



— SOLEDAR. UKRAINE.

REFRACTION

An interactive VR experience about memory, loss, and the city of Soledar
(Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine)

A city. A memory. A way back.



01 ABOUT THE PROJECT

Logline

An immersive journey into the fragmented memory of Soledar, Ukraine, where archival images, personal stories, sounds, and digitally transformed landscapes bring a city back into presence – not as a reconstruction of what was lost, but as a place that continues to exist in the memories of its people.

PROJECT DETAILS

TITLE

ВІДЗЕРКАЛЕННЯ / REFRACTION

FORMAT

Interactive Virtual Reality (VR)
Experience

RUNTIME

Approximately 30 minutes

YEAR

2026

CREATOR / DIRECTOR

Roksolana Dudka

ART DIRECTOR

Vartan Markarian

LEAD VR DEVELOPER

Oleksii Popov

BASED ON

Personal memories, archival materials, and
stories of people connected to Soledar,
Ukraine

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

PLATFORM

Meta Quest 2 / 3 /
Pro

ENGINE

Unity

AGE RATING

PEGI 7

LANGUAGES

Ukrainian, English

COMING SOON

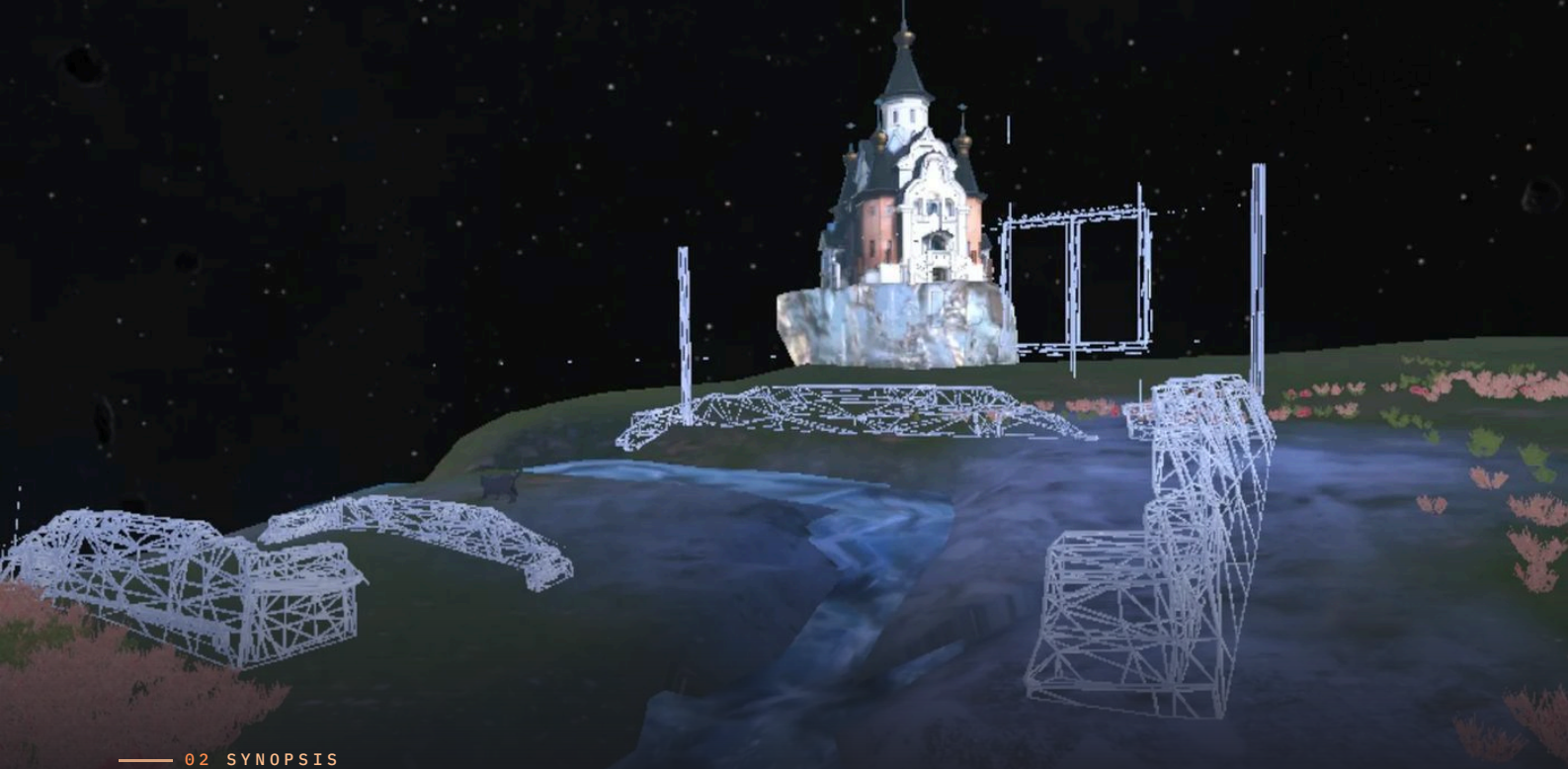
Apple Vision Pro

SPACE REQUIRED

Room-scale VR /
2 × 2 metres

CONTROLLERS

Required



02 SYNOPSIS

Memory as a form of presence

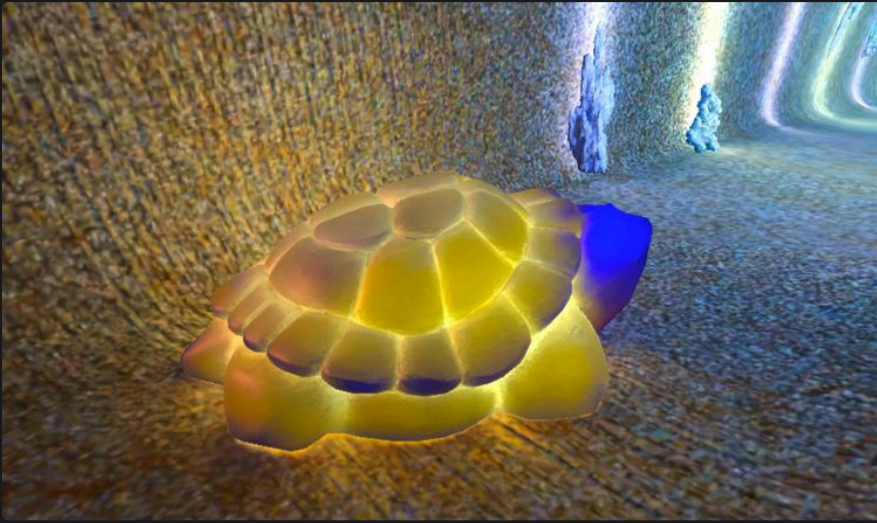
REFRACTION is an interactive VR experience exploring memory, loss, and presence through the city of Soledar in eastern Ukraine. Inspired by the artist's first visit to the city in 2021, the project brings together personal recollections, archival footage, environmental sounds, and stories shared by people whose lives were connected to Soledar and its surrounding communities.

Rather than reconstructing the city as it once looked, the experience creates a fragmented digital environment shaped by the logic of memory and dreams. Underground salt and gypsum mines open into surreal landscapes, while familiar objects, photographs, and traces of everyday life appear in unexpected forms. Voices guide the audience through scenes that shift between personal recollection and collective history.

An essential part of the project emerged through workshops with members of the relocated Soledar community in Kamianske, Dnipro, and Kyiv. Participants created small sculptural objects connected to their memories; these physical works were subsequently digitized and incorporated into the virtual environment. Their forms become part of a shared space in which individual memories coexist without losing their personal character.

REFRACTION invites viewers to encounter Soledar not only as a place affected by war, but as a living presence carried through objects, voices, landscapes, and imagination.

