

XR FESTIVAL FLORENCE 2026

VIRTUAL ÉKSTASI

Dance under the Giotto Tower

Piazza Duomo, Firenze

4 June 2026 - 21.30

XArt EXHIBITION & PERFORMANCE

Oratorio di Santa Croce al Tempio

via San Giuseppe 2r, Firenze

7 June 2026 - 21.00

SPECIAL EVENT

VR OPERA Orfeo & Lwanda

Auditorium Liceo Cardarelli, La Spezia

8 June 2026 - 10.00

Founder, Artistic Director **Carla Zanin**

Producers **Federico Bardazzi, Paolo Bellocci**

in collaboration with

with the support of

XR Festival by Opera Network, Florence, Italy
June 2026

Founder, Artistic Director **Carla Zanin**

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Edition and layout: **Carla Zanin, A&C Creative Studio**
Cover image: **Carla Zanin**

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The third edition of the XR Festival Florence, produced by Opera Network and Ensemble San Felice, confirms and expands our mission to perform as collaborative and participatory platform for research, training, experimentation, production, and performance. It fully establishes itself as a national and international hub for XR technologies applied to the creative and performing arts.

Thanks to international and multidisciplinary collaborations, and the contribution of a wide collective, including musicians, artists, dancers, multimedia artists, technologists, XR performers, researchers, professors, and students who will enrich the festival's special events with their uniqueness, creativity, and visionary innovation.

The Festival reaffirms the significant role played by its established working group focused on cross-disciplinary exchange—between the humanities and sciences, poetic gesture and digital innovation. This ongoing experimentation continues to expand, exploring with renewed vision the dynamic encounter between humans and technology, emotion and artificial intelligence.

The program includes indoor and open-air events, held in marvelous venues in Florence's historic center:

Virtual Ékstasi – Dance under the Giotto Tower

A captivating contemporary dance performance set in Florence's Piazza del Duomo, beneath Giotto's Bell Tower, accompanied by an immersive projection and a unique musical journey through space and time exploring the theme of universal Love. The program spans from the love fragment To Gongila by Sappho, to the sublime hymn Brother Sun by Francis of Assisi, to the magnificent Dantean lyric Love That Speaks Within My Mind (*Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*), and concludes with timeless iconic texts by Bob Dylan and Neil Young.

Transcultural Storytelling in digital times – XR Art & Music installations

Hosted within the enchanting setting of the Oratorio of Santa Croce al Tempio, this interactive event featuring astonishing art creations in Augmented Reality (AR), unique experiences in Virtual Reality (VR), and musical performances immersed in cutting-edge 360 videos. A multi-sensory dialogue in magical atmospheres between visible and invisible dimensions awaits the viewer—where XR technology becomes a gateway to poetic storytelling across cultures, times, space, and perception opens onto unexpected visions and emotions.

Special event VR Opera Orfeo & Lwanda

This research directed by Carla Zanin with Federico Bardazzi as Producer and Music Director has been developed within the Horizon Europe CAPHE Project, VR Opera Orfeo & Lwanda is one of the outcomes of four years of transcultural artistic research connecting European and African traditions through music, storytelling and immersive technologies. Inspired by the encounter between the myth of Orfeo and the Kenyan legend Lwanda Magere.

The project combines opera, dance, immersive sound, motion capture, AI-assisted MoCap, avatars and VR environments in an innovative prototype of VR Opera. Following previous hybrid performances – between physical and virtual – in Nairobi (2023) and Florence (2024), the concept developed in a new experimentation totally in VR, premiered in Kraków in May 2026 as an ongoing international research journey of Opera staging.

Carla Zanin Artistic Director & Founder

IMMERSIVE DANCE PERFORMANCE

VIRTUAL ÉKSTASI

Dance under the Giotto Tower

VIRTUAL ÉKSTASI

Music & Dance through the Millennia

BY CARLA ZANIN

Production

Opera Network Firenze
Ensemble San Felice

4 June 2026 22.00

Piazza Duomo, Florence

Music Director **Federico Bardazzi**

Dancers **Melissa Anna Barraco, Francesca Chiesa**

Light Gospel Choir

Conductor **Letizia Dei**

with the virtual participation of

Capriccio Armonico

The Pilgrims Gospel

Academy Singers

ENSEMBLE SAN FELICE

Program & Selection of the poetic texts for the contrafacta **Federico Bardazzi, Carla Zanin**

Sound Engineer **Nicola Cavina**

Arrangments **Federico Bardazzi**

transcriptions **Federico Bardazzi, Debora Tempestini, Dimitri Betti, Angela Tempestini**

Program

Saffo the Poetess in love

Daniele Garella *Intorno a te*
To Gongila

Francesco lo primo frate minore

Lord make me an instrument of your peace *British Medieval melody*
Lyrics Francesco d'Assisi

Stigmat *The Great Gig in the Sky* Pink Floyd

Hymn to Brother Sun Medley

Contrafactum of *Nella Fantasia / On earth as it is in heaven*
by Ennio Morricone
Lyrics Francesco d'Assisi

Dante the Divine Poet

Amor che nella mente mi ragiona Contrafactum of *Done it again* by
Sinach by Bardazzi / Zanin / Dei

Bob Dylan the Universal Poet

Bob Dylan *Forever young*

Neil Young the Poet in Ékstasi

You are like a rising sun Contrafactum of *Like a Hurricane* by Neil
Young
Lyrics Carla Zanin

A man is shown in profile, wearing a VR headset and a hoodie that displays a digital cityscape with a grid and glowing elements. He is standing in a gallery space where the walls and floor are covered in vibrant, multi-colored light projections. The background features a large, ornate archway with a mural.

**XART EXHIBITION
&
PERFORMANCE**

CAPHE-Communities and Artistic Participation in Hybrid Environments
Production Jagiellonian University Kraków, Opera Network

TRANSCULTURAL STORYTELLING IN DIGITAL TIMES

XR ART & MUSIC INSTALLATIONS

Oratorio di Santa Croce al Tempio
via San Giuseppe, 2 Firenze
7 June 2026 - 21.00

The Music of the Divine Comedy

Soul Odyssey

Kenyan Legend

Chiaroscuro: Aperture Threshold

in collaboration with

TRANSCULTURAL STORYTELLING XR ART & MUSIC INSTALLATIONS

Researchers

Melissa Anna Barraco ON-Opera Network

Federico Bardazzi CP-Conservatorio Puccini La Spezia

Nicola Cavina ON

Francesca Chiesa ON

Leonardo De Lisi ON

Misé Johns ON

Peninah Wanjiru Kamau KU-Kenyatta University

Clinton Kihima Kanyangi KU

John Mugubi KU

David Tozzi ON

Carla Giovanna Zanin ON

Research Group

Academy of Arts Szczecin

Jan Jakub Filipowiak

Students **Natalia Wlodek, Luka Ozog, Emil Opala, Anastazja Okroj,**

Szymon Basinski, Lukasz Skorupinski, Darya Yerastava,

Aliaksandr Beliakouski, Alicja Wilinska

Federico Merani CP

Tiago Shen ON

Bento Coelho Peixoto ON

Dimitri Betti ON

Debora Tempestini ON

Coro Etnico Agorà conductor Daniela Dolce

Light Gospel Choir conductor Letizia Dei

TRANSCULTURAL STORYTELLING XR ART & MUSIC INSTALLATIONS

Introduction

This initiative explores the intersection between traditional narrative forms, traditional and new immersive artistic technologies, through a transcultural and interdisciplinary lens. The hybrid format combines poetry reading, acting, original music compositions, singing, performance, dance, augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), 360 immersive video, enabling a reflection on how XR technologies can reshape and enhance artistic storytelling through identity and new aesthetics.

The event is part of the CAPHE project and presents a florilegium of installations curated by artists, professors, students and researchers, as result of a co-creative process; it features four sections highlighting local legends, myths, stories from oral traditions, and poetic texts, whether medieval or contemporary through the expressive language and new aesthetics of immersive technologies AI mediated, in an excursus combining lyrical recitation, soloist singing and choral music, dance, VR, AR, and immersive video. The audience will be guided on a multidisciplinary and transcontinental journey (Italy, Kenya, Greece, Canada) and actively involved in the living installations, while a performer wearing headset will be mirroring the live VR experience.

