

**60 min storyliving  
immersive show**

**Collaborative  
Interactive  
Narrative**



A BRIEF MOMENT IN TIME

# MANDALA

written by  
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Directed by  
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STUDIOS



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**CANNES XR**  
MARCHÉ DU FILM

DEVELOPMENT  
SHOWCASE 2020



Nothing is permanent...

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# MANDALA

*A brief moment in time*

**3 to 6 users** every 30min

Show length : **60 minutes**

Space : **2 rooms** of 36m<sup>2</sup>

## KEY POINTS

- **60 minutes LBE** installation, **narrative and interactive**, including 30min in free-roaming VR.  
Capacity of 12 persons/hour (2 groups of 3-6 persons).
- A narrative universe from a popular chinese tale : **The Monkey-King** or Journey to the West
- Inspired from the traditional **Chinese Shadow Theater** and Buddhist Mandala
- Interactive system of **collaborative drawing**
- **Real-time Motion Capture** actor performance

# MANDALA



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## ***Storyliving immersive show***

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## SYNOPSIS

Visiting an ancient Buddhist temple, the spectators first enter a preparation room, then a storage room for ancient puppetry material. Playing with the puppets, they unlock mini-games and challenges inspired by the story of a famous Chinese folktale, the journey of Sun WuKong the monkey king and Erlang Shen the heaven soldier.

Going through the story and solving the trials together also bring them to reflect on their everyday behavior and weaknesses and learn the philosophical meaning of the mandala. Once the spectators are ready, they are allowed to enter the temple, where they find VR equipment.

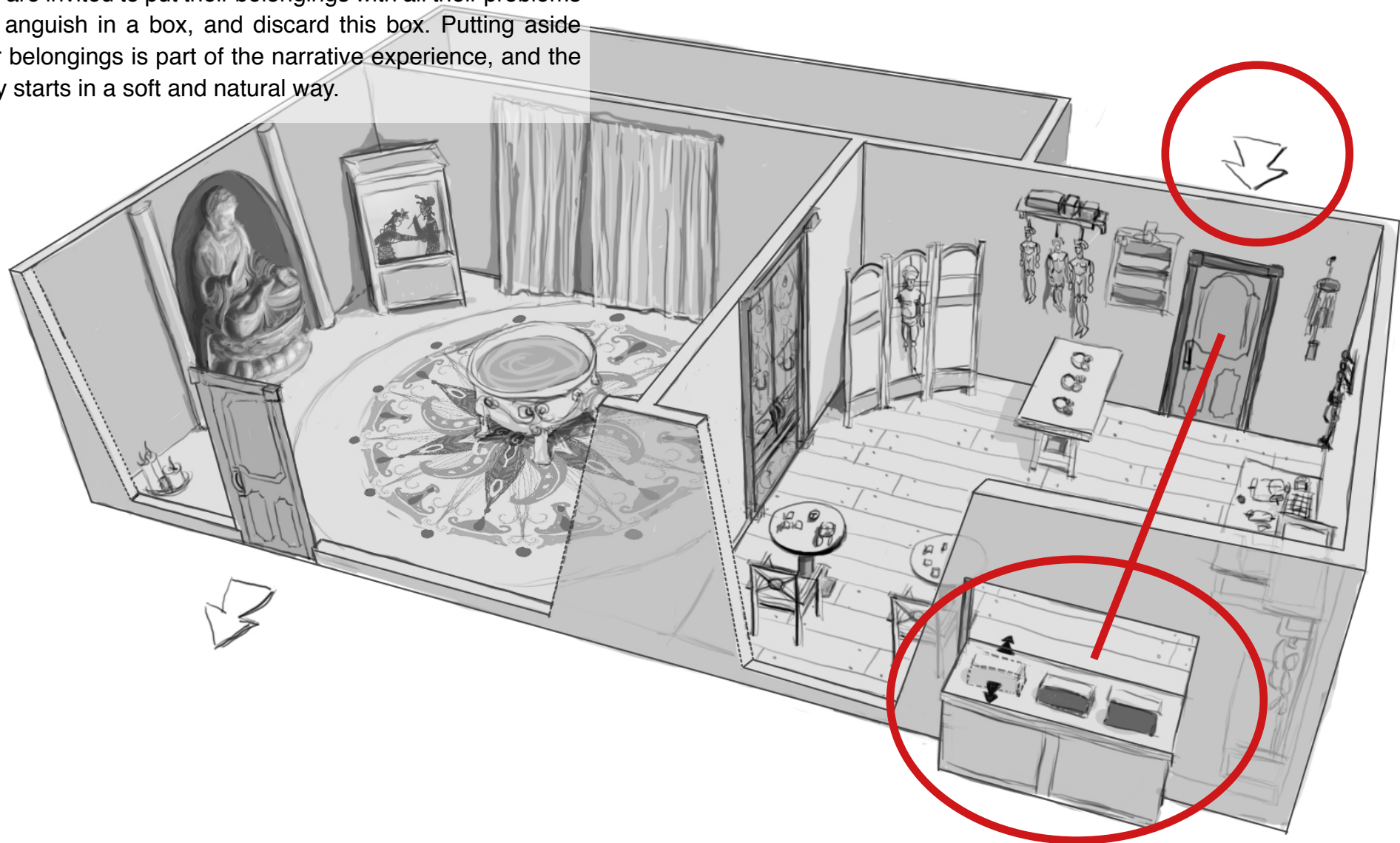
In the virtual world, they can then create altogether a light structure, their own colourful mandala, by moving together, following a relaxing music. Depending on their movements, choices of interaction and collaboration, each drawing created is unique. But the energy instilled in their creation soon awakes the fantastic creatures of the tale. Their newly found philosophy will be put to the test, needing to choose between protecting or betraying the monkey from the soldier chasing him.



