

Art with heart: Pulse-controlled light beams pierce UAE skies



The artwork "Pulse Corniche" is set to show from January 8-17 and features light beams piercing through the sky. (File photo: Shutterstock)

By Saffiya Ansari | Al Arabiya News
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Powerful light beams controlled by people's heart pulse shot into Abu Dhabi's night sky Thursday as part of a new interactive art installation by Mexican- Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer.

The artwork "Pulse Corniche" is set to show from January 8-17 and features light beams piercing through the sky, the brightness and direction of which are controlled by the heart-rate of visitors to the Abu Dhabi Corniche who can hold a sensor that converts the electrical activity of their heart into a unique lighting sequence.

The effect of Lozano-Hemmer's piece is a visual poem on vital signs, arguably the most basic indicator that we are alive.

The artist spoke to Al Arabiya News on what sparked the idea for such an ambitious piece.

“The inspiration for this was that my wife was pregnant with twins and being a nerd I asked for two ultrasound machines so we could listen simultaneously to the pulse of the two children. Their heart rates were very different and created beautiful, syncopating rhythms. I thought it would be great to visualize the heartbeats of many people to create these patterns across the sky.

“I like that the public is an integral part of the artwork,” Lozano-Hemmer added.

“Without their participation the project does not exist, which is a humbling affair.”

But, if the public is exerting their influence over the art, is it really Lozano-Hemmer’s work? The artist gave his view on what it means to open up his art to the public’s control.

“I do think that the interactive artist has authorship because he or she defines the actual platform and constraints for the work to develop,” he said.

This performance is an extension of Abu Dhabi Tourism & Culture Authority’s inauguration of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi’s pre-opening exhibition, “Seeing Through Light: Selections from the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Collection.”

The interactive artwork was also inspired by Roberto Gavaldón’s Mexican film “Macario” in which the protagonist suffers a hunger-induced hallucination wherein individuals are represented by flickering candles in a cave.

“Most often I work out of intuition and my approach is experimental, without planned or expected results in mind,” the artist explained. “It may be that people take a sense of personalization of public space, a memory of how their heartbeat illuminated the city, a moment of connection to others,” he added, referencing the impression he hoped his art would leave on viewers.

The artist himself was born in 1967 in Mexico City and now lives and works in Montreal and Madrid.

In 1989, Lozano-Hemmer received a Bachelor of Science in Physical Chemistry from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada.

“I became an artist in large part because I befriended other artists in University. Often I am still very inspired by Science. For example the project ‘Pulse Corniche’ is part of a series of works that use biometric technologies to detect and the amplify vital signs of the participants, in Abu Dhabi’s case to an urban scale.”

He has also shown at art biennials and triennials in Havana, Istanbul, Liverpool, Montreal, Moscow, New Orleans, Panama, Seville, Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore and Sydney. He has received two BAFTA Awards for Interactive Art in London.