Toxic Garden in an online participatory experience based on **Roblox** and it's composed by two parts:

- The **first part**, which takes place in the "*Toxic Garden Dance Dance Dance*" map, is a collective participatory performance in which **the avatars** of **the users all dance the same choreography**;

- the **second part** is an **individual exploration** where the users are invited to explore the environment and play together with the artist in the *'Toxic Garden'* map.

TOXIC GARDEN DANCE DANCE DANCE

THE PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE

- FIRST PART

The **first chapter** of Toxic Garden takes place in the Roblox map called **Toxic Garden Dance Dance Dance**. In this initial segment of the show, all participants' avatars simultaneously dance, beginning at a predetermined moment. Once the choreography starts, the user's avatar cannot cease dancing, even if they jump or move around the map. They will continue to perform the choreography created by the artist, in collaboration with four dancers from the BTT and Egri Bianco Danza companies. This uninterrupted dance only ceases if the user chooses to exit the game or somehow manages to reset themselves within the map (for example, by jumping off the map).

Dance Dance Dance derives its name from the novel of the same title by Haruki Murakami, where dance becomes the sole viable action to navigate the relentless passage of time that propels human beings forward. Similar to life, Murakami's text and the performance's choreography explore the cycle of "dance," which brings forth complexities inherent in interpersonal relationships. Human connections are intertwined with emotions and sensations that we cannot always control; nevertheless, we must confront them without ever ceasing to "dance."

The music for the performance, titled "Toxic Garden," is original and composed specifically for the project by musician Rafael Bresciani.

Screenshot taken during the performance *Toxic Garden Dance Dance Dance, 2022*

"Yougottadance. Aslongasthemusicplays. Yougotta dance. Don'teventhinkwhy. Starttothink, yourfeetstop. Yourfeetstop, wegetstuck. Wegetstuck, you'restuck. Sodon'tpayanymind, nomatterhowdumb. Yougottakeepthestep. Yougottalimberup. Yougottaloosenwhatyoubolteddown. Yougottauseallyougot. Weknowyou're tired, tiredandscared. Happenstoeveryone, okay? Justdon'tletyourfeetstop"[1]

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[1] Murakami, H., *Dance Dance Dance*, Vintage Books, 1988, p. 57

Screenshot taken during the performance *Toxic Garden Dance Dance Dance, 2022*

Toxic Garden Dance Dance Dance, "OnLive Campus" curatated by Simone Arcagni, Lavanderia a Vapore di Collegno (TO)

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TOXIC GARDEN

THE EXPLORATIVE MAP

- **SECOND PART**

- At the end of the Dance Dance Dance choreography, **all avatars are teleported to the exploration map of Toxic Garden**, using the typical video game 'round system'. **Here begins the individual experience**, in which the avatars can explore the garden, find new locations, or compose their own choreography using the dance steps - the same ones that form the previously danced choreography, but listed individually, no longer sequenced - available in the 'Dance' menu on the map's graphical interface.

ENVIRONMENT AND MINIGAMES

• **The *Toxic Garde*n map is a garden of gigantic poisonous plants**: plant architectures on which visitors' avatars can climb, play, complete parcours and dance. **The seven poisonous flowers, namely hemlock, common yew, jimson weed, belladonna, purple foxglove, castor bean and lily of the valley, contain or conceal within them little video games or secret places that the user must find and explore.**

• All the plants were modelled and painted in ZBrush, starting from realistic photographic references of flowers, which I then decided to customise according to my own style.

• The choice of representing the poisonous plants as load-bearing infrastructures metaphorically underlines the social architecture of human relationships, especially the toxic ones, on which we climb and juggle every day, sometimes choosing to come down immediately, sometimes lingering or going from tree to tree, sometimes staying on top observing from above what happens like Cosimo in Italo Calvino's "The Baron in the Trees".

