Las Meninas in VR: Storytelling and the Illusion in Art

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Abstract

Las Meninas is a virtual reality (VR) artwork based on the painting of the same name by Spanish painter Diego Velazquez. Created for the CAVE(tm), Las Meninas attempts to establish a language of art in virtual reality by placing VR in the realm of storytelling; storytelling that is not simply formalistic and decorative, but also psychological. The viewer confronts a narrative cryptogram which can be deciphered at multiple levels of meaning as he seeks to explore the enigmas inherent in the painting by literally entering into it, both physically and psychologically. This allows for the suspension of disbelief or the illusion in art, the quintessential rule of art.

Keywords

ontological authenticity, kinesthetic / synesthetic stimulation, immersion.

1 Introduction

Many people who have experienced virtual reality (VR) for the first time will attest that they were amazed by the unique perceptual experience, but that their emotional and thoughtful involvement was minimal. This is not surprising since many virtual reality works are, in large part, exercises in visual effects, and not intended as part of a meaningful narrative where form and function are interconnected. To achieve such a narrative, a *language of art* in VR needs to be established. The depiction of *Las Meninas* in VR attempts to establish such a *language* by placing VR in the realm of storytelling that is not simply formalistic and decorative, but also psychological.

The quintessential rule of art is its ability to suspend disbelief and create the *illusion of art.* Through convincing representation, the illusion in art manifests itself, forcing the viewer to become psychologically involved. *Las Meninas* involves the viewer in a psychological narrative imagined as a complex web of signs. The viewer confronts a narrative thread which can be deciphered at multiple levels of meaning. Each deciphered thread embodies a network of signs leading to other signs. If the viewer fails in his initial task he confronts another set of signs to choose from which will lead to other sets. The viewer's psychological inquiry into the narrative and her attempt to decipher its cryptograms