Thirty minutes through the memory of a city

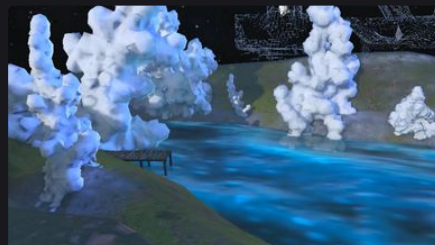


The approximately 30-minute experience unfolds as a journey through interconnected virtual spaces inspired by Soledar's underground mines, industrial heritage, surrounding landscapes, and everyday urban environments.

Viewers encounter interactive objects, archival photographs and videos, spatial sound, and digitally transformed fragments of the city. Some objects can be picked up, examined, or activated through interaction. Others appear as floating forms or incomplete architectural outlines, detached from their original locations.

Voices and sounds play a central role in the experience. Personal recollections bring viewers closer to the details of everyday life: a home, a school, a family pet, a familiar sound, or a place where people once gathered. These memories do not form a conventional linear narrative. Instead, they emerge as fragments that overlap, disappear, and reappear throughout the virtual environment.

The experience gradually shifts between recognizable places and imaginary landscapes, allowing the viewer to move through a city that can no longer be encountered in the same way in physical reality.



Like light through another medium

The title *REFRACTION* refers to the transformation of memory as it passes through time, loss, and imagination. Like light changing direction as it moves through another medium, memories change as they are recalled, shared, and reinterpreted.

The project does not aim to provide a literal reconstruction of Soledar. Its virtual spaces are deliberately fragmented and transformed. Architectural forms become outlines; industrial objects appear detached from their original settings; familiar landscapes expand into dreamlike environments. These transformations create distance from a documentary representation of destruction while preserving the emotional and material traces of the city.

The underground spaces draw on the distinctive geology of Soledar's salt and gypsum mines. They become a threshold between the physical landscape and the inner world of memory. Within this environment, archival materials, personal recollections, and participant-created objects exist alongside one another.

The project also explores how memory can be shared without becoming a single, unified account. Each participant contributes a personal fragment, while the virtual environment creates a space in which these fragments can coexist. The result is not a definitive image of Soledar, but a shifting portrait of a place carried by the people connected to it.



Shaped by hand

The project was developed through a process of collaboration with people from the Soledar community who now live in different Ukrainian cities.

Workshops held in Kamianske, Dnipro, and Kyiv created opportunities to reconnect through conversation, shared recollection, and hands-on creative practice. Participants were invited to make small objects from air-dry clay, drawing on their own associations and memories rather than following a predetermined visual narrative.

These objects were then digitized and incorporated into the VR environment. The transition from physical sculpture to digital form allowed personal contributions to become tangible elements of the shared virtual space.

The participatory process was not simply a way to gather stories for an artwork. It was also a way to establish relationships, create space for exchange, and approach the memory of a lost home through ordinary details and personal associations.

The project combines these collaboratively created objects with personal and official archival materials, allowing different forms of memory to meet without erasing their differences.



Objects of memory created by workshop participants and digitized in 3D.

Voices that bring places back



Sound is one of the principal ways in which the virtual environment conveys presence. Voices, environmental recordings, industrial sounds, and fragments of everyday life help connect individual objects to the memories and places they evoke.

Some sounds come from the artist's own experience of Soledar, including recordings made during the 2021 visit. Others accompany stories shared by participants, allowing viewers to encounter the city through personal recollections rather than through explanatory narration alone.

Archival footage and photographs supplied by or associated with the Soledar community provide additional connections to the city's past. These materials appear within the virtual environment as fragments of a larger history, not as a complete documentary record.

Through the interplay of sound, image, and interaction, *REFRACTION* explores how a place can remain present even when its familiar physical surroundings are no longer accessible.

ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

- Personal archives of Roksolana Dudka from a 2021 research trip to Soledar (*Grounding* art residency).
- Excerpts from ICTV's *Facts* (2021). Report by Olga Chaiko; camera by Viktor Zelenkov and Serhii Marchenko.
- Excerpts from *Film about the State Enterprise Artemsil* (2014), official YouTube channel of SE Artemsil.