# DETAILED SYNOPSIS

## 1- WELCOME

The spectators, after entering the venue and having their booking checked, are quickly lead into the first room. where they are invited to put their belongings with all their problems and anguish in a box, and discard this box. Putting aside their belongings is part of the narrative experience, and the story starts in a soft and natural way.





## 2 - ORIGIN STORY

In the first room, decorated with elements of shadow theaters and traditional puppetry, the spectators will be free to go around. The group of six will have access to three headphones, one red, one green, one blue with positional-tracking technology. Going around the room, those with the headphones will trigger some audio clues on what they should do and how.

The challenges they have to face as a group are both gaming (mechanical enigmas, drawing to do, puppetry...) and act of self-development (like a short meditation, a moral conundrum...). there are more challenges than the spectators can actually solve in the 30min they have in the room, creating a feeling of fulfillment.

The room include a shadow theater, a traditional puppet theater which uses a white screen and transparent characters who seem to be made out of light. Using it, they will learn about hungry ghosts, and the origin story of Sun WuKong, the monkey king, born from a ray of moonlight hitting a rock, taught by a buddhist master how to transform into any animal, yearning for the peaches in the god's garden... They will also have a color attributed to their personality : 2 of them are red, 2 are blue, 2 are green.

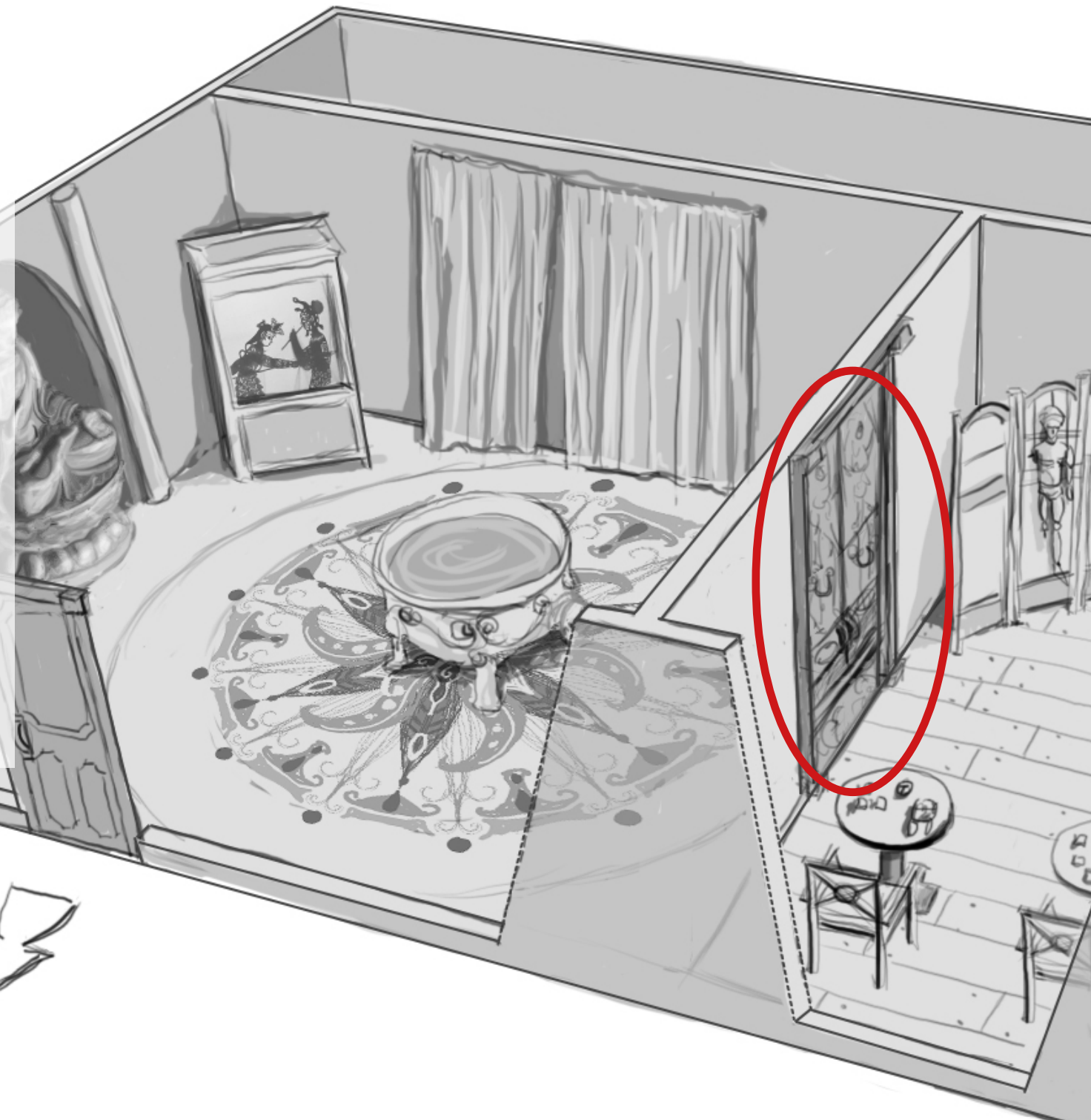


### **3 - THE DOOR**

About 5 minutes before the time is up, the last challenge unveil on two large doors that leads to the temple (the second room). The spectators will need to act together to open those doors. The challenge includes a timer, so the doors open only when the previous team, who was already in the temple, has left.

### **4 - THE TEMPLE**

The group is welcomed in the temple by a buddhist monk, played by an actor. He brings them inside the temple, a simple empty buddhist temple, but hosting 6 VR headsets hanging from the ceiling. The monk congratulates the spectators, and offers to give them what the temple is famous for : a glimpse of their future incarnations. He and his assistant ( a technician) helps them put on the VR equipment.

