The muse : *«Hum, it's getting late. What about exploring naughtier places? Let's go to a bathhouse ! Please lead the way !»*

You end up noticing a woman shaped tree trunk. It has **an old style tap with wide-eyed round handles**. As you turn one of them, blue earthenware starts growing among the grass. The lobby of a bathhouse slowly appears around you.









The bathhouse

A series of doors are displayed around you. You hear laughs and moanings. In this labyrinth of pleasures, doors open (or not) and exhibit the remains of recent frolic. Behind a door, lingerie hangs from a chair and a candel projects haunting shadows. Elsewhere, a dress floats sensually in the air, as if it was under water. Immersed in a bath tube, the muse predicts : *«Someday, I will turn my lover into a supernatural being with his hair aspired upwards. And I will draw myself as a fairy, as a mermaid».*

You hear threatening door slams. The Muse looks worried. She begs you to find an exit. But now doors open in dead ends. In one cabin, bank notes float in a bathtub full of bloody water. In another one knives hang in the air, as they were frozen in time. Elsewhere a masculine voice warns you : *«Let me give you advice, buddy. Walk away from this chick. She belongs to Volpone. This is a final warning.»*

As you open a final door, you discover a model's head with a long moving blond wig. It is within your reach. As you touch the hair, the scenery slowly metamorphoses into a hairdresser shop.

« In this labyrinth of pleasures, doors open and exhibit the remains of recent frolic »

The hairdresser shop

You hear cisors clattering around the seats. In this hypnotic atmosphere, the Muse confides. In every drawer you open, a totem-object reminds her of a past lover that once followed her in the streets of Paris. There is a pair of gloves carved in bronze. There is also a hat and a wooden knob. In a last drawer **a tarot card appears : Death**. All the cisors in the room suddenly gather in the air and rush towards you, stopping one foot away from your face. The muse screams. Mirrors shatter into pieces.



The living room

You are now in an Art-deco living room. The Muse : «*Quiet. We are in Volpone's home. He's never far from here. I lived happy days here. Then he started to follow me. I was his bait. I would meet men in the street. Volpone waited for the right time and he would rob them. One day, he stabbed a man just next to me. I left..*

Suddenly, voices can be heard behind a door. As you walk to the door, you can hear them speaking. They are talking about their next hit. They talk about a notebook where everything

is written down : plans, hide-outs, girls, cops and bribes. The Muse is enthusiastic : «*I need that note-book. if I get it Volpone is finished. Come on, help me. **This room is filled with hide-outs. Find them. But be silent !***

On the library, behind books, a metronome starts ticking. A table plate hides a revolver which barrel turns infinitely. Eventually a concealed drawer opens in the gramophone: the note-book is there. But as the drawer opens, the gramophone starts to play a Josephine Baker song. The revolver falls into pieces, the metronome falls on the ground. The notebook sets to fire. The Muse bursts into laughing.



There is agitation in the other room. Someone tries to open the door, but it is locked. Men curse. One man with a deep voice threatens that he will have the Muse and yourself pay for what you are doing. Men are banging on the door. The Muse laughs although she looks frightened. She urges you to find a way to drift away. You spot a curious insect made of silver spoons and forks. Trees, grass and rocks grow in the living room.

Cadavres exquis

It is night in the Parc des Buttes-Chaumont. The Muse smells the air. You suddenly hear gunshots. Their light traces cut the scenery until it falls into pieces. You are hanging in a white void where an astounded muse and a diversity of objects (scissors, trees, gramophone, bathtub foot) float in the air. As you touch any object, a scenery starts building around you, often upside down. ***Sometimes you walk on the ceiling, sometimes on the walls.*** As you go on manipulating the objets, you travel from one scenery to the other. Places hybridate. The Muse looks very happy with your findings. She takes every unexpected combination as a chance, an unfulfilled desire, a potential freedom. She has fun translating into words and random sentences the associations of objects and places that you have created. The gangsters' shadows and echoes are following you in the labyrinth, but they are slowly vanishing. So is the Muse. She finally disappears.

The backstreet

You end up in the backstreet where everything started. It is lonely and seemingly unaltered. There is just a tinkling somewhere. A thin golden chain is hanging from a lamp post. You draw it. Clic. The lamp post projects a strawberry light. The vitrine fills with blue radiances. In the small mermaid fountain the water turns mint green. You hear a far away woman's laughter.

The End

MOOD-BOARD : OBJECTS



A model with a rake head



A pair of gloves



a blonde wig



A tap with wide-eyed handles



A spoon insect

INTERACTIVITY

Charade is a 3x3m room scale and interactive experience. A muse guides the user in a perception experience where she must look for unusual objects and hideouts.

