



MEOWOLF

ORIGIN STORY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Meow Wolf's Creative Values	2
Workshopping Meaningful Immersive Experiences	3
Time-Stamped Topics	4-7
Entrepreneurship in the Creative Economy	8
How to Execute a Creative Idea in an Immersive Art Installation	9-10
A Secret Ingredient	11
A Note on Corporate Social Responsibility	



PLEASE NOTE:

The documentary is **NOT RATED** but contains **EXPLICIT LANGUAGE AND MATURE THEMES**. Please be sure to change your settings to watch the censored version of the film in a classroom or family environment, if so desired. If watching on Blu-ray or DVD, you can change these settings in the *Set Up* menu.

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FOREWORD

Meow Wolf has always been about artists and collaboration first and foremost.

In 2008, we started as a 10-person DIY collective based out of Santa Fe, New Mexico with the sole purpose of making art and cultivating community. Now, we're a multi-disciplinary creative company employing more than 250 full time artists, painters, engineers, video producers, writers, and more, collaborating towards a common goal. Our goal: create immersive, interactive experiences that transport audiences of all ages into fantastic realms of story and exploration.

Santa Fe is home to our first permanent installation, the *House of Eternal Return*, where guests discover a multidimensional mystery house with secret passages, portals to magical worlds, climbing apparatuses, and surreal, maximalist art exhibits; along with a children's learning center, top ten in the U.S. music venue, and cafe.

With this documentary, we're very excited that we can step into the classroom with you. We are even more thrilled to be connecting with educators and students in the spirit of inspiring collaboration that has fueled us from the start.

Our commitment to communities is to create opportunities for a wide and diverse range of educators and students to participate in new experiences and ask important questions as to how to build collaborative, immersive art. We also seek to empower educators to have class discussions about the role of art in Technology, Science, Entrepreneurship, Narrative Storytelling and how creative minds can be found in every field of interest. Inspiration can and does come from everywhere.

We want to freely offer insights and lessons we've learned over 10+ years about creating powerful immersive experiences, encouraging higher-level thinking, and finding new ways to explore creativity.

We hope the following content will inspire both educators and students alike to explore the accessible unknown!

– Meow Wolf Artist Team

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MEOW WOLF CREATIVE VALUES

These attributes are chief among our values and aesthetic as an immersive artist collective and align with Meow Wolf's creative vision.

COLLABORATIVE

We encourage collaborative projects which involve artists who possess different skill sets working together to accomplish things that would not have been possible on their own. Regardless of whether the project is being proposed by a group or by an individual artist, we ask: Has the artist or artists considered all skill sets and necessary collaborations needed to complete the project? Are they likely to approach the project with an open-minded collaborative sensibility?

KALEIDOSCOPIC

We are drawn to work that is colorful, playful, and layered. Our definition of Kaleidoscopic carries an additional connotation of 'multifaceted.' When evaluating an idea, we ask: Does the work express variety and depth, revealing multiple layers of visual interest and encouraging many interpretations?

MAXIMAL

Back in the early days of Meow Wolf, maximal meant that we threw everything we had at a project. Literally. The fact that empty space was covered was more important than the choice of material we used to cover it. Our definition of maximal has evolved to encompass our ambition to create fully immersive

experiences, and our devotion to detail in considering the whole of a space. When evaluating an idea, we ask: Has the artist considered every part of the space? Is the experience rich in detail and fully immersive?

MIND-BENDING

We prefer the term mind-bending over mind-blowing. It implies a more subtle and effective warping of reality. When you bend the mind, you allow it to get out of its own way, giving it the opportunity to reshape itself by forming new pathways. When evaluating an idea, we ask: How does the work invite people to step outside of themselves and expand their definitions of what is real and what is possible?

UNEXPECTED

We like seeing fresh new ideas that challenge preconceived notions and turn existing concepts and aesthetics on their heads. When evaluating an idea, we ask: Has this concept been done before? If it has, then how does this particular interpretation subvert expectations?

ALL-AGES

All-ages doesn't mean the work is rated G. It means that the work has enough depth and variety to be enjoyed by a wide range of people in various stages of life. When designing an experience, a good rule of thumb is to ask: Is there something here for both the 90-year-old grandparent and their 4-year-old grandchild?

