



THE ABANDONED LIBRARY



EVALUATION

xR StGries



The Art House

YORKSHIRE
FILM ARCHIVE



NORTH EAST
FILM ARCHIVE



INTRODUCTION

The Abandoned Library is an immersive experience that explores issues around the environment, displacement and Artificial Intelligence, combining compelling audio / visuals with a strong literary core.

In a future Northern England devastated by climate change, an environmental worker uncovers an abandoned library where books and technology have fused into the architecture and landscape to create new stories.

19-year-old CJ is working to salvage valuable resources from a flooded and contaminated marshland, the haunting remains of a once-thriving coastal town. The world she inhabits leaves her feeling angry and displaced. She is living through the catastrophic consequences of previous generations' mistakes.

Taking shelter from an approaching storm, CJ ventures inside an old library where she discovers a bizarre 'living' fusion of nature, language and technology. At its heart is The Librarian, a malfunctioned AI that has spent many years gathering data from its turbulent surroundings.

dreamingmethods.com/abandoned



"A powerful message, beautifully presented and curated. Frightening and honest."

- Mary Roche, Voluntary and Community Sector Consultant



R&D

We identified two key areas to explore as part of our research and development with The Abandoned Library:

1. Creative development for our team

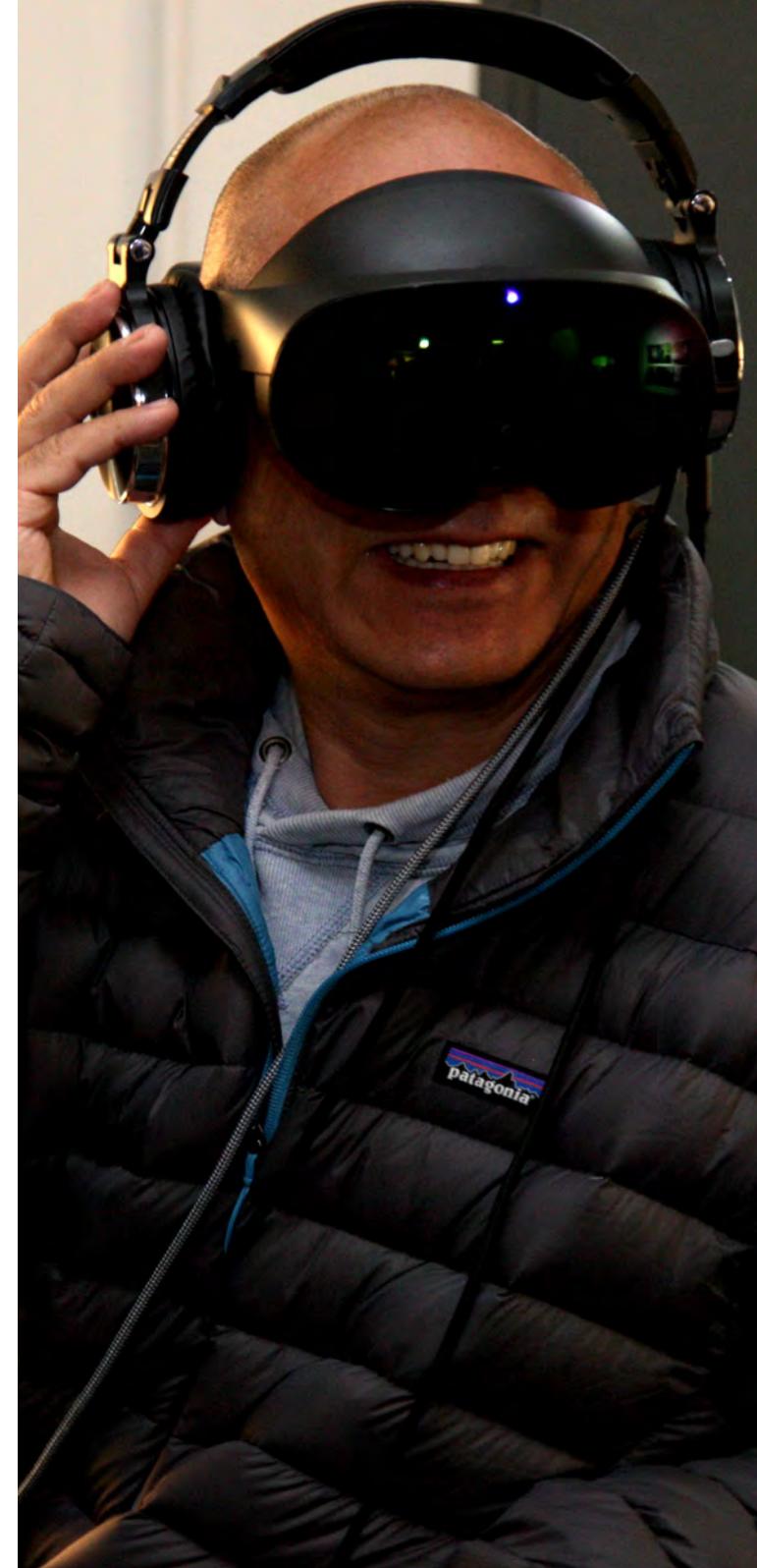
Using the XR Stories Lab we were able to explore bringing motion capture and ambisonic sound into the project. Having access to equipment and technical support at the University of York in these two areas of the creative process was a good skills development opportunity for all our team.

