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## Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, techno-poet

By Eric Clément May 22, 2018 13:28



The artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in front of his last work, *Spherical Stack: Bach*, with 1128 small speakers, sometimes simultaneously retransmits the entire work of Johann Sebastian Bach, composed of 1128 musical creations.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is one of the stars of international art. Exhibited, collected and rewarded everywhere on the planet, the Montrealer of Mexican origin is the subject, from Thursday to the Museum of Contemporary Art, a presentation of its production of interactive installations for 10 years.

Connect the world from Montreal

For 15 years, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and his team have been creating in Montreal, in the utmost discretion, highly sophisticated installations presented in prestigious institutions all over the world. If the artist chose the city, it is the best place to produce media art, he said in an interview with *La Presse*.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer does not know how to draw or paint. Yet he is one of the most important artists of our time. The Montrealer born in Mexico City in 1967 built his reputation by combining his scientific background with his humanistic reflections to create works that use video, electronics, light and artificial intelligence.

Programming is at the source of his experiential art. Supported by his associates, he juggles with electronic circuits, network control devices, 3D graphics, 3D printing, virtual reality, LED arrays, sensors / sensors, smart phones and audiovisual technologies. All this to develop an interactive experience with participants who do not realize the complexity of its design. This is the signature Rafael Lozano-Hemmer.

This gives spectacular creations, as we saw in Montreal in 2011 during the Triennale québécoise, with powerful projectors manipulated by passersby on the Place des Festivals or at Madison Square Park in New York, in 2008, where the intensity of light beams depended on the heartbeat of visitors. Relational architectural works that transform the urban space.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer exhibits permanently in London, Boston, Santa Fe, Nashville, Hobart (Australia), Quebec (MNBAQ) and Montreal (Manulife House and Phi Center). At the same time, he has these days temporary exhibitions in Paris, Seoul, Cologne, Leipzig, Boston, Raleigh and Anchorage! Fifty collections own his works, including the Guggenheim of New York, the Hirshhorn of Washington and the Tate of London.

#### A rewarding filiation

Born in Mexico and Germany, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer lived in Spain before coming to study in Canada at the age of 17. His roots (an inventor grandfather, a Zapotec grandmother, an uncle poet and parents who own nightclubs) have shaped his character.

“My parents’ clubs, which opened up to diversity when homophobia was common in Mexico, influenced me because they are places of light where you can be someone else. And I like this idea of otherness. “

At that time, he wanted to be a chemist. His parents (a father who has married three times and a mother who has married six times!) Have encouraged his scientific fiber. He then coiled in the universe of probabilities, systematic approach and rationality.

Lozano-Hemmer is an intellectual of the technological art, inspired by his uncle, Octavio Paz. From the 1990 Nobel Prize for Literature, he understood the importance of diffusion. If the Mexican poet wanted to bring people together around words, his nephew chose to do so with media art.

He says that with the man of letters, he spoke of his readings as post-structuralist authors. It was his philosophical period in Montreal. “I was a big consumer of French theory ,” he says. This has contributed to my work, in terms of connectivity, algorithms, virtuality evoked by Gilles Deleuze. “

During his studies in chemistry, in Victoria then at Concordia University, he attended choreographers, composers, actors and writers, which led him on the path of art. He presented a performance at the Article gallery in 1988, directed “electronic theater” before going to teach in Madrid in 1992.

His wife, Susie Ramsay, graduated in choreography from UQAM and Montreal being more conducive to performance and contemporary dance, they decided to return to Montreal, where they founded their studio, Antimodular Research, in 2003.

Connect by revealing

In 1992, Lozano-Hemmer put technology at the service of art. Superficial tension consisted of a human eye that followed all the people passing by. Twenty-six years later, visitors will “chat” on Thursday at MAC with Pulsations spiral, a bunch of bulbs that record their heart rate.

“I try to create works that allow people to have an experience of their own,” he says. The challenge for the artist is to create ephemeral parentheses in people’s lives, eccentric readings in relation to the ambient logic. “

The exhibition will also present the MAC vicious circular breathing , an installation that invites the visitor ... to become intoxicated by breathing stale air! A work on the importance of a healthy environment.



Vicious circular breathing ( Vicious Circular Breathing ) was exhibited in 2016 at MUAC Mexico City, Mexico.  
PHOTO MARIANA YAÑEZ, BY RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

“Art is not only about shapes and colors, it’s also the way to address serious issues,” says the artist whose relationship art addresses video surveillance, the power of the internet, violations of human rights or the idea of co-presence.

“My work describes the language of our time that allows us to write new stories,” says Rafael Lozano-Hemmer.

In osmosis with Montreal

Very attached to his Latin ancestry, the artist is in osmosis with Montreal. He would not create anywhere else. “Montreal is the best place in the world to produce media art. Because of its four universities, video game students are able to work with us, but also because of its diversity. “

“In my team of 14 people, half men, half women, six countries are represented. And the quality of life here

makes integration easier. “

He could produce elements of his creations for 10 times cheaper in Mexico, but not in optimal conditions, he says. “My programmers could win twice as much in the United States, but Montreal is perfect for keeping them. They fall in love with the city and learn French! And I work with Pierre Fournier, a master of steel and aluminum who collaborates with Patrick Bernatchez or Michel de Broin. I could not find anyone so good anywhere else in the world. “

The social at the heart of its future

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer says he tries to reinvent himself with each creation, with the help, sometimes, generous patrons, as the Turkish foundation Borusan Contemporary who acquired 12 of his pieces. The artist sometimes has dreams of greatness for his studio. “Like Olafur Eliasson and his 100 assistants in Berlin!” He says.

But he keeps his feet on the ground. “I do not want to become a factory. On the contrary, I aspire to be less prolific, to create more in the tradition of long, slow and silent intellectual pursuits. And I would like to do social work, on issues like refugees, education, oppressed people. Because I am a citizen and it is one of the responsibilities of the artist. “