WORKSHOPPING MEANINGFUL IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES

Here are some important elements that we have learned about immersive installation and experience design over the years. We've defined this formula as an Experience Arc, and find that successful immersive art installations contain the following:

HOOK

An element that catches the visitor's attention and invites them to take a closer look.

EXPLORATION

The closer look provides further discoveries that escalate the visitor's interest.

DISCOVERY

How exploration is rewarded.

Example 1 **Fantastical / Narrative**

HOOK: A glowing door invites the visitor to enter a maze.

EXPLORATION: Navigating the maze leads the visitor to the source of the glow. The glow is emanating from a majestic deer. The deer guards a cosmic orb.

DISCOVERY: The orb sings you a song. The orb is what caused the glow that invited you through the door. Perhaps the song is a clue for elsewhere in the exhibit.

Example 2 **Abstract / Formal**

HOOK: Ten-foot-tall triangle with beautiful stripes.

EXPLORATION: The surface of the triangle is lenticular, viewing the triangle from different angles changes the triangle's appearance.

DISCOVERY: By walking around the triangle and viewing it from different angles, three distinct images become visible.

TIME-STAMPED TOPICS

Art Theory: Maximalism & Immersive Art

The concepts and principles of both Maximalism & Immersive Art largely inform the Meow Wolf aesthetic. They help to achieve the otherworldly-ness and the “accessible unknown” in an installation.

14:28-14:46

- What is maximalism?

26:00-26:20

- Here we see maximalism in theatre. How can maximalism bridge art forms?

27:55-28:25

- In what ways do large-scale installations lend themselves to immersive art?

Art in Science

Meow Wolf strives to bridge the gap between reality and the unknown. Using (or defying) the laws of physics brings forth the possibility of creating new worlds to explore and shatter expectations.

14:16-14:35

- What connection is there between art and invention?
- Between creativity and the birth of a new idea?

15:28-15:56

- How can one draw inspiration from science into an artistic medium?

Art in Technology

Meow Wolf uses technology in nearly every aspect of an installation. Technology can enhance an environment, transport you, make you feel something and allow space for wonderment. Technology is an integral part of storytelling and creates space for tech artists to contribute to visitors’ discovery and engagement.

30:05-30:51

- Tech team assembles for the first time. What role does technology play in an immersive art installation?

1:01:42-1:02:09

- Self-taught initiative. How is tech used to compliment art?
- What role does research play?
- Imagine an everyday environment (a house, a forest, etc.). How can tech transform the space into something interactive and unexpected?

1:05:05-1:05:47

- How tech influences infrastructure. Why is it important to plan ahead?



TIME-STAMPED TOPICS

Art in Narrative

Meow Wolf uses narrative in nearly every stage of the design process while actualizing an exhibition. The art of brainstorming, collaborating, and storytelling is at the heart of every installation and helps draw visitors into the art and enhances their immersion.

13:20-13:50

- How does narrative inform artistic style?

14:40-15:25

- How do you create worlds through the narrative?
- How does this lend to immersive art installations?

1:02:38-1:03:54

- How does storytelling invite the viewer into explore the exhibit?
- Does the narrative drive the interest of the exhibit as a whole?
- Using the formula on page 3, create a fantastical narrative around an object.

Applied Art

This section speaks to process. From the design stage to execution, materials can largely inform the final outcome of your installation. Meow Wolf has always valued using recycled materials and has shown that you don't need a big budget to get to work!

8:47- 9:36

- Draw. On. Everything. Would you rather have a plan/design before you dive in?
- What is the benefit of freestyle?

13:55-14:28

- Found objects and materials, the potential in upcycling and recycling. How does repurposing materials lend to the creative process?

15:29-16:09

- How does interactive art inform design?

1:01:42-1:02:09

- How can you layer mediums to create an immersive installation?

Art Therapy

Art Therapy provides a safe, non-judgmental environment where an individual can express their experiences, traumas, insecurities, and sense of "otherness" through the process of art making.

