



September 22, 2011

This afternoon, the Brooklyn Bridge had some unusual visitors. Nestled in between the usual tourists, bikers, joggers, and eccentrics were seven fish—or rather, seven people in fish costumes.

At 4:30 P.M., three women, two men, and one little girl strapped fish masks to the backs of their heads and embarked upon a two hour slow-motion jog across the bridge. One man dragged a wheelbarrow filled with suitcases behind him. Another man carried a briefcase. All of them looked worried.

The performers were part of a piece called “Evacuation,” which was itself part of a larger event put on by the Human Impacts Institute called “10 Days of Climate Action.” The Human Impacts Institute, founded by Tara DePorte in 2010, is dedicated to fostering “sustainable human impacts on ecosystems through inspired engagement, leadership, collaboration, knowledge-building, and creative expression,” according to the organization’s website. “10 Days of Climate Action” certainly fulfills one of those promises: to encourage sustainability through creative expression. It is essentially a ten-day long series of local performances, put on by artists and musicians, that are designed to raise awareness about climate-related issues.

“Evacuation,” which is being performed today and tomorrow, came to life when DePorte asked her friend Josephine Decker, 30, to stage a piece that raised awareness about “climate and vulnerability”—that is, how climate can affect both people and the natural environment. Decker, a local artist and film director, found inspiration in recent events.

“After the hurricane happened...and the earthquake...the idea of evacuating was really present for New York City,” said Decker. “So I decided to do a piece about fish evacuating the ocean. But I wanted something more. I had to make it relevant to humans, too.”

So after Decker had nailed the “climate and vulnerability” aspect—namely, the idea that the climate can force animals out of their homes on a whim—she decided to integrate World War II themes into the piece. She felt that invoking the War would remind people that they can be forced from their homes sometimes, too.

Thus, the six slow-motion joggers, who included Decker, were adorned with 1940s-style costumes and haircuts. In addition to their fish masks [fashioned to recall 40s-style fascinator hats], they wore fin-like wrist-attachments and makeup that resembled gills.

“The masks didn’t turn out anything like I thought they would,” said Anna Olliver, 23, who served as assistant art director for the performance. “I couldn’t help thinking that Lady Gaga would wear an outfit like this.”

Mercifully, DePorte was nearby to explain to passers-by what exactly was going on. “The idea is to use humor and evoke curiosity in order to get people thinking about climate change,” said DePorte. “It’s a complicated, sometimes boring, topic—so it wouldn’t be very effective if I just went up to people and asked, ‘Want to learn about climate change?’”

In addition to asking people if they had questions about the performance, DePorte also conducted video interviews with passers-by in which she asked if people felt “vulnerable” regarding the prospect of climate change.

“10 Days of Climate Action” started on Saturday, September 17th and will run until Monday, September 26th. Each day will feature a different performance, with the exception of Thursday, September 21st, on which “Evacuation” will run a repeat performance.