
iNVENTX 2025 Creative Exhibition

SUSTAINAISSANCE: Emotion . Expression . Identity

Gelora: Embodied Alienation

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Abstract

Gelora: Embodied Alienation is an augmented reality (AR) artwork transforming fallen flowers from California streets into alien hybrid creatures through mobile camera interaction. This work engages SUSTAINAISSANCE, the convergence of sustain to preserve the ability for action with naissance as giving birth, reimagining our fundamental energies to circulate through technological transformation. Participants perform four-phase elemental rituals based on East Asian cosmology, gathering scattered forces to resuscitate Gelora, an alien-hybrid being embodying the artist's diaspora displacement. The emotional dimension manifests through uncanny valley experiences where participants confront simultaneous attraction and repulsion toward hybrid creatures resembling human anatomy yet remaining fundamentally other. Expression emerges through embodied gestures: bending to scan, dragging elemental dots, waiting for emergence that mirror the artist's original scanning rituals with silica gels. Identity exploration occurs through the artist's experience as a legal "alien" in California, transferring feelings of displacement into technological encounters that transform estrangement into connection. The work demonstrates how present awareness through camera-mediated interaction connects to speculative futures, proposing that alienation serves as a renewable resource for posthuman kinship rather than isolation.

Keywords Augmented reality; Embodied alienation; Elemental ritual; Hybrid creatures; Diaspora displacement; Technological resurrection

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Artist Statement

Concept and Theme

Gelora: Embodied Alienation emerged from my encounters with fallen flowers during my time living in Long Beach, California, USA as a Korean. The phrase "I don't want to be rotten" became central to my experience as an alien, detached from my motherland, South Korea. I have been captivated by the need to preserve my own being while desiring to grow simultaneously. The experience of cultural displacement as a foreigner heightened my awareness of alienation, both my own legal status as "alien" and that of discarded botanical life.

I identify myself as a free-fallen, unknown, unidentified flower found on the ground. Whenever I encounter these fallen flowers, I empathise and pick them up, recognizing fellow displaced beings. What began as scanning processes, using the scanner as apparatus to lighten through these fragile ephemeral creatures, evolved from creating flattened, captured, still images into augmented reality experiences. The AR work focuses on interactive engagement where participants use their mobile cameras to interact with 3D manifestations of Gelora.

The name "Gelora" emerged from my process of transforming these fallen flowers through scanning with silica gels. I coined the term by combining "Gel" from silica gel and "Lora" from flora, a Latin term for plants, flowers, and the goddess of spring. Silica gel projects the desire not to be decayed, smelled, or swamped. As flora means goddess of spring, Gelora became a goddess of desire, symbolizing the movement of desire to explore, grow, and mature. This meaning directly connects to the work's impact: the transformation of decay into desire, of alienation into connection. As the flowers morphed into increasingly alien forms, bodies that suggested human anatomy, particularly feminine forms, yet remained fundamentally "other," Gelora embodied both the intensity of transformation and the preservation of ephemeral life.

The work's title combines "Gelora," the alien-hybrid creature emerging from fallen flowers, with "Embodied Alienation," emphasizing both physical presence and the estranging effect of the resurrected being. Each fallen flower encountered became raw material for creating Gelora, a fellow organic alien entity displaced from its botanical existence and transformed into something unrecognizable yet compelling.

This work engages SUSTAINAISSANCE, the convergence of sustain to preserve the ability for action with naissance as giving birth, reimagining our fundamental energies to circulate through technological transformation. By proposing that present awareness through camera-mediated elemental ritual directly connects to speculative futures, the work suggests alienation serves transformation rather

than isolation. I position viewers as "soil," active agents gathering scattered elemental forces through embodied gestures to resuscitate Gelora. This elemental convergence ritual transforms individual alienation into collective spiritual practice, where estrangement from normal technological interaction becomes the condition for Gelora's emergence. The work addresses sustainability through decomposition transformation, where fallen flowers destined for decay become catalysts for digital resurrection, suggesting sustainable futures require embracing rather than resisting metamorphosis.

Approach and Process

My creative process began in California, where I, a foreigner navigating alien status, initially used the scanner as an apparatus to see through objects. The scanning process consists of vertical lightening, mirroring, and digitizing the real object. My gesture to carve these digitised images of Gelora was about dynamics, a force that stimulates change or progress within a system. I used scanning apparatus with gestures and silica gels to resuscitate fallen flowers, transforming them into engraved digital contact. This methodology resonates with Flusser's understanding of the photographic gesture as a game against the apparatus, where the artist seeks to exhaust the program's possibilities while creating new ones.

