

Artist Jody Zellen puts viewers in charge of her art

by Leah Rhyne • 3 min read • [original](#)

Jody Zellen wants you to have fun with her artwork. She wants you to play with it, interact with it, change it, flip it, alter the size and space and sound. She wants you to enjoy it, and she wants to see what you do when you're in charge of her installations.

That said, her installation — that thing with which she wants you to experiment — has actually been carefully designed and crafted over long months, even years. By the time *Above the Fold* opens at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art on Jan. 31, she'll have tweaked and re-tweaked the setup dozens of times, organizing video screens and projectors and musical elements for you to explore. And that's the part that captures her imagination.

"I'm interested in how people move within a space, how they begin to understand how they can move with the images around them to see what happens," says Zellen. "Those images might get bigger. They might get smaller. They might follow them. There will also be a sound component with six speakers. So not only will the images change as the viewer moves through the space, but sounds will change as well."

The title *Above the Fold* refers to the image in print newspapers which, for centuries, has existed on the front page, literally above the creased fold of the paper. Those are the images that go with the headlines, that sell the papers and capture the audience's mind, and those are the images you'll find in Zellen's exhibit.

For a year, Zellen scanned the front pages of the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times* into her computer and created new images from them, letting the content inspire her to craft line drawings, collections of words, empty comic strip bubbles. They represent a year of our collective life, the highs, the lows, and the news stories in between.

For the installation, she's created a wall of 25 televisions (like the wall of a newsroom) to display the various pictures and extrapolations in a multitude of pre-set orders. Some will be line drawings, some high-resolution black and whites, and some will be animations created from the original images as they are morphed into these other things. Each television will show something different. On a second wall, an 18-minute animation of the images will run on a continuous loop.

The other two walls of this space, created especially for Zellen's installation, will host the interactive component of the show. As soon as a viewer enters the space, an image will be projected. At first, it will be recognizable, but as the viewer moves, it will shift and morph, growing larger, shrinking, transforming into a black-and-white image or a line drawing, or pixelating into oblivion. Sound accompanying the imagery will also change as the viewer moves, and thus, the viewer will become a part of the installation. As multiple viewers enter the space, the images will change accordingly, creating a unique experience for each person.

This is what Zellen loves to create. Though her artistic education began with traditional roots as she studied photography at Wesleyan College, everything shifted as she began to study net art and the interactivity between people and the things they see on the internet. She went to grad school at Cal Arts and NYU's Interactive Technology Program and has worked as a graphic designer and web designer. She's also created several iPad and iPhone apps that allow people to have "art in their pockets."

To continue her explorations into interactivity, she's taken residencies and won grants to help her spend time with more experienced programmers.

"To find ways to create sensor-triggered art," she says. "[I did] an installation where there were toy cell phones hanging from the ceiling, and any time someone pushed a button, an image projected would change. People could choreograph their experience. The idea was for them to begin to understand what happened if they did these different things."

Above the Fold will be much like that, with viewers creating their own experience, almost like a great, big Google doodle. When I described the exhibit as such to Zellen, she laughed and said, "Yeah. I like those. I wish I could be asked to make one."

It sounds like she already has. *Above the Fold*: a great, interactive Google Doodle, brought to life at the Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art. Go see. Go play. Go have a good time doodling.

Artist Jody Zellen will be giving a talk with Bob Trotman at 5 p.m. on Fri. Jan. 31 in Room 309 of the Simons Center for the Arts (54 St. Philip St.) before the opening reception at the Halsey Institute.

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