

THE MAGIC OF MEOW WOLF

Dozens of Colorado artists collaborate
to create a five-story interactive
dream world in Denver

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AT FIRST GLANCE, there seems to be a spaceship docked in the middle of Denver between Interstate 25 and Colfax Avenue. Closer inspection reveals the strange object is actually the oddly triangular, five-story building that houses the new, interactive art-meets-entertainment adventure of Convergence Station, also known as Meow Wolf Denver.

As otherworldly as Meow Wolf Denver looks from the outside, it only serves as prelude to the chaotic interdimensional space travel awaiting all who step inside.

Space travel? Indeed.

It is obvious this will be different from a standard museum experience from the moment visitors arrive. The first person guests meet is someone clad in a spacesuit, who calls out through an amplified headset, “Welcome to Convergence Station. Have you traveled with QDOT before?” QDOT, we learn, is the Quantum Department of Transportation, the agency tasked with guiding “travelers” through this strange spot.

Though it is billed as an immersive storytelling experience, Meow Wolf Denver often feels like a sci-fi amusement park. The astronaut greeter is one of many “creative operators” stationed throughout. Each of these employees portrays a character, lending verisimilitude to the universe that visitors discover, room by room.

If visitors are confused or overwhelmed, that’s OK: Guests are encouraged to lean into “what the heck is going on?” feelings and explore the worlds – plural.

MORE THAN 110 Colorado artists were part of the massive team that spent four years creating Convergence Station. It is the third and by far largest Meow Wolf location. When the artist collective originally started in Santa Fe in 2008, the name Meow Wolf was chosen at the collective’s first meeting; members filled a hat with words written on scraps of paper, then drew two words at random.





A glowing, multicolored castle is part of the ice world of Eemia at Meow Wolf Denver's Convergence Station. The premise of the art experience is that a freak cosmic event tore loose pieces of four separate universes, which then merged with each other to form Convergence Station.



According to Convergence Station's storyline, the people of the world of Ossuary are librarians who preserve knowledge in special stones. Visitors can explore Ossuary's unusual library.

There are layers to the Meow Wolf Denver experience. The overarching narrative concept is that 25 years ago, a cosmic aberration opened a portal between four different worlds: Convergence Street, Eemia, Ossuary and Numina. The collision of these worlds made parts of them merge, erased citizens' memories and caused the disappearance of four women.

Convergence Street, or C Street, was the sanitation district on its home planet but, set free by the cosmos, the residents of this *Blade Runner*-esque world now enthusiastically collect and trade memories and vote for a new mayor every 20 minutes. The tiny ice world of Eemia is steeped in an ancient order known as the Kaleidogoths. The people of Ossuary are librarians, attempting to store and preserve knowledge in special stones.

Numina, the largest world, is actually a living being that exists in six dimensions. The creative operators here portray quiet researchers; they won't speak unless spoken to, but when asked, they theorize that Numina is keeping all the other worlds from disintegrating into primordial soup.

Visitors who can't fully digest the complex storyline will still understand that nostalgia connects all the parts of Convergence Station. C Street evokes the 1980s as much as it does the future, with its Pizza Pals Playzone having the feel of an alternate reality Chuck E. Cheese. Parts of Numina are reminiscent of the Rainforest Cafe chain popular in the 1990s. Even the imagined currency is known as "mems," short for memories.



MEMORIES ARE AT the heart of “Ruptured Time,” an installation within the world of Ossuary that immediately feels like stepping into a brain-themed living room. The space, created by Denver-based artist collective the Church of Many, is a marriage of art and craft, and each artist’s personal story.

Most of the collective’s members met while studying design at Metro State University, and all five had a personal connection to a loved one who dealt with dementia. But the installation’s concept – a space showcasing the brain simultaneously creating and losing memories – was directly inspired by experiences Andrea Thurber had with her grandmother, who was herself an artist.

The creation was a family affair the whole way through. It was Thurber’s sister who saw the news that Meow Wolf was seeking proposals from local artists and encouraged Thurber to apply. Another collaborator’s sister helped finesse the proposal so it stood out among the thou-

sand or more applications.

Thurber’s mother and aunt helped sew and assemble pieces affixed to the couch, walls and even ceiling of the space. At one point, huge sections of the display’s 30,000 strips of fabric, 1,500 CD pieces and 240 feet of aluminum dryer ducting were under construction at her family’s ranch near Sedalia.

Screens in gilded frames flash images and disrupted video clips from 45 home movies from the artists’ childhoods. Some of their voices are also included in the room’s audio, which adds an aural element to the synapses twinkling throughout. Aside from the mix of mediums, it was a creative challenge on multiple levels. Every item had to be approved by the fire department and designed to withstand an anticipated 1 million visitors.

