



▲ John Cleater *I Must Be Seeing Things*

DOUBLE VISION

Augmented Reality, or AR as it is known to a small circle of cyber artists, is the latest 21st century cutting edge art world innovation. With the advent of new technology, we all bought into virtual reality.

But augmented reality? What's that?

TEXT CLARE HENRY



EXPLAINS AMERICAN AR enthusiast, John Cleater, a founding member of the global group, *Manifest.AR*: 'The important point about AR is that it is an actual visual thing to be seen in a specific location. It's almost easier to say what it's not! AR is NOT an online medium. It's not net art suspended on the web and available anywhere. It's not arrived at via Photoshop or collage. It's not 2D or 3D. AR technology uses GPS to overlay a real site, to achieve an actual visual 4D structure which you can only see – via your smart phone – at that particular place.' The artist decides the place – be it Venice, or a street corner in Brooklyn.



▲ John Cleater – Founding member *Manifest.AR*

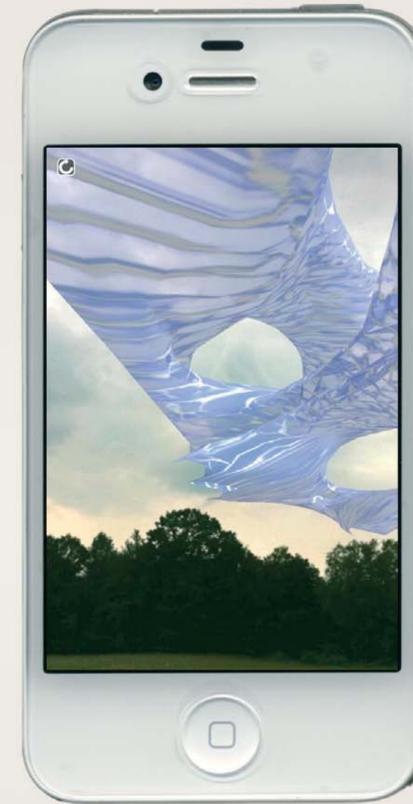
Cleater trained as an architect at Columbia University, New York and has worked in both live theatre and exhibited as a sculptor. His recent progress into AR came by sheer fluke. 'I went to a meditation class, the only time in my life! And there I met the guy who introduced me to AR.'

As Louis Pasteur once remarked: *Chance visits the prepared mind.* John Cleater

jumped right in, learning, experimenting, collaborating, and developing. Shortly afterwards he was busy curating a pioneering outdoor exhibition *Peeling Layers of Space Out of Thin Air*, sited at the Omi International Arts Center in upstate New York. Exhibitors included such high profile names as Vito Acconci, Daniel Libeskind, Site... and Cleater himself.

It was my first experience of AR. Omi is based in 300 acres of rolling farmland with spectacular views of mountains and the Hudson River valley. Its Sculpture Park is home to around 80 contemporary works, which I know well. Yet walking through a warm, wooded June landscape to the top of a hill overlooking a sweep of freshly cut cornfield, I had no idea what AR held in store.

Cleater gave me his iPhone, and soon I was enmeshed all round in a white coloured web (by Leeser architects) then ripples flew (KOL/MAC) and grass grew to 30 feet (Acconci). Daniel Libeskind's planar slabs rose upwards before sinking underground. Real world constraints such as gravity, proportion and opacity become optional considerations as SHoP's ribs of prismatic magenta arched overhead. Cleater's own AR layer features spinning



Left
John Cleater
Dumbo Arts Festival, 2011.

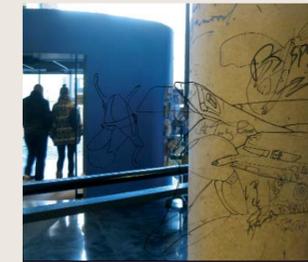
Right
KOL/MAC
Omi International Arts Center, 2011.

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PorPOISE – which is a software he created to allow me to apply interactive actions and animations to the virtual models I create. PorPOISE is the *liaison* that communicates with the Layar mobile phone app.'

AR tends to have a challenging approach. It mostly appears outside museums and galleries: on the street, in a public place or square. Some exhibitions are commissioned, such as at Art Omi, Boston's ICA, Dumbo Festival or the Samek Art Gallery, PA. Other events can be DIY hacker invasions like an uninvited show at MoMA New York in October 2010 – or at last year's 54th Venice Biennial, when *Manifest.AR* constructed virtual pavilions in the Giardini and in St. Mark's Square in order to infiltrate and 'challenge the conventions through which contemporary art is viewed'.

A first, in October 2011, was AR's use in the scenic design of a live theatre production called *House/Divided*, which premiered in Columbus Ohio and comes to BAM, Brooklyn, New York in Spring 2012. Once again, John Cleater is responsible and explains: 'Dutchman Jens de Smit at Layar helped me set up



Left
THINGS: Landingground

Right
THINGS: Pillar

If you can pick your way through the technological jargon, ignore the gimmicks and look ahead, AR or A2R is the coming thing. Art in a parallel universe. Open air sculpture or architecture without touching a twig, tree or park bench; gallery installations without moving walls. AR is already used extensively in areas such as navigation and medicine. Needless to say, some commercial companies are already there. Currently the toy maker Lego has an AR kiosk showing a 3D Lego plane for kids.

LINKS
www.cleater.com
www.manifestar.info