

Kevin Kent

Project: A 3D video and Virtual Reality vision and a voice of the Jerusalem Temple Western Wall inspiring CommUnity.

Artist introduction:

My art is digital whether it is video, audio, photographic, animation, VR, or website development. I enjoy conceiving, planning, recording, and completing a project. My creative experience is recording, editing, and producing optical/online media. My creative credentials derive from a) 30 years as a New York City Department of Education educator/computer technologist facilitating high school students' video, animation, and web science -related projects as well as administrative support computer programming, b) 25 years owning a commercial event, video (live and studio), photography, audio and web business in New York State, and several years as an Adjunct Instructor of Multimedia at Westchester Business Institute. In addition I authored a highly academically successful, trademarked Adobe Flash based, NYS Regents-prep website. This website, Regents Quest (TM), motivated students by mimicking video game art, Metallica background music, and scaffolded data-driven, multimedia-supported Regents quiz questions requiring scripted programming.

Currently I have post-produced standard and 3D format video. I have been collecting 3D models for a few years to make a stereoscopic video to make animations of the Temple service. I then realized that I could use 3D models with filmed 3D to make stereoscopic 3D video. I then learned that these can both be imported into a game engine software to produce and immersive/interactive VR experience.

Project Description:

Jerusalem and its Temple have long represented an iconic inspirational message of peace and unity for all peoples. My goal is to use emerging, immersive technologies, 3D video and Virtual Reality(VR), to produce a unique public local and online experience of the place of which the prophet Isaiah said "My House shall be a House of Prayer for All Nations."

Each year thousands of pilgrims of all faiths come to Jerusalem. Israel Tourist Office statistics show 3.6 million foreign tourists in 2017 with Christians making up 56% of this number. Of these, 90% visited Jerusalem. The Western Wall area is the area in Israel most visited by foreign tourists. Still, there are many who cannot make this journey even though they dream of it.

Conflict has long marred the peace of Jerusalem for which many pray daily. Even as archeological finds such as King Hezekiah's seal give verity to Biblical history, the United Nations Cultural Organization UNESCO has denied a Jewish connection to the Temple Mount. The President's recognition of Jerusalem as the actual rather than defacto Capital of Israel has created strong responses from around the world.

Current 2D video is unable to capture the the size and complexity of the excavations surrounding the Western and Southern Walls of the Temple Mount. I wanted to create a means of more fully experiencing the beauty and intensity of this holy place so that people can be inspired to work towards peace. I am a Torah observant Jew. Observance includes "tikun olam", the repair of the world, using the skills and material items that we have to create a "kiddush HaShem" an honoring of our mutual Creator in this case by working towards unity.

Local and online audiences will view a 3D video of a tour of the Western Wall Tunnels narrated to provide historical background and architectural context of the first, second, and third (future) Jerusalem Temples. It will include the use of various images via 2D/3D animation and hand or digital illustrations. After seeing the video, individuals can experience an immersive and interactive VR walk-through of the Western Wall Tunnel tour. Game-play involves answering questions or making choices dependent on knowledge from the video, historical depictions of the tunnel, 3D videos, an archaeological "dig," and scoring positive points for virtually performing acts of kindness, peace, or unity (for example: helping other tourists, having a positive environmental impact during the "dig") Audience participants, both in person or online, will have the opportunity to sign a "Peace Pledge" card where they pledge to an act of or promoting peace, kindness, or unity.

The video will include interviews with racially, ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse citizens, educators and clergy. Background music and musicians are genre and racially/culturally diverse paralleling the the theme of unity. Music may include blues, reggae, folk, biblical, and contemporary Jewish rock.

I am excited at the possibilities inherent in this project for progressing artistically from both a design and skill perspective. Virtual Reality interactivity through hand controllers, a feature of the HTC Vive, requires C# or C++ programming, practicing on my own Vive system. My previous experience scripting with similar languages for Adobe Flash and HTML-based website gives me the basis for learning to code the necessary scripts. I am not skilled in architectural and character animation (Autodesk 3D Studio Max, Daz3D) beyond the fundamentals. I currently have the relevant fully-licensed 3D models and software as well as the basic skills. I plan to take classes at Anne Arundel Community College and use the mentoring services of a more advanced animator to facilitate the production of the animation to be integrated into the video and VR. I have researched possible venues within the Baltimore area. Local resident Avraham Rosenblum, the innovative "father of Jewish Rock and Roll" has agreed to provide music and marketing and assistance. Rabbi Mordecai Schuchatowitz, an expert in the history and rituals of the Jerusalem Temple has agreed to assist with the technical accuracy in the presentation.

Having time because of retirement, the availability of artistic and educational support and collaboration, and the industry maturity of 3D animation/VR make it the right time for this project .