

BELLA Magazine

LIFE IS BELLA!

By Jessica Licciardello

This past spring, I was partaking in one of my favorite pastimes—walking around the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, visiting as many art galleries as I could. It’s amazing to weave in and out of these different worlds in experiences that can be uplifting, thought-provoking, or heavy and dark, based on the art you are viewing. In the middle of my dance with the arts, I kept running into a fellow art appreciator in each gallery I visited. After the third time we coincidentally walked through the same space, we laughed and decided to introduce ourselves. This is when I met Barcelona Gallery Director, Valentino Caruso, and an exciting new chapter of art discovery began. He is the co-creator of the Barcelona based gallery Amuleto, and he and fellow artist Jantus were spending a month in New York City fully emerging themselves in the art scene. I was able to meet up with them several times during their stay, and every time was exciting and invigorating as they shared the same passion for the arts as I do. Since then I have been following their work and recently came upon a new project they have conceived and created—an augmented reality (AR) exhibition with a home in Barcelona—and ability to travel instantaneously around the world via a smartphone app. I was excited about this new concept, and I had the chance to ask Gallery Director Valentino Caruso and Creative Director Majka Tkáčiková some questions to learn more about this amazing visionary art experience.

What gave you the idea to merge technology with art for this app experience?

Valentino: In 2019, I came to New York with Argentinian painter, Jantus, to learn about art and exhibit his paintings at Art Expo New York.

We had the opportunity to open a small gallery in Greenwich Village for two weeks. We are very passionate about art and it was an incredible experience to not only meet painters, gallerists and see art shows, but also to curate one.

This made us wonder how to continue exhibiting and sharing art. One day, as I walked to Gagosian gallery, I passed by Marianne Boesky’s gallery and I saw a paste-up artwork on The High Line. Next to the door there was a small white sticker with the information of the artwork and a QR code. It took me 3 seconds to scan it and I was redirected to the artist’s website where I could find out who he was and see his other works.

I thought, “What a great way to have a gallery in Chelsea, Tokyo and Bogotá at the same time!”

How did you find Teorema and Gorilla Arm to

collaborate on this project?

Valentino: We have two hopes for Amuleto—to be a gallery, but also a cultural platform. That is why we are open to work with other art enthusiasts who approach us with projects that we can bring to life through mutual collaboration.

Teorema FDE is an emerging international festival that promotes audiovisual experimentation, educational workshops and conferences focused on digital art. It has been in cities such as Seoul, New York, Barcelona, Berlin and Buenos Aires. So when Rodrigo García, the founder, offered us the opportunity to curate the art installation segment, we happily agreed.

Majka: For long time we've been planning a group show to introduce all our beloved artists but as their huge scale paintings are literally placed all around the world, it would be a difficult challenge to bring them all together. Fortunately, the limits of the physical world can be overcome with the digital one, so the solution came naturally.

Festival Teorema is focused on experimentation with technology. The match of our needs and festival's focus couldn't be better. It was a perfect moment and place to bring our idea of an augmented art show to life.

To do so, we collaborated with Marek Pivovarník, a genius developer from Gorilla Arm who fell in love with what we wanted to create. He had the skills and knowledge to create the app, but most of all, he was just as excited as we were to play with all of the potential that technology has nowadays, so we worked day and night to make the magic happen, and it did!

How long did it take from conception to completion for this exhibit?

Valentino: After I returned from New York, thought, “We don't have the space for a normal gallery.” Our artists are from all over the world and produce big formats.

What other place could we exhibit? The outside world. But we couldn't bring the artwork to the streets, so that is where technology came in. We were already curating an electronic festival, so we could take that impulse and advantage.

At that moment, the idea was insane and huge. It was like the arts and Amuleto taking over the city! However, to make it possible on time we adapted it to our resources. We found a stunning place in a warehouse in Barcelona where Teorema's artists performed during the weekend, the most important days of the festival.

