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World Upstream is an inquiry into the aesthetics of leisure. Set in a fictional future which takes for granted the embodiment of artificial intelligence - and with it, the fulfilled techno-utopian promise of freedom through automation - World Upstream asks what remains once labor becomes obsolete.

The setting is a strange picnic. A cast of characters - including a wise poplar tree, a group of quadruplets, or a Dyson vacuum, all equipped with artificial minds -, become equal-parts shareholders in re-wilding an ageing piece of infrastructure: a hydroelectric dam on its path towards obsolescence.

World Upstream exists as a live simulation constructed in a game engine, and it presents as a film which edits itself in real time. The storytelling techniques of traditional cinema are replaced by emergent behaviors, as the conjunction of camera movement, character action and environment design leads to the unfolding of proto-narratives: snippets of action and intentionality which live somewhere between the screen and the viewer's imagination.

The simulated nature of the work also means that the picnic never ends. As long as the GPU fans are spinning and the electricity is flowing, its characters are doomed to continue producing their performative labor of leisure.

**Production Year**

2023-2024

**Medium**

live simulation, sound

**Collaborators:**

Christina Lan (sound),  
Olivia Yin (world design)

**Exhibition History**

2025 — Down the Silicon Meadow, Office Impart x Blueshift Gallery, Berlin & online  
2024 — [Hypertext](Hyperlink), Yale University, ISOVIST Gallery, New Haven  
2024 — Public Spam, a public art project by Spam Index, Bucharest  
2024 — symbiocene/anthropocene, WIP Festival, CYENS Nicosia  
2024 — Matrix of the Not-Yet, Underground Art and Design, online  
2024 — Beyond Human at Artemis Gallery, Lisbon  
2023 — Tellurian Traversals at Putty's Coronation Gallery, New York  
2023 — Reverse Tar Pit at Onassis ONX, Brooklyn Neighborhood Arts and The Wrong Biennale, New York and online  
2023 — Sandbox Mode at Office Impart, Berlin  
2023 — VCA Residency Exhibition, online

You can watch a trailer of World Upstream here: <https://vimeo.com/1062746191>

You can watch a short (7min) preview of the World Upstream software here: <https://vimeo.com/925331203>

The rest of this document contains further still images and information about the work, as well as technical details and exhibition documentation.















The setting, a timeless gathering upstream of a once-majestic dam, points to the nostalgia of a bygone era; The dam is a relic of 20th-century nation building ambitions and progress, and a quiet nudge to ponder the future of today's technological marvels. It invites reflection on the progression of technologies from the peak of their hype cycles towards latter stages of mass adoption and eventual obsolescence.

Media archaeologist Jussi Parikka proposes the concept of "zombie media": an acknowledgement of the fact that electronic waste never fully disappears, but rather remains entangled with natural processes, as a "living dead". The final part of technology's life cycle thus becomes a moment of celebration: a time when technology can be reclaimed by communities and ecosystems.

Following this argument, the dam in World Upstream is a piece of "zombie infrastructure", reclaimed by a slow, emergent, anti-productive process, led by a symbiosis between AI and "nature".













