

Masaki Fujihata's *BeHere/1942* AR app: From Relational Map to Geolocateive Augmented Reality Experience

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Abstract:

Masaki Fujihata's GPS-based augmented reality and volumetric video installation and AR app *BeHere/1942 A New Lens on the Japanese American Incarceration* allows viewer-participants to viscerally experience the forced removal and incarceration of residents of Japanese ancestry from Little Tokyo, Los Angeles on May 9, 1942 by the US government. AR is used to overlay this historical event onto the real space of the Japanese American National Museum's plaza, close to where Japanese-Americans were forced to board buses and trains to relocation camps.

Extrapolating a relational map of the harrowing event from hundreds of impounded archival images recently released into the public domain, Fujihata traces individuals across archival images to understand the geographic context and temporal flow of the event captured within and imagined beyond the frame of photographs taken by military photographers. Reconstructing a relational AR experience from these archival images allows Fujihata to create what he calls a site specific 'prosthetic memory' of the historical event.

BeHere/1942 expands on Fujihata's use of photogrammetry in his earlier *BeHere* app that used 70 synchronized cameras to capture, in 360 degrees, restaged still scenes from archival photographs of everyday life in the Wan Chai district of Hong Kong. The resulting 3D models of the still scenes could be accessed by participants through the augmented reality *BeHere* app on mobile devices at designated locations in the district. While only visible on screen, these 3D 'time-sculptures' could be interacted with and manipulated by participants who could also have their photographs taken with the on-screen scenes of the past.

In contrast to the still 3D models in the earlier *BeHere* app, *BeHere/1942* is notable for being the first time that volumetric capture technology and augmented reality were combined in a large-scale public art exhibition. In the Los Angeles project, Fujihata similarly restaged scenes from archival photographs with actors in period costume and filmed them in green screen studios with high resolution cameras in 360 degrees. While the earlier project in Hong Kong produced still 3D augmented reality however, *Be Here/1942* ambitiously uses volumetric video to create an augmented reality 3D moving image film for viewer-participants to interact with. Volumetric capture software was used to create a 3D model of each individual image taken by the high-resolution cameras. When a series of these images are connected into a 3D film, the 3D models dynamically become moving sculptures.

BeHere/1942 transposes this largescale augmented reality volumetric video onto the plaza of the Japanese American National Museum. Viewer-participants with a GPS-enabled device can simultaneously witness and enter the moving image scene while walking around the plaza. From a distance the scene can be surveyed on a screen like an establishing shot of a film. As you tentatively approach the displaced residents you begin to witness poignant moments of the scene from within as your own motion through the plaza triggers the movement of the characters on screen. Suddenly you become part of the 360-degree scene, subject to the stern surveillance of military police and startled by the flashbulbs of official photographers. What new narratives and power relations can be understood from inside this geolocateive augmented reality scene? What characters emerge? What stories do we intrude upon by walking through the scene?

As you navigate this visual layer of the past, snippets of conversations of passersby and sounds of the city pull you back into the present. Your shadow casts a different angle than those of the characters of Fujihata's site-specific theatre of the past, reminding you that you are both here and there, then and now. At once a truthful and fictional space, *BeHere/1942* forces the viewer to reconsider the haunting absence of disappeared people invoked by the augmented reality volumetric video. The tension between immersion and disappearance created by this augmented reality geolocateive experience asks us not only to question the limitations of previous historical narratives of text and image, but to imagine this event as relational map where the past is still very much a part of the present.

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