16th April 2016
PRESS RELEASE
To Arts and Features Editors
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Osage Gallery presents
Maurice Benayoun: JUST DIG/IT!
A virtual reality media art installation

A Collection of Firsts
Osage Gallery invites you to navigate human-to-human connections in a virtual world by Maurice Benayoun.

The exhibition Just Dig/It! presents for the first time as large-scale installations, Inside the Tunnel under the Atlantic (1995, video, 22’30”) and Inside the Paris-New Delhi Tunnel (1997, video, 13’00”). Presented will also be Tunnel Shots, produced at the Pompidou Center during the exhibition of Tunnel under the Atlantic (1995), never before shown to the public.

The work, Tunnel Under the Atlantic is recognized as the:

• First intercontinental virtual reality installation;
• First virtual reality installation with real time dynamic architecture, and;
• First virtual video director;
• First virtual photo reporter;
• First virtual librarian using artificial intelligence;
• First virtual composer;
• First real time video meeting inside a virtual reality environment;
• First user centric content in a virtual reality environment.
**Tunnel Under the Atlantic (1995)**

In 1995, when the Web was just emerging, Maurice Benayoun created a virtual underground world using images from the collection of French National Museums and the Museum of Civilizations, Quebec. The work took place simultaneously at the Pompidou Center in Paris and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Montreal – linking the two cities in the world’s first virtual *Tunnel Under the Atlantic*. Images from the museum collections formed “cultural obstacles” that visitors had to dig through in Paris and Montreal respectively, led by nothing other than sound and music composed by Martin Matalon in order to meet each other.

Unlike the virtual reality technologies prior to this, which worked predominantly with predetermined, fixed virtual environments, the structure of the virtual tunnels are a formless mass of data and uninformed matter until the user makes certain decisions. The users are thus the pioneering navigators of a constellation of information points that shift based on their input. Benayoun had conceived of a society of intelligent virtual agents, each of whom facilitates the user to discover this virtual environment, while also producing artworks within this world. The team consists of:

- The Librarian: a content manager – draws up the images from the museum collections, anticipating visitors’ desires.
- The Architect: facilitates the digging into these images to form the tunnels
- The Video Director: shoots and edits footage of the entire journey in real time
- The Photo Reporter: captures still shots of the tunnel digging and all the “galleries” created by the participants
- The Composer: composes music and manages the audio mixing in real time

Each agent evolves, improving their skills and changing their topics or their resources, learning alongside the participants.

In his 1995 review of the *Tunnel Under the Atlantic* published in *Le Monde*, Jean-Paul Fargier describes the experience of digging as, “indeed entering images. Not only in what they represent, but in their very fabric. Walking, discovering secret channels, curling up in their folds, being lost in their frames, watching them throb, and bouncing from one to the other like playing hopscotch in an infinite curve.”

**Colors Tunnel and Borders Tunnel (2016)**

The *Colors* and *Borders* Tunnels are newly developed in 2016.

**Colors Tunnel.** Opening up the data set that the virtual environment draws from from museum image collections to the Internet, this new tunnel probes issues surrounding colors. Stemming from the notion of “stereotypes” in the original sense of the word, meaning printing plates used to create the same image, the artist questions how images of colors so often used to represent superficial layers of perception, represent and contribute to our understandings of specific shifts in culture. The images are of Hong Kong, tagged with different colors, and are received at random from the web.

The *Borders Tunnel*, similarly created in 2016, draws from the internet images related to geopolitical boundaries, questioning their direct impact on peoples’ difficulties to move, meet and live together.

In 2016, participants will dig and explore these tunnels using their whole bodies. Motion detection technologies allow the virtual agents to learn from participants’ body language. The virtual space of the tunnels and physical space of the gallery are thus merged.

Ultimately, participants are faced with the question of what it truly means to “connect”. Because of the internet, we now have access to an enormous amount of information and the ability to connect across the globe – yet, has this truly helped us foster cross cultural understandings? Are these materials just more cultural obstacles to be dug through? Is there such thing as a “common”, universal body of data? Do these images reflect real tensions, social and political issues? What are the different factors which “color” the information that we see, and filters that which is accessible and prominent in our cycles of attention? And how do these images affect how we view and connect with one another?

The *Colors Tunnel* and *Borders Tunnel* reminds us of what “distance” means between people when it is more than a geographic challenge. The tunnels can be a transient method for the creation of a cross-boundary, cross-cultural, cross-social and cross-political space for dialogue. Yet, tunnels are not short cuts.
The process of carving, and digging through complex and abundant information and the effort that it takes is key. This is the beginning of a deeper investigation to rediscover the true meaning of distance and the real potential of dialogue.

