Saying Goobye to the Old Whitney Museum with a Digital Drug Trip

by **Benjamin Sutton** on November 20, 2014
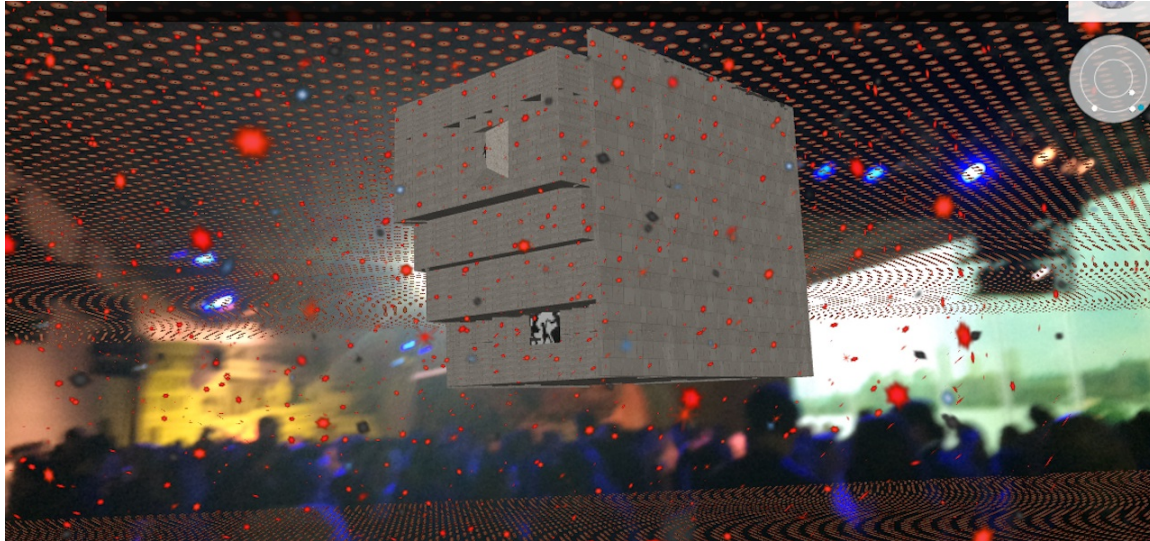
Screenshot of Will Pappenheimer's "Proxy, 5-WM2A" (2014) (all images by the author for Hyperallergic)

Last night the **Whitney Museum** said goodbye to its Marcel Breuer building on Madison Avenue with a gala and party. There, the institution announced the opening date of its new home in the Meatpacking District — May 1, 2015 — and unveiled the last artwork commissioned for the Breuer building: an augmented reality app called "**Proxy, 5-WM2A**," created by new media artist **Will Pappenheimer** for the occasion.

"I'm very interested in making works in technology that are specific and integrated into the place and social situation in which they take place," Pappenheimer told Hyperallergic. "So giving out a drug works well in this way, and I have been doing a series of works that in some way pose drugs as a cure for various social problems. … So [I thought] that I could offer the Whitney community, myself included, the opportunity to ecstatically engage with and detach from the Breuer building."
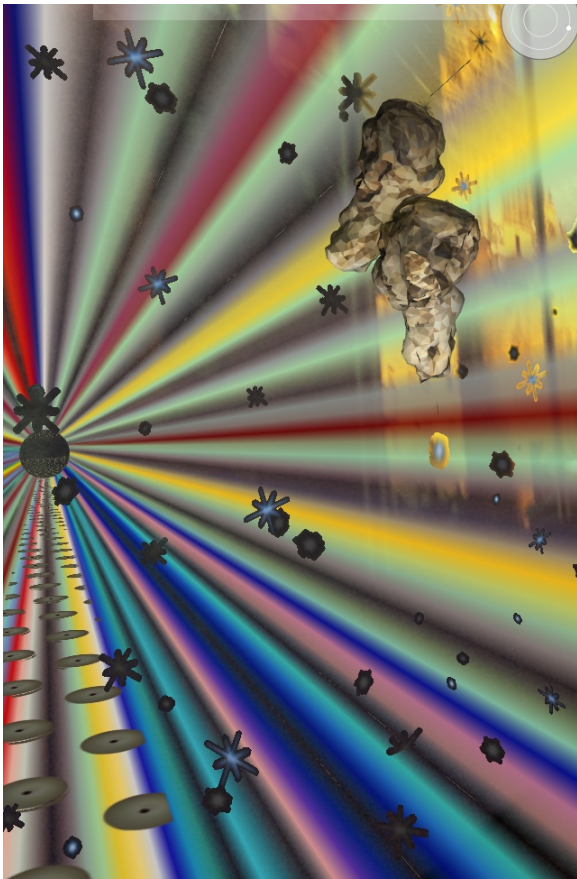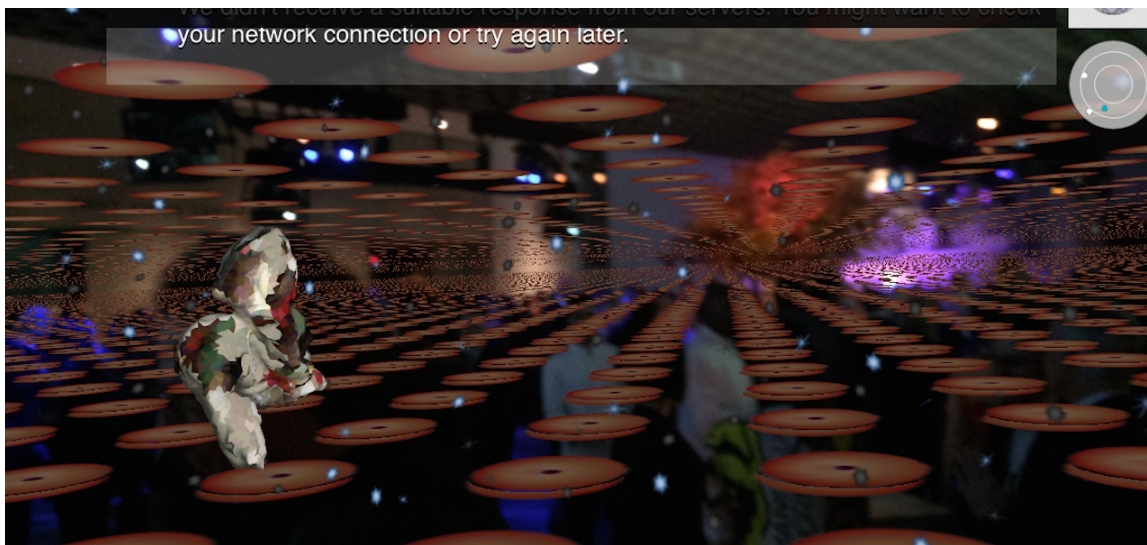
Screenshot of Will Pappenheimer's "Proxy, 5-WM2A"
(2014) (click to enlarge)