Lily of the Valley, coloured puddles *Toxic Garden*, Roblox, 2022

Lily of the Valley, coloured puddles *Toxic Garden*, Roblox, 2022

Castor Plant, Upside-Down Seats, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

Castor Plant, Upside-Down Seats, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

mask

Godlike

uncertainty

disorientation

happy

self confidence

stop

clouds

Close

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Dance Menu - Hemlock, parcour, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

Labyrinth of the Digital Purpure, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

Common Yew, mortal parcour, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

Jimson weed, Season in Hell Show, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

Dance

Jimson weed, Season in Hell Show, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

Belladonna - stage and toxic following flowers, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

*Belladonna - stage and toxic following flowers, Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022*

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ANIMATIONS AND CHOREOGRAPHY
Choreographic workshop

During my residency at Lavanderia a Vapore in Collegno, I collaborated with four dancers from the Balletto Teatro di Torino and the Egri Foundation (Federica Rignanese, Francesca Picca Piccon, Aurora Mecca, and Giada Zilio) to create the dance steps that comprise the choreography for the performance Dance Dance Dance.

After a brief introduction to the intentions behind Toxic Garden, the dancers quickly aligned with the project, analyzing and extrapolating what can be considered the recurring behaviors and emotions experienced in a manipulative or toxic relationship, whether in an active or passive role. Reflecting on these behavioral patterns, certain keywords emerged, serving as catalysts for the composition of each individual step.

The choreography is the thoughtful culmination of these steps, forming a narrative that explores the various aspects of a manipulative relationship.
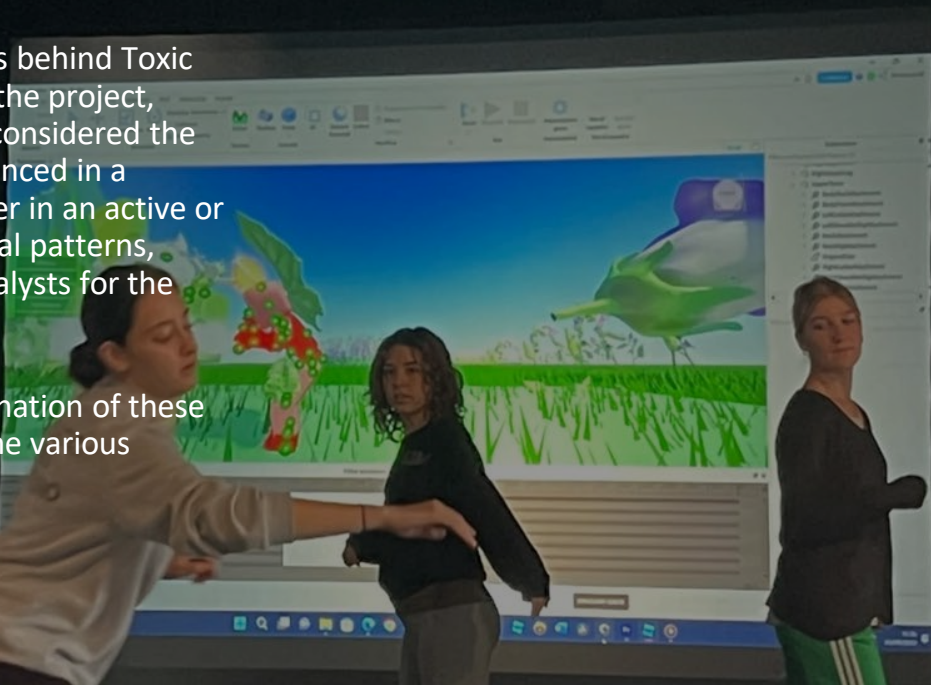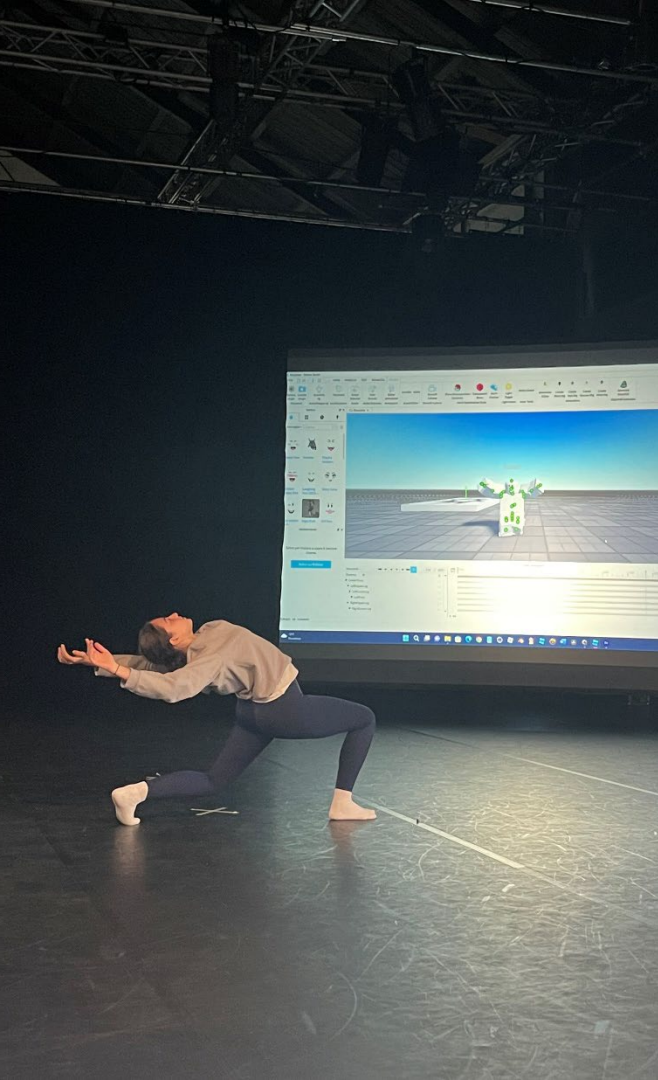
working with AI to capture the movements of the dancers (based on the study of toxic plants and human behaviours)