This collaborative model will give shape to a unique and innovative journey across different artistic languages, allowing the spectator to engage with narratives in multiple layers of multisensory arts experience: textual, audio, video, AR, VR, dance, music, acting. Workshops and training sessions served as preparation for the final performative outcome.

Carla Zanin

TRANSCULTURAL STORYTELLING XR ART & MUSIC INSTALLATIONS

Installation *The music of the Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri*

Text from Divine Comedy *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* by Dante Alighieri Purgatorio Canticle II 96 - 117,
Narrative Voice Carla Zanin

Video *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona*
Music *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona* Contrafactum of *Maria Matrem Virginem*
Leonardo De Lisi *Tenor*
Dimitri Betti, Debora Tempestini *Midi Keyboard*
Federico Merani *Live electronics*
Federico Bardazzi *Conductor*

Amor che nella mente mi ragiona Contrafactum by Bardazzi / Zanin / Dei of
Done it again by Sinach

AR Dante Alighieri by Jan Jakub Filipowiak and Students of Academy of Arts Szczecin Computer Game and VR Department

VR experience on the drawing by Sandro Botticelli Purgatory Canticle II, Music *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona* contrafactum of *Maria Matrem Virginem*
Ensemble San Felice Federico Bardazzi
Melissa Anna Barraco *Mirroring*

Installation *Soul Odyssey*

Text poem *Ithaca* by Konstantinos Kavafis
Narrative Voice Leonardo De Lisi

Video *Soul Odyssey Hybrid*
Francesca Chiesa *Dancer*
Music Ksenita Tou erota *Conductor* Daniela Dolce

Fate revealed Hybrid
Francesca Chiesa *Dancer with body sensors*
Music by Nardelli / Bardazzi / Zanin

VR experience *Soul Odyssey* Music by Bardazzi / Longo / Zanin
Melissa Anna Barraco *Mirroring*

AR artwork *Soul Bodyscape* by Carla Zanin & Federico Bardazzi

VR experience *Soul Bodyscape* Music by Bardazzi / Longo / Zanin

TRANSCULTURAL STORYTELLING XR ART & MUSIC INSTALLATIONS

Installation *Kenyan Legend*

Text *Baobab*, Kenyan Legend from Oral tradition
Narrative Voice Carla Zanin

Video *Ndani Ya 254*
Melissa Barraco *Dancer*

Music

Olele African Song
Coro Etnico Agorà *Conductor* Daniela Dolce

Siyahamba
Light Gospel Choir *Conductor* Letizia Dei

AR artwork on the painting titled *Baobab* by Usi Abdallah Boi, Music *Lwandadeo* performed by Almasi Group, conductor Elijah Adongo

VR experience on the painting *Baobab* by Usi Abdallah Boi, Music *Kolo Ra Mwanzi - Beneath the Bamboo* by Mangi Yaa
Melissa Ana Barraco *Mirroring*

Installation *Chiaroscuro: Aperture Threshold*

The second episode in a multimedia interactive installation series by *Ēthos Cultura*, *Chiaroscuro*, innovates across animation, live performance, and interactive AR/XR to immerse participants in a collaborative exploration of the metaphorical “dark vs. light” duality that shapes our lives. This performance will feature a hybrid adaptation of the experience’s first phase, introducing audiences to themes of desire and its shadow through augmented reality and live performance.

Performers:

Misé Johns
Harriet Kalekye, Melissa Anna Barraco *Dancers*

Installation *The music of the Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri*

Text

The first installation is dedicated to the Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri and focuses on the intimate relationship between poetry, music and contemplation. Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona, one of the most profound lyrical texts from the Convivio and the Vita Nova.

This poem also appears in the second canticle of the Purgatory (112-119), where it is sung by the musician Casella as a tribute to Dante during their moving encounter on the shores of Mount Purgatory.

In this suspended moment between memory, friendship and spiritual ascent, music becomes a vehicle of consolation and inner transformation. Dante personifies Love as a living presence capable of speaking within the mind of the poet, symbolizing the spiritual elevation of the soul toward the beloved woman.

AR Dante Alighieri is an AR experience based on the development of the avatar of Dante Alighieri designed and animated by Jan Jakub Filipowiak and Students of Academy of Arts Szczecin Computer Game and VR Department



Dante Alighieri Convivio

to watch the AR artwork download the free app *ARTIVIVE* and scan this image

Transcultural Storytelling, XR Art & Music installations



VR Experience
Dante Alighieri

*Sandro Botticelli Purgatory
Canticle II*

scan the QR to get the VR Experience



VR on Botticelli artworks

Music

This musical intervention is based on the medieval repertoire of the *Llibre Vermell de Montserrat*, one of the most significant collections of devotional music from the 14th century. The melody “*Maria Matrem Virginem*” is presented in its original context, preserving its spiritual function and its modal structure.

The piece reflects the devotional practices associated with pilgrimage, offering a direct connection to the musical and cultural environment in which it was conceived. Through its repetition, rhythm and melodic clarity, it conveys a collective dimension of prayer and participation, characteristic of medieval sacred traditions.

The Music is a medley with a new version of the text *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona* as a *contrafactum* created by Carla Zanin, Letizia Dei and Federico Bardazzi on the music *Done it again* by the African singer Sinach performed by Light Gospel Choir.

Dante was also a great musician, as attested by numerous sources: in 2015 we carried out an extensive research on Divine Comedy music

<https://www.youtube.com/playlistlist=PLJJChgOGCbAUljXZOv2TH32IGeYfBwYTq>;

in the *Commedia* he refers to many musical pieces that have not survived.

To recreate the atmosphere of *Amor che nella mente mi ragiona*, we used the melody of *Mariam Mater Virginem*: a melody of the medieval Manuscript *Llibre Vermeil*, combined with the Dante’s verse: this is the *contrafactum*, a medieval practice much used in middle age, the poetic custom of adapting a pre-existing text to a different melody.

Carla Zanin, Federico Bardazzi

Installation *Soul Odyssey*

Ithaka by Konstantinos Kavafis

The Odyssey to Ithaca: *Hope your road is a long one.*

Kavafi's *Ithaka* is a philosophical meditation on the human journey of becoming, an allegory of life as an odyssey of the soul. The poem transforms the myth of Odysseus into a spiritual itinerary, where Ithaca ceases to be a geographical destination and becomes the symbol of inner fulfilment.

The monsters —Laistrygonians, Cyclops, Poseidon—are not external threats but projections of the self: fears and passions that exist only if the soul gives them substance. The real journey is inward, shaped by consciousness and desire.

The poet's suggestion that “your road is a long one” elevates duration into virtue: the value lies not in a quick arrival, but in the slow gathering of knowledge, beauty and awareness. When the traveler finally arrives, finding Ithaca “poor,” wisdom reveals the true message: the goal was never possession, but transformation. The soul returns home enriched not by what it has obtained, but by what it has become.

VR Experience Soul Odyssey This experience is the outcome of an experimentation conducted by Opera Network team: Carla Zanin, Federico Bardazzi, Guido Paolo Longo, David Tozzi, Eduardo Bartali, within a live performance where the dancer embodies the emotional energy required to complete a soul-driven journey through the Metaverse, made possible by a live motion capture (MoCap) system connected to her avatar through body sensors. The avatar is designed and customized to mirror her human likeness, embodying the philosophical and aesthetic notion of the “double”. Through MoCap technology the dancer and her identical digital counterpart coexist in parallel dimensions, the physical and the virtual, where each gesture generates a simultaneous reflection, exploring the tension between presence and imagination, body and pure essence. The music is composed by Mirjana Nardelli, Federico Bardazzi and Carla Zanin, with the improvisations of Francesca Paoletti soprano and Dimitri Betti midi keyboard with the sample sound of didgeridoo.



This hybrid VR experience shows the avatar of the dancer with sensors and in the virtual environment, an ancestral cave that represents the sacred dwelling place of the soul.

AR artwork **Soul Odyssey**

The Odyssey of a Soul when life is breathed into the cell.

