

Kamerick, Megan, "ISEA artists explore Intersections of Nature and Technology", *KUNM*, Nov 19, 2012.



ISEA artists explore intersections of nature and technology

by Megan Kamerick, November 19, 2012.

So exactly what kind of sound might stop a Mexican Grey Wolf from taking down a cow?

That's just one of the questions explored by the International Symposium on Electronic Arts. Albuquerque recently hosted ISEA, bringing top international artists for performances, lectures and art installations. It's the first time the event has been in the U.S. since 2006.

Exhibits created as part of ISEA will be here through early January at 516 ARTS and the Albuquerque Museum and many of the pieces tackle hot-button issues like water, climate change and the interactions between humans and nature.

Artist Marina Zurkow and collaborator Christie Leece take technology to a ridiculous extreme with "Gila 2.0: Warning Off the Wolf."

It includes a decorative collar that issues noises like gargling, elephants and singing cowboys. Zurkow is a New Yorker who did a residency in Silver City as part of ISEA. The piece at 516 ARTS proposes -- maybe -- arming cattle to fend off wolves. Zurkow says she tested the sounds out with a predator specialist in Utah.

"He said 'It's great. Just keep it really weird. As long as it's novel and unpredictable, animals don't get used to it and they actually can't stand human sound,'" she says.

The ISEA 2012 theme is "Machine Wilderness." The idea is to re-envision how art, technology and nature can interact and riff off one another. It's a perfect fit for New Mexico, says Andrea Polli, ISEA 2012's artistic director. New Mexico has some of the most wild places in the country, she says, and some of the most advanced science as well.

"It's a perfect place for that clash and juxtaposition of nature and technology," Polli says.

Zurkow imagines a cow with body armor and leg guards that spray scents wolves hate, like citronella and human urine. An electronic cowbird perches on the bovine's rump, ready to set off an alarm and warn ranchers of predators via Twitter.

People have been experimenting with technology around the world to protect livestock. So is Zurkow serious? Maybe. Maybe not. But she says the questions underlying the piece are very real: What do public lands mean? Who gets to use them?

Other ISEA artists also use satire to tackle contentious issues. The Secret of Eternal Levitation operates like a video game where the uber wealth extract global resources. Step right up to the kiosk and create your own floating mansion. Stephanie Rothenberg based the idea on an island of lofty intellectuals in Gulliver's Travels who couldn't bother to support themselves by working, so they took what they needed.

Just use the joystick to start scooping up steel, lumber, water - oh, and workers, of course. A British woman with a creepy deadpan explains how the fictional La Puta Isles scours the earth for resources, including cheap labor.

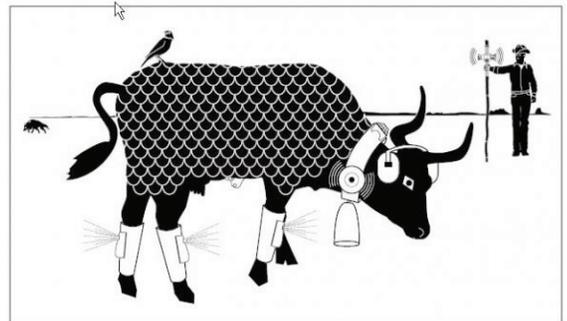
"Due to recent shifts in U.S. immigration policy, our recruiters have identified qualified workers in the area of Plaza Los Nogales in Nogales, Mexico, directly across from the U.S. Arizona border," she intones.

Just click a button and streams of the iconic male and female symbols are sucked upward into the waiting ship to build your dream mansion. Such techniques move visitors beyond passive museum experiences and Andrea Polli says that's deliberate.

"It's not just interactivity for interactivity's sake in many of these pieces," she says. "It's about getting us to think about our human impact."

So there is a plant that spouts odd sounds in reaction to human movement, rushing toward people or skittering away as they enter 516 ARTS.

GILA 2.0
WARDING OFF THE WOLF



Credit Courtesy of 516 ARTS
Warning Off the Wolf imagines an armored cow that uses noise and scents offensive to wolves.