It was 2 months of work, but we made many things in between, so in our Barcelonian timing it was quick.

What were unexpected challenges in creating an AR (Augmented Reality) exhibit?

Valentino: One challenge we faced was the 3D scanner for our only sculptor. Time wasn't on our side for producing 3D AR, so instead of exhibiting his sculptures, we included his sketches and designs. However we are already working on the solution for the next show.

Another challenge was managing time between the festival's art curation and our own Amuleto AR show. There were some coding difficulties that we detected late and we had to repeat some steps before releasing the final version of the app.

Is this only available to view if you are visiting the gallery in Barcelona?

Valentino: No! And that is the most amazing part! It is a super easy-going exhibition. Our first Amuleto group show exhibiting all our artists can easily move all around the world. The potential that such an AR show has is just overwhelming.

A gallery can download the files, print them and hang them wherever the exhibition space is. Anywhere, from a spacious truck to a gas station or a proper gallery space. Once you download the app, you can see the same exhibition I saw in Barcelona 3 days ago. It is completely insane, it breaks the concept of time, space and difficulties of moving the artwork. We are already talking with a curator in Tokyo and a contact in Shanghai, I would love to see the exhibition in Asia!

Majka: We must share art, our enthusiasm, innovative concepts and experiences of beauty. It's incredible what we could do in such a short time, and the possibilities of AR we are just about to discover are so exciting.

It would be amazing to make these powerful artworks travel such distances and reach the public in a way that is very different from the one in Barcelona. We are about to move around a truly international contemporary exhibition.

In a world where we all look at our digital devices so much, how do you feel this benefits the viewer instead of seeing a painting hanging on the wall in reality?

Majka: Smartphones became 'natural' extensions of our minds and bodies nowadays. Most of us can't resist shiny content on our screens, so the invitation for our visitors to use their favorite tool to explore our art show works.

We all know a common situation when visitors are going to see art and galleries just to take pictures of the artwork with their phones. Instead of pointing out how much little attention people are putting on their surroundings today, we played with the very opposite idea, we encouraged our visitors to use their phones.

Here you can see the show ONLY if you have your smartphone in your hand. No need to be shy, take it and explore what's hidden in front of your eyes.

The interaction between the visitors and artworks was incredible! I think it was precisely because art entered their own well-known screens. The attention this experience called and the visitor's need to discover all the details of the artwork was impressive.

The audience was moving around to see every little corner of the works. Coming closer or taking a few steps back to see the full frame. It looked as if the viewer was dancing with the artwork with a smartphone in his/her hand. Without knowing, we planned our little choreography for them.

Valentino: It opened a dialogue about what is left of the painting when we take away the materials which is the concept that interests me more about the AR exhibition.

When people saw the artwork on the screen, the overwhelming colors, composition, technique, they got excited and some of them said, "I like this, I like that," and they discovered details on the paintings, this means the paintings worked for them.

Where would you like to see this concept develop in the future?

Valentino: We would love to continue to develop the concept with our genius app developer Marek Pivovarník and bring the artworks to the most unexpected places thanks to this amazing Amuleto app.

The potential of liberation from time and space is truly overwhelming.

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Be sure to download the free Amuleto app(<https://apps.apple.com/sk/app/amuleto-ar-t/id1480158040>), and print out a code featuring the work of Jantus "The Influence of Violent TV" [here\(https://www.dropbox.com/s/zffkjff9sgtfko9/Marker%20-%20Jantus.jpeg?dl=0\)](https://www.dropbox.com/s/zffkjff9sgtfko9/Marker%20-%20Jantus.jpeg?dl=0) to experiment in your own home. You can follow the work of Valentino, Majka and the Amuleto gallery on instagram at @Amuleto_Art(https://www.instagram.com/amuleto_art/) and on their website at www.amuletoart.com(http://amuletoart.com).

Photography by Lucía Andreacchio(https://www.instagram.com/mlandreacchio/)