Every chapter offers two interaction stages :

Environmental storytelling

- The user explores the scenery for objects and “containers” which animate to deliver a secret.
- Objects and containers open thanks to hand tracking

Transition from one scenery to the other

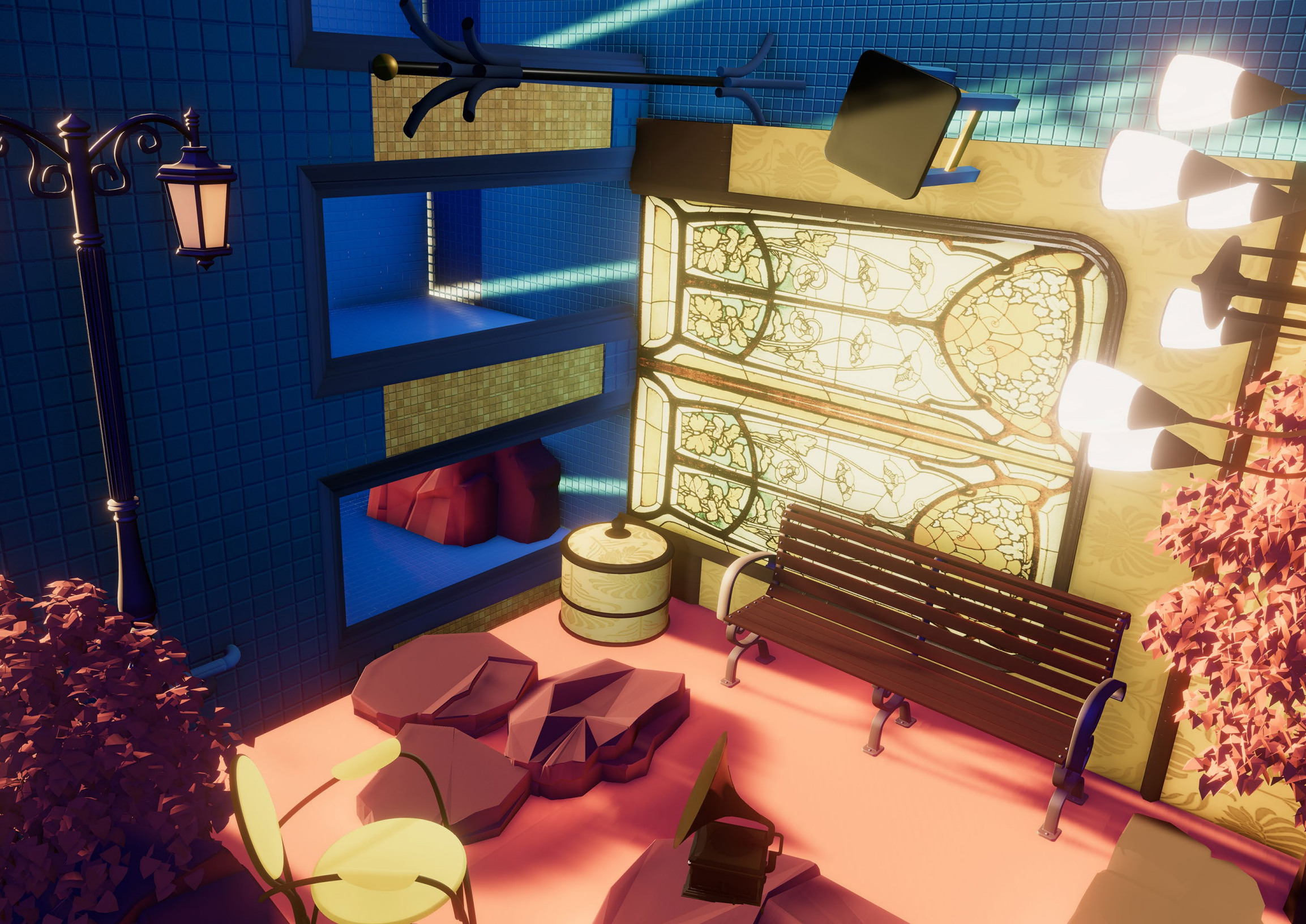
At the end of the previous stage, a new object is displayed in the scenery, which must be found and manipulated

- This «transition» object is hybrid : an object related to the next scenery appears in the present one (a rake in vitrine, a bathroom tap in a parc, etc.). This hybridation produces a new, surprising, sometimes frightening, womanly image. These objects are some kind of warning for the user. The game he is invited to play is everything but innocent.
- When the «transition» object is touched, a metamorphosis of the scenery starts, producing new mindscapes, during the transition lapse.

Cadavres exquis

The previous mechanic eventually allows the user to hybridate places as she wishes.

- Objects belonging to other places are displayed in the scenery. As she touches it, a metamorphosis is triggered.
- The orientation of the «transition» object may induce a rotation of the new scenery. For instance, as the user activates a shower head turned towards the ceiling, she will find herself standing on the bathhouse ceiling. The hybridization of places produces impossible architectures.



PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

Spring 2020

First grant submissions

Fall 2020

Search for partners

Winter-Spring 2021

Creation of a prototype, distribution deals

Fall 2021-Winter 2022

Production

2022

Festivals / Distribution

MARELLE



PRESENTS

Marelle is a digital studio dedicated to the design, the development and the production of immersive pieces. We particularly focus our efforts to the scouting and promotion of innovative narrative projects.

Charade is a Marelle production developped in co-production with Picseyes. **Picseyes** is a Paris-based production and post-production company. Its know-how extends from audio post-production (recording, sound design, 6DOF mix) to motion capture, and to the line production of fiction feature film. All this know-how contributed to the VR piece ***Whispering Walls / Les murs parlent*** (Picseyes / Marelle / Schwartzbild - production stage).

Charade has been designed primarily as a location-based project, to be exhibited in cultural venues, from digital centers to art museums.

The post-covid 19 context means however new challenges for cultural consumption. Although Location based entertainment appears as a sound model for VR (ticketing in cultural venues with established audiences), home consumption of digital entertainment has been increasing and may well create a stable BtoC market for immersive content. We are closely monitoring the current trends. .

picseyes



MARELLE

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