VIRTUAL REALITY AND MASKING

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ABSTRACT

This research connects masking in the real world with internet chat rooms, online gaming and virtual 3D worlds. With the release from real-world constraints participants explore far reaches of the psyche, enabling the expression of a variety of behaviours, the collective unconscious and archetypes.
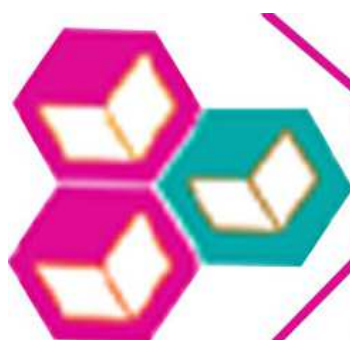
The research is part of a PhD in Fine Arts entitled *Visualising Real- and Virtual-World Masking with Art Glass and Abstract Animation.* It seeks to answer the questions "Does the transformation of identity in virtual reality represent a basic human need to use masking and how can this be visually represented?"

A medium chosen to visually express these experiences is warm fused glass, itself an ancient art. Kiln fired glass can reveal and conceal, be spectacular or subtle – consistent with the masking process. As well, multimedia will be used to visually explore the dynamic aspects of masking.

For creative research to thrive it needs to stretch the boundaries of disciplines, extend across them and then push into unknown territory. This study encompasses ethnography, anthropology, sociology, psychology and the visual arts. It extends well beyond current practice and knowledge and provides an excellent environment for collaboration. It has, for example, implications for further research in virtual environments on addictive, obsessive and deviant behaviours and the psychology of mass participation, transformation, transcendence, immersion and disembodiment. As well, psychological tenets about identity and self are challenged by participants occupying different and multiple identities.

The practical outcomes of this research will assist in a better understanding of human and community needs and how they can be met in the real world. It is likely to assist in understanding and dealing with obsessive and aggressive on-line behaviour. Just as importantly it could lead to an enriched on-line experience, with obvious commercial implications.

KEYWORDS: Study and Collaboration, Environments, Concealment