20:42-21:09

- How can art therapy help people feel supported?
- What type of art best helps you express your feelings?

46:44-48:15

- Who has ever experienced mood swings or drastic ups and downs? What are some ways in helping balance these out?

53:00-53:26

- Can the loss of a loved one contribute to togetherness? How does this affect the collective mentality?



TIME-STAMPED TOPICS

Social Studies in Collectivism

What does it mean to be part of an art collective? When there are inevitably struggles and triumphs that arise, you learn to be a part of a group while sharing space and responsibility.

10:05-11:48

- Inclusivity in forming a collective. The forming of Meow Wolf as a collective. How should an art collective achieve radical inclusivity?
- What problems might arise?

16:15-20:03

- Balance between order and chaos. How much structure is too much?
- Who should be able to set rules in a collective? Should there even be rules?
- How does this stifle the creative process?

22:00-23:09

- Attribution and credit in the collective mentality. Should individuals receive credit when part of a collective whole?

24:42-26:57

- How does expanding the mediums used allow for more participation?
- How can maximalism be interchangeable across formats and mediums and invite contribution and collaboration?

27:55-28:25

- Dividing up rooms inside an exhibition artist by artist. How separate parts equal a whole. How does allocation of space lend to harmony in a collective?
- What's a fair way to allocate that space?

29:30-30:00

- Leadership in collectivism. What happens when a few people step up and take on leadership roles?

30:04-30:44

- With the exhibition *The Due Return*, Meow Wolf first practiced the idea of having teams divide and conquer the work of a large-scale immersive installation. The 5 teams were: The Ship (Fab team), Archives (Narrative team), the Environment (Art team), Performance, and the Tech team.

31:23-32:32

- The extra mile. How might giving all your extra time, money, and resources to a passion project ensure its success?
- What does it mean for the individual to give so much and how might this affect the group mentality?

39:49-41:45

- What happens when the collective starts to gain capital?
- What happens to the collective mentality when you shift from a collective to a business?
- Can you be both at the same time?
- How should a collective handle the allocation of funding?
- Does making money affect the soul of creation?

42:15-43:11

- Breaking off and doing your own thing. What happens when you need to take a break from big groups?

51:53-52:46

- Perseverance and perspective in the face of tragedy. How do hard times bring people closer together? What role does art play?

Art in Entrepreneurship

We'd like to challenge the notion of "The Starving Artist." There are many opportunities to make a living as a creative. Ingenuity, creative problem-solving, and taking risks are all important facets of being an entrepreneur. This section addresses the realities of art in entrepreneurship: the hard work, negotiating, and structuring of an art collective-turned-corporation.

26:23-26:53

- How does structure and hierarchy influence efficiency?
- What are ways to balance a leader's vision with ideas from elsewhere?

29:00-29:29

- Fundraising money that all went toward materials, no one got paid.

37:42-38:35, 39:49-41:06

- What happens when you make a profit and have to negotiate how to spend the proceeds with the group?

