



Photo credits: Ben Williams Photography

When JOY SULIMAN involved members of her community in an augmented reality project, it engaged and encouraged them to create an interactive exhibit that captured the community spaces and activities that they shared.

The City of Canada Bay, NSW, has collaborated with the Rhodes Multicultural Community Association (RMCA) to create the augmented reality (AR) artwork and video exhibition, *While You Are Here... Virtual Traces of Rhodes*. The exhibition brings together technology and performance in exciting ways.

At The Learning Space, City of Canada Bay's library service in Rhodes, we have a strong focus on community engagement through creative use of technology. We have been open since January 2017 and have a program that covers 3D printing and modelling, electronics and coding, wearable tech, robots, digital music, AR, virtual reality, and digital media production for all ages. At the start of 2018 we began exploring how to incorporate green screen videos into AR and thinking of ways to engage with the community through AR. We started by making small test pieces using the [HP Reveal](#) platform, and quickly realised that we had the skills and resources to create a large-scale work with multiple elements.

The Learning Space is in The Connection, the council's community precinct in Rhodes. The location is special as it sits along the Homebush Bay foreshore. The site has four timber clad pavilions, an over-water amphitheatre, a large waterplay fountain, paths, walkways, and open spaces that

are well loved and used by the community. Within weeks of opening, we noticed that the community had claimed these outdoor spaces as their own. On our way in to work, as we were leaving in the evenings, and throughout the day, there were groups practising tai chi, rehearsing traditional Chinese dance, break-dancing, and singing.

We thought that we could use AR to capture how the community have adopted the spaces of The Connection and transformed them into a social and cultural landscapes where music, song, and dance are exchanged. Many of the performers in these groups do not speak English but are connected to the RMCA. The library service worked with the council's Place Manager for Rhodes to invite members of the RMCA for a demonstration of the AR technology. They were immediately excited by the possibilities, and we formed a partnership to develop the work.

Eight performers from the community were nominated to participate. Their performances of 1–2 minutes were recorded on video against a green screen at The Learning Space and the background was removed during the editing process. We then created the auras in HP Reveal, so the performers appear to be in whatever scene we put them in. We created the augmented reality triggers using the titles of the songs, music and dances from each performance, in simple black on white in both Chinese and English, printed them on vinyl, and displayed along 13 metres of the external glass wall of The Learning Space. The result is that using the app, when you hold your phone or tablet over the triggers, the performers appear on your phone, against the live background of The Connection, and dance, sing or play.

WHILE YOU ARE HERE... Virtual Traces of Rhodes



Finally, we invited the performers to share the stories of their performances. These interviews form the final part of the exhibition, a video documentation which was exhibited in the Digital Gallery at The Connection. There was a lovely sense of exchange and dialogue throughout the creative process, with the community sharing their performance and culture, while The Learning Space team contributed their digital content creation skills. The project evolved naturally in both languages, with bilingual RMCA volunteers and staff checking the language and meaning.

The AR component of the work was ready for a trial in September 2018 at the Moon Festival in Rhodes. A small team of staff were joined by community volunteers to present the work. It was loaded onto iPads, and we provided printed instructions for people to use on their own phones and tablets. The response to the work was extremely positive.

We continued to refine the AR, and develop the video exhibition component, ahead of a community celebration launch on 17 January 2019, as part of the Revel in Rhodes summer program. The RMCA provided a program of dancers, musicians, singers, tai chi practitioners, and volunteers who assisted with logistics and introducing people to the AR work. The launch was hugely successful and demonstrated the degree to which this project has captured the imagination and interest of the local community in Rhodes. We were joined by over 800 members of the community on the night, who flowed

Top: Locals using the iPads to view the AR components of the exhibition. Above: Tai chi performance at the launch

between the indoor and outdoor spaces, experiencing the AR, the video work in the Digital Gallery, the food, drink, and the entertainment. It was a spectacular celebration of the merging of the artistic and cultural practices of both the local community and our library team in The Learning Space, and this new sense of partnership and friendship has continued beyond just this project. We have been emphatically embraced by our local community, who now see us as a genuine partner, and include us in their cultural and artistic projects and plans. 🌟

JOY SULIMAN

The Learning Space Coordinator
City of Canada Bay



EMAIL
joy.suliman@canadabay.nsw.gov.au