The app simulates the experience of a kind of Whitney-themed hallucinatory drug trip, a risqué commission for a party whose other signature elements included chocolates in the shape of the Breuer building's distinctive windows and wall-size projections offering visitors a sense of the view from the new Renzo Piano building on Gansevoort Street. Using the Augmented Reality app **Layar**, party-goers scanned a QR code that triggered a psychedelic play of dots, lights, abstract forms, and figurative objects — including a glittering fish and a floating 3D model of the Breuer building — on their smartphone and tablet screens.

"Most everything in this project is made from recycled imagery from the web," Pappenheimer explained. "So the color tunnels are made from images online of Gene Davis paintings … The fish have been developed through a series of projects actually addressing sea level rise and the idea that certain places may eventually be underwater. Here they sort of establish or circulate the immersive fluid space of virtual reality surrounding us."

One of Pappenheimer's earlier Augmented Reality apps, "Dose" (2011–14), features a pattern of dots similar to the one found in "Proxy," but even that relatively abstract element has been given a dash of Whitney flavor.

Screenshot of Will Pappenheimer's "Proxy, 5-WM2A" (2014)

"Breuer designed the Whitney lobby lights, and they are already quite ephemeral the way they form a repeating light field," Pappenheimer said. "I've been doing these planes of dots as a way of creating this closing and opening space, so the substitution of the Breuer lights for the dots seemed too inviting to pass up."

Though it was created specifically for the gala, Pappenheimer hopes the piece will be made accessible to those who didn't attend the party. For now, it is catalogued on the Whitney's **Artport** page.

Will Pappenheimer demonstrating his "Proxy, 5-WM2A" (2014)

Those who missed Wednesday's soirée can still make use of another Augmented Reality app, "**Skywrite AR**," which Pappenheimer originally created in 2012. For the Whitney event he and Zachary Brady collaborated on a new version, allowing party-goers to write messages that, when viewed using the Layar app, appear in the sky over the Whitney. Notes written over the course of the party now form a celestial digital trail linking the Breuer and the

Piano buildings, making for a poetic counterpoint to the delirium of "Proxy."

"The challenge was to make something both fun for a party but relevant to a very auspicious moment in an institution that many of us have grown up with and have been influenced by, often profoundly," Pappenheimer said. "In this case also I realized that I was the only artist making the work for this, and so certainly I felt that added responsibility."
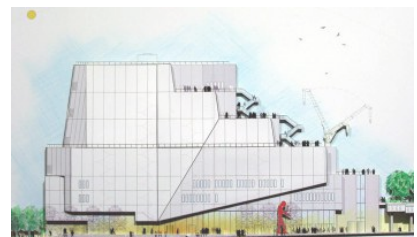

Will Pappenheimer's augmented reality app "Proxy, 5-WM2A" (2014)

The Whitney's Koons Retrospective Talks Money

Manhattan Museums Play Monopoly

Should the Whitney's Breuer Become an Architecture Museum?