2. Audience Engagement

Our objective was to showcase The Abandoned Library to different audiences exploring what works best in showing virtual reality / immersive storytelling to new audiences.

"I really enjoyed doing the motion capture. I've never done anything like that before and I learnt loads."

- Tiara Ashworth, Trainee 3D Artist



CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT: VISUALS & TECHNICAL

We produced a series of prototype visuals using static 3D models and photographic scans to get a sense of the look and feel we were aiming for with the overall story.

To achieve detailed graphics, our studio used Unity's High Definition Render Pipeline for the first time which allowed us to explore its additional tools and capabilities. This gave us the flexibility to work with accurate lighting and more complex shaders.

One of our biggest challenges was creating a realistic weather simulation that would work effectively in VR and allow the environment to dramatically and convincingly change during the course of the story. The simulation ideally needed to include storm clouds, lightning and rain, all of which we managed to achieve in the final piece.

We also developed techniques to embed fragments of text taken from the script and spoken word audio within the landscape, so that it felt like a natural, integrated part of the environment.

"I'm quite overwhelmed... In a good way! Beautiful, hopeful, and totally energetic. The story was strong, the characters felt very real. The use of poetry worked incredibly well."

- Charlotte Blacker, Illustrator and Lecturer

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT: VISUALS & TECHNICAL

Screenshots from early visuals



"I was blown away by the exquisite storytelling and detail involved in the Abandoned Library. From the beginning the world-building shows such a skilful sensitivity to narrative and environmental issues. I particularly loved the character of CJ, we are drawn into her world with amazing force."

- Louise Latham, MIX Immersive Storytelling Conference, The British Library



CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT: TEAM SKILLS

The project gave us the opportunity to develop our team's skills in the following key areas:

Motion capture and 3D character animation

3D asset creation with HDRP

Ambisonic sound production

Realtime weather simulation programming

High Definition Render Pipeline (HDRP)

Environmental design with HDRP

Experimental text rendering in VR

Using archive film within VR



"The technical aspects of the experience was amazing, the motion elements were spot on and the graphics and models were gorgeous."

- Ellie Ohleary, MIX Immersive Storytelling Conference, The British Library

CREATIVE DEVELOPMENT: LEAD ARTISTS

Expanding the lead artists' (Andy Campbell & Judi Alston) creative practice to explore ways of interpreting their VR work from headset into public art gallery space was an important part of the Professional Development of the project.

