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Can You See Me Now? blasts through Banff Centre

By Sabrina Fabian
SummitUP Staff

A group of artists at The Banff Centre took part in a game over the weekend that for some may seem out of this world.

The game called Can You See Me Now? took place from Friday to Monday and involved artists from Blast Theory running through the campus at the centre while trying to "virtually" chase the people playing online.

Using walkie-talkies and a GPS tracking system, the artists were connecting with people from all over the world.

Ju Row Farr is one of the artists who has been a part of Blast Theory since its conceptualization in 1991.

"We've always made work that has a live and interactive element," says Row Farr. "Our performance clubs with audience involvement has evolved over the years."

With the evolution of technology, the group of artists originating from England has taken their art to a whole new level.

The first online game they staged took place in 1998, and was a kidnap lottery project that was viewed online. Can You See Me Now? was first played in 2001.

The artists recreate a world where virtual reality and reality intermingle, drawing viewers – or in this case players – into a desperate chase in real time.

It allows the viewers the opportunity to be involved in the game, says Row Farr, but presents a challenge since you can only "virtually" see who you're chasing.



Brendan Nogue/ SummitUp

Hannah Talbot, left, and Ju Row Farr, "runners" in the game Can You See Me Now?, get their radios and GPS trackers set up to start the game in front of the Jeane and Peter Loughheed Building at The Banff Centre on Sunday.

"We're chasing someone who effectively is not in front of us," she says.

The artists spent the week leading up to the start of the game drawing their virtual map and taking panoramic pictures of the scenery in order to give players the best possible feel for the area they were playing in. Boundaries had to be clearly drawn so as to ensure that all the space was accounted for and the players couldn't fall off the map.

The space used measured roughly 200 metres by 200 metres.

While there are not necessarily clear winners and losers in this game, there are some players who may outlast others. Furthermore, anyone can start again once they've been caught, so the players' total game time can be used to measure their success.

However as opposed to regular video games, the point of Can You See Me Now? is not to win, it's simply to play the game, says Row Farr.

"The thrill is being chased remotely and making connections with strangers," she says.

The game has become quite popular and has been played all over the world, including in Rotterdam, Brighton, Barcelona and Tokyo. The group is planning on going to Chicago, Preston and Dublin later this year. This was the first time the game was played in Canada.

"It's definitely a piece of art that travels well," says Row Farr. "It's fascinating to see how individuals respond differently and how the architecture reflects what you can and can't do."

As a work of art, the game is different, but art nonetheless, and one that is unique and breaks boundaries within the world of art.

"It's a piece of artwork that stays with you," says Row Farr.

For information on the next game and where to play, visit www.blasttheory.co.uk.