

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

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Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: *Lapsus Lumen*

@ [bitforms](#)

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by [Mitch Patrick](#)

NEW YORK — bitforms gallery is featuring a selection of new work from [Rafael Lozano-Hemmer](#) (<http://www.lozano-hemmer.com/>) (b. Mexico City, 1967), whose presenting six works in the exhibition titled *Lapsus Lumen*. The show consists of two large digital prints, and three interactive works: an inverted disco ball, an object- scanning / projection conveyor belt, and two motion activated screen based videos. Each piece touches on issues surrounding surveillance, mass data collection, and the body in it's relationship to the aforementioned. The artworks are humble in aesthetic presentation, neither audibly loud, or ecstatic with movement or color. Liken to the clandestine forms of company and government data collection programs, Hemmer's art work operates softly, the viewer eases in-and-out of each piece, and in some cases leaves a residue of their participation / information behind. Moving ahead I'll touch base on each piece encountered in *Lapsus Lumen*.

Upon entering bitforms the viewer is presented with two large format prints containing hundreds of scanned images of fingerprints. The pieces are part of a larger series titled *Performance Review* (2013) which birthed out of an interactive installation by Hemmer titled *Pulse Index* (2010). *Pulse Index* participants were invited to have their fingerprints scanned and stored / displayed during the installation, resulting in over 10,000 fingerprints. The scanned prints on display in *Lapsus Lumen* are titled after the name of banks *HSBC* and *UBS*. Each fingerprint was scanned by a 220x digital microscope using customized software. The decision of naming the prints after banks calls to mind what banks do: storing, handling, and distributing currency in various forms. One imagines that

physical money itself is handled by a multitude of fingers, and once received by the banker the handling becomes abstracted into data, which is essentially collected for administrative and even other questionable purposes. The scope at which these large prints show matrices of fingerprints nods towards the unseen processes of the banking system after currency leaves the hands (fingertips) of its wielders. For the most part everyone in the modern world has a bank account, and much our well being depends on them. Hemmer's *Performance Review* reveals how the human body is arguably the holy-grail of data, which is easily quantified down into it's fingerprints in order to be cataloged (and imprisoned) into larger financial systems and beyond.



