

# Joel Zika

Immersive Media Artist

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## Expertise

Immersive Media, Experience Design , 3D Design, Virtual Reality, Themed Entertainment, Digital Imaging Attractions & Haunted Attractions, Interactivity and Digital Media Design

## Biography

Dr Joel Zika is an immersive media specialist who studies the entertainment industry and creates contemporary design works from that research. He holds a PhD from Swinburne University in Melbourne for which he was granted an Australian Postgraduate Award. Joel's dissertation focused on the history of indoor ride design and what it can teach contemporary media producers ([link](#)). The study used cutting edge virtual reality technology to examine artifacts of historic entertainment then built unique interactive outcomes from that research. This body of work created new knowledge for practitioners, researchers and students from film, games and location-based entertainment. The PhD involved the creation of the first video archive of historic attractions and contributed to building Joel's status in the field of immersive media research.

As a media designer Dr Zika has led projects in virtual reality film, documentary, interactive animation and public installation for over 15 years. Recently his creative works have screened at the Moss Arts Center at Virginia Tech, Federation Square in Melbourne ([link](#)) and Dark Mofo in Hobart ([link](#)). A key aspect of his research and future endeavours lies in the application of game engines for the location-based entertainment sector and virtual production. His work features in the books 'Darkness and Light in Australia Art' and 'Digital Light' from Fibreculture books. In 2020 he was a mentor for the Australian Centre for Projection Art, an artist in residence for Nillumbik Shire and Test Sites Online. Dr Zika has received competitive funding from government and philanthropic bodies to support his practice resulting in more than \$100,000 in funding (2019-21) and a further \$90,000 committed for 2022.

Dr Zika has worked in academia for over 20 years and has published widely in international peer-reviewed journals. He has been invited to speak at conferences and festivals such as Austin's South By Southwest ([link](#)), Toronto's VRTO and the Themed Experience and Attractions Symposium. Joel is probably best known as the creator of the Dark Ride Project ([link](#)), an initiative to conserve and study heritage haunted entertainment. Dr Zika's recent documentary film pieces on this topic have garnered global media attention with appearances on the BBC's Global Service ([link](#)) and countless news articles worldwide.

## Software

Adobe Suite, DaVinci Resolve, Toon Boom

Cinema 4D, Maya, 3D Studio Max

Touch Designer, VDMX, OBS

Unreal Engine 5, Unity

Mistika VR, Kolor Autopano

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## Education

**Doctor of Philosophy,  
Swinburne University  
Art and Design**  
2013-2021

### **The Dark Ride: Reimagined for Virtual Experience**

A 6-year project documenting historic rides and studying their impact on contemporary immersive media. The artefact was a major experience design installation using a functioning amusement ride and virtual reality.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1959.3/462687>

**Master of Fine Art,  
Monash University  
Art and Design**  
2005-2009

### **The Translation of Cinema into Spatial Experience**

A 4-year study of ride culture and history culminating in a series of experience-based new media installation works.

<https://monash.hosted.exlibrisgroup.com/permalink/>

**Bachelor of Visual  
Communication,  
Honours (Media Arts)  
RMIT University**  
1999-2002

### **Animation and Immersive Storytelling**

Undergraduate units included performance, animation, fine arts imaging, audio visual theory, video installation and sound design.

**Certificate IV TAA40104, Vicseg New Futures Training, 2007**

**Deakin RPL - Graduate Certificate of Higher Education, 2016**

## Peer Reviewed Publications

### **Attractions and Local Histories**

Joel Zika (2021), Vol. 35, Refractory: a journal of entertainment media, University Of Ulster, Ireland. C1

### **From Early Immersion to Virtual Reality**

Joel Zika (2018), Vol. 2, pp. 103-105, Panorama: The International Panorama Council Journal, Luzern, Switzerland. C1

### **The Evolution of Immersive Media**

Joel Zika (2018), Vol. 1, pp. 1-7, Journal of Themed Experience and Attractions Research, Toronto, Ont. C1

### **A Century of Virtual Amusement**

M Burt, J Zika (2018), Vol. 30, Refractory: a journal of entertainment media, Melbourne, Vic. C1

### **Dark Rides: The Dawn of Virtual Reality**

Joel Zika (2017), Vol. 2, pp. 1-17, International Journal of Contemporary Humanities, Queenscliff, Vic. C1

### **The Dawn of the Dark Ride at the Amusement Park**

Joel Zika (2014), pp. 1-4, Proceedings of the 2014 10th Conference on Interactive Entertainment: Interactive Sound and Smart Things, Newcastle, New South Wales. E1

### **The Dark Ride: The Attraction of Early Immersive Environments and their Importance in Contemporary New Media Installations**

J Zika, V Dziekan(2005). Vol. 18, pp 18-22, Mesh Journal Experimenta Media Arts Inc, Melbourne, Vic. C1

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## Employment

### **Artistic Director - Digital Collide Public Arts**

Melbourne  
2019-Present

Overseeing the concept development and design of major arts projects for public and private space. Role involves liaising with community stakeholders including architects, developers, first nations representatives, established and emerging artists.