07 CREATOR'S STATEMENT

The city in this experience is fragmented, transformed, and sometimes impossible to locate. Yet it remains alive through the people who remember it.

I first visited Soledar in 2021 during the *Grounding* residency organized by IZOLYATSIA. I spent a little over two weeks there, exploring its extraordinary landscapes, underground spaces, industrial heritage, and everyday life. What stayed with me was not only the salt mines or the city's recognizable landmarks, but also its unexpected natural forms, sounds, textures, and small details.

When I began developing *REFRACTION*, I did not want to create a reconstruction of a city that people had lost access to. I wanted to explore how a place continues to exist through memory – and how fragile, incomplete, and deeply personal that memory can be.

Working with people from the Soledar community became essential to this process. Through conversations and workshops, we approached the city through ordinary experiences: rooms, objects, family stories, childhood memories, and familiar sounds. These details often revealed more about a sense of home than a conventional account of displacement or destruction could.

The objects created by participants became part of the virtual environment, allowing their memories to take physical form and then enter a shared digital space. Alongside them, I incorporated archival materials and fragments from my own experience of Soledar.

For me, *REFRACTION* is an attempt to preserve a sense of presence without pretending that the past can be restored exactly as it was. The city in this experience is fragmented, transformed, and sometimes impossible to locate. Yet it remains alive through the people who remember it.

I hope the experience offers a way to encounter Soledar beyond the image of a destroyed or occupied city – to approach it through the richness of its landscape, the complexity of its history, and the lives that continue to carry it.

– Roksolana Dudka

Team

Roksolana Dudka – Creator and Director

Roksolana Dudka is a multidisciplinary Ukrainian artist and researcher working across painting, ceramics, installation, public-space projects, VR/AR, video art, and participatory practices. Her work explores cultural memory, intangible heritage, landscape, and the relationship between physical and digital forms. She holds a PhD in Design and is an Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture and Design at Lutsk National Technical University.

Vartan Markarian – Art Director

Vartan Markarian is an interdisciplinary artist working with installation, new media, immersive VR and 360° video, augmented reality, digital art, and painting. His practice explores memory, landscape transformation, destruction and recovery, and the relationship between digital technologies and cultural and ecological processes.

Oleksii Popov – Lead VR Developer

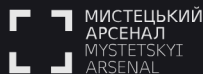
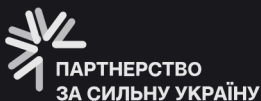
Oleksii Popov led the VR development of *REFRACTION*, translating the project's artistic concept, interactive objects, spatial environments, and audiovisual elements into an immersive digital experience.

09 PRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

REFRACTION was developed within the residency “Heritage. Practical Work”, part of the capacity-building and networking programme “Heritage: A Space for Work”. The programme supports local cultural practitioners in rethinking cultural heritage and strengthening social cohesion in communities affected by the war.

The programme is supported by the Partnership Fund for a Resilient Ukraine (PFRU), funded by the governments of the United Kingdom, Estonia, Canada, Norway, Finland, Switzerland, and Sweden.

The project brings together artistic research, archival materials, community participation, and immersive technology to explore how cultural memory can be carried and shared when a place becomes physically inaccessible.



10 FESTIVALS AND EXHIBITIONS

For presentation

REFRACTION is an interactive VR artwork designed for presentation in cultural institutions, galleries, festivals, and immersive-media programmes.

The experience combines spatial environments, interactive digital objects, archival materials, and recorded voices. Its themes and format make it relevant to programmes focused on immersive storytelling, digital art, cultural heritage, memory, displacement, community-based artistic practice, and contemporary experiences of war.

11 ONLINE RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

PROJECT WEBSITE

vrsoledar.com

TRAILER

youtube.com/watch?v=gUtgxPe5Ew0

PRESS CONTACT

Roksolana Dudka
Roxolana.art@gmail.com

INSTAGRAM

[@roxfolkart](https://www.instagram.com/roxfolkart)

FACEBOOK

facebook.com/Roxolana.art



Project website

The story, a tour of the VR space, and AR objects.
vrsoledar.com

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