working with AI to capture the movements of the dancers (based on the study of toxic plants and human behaviours)

DANCING FOR AN AI

All these steps were filmed with a camera and then processed by artificial intelligence, which transformed them into 3D animations. To successfully capture the videos, the dancers had to move within a specific area, avoid certain movements, and dress in a way that would assist the machine in reading their movements more smoothly. One interesting feedback I received from the four dancers, which I believe is worth sharing, is that all the limitations "imposed by the AI" actually provided them with an opportunity to test their creativity and authorship.

As for the artificial intelligence, it wanted to participate in the choreographic setup by occasionally offering unique interpretations of individual steps. I would sometimes modify these "interpreted" steps to bring them back to their original value, while other times I would retain them, granting the machine a sort of "artistic license". We begin with an inspiration rooted in the realm of plants, specifically poisonous ones, which then translates into the human body and manifests as movement. This movement is subsequently reviewed by a program, creating a natural progression between plants, humans, avatars, and artificial intelligence.

working with AI to capture the movements of the dancers (based on the study of toxic plants and human behaviours)

CHOREOGRAPHY SCRIPT

Encounter -> seduction -> play-> persuasion -> giving -> lightheartedness -> building confidence -> confidence-> up (clouds) -> up (jumps) -> hitting -> being hit-> disorientation -> no listening -> mask -> manipulation -> new confidence -> pressure -> no gravity -> hitting -. > being hit -> action-reaction -> shield -> give and take -> animal-bullet -> immobility -> tapis roulant -> return -> give and take
-> oppression-> insecurity-> realisation -> shield -> help -> take and escape -> confidence -> no gravity -> escape path -> restart.

Memory -> play -> up (clouds) -> give and take -> confidence -> down (hits) -> shield-> tapis roulant-> up (jumps) -> realisation-> down (resignation) -> immobility -> escape path -> stop -> Joy.

AVATARS

The avatars in Toxic Garden are inspired by the seven poisonous plants that make up the garden. Once the player enters the Toxic Garden Dance Dance Dance map, and subsequently Toxic Garden, they lose their custom skin customization and randomly assume the appearance of one of the toxic plants.

During the character design study, I chose to use the typical **blocky anatomy** of Roblox, despite the current ability to create more rounded and realistic avatars. This choice partly aimed to position the aesthetic of the characters in my map within a "traditional" and original sphere of the game, while also **helping to convey a serious and heavy message about toxic relationships in a visually softer and "cute" mood, creating a contrast between representation and content.**

Information about the avatars, including botanical properties and literary historical references related to the flower they refer to, can be found in their dedicated menu, which is accessible through a specific button on the interface (GUI).