Cellular life represents a parallel system of existence, within which processes unfold beyond our full awareness. In the visible and material realm, the cell is born, nourishes itself, communicates, engages in social interactions, and performs its daily functions until the completion of its life cycle. In this AR artwork, the vital breath of the soul awakens the cell to life; starting from a microscopic image of a human cell, which is then infused and animated by the vital principle—the immortal Soul.

Existence is woven from the void, which at times pauses—only to reveal itself. The cell is that pause.

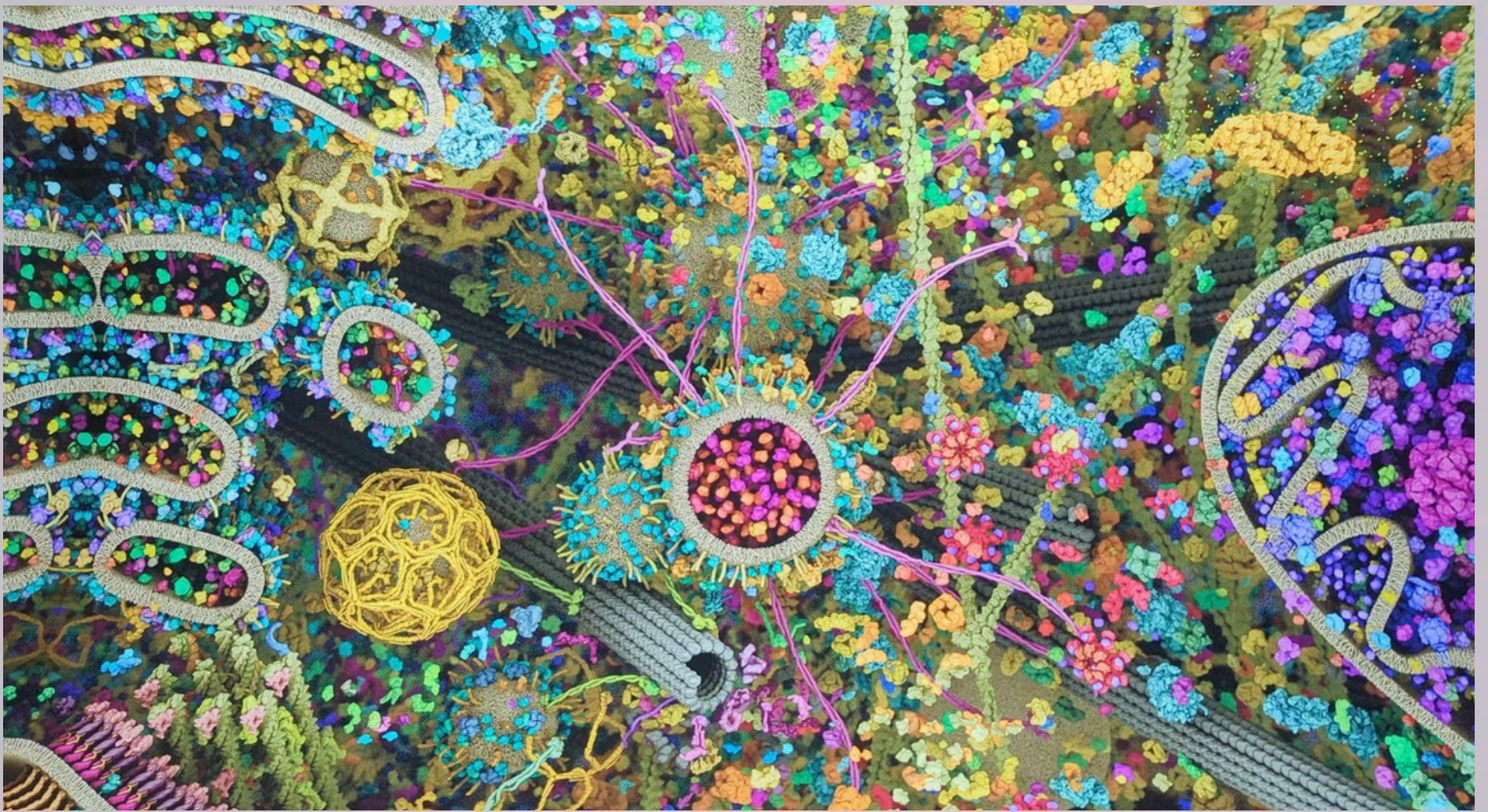



image of a human cell by NASA

to watch the AR artwork download the free app ARTIVIVE  and scan this image

VR Experience Soul Bodyscape

In this experience, VR technology enables the exploration of new perceptual and aesthetic forms, shaping an expressive language through which the human being re-enters the primordial cell, thereby subverting the paradigm that positions the cell as the container of human existence.



scan the QR to get the VR Experience

Music

Soul Odyssey is a music composition co-created by Federico Bardazzi, Guido Paolo Longo and Carla Zanin with a creative process that integrated soundscapes of Naxos Island sea and wind, somatosounds, sampled sounds of traditional instruments, and generative randomization. It is a pathway representing the journey undertaken by the human soul from its embodiment to its return to the astral realm, and back again, within the circularity of a possible new incarnation. When the vital breath of soul unites with the body, the heart begins its rhythmic beating; then it unfolds into lived life, which is but a breath, before returning to the origin of the eternal cycle.

Carla Zanin

Installation *Kenyan Legend*

In Kenya's south coastal and hinterland villages of the area of Ukunda, the Baobab Tree, called Kaya, is considered a sacred tree. People ask Baobab for wishes: to get married or to have a child, they go to the Baobab sanctuary and make an offer, during a sacred celebration, where elders from different villages pray and all the people celebrate with music and fire, surrounding the tree.




Ndani ya 254 is a short video that presents a dynamic, visually immersive showcase of Kenya. The word 'Ndani ya 254' is loosely translated to mean 'inside Kenya', with 254 being the country's code. The video highlights the nation's diverse innovations in different sectors and the unique cultural identity that Kenya holds, merging creative footage and editing techniques. The film takes viewers on an interesting cinematic journey from the tranquil highlands to vast savannahs, mountains, coastlines, and other key attractions. It highlights the beauty, depth and uniqueness of the country. In addition, the vibrant cultural scenes, the economic and urban landscapes, as well as the creative industries, one gets to taste the 'Kenyan feel. Ndani ya 254 is Kenya at a glance!

Peninah Wanjiru Kamau, Clinton Kihima Kanyangi



Baobab by Usi Abdallah Boi

to watch the AR artwork download the free app ARTIVIVE  and scan this image

Usi is a painter/sculptor based in Msambweni, a Kenyan village in the Southeastern County of Kwale. His artworks are strongly connected to the natural environment and the animist vision.

All the pieces are created with recycled materials including fabric, plastic, wood, paper and more.

Each piece is the embodiment of a legend drawn from oral tradition, in a spiritual perspective.

