
Emilie Baltz

In this issue of *Exhibition*, editor Ellen Snyder-Grenier talks with artist Emilie Baltz – who explores the transformative power of sensory experience in the lives of creators and consumers – to learn how her work might offer new perspectives on how we create interactivity in exhibitions.



Emilie Baltz is a food technologist, experience designer, and multimedia artist who creates multisensory experiences for emotional impact. She is an award-winning author and public speaker with appearances at TEDx, DLD, PSFK Conference, Ignite Conference, Creative Mornings, TODAY Show, NBC, *Wall Street Journal*, D-CRIT and more. Based in New York City, Baltz works out of the New Lab for emerging technologies. She is a founding member of NEW INC, the first museum-led incubator hosted at the New Museum and is also part of the founding faculty of the School of Visual Arts Products of Design MFA program, as well as the founder of the Food Design Studio at Pratt Institute. You can see her work at www.emiliebaltz.com.



Q Ellen Can you tell *Exhibition's* readers a little bit about your work - specifically the kinds of interactive experiences you create?

A Emilie I design new sensory interactions that deliver novel ways of experiencing the world around us. I am specifically interested in using play as a way of engaging people in this kind of experimentation and invent fanciful experiences like a Cotton Candy Theremin and a Licking Ice Cream Orchestra that naturally promote playful behaviors. By adding a layer of technology to these experiences, we are able to reimagine our everyday in wild and wonderful ways.

Q Ellen How do you define "interactivity"?

A Emilie Interactivity is classically defined as "the process of two people or things working together and influencing each other." In my work, I also believe that interactivity has to be physical; i.e, it must be an inter-"**action**" that exists in the body and stimulates a human sense.

Q Ellen What can interactivity do better than other means of storytelling?

A Emilie In light of this definition above, I believe in an embodied approach to interactivity; after all, the "hand is the instrument of the mind." If we affect the body, we have access to all of our human senses, and thus more possibilities for storytelling are available. Today, our traditional forms of storytelling still exist mostly as audiovisual expression (film, books, video games, etc.), but physical interaction design has the potential to engage the body, and thus all of our senses - thereby expanding our experience of "story" into taste, touch, sound, smell *and* sight. I think this is a much more profound way of communicating emotion.

Q Ellen Your work seems to focus on the things that make us human, on creating community - how can interactivity help with that?

A Emilie Human beings are social creatures. For hundreds of years we've designed interactions

unconsciously - be it through hunting, loving, breeding, or dying. The way that we engage with each other is how we stitch together the fabric of our lives and cultures. By designing for interaction, we are naturally designing for human behavior.

Q Ellen You frequently use food as an interface - why? What might other equivalents be?

A Emilie I use food because it is our most (and only!) multisensory material. Eating is a confluence of seeing, smelling, tasting, feeling and hearing. When we design with food we have a huge sensory toolkit to play with! There aren't many other equivalents out there, though I do think some forms of dance and performance can be immersive in similar ways of emphasizing a bodily experience.

Q Ellen What kind of work is necessary up front to understand how things and human behavior interact?

A Emilie A keen sense of observation is key. Curiosity and wonder will get you far in this work! By watching how people and things intersect together you can learn an incredible amount right off the bat. I find it helpful to film and photograph people doing "stuff" - e.g. cooking, playing, drawing, etc. - and then reviewing the media to identify key moments of interaction: when is something natural vs. forced? How does a body look when interacting with said moment? Etc. etc.

Q Ellen What do you see as the value in engaging *all* the senses?

A Emilie Research has shown that sensory play builds nerve connections in the brain and lays the groundwork for solving complex problems. If we are able to engage to a user through sight, sound, smell, taste AND touch, then not only have we achieved global communication :) but we are also able to foster complex understanding of the topic at hand. In an era of unease, individualism, and increasingly closed borders, I can think of nothing else I'd rather be supporting than a more multifaceted understanding of the world.