

"Rafael Lozano-Hemmer at the MAC: An embodied experience," *CISION*, May 23 2018.

CISION®

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer at the MAC: An embodied experience News Provided by Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal May 23, 2018 10:30ET

MONTREAL, May 23, 2018 /CNW Telbec/ - The Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (MAC) has the great privilege of hosting the largest-ever solo show in Canada or the United States by Montreal-based and internationally-acclaimed artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. *Unstable Presence* is a major survey of Lozano-Hemmer's work over the past 18 years, bringing together 21 pieces, including several large-scale immersive installations. In his work, Lozano-Hemmer draws on science, technology, politics, sociology, poetry, music and art history, nourishing a rich conversation with the public. From May 24 to September 9, 2018, the MAC invites visitors to an unusual and unique museum experience in which they are encouraged to interact with the exhibition, becoming a part of the artworks.



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Vicious Circular Breathing*, 2013 Class room, below, tubes, brown papree bags, manifold valve system
Courtesy Borusan Contemporary Istanbul (c) Rafael Lozano-Hemmer / SODRAC, Montréal / CEGAP, MADRID (2018)
Photo: Mariana Yañez (CNW Group/Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal)

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: *Unstable Presence* is co-organized by the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). The exhibition is co-curated by Lesley Johnstone, Curator and Head of Exhibitions and Education, François LeTourneux, Associate Curator at the MAC and Rudolf Frieling, Curator of Media Arts at SFMOMA. The exhibition will travel to Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey (MARCO), Mexico, in 2019 and to the SFMOMA, from April 25 to September 6, 2020.

Born in Mexico and proud Montrealer, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is a leading international figure in participatory and digital-media practices. He is highly visible on the world stage, where his work is regularly shown in the most prestigious institutions. During the 1990s, he began exploring the performative potential of interaction and, in particular, the integration of various artistic disciplines through technology, which he describes as “the language of our time”, the use of which has become “inevitable”.

“Limitless talent, ambition and intellectual curiosity animate Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s enormous and wide-ranging output, spanning theatrical interactive installations in public spaces to small intimate experiences in galleries. Robotics, surveillance and computers undergird Lozano-Hemmer’s elegant and exciting cross-disciplinary artistic achievement.”

– John Zeppetelli, Director and Chief Curator at the MAC

The participatory and technological aspects of Lozano-Hemmer’s work are imbued with the notion of co-presence, where live and recorded data overlap. Through the use of microphones, face-recognition algorithms, biometric scanners and computerized surveillance, artworks interact with the visitors in performances that are sometimes both playful and intimate. However, the technology that underlies the interaction often echoes more troubling social, economic and political dynamics.

Showing how we interact with technology and making the internal mechanisms of devices visible is one of the strategies deployed in Lozano-Hemmer’s works. As you walk through the exhibition, the physical presence of the works and their sculptural occupation of space, provide an important counterweight to the argument of digital “dematerialization.”

“Each visitor’s engagement with the technology gives them a key role in the construction of the experience, but also reminds them that the device is part of a much bigger social system in which technology, economics and politics are intertwined in complex and often problematic ways.”

– Lesley Johnstone and François LeTourneux, co-curators of the exhibition, MAC

SCULPTURAL WORKS ACTIVATED BY THE VISITORS’ PRESENCE

Beyond the devices themselves, the life brought into the space through the use of light and shadow, human voices and the spontaneous dance of gesture and interaction adds a poetic materiality to the exhibition.

This note is impressively struck in *Pulse Spiral*, 2008, where 300 light bulbs and kilometres of electrical wire are configured to reproduce, through light, the beating hearts of the Museum’s visitors. The magical and evanescent spiral of light betrays the undeniable fascination one may feel as one actually sees one’s heartbeat, but also to see it in concert with the recordings of the previous 299 participants.

