

## **Rebecca Allen**

### **The Bush Soul**



*The Bush Soul* is an interactive artwork that explores the role of avatars and human presence in a world of artificial life.

In a virtual world, the avatar becomes our other body. But what part of "us" is in our avatar? In West Africa there is a belief that a person has more than one soul and that there is a type of soul, called the "bush soul", that dwells within a wild animal of the bush.

An avatar can serve as a dwelling place for the bush soul, carrying a person's bush soul into the virtual bush.

Through the avatar a person enters a world that is "alive" and responsive. Each of the characters in the virtual world is brought to life through a script that defines its personality and governs its behavior towards other inhabitants.

Communication and interaction between characters occur through gestures, sound and the emission of energy in the form of light particles or energy fields. People navigate their avatar using a haptic, force-feedback joystick which also allows them to feel the energy fields of various characters through tactile feedback. In addition, voice input provides another means of communication and interaction. A person's voice is processed to generate sounds that can be recognized by artificial life forms.

In order to create this piece, it was necessary to first build the underlying framework that would support a living virtual environment. This software system called Emergence is a PC-based, real-time 3D software system that supports an active, responsive, networked, virtual world.

This work draws from the language of video games but moves beyond the restrictions of commercial games. You do not win or lose or collect points, nor is there a need to control or dominate the world. The experience is more like that of visitors observing and exploring an exotic foreign place. Through interaction, they can better understand the environment and its life forms.

*Programmers: Loren McQuade, Eitan Mendelowitz, John Ying*

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*Sound Design: Mark Mothersbaugh, Mutato Musika*

*Additional Sound: Franz Keller, Jay Flood*

*Technical Support: Maroun Harb*

*The Emergence Project is partially funded by a grant from the Intel Corporation.*

*Special thanks to Softimage Inc.*