

## RED SEA IMMERSIVE INVITES AUDIENCES TO EXPLORE A WORLD OF OVER 20 VIRTUAL REALITY PROJECTS

*Red Sea Immersive features a selection of the latest leading Virtual Reality (VR) storytelling and art projects in and out of competition from award-winning international artists and directors, with the all-female competition jury lead by American avant-garde artist Laurie Anderson*

**Jeddah, Saudi Arabia – 18 November 2021 – Red Sea: Immersive**, the exciting programming strand of the Red Sea International Film Festival (RedSeaIFF), today announced its 21-strong programme of virtual reality experiences, running from 7-15 December, presented in collaboration with Art Jameel, and hosted at Jeddah's new creative complex, Hayy Jameel.

**Red Sea: Immersive** will introduce era-defining immersive storytelling experiences to audiences in Jeddah, while also serving as an inspiration and catalyst to future immersive content creators and studios from the region. 13 of the most significant VR works produced in 2021 will be presented in competition for the **Golden Yusr Immersive Award** which includes a cash prize of \$10,000, with eight projects presented out-of-competition. The program is curated by Liz Rosenthal, curator of Venice VR at the Venice International Film Festival.

**Red Sea: Immersive** will be adjudicated by an all-female jury of three leading international artists. The jury will be presided over by pioneering American avant-garde artist Laurie Anderson, who will be joined by BAFTA-winning director Victoria Mapplebeck and one of the first Saudi Arabian street artists, Sarah Mohanna Al Abdali.

Edouard Waintrop, Artistic Director of the RedSeaIFF, said: "There is something truly special about the experiences in **Red Sea Immersive**. It is an art that is so complimentary of the main Festival programme, but also stands independently as a ground-breaking and boundary-pushing selection of work. It is an honour to be able to host this curation, and we are excited to see the lasting impact that **Red Sea Immersive** has on the Saudi art, film, and technology industries."

Liz Rosenthal, the curator of Red Sea Immersive, said: "The selection in **Red Sea Immersive** is truly one of the most exciting presentations of virtual experiences to have graced the festival circuit to date. To have this presentation in such a dynamic new venue such as the Hayy Jameel, and in Saudi Arabia where there is such a burgeoning, young art scene, is such an exciting frontier for this genre of work. I am also excited to see the impact this has on the wider VR industry, especially in the Arab region."

The 13 incredible experiences being presented in the competition are **Anandala**, **End of Night**, **Genesis**, **Glimpse**, **Goliath: Playing with Reality**, **Kusunda**, **Laika**, **Lavrynthos**, **Le Bal De Paris De Blanca Li**, **Marco & Polo Go Round**, **Reeducated**, **Samsara (Lun Hui)** and **The Sick Rose**.

Academy-Award winning VFX artist Kevin Mack presents **Anandala**, a virtual, abstract art installation unconstrained by the limits of reality. Through personal flight, visitors explore a vast three-dimensional labyrinth of evolving shapes and colours populated with intelligent artificial-life, that shapeshift and interact with visitors.

The winner of the Best VR Story at this year's Venice International Film Festival, **End of the Night**, is presented by David Adler. In 1943, you are sitting in a boat with Josef, who is rowing from occupied Denmark to safety in neutral Sweden. Your journey together becomes a living landscape of painful recollections from the night of his escape. As dawn draws near, you will witness the trauma of escape and the guilt of surviving, when those you love are left behind.

**Genesis**, directed by Joerg Courtial, embarks on an emotionally intense virtual reality journey to experience the dramatic milestones in the evolution of earth and mankind. Starting with the young, glowing earth surrounded by cosmic debris and concluding by coming face to face with our human ancestors, **Genesis** takes audiences on an immersive journey through 4.7 billion years of evolution.

Academy Award-winning writer-director Benjamin Cleary and virtual reality creator Michael O'Connor take audiences on an incredible visual journey in **Glimpse**. The animated interactive VR experience stars Taron Egerton as Herbie Turner, a talented illustrator who has just had a painful breakup with his girlfriend. His girlfriend, played by Lucy Boynton, is a graceful deer named Rice who, despite being a deer, dreams of becoming a musician.

**Goliath: Playing with Reality**, directed by May Abdalla and Barry Gene Murphy, follows the true story of a man with a troubled upbringing, who loses his parents and is diagnosed with schizophrenia. The project explores what it means to feel at odds with the world and, through shared realities, find one's place within it. Starring Tilda Swinton, the project was the Grand Jury Prize winner at Venice VR at this year's Venice International Film Festival.

Directed by Felix Gaedtke and Gayatri Parameswaran, **Kusunda** is an interactive virtual reality experience about the endangered Kusunda language in western Nepal. Co-created by Lil Bahadur, a shaman who speaks Kusunda, and his granddaughter Hima, this intergenerational story invites you to support the challenging task of revitalising a dormant indigenous language.

Brought to life by BAFTA and Academy Award-winning director Asif Kapadia, **Laika** is an immersive animated VR short telling the extraordinary story of the first living creature to orbit the earth, a small stray dog who was the historic passenger aboard the Soviet satellite Sputnik II. The short is based on Nick Abadzis' iconic graphic novel and stars Sophie Okonedo and Tobias Menzies.