43:23-44:18

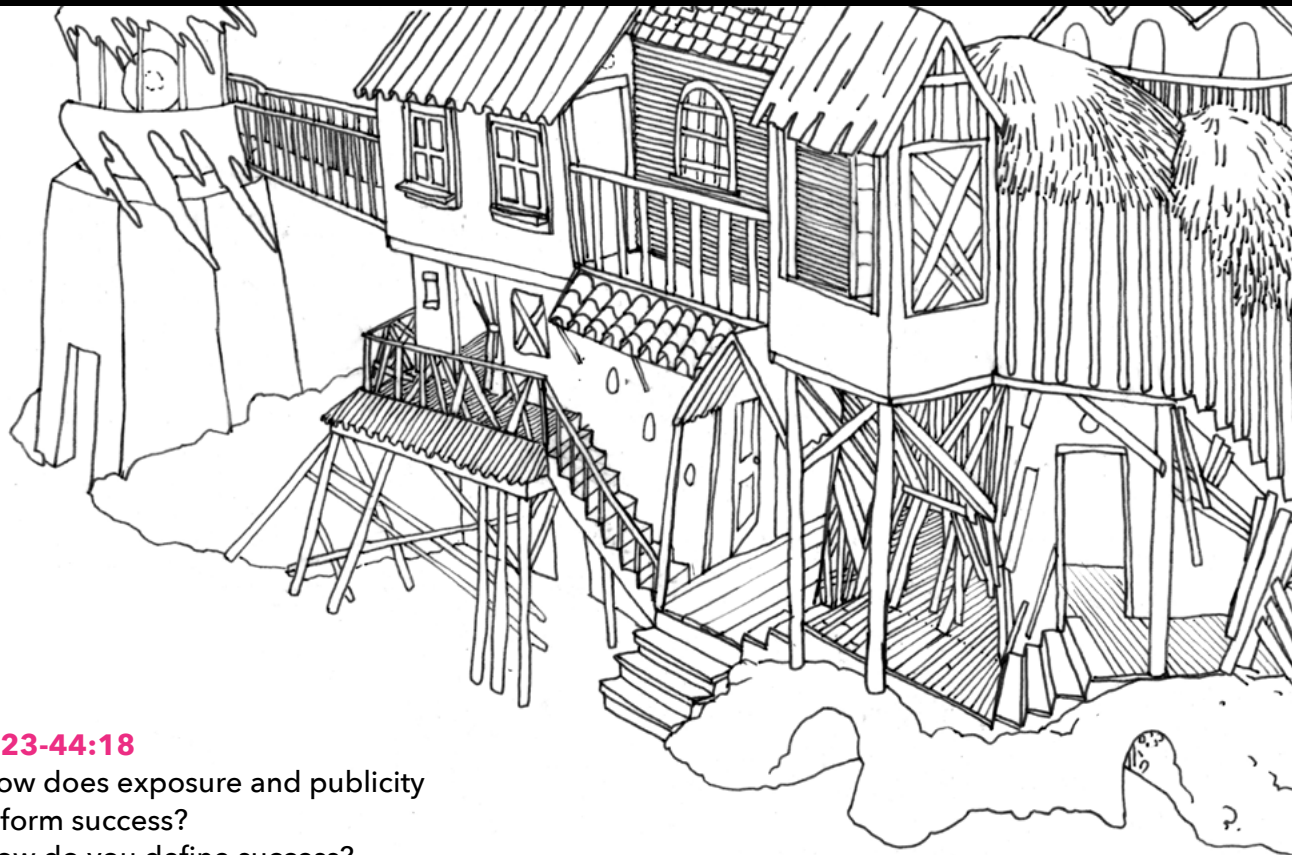
- How does exposure and publicity inform success?
- How do you define success?

53:56-55:10

- Belief in open-ended creativity launches the accessible unknown

56:04-56:22

- How can you fight self-doubt and take risks?



ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE CREATIVE ECONOMY

Aspiring creatives should get in the habit of keeping records of all works and experiences. Here are some tools to consider building upon when you enter the creative economy.

Portfolio

A strong portfolio can help one navigate the working world. It showcases a voice and sets you apart from other artists by reflecting your skills, experiences, and unique talents. This is a great way to build confidence around your work and reflect your goals and aspirations.

Resume and Curriculum Vitae

A resume is typically a page showcasing the highlights of your experience and skills. It is a brief account (1-2 pages) of a person's education, qualifications, and previous experience, typically sent

with a job application. A resume is customizable in that you can arrange it to be as relevant to the job you are applying for. A Curriculum Vitae (CV) is longer and can cover your entire career. It can detail a compilation of your accomplishments, publications, awards, etc.

Research

Being able to conduct your own research can lend to the creative process. From inspiration to creative problem solving, research will help to serve your goal. It can help you stay up-to-date in the field you're interested in or teach you new skills. Bookmark websites and blogs and return to them for inspiration.

Website/Blog

Having a website is a great way to show your portfolio, resume, and/or CV. Often times people would rather view a digital portfolio and usually the way you design your website will also showcase who you are as a creative. Blogs are an awesome

way to incorporate process, narrative, and can clearly articulate your values and aspirations to potential clients and employers.

