

THE TURN AROUND OF “ROUND ROUND”

Following several months of on-distance mentorship with Paris-based Okio-Studio, Shariffa Ali and Yetunde Dada, the winners of the VR category of the first DIGITAL LAB AFRICA competition @ DISCOP Johannesburg 2017, spent two weeks in Paris in a residency program. They tell us all about it and how it impacted their project.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED:

We deepened our understanding of the concept of VR for social good. VR is such an inescapable medium, it can be used to generate empathy. This has helped us refine our ideas around using the project to inspire a sense of empathy in the viewer. We plan the project to bring about social change through discussion and awareness.

We learned more about the various VR platform and manufacturers and the benefits and challenges of each of them.

We learned about new developments in VR from filmmakers, choreographers, producers and directors across the globe. This allowed us to incorporate new ideas into our piece.

We also were invited to two amazing events, the premiere of "Alteration" and we also attended the Paris Virtual Film Fest which hosted some of the world's best filmmakers including Gabo Arora, made famous for his movie, "Clouds Over Sidra".

HOW THE INCUBATION PROGRAM HAS IMPACTED "ROUND ROUND"?

Our VR short was named "Round Round", it is now named "The seventh Turn" to better suit the narrative form. We are really excited to embrace this new identity, which marks a leap in the development and depth of our project as it evolves. The "Seventh Turn", is a dance piece that tells the story of a sacred tree from Kenya, that has the magical ability to allow those who walk around it 7 times to change their sex.

We have now a producer, as VR studio director (and our Digital Lab Africa mentor) Antoine Cayrol from Okio-Studio decided to take a step further and produce our project.

Our project is now set to be the first ever Virtual Reality coproduction between France and South Africa.

WHO WE MET WITH:

. Antoine Cayrol and Pierre Zandrowicz (Okio-Studio) our DLA mentors: they have not only provided us with a lot of support but have also partnered up with us to produce this VR experience on a larger scale. Under the mentorship of Antoine and Pierre, we were allowed to envision the project in a way that we couldn't have possibly imagined before.

. Raphael Beaugrand: a journalist that uses 360° to tell stories. Rapahel encouraged us to think of any additional elements that we can incorporate into the project in order to strengthen the experience, by urging us to brainstorm around adding a 4th dimension to the experience like touch. Our piece can be even more powerful with the concept of room-scale VR.

. Lucie Mariotto and Alexandre Legay from Fabrique de la Danse: they shared insight on how they're able to use virtual reality to notate dance and provide choreographers and dancers alike with a tool for note taking and providing feedback.

. Amandine Schieber: who shared her interest in sound and her background in music entertainment. We discussed various VR platforms and she wishes to remain in touch with us as we forge ahead.

. Aude Merlet at La Nurserie Culture & Innovation: she was so friendly and accommodating while we were with her in the incubation space.

. Balthazar Auxietre and Hayoun Kwon from Innerspace VR: they created an incredible interactive VR piece called "La Peri" which featured a moving dance piece.

. Michel Reilhac: an incredibly well known VR producer. His most recent film "Viens!" is currently on film festival circuit.

WHAT WE WORKED ON:

We built a new pitch deck, which we will use in an effort to raise development funds.

We shot a mini-documentary about our experience in France.

We developed a narrative to best explain the origins of our myth and we learned more about the historical origins about the myth itself.

We have been able to incorporate some of the recent VR trends including room-scale VR into our final deck.

We are also looking into pioneering innovative distribution strategies in South Africa and Kenya in order to have more people seeing our film.

WHAT OUR NEXT STEPS WILL BE:

We will fund-raise for the development funding of our project and then we'll move onto creating the production deck in Oct 2017 - Dec 2017.

We will create the movie in 2018 with the intention to launch it into the film festival circuit, early 2019.

Once our piece has been developed, it is very important that we make it accessible to those who wouldn't ordinarily have access to such technology and we are developing a distribution strategy that will allow us to do so.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS TO AFRICAN PRODUCERS:

The virtual reality scene is so new and there are a lot of opportunities to stand out if you try and make something. However, do not think of virtual reality as the ultimate end goal but rather as the tool to tell a story in a better way. There is a strong desire for great content and so emerging VR makers need not feel discouraged. DISCOP and DIGITAL LAB AFRICA offers an exciting platform for content makers of all persuasions.

We have experienced the VR community to be very generous and open, so join the VR happenings in your community via social media to learn more about the opportunities.



Pictured: Shariffa Ali and Yetunde Dada, during their residency program in Paris. They are the winners of the VR category of the competition DIGITAL LAB AFRICA @ DISCOP Johannesburg 2017.