**Lavrynthos**, by Amir Admoni and Fabito Rychter, places audiences at the heart of the labyrinth of Crete to tell the story of the unlikely relationship between the Minotaur and his next meal, a girl named Cora. The narrative makes use of an innovative way of moving the audience throughout the story, by transforming a 2x2m area in an infinite non-Euclidean maze that can shift space and time.

**Le Bal De Paris De Blanca Li**, directed by Blanca Li, was the winner of Best VR Experience at this year's Venice International Film Festival. Adèle celebrates her homecoming to Paris with a great ball organised by her parents, until Pierre, one of the guests, changes the course of the party. The audience can follow

Adèle's love story unfolding in three acts, through music and dance, merging with virtual reality, to offer the audience an innovative, festive, and spectacular experience.

**Marco & Polo Go Round**, by Benjamin Steiger Levine, is a comedic love story with a very surreal twist. A couple confronts the difficulties in their relationship as gravity turns on its head and their world literally falls apart around them.

Award-winning documentary, **Reeducated** directed by Sam Wolson, takes viewers inside a detention camp in Xinjiang, China, guided by three men who were imprisoned together at the same facility. Using hours of first-hand testimony, hand-drawn animation and ambisonic audio, the VR film reconstructs the experience of detention and political re-education in an immersive three-dimensional space.

**Samsara (Lun Hui)** is the latest project from artist Hsin-Chien Huang. In the piece, the protagonist escapes the earth after global nuclear destruction to find a new planet to live on but finds that he/she always returns to it, learning the profound lesson of life.

Directed by Tang Zhi-Zhong and Huang Yun-Hsien, **The Sick Rose** tells a story that takes place in a time of raging pandemics, where all beings are in crisis. A little girl travels through a city filled with viruses with a magical rose to give to her mother, who is courageously saving lives at a front-line hospital. During the process, she encounters cursed demonic creatures and receives help from a tribe of discriminated rats. The journey is like the worldwide anti-pandemic battle: bumpy and full of frustration, but where hope is never lost.

**The Book of Distance, Hangman At Home, Mare, Maskmaker, Paperbirds 1 & 2, Replacements (Penggantian), We Live Here** and **VRChat Worlds Collection** are the eight experiences presented out-of-competition, as part of **Red Sea Immersive**.

Directed by Randall Okita, **The Book of Distance** tells the story of Yonezo Okita, the director's grandfather, who left his home in Hiroshima, Japan, and began a new life in Canada in 1935. War and state-sanctioned racism changed everything, and Yonezo became the enemy. Three generations later, his grandson, Randall leads the audience on an interactive virtual pilgrimage through an emotional geography of immigration and family to recover what was lost.

**Hangman At Home**, by Michelle and Uri Kranot, was the winner of the Grand Jury Prize at Venice VR at the 2020 Venice International Film Festival. Inspired by the 1922 Carl Sandburg poem of the same title, this VR single-user immersive experience explores themes of acknowledgment and participation. Through five interwoven stories, that capture pivotal moments in people's lives, this experience speaks to the awkward intimacy that comes with being human, and the connection between spectator, witness and accomplice.

From Rui Guerreiro, **Mare** is an immersive experience that tells the story of the strange lands of Mare. Crossing paths with a helpless companion, you venture deep into unknown territory on a puzzling adventure while unravelling a mysterious narrative and the secrets hidden within, all to ensure the arrival of the companion at her impending destiny.

In **Maskmaker**, by Balthazar Auxietre, the audience play as a Maskmaker's apprentice and learn the magic of crafting masks. From mask-to-mask and puzzle-to-puzzle, the audience explores their way through the "mask realm" to seek Prospero who appears to rule it, to ultimately unravel the secret of this identity.

**Paperbirds 1 & 2**, directed by German Heller and Federico Carlini, is a story of a short-sighted child with an exceptional talent for music, who must find his way through the world of darkness to bring back his sister, who has been taken away by the shadows. This journey uses the senses to evoke our inner darkness and the mystery that lies within it. Starring Edward Norton, Archie Yates and Joss Stone, this is a story about inspiration, intuition and emotion, and how these qualities are invoked by music.

Directed by Jonathan Hagard, **Replacements (Penggantian)** is a VR story about roots, time and change. It depicts a Javanese family routinely observing their neighbourhood day after day, generation after generation, replacement after replacement.

In the interactive VR experience, **We Live Here**, director Rose Troche introduces the audience to Rocky, a 59-year-old woman who has been living in a tent, in a park in Los Angeles, for almost three years. By interacting with her belongings, the audience learns about her life and stories, understanding that anyone, through a series of misfortunes, could find themselves homeless like Rocky.

The final selection of the out-of-competition section is **VRChats Worlds Collection**. Over the pandemic, VR creators from around the world have freely published their fantastical creations as environments to meet, play, perform and experience with others in the avatars of their choice. The selection celebrates the creativity of eight leading VRChat world-builders, allowing the audience to hop from one world to the next: journey to a spectacular alien mountain planet, jump into a luscious tropical aquarium, take a river trip through 1950s Moscow, visit a sumptuous Swedish Museum Palace, experience visceral immersive music videos and art and end your tour in a fantastical futurist apartment.