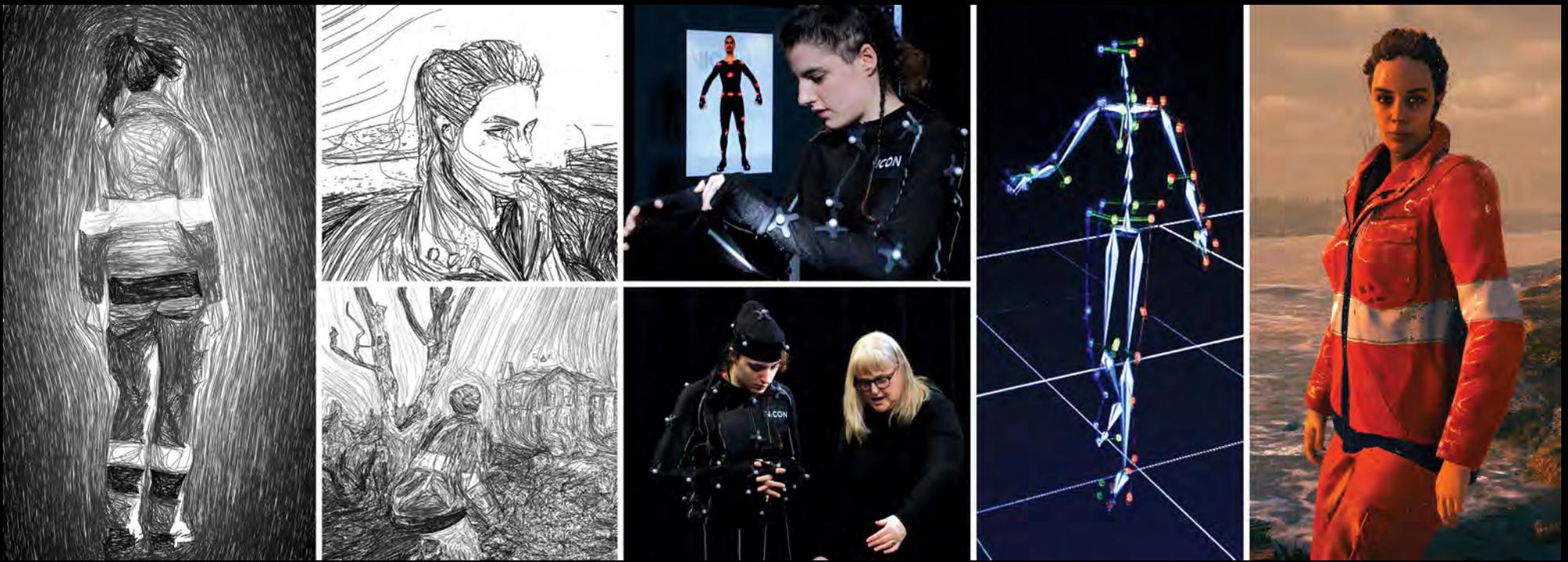
The exhibition included:

- Physical installation
- Large scale projection
- Interactive touch screen
- Process boards
- Artwork from the project
- Short documentary film
- Archive film
- x2 VR stations



*“Congratulations to you both on a wonderful interactive exhibition. You smashed it!
A fantastic achievement. The audience response and numbers say it all.”*

- Damon Jackson-Waldock, Curator, The Art House, Wakefield



ABOVE: Original character sketches, motion capture and the final 3D character model BELOW: The Librarian concept, archive film used in the scene, green screen filming and concept art





AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

We explored three different methods of public engagement to test out audience reactions and impact. Each event or location brought the project to different audiences. These were:

- A public art exhibition running several weeks freely open to all
- A one off conference / festival with international delegates
- Workshops with mixed age participants local to our area

Learning from these three different approaches has been useful to inform future projects.

The Abandoned Library Art House Exhibition, Wakefield

THE ART HOUSE INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION & WORKSHOPS

The art exhibition ran in the Tiled Gallery, The Art House, Wakefield, for 3 weeks. We created an installation to make the audience feel they were in a disused library, using old shelves and ephemera from the former Wakefield Library where the gallery is now sited.

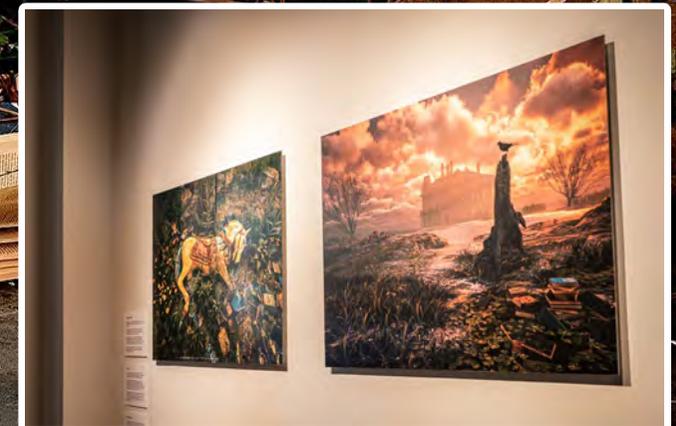
Wakefield Library supported the project by donating 200 books ready to be recycled, and funded a series of family-friendly workshops.

