

BOJY MOVIES

GOLD



What if a building could breathe, gesticulate and emote in the manner of a living organism? *Body Movies*, an installation staged in Rotterdam, Netherlands, as part of the 2001 Cultural Capital of Europe festival, allowed the exterior of the city's Pathé Cinema to do just that. Giant shadow play initiated by pedestrians transformed the blank canvas of a 1,200-square-meter public square (the Schouwburgplein) into a dynamic performance stage.

Masterminded by Madrid, Spain-based electronic artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Body Movies* was culturally contextual, inspired by Samuel van Hoogstraten's 1675 engraving, "The Shadow Dance." (The original Dutch print depicts a scene in which street actors' shadows—cast onto a wall from varying distances by a minute light source at ground level—take on alternately demonic or angelic characteristics.) In this vein, Lozano-Hemmer employed the same anamorphic optical effect, but with digital enhancements. Photographic portraits cast onto the building's façade via robotically controlled projectors were washed out by intense xenon lighting—that is until portions of each image materialized in the silhouettes of passersby. A camera-based tracking system monitored the coordinates of overlaid shadows in real time, using movement as an agent of change. Each time pedestrians willfully aligned their own shadows with the photos on the wall, the next sequence of portraiture was triggered. Antics naturally ensued.

Body Movies marked the sixth public exhibition staged in response to what Lozano-Hemmer decries as the current "crisis of urban self-representation."

Globalization has spawned a proliferation of generic "default" skyscrapers that no longer reflect local inhabitants or concerns, he says, causing a disconnect between cities and the people who inhabit them. At the same time, urban centers have been pickled by the preservation of what Spanish architect Emilio López-Galiacho calls "vampire buildings"—symbolic structures that aren't allowed to die a natural death.

"These are buildings that are kept alive artificially through restoration, citation and virtual simulation, forced into immortality by 'architectural correctness'—that cultural, political and economically conservative predisposition to assign an identitarian role upon a select number of buildings, like Vicenza's Villa Rotonda or Sevilla's La Giralda," Lozano-Hemmer observes. "The two phenomena of default and vampire buildings are flip sides of the same coin, but both define the exclusion of eccentric architectural readings."

Conversely, *Body Movies* enlisted citizens in a form of mutable graffiti. Juror Erik Adigard lauded the installation for its surreptitious appointment of pedestrians as harbingers of "storytelling, sculpture and super graphics." The melding of complex technologies with variable human behaviors yielded a tensile outcome he described as "at once restrained and bold, conceptual and visceral."

—JENNY SULLIVAN



