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## Wonder, Walking, and Water

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# Wonder, Walking, and Water

## **Abstract**

Art and Science is a seminar and studio course on science-inspired art practices. We will survey and discuss cutting-edge art-science theory, practice, and institutions in seminar. In studio, we examine art-science topics in hands-on experiments, and guided activities leading to art projects.

## **Author/Artist Bio**

Rachel Mayeri is an LA-based artist working at the intersection of art and science. Her videos, installations, and writing projects explore topics ranging from the history of special effects to the human animal. The multi-year project “Primate Cinema” investigates the boundary between human and non-human primates in a series of video experiments. This work has shown at Sundance, Berlinale, Ars Electronica, and dOCUMENTA (13). Recent commissions include the environmental art project “Critters Speak” about the Gulf of Mexico ecosystem seven years after Deepwater Horizon, with Brandon Ballengée, funded by National Academy of Sciences Keck Futures Institute; the animated opera “Ofeo Nel Canale Alimentare” about the digestive tract, supported by Imagine Science Films, and “The Jollies” an animated documentary about the primatologist Alison Jolly. As professor of media studies at Harvey Mudd College, she teaches courses in Animal Media Studies, Art & Science, and Stories from the Anthropocene.

## **Keywords**

Art, Science, Technology mixed media, science-inspired art practices

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## Wonder, Walking, and Water

*Rachel Mayeri*

*Art, Science and Technology* is a seminar and studio course on science-inspired art practices. We will survey and discuss cutting-edge art-science theory, practice, and institutions in seminar. In studio, we examine art-science topics in hands-on experiments, and guided activities leading to art projects. There are several fun extracurricular activities planned: a field trip to the Museum of Jurassic Technology and the Center for Land Use Interpretation; the Nelson Speaker Series on Water; an artist-led tour of the waterways of the Inland Empire and Mojave Desert. The course will offer concepts, materials, techniques, and processes for students to create art-science projects. Students are invited to share and employ their own knowledge and skills in art, science, and technology.



*Students discussing their work*

This year, the themes- of wonder, walking and water charted our course through the vast territory of art and science intersections. Wonder is a state of mind: both art and science can inspire curiosity, confusion, surprise, and conversation. We began the semester by learning about Wunderkammer, cabinets of curiosities containing objects that precede the historical division between art and science.



*Part of a student exhibition*

Our first art and science project was to produce our own wunderkammer and exhibit it at Honnold Library. Students documented and reflected on their Wonder project through several prompts:

*Intentions: What was your intention in your project: what kind of meaning/experience/aesthetic were you trying for? Did you fulfill your initial vision, and if not, how did it change? Learning: As part of experiential learning, it's important to reflect back on the whole structure of the activity we just participated in to produce the show. I'd like for you to think about the challenges and rewards of your art-making process. Where did you get your inspiration? What was the most fun? What was the most difficult? Did some constraint help you (materials, conceptual framework, display, space)? How did the collaborative aspects of the project go for you? Did you learn something when you presented your work to others?*

*Connect the exhibition to the readings and framework of the class. How is the project as a whole related to art? To science? To technology? To wonder? What readings, experiences, and artists' work were most salient in making these connections? Please make detailed references and analyze the reading from the viewpoint of your experience as an artist working with historical and speculative geological, anthropological, and cartographic material. Let me know if you have any questions or want help with this. We could begin a forum discussion, if that would be useful.*

Our second project was a walk. Walking is a simple way to produce wonder, and to engage the mind and body in time and space. Walking as an art form has inspired postmodern dance, procedural performance, audio and video tours and installation. The third theme, water, is a “magic molecule” connecting the body to the land, culture to nature, and economics to the environment. Students were given the instructions to:

*Design or document an experience of walking. Materials and techniques include protocols, chance, Postmodern dance, drift, psychogeography, drawing lines on a map, walking in other people’s shoes. Consider walking as an experience of place, the defamiliarization of conventional space, a decision-making practice, a metaphor that activates an issue, an interface for a story, an exploration of senses, a reflection on everyday life, an intervention in the public sphere, an excuse for serious play, or a deceptively simple means for performance.*

Water swells with metaphorical meaning and significance in the Anthropocene, with global freshwater scarcity and our own local drought (and/or “Godzilla El Nino“). Through the subject of water, we explored artists’ engagements with ecology, experimental geography and map-making, as models for producing final projects. The students were required to share their critiques:

*The critic must set aside time to look at or experience the artwork in depth and in person. Discuss the artwork by answering the prompts below. Address the artwork first, without reading the essay of intentions. Then come back and add anything that you learned, explaining if there’s anything in the writing what changes your interpretation of the piece.*

*Discuss “the read.” Describe your experience with the piece. Tell what you were thinking as you experienced it and how you reacted.*

*Discuss the literal level. What formal choices did the artist make? What is actually in the piece – type of paper, composition, words, lines? List the specifics of what we see — make no assumptions or conclusions at this level.*

*Discuss the associations of the piece. Does the piece recall any known “genre”? Does it bring to mind other works that you know? What is it like, if anything? Does it reference anything you already know or have seen in or outside of class?*

*Examine the concept. What is the basic concept of the work, and can this concept be refined or improved?*

*Brainstorm improvements. How could the piece be more effective? How can this work be “refined” or changed?*