

Lozano-Hemmer defies world of surveillance through interactive art

By Woo Jae-yeon

SEOUL, May 3 (Yonhap) -- The Mexico-born Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer on Thursday, quite intriguingly, deferred giving comments on his show in Korea. He also said that he doesn't have any control over his artworks once they are installed.

"I don't have a comment before the show. I will have comments after the show. My pieces are out of control. I don't control the content," he said during a media event held at the Amorepacific Museum of Art (APMA), an art space located in the basement of the cosmetic company's newly built headquarters in Yongsan, central Seoul.

"In the end, it is the public that makes the decisions."



Artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer explains his artwork titled "Airborne Newscast" at the Amorepacific Museum of Art on May 3, 2018. (Yonhap)



A visitor checks out "Surface Tension" by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer at the Amorepacific Museum of Art on May 3, 2018. (Yonhap)

As cryptic as it might sound, his artworks, 29 pieces in total, indeed become only complete with people's active participation. Throughout the press event, he underlined the importance of interaction and connection between the artworks and audience.

"If there is nobody in the piece, the piece does not exist," he said.

Lozano-Hemmer, who defined himself more of a performance artist than a media or electronic artist, uses visitors' voices, heartbeats, movements and even fingerprints to make art.

"Airborne Newscast," a shadow play of sorts, projects onto a wall text images of news collected around the world. By using sensors that track visitors' movements, the visitors' shadows create bellowing smoke, which poetically disperses the texts on the wall.

In another piece, "Voice Array," visitors' voices are collected through an intercom and turned into light. With each new recording, a previous one -- in the form of flashing light -- is pushed down and gradually disappears.



A visitor interacts with "Sandbox," an artwork by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer at the Amorepacific Museum of Art on May 3, 2018. (Yonhap)

The large interactive installation "Sandbox" enables people to enjoy the artwork on three scales, according to the artist.

One is the big scale of an artificial beach, another is the small scale of a sandbox and the last is a normal, lifesize scale of "just being able to exchange your position with others." A participant can play with the sandbox, where the image of one's hands is projected live on the artificial beach.

In another fun piece, he created what he called a "speech bubble" in 3-D printing technology.

"When we speak, we create a turbulence of air. It is an incredible feeling that air inside of you that's private becomes public and shared," he said. By using a laser tomography system that produces a density graph, he scanned the air of people exhaling and printed it in aluminum.



The image provided by the Amorepacific Museum of Art and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is of the artist. (Yonhap)

Born in 1967 in Mexico City, he earned his bachelor's degree in physical chemistry at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.

Interested in the effects of advancing technology on art and human life, he has created a series of interactive installation artworks to start conversations about the subject.

His Seoul show underlines the need to talk about how "violence of technology" like facial recognition, fingerprinting, and the control system used by police and military is on the verge of "enslaving" people.

The use of technology, he said, is inevitable "because it is the language of our time" and "our second skin." He wonders how the Korean audience will react to his work.

"I am very curious to see if people find the works more playful and seductive or they would find them violent."

His solo show "Decision Forest," his first in Asia and the opening show of the newly relocated museum, will continue until Aug. 26.



The image provided by the Amorepacific Museum of Art shows the artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in front of "Blue Sun." (Yonhap)