### **Visiting Lecturer Digital Design**

**RMIT**  
Melbourne  
2022-Present

Position includes curriculum design and delivery for Professional Practice in Digital Media. The unit introduces students to the strategies, skills and behaviours needed to enter the digital media industry.

### **Lecturer, Level B Screen and Design Deakin University**

Melbourne & Geelong  
2012-2021

Position included internship supervisor, member of the Deakin Motion Lab, Public Arts Initiative and Hycel research group. Curriculum designed and delivered includes: 3rd year Collaborative Practice Studio, Design for Space, Digital Design Skills and Professional Practice.

### **Foundations Teacher Multimedia & Design RMIT University**

Melbourne  
2015

Position included teaching subjects in the Foundation Studies program for students preparing entrance into RMIT. Classes were taught across Art, Design and Multimedia.

### **Lecturer, Animation & Games Design Noroff University**

Kristiansand, Norway  
2013-14

Secondment role. Development and design of curriculum in the newly formed Bachelor of Animation and Games Design. Units designed and delivered included: 3rd year Interactive Studio, 3D Computer Graphics and Design Skills.

### **Associate Lecturer Multimedia & Digital Art Monash University**

Melbourne  
2005-2011

Position included teaching subjects in the Bachelor of Multimedia and Bachelor of Fine Arts Photomedia. Units designed and delivered included: Digital Imaging 1+2, 3D Modelling, 3rd Year Multimedia Studio and Motion Graphics.

### **Visiting Lecturer Photography RMIT University**

Melbourne  
2011

Position included teaching in the Bachelor of Fine Arts Photography. Curriculum design and delivery in alternative imaging practice.

### **Sessional Lecturer Graphic Design ACU University**

Melbourne  
2002-03

Position included teaching into the Bachelor of Arts. Curriculum design and delivery for the newly formed Bachelor Visual Arts and Design.

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## Recent Research Projects

### Saturation South Side Festival

Upcoming May 2022  
Grant \$30,000

An interactive film project working with community choir 'The Voices of Frankston'. The work features a custom-built digital water screen and original film of the local artists. Commissioned by the South Side Festival 2022.

<https://www.southsidefestival.com.au/Whats-On/Saturation>

### Musa Botanica Festival

Upcoming May 2022  
Grant \$30,000

An augmented animation project working commissioned by the Museum of Brisbane for the Botanica Arts festival. The work uses augmented reality screens to bring lost fauna once abundant in the area back to life.

[https://youtu.be/br\\_9b06YppQ](https://youtu.be/br_9b06YppQ)

### Artist in residence NSW Rail Museum

Upcoming July 2022  
Grant \$10,000

Two week residency and performance using new technology to reveal and examine parts of the museum archive and interpret transportation data. Funded by Southern Tablelands Arts.

<https://www.southerntablelandsarts.com.au/projects/air/2021-air/>

### Projection Commission White Night

Upcoming Oct 2022  
Research commission \$5,000

Interactive water screen installation and performance. The work interprets live data from weather systems to create an interactive 'weathervane' made of water. Designed by Joel Zika and produced by Collide Public Arts Initiative.

### Waterline Geelong City Council

June 2022  
Grant \$8,600

A mentoring project between Joel Zika, Collide Public Arts Initiative and two young artists funded by a Geelong Creative Communities grant. The work will develop a series of unique projection works for public display.

<https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/common/public/documents>

### Collision Federation Square

Jan 2021  
Grant \$19,000

Interactive projection design work re-interpreting the architectural space of Federation Square. Designed by Joel Zika and Collide Public Arts Initiative. Commissioned by the Victorian Government.

<https://vimeo.com/506877339>

### Artist in residence Nillumbik Shire

June 2020  
Grant \$5,000

A Covid arts remote residency, Collide Public Arts and Joel Zika developed bespoke installations at the Montsalvat historic site for exhibition.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CMRERrKj1yI/>

### Test Sites arts residency Testing Grounds

June 2020  
Grant \$5,000

A remote residency held over 4 months online during the Covid period. Joel Zika and Collide Public Arts prototyped their system for projection onto water (see video). Funded by the City of Melbourne.

<https://vimeo.com/420928282>

### Night Mass Dark Mofo Festival

June 2019  
Research commission \$20,000

Multi-screen installation space and performance. Designed by Joel Zika and Moth Design. Commissioned by Asahi for Dark Mofo.

<https://joelzika.com/2019/11/01/dark-mofo-dome/>

### Dark Ride Project Virtual Reality Films

July 2017  
Crowdfunded \$19,000

An archival film project with immersive media heritage. Virtual reality and HD works documenting the history of the dark ride. Crowdfunded.