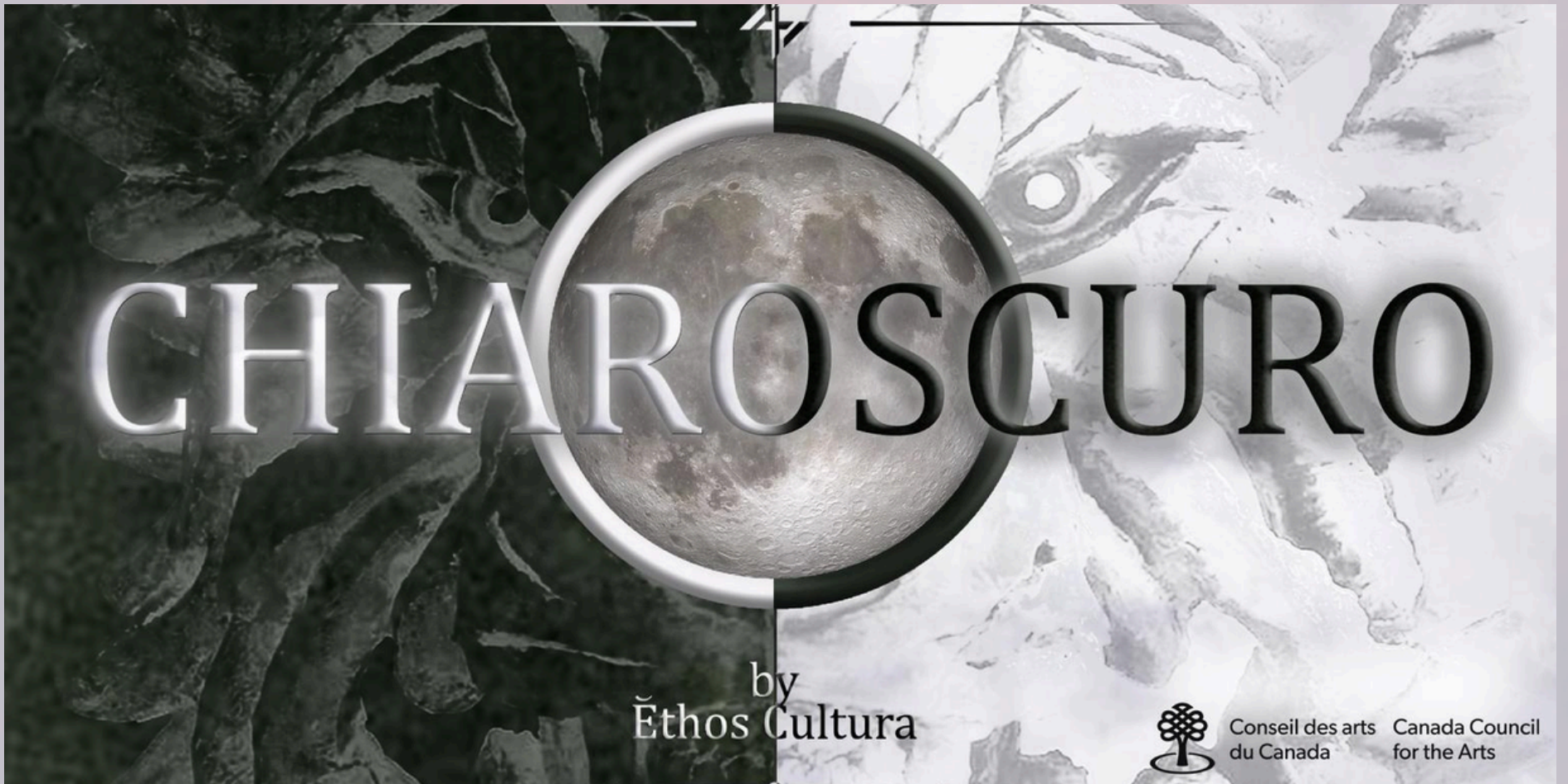
*Since 2024 he takes part to the **VR Training “Kwanza ON Art Studio”** led by Opera Network to digitalize paintings and sculptures in an interactive VR Gallery offering multisensory experience.*

This is the starting point for a sustainable methodology of transcontinental co-creation, where immersive technologies become catalysts for renewed models of storytelling.



scan the QR to get the VR Experience

Installation Chiaroscuro: Aperture Threshold



The second episode in a multimedia interactive installation series by Éthos Cultura, Chiaroscuro, innovates across animation, live performance, and interactive AR/XR to immerse participants in a collaborative exploration of the metaphorical “dark vs. light” duality that shapes our lives. This performance will feature a hybrid adaptation of the experience’s first phase, introducing audiences to themes of desire and its shadow through augmented reality and live performance.

TEXTS

The Music of the Divine Comedy

Dante Alighieri Purgatorio II 112 - 119

«Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona»
cominciò elli allor sì dolcemente,
che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.

Lo mio maestro e io e quella gente
ch'eran con lui parevan sì contenti,
come a nessun toccasse altro la mente.

Ed ecco...

Dante Alighieri Purgatory II 112 - 119 ***Love that discourses in my mind.***

*"Love that discourses in my mind," then he
Began he so sweetly, that the sweetness still
Within me sounds.*

*My Master, and myself, and all that people
Who were with him, appeared as satisfied
As if naught else might touch the mind of any.*

And lo...

Soul Odyssey

Ithaka

by Konstantinos Kavafis

As you set out for Ithaka
hope your road is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.
Laistrygonians, Cyclops,
wild Poseidon—you won't encounter them
unless you bring them along inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up in front of you.

Hope your road is a long one.
May there be many summer mornings when,
with what pleasure, what joy,
you enter harbors you're seeing for the first time;
may you stop at Phoenician trading stations
to buy fine things,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
sensual perfume of every kind—
as many sensual perfumes as you can;
and may you visit many Egyptian cities
to learn and go on learning from their scholars.
Keep Ithaka always in your mind.
Arriving there is what you're destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for years,
so you're old by the time you reach the island,
wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to make you rich.
Ithaka gave you the marvelous journey.
Without her you wouldn't have set out.
She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaka won't have fooled
you.
Wise as you will have become, so full of
experience,
you'll have understood by then what these
Ithakas mean.

Translation from Greek by Edmund Keeley

Ιθάκη

Σα βγεις στον πηγαιμό για την Ιθάκη,
να εύχεσαι νάναι μακρύς ο δρόμος,
γεμάτος περιπέτειες, γεμάτος γνώσεις.
Τους Λαιστρυγόνας και τους Κύκλωπας,
τον θυμωμένο Ποσειδώνα μη φοβάσαι,
τέτοια στον δρόμο σου ποτέ σου δεν θα βρεις,
αν μὲν ἡ σκέψις σου υψηλή, αν εκλεκτή
συγκίνησις το πνεύμα και το σώμα σου αγγίζει.
Τους Λαιστρυγόνας και τους Κύκλωπας,
τον άγριο Ποσειδώνα δεν θα συναντήσεις,
αν δεν τους κουβανείς μες στην ψυχή σου,
αν η ψυχή σου δεν τους στήνει εμπρός σου.

Να εύχεσαι νάναι μακρύς ο δρόμος.
Πολλά τα καλοκαιρινά πρωιά να είναι
που με τι ευχαρίστηση, με τι χαρά
θα μπαίνεις σε λιμένας πρωτοϊδωμένους·
να σταματήσεις ὀ εμπορεία Φοινικικά,
και τες καλές πραγμάτειες ὕ αποκτήσεις,
σεντέφια και κοράλλια, κεχριμπάρια κ' έβενους,
και ηδονικά μυρωδικά κάθε λογής,
όσο μπορείς πιο άφθονα ηδονικά μυρωδικά·
σε πόλεις Αιγυπτιακές πολλές να πας,
να μάθεις και να μάθεις απ' τους σπουδασμένους.
Πάντα στον νου σου νάχεις την Ιθάκη.

Το φθάσιμον εκεί είν' ο προορισμός σου.
Αλλά μη βιάζεις το ταξείδι διόλου.
Καλύτερα χρόνια πολλά να διαρκέσει·
και γέρος πια ὕ αράξεις στο νησί,
πλούσιος με όσα κέρδισες στον δρόμο,
μη προσδοκώντας πλούτη να σε δώσει η Ιθάκη.
Η Ιθάκη ὀ έδωσε τ' ωραίο ταξείδι.
Χωρίς αυτήν δεν θάβγαινες στον δρόμο.
Άλλα δεν έχει να σε δώσει πια.

Κι αν πτωχική την βρεις, η Ιθάκη δεν σε γέλασε.
Έτσι σοφός που έγινες, με τόση πείρα,
ήδη θα το κατάλαβες οι Ιθάκες τι σημαίνουν.

Kenyan Legend

Baobab

"My name is Kaya, I'm a Baobab, I'm a sacred tree. People come here to my sanctuary, to get blessings and ask me for wishes or miracles. During the celebration, the elders from the villages pray and all people celebrate with music and fire, surrounding me to get the good result."

Beneath the Bamboo Groove

After his fishing activities, before heading to the market,

He offers thanks for his catch by playing chivoti music.

"Do not take my mudfish,
It's the only one beneath the bamboo."

Today, Lake Sametha has gifted me a mudfish

No other fish compares to its skin,

A mudfish with no scales.

Have you seen its shiny, slippery exterior?

This is my glowing moon.

"Do not take my mudfish,
It's the only one beneath the bamboo."

The beautiful chivoti melodies catch her attention.

She follows the sound and sees the broad shoulders of this man.

She removes the calabash from her head

Ooh, how she loves music!

She sits near the musician, captivated by the soothing notes.

