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Arts City: Laser turns her focus to DiverseWorks



Artist Liz Magic Laser, right, discusses her performance-art project with former KPRC-TV news anchor Linda Lorelle, left, and other collaborators during a meeting in February. The group will stage "Tell Me What You Want to Hear" for DiverseWorks starting Friday.

What ever happened to just putting on a show?

Contemporary artists like Liz Magic Laser, whose "Tell Me What You Want to Hear" premieres Friday at DiverseWorks, are subverting - and radically complicating - things with a category of art called "delegated performance."

Unlike old-school performance artists who use their bodies to make their statements, they employ nonprofessional actors. The brainy Laser also aims to stir controversy, or at least discussion.

Commissioned to create T-shirts, tote bags and other giveaways for the New York Armory Show earlier this month, she produced purposefully bland items with text that drew attention to the show's commercial, exclusive nature; also staging a "focus group" of art-industry professionals to critique the stuff.

For "Tell Me What You Want to Hear," she explores how the news media, politicians and public relate. She started by conducting workshops in February with seven Houston collaborators, including Chronicle political cartoonist Nick Anderson, University of Houston staffer (and former Chronicle reporter) Shannon Buggs, artist Felipe Campos, Realtor Maurice Duhon, former KPRC-TV news anchor Linda Lorelle, former Houston City Council member Sue Lovell and public affairs pro Mustafa Tameez.

Anderson said he's been a little puzzled by the process, although he's learned how to present himself better for TV interviews. During the workshop, Laser asked the collaborators to describe times they'd appeared on camera. (She's interested in ways they felt authentic or manipulated.) The participants were videotaped, coached and did retakes; then Laser chose one experience for each of them to work with.

Wednesday, they'll "perform" in an interview-format "TV show" moderated by Buggs on the university campus; it will be live-streamed to an invited audience at DiverseWorks whose reactions will also be videotaped. (With cameras upon cameras upon cameras, it's sounding like performance art as an infinity mirror.)

The combined footage will be shown as a multichannel video installation at DiverseWorks Friday through May 18. The opening reception is at 7 p.m. Friday at 4102 Fannin, Suite 200; 713-223-8346; www.diverseworks.org. Admission is free.