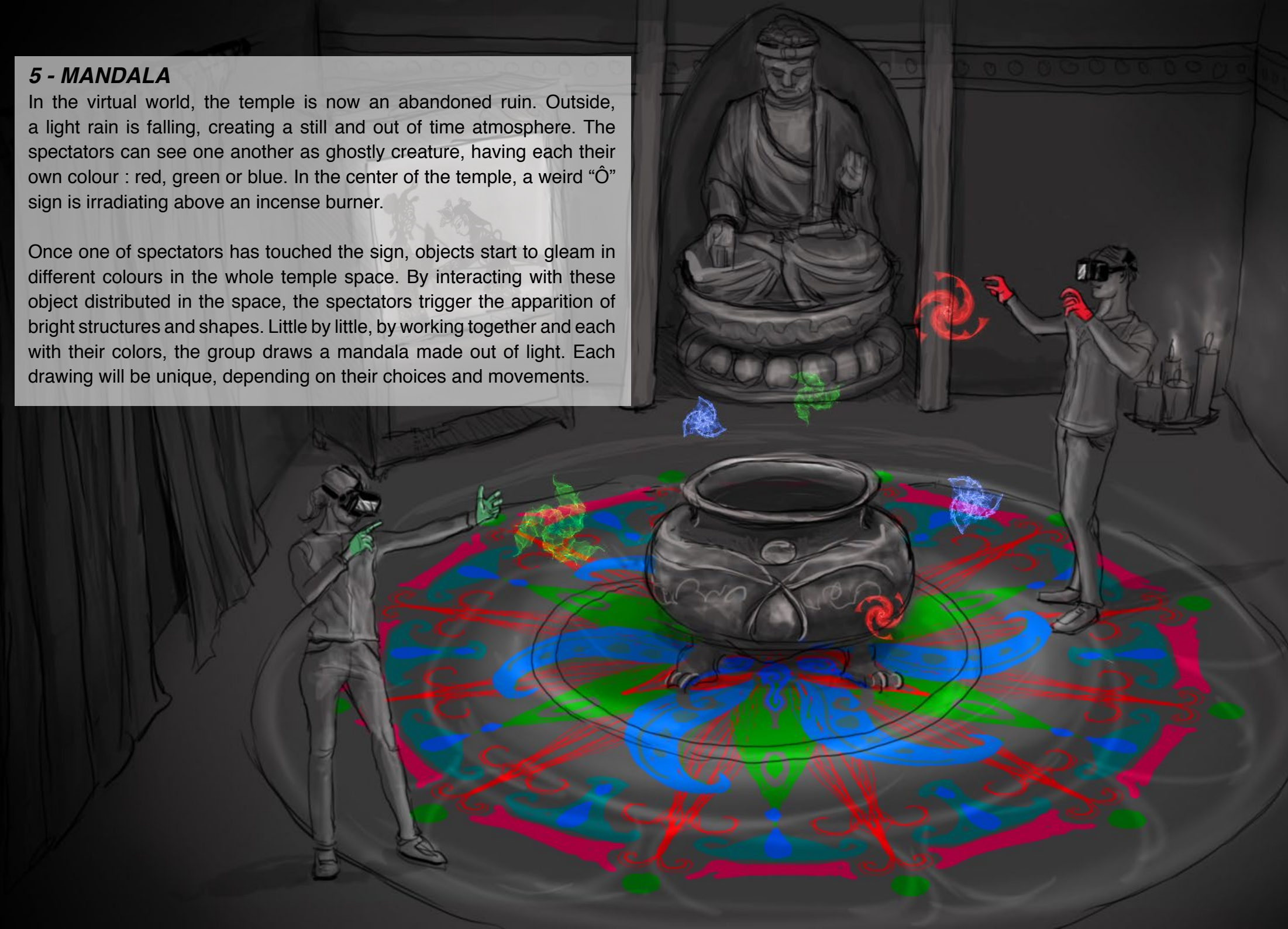




## 5 - MANDALA

In the virtual world, the temple is now an abandoned ruin. Outside, a light rain is falling, creating a still and out of time atmosphere. The spectators can see one another as ghostly creature, having each their own colour : red, green or blue. In the center of the temple, a weird “Ô” sign is irradiating above an incense burner.

Once one of spectators has touched the sign, objects start to gleam in different colours in the whole temple space. By interacting with these object distributed in the space, the spectators trigger the apparition of bright structures and shapes. Little by little, by working together and each with their colors, the group draws a mandala made out of light. Each drawing will be unique, depending on their choices and movements.







