

The Black Box Sessions

The Black Box Sessions takes place in a pitch-black room approximately 6m x 5m in size. Single audience members are invited to enter the room under the premise that they will be presented with an individual performance from one of several entertainers present at the venue. To view the performance (in the pitch-black surrounds) the audience member finds a single peephole located in the wall of the space.

When looking in the peephole, the audience member sees a screen with a live video feed of themselves, captured from an infra-red capable camera at the rear corner of the room. They hear a door open off to the left in the darkness and then see the performer enter the room via the mediated video image. The performance commences...

Thirteen performers from Austria and Australia collaborated on the project. Each performer was shot in a chroma-key studio configured to simulate the physical installation space. The performers were instructed to engage with the (future) audience members and to imitate performing in a pitch-black space so that their actions would be plausible within the context of the actual installation environment. The studio video content was subsequently processed so that it could be composited with the live video feed in the installation space.

Several scenarios were recorded for each performer. These variations are randomly selected when audience members enter the installation space. In addition to the performances, an actor undertook the role of an usher. The usher directs audience members to both real and fake exit points, and provides short interactions between the more lengthy performance pieces (each performance ranges from 1.5 to 10 minutes in duration). An additional purpose of the usher persona was



to determine if direct natural contact with the audience members could elicit a response i.e would real people follow directions from an avatar? The combination of the usher and performers creates a virtual representation of a plausible live performance scenario. 'Live' performances were chosen as the foundation of the work due to their potential to innately provide engaging and compelling content for the audience.

Event programmes and publicity further propagate the illusion by stating that selected performers will present improvised performances to individual audience members. Even prior to entering the installation, audiences are more receptive to the illusion, as seeds are planted in their mind that they are, in fact, going to be witnessing live performances by artists who are physically present.

