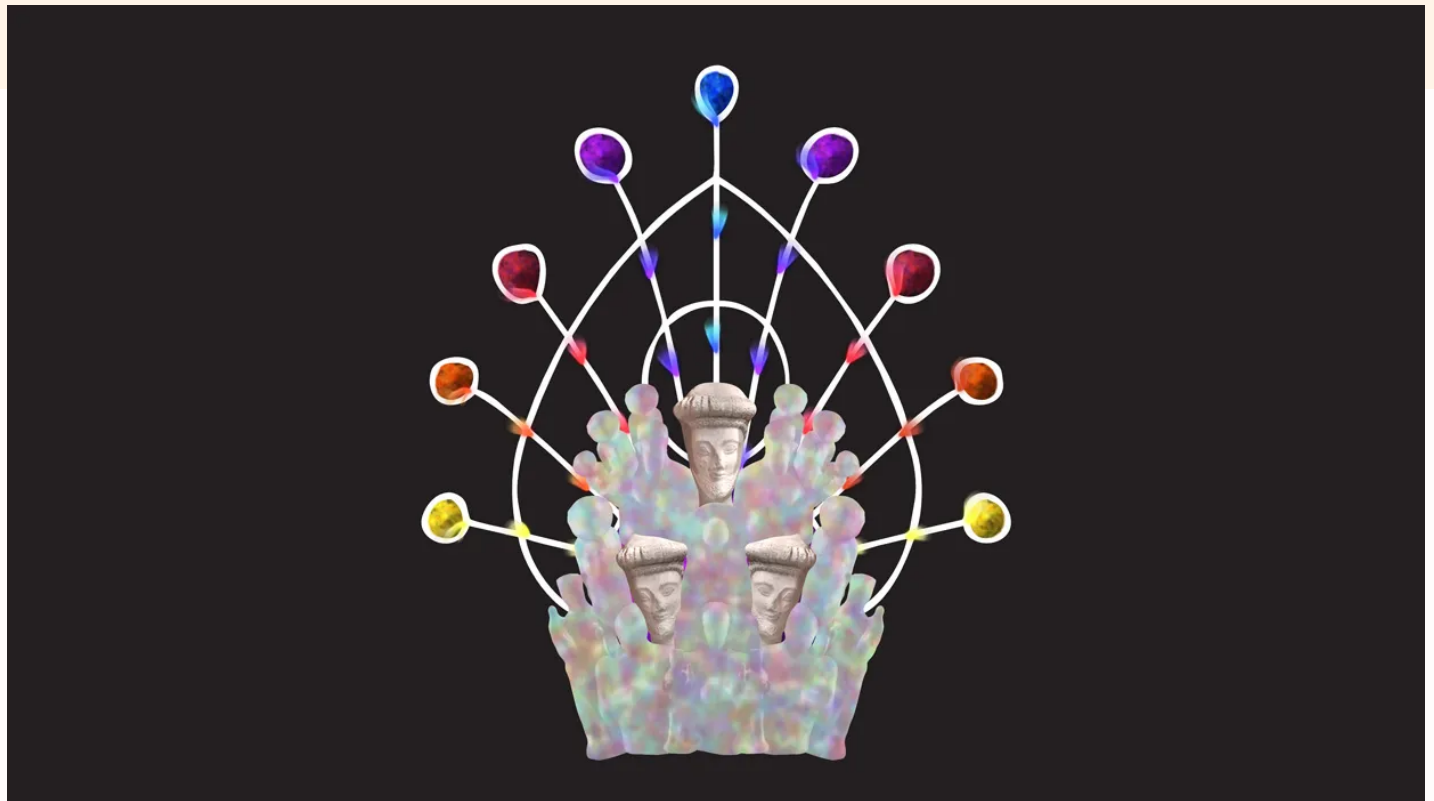




VISUAL

Saya Woolfalk: Expedition to the Chimacloud, March 1 – Sept. 1, 2019

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Intense kaleidoscopic plays of color. Extraordinary shapes. Uninterrupted streams of fantastic images. An awe-inspiring new world. You have been transported to the ChimaCloud, a site-specific experiential installation at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art by contemporary artist Saya Woolfalk.

Woolfalk's immersive installations fulfill our inherent desire to transcend our physical spaces and experience new dimensions. Through a combination of sculpture, painting, ceramics, textiles, plexi, metalwork, digital media and a rich utopian narrative, Woolfalk encourages us to explode from our physical limitations and blur our psycho-cultural boundaries so that we may elevate to another level of consciousness, and become more open, empathetic individuals.

Woolfalk is a storyteller as much as she is a visual artist. Each immersive art installation is another chapter in the narrative that takes us further into her alternate utopian reality. Imagine your own utopia. What would that world look like? Who would occupy it? How would you sustain it? Woolfalk began asking these questions of herself and others in 2006 at the beginning of her career as a professional artist. The collective answers laid the foundation for the work she has produced in the 13 years since, for impressive venues like Times Square and the Seattle Art Museum. Now, Woolfalk invites us to experience the ChimaCloud, an alternate digital universe discovered by the Empathics, a fictional race of half-plant, half-human beings. Visitors to the museum will be the first to experience this new digital realm that will fill the gallery with vibrant projections and ambient music.

Influenced by the museum's permanent collection, Woolfalk has incorporated aesthetic elements from select works of art into components of the installation. The early 14th-century Chinese wall painting of Buddhist astrology, *The Assembly of Tejaprabha*, behind *Guanyin of the Southern Sea* in gallery 230, serves as the foundational design for Woolfalk's lotus-shaped cosmic map made of colorful plexi disks. Other objects in the museum's collection, specifically those that once served a purpose in the ritual ceremonies of cultures past and present, inspired the term "sacred technology" and Woolfalk's liminality headdresses. The headdresses, made out of 3D printed objects, ceramic disks and metal mandalas, are tools that the Empathics use to access the ChimaCloud. Woolfalk's contemporary interpretation of historical objects in the museum's permanent collection provides visitors the opportunity to see these works from a different perspective.

There is a true sense of wonder in *Expedition to the ChimaCloud*. During a time when immersive art experiences seem to be popping up everywhere, Woolfalk's installations stand out. They are not just a background for a great Instagram picture nor are they conceptual in a way that leaves people confused. She strikes just the right balance. Many museumgoers, myself included, come to the hallowed halls of the Nelson-Atkins to escape, contemplate and be in the presence of exceptional beauty and skill. In these ways, a visit to Woolfalk's exhibition will feel familiar. What will be new and exciting for museum visitors is the full immersion in a spectacular multimedia environment and otherworldly story. So finally, here it is, your invitation to the ChimaCloud. Enter with an open mind and let the visual feast take over.

–Sarah Biggerstaff, Curatorial Assistant, Architecture, Design & Decorative Arts