寺庙场景  
Temple Scene

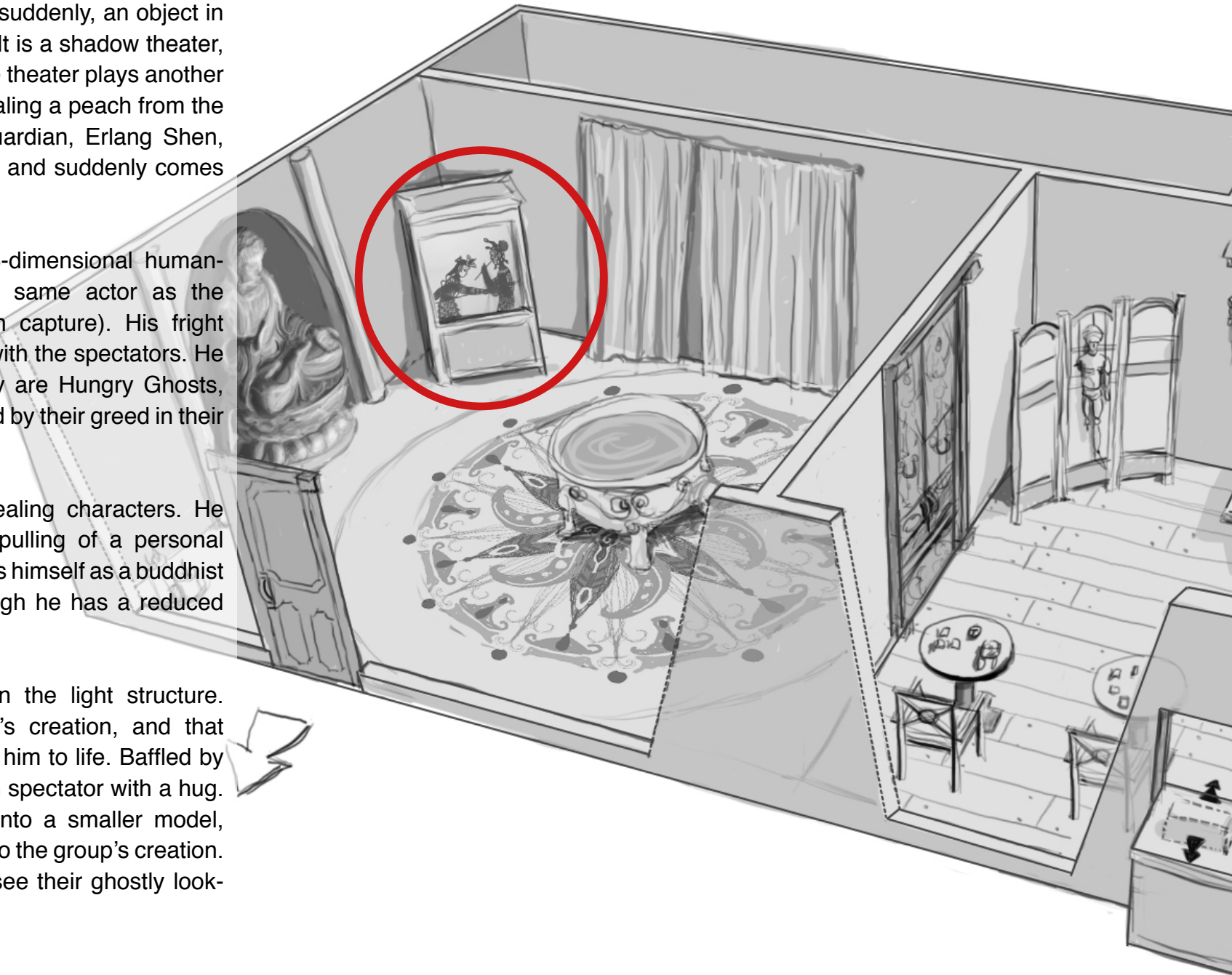
## 6 - SHADOW THEATRE

When a mandala is completed, suddenly, an object in the temple's corner illuminates. It is a shadow theater, like the one in the first room. The theater plays another scene, the monkey Wukong stealing a peach from the gods' garden. The third eye guardian, Erlang Shen, chase him. WuKong runs away, and suddenly comes out of the theatre screen !

WuKong is transformed in a 3-dimensional human-size character (played by the same actor as the monk, now in real-time motion capture). His fright gone, he starts a conversation with the spectators. He explains, for example, that they are Hungry Ghosts, low reincarnation being punished by their greed in their past lives.

WuKong is a stagey and appealing characters. He engages with each spectator, pulling of a personal element each time. He introduces himself as a buddhist expert in philosophy, even though he has a reduced knowledge of it.

Quickly his attention settles on the light structure. The Mandala is the spectator's creation, and that creative energy is what brought him to life. Baffled by its beauty, WuKong thanks each spectator with a hug. He then shrinks the mandala into a smaller model, mischievously offering to dive into the group's creation. Looking inside, the spectators see their ghostly look-alike moving around.











## 7 - INSIDE THE MANDALA

The spectators are projected inside the Mandala. They discover a fantastic world populated with magical creatures. The mandala is laid at the top of a rocky peak, and in the distance, we can see other peaks and other mandalas. A giant carp swimming in the air gives them curious glances.

Again, Spectators can draw together a tree of light in the center of the space. Soon, Wukong joins them, but he is suddenly frightened and hides inside the tree. And for a good reason: The three-eyed heaven soldier is coming to get him.

Erlang Shen, more than 2 meters tall, is a dreadful creature armed with a spear. In a blast, he lands among the spectators. He is looking for the monkey, and will put them into questioning if needed. Do they know the monkey? Do they know where he is hiding? Do they realize the offense he made to the gods?