As dusk approaches, her mother wants to cook;

There's no water even to drink.

The calabash rests beneath the bamboo,

While the bearer is in the lake,

Swimming and entwined with the musician,

Until her father's guards arrive to seize Mlangulo.

"Do not take my mudfish,
It's the only one beneath the bamboo."

K"I swear to God, I'll have your head,

Hang it from the bamboo tree!

Don't you dare come near my daughter

She'll never marry a sorcerer,

A musical sorcerer, God forbid!

In fact, look him up now.

"Do not take my mudfish,
It's the only one beneath the bamboo."

Kolo Ra Mwanzi

Mlangulo! Mlangulo! Mlangulo!
Uvuvi akimaliza, ywapolea chini mwanzi
Chivoti anapuliza, kumshukuru Mwenyezi
Kabla kwenda kuwauza, alowavua mitonzi,
Usinilashe mtonzi, Ni roupata kolo ra mwanzi.

Ziwa hili la sametha, Leo limempa mtonzi,
Mitonzi bila mashaza, nyororo ni yake ngozi
Wateleza na kunga'za, mtonzi ni mbalamwezi,
Usinilashe mtonzi, roupata kolo ra mwanzi

Kahonzi anarihula, kitswani boya ra madzi,
Chivoti anakimala, kimuusire matsozi,
Kiza kinakumala, mudzini kakuna madzi,
Usinilashe mtonzi, roupata kolo ra mwanzi

Kahonzi anarihula, kitswani boya ra madzi,
Chivoti anakimala, kimuusire matsozi,
Kiza kinakumala, mudzini kakuna madzi,
Usinilashe mtonzi, roupata kolo ra mwanzi

Ywataka kupika mama, Kahonzi anaoga madzi,
Mlangulo wamezama, keshayapata Makazi,
Bwana chifu awatuma, walinzi wamfungue nyuzi
Usinilashe mtonzi, roupata kolo ra mwanzi

Senzi kaheri nikone, na mwanangu Kahonzi,
Na ukiona ni zsha matdhe, undambolwa na
matsozi,
Kitswacho nikitose, nichanike henye mwanzi,
Mumezerehe go mahe, ela kundamuhala
Kahonzi.

Kahonzi akiwa sametha, mkufuwe kazama zi!,
Ilikuwa zawadi ya Baba, Kwa binti peke kipenzi,
Machizi yanamwagika, amejawa na simazi,
Usinilashe mtonzi, roupata kolo ra mwanzi

Juhudi za kutafuta, zilikosa kukurunzi,
Mlangulo fingo kazika, viboko mamba wakachizi,
Mkufu akaupata, baada ya kupiga mbizi,

Usinilashe mtonzi, roupata kolo ra mwanzi

Dawa ya deni kulipa, Mkwe chifu akamaizi,
Ngoma zinasikika, Ni harusi mandalizi,
Ngulo mtonzi kapata, ywaupeleka kwenye Ndazi,
Usinilashe mtonzi, roupata kolo ra mwanzi.



VR OPERA

by Alessio Bianciardi

CAPHE-Communities and Artistic Participation in Hybrid Environments

Production Opera Network, Kenyatta University, Academy of Arts Szczecin

SPECIAL EVENT

VR OPERA ORFEO & LWANDA

The Soul in spiritual and hybrid traditions

L'Orfeo by Claudio Monteverdi - Kenyan Traditional Music

Auditorium Liceo Cardarelli, La Spezia

8 June 2026 - 10.00

Concept, Research & VR Director **Carla Zanin**

Music & VR Director **Federico Bardazzi**

Virtual Environments, Avatars **Guido Paolo Longo, Jan Jakub Filipowiak,
David Tozzi**

VR Shooting Team **Clinton Kihima Kanyangi, Peninah Wanjiru Kamau**

Sound Engineer **Nicola Cavina**

Video Reportage on Orfeo, Dante into the underworld

Szczecin, Poland May 2026

by **Gaia Fè, Giulia Kokaj, Sara Lusardi, Eleonora Vernazzani**

Liceo Artistico Cardarelli La Spezia

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Peninah Wanjiru Kamau, Zephaniah Lukamba**

Sound Engineer **Nicola Cavina**

Avatars & Sensor Expert **Eduardo Bartali**

Program by **Federico Bardazzi, Carla Zanin, Priscilla Gitonga**

KU Coordinator **John Mugubi**

VR Dancers & Performers **Miguel Duncan Amuyoga,
Harriet Kalekye, Carla Zanin**

VR OPERA ORFEO & LWANDA

The Soul in spiritual and hybrid traditions

with the Virtual Participation of

Leonardo De Lisi *Orfeo*

Michela Mazzanti *La Speranza*

Mira Dozio *Proserpina*

Lorenzo Tosi *Plutone, Caronte*

Enrico Busia *Apollo*

Mangi Yaa *Lwanda storyteller*

Dominic Ogari *Lwanda storyteller*

Almasi Chorale Kenyatta University

Conductor **Elijah Adongo**

Coro Etnico Agorà

Conductor **Daniela Dolce**

Ensemble San Felice & Choir Opera Network - Let's Sing

Conductor **Federico Bardazzi**

VR OPERA ORFEO & LWANDA

The Soul in spiritual and hybrid traditions

FIRST PICTURE

Claudio Monteverdi L'Orfeo ATTO I

Orfeo Rosa del ciel

Nymphs and Shepherds Vieni Imeneo

Storyteller Wimbo wa Lwanda Magere *Contrafactum* by Friend
Dominic Ogari Obokano

SECOND PICTURE

Claudio Monteverdi L'Orfeo ATTO II

Nymphs and Shepherds Ahi! Caso acerbo

Mikayi, Lwanda Percussions / Sensual Dance Lwandadeo

THIRD PICTURE

Claudio Monteverdi L'Orfeo ATTO III

La Speranza Ecco l'atra palude

Orfeo Possente spirto

Caronte Ben mi lusinga alquanto

Infernal Spirits Nulla impresa

Lwanda Jikele Maweni

FOURTH PICTURE

Proserpina Signor, quel infelice

Plutone Tue soavi parole

Storyteller Kugwa Kwa Magere *Contrafactum* by Victor Mangi Yaa

FIFTH PICTURE

Claudio Monteverdi L'Orfeo ATTO V

Apollo, Orfeo Sinfonia - Saliam cantand'al cielo

Chorus Dudu

In the context of **CAPHE** project, over the last 4 years Opera Network carried out a cross-continental, transcultural and multidisciplinary study through participatory and co-creative research practices connecting different cultural communities within the context of digital hybrid environments.

The research has brought into dialogue two different myths referring to the same archetype and to a common ancestral energy. On one side, the European myth of Orfeo and on the other side the African myth of the Kenyan hero Lwanda, bringing them into relation through music and storytelling. Orfeo, like a shaman is able to make the journey between the upper and lower realms, while Lwanda is a powerful hero like Achilles. They both need to undertake an initiatory path toward confronting their shadows, which are not meant to be healed or “fixed,” but simply to be passed through, to be acknowledged.

At Kenyatta University and at the headquarters of Opera Network in Florence, transcultural workshops and masterclasses in singing, instrumental music, choral techniques, dance, and acting were conducted, placing European Baroque opera in dialogue with African performative traditions; labs focusing on immersive audio and video techniques, as well as VR technologies, were organized, involving the collaboration of Italian and Kenyan researchers, artists and professors. These activities led to the development of the hybrid case study **Orfeo & Lwanda in Hybrid Spiritual Traditions**, which took place in Nairobi in 2023 and in Florence in 2024, involving all CAPHE partners according to their different competences and experiences.

This experience, a prototype of hybrid staging between physical and digital spaces, developed into a new experimentation, a **VR Opera** realized through AI-assisted Motion capture, which premiered in Kraków at the Jagiellonian University, as a starting point of this ongoing research activity.