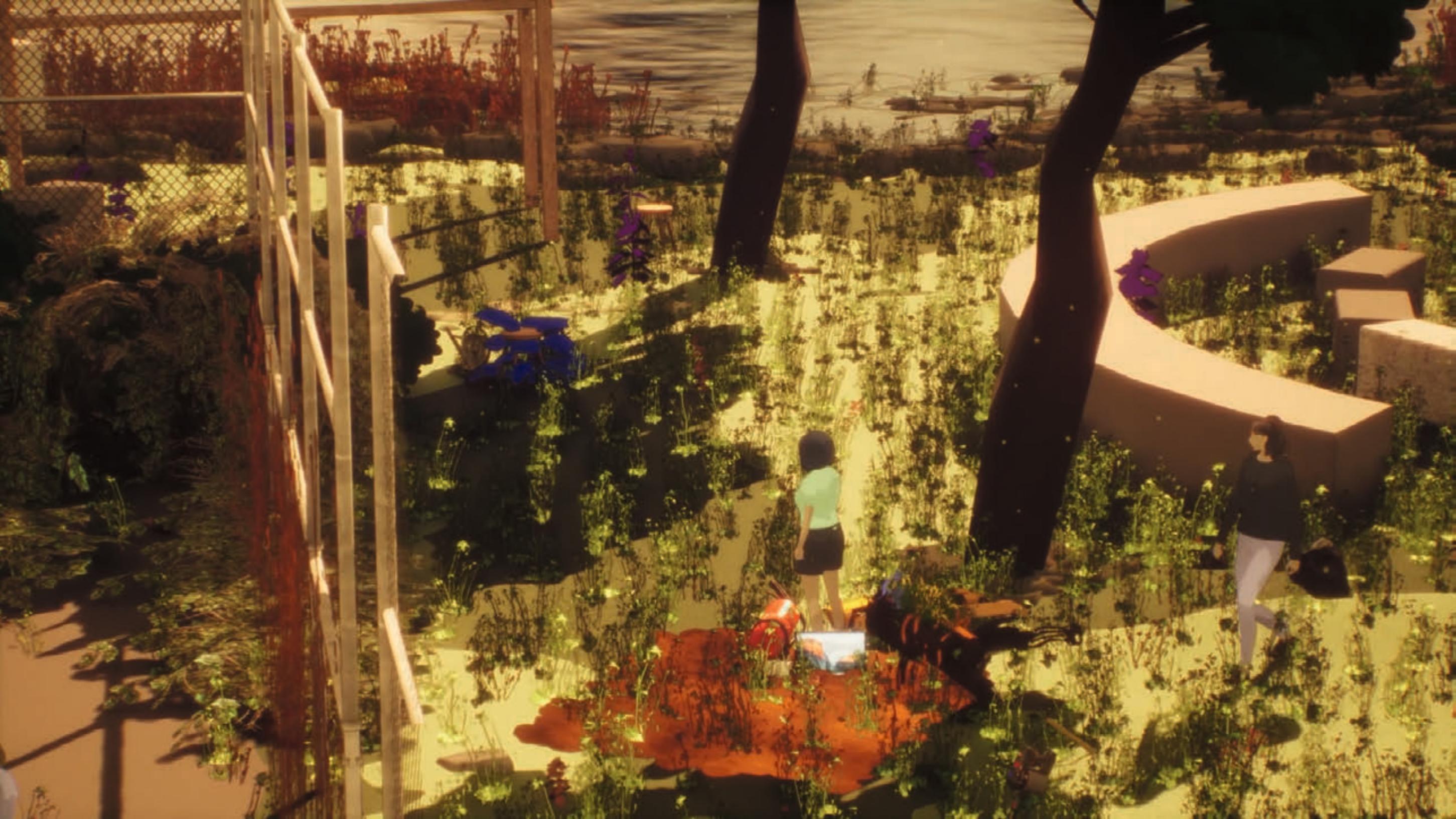




The inhabitants of World Upstream, whether living beings, inanimate objects or elements of infrastructure are driven by an artificial intelligence system: a cognitive architecture rooted in five different desires each character tries to fulfill through their actions in the virtual environment.

This set of five desires - nostalgia, nesting, curiosity, cacophony and togetherness - transcends regular physiological needs, standing as a proposition to consider embodied artificially intelligent beings in a non-productive, post-capitalist context. Each AI's *umwelt* is mediated by the landscape, rather than the server farm, driven by a sense of slowness and playfulness.

There is a certain naïvité in World Upstream: in the visual language, in the cognitive architecture behind each character. While it may seem like a utopian dream, it also stands as a question mark: is there space for being slow and playful in a world crying out for urgent solutions?















During the research phase of this work I encountered Anna Tsing's "Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet", which introduces this re-framing of a "ghost" as a past that could have been, as ecosystems and entities that are no more, but live through in material or immaterial ways. It's been deeply influential in the way I think about world building, in the context of World Upstream and my practice at large, so I leave you with her words:

*As humans shape the landscape, we forget what was there before.*

*Ecologists call this forgetting the 'shifting baseline syndrome'.*

*Our newly shaped and ruined landscapes become the new reality.*

*Admiring one landscape and its biological entanglements often entails forgetting many others.*

*Forgetting, in itself, remakes landscapes,  
as we privilege some assemblages over  
others.*

*Yet, ghosts remind us.*

















World Upstream was produced between 2023 and 2024, with immense help from Christina Lan (Laenz) on sound design and Olivia Yin on world design. Since the first exhibition of an artifact belonging to this body of work, a still image shown at the final exhibition of the Vertical Crypto Art Residency in 2023, World Upstream was featured in 12 exhibitions across Europe and the United States, in galleries, new media art festivals and universities, with more shows planned for 2025.

