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Guanajuato: a virtual exhibit

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GUANAJUATO
A VIRTUAL EXHIBIT

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by
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To my parents, for the gift of life.
To my cousin Margarita, for her support.
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Abstract

This thesis will present a virtual exhibition of a tourist destination in Mexico, Guanajuato City. By applying my previous experiences and the knowledge and skill acquired during this MFA program, I developed a Multimedia exhibition that encompasses a new virtual experience of the Mexican culture. This exhibition demonstrates my proficiency in the area of motion graphics.
Guanajuato: A Virtual Exhibit

After making the decision to pursue an MFA in studio arts in the graduate program at LSU, more than two years were spent developing my knowledge and skills. The Graphic Design concentration has expanded my knowledge of the general aspects of graphic design and the more specialized use of software and hardware for interactive and multimedia projects. Today, having reached the latter stages of my graduate studies, my commitment to develop a project that will reflect my accomplishments is culminating in my thesis project.

After spending eight years working in the Mexican Financial System as a senior manager developing promotional campaigns, advertising and designing visual communication, my expectations for my career were focused on the emerging technologies that were changing communications during the 90’s. This new technology is interactive media that incorporates motion graphics, web design, and environmental design. This thesis project is based on the experience acquired in advertising and the new understanding of artistic representations in graphic design I learned during my MFA studies at LSU. This work will satisfy my expectations of applying and developing an artistic style in my work without requiring a business-oriented process as it was in the past.

This thesis project is a virtual exhibition that represents and promotes a colonial city, which is the capital of Guanajuato State in Mexico. With a strong and powerful environment, history and culture, Guanajuato City, is a magnificent place that presents the perfect opportunity to promote Mexican culture. It provides an ideal location to develop an interactive exhibition with new approaches and techniques.
The exhibition is based on an advertising campaign model; however, it is intended to be an artistic experience rather than a regular promotional campaign. It has been formulated to develop a clear understanding of meanings that Guanajuato holds in the collective memory of our culture, and from that, to build a new artistic approach to the visitors.

By using interactive and virtual media, such as motion graphics, environmental design multimedia, and 3D environment, the tradition, culture, and history of Guanajuato will create an atmosphere of modernity that will place historical attributes in a contemporary context designed for the audience.

Developing an exhibit or “welcome exhibition” provides a comprehensive opportunity to introduce the audience to a new cultural environment.

It will invite attendees to imagine, discover, and explore the city of Guanajuato in an immersive media experience. Like a fine picture, a well-designed virtual environment lures us into the meaning of visual experiences. It serves to increase understanding, improve awareness,
infuse a message with tone of voice, and convey nuances of feelings and memories. Rarely does a virtual environment call direct attention to itself; instead, it speaks eloquently on a subliminal level. It enhances, supports, and occasionally serves as the key visual element in an animation.

Working together with video and images, the virtual environment is a powerful visual medium, which helps to present the elegant, historical, playful, and provocative spirit of a city that embraces a variety of styles.

The Guanajuato Virtual Exhibit enables an audience outside of Mexico to explore a place that has not been promoted in their culture. From the simplest attempts at communicating information through images and video, Guanajuato arrived at its own formalized style to allow visual expression of feelings and ideas. The city of Guanajuato assumed many visual forms that bring us to different periods of time though history and culture.

In the production phase, as I develop the project, I identify the different elements that will form the exhibition, how they are a representation of a new approach, and the way in which they create a contemporary image of the characteristics of Guanajuato.

To identify the different elements for this virtual experience it is necessary to use more than one medium to illustrate the concept. In this project, I will use motion graphics, environmental design, and a virtual 3D environment. Motion graphics is the combination of images and text with different rhythm and movement that will create a “real life” perception of the place or object. The environmental design helps to shape an atmosphere of the place by using images, textures, or elements related to it. The virtual 3D atmosphere creates volume and depth that generates the idea of being in the actual place.
Fig. 2. Example of environmental design.

Fig. 3. Example of design and virtual environment.
These elements are a representation of a new approach toward Guanajuato, because it is a city of traditional colonial style and rich history, and has been represented in many ways. By using this innovative new media, the exhibit may increase the richness and beauty of the city’s narrow alleys, baroque buildings, and cobblestone streets.

Finally with the combination of this new approach and the characteristics of Guanajuato, the final virtual exhibit stands by itself in this new era of fast communication and technology.

After addressing the visual elements, the representation of the new approach and the contemporary view that generates this exhibition of Guanajuato, the last point to address is the description of the visual elements inside the exhibit and how they are integrated.

