



Image Bending: Spanish artist transforms downtown Houston office atrium with *Waves*

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An email from my old Caroline Collective office mate, John Carrithers, read, "You have to see this." He was talking about Daniel Canogar's *Waves* in 2 Houston Center.

Carrithers was in the process of making a film on the installation of *Waves*, a sculptural LED installation designed specifically for the atrium of the downtown office building. Kinzelman Art Consulting worked with building management team CBRE on behalf of the owners of the Houston Center to bring the Spanish artist to Houston.

Carrithers knew that the content — human movement used in an extraordinary way in a public space — would be right up the alley of my sensibilities, and he was right. One visit to Canogar's website and I was on my way to 2 Houston Center.

The images in *Waves* come from the actual office workers crawling in various patterns. It's witty, beautiful and actually elicits movement from the viewer to fully take in the piece.

This is the first time the Spanish artist's work has been seen in Houston. Canogar has just finished *Quadratura* for Bildmuseet, Art and Visual Culture, Umeå, Sweden, and *Crossroad* for Borusan Contemporary in Istanbul, Turkey. We had a chance to visit before he headed back to Spain.

CultureMap: When you first saw the site at 2 Houston Center, what were your initial thoughts? The building is so square and *Waves* is about spirals, so there's such a contrast.

Daniel Canogar: I was initially interested in how the public used the space. There were some very set trajectories that, after a while, become apparent to me: From the garage elevators to elevator banks and back, from elevator banks to 1 Houston Center and back, and from elevator banks to escalators. I found a high position in the second level to observe these crisscrossing pathways and this helped me to start envisioning what the final piece could look like. It was also very important to try to imagine how the piece would be experienced by the public walking along the above-mentioned routes through the space.

CM: During the opening, I watched people stop in their tracks when they looked up to see it. I also visited with a few of the actual crawlers. They loved the piece, and really enjoyed pointing out their fine performances to me. You must have a thing about crawling because it's appeared in some of your other works. It's particularly interesting in the context of *Waves*, because we usually don't much see business people in suits and skirts crawling. Why is this movement choice important to you?

DC: I'm fascinated by how vulnerable we become when we attempt to crawl as adults. It takes us back to our infancy, but it also becomes a very reptilian gesture. I'm interested in this primal kind of movement that seems so far away from how we normally negotiate space, yet was so crucial in our early days as humans. In the case of *Waves*, I created an event to capture building workers and tenants crawling along a green screen surface, video material that I then used for the final video of *Waves*. I love to create situations where adults can behave playfully in public spaces. It changes their relationship to that space forever. Our use of public space is too encoded and rigid, and through art, I'm interested in not only activating such spaces but engaging the public to become more aware of the spaces they traverse daily.

CM: In our first meeting, you questioned why we always have to look at video images on a stiff, flat screen. Waves certainly challenges that notion.

DC: My work has always explored ways of departing from the flat image, and creating art works with still or moving images that are three dimensional. In our hyper-saturated visual ecosystem, images surround us constantly. I'm interested in extending this experience to my art practice and explore what happens to us when the frame disappears.

I am also very keen to interrupt the static experience of looking at a framed piece of artwork, and invite the public to walk around and discover different aspects of the work. I want to incorporate our body's movement as a crucial element in the experience of an artwork. We spend too much time parked in front of screens (computer, television and theater screens). How do we cognitively process a screen that does not reveal itself from one vantage point? Reading the image in movement adds a whole other dimension to the experience of the spectator.

CM: How did you challenge yourself, especially in using materials created especially for this installation?

DC: One of the major challenges in the creation of Waves was finding an LED tile that was flexible enough to be able to adapt to complex curving shapes. I needed double-torquing tiles for the sculpture that I was envisioning for 2 Houston Center. I finally found a fabricator in China, Design LED Pro, that was able to create such

LED tiles for me. This is the first time they have been used, and I am thrilled by the results. As always, when developing new technologies, there were major obstacles along the way, but I now have a tool that will allow me to create new and audacious shapes previously impossible.

CM: Talk about the actual form of the structure, which takes the shape of a spiral, asking the viewer to move around it.

DC: The client was very interested in having an artwork that would activate the space, not just from the ground floor, but from multiple vantage points from the upper levels. When the viewer takes the escalators to P2 or P3 to



Photo by © John Carrithers
Daniel Canogar, Waves, LED screens, steel, 30-minute video, 24 feet long by 6 feet wide

