Venice Immersive: Victoria Bousis shares about her immersive film

Elena Dal Forno (September 26, 2022)

At the Venice Film Festival, we discovered the extraordinary story of Pin Yathay and spoke with the director about the immersive experience

Virtual reality as a glimpse into the world. To talk about human rights, the struggle for survival, vicious dictatorships masquerading as new freedoms. An immersive, powerful and alienating journey into the soul of a man forced to make unspeakable choices, such as abandoning his sick 6-year-old child to escape the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge. It is "Stay Alive my son/ Tu vivras, mon fils" by Greek-American director Victoria Bousis, an innovative and immersive project capable of combining interactive storytelling, virtual technology and immersive experience, which will be presented in Competition at the 79. Venice International Film Festival in the "Venice Immersive" section (Old Lazaretto Island). Based on the international best seller by Pin Yathay, "Stay Alive my son/Tu vivras mon fils" transports the viewer into the life of a man desperately searching for his son against the backdrop of the Cambodian genocide in the second half of the 1970s. It is a story of survival, of family love, but also of atonement. With a man who even 50 years after his escape must come to terms with his own demons to find peace and forgiveness. "Pin Yathay's memoir electrocuted me," says director Victoria Bousis, "He is now very old and lives in France, but he was happy to be part of this project. I thank him deeply for sharing his story with me. It is hard to admit that you have to leave your child behind in order to survive; I admire his courage. All his pain emerges in the book:

like many survivors, and particularly parents, Pin Yathay had to make unspeakable choices to survive, such as abandoning his son-a decision that weighs heavy, precisely because he never found him again. Yathay questions whether what he did was right or not."

"Stay alive my son" is an immersive, epic and mythically cinematic experience that places the viewer, in this case a player (gamer) in the shoes of a father forced to abandon his young son to escape the Cambodian genocide. The project engages all the senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, even taste: wearing a viewer equipped with headphones and a wristband that sends pulses, the player experiences a wide range of emotions and feelings. Immersive content goes so far as to stimulate concentration, foster interaction between characters and worlds, while real-time feedback allows a path of awareness within the story. "After two minutes of viewing, the body reacts and feels physical emotions," explains director Victoria Bousis, "the brain searches for objects, moves them around, moves the body, makes people feel. I've seen players cry, gasp, vocalize their feelings, say "oh my god, I want to help, I want to do something." It is not the usual virtual reality that makes players see the world in an "augmented" way. It's different: in "Stay Alive, My Son," the brain begins to believe it is part of that universe. Which opens up an incredible opportunity: the audience can really experience strong emotions and be touched by them, changing their gaze from the things being told

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