

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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The New York Times

How Do You Get Your Nature Fix?

By Natalie Proulx

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Kevi Lipe in the conceptual artist Rachel Lee Hovnanian's "NDD Immersion Room," which visitors cannot enter without surrendering their phones. The artist meticulously recreated a forest at night, indoors. Credit Yana Paskova for The New York Times

Do you enjoy spending time outside? Or do you prefer being indoors? Why?

In "[Nature With Chirps, but No Tweets](#)," Bob Morris writes:

Sometimes when Rachel Lee Hovnanian, a conceptual artist who lives in Manhattan, sees a hill, she will stop what she's doing to roll down it. She also likes lying under trees.

"As a tomboy in Ohio and then Texas, I was always outdoors," she recalled recently, while giving a tour of her current show at the Leila Heller gallery in Chelsea. "I would make mud pies, climb trees and go fishing and camping all the time."

Not doing much of anything in nature, she believes, especially in a time of pervasive smartphone and tech entertainment addiction, can be good for the imagination.

And that explains why her new exhibition has an "NDD Immersion Room," and why visitors are asked to give up their phones and have them locked up by staff members in glass boxes on the wall before entering.

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NDD stands for nature deficit disorder, a phrase coined by the writer Richard Louv in a 2005 book, “Last Child in the Woods.” Ms. Hovnanian first saw the term used on a psychology website called Positive Prescription, and it resonated with her own ideas about humans needing some contact with nature to be healthy, whether that means seeing mountains on the horizon or touching mud.

The artist’s Immersion Room is an elaborate indoor installation that meticulously recreates a forest at night. You enter with lanterns, one or two at a time through mirrored swinging doors, to walk on leaves and a wood stump path under towering, fragrant fir trees. The sound of crickets and rushing water fills the darkness. A fake campfire flickers under an artificial sky full of stars where there’s a log to sit on or a camping cot for anyone who cares to lie down. All of this is next to the West Side Highway.

Students: Read the entire article, then tell us:

– What do you think of Ms. Hovnanian’s art exhibit? Would you give up your phone to spend time in the “NDD Immersion Room”?

– Do you agree with the artist that humans need some contact with nature to be healthy? Why or why not?

– How do you get your nature fix? Where do you go to experience the great outdoors? How do you spend your time there?

– Do you think people today spend enough time outdoors? Do you spend as much time in nature as you would like? If not, what are some things that prevent you from doing so?

– How does being in nature benefit you? Do you feel more relaxed, revived, stimulated, challenged, connected or inspired? Do you think you can get these feelings only from being outside? Why or why not?

Students 13 and older are invited to comment. All comments are moderated by the Learning Network staff, but please keep in mind that once your comment is accepted, it will be made public.