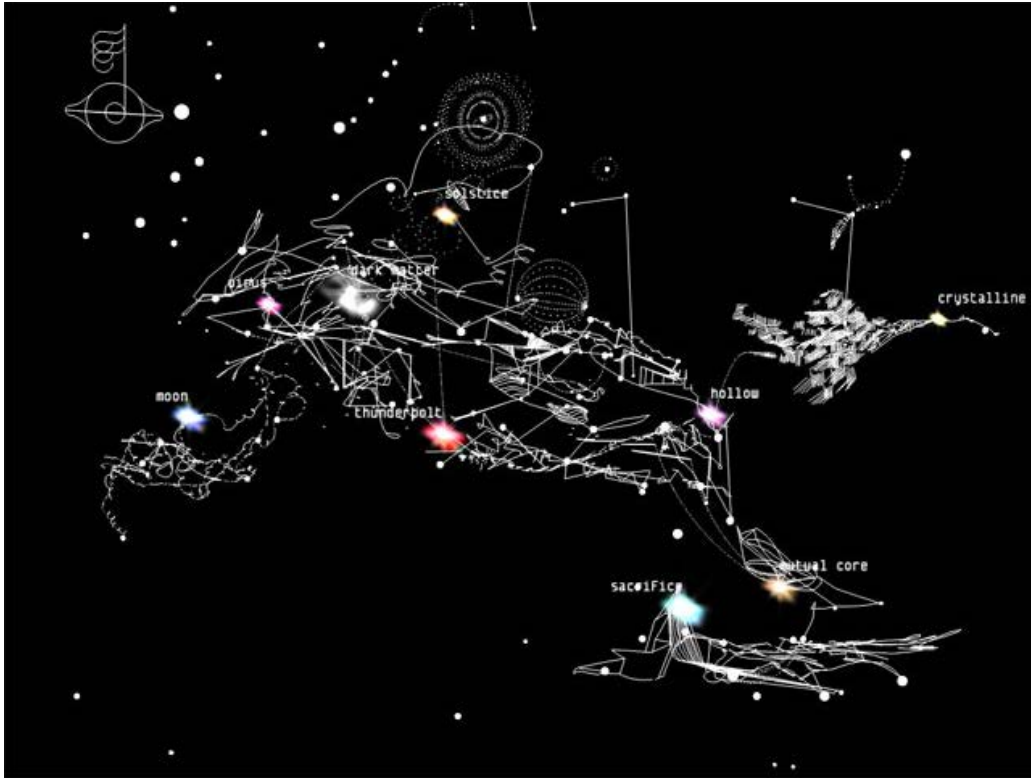


JUNE 11, 2014 | COLLECTION & EXHIBITIONS, DESIGN

Biophilia, the First App in MoMA's Collection

Posted by [Paola Antonelli](#), Senior Curator, Department of Architecture and Design



Björk Guðmundsdóttir, with Mathias Augustyniak and Michael Amzalag of M/M Paris, Sjón, Scott Snibbe, Sarah Stocker and Mark Danks of Kodama Studios, Touch Press, Max Weisel of Relative Wave, Nikki Deben, Stephen Malinowski, and John F. Simon, Jr. *Biophilia*. 2011. Interactive digital application for tablet devices. Gift of Björk and One Little Indian

I cannot forget the first time I heard and saw Björk. It was 1987, she was part of the Sugarcubes, and she was singing the most arresting song, "[Birthday](#)." The video was shot in Reykjavik—otherworldly light, curious characters, peculiar architecture. She looked like an alien Tinkerbell and her voice was simultaneously haunting, corrosive, and incredibly moving. In the decades since, Björk has never ceased to experiment and surprise. The multidimensional nature of her art—in which sound and music are the spine, but never the confines, for multimedia performances that also encompass graphic and digital design, art, cinema, science, illustration, philosophy, fashion, and more—is a testament to her curiosity and desire to learn and team up with