The Guanajuato virtual exhibit is divided in four sections: the introduction of Guanajuato, the presentation of the exhibit content, the location of the physical place of the city of Guanajuato, and the last part or main body. As a teaser or introductory element, there is a combination of motion graphics and a graphic solution of the exhibit, which welcomes the audience to the show. Another element is the presentation of the exhibit’s content. The content objective is to invite the audience to imagine, discover and explore Guanajuato. Finally the last element before the main body is a geographic presentation of the physical place of Guanajuato City for the audience, to facilitate the location in relation to the United States of America.

In the main body of the exhibit it is necessary to address the characteristics of the city and culture with a visual solution and artistic representation. Mexican culture is full of mixed textures, colors, shapes, smells and natural scenery which; creates a vivid environment that invites people to explore. In this case the environmental design of the exhibit is full of an exciting combination of images, textures, streets alleys, houses, parks, etc, that harmonize with
Guanajuato’s natural imagery. The layout of the virtual exhibit follows the scenery and environment of the city by showing some of its most striking characteristics such as history, geography, the subterranean highway, the baroque style of the city, and the narrow alley ways located throughout city’s hill sides.

At this point the audience is submerged in a virtual journey around impressive buildings, “Quinta” houses, and streets side cafes that are represented in either video or still images. By using the camera as the audience’s sight, the attendees can move around the virtual space enjoying a different representation of the city.

Fig. 4. Example of final images before rendering.
Fig. 4. Example of final images of the introduction before rendering.
In conclusion, this thesis is a creative process that combines art and technology to communicate ideas. It begins with a message that is converted into communication that transcends mere words and images.

By controlling image and text, the exhibit creates an environment where the message can inform, persuade, and educate a specific audience.

The creation of this thesis project will be a significant development of my experience as a graphic designer, not only in the business world, but also in my artistic formation. Considering my background and cultural origin, the exchange of ideas and experience with American students and audience will be a key point in my goal to be a professor in the future.
Appendix A

Guanajuato City, Capital of Guanajuato State

Guanajuato is a state, which is remarkable for its many religious and historical fiestas. It is considered the colonial center of Mexico. Other features of this state are the International Cervantes Festival in the capital, the San Miguel de Allende Chamber Music and Jazz festival, the Short Film Festival, and the State Fair held every January in Leon. Also to be considered are the many tourist characteristics of Guanajuato, such as weather, geography, cuisine, arts, crafts, folklore, and food.

“Until the beginning of the 15th century, Guanajuato was home to a settlement of Otomi natives. Indeed, the name “Guanajuato” comes from a word in the Purepecha language, “guanaxhuato” meaning “hilly place of the frogs.” The city of Guanajuato owes its foundation to the rich silver mines that were discovered by the Spaniards in 1548. In 1741, the city was given the title of “The most Noble and Loyal City of Santa Fe y Real de Minas de Guanajuato”, and subsequently continued to become the richest city in Mexico in the 16th century. The mining splendor of this period is reflected in the city’s magnificent religious and civil architecture. Guanajuato boasts some of the finest examples of Barroque and Churrigueresque architecture in the New World, such as the Valenciana, Cata and La compañía Churches, as well as the Basilica of Our Lady of Guanajuato. The city is a beautiful example of the art and architecture of the age of the Viceroyals and style, which continued into the 19th century. This can be seen in magnificent neoclassical structures, including the Juarez Theater or the Plaza de la Paz, which is
lined with some of the city’s most striking palaces, including Guanajuato’s city hall, the Palacio Legislativo. The picturesque garden, the Jardin de la Union, is the city’s favorite gathering point, where one can enjoy excellent international cuisine in the different restaurants around the garden. The French style Hidalgo Market offers a wide variety of popular handcrafts also. The city’s underground road system is also a particular interest for tourist and visitors. This underground street system runs across the city along the dry riverbed of the River Guanajuato. From 1963 to 1966, they were converted into streets measuring 3 km long. In recent time, this has expanded, covering the downtown area and it is provided with charming archways and balconies, which loom over every opening in the tunnel. Owing to its peculiar topography, the city is made up largely of a series of alleys, where one can find numerous picturesque recesses. It is through these alleys that you can take one of the famous night tours, or “callejoneadas,” which are accompanied by the merry songs of Guanajuato’s student minstrels or “estudiantinas,” creating a very special atmosphere. Guanajuato offers an endless variety of tourist attractions, as well as the joyful atmosphere of its plazas and callejoneadas, (the traditional tour of Guanajuato’s enchanting streets). The city is also home to important cultural festivals, such as the International Cervantes Festival, which takes place in October, as well as other artistic events that take place every weekend throughout the year. As a capital of the state, Guanajuato is also a doorway to the modern world with events that have more contemporary amenities such as museums, professional golf courses, and spas for hydrotherapy or relaxation”. This text was taken from the Brochure “Stampa” of Cotur, Coordinadora de Turismo of Guanajuato State, for informative background of Guanajuato.
Appendix B

