Magician in Residence: The art of the impossible

Call
Watershed and the University of Bristol are offering a unique research residency to support the exploration of creative ideas that blend technology, interaction design, magic and illusion.

Delivered collaboratively by Watershed and the University of Bristol, this is a unique opportunity to develop experimental works and make new connections. Residencies are open to UK-based practitioners interested in working with magic and technology, in a contemporary cultural context.

We are interested in magic in the widest possible sense, so practitioners could include magicians, artists, illusionists, or designers. The residency will be co-hosted by Pervasive Media Studio and The Bristol Interaction and Graphics Group in the Computer Science Department of the University of Bristol and will support early-stage ideas that require critical and technical investigation and discussion.

Theme
The art of magic and illusion has wowed audiences for centuries, with magicians using elaborate ploys to direct the gaze and confound the senses. From age-old tricks like Pepper's Ghost (which required a specially-built theatre to house it), to contemporary conjurers, illusionists and tricksters, magic is one of the oldest forms of interactive storytelling and a design form that deftly combines technology, psychology and theatre.

The questions a magician in residence might seek to explore could include any or all of the following:

- How might technology be used to create or augment 'impossible' objects, interactions or experiences?
- How might new technologies expand the magician's box of tricks enabling new types of extraordinary illusion?
- How might we use magic to illuminate the potential of emerging technology areas such as the Internet of Things?
- How might magic make technology visible, accessible and understandable?

The residency will enable an exploration of magic and illusion, with an emphasis on perception, interaction and misdirection. It will create space for a magical practitioner to become resident within two distinct research labs, work with technologists and researchers to turn 'impossible' ideas into amazing prototypes.

When
The residency will take the form of a two-month research and development period, beginning October 2013 and will culminate in a showcase event at Watershed in December 2013.

Scope
The scope for this call is broad: Successful projects might involve the creation of an object, interaction mechanism, trick or experience. The possibilities in terms of materials and processes are infinite. Researchers from both labs will support the successful candidate to explore a range of technology platforms, but the focus is not the technology itself, but the meaning behind the idea and the potential effect it could have on audiences/users.

Some example projects that have utilised Magic and Technology:

MediaLab Prado, Interactivos? Lima '09: Magic and Technology Workshop
International workshop to collaboratively develop software and interactive installations that rethink magic tricks. Includes *mestre de las sombras* by artist Ricardo O'Nascimento, in which people could use a magic wand to control shadows.
http://wshd.to/magiaytecnologia

Mercurial Wrestler
Specialists in a unique form of immersive, audience led performance. Inspired by the pervasive nature of the media around us and the desire to make the impossible possible.
www.mercurialwrestler.com

Joe Marshall
Joe's PhD explored computer-aided performance, and included a range of interactions between traditional and technological magic techniques, including the idea that revealing how technology works can be used as a form of performative misdirection.
http://www.cs.nott.ac.uk/~jqm/?p=279

Georges Méliès
A French illusionist and filmmaker famous for leading many technical and narrative developments in the earliest days of cinema. Because of his ability to seemingly manipulate and transform reality through cinematography, Méliès is sometimes referred to as the first "Cinemagician".
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georges_Méliès

Marco Tempest: A cyber-magic card trick like no other
The suits, numbers and colours in a deck of cards correspond to the seasons, moon cycles and calendar. Marco Tempest straps on augmented reality goggles and does a card trick like you've never seen before, weaving a lyrical tale as he deals.
http://www.ted.com/talks/marco_tempest_a_cyber_magic_card_trick_like_no_other.html

More about the programme
Watershed's residency programmes enable practitioners to explore the potential for collaboration and exchange with creative peers. Participants share knowledge as widely as possible through a structured, facilitated programme including:

- Regularly scheduled conceptual and technical critiques
- Online documentation of project process
- Research dissemination through a range of social media
- Opening and closing events offering the opportunity for discussion with both peers and public

As well as supporting a strong network of creative practitioners and academics, Watershed seeks to engage the public through it's year round programme of films, events, festivals, artist commissions and conferences. As such, we're keen for work produced during the residencies to have public visibility. This could be realised through audience participation and feedback during development, test installations, open lab style events, or engaging use of public space at Watershed/University of Bristol.

At the end of the programme, participants will be expected to present and demonstrate their work in a public arena and produce a final report that considers process, findings and value. Event documentation and reports will be published online and disseminated through the Pervasive Media Studio, Watershed and the University of Bristol networks.

Who
We're looking for conjurors and creative practitioners with an open, rigorous and experimental approach, who are willing to produce work that is exposed, tested and investigated as it is developed. Practitioners will be encouraged to focus on exploration and process, rather than completion of a finished product.