Exhibition audience: 1,648 visitors
+ 8 family workshops (32 participants)



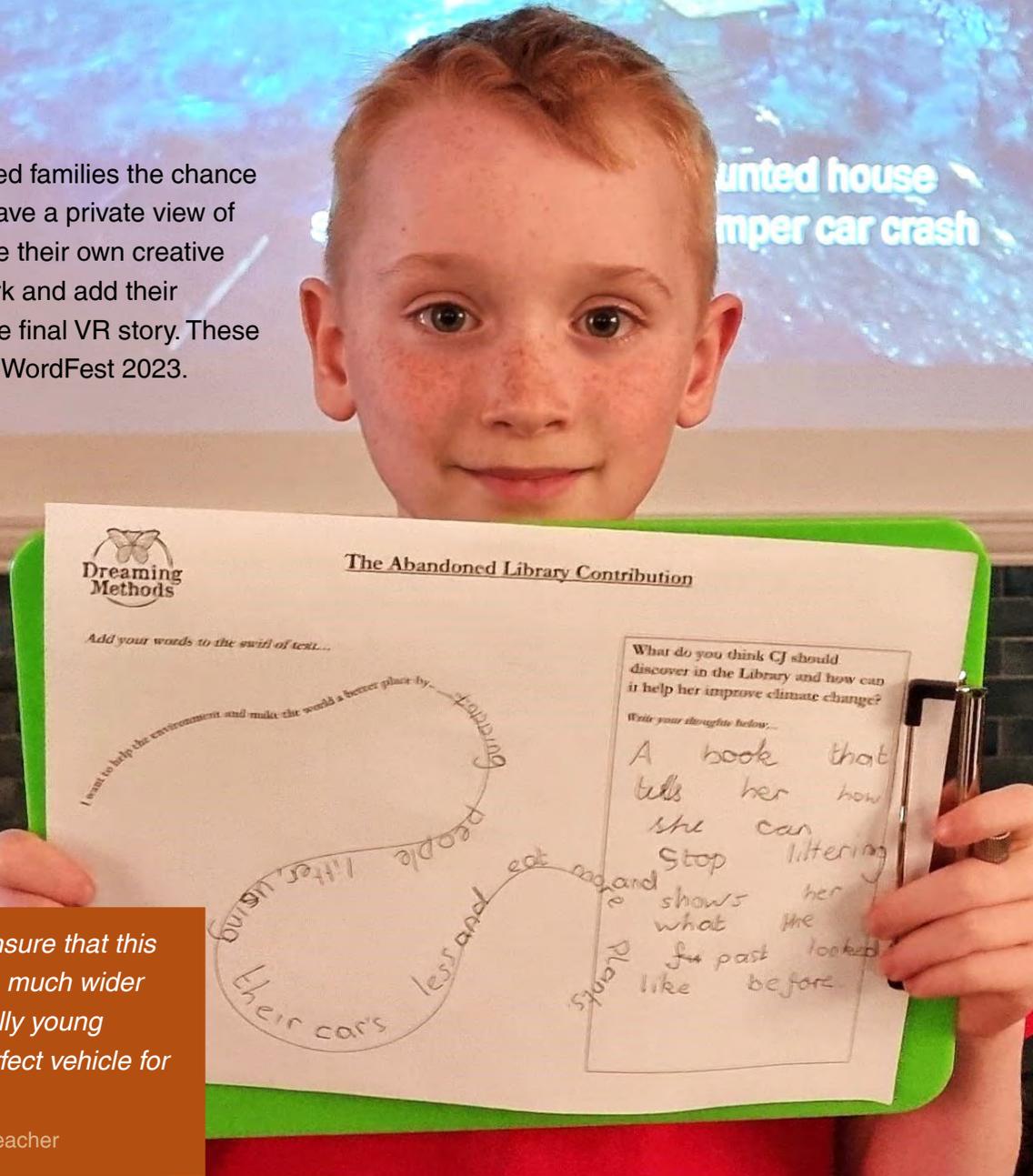
"An incredibly absorbing and engaging experience. Thoroughly thought-provoking. Beautifully rendered visuals, with an amazing level of detail."