Self-documentation

Self-documenting is an awesome way to share your story. When you are creating work be sure to take pictures, timelapses, or recordings of your process. You can then put these pictures on your website, blog, or social media account to help promote yourself.

Experimentation

Experimentation is crucial to creativity. Challenge yourself to change things up and don't be afraid to fail! Oftentimes we learn a lot from trying new things, even if the end result is not what we intended. Try out a new medium and teach yourself new techniques, there is always room to grow!

HOW TO EXECUTE A CREATIVE IDEA IN AN IMMERSIVE ART INSTALLATION

Meow Wolf encourages artists to consider these questions to help evolve, edit, or solidify an idea.

Defining Immersive Experiences

- Have you considered the floor, ceiling, doors, light fixtures, etc?
- Is every surface used thoughtfully?
- How does it go beyond something on every surface?
- How is the immersive design different from interior design?
- What will the environment sound like?

Subverting Expectations

- Have you seen this before?
- Does it transcend trends? Is it current, timeless, or tired?
- What makes something good-weird?
- What makes something unexpected?

Audience

- Who will get this? Who won't?
- How is it viewed by an outsider?
- Does it have the right balance of accessible vs. unknown?

Psychophysics

- How will the project invite the visitor to behave/react?
- How does the project reward or discourage various behavior?
- What will they try? (Example: Drawers are bolted shut on a dresser; after thousands of visitors, the audience may eventually pull the knobs off the drawers from trying to open them over and over.)
- How do we make, do, or change plans if visitor interaction is problematic?

SEE EXAMPLE

EXAMPLE: A loose prop on a table; how will visitors react?

- Pick it up, try it on other things, leave it somewhere else, keep it...
- How do we react?

REWARD

- Let them pick it up and use it—have replacements handy.

DISCOURAGE

- Bolt to the table (still have replacements handy).

MAKE DO

- Have staff keep watch... and have replacements handy!

CHANGE PLANS

- Replace with a different, less inviting, prop.
- Replicate prop out of a material that can be bolted down.
- Remove prop entirely.

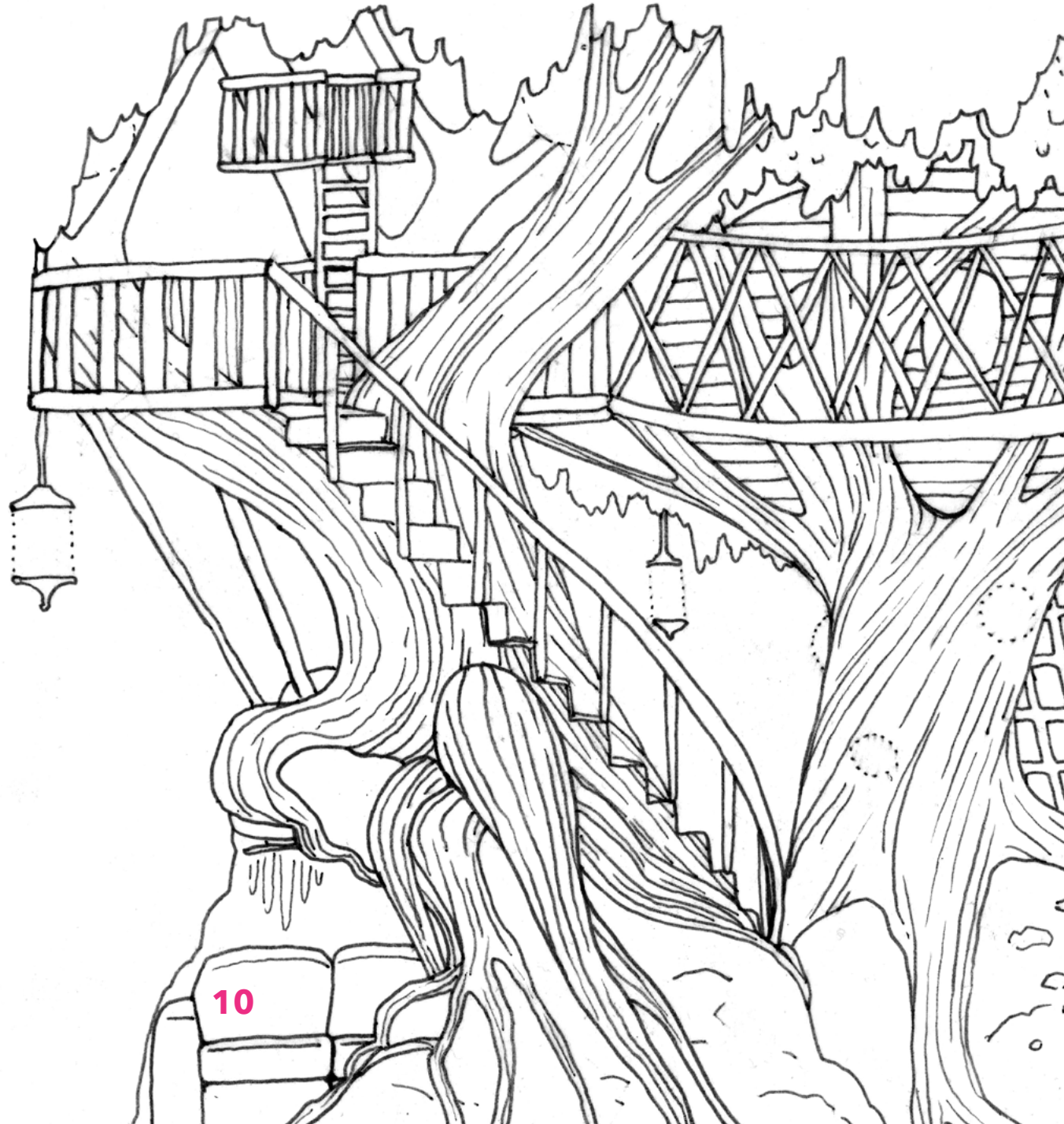
HOW TO EXECUTE A CREATIVE IDEA IN AN IMMERSIVE ART INSTALLATION