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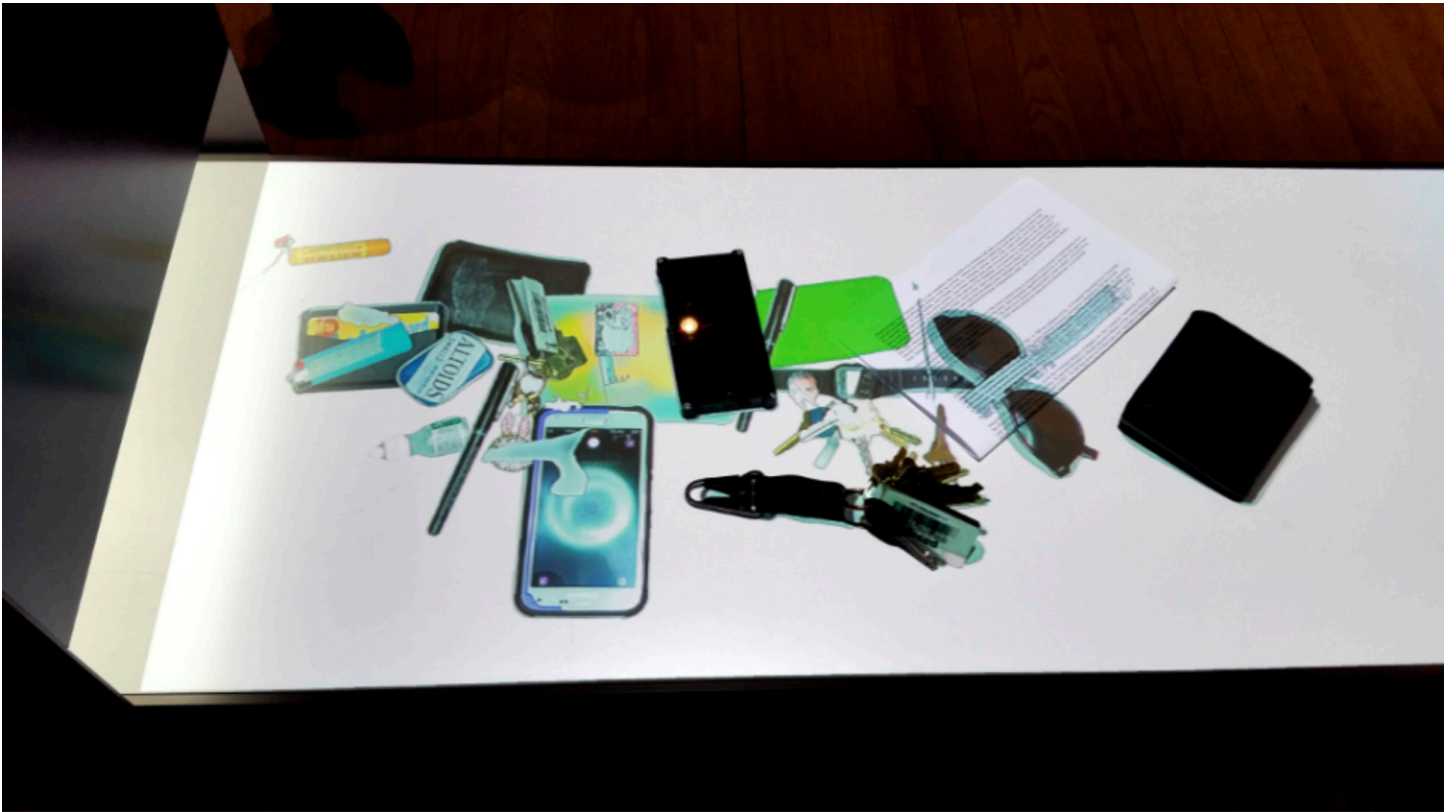
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Beyond *Performance Review* and inhabiting a darkened space to the left is *External Interior* (2015) which simply consists of what at first seems like a suspended disco-ball supported by a pulley. Visitors are invited to step under the disco-ball which is hollow and wear it like a helmet. Unlike a standard disco ball made of small square mirrors, this one is entirely made of one way mirrors in which the reflective side is facing inward inside of the ball. Once inside, the viewer sees themselves fragmented repetitively across 1,600 small one-way-mirrors (think insect eyes, but reversed). Viewing a participant from the outside however is transparent, one can see the head of the “user” inside of the disco ball, but the user inside can only see the fragmented version of themselves. This analog piece reminded me of how surveillance can operate, those doing the surveilling (outside of the artwork in this case) can see entire snapshots of their “targets”, whether they are on the other side of a large one-way mirror in an interrogation room, an airport, or a computer screen. Residual information that we (sometimes unconsciously) leave behind is compounded together into a single entity for various institutions: ad targeting agencies, government surveillance, hospital records, social media, bits of information that are collected is pieced together into a single unit. The participant having their head inside of the disco ball is forced to see themselves in fragments splayed across the mirrors, unaware of outside observers. *External Interior* succeeds in it’s ability to meditate on both sides of how surveillance systems can operate, how users get lost within a spectacle of distractions (duplicates of one’s digital identity), while the observers receive a clear picture of an individual.



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Moving into the main gallery we encounter three more video works. the first being *Please Empty Your Pockets* (2010); a conveyor belt in which viewers are asked to empty their pockets and place their items on front of the belt. The un-pocketed items are carried into a black box, on the other side of the box the items emerge with digital duplicates projected accurately on top of them. After removing the items off of the belt the digital duplicates remain projected until the belt loops back under the piece. The digital items are stored in the works onboard memory and will re-appear in their exact locations once more items are scanned. This iteration of *Please Empty Your Pockets* will display only the items that pass through during the duration of the exhibition. *Please Empty Your Pockets* operates quietly in the dark, showing its participants a number of gestures on the nature of surveillance and digital images. Today, images arguably out number their physical counterparts, the physical form of the conveyor and the black box suggests inspection, scrutiny, and the disposability of all things virtual.