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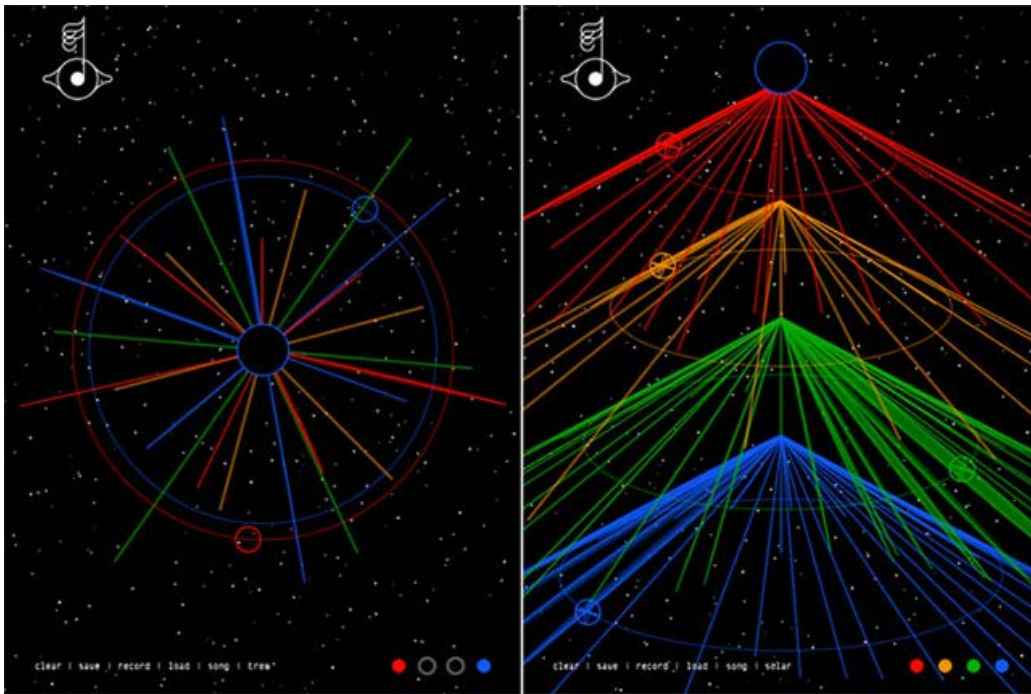
MoMA | Louise Bourgeois: A Flashback of Something that Never Existed
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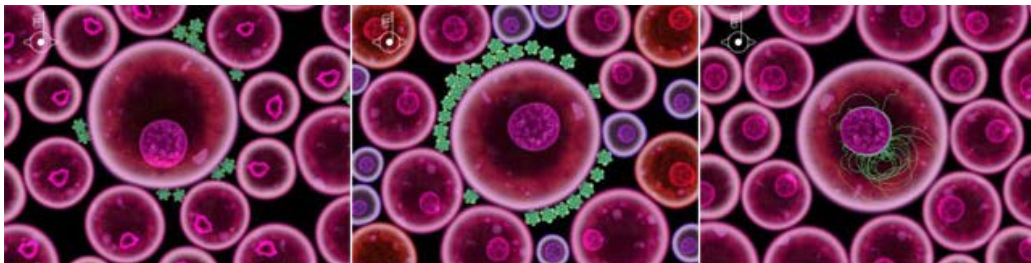


Giancarlo Piretti. *Plia Folding and Stacking Chair* (1967)
6 people recommend this.



Björk Gudmundsdóttir and Max Weisel of Relative Wave. Two views of "Solstice," from Biophilia. 2011

The interactive graphics and animations of the mini-apps relate directly to the theme of each song and are the musical instruments. In the song "Solstice," for example, players control the orbits, speed, and coordinates of planets orbiting a star. Rendered as simple colored lines, each planet and coordinate represents and controls the string music accompanying Björk's vocals. In this elegant [player-singer collaboration](#), users create alternately spare or highly layered and complex music, and are given the option to record and save their own unique Björk composition. For the romantic song "Virus," a close-up view of cells being attacked by a virus represents what app designer Scott Snibbe referred to as "a kind of love story between a virus and a cell. And of course the virus loves the cell so much that it destroys it." As the song progresses [players can choose](#) to halt the attack of the virus, though if they succeed the song will cease. Only by allowing the virus to attack and infect the cell can the player hear the rest of the song. At the formal Acquisitions Committee meeting where Biophilia was proposed—and accepted into the collection—Paul Galloway, MoMA's Architecture and Design Study Center Supervisor and the mastermind behind our digital acquisitions, played a demo for the committee members.



