

Arenberg – Second edition ToW 2022

From 8 December through to 11 December Arenberg hosted its second edition of Curious festival. Equipped with a newly renovated foyer, a full program and four very talented scientist artist duos we were ready to go.

Years & Years – Group exhibition curated by Please add Color

Thursday 8 December marked our opening, guests filed in on the smooth beats of music provided to them by a local Antwerp DeeJay collective SoulSupply. With drink in hand the soulful serenades by talented Bitá Nascimento ushered visitors upstairs to admire the “Years and Years” art exhibition curated by “Please add Color”. The theme for this group exhibition looked at the resilience of ordinary people who continue to fight for our existence despite the very realistic side effects of our society’s rapid evolution.

Extended Synthesis - Rosie Broadhead & Kaivalya Brewerton

Downstairs another conversation was being started about the value of balance between our physical self and our natural environment. Where does nature start and end in our body? Humans and their creations are considered somehow separate from other aspects of earthly existence. In ‘Are We The Body’, a polyphonic lecture emphasising the value of balance between our body within different environments. These are the environments we live in, who and what we surround ourselves with and who is living on us. Balance of our psychological, physical and environmental ecologies, microbial balance on our bodies and the balance of these human and nonhuman inter and intra actions. Transcending this idea that we can revert back to mother nature. ‘Are We The Body’ is a tool to understand the body and its orientation and the way we think about physiological individuality.

Whatchamacallit – Charlotte

The evening’s last performance came in the form of our theatre being transformed into a museum setting: a landscape of different installations of bodies, sound boxes and screens. Not a classical theatre-setting. Where people were able to choose who they wanted to watch, like a kind of live Instagram.

Evening 2 – 9 December

Nano spectacle

Our second festival day was especially exciting for certain members of our production team who after months of waiting were able to assist our partners from Serbia with the nano spectacle, alSham. The immersive theatre which consisted of a carefully chosen route in the city concluded in one of the artist foyers within Arenberg.

Alan the A.i Actor –

That same evening a very special performance took place in Arenbergs black box, a robot and its creator charmed their audience with an interactive theatre.

Day 3 , 10 December – international Augmented lectures and first two Belgian AL

Kicking off the third day was Serbia’s alSham with the highly anticipated Epilogue given by Dr Mirko Stojkovic the mastermind behind this incredibly unique and amazing take on immersive theatre. During his epilogue, Dr Mirko highlights how not all is always as it seems and how easily influenced our minds can be if prodded and poked in the right way...

Following him was the equally fascinating Bulgarian augmented lecture, “The Exciting World of Maps” brought by geographer Evgenia Sarafova and the video-artist Nikola Nalbantov. Deep diving into how maps have accompanied and helped the development of human civilizations, exploring their history maps, their use, as well as the unexpected sometimes curious ways they were sometimes used.

The last but certainly not the least international Augmented lecture came from Italy, “What is Life?” by Dr Gianluca Lattanzi and actress Maura Pettoruso. During this performance audiences were introduced to a brother and sister talking to their recently deceased grandfather, whilst reminiscing about fond memories from their times together they inevitably end up tackling the mother of all questions..What is life?

The second part of the day started in the evening and was led by two incredible women. Dr Amal Miri and her artistic counterpart Anna Borodikhina. Together they created the Augmented Lecture , (Un)certain Mothers, in which they highlight the many challenges faced by mothers with a migration background. Based on Amal ‘s feminist and postcolonial migration research which zero’s in on affective citizenship, the audience were taken on a journey as both Anna and Amal played out heart-breaking scenes from their own mother’s experience in Belgium. Our talented first duo wow us not only with their stage presence but also with the powerful messages that Anna so effortlessly sang and spoke into her microphone.

A strong act to follow and stepping to the challenge were Leon Rogissart and Gerben Dierckx. Their augmented lecture started off mysteriously, as the audience were led through the doors towards a pitchblack “Black Box”. Through the darkness a voice greets a somewhat apprehensive crowd, the voice takes form as a blue light shining out of ball whizzes out into the middle of the stage introducing itself and urging its onlookers to come closer and form a circle around it. So begins the incredible monologue by this little A.i, as it zooms around stopping and staring at each person in the room. The little robot explores the past, present and possible ominous future of our lives with artificial intelligence. The augmented lecture concludes with cyber specialist Gerben taking to his laptop, whose screen is projected on the wall, and engages in a live conversation with a week old A.i. The conversation slow at first, starts getting more fluid as the A.i evolves. He concludes their conversation by asking the A.i to explain the possible danger of Artificial intelligence in 200 words and to do so in Shakespearean style grammar. In under a minute the audience is able to read the A.i’s faultless response.

