

ABSENCE AND PRESENCE
ARE NOT OPPOSITES

RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

Art Critic and Writer Maja Markovic in Conversation with Mexican-Canadian electronic artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer about his inspirations, his art and his new commissioned work at Borusan Contemporary.

To begin with, please tell us a little about your work. What is it you endeavour to discover or reveal in your art? When asked about what you do, how would you describe your artistic practice?

My work is mostly at the intersection of architecture and performance art. I develop audiovisual platforms for public interaction: many pieces are about self-representation, intimacy, agency and the key idea that absence and presence are not opposites. The content of my work is often derived from participation, typically through technologies that are both violent and seductive.

With a B.Sc. in Physical Chemistry, what made you go down the artistic route?

Friends, family and ADHD.

Who or what would you say are your greatest inspirations and motivations?

The typical ones: Sol LeWitt, Agnes Martin, Luis Buñuel, Chuck D.

Which works do you consider particularly significant in your oeuvre and could you tell us more about them?

"Voz Alta" was a memorial for the 40th Anniversary of the Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico City. For this project an uncensored megaphone placed at the site of the killings converted people's voices into powerful light beams and FM radio signals that could be seen and heard from everywhere in the city.
http://lozano-hemmer.com/voz_alta.php

When it comes to your installations, do you choose locations that will best serve the ideas or are the works created to adapt to any environment?

Half and half.



BIFURCATION
SHADOW OBJECT 2
2012
Projection
Photo: Antimodular
Research

As the modern world has become divided between digital and analog realities, the lines between the imagined world, dreams, and 'the real' have become increasingly obscure. How much do you want your installations to retain their technical presence and to what extent do you aim for suspension of disbelief?

I work with dissimulation rather than simulation. I don't want anyone to suspend their disbelief, exactly the opposite: I aim for everyone to be complicit with the artificiality of the project.

Your 'relational' art is reliant on a relationship between the artwork and the public, inhabiting spaces and creating zones of communication. Tell us about the importance of platforms of viewing in your art. Is there a particular medium or method of display with which you enjoy working most?



THE YEAR'S MIDNIGHT, 2010
High resolution interactive display
with built-in computerized
surveillance system
Photo: Marco Casado

Certainly work in public space is the most rewarding from the perspective of diversity and unchoreographed behaviour. This is not to say that public space is 'neutral' or completely unpredictable, but taking the same project from one city to another affords great surprises.

How do you think the role of science and technology in art has shifted in the contemporary art world in the last few years?

The role of science continues to be minimal in contemporary art, except for a few nerds like myself who are inspired by its crazy developments. Technology, on the other hand, has become the language of globalization and so it is completely unavoidable, I might even call it 'natural'. Even if you are a painter your public watches an average of 8 hours of screen time per day so to pretend that somehow we are "outside" of technology is laughable. Pol Pot was the last one to try.

Tell us more about your newly commissioned work 'Vicious Circular Breathing' at Borusan Contemporary.

Vicious Circular Breathing is a hermetically-sealed installation that consists of a transparent glass room where people enter and breathe air that was already breathed by past participants. The breath is visualized using 81 brown paper bags which inflate and deflate within the normal range of human respiration, 8,000 and 30,000 times each day. The piece uses organ-like motorized bellows to make the stale air circulate and a set of electromagnetic valves to distribute the air to the bags. As the bags 'breathe' the crackling paper and the soft hum of the air flowing through the ribbed tubing create an eerie sound for the whole installation.

People are invited to enter the glass room through a decompression chamber and, once inside, the oxygen and carbon

**GLORIES OF
ACCOUNTING
2005**
Subsculpture 5
Photo: Antimodular
Research



dioxide levels are monitored constantly: two emergency doors open automatically in case these reach dangerous levels. It's totally optional, obviously, to walk in and breathe the recycled air or just stay outside and watch the valves, the room and the brown paper bags inflate and deflate.

What does the future have to bring in your work and explorations?

My next piece is a collaboration with polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko for the International Architecture Biennial in Beijing. He is an artist that I have always admired and I am thrilled to be able to work with him.