

Jovanovic, Rozalia, "Liz Magic Laser's 'Absolute Event' Turned Paula Cooper Gallery Into a Participatory TV Studio," *Artinfo*, November 15, 2013, page 1 of 3.

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Liz Magic Laser's "Absolute Event" Turned Paula Cooper Gallery Into a Participatory TV Studio

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"Ask me anything you want," said a man in a suit sitting at a conference table last night at **Paula Cooper Gallery**'s project space at 197 Tenth Avenue. He was surrounded by a few other people.

"When was the last time you masturbated?" said a woman sitting nearby.

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"This morning," he replied. "Twice."

The man in the suit was playing the role of a Congressional aide in artist **Liz Magic Laser's** installation/performance "Absolute Event."

Though the scripted dialogue and narrative of the performance took cues from the legend of **Cyrano de Bergerac** as well as news of the recent government shutdown, the dialogue often veered into improvisational territory thanks to the ad-libbing from audience members who had volunteered to take part in the round-table discussion. Behind them, the wall was painted green and nearby there was a disco ball as well as several wall-mounted instruction panels, one of which gave step-by-step directives on doing the 1970s dance The Hustle.



Jovanovic, Rozalia, "Liz Magic Laser's 'Absolute Event' Turned Paula Cooper Gallery Into a Participatory TV Studio," *Artinfo*, November 15, 2013, page 3 of 3.

The discussion as well as the audience in the room were being filmed and projected via live-feed onto a screen in the back room where Laser was seated behind a bank of television production equipment like monitors and control boards, directing changes to the projection. On the screen, the disco ball and the dance diagram were nowhere to be seen. The table was transformed, via background visuals and green screen technology, into a situation room-like scenario worthy of CNN's **Wolf-Blitzer**, even though the dialogue was often far from it.

"Can I pop out of your third eye of the kaleidoscope of spontaneity," said one man sitting at a conference table, a zealous participant. As per Laser, the only people who had scripted dialogues were the two men she hired (**Gary Lee Mahmoud** and **Daniel Abse**) to play Congressional aides. Everything else was simply off-hand chit-chat generated by the main characters. It was more than neat to see the performance evolve before us, and get transformed instantaneously. The night also consisted of some inspired moments, like spontaneous dancing under the disco ball.

While the video installations will be up through November 30, there will be one another live performance on Saturday night, November 16. While the performance begins promptly at 7pm, we suggest you get there a few minutes early as last night, by 7pm, the Paula Cooper annex was already filled to capacity.



— Rozalia Jovanovic (@Ruschka)

(Photos by the author.)