



The History and Future of the LGBTQ+ VR Museum

Jon Jaehnig | June 29, 2022

An interview with Antonia Forster, Director of the first LGBTQ+ VR Museum.

[The LGBTQ+ VR Museum](#) has been on our radar for a while now, and we initially intended to include a mention of it in our Pride Month article. But, as that article was coming together, the exhibition won the New Voices Award at Tribeca, and ARPost was invited to interview the Museum's director Antonia Forster.

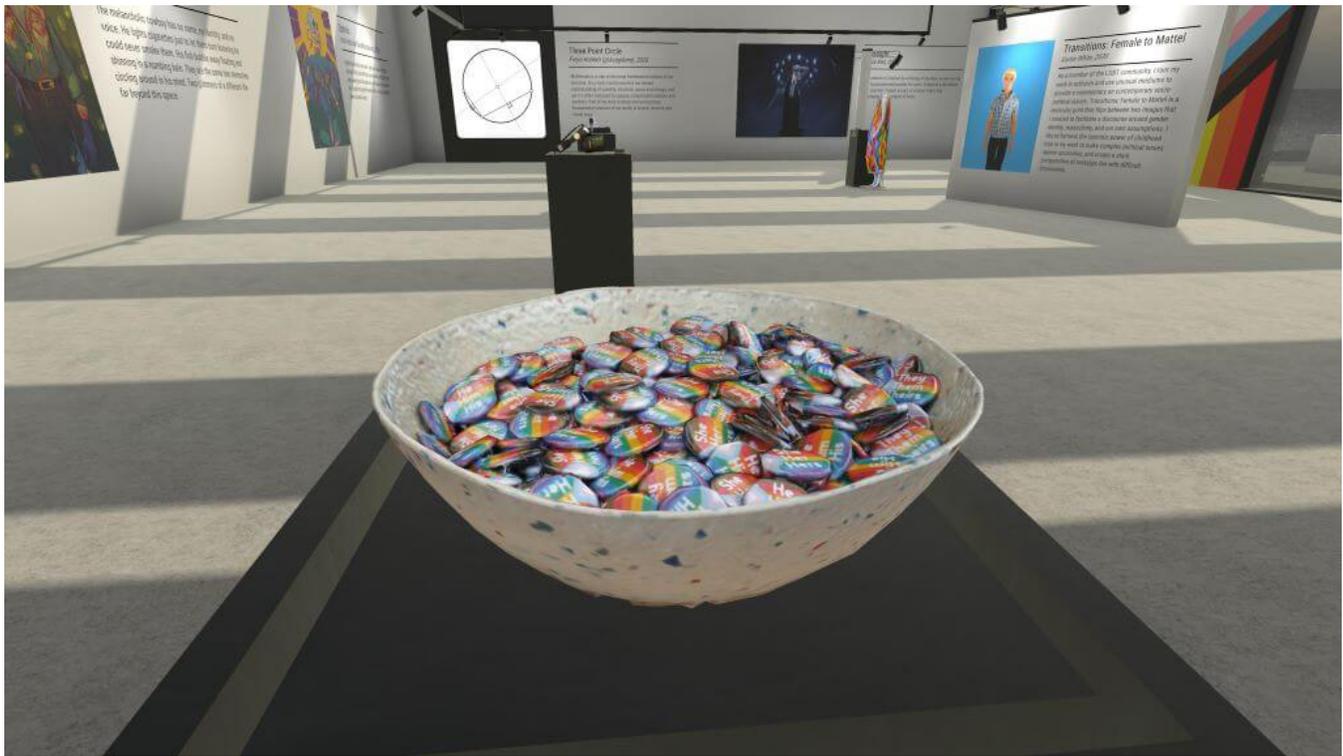
Forster's responses were so comprehensive and moving that, while the VR Museum is still listed in our [Pride Month article](#), we elected to publish a complete article dedicated to the Museum.

The Beginning of the LGBTQ+ VR Museum

Forster was inspired to create the LGBTQ+ VR Museum after her own coming out experience "didn't go smoothly." She felt that if there were spaces dedicated to LGBTQ+ stories, it would foster acceptance as well as healing.

"I searched online to find out if there was any museum dedicated to platforming LGBTQIA+ stories, and was shocked to find out that there wasn't one," said Forster. "I don't have the resources or connections to build or curate a physical museum – but I do have the technical skills to build a virtual one. So that's what I did."

In the spring of 2021, Forster and developer Thomas Terkildsen began prototyping. Terkildsen brought VR expertise, as well as the biometric element that makes the exhibition even more personal. When visitors go through the VR Museum, their heart rate and skin response are recorded and rendered in an artistic and individual virtual model of their emotional experience.



"Huge thanks also to Albert Millis and Samantha Kingston of Virtual Umbrella, and Adam Tuffey, for their help staging our physical exhibit at Tribeca," said Forster. "And finally, my heartfelt thanks to every artist and storyteller that contributed their objects, voice, and art to the work! It's been a phenomenal team effort!"

The Museum Today

The LGBTQ+ VR Museum is home to 15 3D scanned objects with audio information, as well as 25 2D artworks with written information, all contributed by LGBTQ+ creators who wanted to tell their stories through the VR Museum. These artworks surround a lifesize 3D scan of the three-ton marble "Memorial to a Marriage" by artist Patricia Cronin depicting her and her wife Deborah Kass.

"The statue ... was created 20 years ago when gay marriage wasn't legal," Forster explained that only death documents recorded same-sex relationships at the time. "Patricia created the piece as a mortuary sculpture, as an elegant, permanent protest to ensure that her and her partner's relationship would be acknowledged, and treated with dignity, even after their death."

The physical monument, which Forster called *"the first and only LGBTQ+ marriage equality monument in the world,"* is located at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx on a plot pre-purchased by Cronin. Laws changed, and the couple was able to legally marry – and both are still alive. *"But,"* says Forster, *"the piece remains an extremely important part of LGBTQ+ cultural history."*



Forster is currently in talks with Deloitte and the Danish Consulate in hopes of taking the experience abroad for the first time. The hope is that showings in larger museums and institutions, with grants and funding, will support smaller showings as well as the expansion of the collection.

The Museum Tomorrow.

Naturally, many of the early plans for the future of the VR Museum involve expanding its collection and expanding its availability. Expanding availability comes in two ways, allowing more or smaller installations, and allowing individual viewing.

"We'd love to expand the museum by creating bespoke versions of it on a commission basis – for example, working with an organization or a community to collect and showcase stories from their local queer community," said Forster. "We'd love to build up a large enough archive of stories that users can 'self-serve' (content most interesting to them)."

Allowing smaller installations and individual viewing would be valuable but comes at a cost. The biometric recording of the viewers' emotions as they view the Museum is moving, but it also requires more hardware and attendants.

"Our future plans involve exhibiting the museum without the biometric element. This allows us to stage exhibits much more flexibly, and use as much, or as little, space as is available," said Forster, who hopes larger-scale exhibitions will fund smaller showings. "Eventually we would like to make the museum publicly available online. That won't be for a little while yet though."

Something to Be Seen

"We've had such strong emotional reactions from people who have seen a story like their own, represented for the very first time," said Forster. "It would be even more wonderful to allow people to see not just one story like theirs, but being surrounded by them. Or, of course, allowing people to explore stories very different to their own!"

Whatever shape the Museum takes in the future, Forster is dedicated to making sure that it "makes people feel seen and affirmed." The VR Museum also allows people, LGBTQ+ or otherwise, to experience both stories that they relate to and stories that are entirely new to them.