Music for these new tunnels are composed by Jean-Baptiste Barrière.

**Trailer to Inside the Tunnel Under the Atlantic:**
https://vimeo.com/142968069

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**Exhibition Fact Sheet**

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<th>Exhibition Period</th>
<th>20th April – 25th May 2016</th>
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| Opening Hours     | Mon – Sat: 10.30 am – 6.30 pm  
                    Sun: 2.30 – 6.30 pm  
                    Open to special appointments outside of these times.  
                    Closed on public holidays. |
| Opening Reception | 20th April 2016, Wednesday, 6:00-8:00 pm |
| Venue             | Osage Hong Kong  
                    4/F, 20 Hing Yip Street, Kwun Tong, Kowloon, Hong Kong |

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**About the Artist**

Maurice Benayoun AKA MoBen 莫奔, is a French artist based in Hong Kong. A pioneer of Open Media Art, MoBen’s highly diverse work explores all the artistic fields of expression, using various media from photography and video to urban large-scale installations.

His work has been exhibited in major contemporary art museums (Centre Pompidou, MAC Lyon, MAC Montreal, Kiasma (Helsinki), Eyebeam, Moving Image (NYC), ICC (Tokyo), Machida Museum, Museum of Art Seoul, Chi K11 Art Space, (Shanghai) and the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum, etc.) Commissioned by biennials and part of many public and private collections, MoBen’s work has won numerous international awards including the coveted Golden Nica, Ars Electronica Prize.

Benayoun is a contributor to the vibrancy and activation of Hong Kong’s new media arts scene. He is the initiator and curator of the Open Sky Campus Project, which made possible the use of the ICC as an urban screen and platform for emerging media artists. He has also been involved in a number of media art projects in Hong Kong such as Fleeting Light: the Fourth Large Scale Interactive Media Arts Festival as co-curator, ISEA 2016 Hong Kong, as a member of the organizing committee and IFVA, as a jury panel member. Benayoun is also currently Professor at the School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong.

**About Osage Gallery**

Osage Gallery was established in Hong Kong in 2004 and grew quickly to become one of Asia's largest commercial gallery groups. Osage has become well known in the art world for its uncompromising support for the most challenging and critically thought-provoking contemporary art.

Osage Gallery dances the edge of the latest innovations in art, culture and technology and is a platform for forward thinking and new ideas. Osage Gallery is curatorially driven and aims to be a catalyst for creative expression and the active engagement of audiences. Its programmes of exhibitions, publications and research examine the questions that shape and inspire us as individuals, and our cultures and communities.

Osage Gallery has gained wide international recognition for the global, multidisciplinary and diverse approaches of its programmes. Osage was the first Hong Kong gallery to feature at the Statements section of Art Basel, Basel in 2011, the Spotlight section at Frieze Masters in London in 2012, Arte Fiera in Bologna, Italy, 2014, Art Cologne in Germany, 2014, and is one of the first Hong Kong galleries to participate in Moving Image New York, 2014. Osage has also participated in Art Hong Kong from 2008 – 2012 and at Art Basel, Hong Kong from 2013-2016.
www.osagegallery.com

**Media Enquiries**
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**Images**
Please caption and credit as below. Images are available for download at the link:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/jx6jkvmqi0qb3gd/AAAdyrGcGX7Gy6jsF_kMaXMva?dl=0
http://pan.baidu.com/s/1nvti1Xv
Maurice Benayoun
*Tunnel Under the Atlantic (installation view at Pompidou Center, Paris, 1995)*
1995
tele-virtual art installation
Dimensions Variable

Image courtesy of the Artist and Osage Gallery
Maurice Benayoun

**Tunnel Shot (Thursday, September 21, 19:47:59 PDT 1995)**

1995
captured still image
26.7cm x 19.4cm

Image courtesy of the Artist and Osage Gallery
Maurice Benayoun

**Tunnel Shot (Friday, September 22, 13:52:32 PDT 1995)**

1995
captured still image
26.7cm x 19.4cm

Image courtesy of the Artist and Osage
Maurice Benayoun

Tunnel Shot (Saturday, September 23, 20:39:09 PDT 1995) (the first real time video meeting inside a virtual reality environment)

1995
captured still image
26.7cm x 19.4cm

Image courtesy of the Artist and Osage Gallery
Maurice Benayoun
Tunnel Shot (Saturday, September 23, 20:06:44 PDT 1995)
1995
captured still image
26.7cm x 19.4cm

Image courtesy of the Artist and Osage Gallery
Maurice Benayoun

**Tunnel Shot (Sunday, September 24, 19:30:17 PDT 1995)**

1995
captured still image
26.7cm x 19.4cm

Image courtesy of the Artist and Osage Gallery