

Case study

ECHO – Empathy and art

Using technology and personal storytelling, the ECHO installation sparked connection and empathy from Australia to South Africa

What

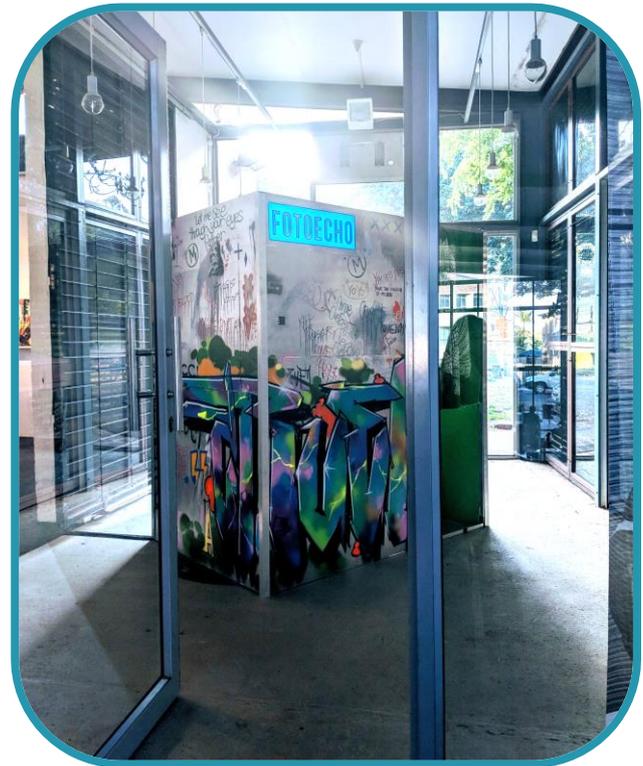
ECHO is an iterative, multimedia art installation, created by Queensland artist Georgina Pinn, which combines portraiture, storytelling, animation and facial recognition technology.

Stepping into the ECHO booth, participants hear an AI voice saying she can “Help them connect”. Participants are then prompted to pick an online-narrator, from a gallery of images, who tells a personal story of a life challenge, win or hardship. As the story unfolds, the participant’s face slowly merges with the on-screen narrator until the participant sees their face speaking the narrator’s words and expression.

The experience aims to induce empathy in an emotional and provocative way, allowing participants to step into the shoes of a complete stranger. At the conclusion participants are invited to contribute their own story to the installation.

The ECHO installation was developed by Georgina, during a three-month residency at The Cube, commissioned by Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and then further developed in a commission from Federation Square, Victoria.

Support from the Queensland Arts Showcase Program (QASP) helped Georgina take the installation to ISEA 2018 (International Symposium on Electronic Art) in Durban, South Africa where it received positive feedback from international audiences and critics.



Echo installation. Image courtesy the artist.

When and where

June to July 2018, Durbin, South Africa

Key stats

- 2 Queensland artists employed
- 6 new narrative captured and added to ECHO
- 1308 attended or participated

Arts Queensland investment

\$13,450 **QASP - Arts Ignite**. QASP supports vibrant and accessible arts and cultural experiences.

Outcomes

- Involvement in ISEA has benefited Georgina's career as an electronic artist, broadening her networks, experiencing the work of other international artists and in receiving positive feedback on her work.
- Georgina had the opportunity to work with Kendyl Rossi, Creative Projects Producer, Federation Square in the production of the installation in Durban. Georgina and Kendyl are in discussion to submit a new artwork for the next ISEA.
- Local street artists in Durban were engaged to add to the installation, painting new walls for the booth that were relevant to their own story in South Africa.
- New personal narratives were captured from the public during ISEA with six integrated into the Echo Empathy engine.
- ECHO was featured at the 2018 Ars Electronica Festival in Austria in September 2018, receiving an Honorary Mention in the Interactive Art+ category.



Experiencing ECHO. Image courtesy the artist

Reflections and learnings

My performative presence, as an artist accompanying the installation, worked extremely well in bridging the gap between the technology and the audience. It worked well in gaining trust in sensitive intimate material and strengthened the view of the project's potential.

Feedback and reviews

It felt emotional and good to know that someone else can feel like that...because I have maybe felt like that a little bit, not exactly like that but the same emotion. It felt right to know that I'm not the only one. – SUV (Durban)

Feeding yourself into another experience, that you might normally shrug off or not even see... that makes the point and it's quite powerful.

Why it's so personal and maybe a bit scary is because your photograph gets enmeshed with the other person. At some stage you can't see who's what, especially when it reaches the half way mark...it's almost like you lose your identity.. I was more intrigued than scared - Martha (Durban)

Tips of others

Work closely with your audience. On the opening night and throughout the symposium duration I accompanied the work, engaging with almost every participant. When working with immersive experiences the feedback from your audience is an integral part of artwork. Emotional responses and conceptual evaluation are extremely valuable to an artwork such as this that is constantly evolving.

What next?

The installation is travelling internationally - collecting, archiving and sharing human stories. It is currently located at Volkswagen Gallery, Drive in Berlin, supported by Ars Electronica and curated by Manuela Naveau. The show runs until April 2019.

Find out more

[Electric Puppet website](#)

Link: <https://vimeo.com/279965556>