- Jim Souper, Photographer



THE ART HOUSE INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION & WORKSHOPS

The workshops offered families the chance to meet the artists, have a private view of the exhibition, explore their own creative writing, create artwork and add their climate pledges to the final VR story. These events ran as part of WordFest 2023.



The Abandoned Library Contribution

Add your words to the swirl of text...

I want to help the environment and make the world a better place by...

holding people's litter, using their cars

What do you think CJ should discover in the Library and how can it help her improve climate change?

Write your thoughts below...

A book that tells her how she can stop littering and shows her what the sea past looked like before.

"Please, please ensure that this gets shared with a much wider audience, especially young people, it's the perfect vehicle for engagement."

- Roz Szpigel, Head Teacher



THE BRITISH LIBRARY: MIX IMMERSIVE STORYTELLING CONFERENCE

We were invited to show The Abandoned Library and to present at the MIX International Digital Storytelling Conference in London where the project received an overwhelmingly positive response.

The Abandoned Library is featured in the MIX Conference Showcase Catalogue and is currently a focus of study for academics.

“Very moving and powerful use of VR ‘time-travel’. I enjoyed the dramatic elements, The Librarian, the archive film... It brought me back to myself and to the now and our responsibility is the present. I’ll remember this.”

- Mandy Rose, Director of Bristol’s Digital Cultures Research Centre, University of the West of England

*Audience: 200 people
52 written responses to the work*



CHALLENGES & ACHIEVEMENTS

Showing VR projects at events and in public spaces requires a lot of commitment both to the kit and to the staffing of it. Graphically intense tethered VR experiences requiring minimum specifications can be expensive and problematic for small studios or independent gallery spaces / conferences.

We are keen to use our experience as creators of immersive stories alongside having a long track record of community / audience engagement to explore new ways of bringing this genre of work to wider audiences and a new generation of makers. This means looking at the technical options as well as screening and exhibition opportunities.

We are interested in pursuing a collective action between tech companies who make the hardware, funders of immersive storytelling, places who screen work, and creative producers. This collective action is what is needed strategically to expand the offer and reach of XR storytelling.

We hope to seek next-stage funding to create an immersive and accessible 'touring exhibition' of The Abandoned Library to widen our audience and further develop our approach with XR technology within gallery / installation settings.

Achievements

Standalone 14-minute VR story

3-week interactive exhibition with 1,648 visitors

Officially selected by Bolton and Aesthetica International Film Festivals

Awarded a 'Triple F' rating by Bolton International Film Festival for positive representation of women on screen and within the production team