We're keen to hear from established or emerging practitioners - particularly those interested in researching and extending their existing practice at the juncture of magic and technology. We're most interested in supporting practitioners whose practice will significantly develop through inclusion in the programme. An openness to collaboration and sharing of ideas and thoughts is an important part of the programme.

The programme welcomes applications from creative practitioners interested in magic, and is open to both individuals and groups. It will support projects that have already been conceptualised, but require critical and technical support to develop.

Where
The residency will be co-hosted at the University of Bristol's department of Computer Science and Watershed's Pervasive Media Studio and will include regular events at the Studio. The successful practitioner will become part of an extensive interdisciplinary network of content producers, artists, academics, technologists and tinkerers, whose practice resides in diverse creative fields such as performance, live art, theatre, gaming, robotics, music, animation, haptics, broadcast, storytelling, sonic art, film & video, augmented reality, projection, sensory environments and social media.

About the host venues:

Watershed and The Pervasive Media Studio
Watershed is a cross-artform venue and producer, sharing, developing and showcasing exemplary cultural ideas and talent. Through curation of people, ideas and spaces, we enable artistic visions and creative collaborations to flourish and produce work that cuts across film, music, theatre, design, visual and applied art, and the creative and technology sectors.
http://www.watershed.co.uk

The Pervasive Media Studio is Watershed's city-centre research lab, bringing together artists, technologists and academics to explore the future of mobile and wireless media. Research projects are both cultural and commercial and span gaming, projections, location-based media, digital displays and new forms of performance. Run in partnership with the University of the West of England's Digital Cultures Research Centre and the University of Bristol, the Studio has a great workspace, an open ethos and a can-do attitude.
http://www.pmstudio.co.uk

Interaction and Graphics Group at the University of Bristol
Interaction and Graphics is a research group located within the Department of Computer Science, which acts as a hub for collaboration between social scientists, artists, scientists and engineers to combine efficient and aesthetic design. Members of the group have expertise in research areas spanning human-computer interaction, visual and tactile perception, imaging, visualisation and computer-supported collaboration. The group is particularly interested in areas which couple the design of devices with deployment and evaluation in public settings.
http://big.cs.bris.ac.uk

What's on offer?

The residency project will receive:

Research and Production support:
- £3,000 fee
- £1,000 for materials and production
- Critical and technical advice and support
- Work space in a collaborative environment
- Up to £1000 for travel and accommodation*
- Opportunity to focus intensively on development of an idea

* To cover relocation expenses or relevant research visits. Travel and accommodation is not arranged, but partners will assist in sourcing local places to stay.

Development support:
- Peer community of potential collaborators for current and future projects
- Structured process featuring research blogs, regular catch ups, discussion and feedback events

What do we expect from you?
- Regular online documentation of progress and ideas
- Participation in events, critiques and discussions
- At least 3 days per week dedicated research time at host locations (at least 2 days pw at the University of Bristol and 1 day pw at Pervasive Media Studio)
- A willingness to contribute to host communities
- An open, rigorous, experimental approach
- Production of work which is exposed, tested and investigated as it is developed
- Presentation and demonstration of a prototype work
- Completion of an illustrated research report, documenting process, describing findings and considering value

Timetable
Open for applications: 29th April 2013
Deadline for applications: 9am, 10th June 2013
If your application is successful, you will hear by: 21st June 2013
Interviews (in Bristol): Wednesday 3rd July 2013
Development period for successful applicants begins: 1st October 2013

Eligibility
We will consider applications from:

- Established or emerging creative practitioners with a proven interest/track record in magic, who live and work in the UK (as described in the 'Who' section, page two);

- Practitioners may apply as individuals or groups, but may submit only one application per person/group to the scheme;

No other applications will be considered. Undergraduates and students in full time education are not eligible to apply.

If you have questions regarding eligibility, please contact Victoria Tillotson (details below).

Assessment Criteria

Project applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Development – Does the proposal demonstrate a clear progression on from existing or past work? Will it develop and enrich the applicants' practice in the medium to long term?
- Quality and originality of proposal
- Fit of project within the applicants' current practice
- Communication - How will the proposed project communicate the idea or concept?
- Impact – What is the anticipated impact of the proposed project beyond the timescale of the residency?
- Technology - does the applicant demonstrate a clear and appropriate interest in using new technologies within their practice?
- Viability - Is the scope of the project realisable in terms of the available resources and timescale?
- Approach - Does the applicant advocate an open, rigorous, experimental approach?

How to apply

If you are interested in applying for a residency, please complete a short application form, available to download from the opportunities section of: www.watershed.co.uk

Contact

If you have any questions or queries please contact:

Victoria Tillotson, iShed Producer
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