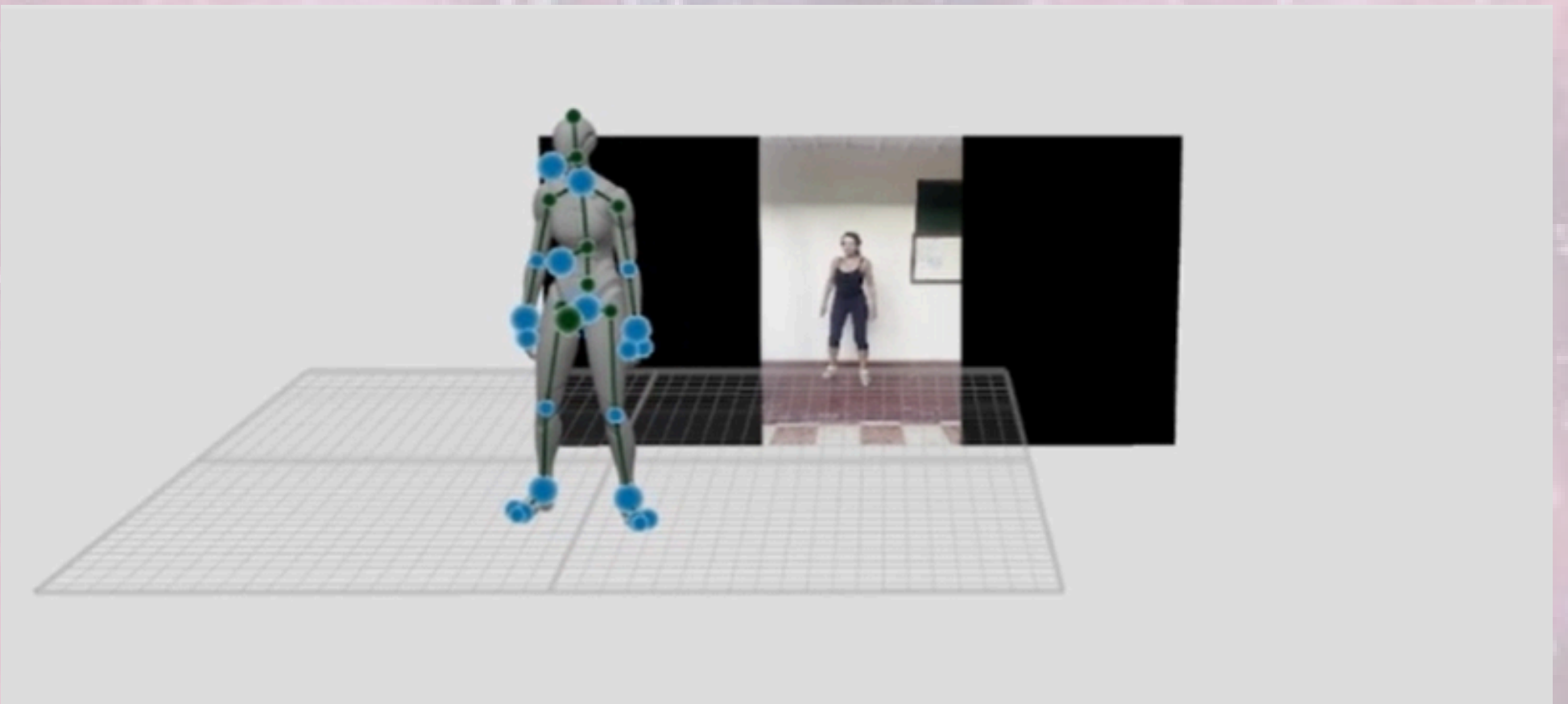
This innovative prototype takes in account the most representative pieces of Monteverdi's opera “L'Orfeo”, one of the first form of “melodrama” together with choral instrumental music and dance from Kenya. Sampled sounds of original western baroque instruments and traditional African instruments are played by midi keyboards together with physical instruments.

The opera is structured in five pictures developing in a continuous flow where the avatars act as a “catalyst”, accompanying the two legends.

In the geographical area of Kenya and neighboring countries, animism and tribal ancient shamanic traditions coexist integrated with new form of spirituality and they are well connected in the social and religious fabric. Despite the official religions, African animist beliefs persevere. Orpheus is the psychopomp and his archetype could be well connected to the animism tradition, as he makes the shaman journey between the physical and spiritual realms, becoming an intermediary between visible and invisible world as shamans do.



Carla Zanin
Rehearsing Orfeo & Lwanda, Nairobi 15 February 2023



Metahuman Avatar

Lwanda Magere the Great Warrior of the Luo

No Luo warrior has had a more profound effect on the community than Luanda Magere, son of the Sidho clan. His name means "fierce rock", or the rock that he builds and this shows how mighty this warrior once was.

Stories are told of his supernatural powers and stony skin. It is said that he was indestructible and that spears, arrows and maces simply bounced off his body. His uncanny ability to tear apart entire armies is still celebrated today. The Nandi were the traditional enemies of the Luo and were extremely good at fighting especially at night.

On the other hand, Luanda Magere and her tribesmen fought better during the day. While the people fought, Luanda was seen at home smoking tobacco, but if he felt that the Nandi were threatening his people, he demanded that the shield and spear be brought to him immediately.

The ensuing battles would result in Luanda taking down so many Nandi Warriors at once that the rest would have no choice but to flee. The Nandi were so afraid of mighty Luanda that whenever they heard that he too was on the battlefield, they all ran back to their lands.

Luanda Magere sometimes even followed them into their homes and took their livestock, their most prized possessions. It finally reached a point where the Nandi gave up fighting Luanda Magere as they didn't know what to do to defeat him. They left him alone, deciding that it was indeed God's miracle.

Luanda's downfall, however, came in the form of his wife, Nandi. The Nandi had given him their most beautiful girl to appease him and make him leave their cattle alone.

It so happened that one day Luanda fell ill and his first wife was not there to take care of him. He chose to call his wife Nandi to bring him medicine. He instructed his wife Nandi to cut her shadow with a knife to administer her medicine. Can you imagine her shock when she saw the shadow bleed!

That same night, cunning wife Nandi sneaked back to her people and told them the secret of Luanda and they attacked the same night using the element of surprise. Caught unprepared, Luanda and the Luos fought bravely and defeated the Nandi.

It was nearly dawn when the cowardly attackers retreated in defeat. And then a Nandi warrior remembered that Luanda's shadow was bleeding. He stopped at the top of a hill and speared the emerging shadow of Luanda. Alas!

Suddenly, strong winds blew over the land of the Nandi and Kano, the land of the Luanda people. And then, two years of drought followed the death of Luanda Magere. Luanda appeared to the Luo elders in a dream and told them where he had died.

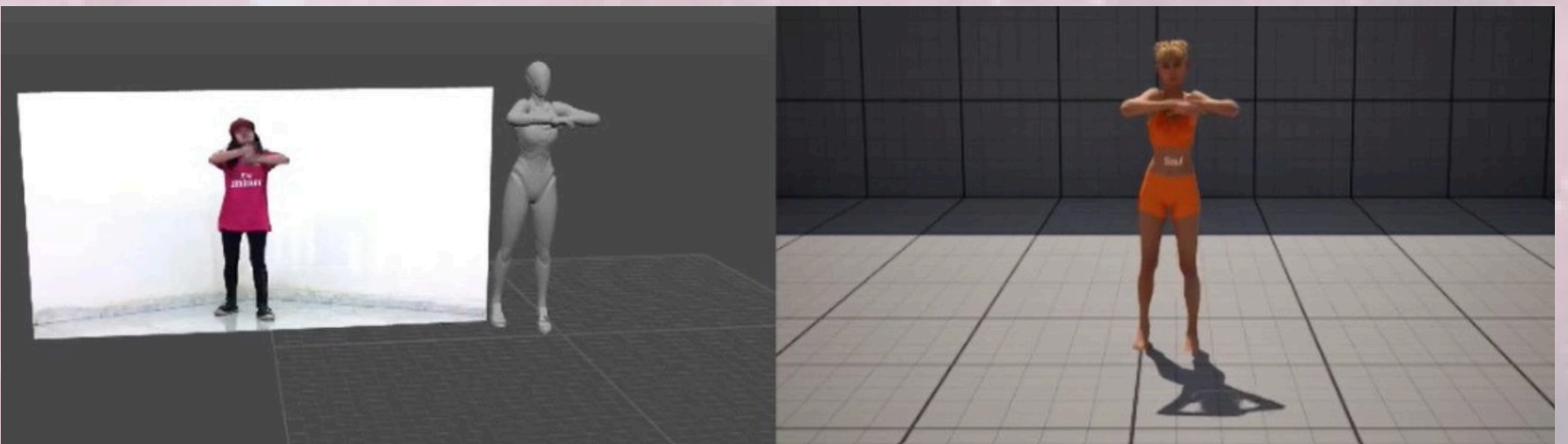
to this day, the place where he died is revered and people come from all over the world to conduct rituals and prayers on the stone. Even today the story of Luanda Magere is handed down from generation to generation.