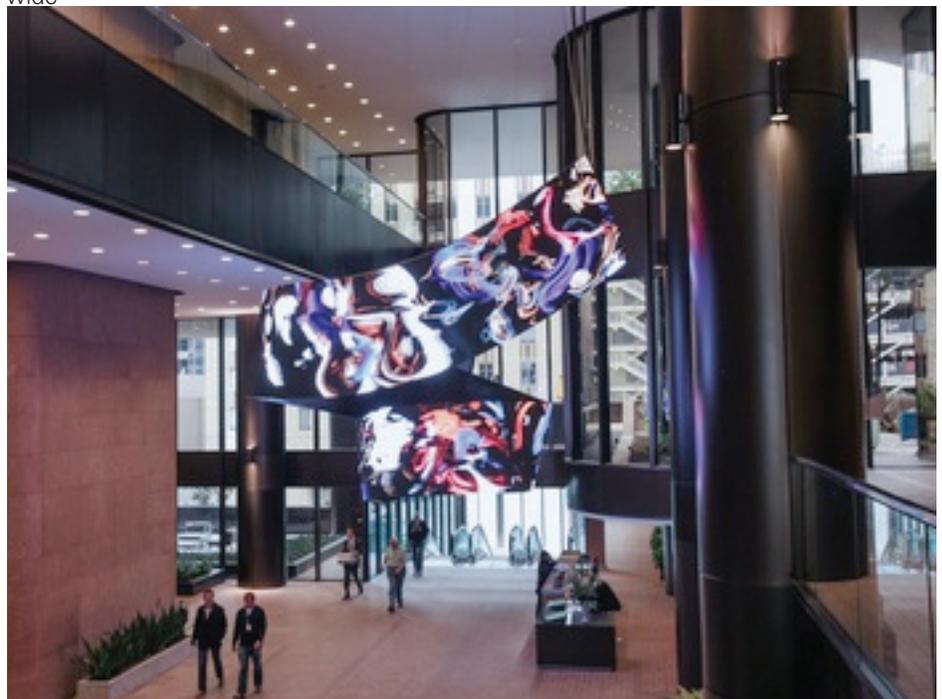


Photo by © John Carrithers
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experience the work from a different angle, he/she is also discovering the atrium and finding new areas to enjoy in the future. The work is as much about the physical object as how it relates to the space. It's very important for me that the LED screen bathes the atrium in light. It was inspired by a lot of post-minimal light artwork such as that of Dan Flavin and his use of colored fluorescent light.

CM: What were the instructions for the participants?

DC: Participants were invited to crawl along the green-screen platform, but also advance on their knees, roll, run and interact with other participants. I was also very keen on having participants make suggestions. Often this brings some of the best material to the final artwork. Another important aspect of these performative events is how participants become spectators of other participants. Actors become spectators, spectators are invited to become actors. As they watch, they think of variations to the crawling experience, and challenge themselves to come up with new material. The green-screen events are always high-voltage creative experiences for me.

I want to activate the spectator to physically experience the work, have a more haptic contact with the work. This has always been a fundamental objective of my installations. Waves allows me to do this with screens in a way that wasn't possible in the past. I am already coming up with crazier and more complex shapes that I hope I will be able to apply in future commissions.

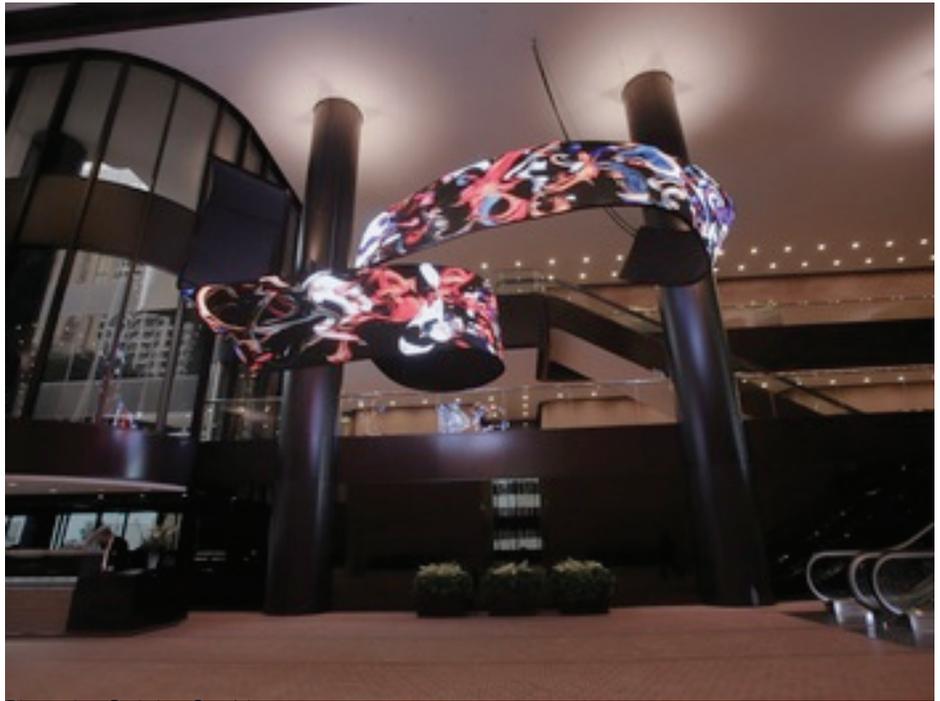


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Natali Leduc, Ma Chengwei and Daniel Canogar work on the installation