

OPINION NOVEMBER 30, 2015

How can we go with the flow?

HIGHLIGHTS

HOLOSCENES performances address climate change

Everyday lives disrupted by flooding



BY LARS JAN
www.holoscen.es

Since Hurricane Katrina made landfall 10 years ago, I've witnessed a deluge of media images of frail human figures at the mercy of surging waters, their bodies and movements transformed by this life-giving element momentarily turned against them.

In 2010, I began a personal inquiry into the increasing incidence of devastating floods around the world. The pattern seemed undeniable and relentless, and by 2012, it had reached my apartment in Brooklyn in the form of Hurricane Sandy.

Both when Katrina and Sandy hit, I recall several scientists responsibly conceded in the national media that, No, these particular hurricanes could not be attributed directly to climate change. The devastation climate change wreaks is a macroscopic trend, not any one single event, so it has been nearly impossible to give this complex phenomenon a symbolic face around which people can mobilize.

As an artist and citizen concerned about climate change — and overwhelmed by the widening stream of fearsome reports and headlines — I find inspiration in the precedent of the iconic photograph known as *Earthrise*, among the first color images of our planet taken from space.

It's generally accepted that the environmental movement reached mass scale in 1968 when the photo first reached the public. The image conveyed a simple truth to millions of people: Earth is one system, and they were all a part of it. With the barren surface of the moon looming in the foreground, the uniquely hospitable nature of our collective home was wordlessly apparent.

I wonder at the terrifically precise integration of science and engineering that was, and is, the space program, but ultimately I find its most powerful expression to be through the comparatively archaic technology of photography. *Earthrise* is a piece of art, taken by an amateur photographer who just happened to be a professional astronaut.

The environmental movement had many heroes up to then, but this photograph changed popular consciousness more than any person or piece of legislation ever had.

For four years, together with a team of engineers, scientists and artists, I've been developing and presenting *HOLOSCENES*, a public art and performance project in which the human body collides with a massive amount of moving water. The project features a massive aquarium-like sculpture exhibited in public space that fills and drains with 12 tons of water in less than a minute. Inside each aquarium, a single performer simulates an everyday behavior that collaborators around the world have submitted by video — such as selling fruit in India or getting ready to go to bed in Norway.

Water surges in and out at varying speeds, deluging the performers while they adapt their behaviors to this cycle of endless mini-floods — a layering of the patterns both making up our lives and transforming our biosphere.

HOLOSCENES will translate into many photos and videos, but the beating heart of the project is a shared live experience. Already living amid a flood of images, I hunger for the local and the live to counterpoint and complement an increasingly screen-based world. This urban intervention will travel to one community at a time, manifesting in a visual, visceral experience in public spaces, accessible to the broadest audience possible, at no cost to them.

It's no coincidence that our first two presentations of *HOLOSCENES* in the United States have been in Florida, the first in Sarasota right on the Gulf of Mexico and now in Miami — projected to be under water in large swaths by 2050. As the king tides and Art Basel both descend upon greater Miami, I cannot help but think that this place is uniquely positioned (and pressured) to lead the conversation on creatively combating climate change.

I'm working under the influence of *Earthrise*, but today it's not an astronaut making the picture; everyone will. Then again, as a hero of the environmental movement, Buckminster Fuller, said, "We are all astronauts on a little spaceship called Earth."

LARS JAN IS AN ARTIST AND DIRECTOR. HIS LARGE SCALE OUTDOOR INSTALLATION HOLOSCENES WILL BE PRESENTED FROM DEC. 2-5 ON MIAMI DADE COLLEGE'S WOLFSON CAMPUS ON KRYKIAKIDES PLAZA. THE EVENT IS FREE TO THE PUBLIC.



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