The spectators are put to the test: Under Erlang Shen's pressure they can betray the monkey-king and reveal where he is hiding, or support the test and oppose the monster. They can also fight and defeat Erlang Shen using again color interactivity.

曼达拉场  
Mandala







# CONCEPT

**Mandala, The immersive show** is a self-exploration experience, alternating gaming sequences to more philosophical conundrums. It is a promenade theatre including two rooms, and a food and drink chill out zone that is also part of the immersive universe.

Groups of 6 persons enter the first room, which offers an immersive experience close to a collaborative escape game, but inspired by the buddhist philosophy. The gaming challenges are mixed with reflexions on their everyday behavior, especially their relation to physical possessions in our materialistic world.

In the second room, the temple, they enter the virtual world. The drawing of the mandala is an opportunity to collaborate for the creation of a unique artwork.

The creative act will be the basis of spectators' emotional involvement, introducing them into the story. With physical props and a live motion capture actor, the VR experience aims to an absolute immersion. They will face the characters of the story, protect their creation and then learn to detach from it. Confronted with a moral dilemma, even though it's presented with humour, the experience gives them the opportunity to discover à little more about themselves.

## Atmospheres and themes

Mandala, the immersive show takes visual inspiration in the chinese traditional art of the shadow puppet theater, and its most famous story (Journey to the West), and from the Mandala technique used by Buddhist Monks.

On the opposite of most of VR experiences which seek strong emotions, Mandala, The Immersive Show develops a quiet and introspective atmosphere. It deals with the relation to the physical world, based on the Buddhist philosophical concept of impermanence, which considers that all phenomena and objects of the physical world are perpetually changing and have no permanent nature.

## PARTNERS

### in France

**Digital Rise** : French producer behind the project, specialized in the creation of collaborative storyliving content involving new technologies.

**DVgroup** : Innovation studio specialised in real time VR immersive theater experiences. They will be our consultants for the UX.

**G4F** : Sound creation studio specializing in video games and interactive creations, located in Angoulême. They will create all the interactive sound design and original music.

### in China

**Sandman Studio** : Chinese producer and animation studio specializing in VR, they will do most of the CGI creation work.

**Sandbox film festival** : New media festival located in Qingdao, SIF has established itself as the biggest VR content festival in China. Partners of Sandman studio, they helped in financing the development of the project and to owcase a prototype during the June 2019 edition.

**Optitrack** : This well-known VR company provides us with material and logistical support for the creation of the experience, notably for tracking and motion-capture.

## **TRACKING HEADPHONE TECHNOLOGY**

In the first room, the players will have access to headphones. Those headphones are equipped with a technology tracking their position. It means that depending on where they are, the players will be able to hear different atmospheres or dialogues. We have only 3 headphones, in order to create an asymmetrical collaborative experience where one player has the headphone and hear the clues, and another one is supposed to perform under the direction of the first player. The headphones have colors, so that the spectators start being used to the 3 colors principles.

## **VR FREE ROAMING**

Mandala, the immersive show includes a VR experience in free-roaming in a 36m2 room, the spectators can move freely in a controlled virtual environment thanks to a wireless VR device. Physical props are built with the exact same shapes than the virtual objects. The spectators are able to physically interact with all the virtual objects.

An actor is present. Equipped with a motion capture device, he incarnates in real time the two virtual characters. Like a game master, he also controls the pace of the experience, with the help of a remote control.

The users are set in 3 to 6 persons group. Each is being attributed a color that he can see on his hands: Red, blue or green. These colors are the base of the interactivity, each spectator can interact with objects of their attributed color.

## **COLLABORATIVE DRAWING**

The first part of the experience let the group interact freely with the colored objects. Each object touched triggers the drawing of a light structure. Depending on the order, the color and position of the objects they trigger, the drawing will be different. Some structures need the activation of two objects, creating unique drawings thanks to the spectator's collaboration. Some will need two spectator to join hands, to reach the secondary colors (for example the green and blue player need to collaborate to trigger the yellow signs)

Most of the structures will be on the floor, drawing according to a symmetrical system inspired by Buddhist mandalas. Others will burst out in the air creating arcs of light and volumes. A colorful mandala spreads depending on the spectators acting together.