Orfeo & Lwanda, Florence 2024



Orfeo, La Speranza Avatar



Avatar work flow on Cascadeur

Lyrics

Orfeo

Rosa del ciel, vita del mondo, e degna
Prole di lui che l'Universo affrena,
Sol, ch'l tutto circondi e'l tutto miri,
da gli stellanti giri,
dimmi: vedestù mai
Di me più lieto e fortunato amante?
Fu ben felice il giorno,
Mio ben, che pria ti vidi,
E più felice l'ora
Che per te sospirai,
Poi ch'al mio sospirar tu sospirasti:
Felicissimo il punto
Che la candida mano
Pegno di pura fede à me porgesti,
Se tanti cori havessi
Quant'occh'ha il ciel eterno, e quante chiomè
Han questo colli ameni il verde maggio,
Tutti colmi sarieno e traboccanti
Di quel piacere ch'oggi mi fà contento.

Orpheus

*Rose of heaven, life of the world,
and worthy Heir of him who holds the
Universe in sway:
O Sun, who encircles all and sees all
From your starry orbits,
Tell me, have you ever seen
A happier and more fortunate lover than I?
So happy was the day,
My love, when first I saw you,
And happier the hour
When I sighed for you,
Because at my sighs you sighed:
Happiest the moment When your white hand,
Pledge of pure faith, you gave to me.
If I had as many Hearts
As eternal Heaven has eyes and as these
Lovely Hills in green May have leaves,
They would all be brimming and overflowing
With that pleasure that today makes me content.*

Ninfe e Pastori

Vieni Imeneo, deh vieni,
E la tua face ardente
Sia quasi un Sol nascente
Ch'apporti à questi amanti i dì sereni
E lunge omai disgombre
De gl'affanni e del duol gl'orrori e l'ombre

Nymphs and Shepherds

*Come, Hymen, do come,
And may your ardent torch
Be like a rising sun
That brings these lovers peaceful days
And forever banish
The horrors and shadows of torments and grief.*

Wimbo wa Lwanda Magere *Swahili and Dholuo Language*

Huyu ni Lwanda, Lwanda Magere ni Lwanda, huyu ni Lwanda
Sibuor mang'ang'a
Huyu ni Lwanda, Sibuor Mang'ang'a ni Lwanda,
Huyu ni Lwanda, Sibuor Mang'ang'a.
Aliwaua waNandi wengi huyu Lwanda, aliwaua waNandi wengi
Huyu ni Lwanda, Sibuor mang'ang'a.
Aliwateza waNandi sana huyu Lwanda, aliwateza waNandi sana,
aliwateza waNandi sana
Huyu ni Lwanda, Sibuor mang'ang'a.
Alikuwa mlinzi Wawajaluo, mlinzi,
alikuwa mlinzi Wawajaluo
Huyu ni Lwanda, Sibuor mang'ang'a.
Alipewa mrembo katoa siri, mrembo,
alipewa mrembo katoa siri.
Alikuwa kifuri huyu Lwanda, kifuri,
alikuwa kifuri huyu Lwanda.
Huyu ni Lwanda mwenye nguvu kama simba
huyu ni Lwanda, Sibuor mang'ang'a

Ninfe e Pastori

Ahi caso acerbo, ah fat'empio e crudele,
ahi Stelle ingiuriose, ah Cielo avaro.
Non si fidi huom mortale
Di ben caduco e frale,
Che tosto fugge, e spesso
A gran salita il precipizio è presso.

Nymphs and Shepherds

*Ah bitter fate, ah wicked and cruel destiny,
Ah hurtful stars, ah avaricious Heaven.*

*Let no mortal man trust Fleeting and frail happiness,
That soon vanishes, and often
After a great ascent a precipice is near.*

La Speranza

Ecco l'atra palude, ecco il nocchiero
Che trahe l'ignudi spirti a l'altra riva,
Dove hà Pluton de l'ombre il vasto imperro.
Oltra quel nero , ', oltre quel fiume,
In quei campi di pianto e di dolori,
Destin crudele ogni tuo ben t'asconde.
«*Lasciate ogni speranza ò voi ch'entrate.*»

The Hope

*Here is the dark marsh, here is the helmsman
who ferries naked souls to the far shore
where Pluto rules his vast empire of shadows.
Beyond that black swamp, beyond that river,
in those fields of tears and pain,
cruel Fate hides all your joy.
'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here!*

Orfeo

A lei volt'ho il cammin per l'aer cieco,
A l'Inferno non già, ch'ovunque stassi
Tanta bellezza il paradiso hà seco.

Orpheus

*For her I have made my way through the blind air,
Not yet to Hades, for wherever there is
Such beauty there is Paradise in her company.*

Kenyatta University Nairobi MoCap December 2025



Carla Zanin VR Opera Director, Harriet Kalekye Dancer



Clinton Kihima Kanyangi Set Director, Azmina Cameramen

Caronte

Ben mi lusinga alquanto
Dilettandomi il core,
Sconsolato cantore,
il tuo piant'el tuo canto.
Ma lunge, ah lunge sia da questo petto
Pietà, di mio valor non degno affetto.

Charon

*You do indeed somewhat beguile me,
pleasing my heart,
disconsolate singer,
with your lament and your song.
But far, ah far from this breast
be pity, an unworthy feeling of my strength.*

Spiriti Infernali

Nulla impresa per huom si tenta invano,
né contro a lui più sà natura armarse,
Ei de l'instabil piano
Arò gli ondosi campi, e 'l seme sparse
Di sue fatiche, ond'aurea messe accolse.
Quinci perché memoria
Vivesse di sua gloria,
La fama à dir di lui sua lingua sciolse,
ch'ei pose freno al Mar con fragil Legno,
che sprezzò d'austr'e d'aquilon lo sdegno.

Infernal Spirits

*No undertaking by man is attempted in vain,
Nor against him can Nature further arm
herself. And of the unstable plains
He has ploughed the wavy fields, and scattered the seeds
Of his labors, whence he has
gathered golden harvests.
Thus, as memory
Might live of his glory,
Fame, to speak of him, has loosened her tongue,
He who restrained the sea while in a fragile barque,
Who disdained the wrath of the South and North Winds.*

Jikele Maweni *Xhosa Language*

ntonga zamakwenkwe
Zapugel' emlanjeni wo-hmm
Ukubeta kubetsw' intonga ya-hmm
Amadod' ayoyika ukubeka
Emlanjeni wo-hmm
Ukube ka mlanjeni wo-hmm
Ukuba kubetsw' iintonga, ya-hmm
O Jikele maweni ndiyahamba
Jikele maweni ndiyahamba
O Jikele maweni ndiyahamba
Jikele maweni ndiyahamba
Aqensa makwenkwe
Aqensa kwabamand'
Aqensa makwenkwe
Aqensel' emgodin'
O Jikele maweni ndiyahamba
Ajika' amadoda ajika kwabamand'
Ajika' amadoda
Ajikel' emgodin'
O Jikele maweni ndiyahamba
Ajika' amadoda
Intonga zamakwenkwe
Zapugel' emlanjeni wo-hmm
Ukuba kubetsw' iintonga, ya-hmm

Turn Back at the Cliffs

*The sticks of the young men
Are being broken at the river,
Because there is stick fighting going on!
Even grown men are afraid
To go down to the river.
Down there at the river,
Because there is stick fighting going on!
Turn back at the cliffs, I am going,
Turn back at the cliffs, I am going,
Turn back at the cliffs, I am going,
Turn back at the cliffs, I am going.
The young men are dancing,
Dancing at the mine,
The young men are dancing,
Dancing in the mine.*