Voice Over of the Guanajuato: A Virtual Exhibit

In the heart of Mexico it is one of the country’s most beautiful cities, fascinating Guanajuato, from lavish churches and elaborate mansions to winding cobblestone streets and twisting tunnels you will find a new surprise on every corner here. (Pause)

The best way to explore this historical city is it just to lose yourself in it. Let’s explore Guanajuato! (Pause)

Just to the west of Mexico City, is the picturesque city of Guanajuato. Its historical and geographical landmarks are intimately linked to many important events of the Mexican Independence movement, and the city has one of the world’s most unusual street systems. A trip to Guanajuato is like opening an encyclopedia of unforgettable scenery. (Pause)

A unique elaborate subterranean highway makes up the city’s low ground. Cars now drive through the stone arch tunnels that were once the city’s flood control canals. (Pause)

Above ground, a maze of cobble streets, narrow alley ways, steep stairways and brick bridges covers the city’s hillsides; in fact, some of the streets have become legendary, like the famous and extremely narrow “Callejon del Beso” or Alley of the Kiss. (Pause)

The first battle and victory of the fight for Independence took place in Guanajuato, as evidenced by numerous monuments. (Pause)
The city’s place in history was also assured when silver mines were discovered and Guanajuato was built from the subsequent wealth. Today this can be appreciated by viewing the dazzling display of fine architecture in the remaining mansions, detail churches, public buildings and baroque theaters. (Pause)

The tradition of a sophisticated cultural scene is ever present in the city’s dedication to the world of theater and its renowned International Cervantes Festival. (Pause)

Guanajuato is made for walking; it seems that every side street leads to inviting parks, Quinta houses, impressive buildings or streets side cafes. There is a certain flavor to this colorful city that can only be felt by strolling though it. (Pause)

Other attractions in Guanajuato include the many museums that carefully display the region’s rich past. Several old Haciendas and Universities also attest to magnificent architectural wizardry and dynamic legends of the past. As for shopping, the local stores are clean, colorful, and full of interesting crafts. (Pause)

In this vibrant colonial jewel of a city, you will dine later at night and enjoy regional specialties. Guanajuato is the perfect place to forget the 21st Century. (Stop)
Appendix C

Technical Report

In the production of the Guanajuato: A Virtual Exhibit was required a combination of different software, hardware and design techniques. It was also necessary to go to the City of Guanajuato to take photo images and video, ten hours of video and 500 images to be used as a video clips and in the environmental design graphics. The 10 hours of visual material was converted into video clips of QuickTime movie format and the images were selected and transformed into jpegs for easy use. The “virtual gallery” was produced in Cinema 4D, a 3D software for Macintosh, which facilitates the interaction with other software involved in the final production. All the selected video clips and images were exported into the “virtual gallery” file in Cinema 4D and rendered into a final QuickTime movie. Later it was integrated into After Effects. Images from the LSU Campus were merged with special visual effects, which were created for the motion graphics introduction. The credits, sound, the virtual gallery, and the motion graphics introduction were then combined and concluded in After Effects.
Vita

Norma Elena Gonzalez was born in Mexico City, the daughter of Sergio Gonzalez and Maria Meza de Gonzalez. She graduated in 1992 from the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana with a graphic design degree. After graduating, she acquired 8 years experience in the Mexican financial system in different financial institutions, developed promotional campaigns and corporative images. In 1998 she arrived to the United States of America and spent two years studying in the Academic English Program at The University of Texas at Austin, where she also volunteered in the advertising department with Professor Murphy, an authority in his field. She entered the graduate program of the Savannah College of Art and Design in 2000, where she began to obtain experiences in the area of motion graphics. Following this lead she decided to transfer her credits to the School of Art in Louisiana State University and pursue a Master of Fine Arts specializing in multimedia and motion graphics. During her graduate studies she taught freshman students in the Department of graphic design and received recognition for her skills to train students pursue a graphic design major.