"Bella"
Belladonna Avatar

"Datura"
Jimson weed
Avatar

"Jimson"
Jimson weed
Avatar

"TheDigi"
Foxglove Avatar

"Yo-Yew"
Common Yew
Avatar

"Castor OP"
Castor Palnt
Avatar

"Hemly"
Hemlock Avatar

HIDDEN PLACES (SUBMAPS)
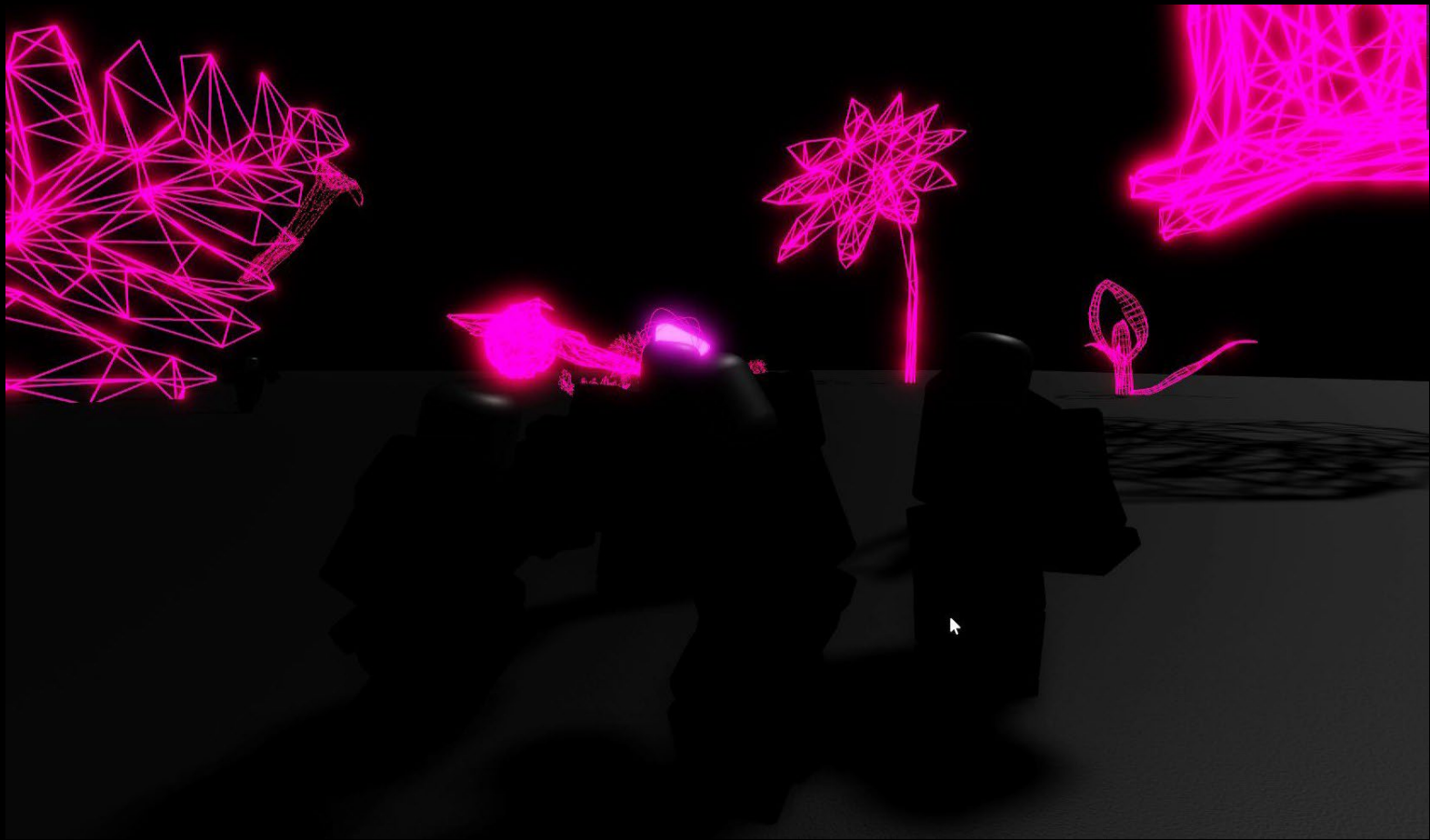## Dance Dark Dancer
Pink Obsession