**Production Year**

2023-2024

**Medium**

real-time simulation, sound

**Collaborators:**

Christina Lan (sound),

Olivia Yin (world design)

**Exhibition History**

2025 — Down the Silicon Meadow, Office Impart x Blueshift Gallery, Berlin & online

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## World Upstream, Exhibition View



World Upstream, 2023-2024  
real-time simulation, sound  
images courtesy of Office Impart (Berlin) and  
Artemis Gallery (Lisbon)



## World Upstream, Exhibition View



World Upstream, 2023-2024  
real-time simulation, sound  
image courtesy of Office Impart (Berlin)

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real-time simulation, sound  
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World Upstream, 2023-2024  
real-time simulation, sound  
image courtesy of Artemis Gallery (Lisbon)





World Upstream, 2023-2024  
real-time simulation, sound  
image courtesy of Artemis Gallery (Lisbon)

World Upstream, 2023-2024  
real-time simulation, sound  
image courtesy of WIP Festival, CYENS Nicosia



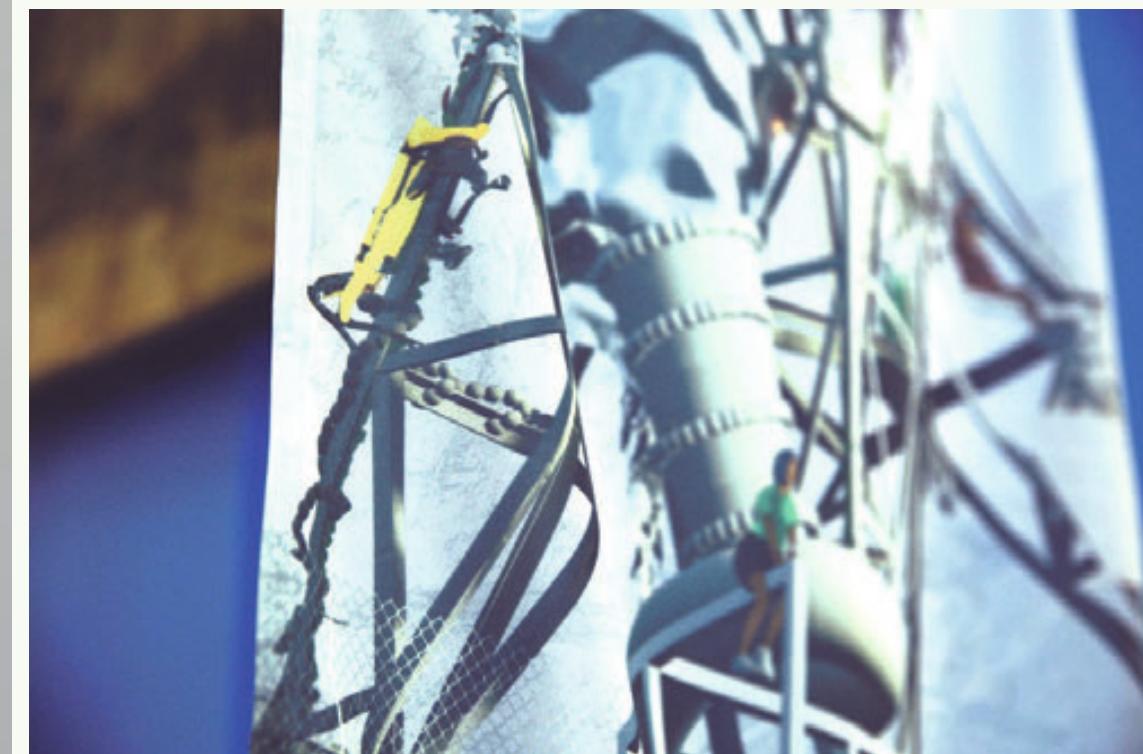
World Upstream, 2023-2024  
real-time simulation, sound  
image courtesy of WIP Festival, CYENS Nicosia