Björk Gudmundsdóttir and Scott Snibbe. Three views of "Virus," from Biophilia. 2011

The scientific term *biophilia* refers to research that suggests an instinctive biological bond between humans and other living systems. This suggestive link forms a powerful subtext to both the lyrics and visuals of the 10 songs in the app. I started thinking about acquiring Biophilia when it was released, in 2011. At that time, a year after the iPad had been introduced, designers and developers were excitedly experimenting with apps that took advantage of a screen bigger than the iPhone. With Biophilia however, Björk truly innovated the way people experience music by letting them participate in performing and making the music and visuals, rather than just listening passively.








Biophilia also happened to be designed by several masters of interaction design, from the aforementioned Scott Snibbe—a major figure in the field whose pioneering work has influenced the youngest generation of artists and designers—to the other great artists that designed the 10 song/apps (and whose names are listed in the caption above). Among them is [Max Weisel](#), who was part of the MoMA exhibition [Talk to Me: Design and the Communication between People and Objects](#) in 2011. The "mother app"—the galaxy—was conceived by Björk and Mathias Augustyniak and Michael Amzalag of M/M Paris, the artist's longtime design collaborators.

Biophilia is the first downloadable app in MoMA's collection. Apps—short for applications—are packaged,

http://moma.org/wp/moma_learning/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Marilyn-PhotoPortrait-332x395.jpg

One person recommends this.

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portable programs that are designed as products one can purchase from digital shelves. We have in the past acquired several digital artifacts, from dynamic visualizations to fonts and video games. For all of our digital acquisitions, we have established a protocol that speaks to the modalities of acquisition—code, files, videos—conservation, and display. The first apps added to the collection were John Maeda's 1994 [Reactive Books](#), distributed on floppy disks inside old-school physical books. Even more than [video games](#), apps are highly "collectible" because of their finite or semi-finite nature—they might be connected to live feeds and to the Web, but their infrastructure design is stable and defined, unlike that of websites. Indeed, in the case of an app like Biophilia, the only variable left open is the exquisite interaction that the artwork welcomes and invites, a testament to the equally exquisite experimental nature of the artist that conceived it.

Collaboration, creativity, open-mindedness, curiosity, and endless talent are the basic ingredients of most great examples of art and design. True innovation—technological, social, performative—supported by great art is a mesmerizing gift to the world.

Tags: [interaction design](#), [Björk](#), [Scott Snibbe](#)

Comments

JUNE 12, 2014, 9:16 A.M.

Brilliant Bjork

Posted by Anna

JUNE 12, 2014, 9:43 A.M.

Congrats Bjork! This is amazing. Biophilia will be playing tonight at Gasser Grunert Gallery in NY, on an amazing sound system. Must listen!

Posted by Linda

JUNE 12, 2014, 2:08 P.M.

Oh here's the link the the fbook event for tonight. Biophilia will sound great here!

Posted by Linda

JUNE 12, 2014, 9:02 P.M.

amazing bjork!!!!

Posted by Luca

JUNE 13, 2014, 1:39 P.M.

Big Step Bjork, don't stop.

Posted by carlos zerpabzueta

JUNE 15, 2014, 11:21 P.M.

wow, and can you believe 10 years ago i saw her by there...lol I love Biophilia.

Posted by juanex

MARCH 3, 2015, 8:17 A.M.

This is wonderful news! Great for the museum as a leader. As Klaus says, it's time to redefine the canon of what's collectible. Bjork is CONNECTism...and the MoMa is truly connected to what's happening! Kudos!!!

Posted by Dominick Leuci

APRIL 3, 2015, 5:56 P.M.

Kudos to the writer for the spot-on description.

“She looked like an alien Tinkerbell”—that made me laugh.

“...her voice was simultaneously haunting, corrosive, and incredibly moving.”

Haunting, corrosive, moving—those three adjectives capture Bjork’s voice perfectly.

Posted by sjt

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