

Uirapuru over the Amazon: Eduardo Kac's Award Winning Artwork Merges Telepresence With Virtual Reality



Uirapuru is an artwork by Eduardo Kac that merges telepresence with virtual reality on the Internet. The work is being exhibited both online and in a gallery at the InterCommunication Center (ICC), Tokyo, as part of the ICC Biennale '99. The multi-user VRML world and the live streaming video and audio of "Uirapuru" is accessible at the ICC website <<http://uirapuru.ntticc.or.jp>>, with documentation of the project archived at Kac's site <<http://www.ekac.org/uirapuru.html>>. Remote participants are encouraged to navigate and interact with "Uirapuru," a colorful, flying telerobotic fish that hovers above a "forest" at the exhibition site. "Uirapuru" is the name of both an actual type of bird and a legendary creature. This bird is known for the remarkable melody it sings in the rain forest once a year. According to the legend, Uirapuru's song is so beautiful that all other birds stop singing to listen to it.

"I've always been fascinated by the Uirapuru story and by its dual status as real and legendary," notes Kac. "I believe that telepresence, which creates an experience that is both physical and virtual, can capture this duality in a unique way. With this interactive piece I create my own version of the legend and I unite telepresence and multi-user virtual reality in an interconnected realm of experience. In my personal mythology Uirapuru is a flying fish that hosts the spirits of those who are far away. This fish hovers above a forest populated by pingbirds, i.e., telerobotic birds that sing the songs of real Amazonian birds according to the rhythm of global network traffic."

"Uirapuru" is Kac's quintessential telepresence work, marking over a decade of the artist's innovative contribution to this field. Telepresence provides access and a point of entry to a remote physical environment, in this case the "Amazon forest." This forest consists of over twenty artificial trees, on top of which vividly painted pingbirds are perched. There are three distinct areas in the forest. One area displays the live video from the point of view of the flying fish (the Web interface is also available online), enabling participants to change the

flight pattern of Uirapuru in real time above the forest canopy. Another area has a VRML interface (also available online). The VRML world is the virtual counterpart to the physical environment. An avatar of the flying fish also flies in virtual space according to the actual flight pattern of the real fish.

Along a pathway, hidden within the forest, a bench awaits local visitors who may rest and enjoy the song of the Amazonian pingbirds and Uirapuru. The ping commands (which indicate network traffic) are issued to IP addresses geographically located directly in the Brazilian state of Amazonas, where the rainforest is located.

River Festival Presents Webcast from Burkina Faso

The River Festival, organized by Camel Zekri and hosted by the Leonardo Virtual Africa project, presented a broadcast on the web on 29 January, during which Zekri gave a concert via Real Audio from the French Cultural Center of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). For a fascinating encounter with the arts and culture of Burkina Faso, visit <<http://www.olats.org/zekri>>.

The River Festival continued until 1 February 2000, as a group of international artists working with art, music and new technologies traveled down the River Mouhoun in Burkina Faso, meeting and collaborating with local artists. See <<http://www.olats.org/festival-eau/>>.

Penelope Finnie Joins Leonardo/ISAST Board

Penelope Finnie is the Executive Producer of Ask Jeeves, where she oversees Ask Jeeves, Ask Jeeves for Kids, and all distribution and partnerships (which include Alta Vista, Netscape and Bell South). She has been with Ask Jeeves for 4 years, developing the original site and growing it from 24,000 questions to 1.3 million questions per day in one year. In 1998, Finnie developed Ask Jeeves for Kids, growing it to 50,000 questions per day and earning the Best Children's Search Engine award from *PC Magazine*.

As with all start ups, she has worn many hats at Jeeves over the past 18 months: producer, art director, executive editor, biz dev person, strategist, chief evangelist, and recruiter all at once. Thankfully, Jeeves is no longer staffed by 10 people, but has grown to 350.

In 1992, Finnie founded Jack of all Trades, a multimedia-turned-web development company that developed numerous major sites during the '90s, including those for Stanford Business School, Improvenet, Onsale, Mill Valley Film Festival, DMK, Global Touch, Ask Jeeves and many others.

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