Music lovers will be delighted and alarmed by *Sphere Packing: Bach*, 2018 — a new work by the artist presented for the very first time — and *Sphere Packing: Wagner*, 2013. These installations are two in a series of 17 works that concentrate the entire musical production of a composer into a single multi-channel sphere. The black-glazed porcelain sphere dedicated to Richard Wagner (13 centimetres comprising 110 channels of sound) hangs from the ceiling and visitors have to bring their ear up close in order to hear the individual compositions. The far more prolific composer, Johann Sebastian Bach, required 1,128 individual speakers distributed through a 3-metre sphere that visitors may physically enter and thus immerse themselves in the totality of the Baroque composer’s opuses, played simultaneously.

In *Call on Water*, 2016, the writings of celebrated Mexican poet Octavio Paz, who was the artist’s uncle, are

presented in a fountain that acts as a poetry machine. The water is turned into cold vapour by ultrasonic atomizers, which project the words into the air above the basin for a few compelling instants. Contemplative and poetic, the work highlights the materiality of language and converts it, as the poet would probably have appreciated, into a breathable atmosphere.

In a whole different register, one which engages with power relations and surveillance equipment, *Zoom Pavilion*, 2015, made in collaboration with Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko, is a room-sized interactive installation where participants are surrounded by projected black-and-white images of faces and bodies localized within the space. Twelve computerized surveillance cameras track the presence of participants and, employing facial recognition combined with background subtraction and machine-learning algorithms, record their spatial relationships to one another. The piece makes evident the omnipresence of surveillance cameras, but what is at stake is the tracking of public assembly, and keeping an archive of how long and how far each visitor was from each other.

Vicious Circular Breathing, 2013, (photo) is a large sculptural installation evoking both a curious scientific device and a gigantic musical wind instrument, similar to an organ. It consists of brown paper bags that inflate and deflate at human breathing rates, a set of motorized bellows and valves that control the bags, and a sealed glass room with a decompression chamber. Visitors are invited to enter the glass chamber to breathe the air that was previously breathed by earlier participants. Despite its amusing musical allusions, the piece is disturbing and uncomfortable: it includes warnings regarding the risks of asphyxiation, contagion and panic. Among other interpretations, the piece is a statement on the limits of the planet's resources but also a commentary on the supposedly empowering culture of participation, — in this piece your participation makes the air more toxic for future visitors.

Biography

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, who was born in Mexico City in 1967, lives and works in Montréal. He was the first artist to represent Mexico at the Venice Biennale, with an exhibition at the Palazzo Van Axel in 2007. He has also shown at biennials and triennials in Cuenca, Havana, Istanbul, Kōchi, Liverpool, Melbourne, Montréal, Moscow, New Orleans, New York, Seoul, Seville, Shanghai, Singapore and Sydney. Lozano-Hemmer's artistic production has been featured in solo exhibitions and performances in numerous institutions, including the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City (2015), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) (2012), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2011), the Manchester Art Gallery (2010), the Guggenheim Museum, New York (2009) and the Barbican Centre, London (2008). His public art has been commissioned for events such as the Millennium Celebrations in Mexico City (1999), the Expansion of the European Union in Dublin (2004), the Student Massacre Memorial in Tlatelolco (2008), the Vancouver Winter Olympics (2010) and the pre-opening exhibition of the Guggenheim Museum in Abu Dhabi (2015). His work may be found in the collections of such museums as the Museum of Modern Art (New York), SFMOMA, Guggenheim Museum (New York) and Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington) in the United States, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal, Art Gallery of Ontario (Toronto), Vancouver Art Gallery and Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (Québec) in Canada, the Tate Modern (London), Science Museum (London) and Manchester Art Gallery in the United Kingdom, the Colección Jumex (Mexico City) and MUAC (Mexico City) in Mexico, the Museum of Old and New Art (Hobart) and National Gallery of Victoria in Australia, the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (Karlsruhe) in Germany and many others. He is represented by bitforms gallery (New York), Art Bärtschi & Cie (Geneva), Max Estrella (Madrid) and Future\|Pace (worldwide).