

## Three Dimensions at Contemporary Calgary encourages viewers to become one with art



*Three Dimensions, an exhibition by artists Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins, at Contemporary Calgary on Wednesday, October 18, 2023. ARYN TOOMBS / FOR LIVEWIRE CALGARY*

By **Aryn Toombs**

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Not even the paintings are static in Contemporary Calgary's new exhibition *Three Dimensions*, which combines traditional media along with mixed video and sculptural work with interactive pieces including the use of virtual reality and augmented reality.

The exhibition is a combination of *Balancing Act*, a giant claw crane game that allows visitors to interact with the 3D pieces found in other works in the show, *THX2020*, which is a video homage to George Lucas' 1971 dystopian sci-fi film *THX*, and *ABCD*, which combines multi-disciplinary works together in VR and AR.

*Three Dimensions* was created by award-winning artists Jennifer Marman and Daniel Borins, who worked with Contemporary Calgary for several years to bring the show to the gallery—much of the exhibition being shown for the first time, with only *Balancing Act* having been shown at the Cristin Tierney Gallery in New York.

# CRISTIN TIERNEY

“When we were thinking about this show, we’re always thinking of the relationship between the artist and the viewer or the artwork and the viewer and engagement,” said Marman.

“We were also interested in going back to the idea of engagement with kinetic work and interactive work—really the levels of viewership. And quite often the work is not complete until a viewer decides to participate. And then there are levels of viewing, because it’s also equally fulfilling to watch someone else participate and see reactions.”

Kanika Anand, Senior Curator for Contemporary Calgary, described *Three Dimensions* as a layered exhibition that is accessible to kids and youth, but is also a set of work that will leave adults with questions about what contemporary art can be and what it means. “The artists really want to present viewers with an active role in the exhibition in each of the three installations. In doing so, you’re an active participant in the artwork where it doesn’t seem as much of a passive experience,” she said.

“It’s an experience of actually being in a situation where you’re doing and thinking. And I think that that really brings in a different sort of takeaway and a different level of thinking.” That sense of questioning, said Borins, was at the heart of what the duo hoped Calgarians would take away from the exhibition.

“In what better place in the world than the former science centre in Calgary. The intention of these Centennial buildings was supposed to be forward thinking and how museum-going experiences would unfold.”

*Three Dimensions* runs from October 19 to March 17, 2024.



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## Travelling through multiple dimensions

Borins and Marman said that viewers would get the most out of the experience by generally following a path through the exhibition that first takes them to the Balancing Act giant claw machine, followed by looking at the variety of paintings prepared for the exhibition, followed by a showing of *THX2020*, and then taking in the AR and VR experiences of *ABCD*.

*THX2020*, as a homage to George Lucas, uses those elements of 1970s and 1980s sci-fi dystopian paranoia to refer to the connection between people and technology, Borins said.

“There’s a reference being made to a moment in time when collectively in popular culture, it was realized that the human would merge with machine. As you hold your smartphone, it is an extension of yourself,” he said.

“There will be a time we imagine where we will be biologically connected to computers, if we’re not already. In that case, we’re looking at what kind of symbolism can we use and put that in an art viewing process.”

The video in *THX2020* features all 17 paintings, which is intended to change the way that visitors look at the paintings after the video. They are then guided through the exhibition hallway past those same paintings to an augmented reality display that asks visitors to don a hat—fittingly an official Devo hat from the band turned pink—and to manipulate art using facial expressions.

As a final step in the journey through *Three Dimensions*, visitors are asked to don VR goggles, which give objects in the *ABCD* showing motion and purpose.

“There’s a lot of content. It’s not just look at some pictures and go. There’s a lot of things to do in this exhibition,” said Borins.

Anand said that she hoped gallery audiences really participate in everything that there is to do and that it sparks conversations afterwards.

“I think when we program exhibitions, and we work with artists, we want there to be something different for everyone. In that sense, I think it achieves that,” she said.

“We would encourage people to be more actively participating, bring friends, get more people and come again. But really, we’re looking at creating more conversation about these things that really are all around us. We are, of course, in this time where digital is very, very present in our lives.”