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Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, a technological humanist in Montreal By Jaime Porrás Ferreyre May 26, 2018

The Mexican artist inaugurates the Unstable Presence exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art of this city, which includes several of his most recognized works



The installation Vicious Circular Breathing of Lozano-Hemmer MUAC

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (Mexico City, 1967) is in Canada since he was 17 years old. He graduated as a physicist, although the artistic creation knocked on his door quickly, first integrating a performance group and then focusing on the artistic possibilities of electronics. "Electronic art is a performing art. I do not rely on objects or something permanent. I am interested in the ephemeral and what happens with the participation of the public. Something ludic or fearful may arise. It is not known and I like that: that I do not control the outcome of the work. People participate in the aesthetic experience," says Lozano-Hemmer.

The interaction is at the center of the creative universe of the Mexican artist. His works for public spaces have

endorsed it. One example was *Elevación Vectorial* (1999), in which he invited Internet users to design light sculptures in the zocalo of Mexico City. Another was *Solar Equation* (2010), an installation in Melbourne that consisted of a replica of the sun on which projected images of the star taken by NASA, but that attendees could change by mobile devices.

This need for the public to be a part of the work has also recurrently appeared in the pieces by Lozano-Hemmer exhibited in biennials, museums and galleries around the world. The MoMA in New York, the Tate Gallery in London, the Venice Biennale and other spaces of importance have witnessed this. From 24 May to 9 September, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal -in co - production with modern art San Francisco- offers exposure *Unstable Presence* (*unstable Presence*), which brings together 21 of the most recognized works in the Mexican career. Montreal is not just another city for Lozano-Hemmer; He spends most of the year in this city, where he opened in 2003 *Antimodular Research*, his creative studio that welcomes 14 collaborators (linguists, programmers, architects, among other experts).

The pieces exhibited in Montreal reveal the issues that concern Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. "I am very interested in making tangible invisible processes that are always with us," he says. Thus, issues such as memory, presence, forms of control and violence appear thanks to the participation of the public, under a vast range of technological resources. Lozano-Hemmer has recognized the influence of creators such as Jochen Gerz, Buckminster Fuller, Marta Minujín, Gyula Kosice and the Mexican *estridentistas*.

In *Zoom Pavillion* (2015), located in the first room of the exhibition, Lozano-Hemmer presents -in collaboration with the Polish Krzysztof Wodiczko- an installation where black and white images taken by surveillance cameras are reflected in the walls, making use of facial recognition systems in visitors and algorithms to monitor their relationships in time and space. In this way, the environment acquires Orwellian tints. Meters later it appears *Vicious Circular Breathing* (2013), an imposing system of tubes, valves and paper bags that ends in a sealed cabin. There, individuals should breathe the air left by previous visitors, in an anonymous interaction typical of everyday life.

"Unlimited talent, ambition and intellectual curiosity animate the varied production of Lozano-Hemmer," says John Zeppetelli, general director of the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art. Two works exemplify the Mexican interest in other disciplines of art. The first one is *Call on Water* (2016), a kind of aquatic mirror in which when a person approaches a mechanism that releases words in the form of steam is activated. The words are fragments of some poems by Octavio Paz, uncle of Lozano-Hemmer. The second one is *Sphere Packing: Johann Sebastian Bach* (2017), shown for the first time to the public. It is a sphere where a visitor is surrounded by 1,128 small speakers, which emit fragments of the same number of compositions of the renowned musician.

"You have to use technology in art to criticize, resist, dialogue, look for poetic situations. We can not separate it from us. Marshall McLuhan already pointed out by saying that it is not possible to detach ourselves from technology because it is like a second skin," says Lozano-Hemmer. The *Unstable Presence* exhibition will arrive at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Monterrey in August 2019 and the Modern Art Museum in San Francisco in September 2020.