Dance Dark Dancer

In Dance Dark Dancer, the "plant avatar" is replaced by a dark avatar that moves in a completely black environment. Within this setting, the poisonous plants are presented in a neon pink and wireframe version, revealing the skeletal structure of their 3D geometry. In this world dominated by darkness, the avatar must find its own image by utilizing the few light sources provided by the glowing skeletons of the plants. It becomes a search for self amidst the primal realm of vegetation.
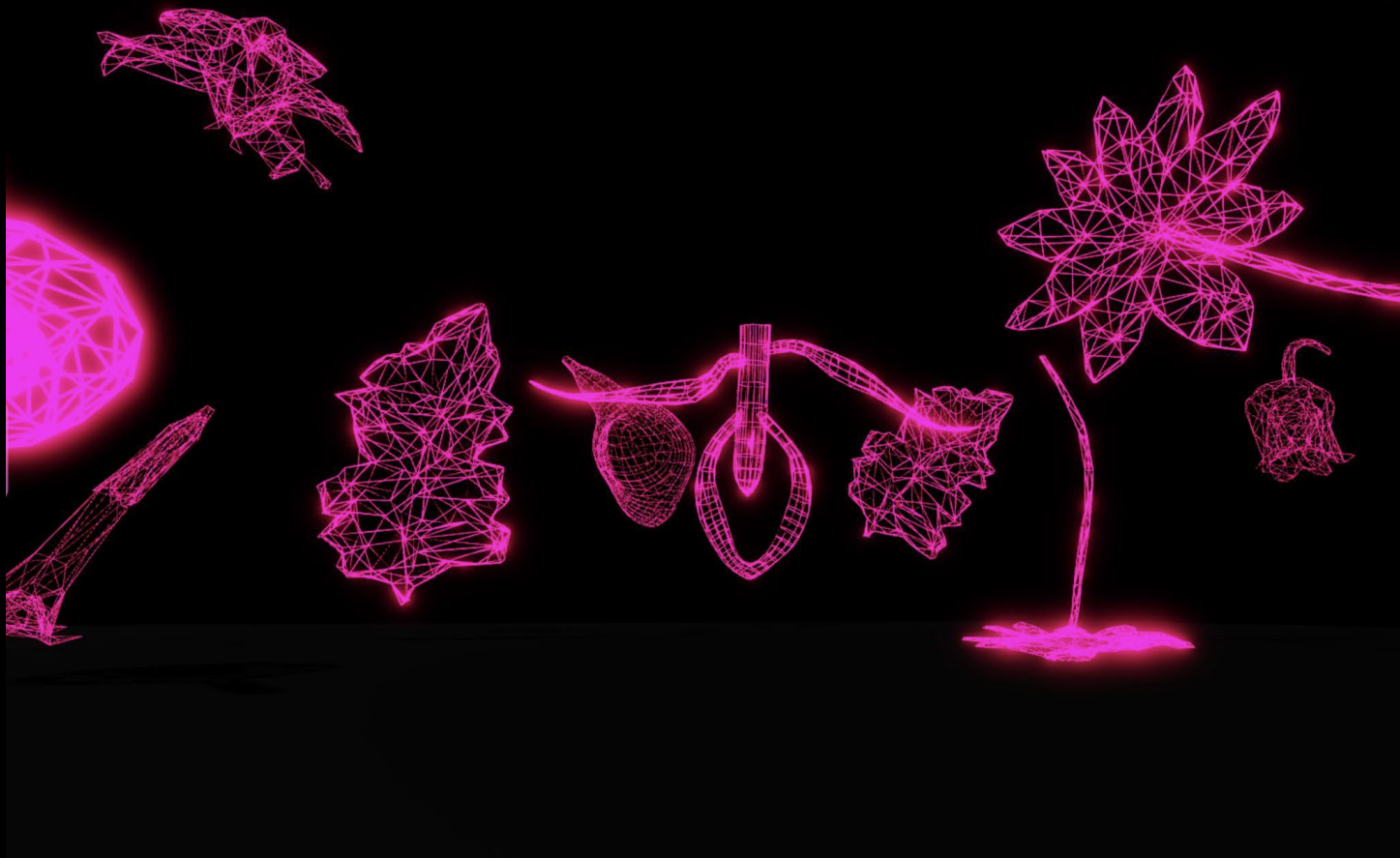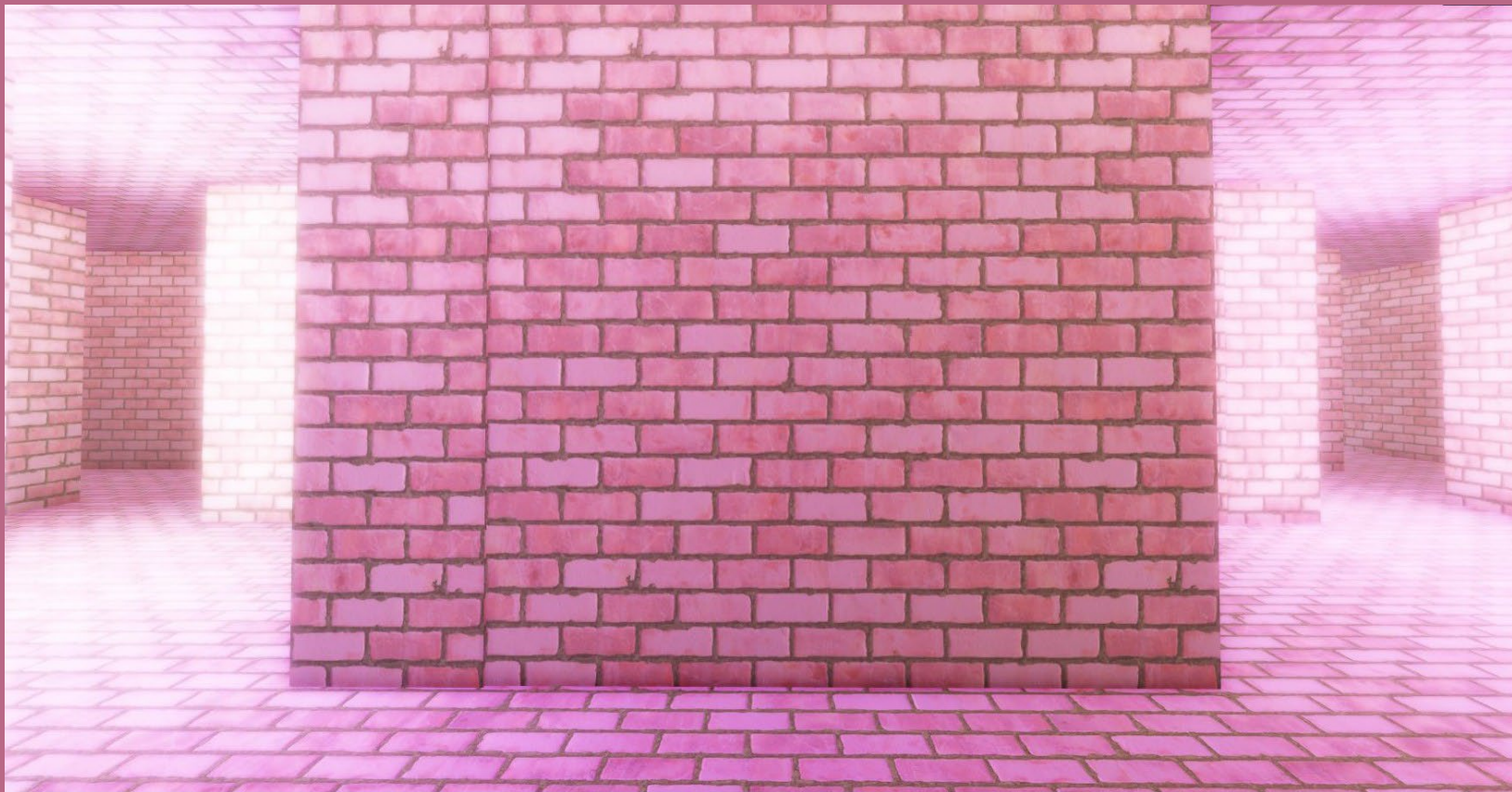
Dance Dark Dancer
Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

