

# DREAM LOGIC

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## TECHNOLOGY AS AN ART FORM

In October of last year, more than five hundred attendees filtered through the gallery doors of The Laundry—and found themselves transported into a technological dream world straight from the pages of a science fiction novel. Over two dozen artists and technologists had converted the space into a bewitching labyrinth of electronic devices and wires. The lights were dimmed. Projectors caused phosphorescent colors to flash, flow, and flex over walls and faces. People wearing large headsets over their eyes reacted to unseen stimuli—craning their necks and caressing the air with outstretched hands. This was Dream Logic’s first art show, *The Art of Dying*, an event that harnessed virtual and augmented realities to discuss the taboo subject of mortality.

Before diving into the details of this show, you’ll want to meet the minds behind it. After all, what is a creation without its creator? The founders and curators behind it all are Kelly Vicars and Lindsay Saunders. Kelly is the creative spirit. Among other things, she creates graphic design for the business and gives input on decorating rooms for the shows. Besides her work with Dream Logic, she is currently working on converting a Boeing 747 airplane for Burning Man. Lindsay, by contrast, is the businesswoman. Anything to do with number crunching falls to her, be that budgeting, handling taxes, or coming up with solutions for reducing the waiting times of large cues for shows. She’s a problem solver, with a mind for fixing what she reflexively calls “glitches.”

The two women met at a virtual reality (VR) workshop last April. Lindsay came as an attendee. After curating an augmented reality (AR) art show in Brooklyn and producing a live theater play that incorporated VR into the performance, she decided it was about time to get some hands-on experience. Kelly was the class’s organizer. As fate would have it, the two women ended up on the same couch. Kelly was captivated by Lindsay’s descriptions of paring VR with art. They realized that San Francisco—a city alive with artists and technologists—would be an ideal location for such a phenomenon. It wasn’t long before they were brainstorming ways to entwine these two fields.

The name for their endeavor, Dream Logic, presented itself when they began noticing parallels between VR and the dream world. Both are removed from reality, which allows them access to imagination and the subconscious. “It’s a place where anything is possible,” Kelly declares. “You can suspend the laws of physics, you can travel to Mars, you can experience the life of a refugee.” Dreams also directly influenced their first show. One morning, Kelly woke up with the memory of a dream about an old man who traveled from town to town, pulling a strange contraption behind his truck. He invited people to step inside and, for a brief moment, they would “experience” their death. It wasn’t a menacing vision, but a joyful one.

To bring this first show to life, Lindsay and Kelly recruited two more members to their small team. Sean Kennedy was brought on as technical director and Liisa Laukkanen as designer. As the event neared, Sean set up the electronic control center, a place to bring the different platforms all under one roof. And there were



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a lot of platforms—among them Vive, GearVR, Oculus, and Google Cardboard. “It itself was an installation!” Kelly laughs, as she recalls the room. “There were headsets everywhere, there were computers, there were computer parts, there were all these crazy schematics up on this whiteboard.” Liisa, with input from Kelly, designed installations for the rooms to reflect the VR content housed in each one. Lindsay planned for crowd control. And everyone pitched in with the grunt work. There were also the artists to think about. With the money from ticket sales, the Dream Logic team were able to offer temporary communal housing. “We really tried to form a community, a place where people were able to build, share ideas, and collaborate,” Lindsay remarks.

The final result was over 30 works that explored dying—a transition that all must undergo, but everyone views a little differently. “The experiences range from joyous to thought-provoking, meditative to silly, deep to fantastical, sublime to sad,” Kelly explained in an interview just prior to the show’s opening. “We hope the exhibit will inspire new ways of looking at death and support new conversations about living.”

A tour through three of those works will give you a feel for the experience. “White Light,” silvery digital threads pulsing and responding to participants, became the perfect portal for symbolically transitioning from life to death. “Ceremony for the Dead” used Google’s Tilt Brush—a three-dimensional painting tool that digitally creates art in thin air—to display a Mayan-inspired temple for viewers to traverse. And a deceptively traditional gallery with paintings and sketches on the walls morphed when viewed through phone screens, the once static images stirring to life and moving about their frames as if seen through the eyes of the artist who created them.

One goal unites all of Dream Logic’s experiential art shows: a desire to comprehend different perspectives or, as the website so articulately puts it, a desire “to explore new ways of seeing.” The technology assists in that goal. “I think a really good way of understanding VR is that it lets us create and share worlds of our imagination,” Kelly says. “We get to step inside someone else’s reality.” In other words, it can become a tool for one individual to share how they view and think about the world with others. “That’s what people are looking for in art right now,” Lindsay adds. “They want an experience. They want to feel something.” Through these experiences, people also have the opportunity to learn in a novel way.

Possibly the most popular artworks that first evening were the fully immersive VR ones. In “Crossover,” the artist created a series of conversations held between the living and the dead within the rooms of a house. He created this space to grieve as well as find closure after losing his wife to suicide. In “Imago,” the viewer enters through the eyes of a former dancer who is now completely paralyzed and learns of the helplessness of being incapable of communicating with loved ones. Attendees sat in wheelchairs to fully assimilate themselves into this other life.

These experiences, like the others, offer different perspectives not simply for the sake of being different, but also to encourage empathy. “You get a connection with somebody when you see their art—especially when you’re *in* their art—that you don’t get any other way,” Lindsay says. This inevitably promotes vulnerability—both mentally and physically. To open themselves to another’s experience, attendees must voluntarily shed their own reality. A VR headset becomes a high-tech blindfold and, when paired with headphones, completely cuts off that participant’s world so he can immerse himself in that of another.

Perhaps Dream Logic’s most compelling achievement is their demonstration that technology can be an art form. “A lot of ways that we see VR showcased is big, crazy, flashy simulator rides and shoot ‘em up games.” Kelly says. “But the work people are doing in VR is so imaginative. People are really pushing the boundaries in this medium.” Technology doesn’t have to be sterile. It can be alive and it can be colorful.



*The Art of Dying Show*



*Transitions by Mike von Rotz & Joost Jordens*

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