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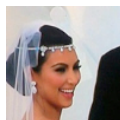


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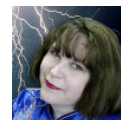
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Dancing with Ataxia: Erica Lehrer's Poetry Book Launch at McMurtrey Gallery

By Altamese Osborne Fri., Oct. 7 2011 at 1:00 PM
Categories: [Books](#), [Visual Arts](#)

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Art Attack arrived early to McMurtrey Gallery for the launch of Erica Lehrer's book of poems, *Dancing with Ataxia*, on Thursday. The gallery was empty, except for Lehrer, whose smiling face lit up the room. For a few precious moments, it was just us, and Lehrer graciously talked at length about her disease, her book of poetry and how she remains optimistic through it all.



Lehrer was diagnosed

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Erica Lehrer and Howard Sherman
with Multiple System

Atrophy, a rare neurological disease, about a year ago. The disease, which is incurable, has severely limited her walking, balance and speech.

"My husband thought I was forging my checks," said Lehrer, laughing.

When she found she could no longer talk, she started writing poetry to cope.

"Poetry is very freeing," said the former journalist. "I liked the fact that there were no constraints, no limits and no subject matters."

Subjects in *Dancing with Ataxia* range from love, to love lost, to Lehrer's dealings with and eventual acceptance of the disease. For inspiration, she reads poetry each day. Some of her favorites are [Wisława Szymborska](#), who won the Nobel Prize in 1995, and [Tony Hoagland](#), a Houston-based poet who writes whimsical satire.

A few minutes later, artist and book cover illustrator [Howard Sherman](#) joined the poet, and the pair explained that their meeting at a studio residency in Vermont became synergistic when they discovered they were both Houstonians. Lehrer, who was in the process of completing her book, asked Sherman to illustrate the cover, and he did so willingly,

"It seemed like a good fit," Sherman said.

Pretty soon guests began pouring in. Lehrer signed every book sold with a personalized "E" and "R" stamp, plus her warm, heartfelt smile. While she was busy, we stole away to check out Sherman's art, currently on display at McMurtrey.

Although his paintings are abstract, there is a colored theme to each. His "silk gloves and popsicles" acrylic-and-marker piece is a purple, yellow and black mix of squiggly thin and thick paint strokes and globs of purple goo. Pop phrases like "yes!" and "when? what?" are sprinkled throughout. The wordplay and color themes continue on to "cement shoes," an abstract painting of a white cow covered in pastel blue swirls with silver forks sticking out its side. The piece's funny climax is the cow holding a cigar with a piece of tape that masquerades as a watch.



Message over style, style over message

The burnt-orange, lime-green and yellow painting in a corner of the gallery is Sherman's

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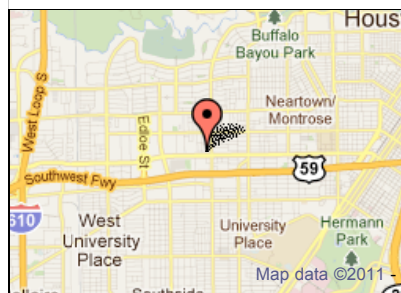
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80-by-70-inch "Message over style, style over message," and is also the cover of the book. Words like "pinky," "pimp hand" and "No more rides for free" are inked onto the neurotic painting. Sherman, a former newspaper cartoonist, said that he and Lehrer chose that particular piece for its high-energy and poetic feel, which is what the latter wanted to convey as the theme of her book.

"It's very hard to maintain a sense of humor [about this disease]," Lehrer said. "But, I'm a very optimistic person."

Proceeds from book sales go to the [National Ataxia Foundation](#) and to [Princeton's Neuroscience Institute](#). Sherman's show is until October 15. To get in touch with poet or painter, contact [McMurtrey Gallery](#) at 713-523-8238.

Location Info

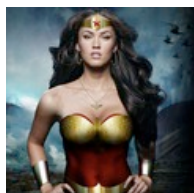


McMurtrey Gallery
3508 Lake St., Houston, TX
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Caroline Fallon 3 weeks ago

Erica, how I wish that I could have been there today. Will you really be here in January? You must stay with us in the country. Christopher feels jealous that he has not met you. We can't wait to read your new book of poems.

All my Love,
Caroline

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SANDY HAYNES 2 weeks ago

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

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