World Upstream, 2023-2024  
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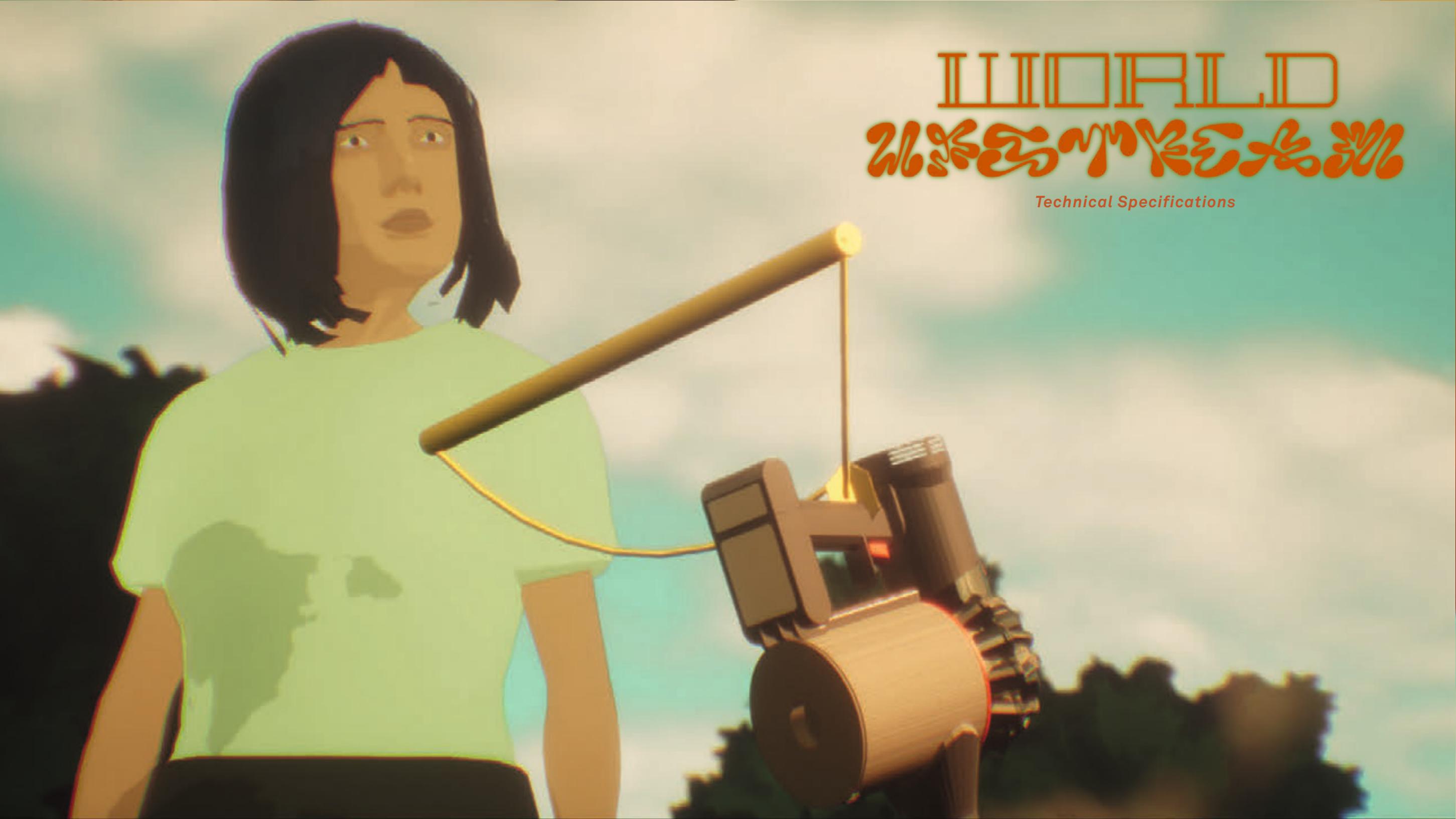
## World Upstream, Exhibition View



*The World Upstream (Stood Still) #2, 2024*  
dye sublimation on fabric  
280cm x 70cm  
images courtesy of Artemis Gallery, Lisbon

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*Technical Specifications*



## Hardware Specifications

World Upstream is a simulated, non-interactive digital ecosystem delivered as a .exe software (like a computer game.) It runs in real time as a single-channel video of infinite duration, in an aspect ratio of 21:9 (projection presentation) or 16:9 (screen presentation.)

The technical requirements for exhibiting the work are:

- \* a projector or a screen
- \* a Windows gaming PC, with the following minimum requirements:
  - \* a recent graphics card (NVIDIA RTX 3060 or equivalent)
  - \* 16GB RAM
  - \* a recent processor (12th generation Intel Core i7 or equivalent)
- \* speakers or headphones (2 channel).

