

AT THE BIENNALE

From our skyline to Venetian back alleys

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VENICE—Having spent weeks lighting up Toronto's Harbourfront for Luminato, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is now illuminating the gothic Palazzo Soranzo Van Axel hidden among many of Venice's back alleys.

"With Toronto, I thought of *Pulse Front* as a public fountain," says the Mexico-born Canadian artist. "That's the only way to get politicians to understand it, as something that must constantly be supported. But in Venice we just had to follow what we were given by the architecture."

Welcome to the Mexican Pavilion at the 52nd Venice Biennale, now deep into its sleepy tourist season. And welcome to "Some things happen more often than all of the time," the title of the Lozano-Hemmer multi-part exhibition that re-establishes Mexico's presence in Venice for the first time since the 25th Biennale more than 50 years ago.

Although bone tired from his non-stop schedule, the 39-year-old artist seems upbeat, like his career. Having heard that *Pulse Front: Relational Architecture 12* had its night-life extended by a week in Toronto, he's already thinking about his participation in the "Automatic Update" group show opening June



ANTIMODULAR RESEARCH PHOTO

Mexico-born Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer has brought his *Pulse Room* (seen in Puebla, Mexico in 2006) to the 52nd Venice Biennale.

27 for the summer at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

One space in Lozano-Hemmer's Biennale exhibition features the *Pulse Room* (2006), which reiterates some of the theory and technology in *Pulse Front*.

Instead of a Canadian sky being raked with searchlights, a cavernous, L-shaped, Venetian interior is dimly illuminated by some 100 light bulbs no brighter than the flicker from wax candles, each animated by sensing a visitor's pulse.

The cozy, techno-art cocoon Lozano-Hemmer has crafted for Venice couldn't be further from "the spectacular, but disruptive" effect of *Pulse Front*, as he describes it.

A version of *Pulse Front*, although perhaps closer in scale to Venice's *Pulse Room*, might well be a permanent installation in Toronto, he adds. A major part of Lozano-Hemmer's performance in Venice has been in simply reclaiming the Palazzo Soranzo itself.

"Not having an actual pavilion worked out in our favour," he says.

"I looked for it. I found it. The space was mostly uninhabited for the past 10 years. We've had to clean it and rewire everything completely. But even if all you had to do was place a few paper clips here and there, it would still be a beautiful space."

Pulse Front showed where Lozano-Hemmer's art might be headed. But "Some things" in the Mexican Pavilion reveals the Montreal artist's past as his debt to such great earlier light artists as James Turrell and Dan Flavin.

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