

MEDIA KIT

AWAVENA

LYNETTE WALLWORTH

PRESENTED IN ASSOCIATION WITH ART GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

ART GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

EXHIBITION: FRI 7 FEB – MON 2 MAR

TICKETS: FREE

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Take a Virtual Reality journey to the Brazilian Amazon and into another way of knowing. A mixed-reality work created by legendary artist/director Lynette Wallworth and the Amazonian Yawanawa people, Awavena tells a stunning tale of metamorphosis. This collaboration combines technology and transcendent experience to share a vision and the story of a people coming back from the brink of extinction. Awavena is an unmissable immersive experience and a gift from the Yawanawa at a time of peril.

ABOUT

From legendary artist/director Lynette Wallworth and the Amazonian Yawanawa people, “Awavena” is a stunning tale of metamorphosis, and the second in a series of mixed-reality works by Lynette Wallworth and producer Nicole Newnham, following their Emmy-winning VR film “Collisions.”

For the Amazonian Yawanawa, ‘medicine’ has the power to travel you in a vision to a place you have never been. Hushuhu, the first woman shaman of the Yawanawa uses VR like medicine to open a portal to another way of knowing. AWAVENA is a collaboration between a community and an artist, melding technology and transcendent experience so that a vision can be shared, and a story told of a people ascending from the edge of extinction.

Using a technology that the Yawanawa feel enables them to share their story and visions, this immersive work presents fluorescent and bioluminescent specimens in previously unseen colors from the forest world, to create a vivid, luminous vision.

AWAVENA is made at the invitation of, and in intimate collaboration with, the Yawanawa people during a time of both peril and potential for people, their forest, and the connected ecosystems that drive the planet. The film aims not to provoke empathy for the Yawanawa people but is rather a gift from them, to those who will virtually visit their forest and receive this transmission — a gift that can shift our consciousness, changing the way we perceive the world and the decisions we make.

LYNETTE WALLWORTH | FILMMAKER

Lynette Wallworth is an Emmy award winning artist/filmmaker who has consistently worked with emerging media technologies. Her immersive installations and films reflect connections between

people and the natural world, and explore fragile human states of grace. Wallworth's work has shown at the World Economic Forum, Davos, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, the American Museum of Natural History, New York, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, the Smithsonian, as well as film festivals including Sundance Film Festival, London Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival, Sydney Film Festival, and the Adelaide Film Festival. She has been awarded an International Fellowship from Arts Council England, a New Media Arts Fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts, the inaugural Australian Film, Television and Radio School Creative Fellowship and the Joan and Kim Williams Documentary Fellowship. Her works include the interactive video Evolution of Fearlessness; the full dome feature Coral, with accompanying augmented reality work; and VR narrative Collisions, which received a 2017 Emmy award for outstanding new approaches to documentary filmmaking. In 2014, Wallworth's feature documentary Tender won the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Award for best televised documentary. In 2016, Wallworth was awarded a UNESCO City of Film Award, the Byron Kennedy Award for Innovation and Excellence and Foreign Policy magazine named her as one of the "100 Leading Global Thinkers" of the year.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT

Awavena is a true story with all the power of myth. It tells the story of Hushahu, the first woman Shaman of the Yawanawa, and of the radical reconfiguring of gender relations that takes place following her induction into the Yawanawa spiritual traditions by the tribes spiritual leader Tata.

Tata, the 100 year old Shaman, had lived through slavery and survived the cultural destitution wrought by missionaries. He foresaw the challenges on the horizon for the diminished population of the Yawanawa and eventually came to believe that their future strength relied on power being shared with women. He broke an eons old cultural taboo and sparked a revolution, one that has resonances for us all.

The invitation to come to the Amazon to film Awavena came from the Tashka, Chief of the Yawanawa. He looked at the VR/AR technologies of this moment and saw a compatibility with the visioning techniques that sit at the heart of their society. Tashka said, "These glasses act like medicine, they carry you without your body to a place you have never been, colours and sounds are intensified, you meet the elders, you are given a message and then you return." Our most current of technologies is still a lesser version of the visioning technologies that the Yawanawa have spent generations mastering.

At the end of last year the Yawanawa sent us a message, Tata the old Shaman was dying, and we should come quickly so his message could be shared. We were privileged to have our cameras there while Hushahu tended to the gracious old man who had trained her and changed her destiny. We returned to the community some months later community so Hushahu could hold a vision using the traditional medicines. That vision is precisely the gift the Yawanawa want to share. VR seems purpose built for this moment as it places the viewer central to the unfolding scene and allows us, for the first time, to see the world as Hushahu sees it, transported in her minds eye by the medicines

Tata trained her to use.

We engaged DP Greg Downing from XRes to film in the Amazon and brought the eminent Australian fluorescent biologist Dr Anya Salih, my longtime collaborator, along on the shoot so we could film the previously unseen world of forest fluorescence as part of the vision sequence. We carried torches that illuminate in a specific wave length and we covered the cameras with yellow filters to reveal fluorescent species in the very colours that appear to the Yawanawa in the vision state. The “vision sequence” in Awavena emanates magical qualities due firstly to the fluorescent species we were able to capture with special Canon night cameras, and secondly as a result of the incredible PX 80 Lidar scanner provided to us by Occipital. There were only three such scanners in the US when we set off for our shoot and one of them came with us. It captured 300,000 points of data per second to render a perfectly accurate yet perfectly ethereal version of the Yawanawa forest. In gathering such a range of technologies for different forms of capture we were responding to a very specific request. Last year when we met at the Sundance/Skoll Stories of Change Lab to plan our work ahead I asked, “What essentially must the vision show?” and Chief Tashka answered “That everything is alive.” We transported 3 canoes full of technology; multiple cameras and scanners, all to reveal what the Yawanawa have always known.

In one of my conversations with Tashka last year I asked a question. Given in 360 video the place of the camera is where the viewer feels themselves to be, I wondered how it would be for the old Shaman Tata to directly address the camera as though it were a person, to pray for us, a disembodied entity far away in our western world. It seemed to me this might prove a conceptual challenge for him. There was silence at the other end of the phone that told me I had said something odd. Finally Tashka responded and patiently explained “Lynette, when Tata prays in a vision he first prays for the person in front of him, then he prays for the community, then he prays for the forest

There is a humility in taking up this work, the gift of story that is being offered to us at, it seems to me, exactly the time we need it most. I am, as always, simply a translator for a larger story, one of profound hope, that holds us all inside it.

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