The exhibition presentation of the work should always include the PC running the simulation as a part of the physical installation, as well as exposed cabling.

A later section of this document contains guidelines on the visual style of the gaming PC.



Exhibition view, image courtesy of OFFICE IMPART



Exhibition view, image courtesy of CYENS Nicosia

## Exhibition Presentation

World Upstream can be presented either as a projection, or on a screen.

### Projection Presentation (Preferred)

World Upstream can be shown as a wide-screen, 21:9 aspect ratio projection.

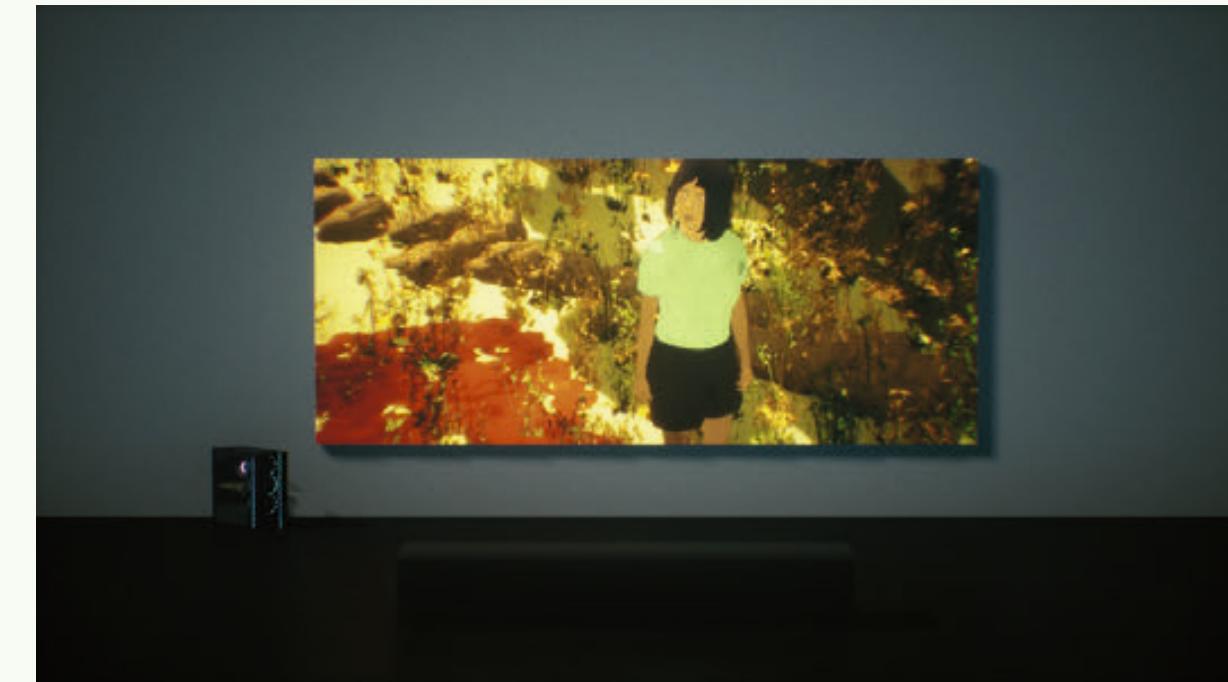
The projection screen can exist either as a hanging panel (Option 1, image on the right) or as a panel attached to a wall (Option 2, image on the right). The projection screen dimensions should be a minimum of 3m wide x 1.28m tall. For Option 2, the work should never be projected directly on a wall - if projecting on a panel is not an option, the screen presentation is preferred.

The projection presentation requires a dark space.

The projector should be masked in the 21:9 aspect ratio, in order to prevent light bleed coming from the black letterbox.



Projection presentation: Option 1 mock-up



Projection presentation: Option 2 mock-up

## Exhibition Presentation (continued)

World Upstream can be presented either as a projection, or on a screen.