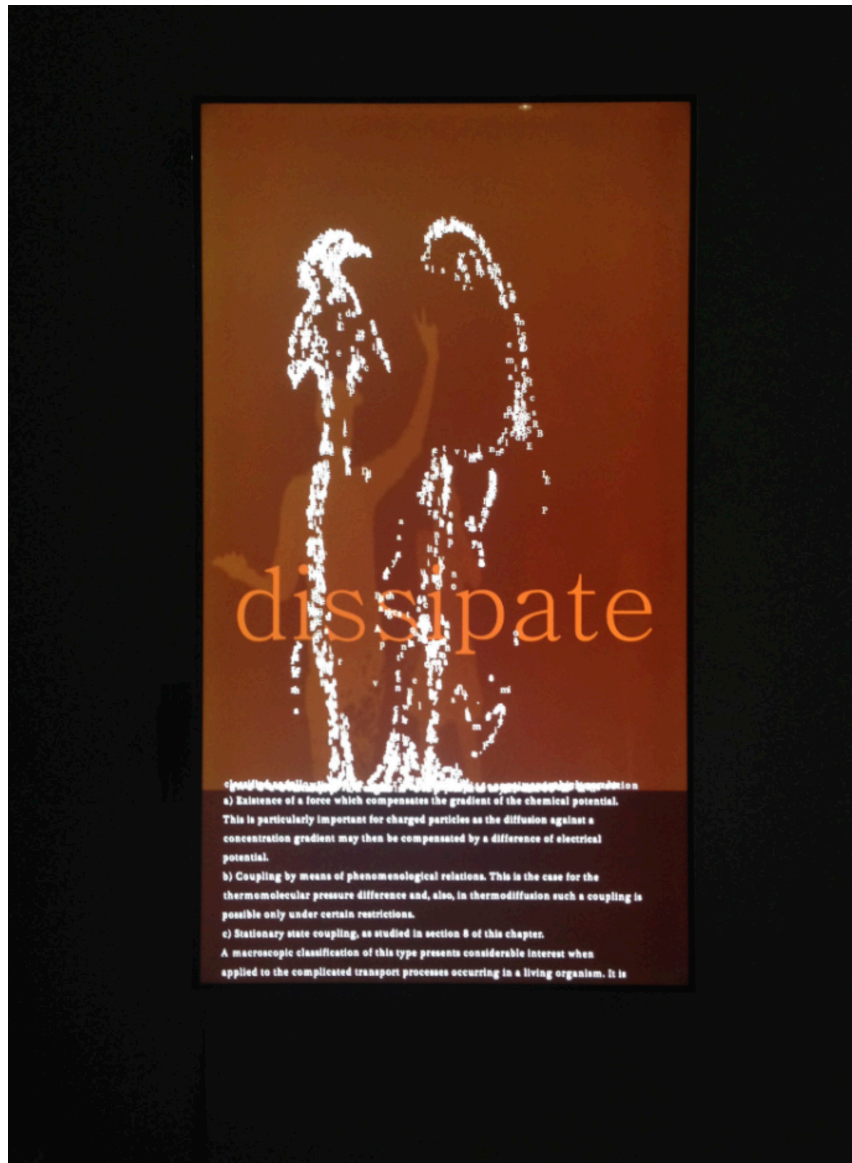


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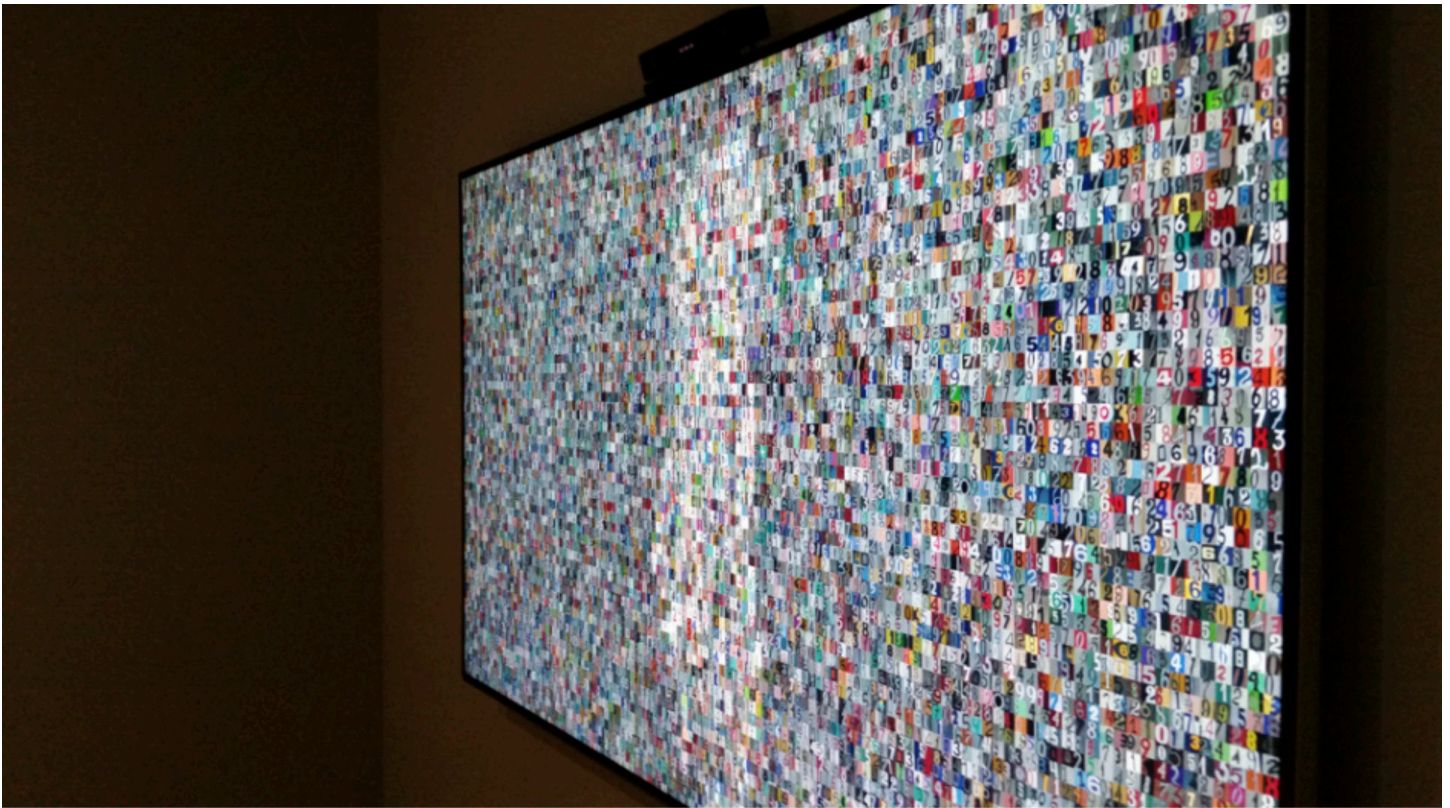
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Mounted on the wall to the left of *Please Empty Your Pockets* is an interactive video piece titled *Airborne 6* (2015). Viewers stand in front of a screen and their body is used to push around the text taken from the book, *Thermodynamics of Irreversible Processes*. The quotes from the book start at the bottom of the screen and slowly scroll upwards until it meets a live video feed of the viewer and re-acts to their motion. At this point the viewer is able to sluggishly push the letters around using their body, thus visually activating the subject matter of the text. As the text is moved about by the viewer it slowly floats towards the top of the screen then gently starts to fall down. Also to note, the word “dissipate” is positioned across the video feed, providing a nod to Ilya Prigogine’s dissipative structure theory. *Airborne 6* works in its ability to simply let the text and body reciprocate with one another, allowing the text to literally represent the science it details.

