

## A portal into Björk's virtual and personal reality



ANDREW THOMAS HUANG

Images from the exhibit “Björk Digital.”

By [Christopher Muther](#) | GLOBE STAFF NOVEMBER 04, 2016

MONTREAL — Björk stood in front of me on a volcanic beach in Iceland. The chiffon panels of her electric green dress blew in the stiff wind as she emptied her sadness into a song.

“What is it that I have that makes me feel your pain?” she warbled passionately as she twirled on the damp, black rocks.

Because this was the ambrosial and otherworldly Björk, and because she sounded like a wounded bird, I reached out to hug her. My arms only felt air. Although it appeared she was standing close, she wasn't. I was watching Björk through virtual reality goggles while sitting on a stool in Montreal, not a beach in Iceland. My eyes followed as she circled me. I spun on my seat to take in the entirety of the scene. When I looked up I saw the purplish-gray sky. All around the waves crashed. I was there, but I wasn't.



Unlike last year's [universally panned](#) Bjork retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art, "Björk Digital" is not a collection of ephemera from the singer's 25-year solo career. The Montreal show could easily be called "A Private Audience with Björk." This may be a showcase of the wonders of virtual reality, but the technology of "Björk Digital" creates an unexpectedly intimate experience. The five songs that are turned into virtual reality films focus on her divorce from artist Matthew Barney. The pain she conveys makes some of the VR experiences, such as "Stonemilker," absolutely gutting.

"You're going on an emotional voyage with her," said Cheryl Sim, curator of the DHC/ART. "I think this show answers the question 'What would it be like to go on a musical journey with Björk?'"

It's an intense trip that you also take with strangers. Participants are led in groups of 25 to a series of rooms equipped with virtual reality headsets and headphones. You sit on a stool so you have the ability to follow the 360-degree action and quickly forget about the others in the room. It's just you and Björk.

The ultimate sign of success is that you can move from room to room and eventually forget you're wearing a pair of clunky VR goggles which may or may not fit your head comfortably depending on how effectively you've fiddled with the straps.

Emotion intertwines with art, and a healthy serving of weirdness. Remember, this is Björk. One of the VR experiences was set almost entirely inside her mouth. It was simultaneously beastly and beautiful.

The journey ends with the world premiere of the VR video for the song "Family." A completely digitized spectre of Bjork flitted about like some kind of ghostly, fragile superhero. "There is a swarm of sound around our heads" she sang while filling my eyes with her phantasmagoric presence. If this is what it's like to take a musical voyage with Bjork, I'd like to book a round-trip ticket and go one more time.

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