However, the work evolved beyond static documentation toward dynamic AR experiences emphasizing live technological resurrection. Participants begin their encounter by discovering a 40cm-height box labeled "Ground Access." Its lowered position intentionally mirrors the gesture of picking up fallen flowers, directing attention to small, overlooked things in daily life. This physical act of bending down initiates the ritual of noticing what lies beneath our usual sight lines. Upon scanning the QR code, participants enter the AR space through their smartphone screens, where they first confront the elemental ritual. The interface presents four coloured dots pulsing with distinct energies, scattered across their screen like dispersed silica gel.

The AR experience transforms the intimate screen into a portal for resurrection. Participants must move these elemental forces by dragging them into the center to collect Wood's green growth, Fire's red passion, Metal's white structure, and Water's blue flow. This process mirrors my original scanning gestures, but now distributed across multiple bodies and devices. As participants perform these movements, they enact what Merleau-Ponty describes as embodied perception, where the smartphone becomes an extension of their sensory apparatus.

Then Gelora emerges. Participants suddenly confront these alien hybrid creatures through their screens, experiencing the uncanny valley between botanical and bodily forms. The imagery I created underwent processing to maximise alienation from subtly recognizable botanical forms, deliberately producing creatures that resist identification while suggesting simultaneous organic, technological, and

anatomical origins. This aesthetic strategy follows Kristeva's notion of the abject as that which challenges classification systems. Through AR, I fragment observed reality, creating what Barad would call new "cuts" in the fabric of matter-meaning (2007), each participant's screen becoming a unique window into this alien resurrection.

Meaning and Impact

Gelora: Embodied Alienation demonstrates how alienation can operate as a generative condition rather than a state of isolation. Through mobile camera-mediated rituals, the work reveals how technological interfaces, often associated with distance, can instead produce moments of intimacy between participants and hybrid entities. The elemental convergence process transforms individual experiences of displacement into embodied engagement, positioning estrangement as a site from which new forms of technological kinship may emerge.

The smartphone camera functions as a phenomenological extension, expanding participants' perceptual awareness beyond immediate physical presence. As participants gather and converge elemental forces, they encounter a moment of suspension before *Gelora* emerges, a pause that destabilises familiar categories of meaning. This interval of waiting echoes the artist's earlier gestures of scanning and seeding, where small, attentive actions accumulate into transformative encounters. In this sense, meaning arises through interaction itself, as awareness is shaped by the act of engagement rather than preceding it.

The work evokes feelings of abjection and uncanny recognition through deliberately alien hybrid forms that resist fixed categorisation. By transforming fallen flowers into bodily yet unfamiliar entities, *Gelora* aligns with cyborg aesthetics that dissolve boundaries between organism and machine. Its impact lies in reframing everyday technological interaction as conscious practice, where minor gestures—bending, scanning, gathering, become acts that reconfigure perception and relational awareness within mediated space.

Materials and Techniques

The scanner's harsh directional light creates dramatic shadows and translucency, revealing internal flower structures while suggesting X-ray or medical imaging, reinforcing themes of alien examination. The 4800 dpi resolution captures microscopic details that, when enlarged, become uncanny anatomical suggestions. Silica gel's crystalline texture adds otherworldly qualities during scanning.

The artwork utilises web-based augmented reality (AR.js version 3.4.0) accessible through participants' mobile cameras, transforming ubiquitous technology into consciousness-expanding ritual

instrument. The technical framework includes JavaScript, WebGL, and AR.js for real-time camera processing responding to device movement while generating Gelora's alien hybrid form. The AR experience is hosted on GitHub Pages for accessibility and requires no app installation, democratizing access in line with sustainability principles. JavaScript's event-driven architecture mirrors the work's emphasis on responsive interaction, while WebGL's GPU acceleration enables smooth real-time morphing of Gelora's form. The technical stack prioritises open-source tools, reflecting the work's ethos of transformation through accessible technology rather than proprietary systems.

The gestural interface allows participants to drag coloured dots representing different elements: Green (East/Wood), Red (South/Fire), White (West/Metal), and Blue (North/Water). The interface responds to haptic feedback and movement rather than requiring direction alignment. Post-emergence, Gelora maintains individual elemental motions through its hybrid body. Participants can continue to interact with the converged experience by using various taps and gestures.