*Turn back at the cliffs, I am going.
The grown men are turning, turning beautifully,
The grown men are turning,
Turning in the mine.
Turn back at the cliffs, I am going.
The grown men are turning.
The sticks of the young men
Are being broken at the river,
Because there is stick fighting going on!*

Proserpina

*Signor, quell infelice
Che per queste di morte ampie campagne
Và chiamand' Euridice,
Ch'udit'hai tù pur dianzi
Così soavemente lamentarsi,
Moss'ha tanta pietà dentr'al mio core
Ch'un'altra volta io torno a porger preghi,
Perchè il tuo Nume al suo pregar si pieghi.
Deh, se da queste luci Amorosa dolcezza unqua trahesti
Se ti piacqu'il seren di questa fronte
Che tù chiami tuo cielo, onde mi giuri,
Di non invidiar sua sorte à Giove,
Pregoti per quel foco
Con cui già la grand'alma Amor t'accese,
Fa ch' Euridice torni a goder di quei giorni
Che trar solea vivend'in feste e in canto,
E del miser Orfeo consola il pianto.*

Proserpina

*My lord, that unhappy man
who through these vast realms of death
goes calling for Eurydice—
whom you yourself heard just now
lamenting so sweetly—
has stirred such pity within my heart
that once again I return to plead,
that your divine will may bend to his prayer.
Ah, if from these eyes
you ever drew loving sweetness,
if the serenity of this face once pleased you,
which you call your heaven, and by which you swear
not to envy Jupiter his fate,
I beg you, by that fire
with which Love once inflamed your noble soul,
let Eurydice return to enjoy again those days
she once spent living in joy and song,
and console the tears of wretched Orpheus.*

Plutone

Tue soavi parole
D'amor l'antica piaga
Rinfrescan nel mio core,
Così l'anima tua non sia più vaga
Di celeste diletto,
Sì ch'abbandoni il marital tuo letto.

Pluto

*Your gentle words
renew within my heart
the ancient wound of love,
so that your soul may no longer wander
in heavenly delight,
and you may forsake your marriage bed.*

Kugwa Kwa Magere *Swahili Language*

Waridi wa kinandi, kapewa Lwanda Magere,
Mpenzi kaanza mwendi, wa kumchezea shere,
Msichana mlafidhi, afumbuliwe ndarire,
Lwanda Luanda Magere, Kageuka jiwe la mwamba.

Luanda aligonjeka, Mke wa kwanza hakua,
Mnandi akaitika, kivuli kumdungilia,
Damu ika mwagika , msaliti kafurahia
Lwanda Luanda Magere, Kageuka jiwe la mwamba.

Usiku ulipofika, mnandi akakimbia
Siri ikafichuka, Wanandi wakavamia,
Harabu zikaamka, wanandi wakaambulua
Lwanda Luanda Magere, Kageuka jiwe la mwamba.

Jeshi mmoja kakumbuka, Kivuli kuvuja damu,
Mkuki akachomeka, kwa hamu nayo ghamu,
Shujaa Kaghadhabika, kaanguka kimahamumu,
Lwanda Luanda Magere, Kageuka jiwe la mwamba.

The Fall of Lwanda Magere

*Lwanda's fall came swift and sly,
A Nandi bride with a cunning eye.
They gave their best to spare their land,
And placed their fate in beauty's hand.
One day he sickened, weak and worn,
His first wife gone, the house forlorn.
He called the Nandi girl to tend,
And showed the shadow he must mend.
She saw it bleed her heart grew cold,
That night she ran, the secret told.
The Nandi struck with silent grace,
But Luanda's might held firm its place.
At dawn one warrior knew the tale,
He hurled a spear that did not fail.
It struck the shadow blood was thrown,
And Lwanda died, then turned to stone.*

Apollo, Orfeo

*Saliam cantand'al cielo, Dove ha virtù verace
Degno premio di sé, diletto e pace.*

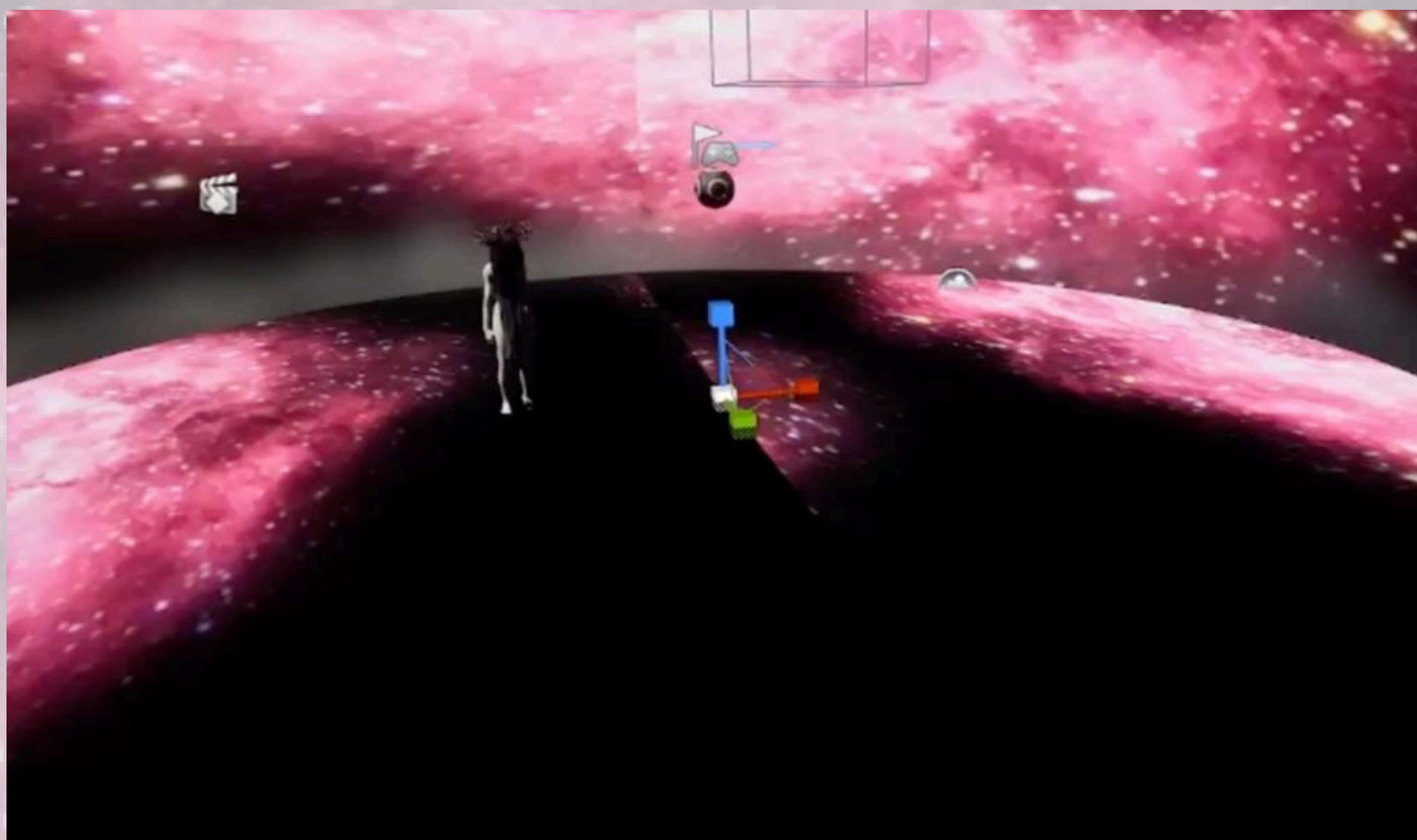
Apollo, Orpheus

*Let us ascend, singing, to heaven,
where true virtue
finds its worthy reward: delight and peace.*

Be isewinjio contrafactum of Dudu *Dholuo Language*

*Be isewinjo wach mar Lwanda
ehheeeee
Wuod chief manosenindo
Ang'o matimore?
Giwacho ni en juogi
Ing'eyo, ni mano ok en adier*

*Have you heard of Lwanda,
ehheeee
The late chief's son.
What happened?
They say he is a ghost
You know that is not true.*



La Messagiera on Unreal VR Environment