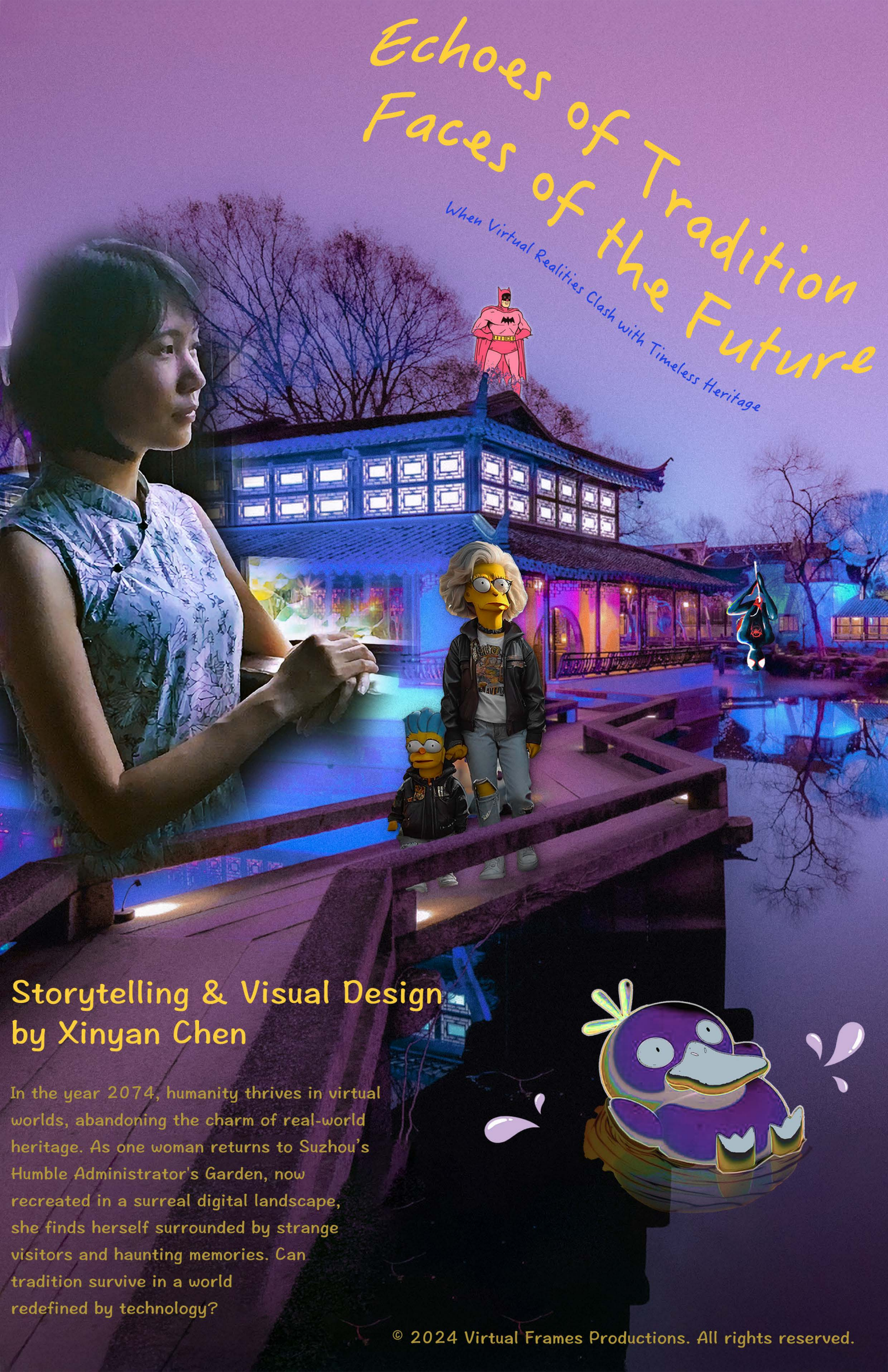
Echoes of Tradition Faces of the Future

When Virtual Realities Clash with Timeless Heritage



Storytelling & Visual Design by Xinyan Chen

In the year 2074, humanity thrives in virtual worlds, abandoning the charm of real-world heritage. As one woman returns to Suzhou's Humble Administrator's Garden, now recreated in a surreal digital landscape, she finds herself surrounded by strange visitors and haunting memories. Can tradition survive in a world redefined by technology?

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The story takes place 50 years in the future, when humanity has fully transitioned to virtual worlds. Real-world landmarks, such as Suzhou's Humble Administrator's Garden, have been neglected and fallen into disrepair. To preserve their memory, these sites are reconstructed in the virtual space. The protagonist—an older version of myself—decides to revisit the garden, driven by nostalgia. Visitors must upload their identity and select an avatar to enter, and the other visitors appear as surreal figures, like a pink Batman, a blue Spider-Man, a Simpsons-style mother and son, and a glowing Psyduck. These fantastical characters contrast sharply with the traditional architecture, highlighting the tension between heritage and the digital era.

To bring this story to life, I adopted a surrealist and cyberpunk-inspired style. The garden is rendered in realistic tones to preserve its cultural beauty, while the avatars are vibrant and hyperreal. I designed the visual flow from left to right, starting with a nostalgic photo of myself in a modernized qipao, moving through the surreal avatars, guiding viewers through the story step by step. The poster doesn't just depict a creative vision of a future virtual world—it also raises awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage. Through color, composition, and surreal elements, the work explores the clash between tradition and modernity, inviting reflection on how cultural heritage can survive in a digital future.

— Xinyan