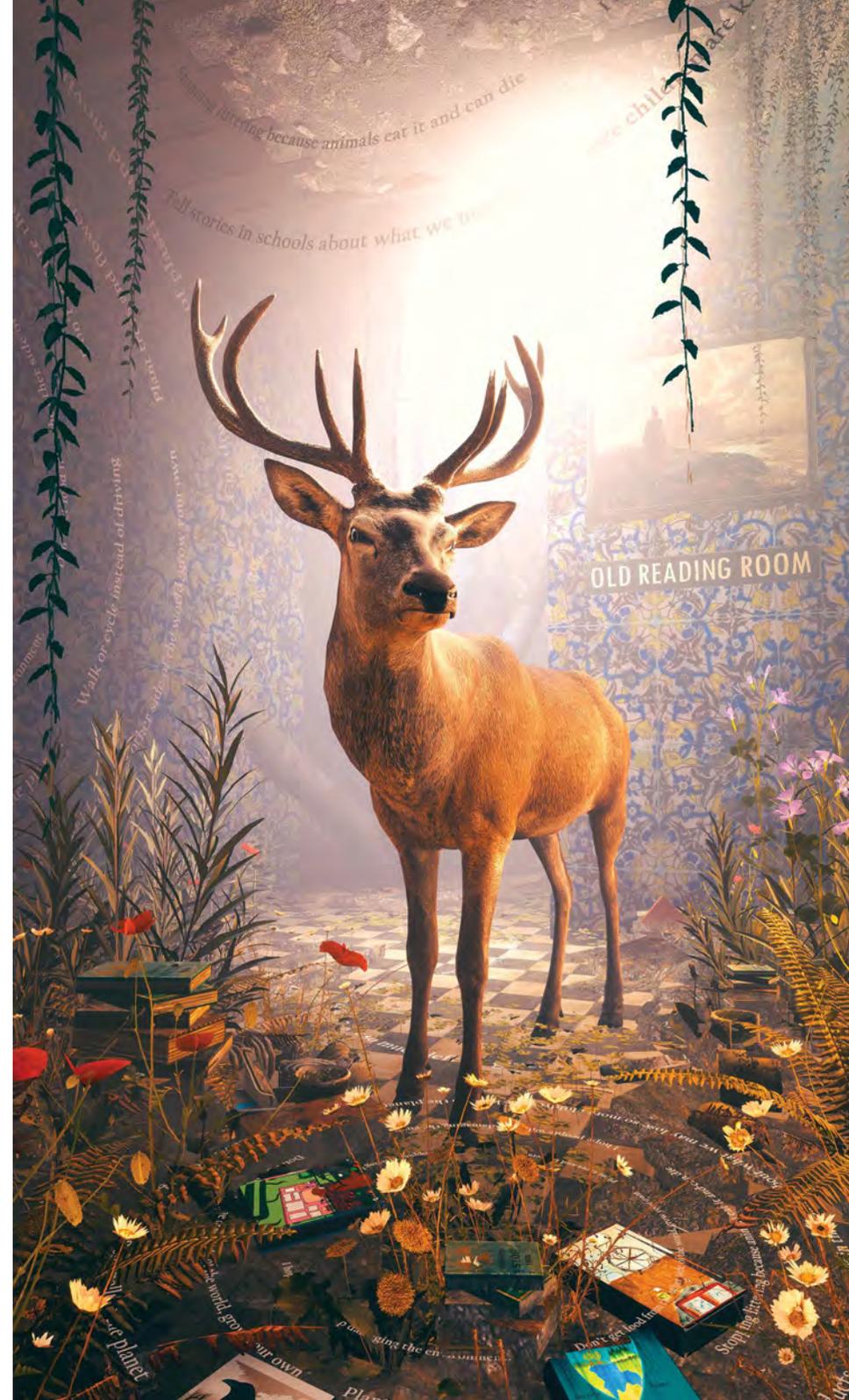
Winner at the Los Angeles Film Awards for 'Best VR Experience'

Winner of 'Technical Excellence' Award from Athens International Film Art Festival

The Abandoned Library poster selected for exhibition by Aesthetica International Film Festival

Large-scale public artwork (pictured) exhibited by Wakefield Council for 6 months outside WX (the former market hall) incorporating QR codes linked to the project

Showcasing The Abandoned Library at The Art House 'Late' and Game Republic to a combined audience of over 300 people



BOLTON FILM FESTIVAL

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

Each of the following organisations contributed funding or inkind support for the The Abandoned Library:

XR Stories - main funder

The Art House Wakefield - curatorial support & exhibition space

Wakefield Libraries - funding for workshops and having The Abandoned Library as part of WordFest 2023

The Yorkshire & North East Film Archives - working with us to identify archive film as part of the AI scene



Dreaming Methods would like to thank all the supporters, audiences and funders for making the project possible.

The Abandoned Library Team are:

Written, directed and produced by
Andy Campbell and Judi Alston

CJ spoken word poetry written and performed by
Torja Garbutt

The Librarian
Dr Guddi Singh

**Director of Photography -
The Librarian**
Dean Hinchliffe

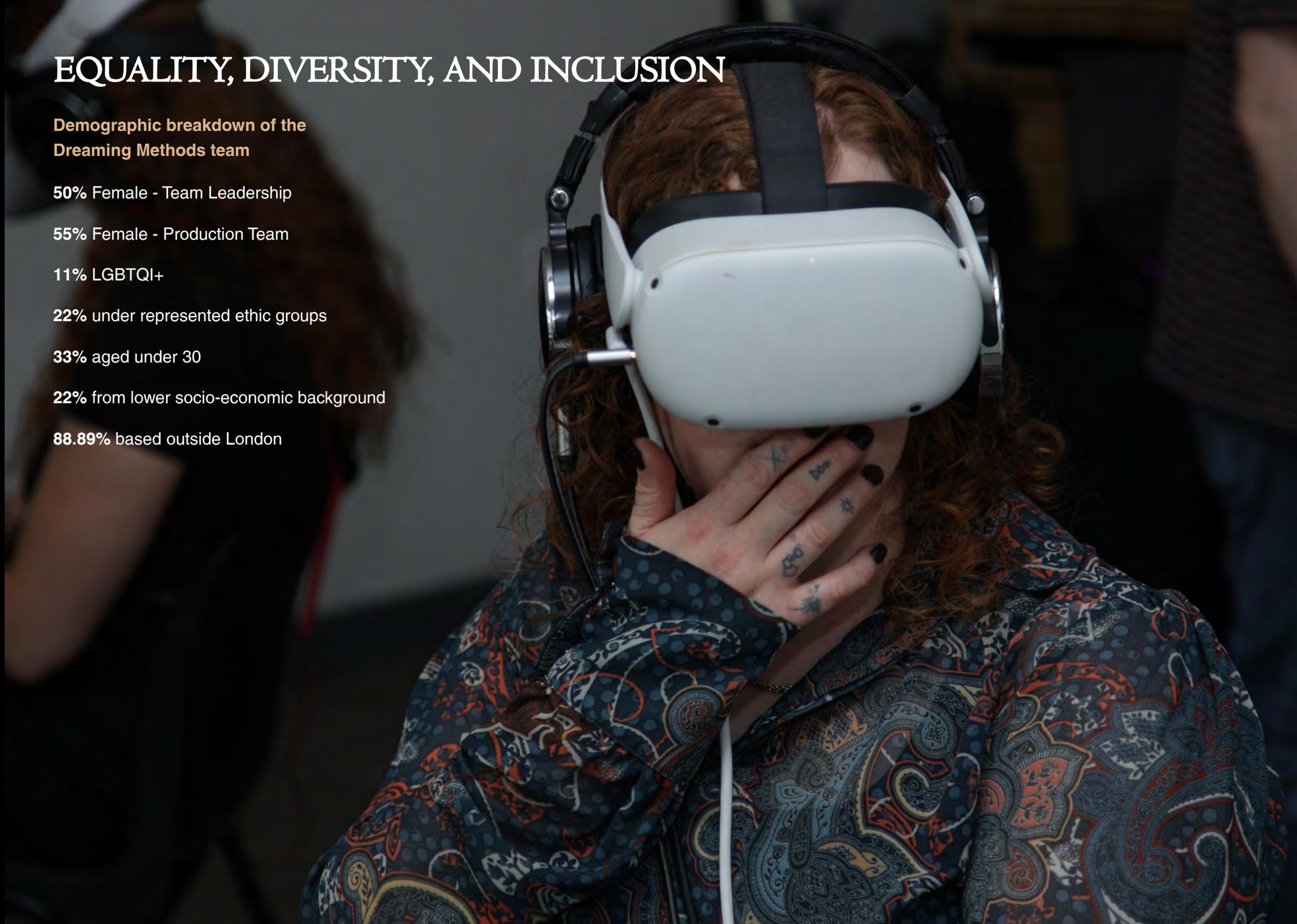
Soundscape
Barry Snaith

3D artist and motion capture model
Tiara Ashworth

Music
Gesang Kangsa

Illustrations & Artwork
Evie Godfrey

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION



Demographic breakdown of the Dreaming Methods team

50% Female - Team Leadership

55% Female - Production Team

11% LGBTQI+

22% under represented ethnic groups

33% aged under 30

22% from lower socio-economic background

88.89% based outside London

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Concept screenshot



Having created an imaginative future world environment, storyline and characters, and gained a very positive audience response, we are keen to expand on the The Abandoned Library's potential to become an immersive / touring exhibition for wider reach / impact.



Dreaming Methods

www.dreamingmethods.com