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Talk Piece: Modes Of Perception And Communication Discussed At NYC Leonardo Art Science Evening Rendezvous (LASER)

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Eve Mosher, Mark Paterson, Nina Yankowitz, and Sherry Mayo taking questions from the audience at the NYC LASER on Sunday. Photo credit: Ashley P. Taylor

How can we take advantage of all our senses?

In 2007, artist-activist **Eve Mosher** spent six months walking the streets of Manhattan and Brooklyn drawing chalk lines on the ground to raise awareness of global warming. The lines, made with a rolling cart that leaves behind a streak of chalk dust, demarcated areas that climate scientists predict may be flooded more frequently in years to come. Specifically, the “**HighWaterLine**,” as she called the chalk stripe (and her project), represented the line 10 feet above sea level on a topographical map. “This will be under water; that will be dry,” Mosher told people she met on the street, referring to either side of the mark she was making. Mosher, along with three other artists, presented her work Sunday at the NYC Leonardo Art Science Evening Rendezvous (LASER).

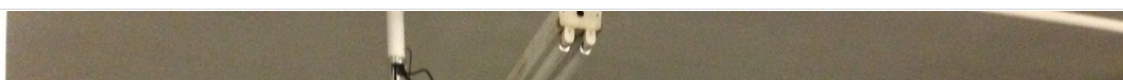
By Ashley P. Taylor

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Mark Paterson presenting his work at the NYC LASER on Sunday. Photo credit: Ashley P. Taylor

LASER is a salon—complete with wine, cheese, and discussion—at which artists and others engaged in cross-disciplinary work give short presentations to an audience consisting mostly of artists and scientists. LASER was initiated by Ellen K. Levy, Victoria Vesna and Patricia Olynyk in 2009 in conjunction with Leonardo/the International Society for the Arts, Sciences and Technology, a nonprofit dedicated to interdisciplinary cross talk in the tradition of Leonardo da Vinci. LASER is held at Levy's studio to foster an informal atmosphere and discussion.

In response to Mosher's presentation, an audience member asked how artists could viscerally communicate the threat of global warming. More broadly:

“How should we take advantage of our many senses to communicate?”

University of Pittsburgh professor **Mark Paterson**, who studies perception and communication, discussed the *sensorium*, the sum of all of our senses. Throughout history, he explained art has been biased to the sense of sight. Contemporary art projects are appealing to more of the senses and using technology to heighten them. As an example of such a technology-enhanced sensory experience, Paterson mentioned a program modeled after a videogame which simulates the traumatic experiences of war. Former soldiers can use the program to become desensitized to troubling memories.

New York-based installation artist **Nina Yankowitz** presented her current project, *Crossings*, a virtual, multi-faith cathedral. In the gallery space, texts pulled from five different religions are projected onto the walls. Users control the text displayed by selecting topics (such as “mother” or “lord”) to explore, and prioritizing or weighting them; each group of weighted topics calls up a different blend of quotations from the religious texts. *Crossings* premiered at the Thessaloniki Biennale (Greece) in 2009 and will be on display at the Guild Hall Art Museum in East Hampton, New York, this summer.

In her presentation, **Sherry Mayo**, a New York artist, brought up the idea that our digital devices might reduce our ability to empathize or to put ourselves in the shoes of another. Yankowitz countered that computers, able to consider many perspectives and possible outcomes (an idea exemplified by her work), have the potential to foster empathy.

Eve Mosher emphasized that an important part of her project “**HighWaterLine**” was interacting with people on the street, telling them about climate change, and representing it visually, though temporarily: chalk washes away. An audience member asked Mosher why she didn't make her lines permanent. She replied that she thought people might become desensitized to a permanent mark.

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Ellen K. Levy

01/22/2014 9:22am

This is an appreciative comment, noting that Adrienne Klein has co-organized many of our NY LASER meetings with us this past year.

Ellen Levy

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