

Times of India, 13/09/2020, « Artiste Diya Naidu's latest work merges movement arts with virtual reality »

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Artiste Diya Naidu's latest work merges movement arts with virtual reality

By -

TNN

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Mid-March when dancer-choreographer Diya Naidu was diagnosed with the Coronavirus disease, it was an experience of extreme fear and panic for her. Weeks after when she tested negative and was finally discharged from the hospital, the movement artiste was labelled a 'murderer' for apparently not being proactive enough in raising the alarm. While Diya eventually got back on her feet again and resumed her virtual dance classes, she was asked to vacate the house where she was staying on rent, thanks

to the stigma attached to COVID-survivors. Despite all of this, the artiste was one of Karnataka's first plasma donors. During the lockdown, she even managed to make a short film, loosely based on her personal experience of the pandemic, while she has also been collaborating with local and international artistes on some interesting virtual reality and augmented reality dance projects. Excerpts from a candid chat:

Tell us about the film you have worked on during the lockdown – ‘Of words and bodies’...

This is the outcome of an Indo-Swiss collaboration – a spin-off of a bigger project, which was originally commissioned by the Embassy of Switzerland, but got stalled due to the pandemic. Conceived and curated by Madhura Phatak, the 12-minute film is a collaborative work that involved singer Bindhumalini Narayanaswamy, composer-musician Fortunat Frölich, filmmaker Vishnu Nambiar and myself. Made during the lockdown, the piece is based on an excerpt from a published article that I had written.

You seem to be mixing movement arts with AR and VR projects. How is that coming about? The current project that I am working on is La Comédie Virtuelle. So, it's a VR space based on an actual building in Geneva. It replicates the experience of visiting an actual auditorium to watch a live performance. While performing, I wear a VR motion capture suit. For this, I have collaborated with artistes based in Sydney and Geneva. It was commissioned for the latest edition of Venice VR Expanded.

From stigma to trolling on social media, you have braved it all with resilience. How has life changed for you after COVID-19?

I think I am fortunate that I didn't have the worst kind of manifestation of the Coronavirus. People have suffered way more. But yes, I do still go through a certain fragility in my body, and have some mysterious side effects from the disease. In general, life after COVID 19 has been a challenging experience – from getting trolled on social media to having to vacate my rented home. But again, the situation was such that there was a lot of fear and anxiety among people, so the circumstances couldn't have been avoided. But I must mention here that during the crisis that I faced, the entire artistes' community had come forward to help me. There was a unique sense of humanity that people showed, and I hope that stays on even after the pandemic.