

The Intersection of Art & Technology

EMMY-AWARD WINNING CREATOR
YASMIN ELAYAT '00 FINDS HERSELF
THROUGH VIRTUAL REALITY
DOCUMENTARY STORYTELLING

“I was always moving along parallel tracks, following two passions, at least that’s how I saw it at the time,” Yasmin Elayat '00 explains about her time at Castilleja. She loved math and science classes. In her free time, she taught herself to build websites on a computer her dad had given her. She felt lucky to be going to Castilleja and growing up in Silicon Valley because her school community and the wider world around her supported her desire to explore emerging technologies.

Meanwhile, though, there was the parallel track. “The websites I was building when I was a kid, I was making them to share my art and poetry and digital animation projects.” She took art classes, and she loved them, but she remained convinced that art was her hobby, something that happened beside her real work, which was computer science. After she graduated from college, Yasmin became a software engineer, and for many years she thrived.

“I was doing interesting work and solving creative problems, but over time, something felt missing,” she admits. Then there was a moment; actually, it was a piece of art called *Wooden Mirror*, by Daniel Rosen, that brought her passion for art and technology into alignment. “He used technology to turn small pieces of wood into an interactive mirror. As soon as I saw it, I thought, ‘There are others like me.’”

Yasmin enrolled in graduate school and began to explore where her passions intersected. Through creative technology, she became confident expressing herself as an artist while designing the platforms to support her works. But there was still one element that hadn’t come into focus yet. Finding the crossroad was one thing; understanding why she was there was another.

Yasmin kept working while she sought the answer to that question, always focusing on questions of social justice. During the Egyptian Revolution, Yasmin, who identifies as Egyptian American, moved to Cairo because she was inspired by how Egyptians were documenting events in real time using social media. “It was like the world was witness to the frontlines of history in the making,” she explains. During her time there, she built a team to co-create *18DaysInEgypt*, an interactive documentary



When a friend said she was, above all else, a storyteller, “All the pieces locked into place and finally made sense.”



that calls on the community to tell their own story in their own voices. In another work, *Blackout*, she co-created an immersive documentary inviting New Yorkers to share their stories. Yasmin, finally understanding herself as a director, won an Emmy for *Zero Days VR*, a documentary she made about cyber warfare.

Over time, she had amassed an impressive body of work, but she was still grappling with finding the throughline in her projects. “In grad school, my thesis was an animated film about my family’s history in Egypt told through three generations of women.” Looking back on that now, the answer seems obvious, but it was an outsider’s perspective that helped her see herself more clearly when a friend suggested that above all else, she was a storyteller. “In that moment,” she says, “all the pieces locked into place and finally made sense.”

Now, she is thinking about new ways to tell stories. As the co-founder of a company called Scatter, she is one of the pioneers in volumetric filmmaking, which she defines as a way to capture human performance in full 3D, using depth and color to create immersive content. Her newest work, entitled *The Changing Same*, is a magical-realist virtual-reality experience that travels through time and space to explore the last 400 years of American history of racial injustice—an ambitious and brave undertaking. The title itself, though, seems also to be a nod to its creator, someone who has both changed and remained the same throughout her creative and innovative career.