A little bit like a "collaborative Tilt Brush", the spectators will create a common artwork. This system will be developed in an evolutive way, allowing us to add more shapes, textures and complex combinations of the spectators' actions and colors.

The goal is to have a system with a simple interface for the spectators, but with a complex operation, which generates a lot of unique and harmonious drawings. The spectators won't necessarily understand the system. The experience is not about offering a drawing tool but about living an experience of a collaborative creation of beauty. The spectators will understand that their actions have consequences, without needing to understand of the system.



## **MANDALA**

The mandala is a complex symmetrical drawing, which has multiple significations in various religions. It's originating from the hinduism, but the practice the most interesting today is the Mandalas of the Tibetan Buddhist monk. They use colourful sand thoroughly arranged in a complex drawing. They often represent the different cosmology kingdoms in buddhism, tangled in a "wheel of life" illustrating the irremediable passage of time. The monks spend days creating together these incredibly detailed drawings. Then after a ceremony, the mandala is dissolved, the sand is mixed and given as an offering, most of the time in a river. This practice highlights the fleeting nature of the physical world, and the concept of impermanence, pillar of the buddhist philosophy. The beauty of the mandala's ephemeral nature is often not understood by westerners willing to "immortalize the artwork with at least a picture".

In our experience we take again the strong principle of this practice : a collaborative creation. A creative action which gives birth to a unique artwork. An ephemeral piece, which will be visible only by the experience's spectators and which they will destroy on their own will.





## SHADOW THEATER

Age-Old art in Chinese tradition, the shadow theater is composed of a backlit white screen on which we tackle colourful and translucent puppets. The puppets are made out of very thin waxed and dyed leather with a drawing sometimes very refined and sometimes made out of very complex joints. The whole set is operated by one or several puppeteer hidden in a wooden hut.

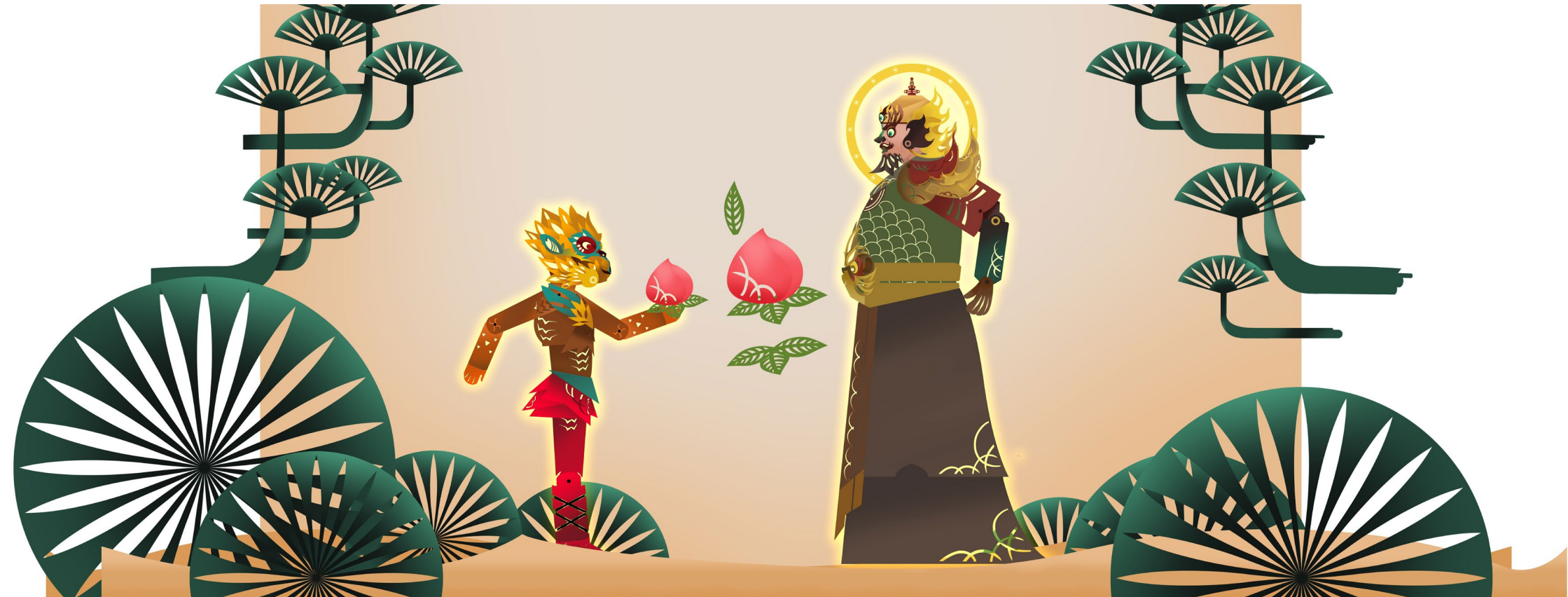
We use the visual universe of shadow theater and its puppet for our experience. As they are translucent and colourful, they seem to be made out of light themselves. Our characters (WuKong and Erlang Sheng) are puppets which left the screen. In volume they still seem to be made of this translucent and luminous material and are contrasting with the grey and sad scenery.