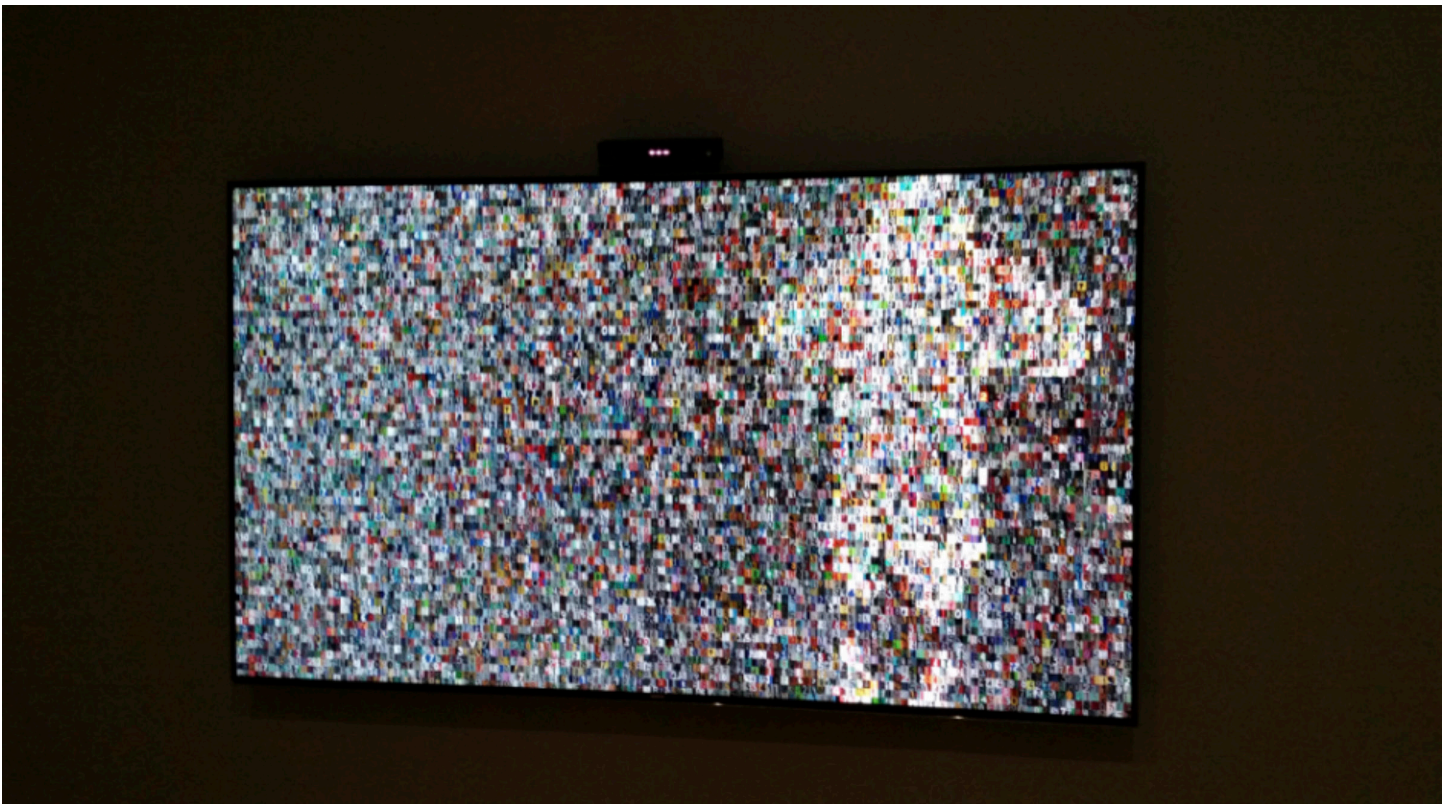


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Lastly on the rear wall of the gallery is one of my favorite works in the show titled *1984×1984* (2014). Like *Airborne 6*, *1984×1984* is comprised of a screen and a Kinect sensor mounted on the wall. As one approaches the screen an inverted silhouette of themselves takes form in a sea of numbers. The numbers are actually images that are sourced from google street view's photographed addresses. Once one is close enough to read the numbers on the screen they realize that the numbers within their silhouette count down to "1984", while the numbers on the outside remain entirely random. *1984×1984* pays homage to the 30th anniversary of George Orwell's book, *1984* and it's aesthetic source material is cleverly chosen. Hemmer's use of google street view addresses harkens back to how our participation in networked technologies warrants our data to be fair game for clandestine surveillance programs, reminding us that our physical addresses are made transparent to anyone with internet access. The simple gesture of showing the viewer's silhouette comprised of "1984s" suggests that we, our generation, have become a part of what Orwell foretold sixty-six years ago.



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