The camera interface creates what I term "intimate alienation," technological mediation generating closeness through distance. Mobile devices become prosthetic eyes extending participants' perceptual fields beyond immediate physical presence, enabling simultaneous awareness of present moment and speculative future transformation potential through elemental collaboration.

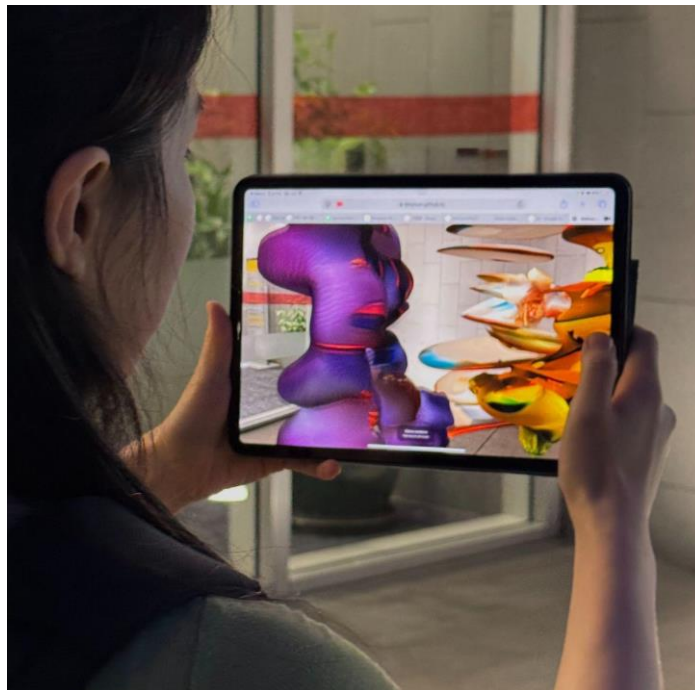


Figure 1. Participant Interaction with Gelora AR Interface

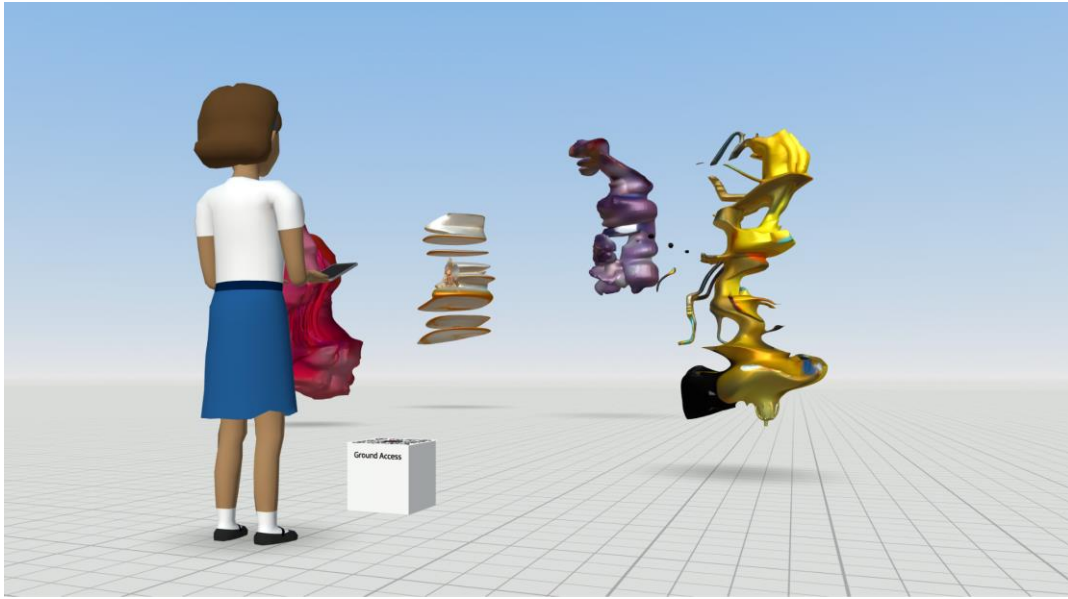


Figure 2. Installation View Showing Ground Access Point and Gelora Manifestations

Artistic Influences

This work draws from alien aesthetics theory, particularly research on how estrangement serves speculative and critical functions. Vilém Flusser's *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (2000) informs the approach to camera consciousness as expanded awareness practice, particularly his concept of technical images as abstractions that program human behavior and perception. His ideas about the camera as an apparatus that transforms intention into image deeply influenced my use of scanning and AR technologies. When I scan fallen flowers with silica gel, I enact Flusser's notion of the photographer as someone who plays against the camera's program, creating images that resist easy categorisation.