ANOTHER INTERGENERATIONAL collaboration of Colorado artists at Meow Wolf Denver is called “Indigenous Futures Dreamspace Lounge.” The installation

features benches to encourage visitors to relax and reflect on the 360-degree mural, symbolic video and 90-minute looped soundtrack.

When multidisciplinary artist Adrian H. Molina heard the excitement surrounding “this thing called Meow Wolf,” he knew he wanted to apply. A poet and rapper performing under the name Molina Speaks, he also curates visual and performance artists, including a successful 2019 collaboration with the Denver Art Museum. As he thought about multiple project ideas, one artist kept coming to mind: Stevon Lucero.

Lucero, a co-founder of the Chicano Humanities Arts Council, was a legendary painter and key part of the city’s art scene for the past 50 years. Molina knew Lucero’s skills and guidance could produce a fruitful collaboration. What he didn’t know was that Lucero already had a vision for their project – a vision he had been nurturing for more than four decades.

A vivid dream had haunted Lucero

Andrea Thurber sits in the installation “Ruptured Time,” which she and fellow members of Denver-based artist collective the Church of Many created in Ossuary. The installation draws on the artists’ personal stories to explore themes of memory.





The largest world to discover at Convergence Station is Numina, which is said to be a sentient being that exists in six dimensions.





The trash and old street signs used to construct Convergence Station's "Gremlin Symphony" installation were salvaged from various places across Colorado.

since 1975, but he had never been able to realize it in painting form. Combining the storytelling capacities of music and paint – plus video totems representing the five epochs of the Aztec calendar – enticed Lucero to effectively come out of retirement to work on the project and take Molina on as an apprentice.

The result is a visual story that takes place spread across a zigzagged, six-walled room, incorporating elements of Toltec, Aztec and Chicano folklore. Ten storytellers, including Molina and Lucero, are featured in the audio accompaniment. All told, the artists incorporated into the project range from 22 to 71 years old.

The installation also acts as a love letter to the art and life of Lucero, who died in November. Lucero's work and tutelage impacted several generations of Chicano and Latino artists across the Southwest. Molina is especially excited that Lucero's work is finding an audience outside of a museum or gallery because of Meow Wolf's wider appeal. Not only does Convergence Station bring different kinds of art into the mainstream, but it encourages people to experience it in entirely new ways.

CONVERGENCE STATION ATTEMPTS to have something for everyone – and comes remarkably close to succeeding. Art lovers can gawk at the level of skill on display. Video gamers can nerd out on interactive games, including a laser light show on Eemia's ceiling. True crime obsessives can solve the mystery of what happened to the four women who went missing at the moment of convergence.

Side mysteries also appear in singular hallways, never to be referenced anywhere else. Many tunnels and secret doors have been placed at child height, though all are encouraged to tap into the inquisitive child within. The large elevators and stairwells provide quiet corners for the overstimulated, plus easy entry to varying parts of the building.

The installations are 90 percent wheelchair accessible and designed to be enjoyed by users of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. Seats are placed throughout to give visitors chances to rest while roving the 65,000 square feet of exhibition space.



The “Indigenous Futures Dreamspace Lounge” installation is based on a powerful dream renowned Denver artist Stevon Lucero had in 1975. Visitors can interact with projections of colorful light shows and sounds at the “Perplexiplex” concert space.



Convergence Street, or C Street, was the sanitation district on its home planet before being torn away by the cosmos. Meow Wolf Denver is nestled between an elevated section of Colfax Avenue and a swooping onramp near Empower Field at Mile High.

Because so many Colorado artists worked with the Meow Wolf team to bring their unique projects to life, the result is a space that feels simultaneously not of this world and close to home.

“Melting of Mines” is a surrealist landscape created using images of real Colorado mines. “Prairie Dog Fever Dream” invites visitors to see the flora and fauna of the Eastern Plains from a rodent’s perspective. The “Gremlin Symphony” room includes street signs from so many Colorado municipalities that it’s a fun game to

see how many street names or sign types longtime residents can spot from Greenwood Village, Grand County and beyond.

Other easter eggs have been placed in the form of replicated signs from places of Denver past, like CinderAlley from by-gone shopping mall Cinderella City, and the beloved Denver Drumstick, where fried chicken came in a boxcar and a train went room to room around the entire restaurant.

As visitors stumble out into the parking lot, processing what they’ve seen over the

past several hours, the voice of a QDOT employee echoes behind: “Thank you for traveling with us! Come back soon.”

Exploring Convergence Station can leave guests both exhausted and exhilarated. Some people advise first-time visitors not to plan anything for a few hours after their experience to allow time to decompress. But for all the exhibit’s sci-fi and fantasy elements, the biggest thing visitors take away from Meow Wolf Denver is a renewed appreciation for Colorado and the memories we make here. 🐾