Durability

- How will the project hold up to damage?
- Will it still be successful if it is broken and waiting for maintenance?
- Crowds / repeated use: How will it hold up to high traffic?

Revision

- Is every choice intentional, and reinforcing and/or enriching of the overall project?
- What have you not considered?
- Is it legible? Will the audience get it– or is it ok if they don't?
- How will it come across in photo/video? Unphotographable = OK!
- Is the illusion complete? Does it hold up to close scrutiny?
- Is it successful regardless of which level the participant chooses to engage with?
- Is it too much? Can it be edited down?
- What is the core reason for this space? Are there layers of information? What is the payoff?



A SECRET INGREDIENT

Making the Unknown Accessible

Meow Wolf makes the unknown accessible by creating art experiences that immerse visitors in fantastic worlds. We believe that the best way to have transformative experiences is by experiencing the unknown. However, we acknowledge the important role that the known plays in adding context and meaning to the unknown.

When people encounter new environments, their brains are hardwired to search for completion and familiar anchor points. If there is too much of the unknown, it can be overwhelming and disorienting. In these situations, the brain can glaze over and shut down out of self-preservation.

On the flip side, when people encounter environments that consist of too much known, the brain classifies them as familiar, and therefore unworthy of interest. In this way, people often fail to see the things they look at every day.

100% unknown is un-relatable. 100% familiar is unremarkable. The sweet spot is a mixture of both.

For example, an alien creature becomes much more alien when it is present in a familiar setting, such as sitting in a donut shop reading a paper, and the everyday experience of opening a refrigerator is transformed when the door becomes a portal to the Multiverse.

The ratio of known to unknown varies depending on the piece, but it's always important to consider. When evaluating work we ask, has the artist considered the balance between known and unknown?

Corporate Social Responsibility

Meow Wolf is committed to communities and by focusing on four areas where our commitment and scale can make the biggest impact. We encourage others to do the same.

- Strengthen **RESPECT FOR YOUR COMMUNITIES** by supporting pre-existing organizations
- Create pathways and employment opportunities to increase **RESPECT FOR ARTISTS**
- Operate an eco-friendly business model that has **RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT**
- **RESPECT AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY** through responsible and local hiring practices