

Losing Oneself: Art Night at XR Marin

by Maya Bartolf
Community Engagement, XR Marin

XR Marin instructor
Solomon Smith
delivers a Tilt Brush
lesson on October 23.

Upon entering XR Marin for VR Art Nights, artists are immediately struck by a studio space devoid of the typical artistic trappings of paint splatters, easels, canvases, brushes and modeling tools. Instead, artists find a series of twenty computer stations attached to corded blackout headsets.

"As an artist, working in 3D is really interesting when I'm used to painting in two dimensions," said Deborah Phillips, a professional muralist and traditionally trained artist who lives in Marin.

VR Art Nights at XR Marin provide an opportunity for artists of all skill levels to create art in a limitless space using VR technology. Artists are given a short lesson on how to use a particular VR art application - Tilt Brush, Medium, and Blocks. Then, they enter an immersive space to experiment through with creation tools by doodling or to create a masterpiece.

"Our participants range from novice to professional artists with little or no experience creating in this emerging medium that is pushing the boundaries of art forward," said Jesse Madsen, Assistant Project Manager at

the Marin County Office of Education. "While VR art is an entry point, there is so much more to this technology and we are only scratching the surface."

"I really enjoyed this class and look forward to the next one," said Phillips as she donned her VR goggles. "How fun is it to walk around inside your own artwork? I never thought the day would come when you would be able to do this."

Jerolyn Dolan's son Jesse, a senior at San Marin High School in Novato attended the October 23 session. As she viewed his work and looked around the

room at the art made by others, she remarked, "It's mind-bending and amazing! There were so many truly creative and beautiful things being created by people of all ages."

The virtual room is a limitless canvas to unleash your imagination. "In VR, the possibilities are endless" shared Solomon Smith, XR Marin Instructor. "The point is to create an environment that one can literally lose oneself." Art is not to be observed, but experienced.

Dane Lancaster, Senior Director of Information Systems at the Marin County Office of Education has seen this coming for a long time. "For years, VR has been somewhat of a novelty, but now it is developing into a real tool for self-expression and storytelling. When it comes to art, VR is about to emerge as the next big medium."

Virtual and augmented reality is pushing the boundaries of this new immersive visual experience in art while also presenting many exciting opportunities for artists and art enthusiasts. These opportunities include:

Providing new ways to create and experience art

Virtual art can be created anywhere and shared with audiences across the world. It removes the constraints of the physical world and allows artists to further explore their imaginations while expressing themselves in a 3D space without barriers or limits. Art experiences will become more interactive and immersive, allowing artists to engage with their audiences in an innovative and unique way.



Jesse Woodall makes subtle changes to his Tilt Brush masterpiece.

Increasing equity in art-making

Virtual artists have access to endless art-making materials in any color, as well as infinite space for experimentation. With virtual reality stations increasingly available in public places such as schools, libraries (through programs made possible by the Marin County Free Library and XR Libraries), and community training centers like XR Marin, soon everyone will have the ability to make art in a virtual environment

Engaging a new generation of artists and art enthusiasts

As more youth engage with virtual reality, art applications will become increasingly popular and help catapult the next generation of artists and art enthusiasts.

Art Night participants will showcase their virtual creations at a VR Art Show on Saturday.

November 17, from 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. as part of the International VR Day celebration program at XR Marin. The event is open to all ages and free to attend. XR Marin is one of over 50 locations worldwide celebrating virtual reality.

XR Marin is a program of the Marin County Office of Education in partnership with the College of Marin, Novato Unified School District, and Marin County Free Library. It provides educational programming, industry workshops, immersive experiences for the community. Along with seed money from a Workforce Alliance of the North Bay innovation fund grant, the Marin County Office of Education has allocated resources and staffing to provide the support necessary to launch and operate this program.

Learn more about XR Marin at www.xrmarin.net or on Twitter, Facebook, & Instagram: @xrmarin.