### Screen Presentation

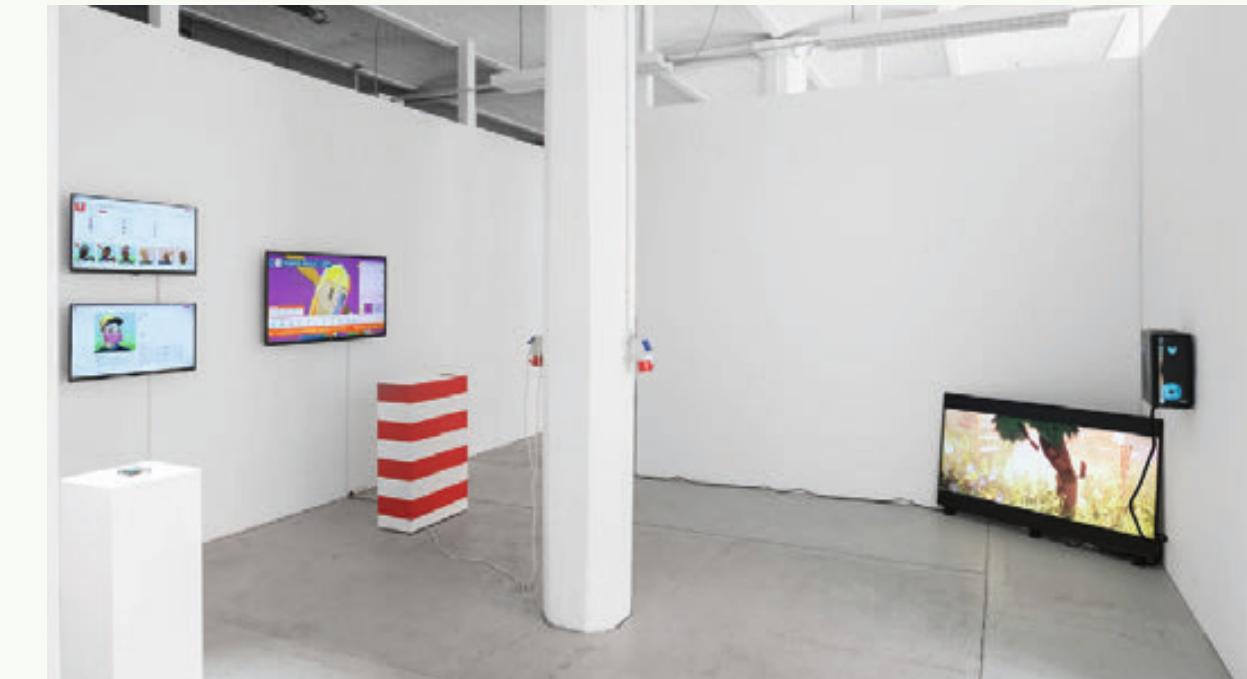
If the provided space is not suitable for a projection, World Upstream can be exhibited on a screen in a 16:9 aspect ratio.

The screen diagonal size should be **at least** 127cm (50in.) The screen should be mounted on a wall, pole, standardazied stand or custom-made stand, depending on venue and budget.

The PC running the simulation should be a visible part of the installation, in the vicinity of the monitor, and cabling should be exposed. The exact install format can vary based on the venue.



Screen presentation, featuring PC, exposed cabling and monitor. Image courtesy of Artemis Gallery Lisbon.



Screen presentation, featuring PC, exposed cabling and monitor. Image courtesy of OFFICE IMPART.

## PC Visual Style

Beyond the technical specifications of the PC, its the visual aspect is extremely important, as it is a part of the physical installation.

### Visually, the computer used as part of the install should:

- \* have a rectangular shape and simple, minimal design;
- \* not feature prominent branding of the PC manufacturer (it's ok for internal components to show brand names if the PC has a transparent case, e.g. GeForce for a graphics card);
- \* have a transparent case (one side or all sides); *if this is difficult to source, it's ok to use a PC with a fully opaque case, as long as it meets the other visual requirements.*

**Please get in touch with me (c@cezar.io) if you have doubts about the PC choice.**



## Software Delivery

The World Upstream software will be delivered by the artist either through an online download link (exhibition, temporary loan) or on a flash drive (ownership.) Given that you are in possession of a PC able to run the simulation (see the Hardware Requirements section of this document,) you can run World Upstream by double-clicking the *WorldUpstream\_1.0.0.exe* icon. An internet connection will be required for the first run.

## Registration

As a security measure against unauthorized distribution, the World Upstream software needs to be registered in order to run without a watermark. You can see an example of the watermark present in an unregistered work in the first image on the right side.

### Registration using an access code

The artist issues unique access codes for collectors, as well as exhibition copies. The software can be registered by opening the Control Panel (Shift + C), typing the access code in the Registration section, and clicking Authenticate.