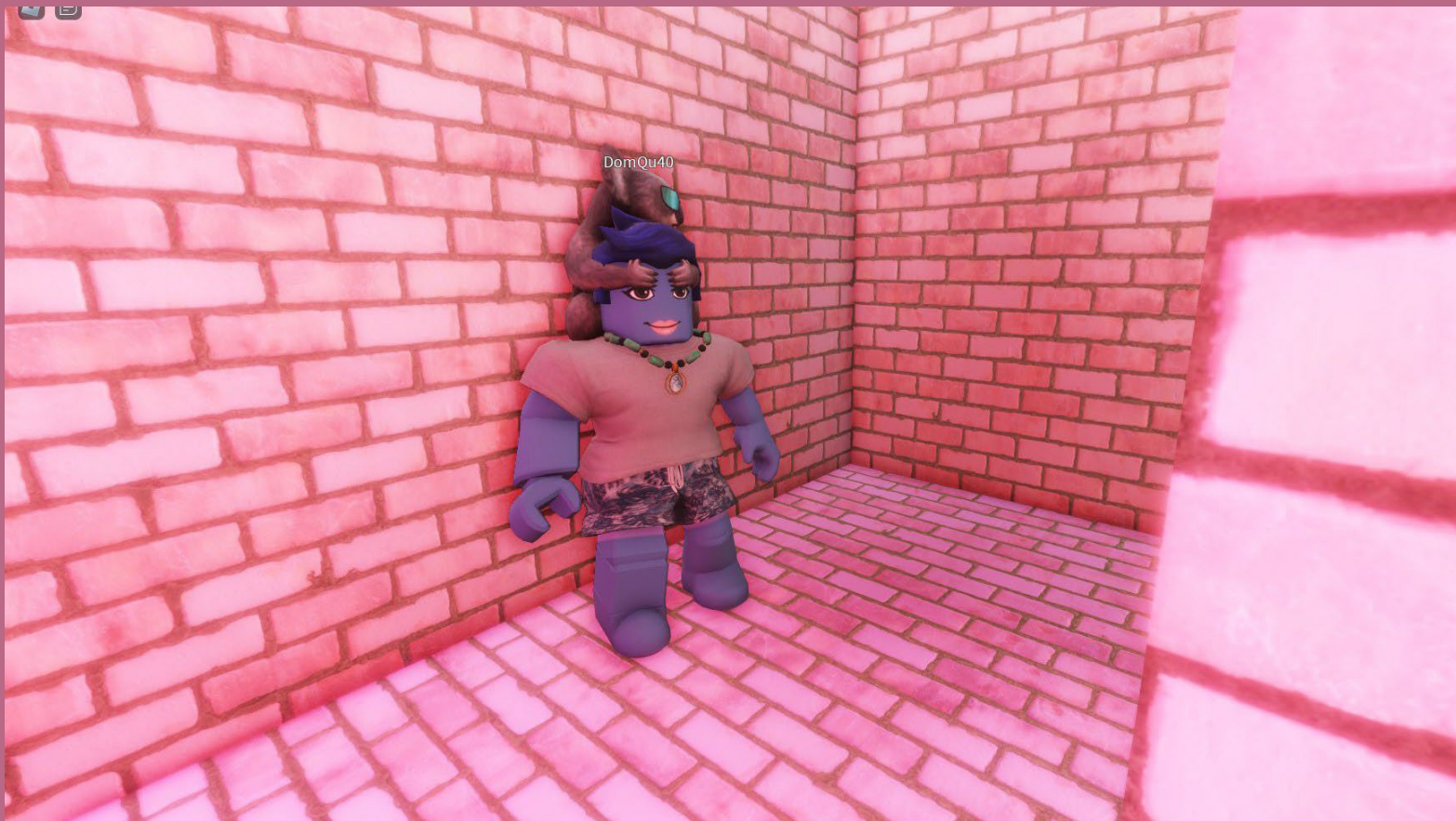*Dance Dark Dancer*
Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

Pink Obsession

In the Pink Obsession map, I teleport the user into an all-pink maze, effectively blocking the camera in a first-person perspective. This enforced first-person view prevents the player from ever seeing their own avatar, while still allowing them to see the avatars of others in their original, non-customized version created by me. I've observed that players, having grown accustomed to embodying plants and seeing others as plants in the previous two worlds, are taken aback when they come across another person inside the labyrinth who is dressed in their original attire. It creates a sort of "return to normalcy" in terms of representation, where encountering another avatar becomes a reflection of that normality.

Pink Obsession
Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022

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Pink Obsession
Toxic Garden, Roblox, 2022