Short documentary (5') on the Chinese shadow theater art :  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3sl1lvO6Jw>

Exemple of a shadow theater :  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoMoZyX53UU>

A journey to the west is one of the most famous and popular in the shadow theaters. The character Sun WuKong with his multiple transformations, is a boon for this medium.

WuKong and Erlang Shen's fight (a very authentic representation!)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lazfPhHS1dc>



# NARRATIVE UNIVERSE : THE JOURNEY TO THE WEST

The journey to the west is the most famous story among the Chinese ancient novels. Written in the XVI century, it is probably the most adapted Chinese story.

The novel relates the journey of Tripitaka, Buddhist monk in charge of bringing to China a copy of the sacred texts which are preserved in India. The monk is supported in his long journey by the Bodhisattva Guan Yin, goddess which provides him with 4 companions with supernatural powers in order to protect him from demons and other evil creatures.

The first of his companions, Sun WuKong, the monkey-king, is in fact the real hero of the story, as the novel starts by his birth, his ascension to great powers, his arrogance in front of the gods and his imprisonment by the Buddha under a mountain. Sun WuKong's journey with the monk is the occasion to repent and to work on himself, bringing him to the Buddhist enlightenment.

## Sun WuKong

Prototype character derived from Hanuman in the Hindu mythology, Sun Wu Kong is a gold mine for dramatic art, because he mixes a great physical and magical power and a childish ingenuity. His candid posture allows the novelist to interrogate through the monkey the certainties of the world and his power allows him to be close from the gods. Hanuman, in the Hindu Mythologie shows this supernatural power, but he is confined to the role of Rama's adjuvant and he is a symbol of raw strength.

Sun Wu Kong, on the contrary is facetious, ignorant and very human, which make him swing from one side to another, positive or negative character. It gives more importance to his journey of initiation, as his potential is great but he is severely lacking self-control.





The monkey, the pig and the pilgrim monk's characters are pillars of the Chinese folklore. From the traditional puppet play to the VFX-loaded blockbusters, adaptations of the universe are countless (an impressive list on Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_media\\_adaptations\\_of\\_Journey\\_to\\_the\\_West](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_media_adaptations_of_Journey_to_the_West)). They can be compared for example with the French Three Musketeers or the Little Prince. They arrived in France in an unexpected but in a smashing way since in 1984, Akira Toriyama draws a free adaptation in the world famous manga: **Dragon Ball**, where Sun Wu Long becomes San Goku, the candid with superhuman powers.

In our experience, the users will have the opportunity to talk with this legendary character. The choice of an actor able to improvise and ham it up will give form to this encounter.



**Akira Toriyama's Dragon Ball**, a modern adaptation of the Monkey King story

## Erlang Shen

Erlang Shen, the three-eyed semi-god has less importance in the novel. Sent by the Jade Emperor to bring back the monkey, he is one of the antagonists. His character was developed later in the shadow theaters' plays where the fight between him and the monkey king remains legendary. Erlang Shen being a master in transformations too, the fight between the two will be a series of metamorphosis in various animals.

Jade Emperor's nephew, this semi-god has a third eye, that allows him to see the truth behind appearances. Yet the monkey succeed in deceiving him. In our experience, Erlang Shen is a giant with 3 eyes, steaming and blowing. He plays with the intimate space of the spectators, approaching very closely to interrogate them.

The actor will have to act on a range from scary to comic. We know that immersive theater plays can be very strong emotionally and we don't want to terrify our spectators. The actors will need to "defuse" their fears by comedy elements.

**Thomas Villepoux / Yang Huang**



**Erlang Shen**, the three-eyed guardian in Mandala, The Immersive Show.



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