

Art of Statistics that Runs the World

by Express News Service

KOCHI: For Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, the Mexican-Canadian artist at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2014, it is difficult not to bring up Nobel laureate and popular Mexican ambassador to India, Octavio Paz, in relation. Not only because the celebrated Paz is widely-translated into Indian languages and he started the now-defunct Triennale, but also because he is the uncle of Lozano-Hemmer.



"I first interviewed him when I was 18 and I met him a few times after that. My romanticism on India comes from him. He always spoke with reverence about this country," says the 47-year-old artist. Lozano-Hemmer creates pioneering technology-driven installations that include and work through his audience. And there is a politics that never escapes his works, much like his the late legendary uncle who essayed his concern for the people through writings.

For KMB '14, the artist plays with a relatively new concept - "speaker as pixel"- where speakers are arranged country-wise in sets according to their military spending with relation to their GDP. They are fixed with motion sensors that detect the presence of a visitor and the country's names light up and they play the national anthems corresponding to the visitor's movements, letting out an indecipherable cacophony.

"This is my latest obsession... I am researching the density of sound through the cacophony that is created. I was very excited to come to Kochi and work in the context of the show," said the artist, who feels that this biennale is a paradise for artists.

'Pan-anthem' is a new work that Lozano-Hemmer has designed to "make tangible the statistics that runs our world". It arranges countries, represented by speakers playing national anthems, in sections according to their military spending, with the lowest spenders - Congo, Madagascar and Timor Leste - starting at the left and graduating to high spenders - the US, Oman, Israel, the UAE, Singapore and Saudi Arabia. India comes within the \$31-\$47 million spending bracket, while Pakistan comes in the \$73-\$118 set. Though it seems like a political work, according to the affable artist "this is just an experiment with data; my work does try to make links to social and historical issues, but this is not the

main focus”.

Over the years, the artist has been commissioned to create interactive technology-driven works in Mexico City’s Zocalo Square to commemorate the year 2000, in Europe and the US, that end up making sometimes humorous statements about anti-consumerism or people’s interactions with one another.

Lozano-Hemmer’s work is partially supported by the Mexican Embassy in India and Ambassador Jamie Nualart accompanied the artist on his visit here. “It is a work of extraordinary talent, creativity and politics. It is full of surprises,” says Nualart.