### Registration using NFT ownership (*in progress as of April 2025*)

As a collector, it is also possible to register your copy of World Upstream by proving your ownership of the associated NFT. In order to do this, you need to type (paste) your ETH wallet address into the Registration field and click Authenticate. You will then receive a notification in your wallet, asking you to sign a message, which confirms the provided wallet belongs, in fact, to you. Upon successful verification of your World Upstream NFT ownership, the registration process will complete.

An internet connection is required to perform the registration. This is a one-time process.

## Software Settings

In order to ensure optimal display, the control panel features a few other sections which allow for visual and performance-related adjustments.

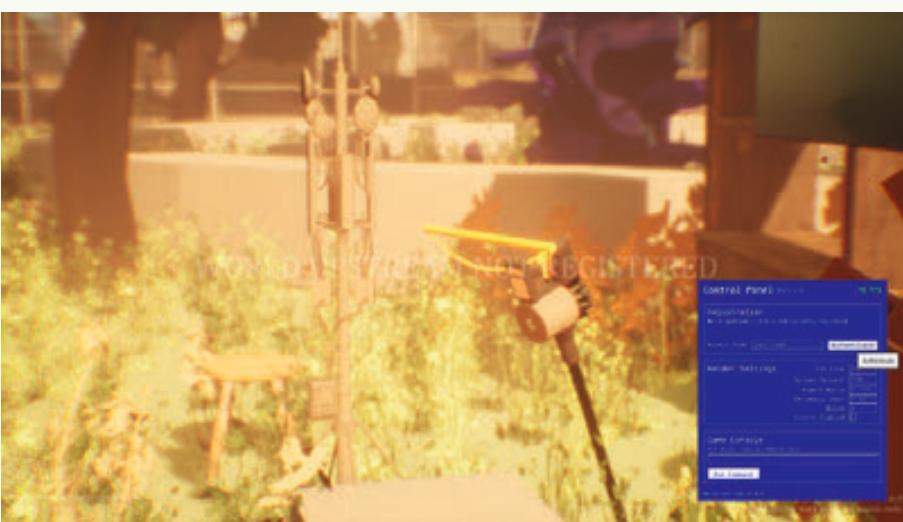
### Render Settings

The Render Settings section of the Control Panel allows for adjustments in the graphics quality as well as the presentation format. The software aspect ratio, resolution, frame rate and other visual parameters can be adjusted here.

### Game Console (Advanced)

In rare circumstances, more advanced performance or graphics quality tweaks need to be made in order to ensure the proper display of World Upstream. For that reason, the software exposes the Unreal Engine in-game console, which allows granular adjustments for quality and performance settings.

Upon opening World Upstream for the first time, you will be met with a watermark. You need to register the work using either an access code provided by the artist (for exhibitions & temporary loans), or your ETH wallet address (for ownership.)





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*Collector Information*

The World Upstream real-time simulation exists in the contemporary art market as an edition of 3+2AP.

There are two options for collecting it:

#### Option A: Software Only (inquire for price)

The collector purchases the .exe simulation, and takes on the responsibility of sourcing the appropriate hardware for running and displaying the artwork, based on instructions provided by the artist. The collector receives the following artifacts:

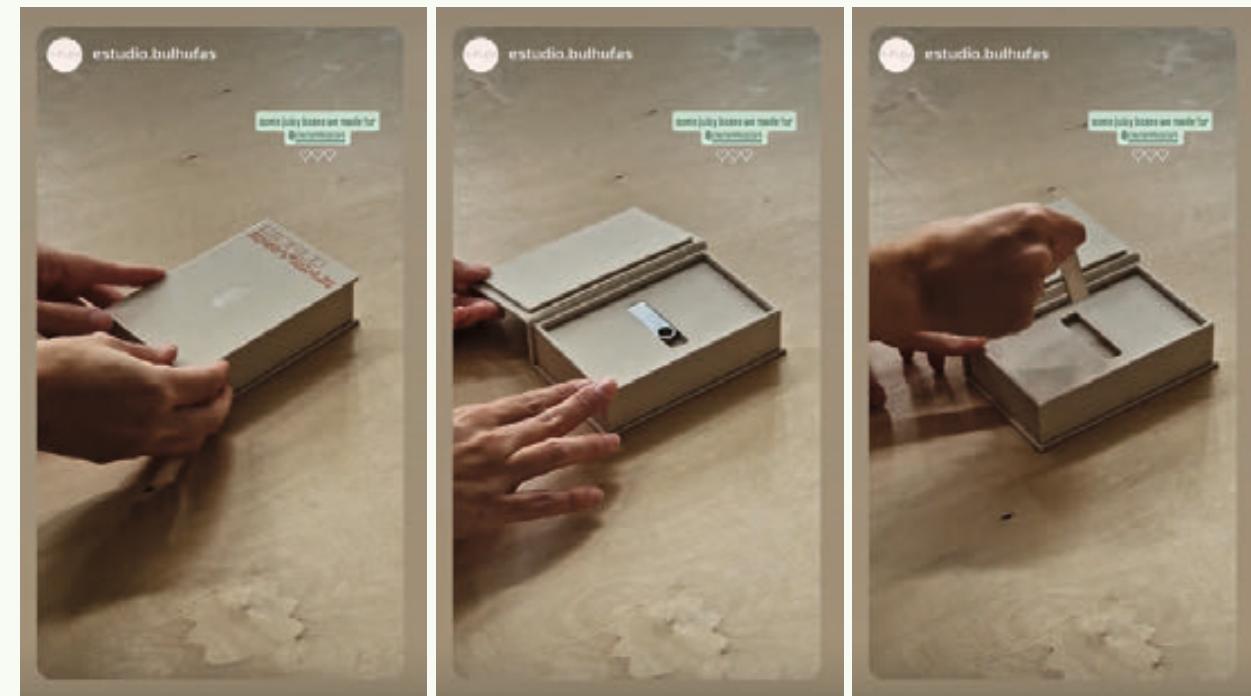
- \* a physical flash drive containing the worldupstream.exe real-time simulation (in a lovely box produced by Estudio Bulhufas, images on the right side.)
- \* an NFT certificate of authenticity, on the Ethereum blockchain. Ownership of this NFT is required in order to register the work (see the Software Details section of this document.)
- \* a physical certificate of authenticity (*by request, or if the purchase was made through a gallery*)
- \* an instructions manual, containing technical information and guidelines for exhibiting the work
- \* permanent access to a digital copy of the worldupstream.exe real-time simulation, through a download link hosted by the artist. *This includes access to future software updates the artist might make.*
- \* conservation and technical support

#### Option B: Software + Hardware (inquire for price)

In addition to everything included in Option A, the Software + Hardware route means the collector will also receive an appropriate gaming PC for presenting the artwork, with the World Upstream software installed on it and set up for exhibition (which means that the simulation starts as soon as the PC is turned on and is programmed to restart automatically when stopped.)

This option incurs the additional cost of an appropriate gaming PC (around 1,500 EUR) as well as shipping costs if necessary.

This option does NOT include a monitor, projector or sound system. Sourcing these peripheral devices is still the collector's responsibility.



World Upstream packaging, produced by Estudio Bulhufas in Lisbon.

## What if I don't have a crypto wallet?

I am happy to help you set one up, and transfer you the token of the edition you own. If you really don't want a crypto wallet, there is an alternative route to registering the work, using an access code.

## Can World Upstream be played?

No, World Upstream is not interactive. Even though it's built using the same tools computer games are developed with, World Upstream is meant to be watched and lived with, rather than played. In some ways, it plays itself.

## Does World Upstream use AI? Is World Upstream AI?

The work uses what folks in the industry call “good old-fashioned AI”, which is more akin to procedural (behavior) generation rather than the neural type of artificial intelligence we’re used to in 2025. The character behaviors are driven by a certain cognitive architecture, with a mechanic similar to maybe non-player characters in traditional computer games, which was for a long time called AI. I do see World Upstream as an artificial ecosystem which does have some sort of intelligence, but it doesn’t use any of the recent popular AI tools (large language models, diffusion models, etc.)

## What is a real-time simulation? How did you build this work?

A real-time simulation is a computational process, interactive or non-interactive, which employs algorithms and procedural generation towards the goal of achieving dynamic, possibly emergent behaviors, over time, of the world it creates. I built World Upstream in Unreal Engine and C++, taking inspiration from various generative art techniques as well as cognitive science texts.

## How can I get in touch with you? Where can I see more of your work? CV?

Send me an email, c@cezar.io. My work is at <https://cezar.io>, and a recent CV is [here](#).

