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## 'We as Artists Need to Intervene': Watch Rafael Lozano-Hemmer Build an Interactive Art Installation That Straddles the US-Mexico Border

As part of a collaboration with Art21, hear news-making artists describe their inspirations in their own words.

**Caroline Goldstein**, October 8, 2020



Production still from "Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in 'Borderlands,'" an extended presentation of the artist's segment from "Art in the Twenty-First Century," Season 10. © Art21, Inc. 2020.

If you happened to be in El Paso, Texas or Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua back in 2019 and looked up at the night sky, you may have seen what looked like search lights beaming over the landscape as voices echoed across the US-

Mexico border.

Those lights were part of a large-scale outdoor installation by Mexican-born artist [Rafael Lozano-Hemmer](https://art21.org/artist/rafael-lozano-hemmer/) (<https://art21.org/artist/rafael-lozano-hemmer/>), whose participatory works employ advanced technology like robotics and heart-rate sensors to inspire civic engagement. In an exclusive interview as part of Art21's brand new season of "Art in the Twenty-First Century," (<https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s10/rafael-lozano-hemmer-in-borderlands-extended-segment/>) Lozano-Hemmer describes the work, titled *Border Tuner*, which he conceived as an antidote to the commentary on President Trump's border wall.



Production still from "Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in 'Borderlands,'" an extended presentation of the artist's segment from "Art in the Twenty-First Century," Season 10. © Art21, Inc. 2020.

"People there are sick of the wall," Lozano-Hemmer explains. "They want to talk about the ways in which the two societies interpenetrate." That's why the artist came up with the poetic "symbolic bridge" that converted voices into lights, allowing individuals to speak for themselves, as well as for others who may not have a platform.

"Perhaps the most important role that art can play is that of making complexity visible," [Lozano-Hemmer tells Art21](https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s10/rafael-lozano-hemmer-in-borderlands-extended-segment/) (<https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s10/rafael-lozano-hemmer-in-borderlands-extended-segment/>). "We as artists need to intervene and complicate things to show the dynamics and the interrelations that take place between the two sides." In *Border Tuner* and other light installations, the artist is able to "interrupt the normal ways" of communicating, allowing everyday people to step into abstract, creative roles.

Watch the video, which originally appeared as part of Art21's series *Art in the Twenty-First Century* below. The brand new 10th season of the show is available now at [Art21.org](https://art21.org).

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in "Borderlands" - Extended Segme...



*This is an installment of "Art on Video," a collaboration between Artnet News and Art21 that brings you clips of newsmaking artists. A new series of the nonprofit Art21's flagship series Art in the Twenty-First Century is available now on PBS. Catch all episodes of other series like New York Close Up and Extended Play and learn about the organization's educational programs at [Art21.org \(https://art21.org/\)](https://art21.org/).*

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