Day 4 – 11 December Last two Belgian Augmented lectures and a talk about the future of gardening

Before we knew it the final day of the festival had arrived, waiting for us were the last two Belgian augmented lecture and a live conversation about “Permaculture in Belgium” hosted by Arenberg’s very own Kay Doms.

But first it was time for Voice Over – By Prisca Agnes Nimshiwe and Baudouin Mena Sebu. The audience were led through to the Blackbox, cheerful Congolese music booming through the speakers greeted them as they found their seats. On stage an old wooden colonial desk , surrounded by a half circle of seven African masks on stands. Baudouin, the scientist, took to the stage and read excerpts from Belgium’s colonial past. Eerie voice overs started to play and drowned out his voice as streams of lights shot out of the eyes of each mask. Now and again a very inquisitive audience member disrupts his lecture and blurts out questions, challenging his knowledge. Baudouin undeterred answers the questions and carries on reading from a letter he finds in one of the drawers of the desk. The letter downplays and even defends the harrowing acts made by Leopold the 2nd in Congo, Baudouin finishes reading and utters the year that the letter was written as 2017. The silence in the room is thick, until its broken by the same inquisitive audience member. However this time her question is replaced by a beautiful haunting howl. Prisca, the artist, stands up from her seat and

walks onto the stage her voice captivating audiences long enough so they don't notice the saw in Baudouin's hand as he makes his way over to wooden desk. For the next 15 minutes a powerful scene unfolds as Baudouin completely demolishes the Colonial wooden desk, the sound of the cracking wood overwhelmed by Prisca's incredible voice as she chants in remembrance of long lost souls.

A well earned intermezzo for performers and audiences alike came in the form of a captivating talk about nature. Nora Ramaker delighted us with her advice on gardening in the city and explained to those who had never heard about Permaculture what it was about and how it could help us in the plight to save our climate.

Not new to our stage, Futurologist dr Maya Van Leemput paired up with the wonderfully talented Youniss Ahamad. They joined forces and tried to explain the workings around her study, the potential downfalls of its standardisation and the correlation her field had with Youniss's field in music. Their fascinating at times humorous dialogue was logged by a beautiful entity projected behind them. This entity, created by Youniss whose talents stretch out far beyond music into the world of programming, was in fact visualising their conversation. How? By recording the sounds or vibrations of their voice in real time and creating a visually pleasing image that was in constant motion and evolving with their voices. Not only was their talk beautiful to look at, but we learned that when we talk of the future we talk of the near present.

The evening ended at Arenberg's Bar Lokal, where audiences were able to connect and talk with duos well into the night.

Are you CURIOUS to know what's coming next?

The CURIOUS project is coming to an end... It's been a fascinating adventure, fraught with immense difficulties of connecting, working and most of all performing scenic arts brought upon us by the COVID pandemic. Nonetheless, we adapted the project, continued to maintain physical connections wherever possible, took other activities online, and managed to pursue our ambition of exploring the communication of science through theatre science and in particular Augmented Lectures.

We have learned a lot through the project, about mobilising and engaging with both scientists and artists, about working with them to co-create performances both scientifically robust and artistically wonderful, about mobilising diverse audiences, about resilience in times of pandemic. What we have learned is being captured in the CURIOUS methodology, an open resource aiming to capacitate the science and art community in working together through the creation and performance of Augmented Lectures.

To take our work one step further, we are developing a follow-up project through which we plan to launch a school for scientists on the creation and development of critical science literacy tools based on techniques of storytelling and its many faces (digital, stage, web, etc). We trust this will address some of the challenges faced in terms of mobilising scientists, raising awareness of the science community to the opportunities of science communication via scenic arts, and designing a sustainable business model.

Interested in learning more about our future ambitions? Don't hesitate to contact one of the project partners or send us an email on curious@projectcurious.eu, we will be happy to exchange with you!