<https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/dark-ride-project-historic-haunts-in-vr-#/>

### District Night Lights

June 2017  
Grant \$18,000

Major installation on Australia's largest permanent projection screen. Designed by Joel Zika and commissioned by the City of Wagga Wagga.

<https://joelzika.com/nightlights-projection>

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## Selected Exhibitions

- 2021** 'Collision', Federation Square, Vic  
'Waterline', Montsalvat Gallery, Vic  
'A Southern Dark Ride', GBiennale, Vic
- 2020** 'Love in the Time of Covid', Greenaway Art Projects, SA
- 2019** 'Night Mass', Dark Mofo, Tas  
'A Southern Dark Ride', Moss Arts Center, Virginia Tech, USA  
'Uplight', Geelong After Dark, Vic
- 2018** 'Caisson', Geelong After Dark, Vic
- 2017** 'District', Wagga Wagga City Council, NSW  
'Concourse', City of Wiloughby, NSW  
'Photo130', RMIT Gallery, Vic
- 2016** 'Horror Show', Strange Neighbour Gallery, Vic
- 2015** 'Burnie Art Prize', Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Tas
- 2014** 'Substation Art Prize', Substation Arts Centre, Vic
- 2013** 'Art and Object', Despard Gallery, Tas  
'Miracle Strip', Diane Tanzer Gallery, Vic  
'Cabiria', Gertrude Projection Festival, Vic
- 2012** 'Dreamweavers', NETS Touring Show, Vic, Tas & NSW
- 2011** 'New Romantics', Mars Gallery, Vic  
'Monsters', Collaborate Gallery, Oakland USA  
'Wildwoods', Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Vic  
'Pleasure Island', Kick Gallery, Vic
- 2010** 'Terrorium', No Vacancy Gallery, Vic  
'Not Fair', Block Projects, Vic

## Prizes

- 2015** Burnie Art Prize, finalist  
Agendo Art Prize, finalist
- 2014** Substation Contemporary Art Prize, finalist

## Public Collections

- 2021** Art Gallery of South Australia  
**2013** Gippsland Regional Art Gallery

## Articles

- 2016** **The Conversation**  
'Preserving fright, one haunted house at a time'  
**Vice**  
'Virtual Reality is Preserving the Dying Art of Spooky Dark Rides'  
**Virtual Reality News**  
'How the Dark Ride Project is saving indoor amusements with virtual reality'

## Bibliography

- Tofts, D., 2015. **View in Half or Varying Light: Joel Zika's Neo-Baroque Aesthetics.** In: S. Cubitt and D. Palmer, ed., Digital Light. [online] Melbourne University, pp.193-204.
- Gregg, S., 2011. **New Romantics: Darkness and Light in Australian Art.** Australian Scholarly Publishing, pp.56-59.

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## Selected Conference Presentations

### **CFP Transdisciplinary Imaging Conference 2020: DARK EDEN**

Zika, J. A Southern Dark Ride, University of New South Wales, 8 Nov 2020 (Conference paper)

### **IAAPA Expo: Themed Experience and Attractions Academic Symposium**

Zika, J. Dark Themed Attractions and Local Histories, Orlando, USA, 22 Nov 2019 (Conference paper)

### **Digital Innovation Festival**

Zika, J. Location Based Entertainment, Geelong, 30 July 2019 (Presentation)

### **AMPS: TANGIBLE - INTANGIBLE HERITAGE(S)**

Zika, J. Immersive Media and Cultural Trauma, University of East London, 14 Jun 2018 (Conference paper)

### **2018 South by Southwest Festival**

Zika, J. Immersive Horror Experiences, Austin Convention Center, USA, March 8 2018 (Conference presentation)

### **ACMI X: VRCC**

Zika, J. Virtual Reality Networking, Australian Centre for the Moving Image, July 28 2017 (Presentation)

### **Academy Xi**

Zika, J. Immersive Storytelling: Evolution of storytelling in the 21st century, Academy Xi, July 15 2017 (Presentation)

### **Virtual & Augmented Reality World Conference**

Zika, J. The Cutting Edge for Home VR Entertainment, Ryerson University, Toronto, June 26 2017 (Panel presentation)

### **MPavilion - MTalks vital (de)signs:**

Zika, J. VR & the Science of Space, MPavilion, 1 February 2017 (Panel presentation)

### **Australian Centre for Architectural History, Urban and Cultural Heritage Symposium**

Zika, J. The Dark Ride - Memory, Space and Trauma, Melbourne University, 22 September 2017 (Conference paper)

### **National Trusts of Australia & Australia ICOMOS Conference.**

Zika, J. The Dark Ride Project, Melbourne Cricket Ground, 4 October 2016 (Conference paper)

### **Transdisciplinary Imaging Conference**

Zika, J. The Dark Ride Project, Plymouth University, UK, 1 July 2016 (Conference paper)

### **Society for Animation Studies Conference**

Zika, J. Collodi's Dark Ride: Translating text into spatial experience, RMIT University, 25 June 2012 (Conference paper)