Karen Barad's posthuman performativity in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (2007) provides the framework for understanding technological mediation as material-discursive practice. Barad's concept of "intra-action," where agencies emerge through their entanglement rather than preceding their interaction, shapes how I position viewers and Gelora as co-constituting each other through the AR interface. The elemental ritual exemplifies this intra-action: Gelora cannot exist without participants' gestures, yet participants' movements gain meaning only through Gelora's emergence.

The aesthetic alienation connects to Julia Kristeva's abjection theory from *Powers of Horror* (1982), exploring how alien forms simultaneously repulse and fascinate. Kristeva's analysis of the abject as that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (p. 4) directly informs Gelora's hybrid form that refuses botanical or anatomical categorisation, existing in the uncanny valley between plant and body. The moment participants first encounter Gelora's bodily yet botanical form creates the abject response Kristeva theorises, a simultaneous attraction and repulsion that challenges stable identity categories.

Korean artist Haegue Yang's exploration of alienation through sensory environments provides additional context for my work. Her practice of transforming personal experiences of displacement into multisensory installations resonates with how I use AR technology to create immersive encounters with alienation. Yang's methodology of using emotional narratives and the interplay between public and private spheres informs my approach to making intimate technologies reveal collective experiences of displacement.

Lee Bul's monster and cyborg sculptures provide visual precedent for understanding alien aesthetics as expressions of displaced identity. Her work "Cyborgs" series (1997-2011), as analyzed by Yeseung Chung (2018), demonstrates how hybrid bodies can embody both technological anxiety and feminist resistance, influencing my approach to Gelora's feminine yet alien morphology. Like Lee Bul's hanging sculptures that never touch the ground, Gelora exists in perpetual displacement, neither fully botanical nor human.

Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) influences the work's approach to technological intimacy, particularly her argument that the boundary between organism and machine has become permeable (p. 152). This permeability manifests in how participants' smartphones become extensions of their sensory apparatus during the AR experience. Haraway's vision of the cyborg as a creature of both imagination and material reality guides how Gelora exists simultaneously as digital code and embodied experience.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962) informs camera-mediated embodiment understanding, especially his concepts of the body-schema and how tools extend our bodily presence in the world. His phenomenological approach grounds the work's exploration of how digital interfaces can create new forms of embodied experience. When participants move their devices to gather elemental forces, they demonstrate Merleau-Ponty's insight that perception is always an embodied act.

The elemental framework draws from the traditional East Asian five-element theory (Wu Xing), as documented by Feng and Shizhe (2012), transforming it through technological mediation and diaspora experience. This cosmological system, which understands reality through interactions of Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water elements, provides the structural logic for the AR interface while being reimagined through digital resurrection practices.

Conclusion

Gelora: Embodied Alienation demonstrates how small empathetic gestures can generate transformative awareness. By collecting fallen flowers and translating them through scanning and augmented reality,

discarded materials are reanimated into digital entities, where acts of preservation and attention become catalysts for emergence. These gestures, picking up, scanning, and re-seeding, form the foundation of a practice that reconsiders how care and transformation operate within mediated environments.

The work engages the convergence of sustain and naissance, where preservation and repetition enable new forms to arise through metamorphosis. The elemental convergence ritual gathers scattered forces into a unified process, reflecting how experiences of displacement can be reconfigured through embodied participation. In this way, minor actions accumulate into meaningful transformation, foregrounding attentiveness as an active, generative condition.

Ultimately, Gelora positions technological mediation not as a source of detachment, but as a site for renewed relational awareness. By transforming everyday camera use into an embodied ritual, the work suggests that alienation itself can become a productive ground for connection, opening speculative pathways for posthuman kinship within digital–organic encounters.

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Authors' Bio

Bin Youn is a Korean multimedia artist and educator based in Vietnam, whose practice bridges lens-based media, poetic spatial installation, and participatory environments. Currently an Associate Lecturer at RMIT University Vietnam, Youn explores diasporic identity, otherness, and language through ephemeral materials such as light, shadow, reflective surfaces, and found materials. Her work examines displacement and alienation as generative forces, investigating how estrangement can create new forms of connection across cultural, technological, and spatial boundaries. Holding an MFA from California State University, Long Beach, Youn has exhibited internationally and is dedicated to creating sensory experiences that foster cultural reflection. Her recent work investigates "portal aesthetics," transforming minimal architectural spaces into gateways for speculative encounter and cultural translation, where the boundaries between self, space, and time are continually re-imagined.