The projects include:

**Aquarius; World Creators:** Fins, Cyanlaser, Fionna, Lakuza, Legends, Ruuubick, Jordo, Chim Cham, Akalink, orels1, Hare.

**Cycle of Life; World Creator:** Karl Kroenen.

**Lost It; World Creator:** Mochie.

**Moscow Trip 1952; World Creator:** DrMorro.

**Museum of VR Painting; World Creator:** Tanabe.

**The Hallwyl Museum; World Creator:** tigerchips.

**Uncanny Alley; World Creator:** Metarick.

**World.Execute (Me); World Creator:** Josephine Anna Wall (Skuld).

The inaugural edition of the Red Sea International Film Festival will run in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia from December 6-15, 2021.

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## Editors Notes:

### Red Sea International Film Festival

The inaugural edition of the Red Sea International Film Festival in partnership with the MBC GROUP, Saudia Airlines and VOX Cinemas is set to bring the best in Arab and World Cinema to the UNESCO world heritage site of Jeddah Old Town from December 6-15, 2021.

The Festival will showcase a compelling slate of new and diverse films, alongside a retrospective programme celebrating the masters of cinema as well as introducing audiences to exciting new voices from the region and beyond. The Festival will provide a platform for Arab filmmakers and industry professionals from around the world to connect, host feature and short film competitions, and present a series of events, masterclasses, and workshops to support emerging talent.

### About Hayy Jameel

[Hayy Jameel](#) is developed and managed by [Art Jameel](#) as a dedicated arts complex and creative hub for Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, joining its sister institution [Jameel Arts Centre](#), Dubai in striving to build culture-oriented, connected communities. Designed by [waiwai](#), *Hayy* references an Arabic word for *neighbourhood*, denoting the convivial and collaborative nature of the complex and its intent in bringing together a wide range of creative disciplines in one destination. Alongside the museum **Hayy Arts**, education platforms **Hayy Learning** and **Hayy Studios** is **Hayy Cinema**, Saudi's first independent audiovisual centre, which includes a theatre for Arab cinema and independent films from around the world; community screening room; library; and meeting and learning spaces for the Saudi film community. Hayy Jameel's opening season launches on December 6, 2021 and culminates in the opening of Hayy Cinema in April 2022.

The Art Jameel-run not-for-profit spaces are joined by **Hayy Residents** – a set of pioneering, homegrown creative enterprises that range from contemporary art and performance to design and publishing, culinary institutes, new cafes and eateries.

The launch of Hayy Jameel in 2021 is in line with Vision 2030 and comes to fruition with a new era for the arts and creative sector across the Kingdom.

### About Majid Al Futtaim

Founded in 1992, Majid Al Futtaim is the leading shopping mall, communities, retail and leisure pioneer across the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

A remarkable business success story, Majid Al Futtaim started from one man's vision to transform the face of shopping, entertainment and leisure to 'create great moments for everyone, every day'. It has since grown into one of the United Arab Emirates' most respected and successful businesses spanning 17 international markets, employing more than 43,000 people, and obtaining the highest credit rating (BBB) among privately-held corporates in the region.

Majid Al Futtaim owns and operates 29 shopping malls, 13 hotels and four mixed-use communities, with further developments underway in the region. The shopping malls portfolio includes Mall of the Emirates, Mall of Egypt, Mall of Oman, City Centre malls, My City Centre neighbourhood centres, and five community malls which are in joint venture with the Government of Sharjah. The Company is the exclusive franchisee for Carrefour in over 30 markets across the Middle East, Africa and Asia, operating a portfolio of more than 375 outlets including City+, the region's first checkout-free store, and an online store.

Majid Al Futtaim operates more than 600 VOX Cinemas screens as well as a portfolio of world-class leisure and entertainment experiences across the region including Ski Dubai, Ski Egypt, Dreamscape, Magic Planet, Little Explorers and iFLY Dubai. The Company is parent to a Fashion, Home and Specialty retail business representing international brands such as Abercrombie & Fitch, Hollister, AllSaints, lululemon athletica, Crate & Barrel, Maisons du Monde, LEGO and THAT, a Majid Al Futtaim fashion concept store and app. In addition, Majid Al Futtaim operates Enova, a facility and energy management company, through a joint venture operation with Veolia, a global leader in optimised environment resource management.

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### **About Saudi Arabian Airlines (SAUDIA):**

Saudi Arabian Airlines (SAUDIA) is the national flag carrier of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Established in 1945, the company is one of the Middle East's largest airlines.

SAUDIA is a member of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the Arab Air Carriers Organization (AACO). It has been one of the 19 member airlines of the SkyTeam alliance since 2012.

SAUDIA has received many prestigious industry awards and recognitions. Most recently, it was ranked a Global Five-Star Major Airline by the Airline Passenger Experience Association (APEX) and the carrier was awarded the Diamond status by APEX Health Safety powered by SimpliFlying.

For further information on Saudi Arabian Airlines, please visit [www.saudia.com](http://www.saudia.com)

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