



'Airborne' poetry to play with shadows

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Shadowy activities were under way after dark Wednesday on an open lawn across from Virginia Arts Festival headquarters in Norfolk.

Art was happening. Although, not exactly happening at the moment.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, who has been pioneering the art form of interactive video projection since 1995, was setting up a new piece to be premiered tonight.

"Airborne" will consist of about a 100-foot-by-100-foot projection onto a plain parking garage wall. Poetry will be projected and passers-by will be encouraged to walk in front of the two super-bright projectors so that their shadows will appear on the wall.

As these visitors move around, their gestures will disturb the letters of the poems, causing them to twirl around. Also, their shadows will appear to emit smoke that will swirl around, eventually rising to a portion of the garage wall that resembles, but is not, a chimney.

That was the plan, and it had worked in his studio back in Montreal. By 10 p.m. Wednesday, here in Norfolk, the artist and his team had gotten the letters to disperse as his production manager, Julie Bourgeois, waved her arms in front of the projectors. The smoke also was starting to come, but not off her moving figure.

"It's beginning," said the artist, who looked more energized than disheartened by the technical challenges. "Just the beginning."

"The night is young," he said to Bill Hennessey, director of the Chrysler Museum of Art, who first saw Lozano-Hemmer's work at the 2007 Venice Biennale, a kind of world's fair for contemporary art.

"Come back at 6 a.m."

The Chrysler is presenting "Airborne" tonight through April 28 in association with the Virginia Arts Festival. For 10 consecutive nights, anyone may play with the shadows from 8 to 11 p.m.

Lozano-Hemmer found his art form in 1995, when he created his first interactive video projection.

It was a way to bring together parts of himself. He has a chemistry degree, which means he has a scientific mind able to grasp complex technology. He has worked in theater, so he enjoys both the team and performance aspect.

Poetry often enters his work. It's a lifelong enthusiasm, partly because he is related to the Nobel Prize-winning Mexican poet Octavio Paz. Lozano-Hemmer was born and raised in Mexico, until his parents split and his mother took him to Spain. At 17, he moved alone to Canada and put himself through school.

Lozano-Hemmer has done well, able to hire a full-time staff of eight to 10. New York's Museum of Modern Art and London's Tate Modern have featured his work.

And he succeeded this week. Speaking from the airport Thursday morning, he said they had finally gotten the art piece to work. "At 6:30 a.m."