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Walking in the shadows

CROWDS are expected to flock to the Market Square in Northampton during the next 10 days to take part in a £1 million interactive lights display. Designed by Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (top left), the display projects movie images into the shadows of people as they walk across an area of the Market Square. ■ Page 8&9



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TONIGHT Northampton's Market Square and its people will become the scene and stars of a £1 million revolutionary light show, using the world's largest projector and the latest video technology.

For the next 10 days, the Under Scan display will be beamed on to the floor of the town's main square, giving passers-by the chance to interact with images that appear in their own shadow.

People who walk into the 1,000 square metre scope of Under Scan's cameras – which are trained on to the paving of the Market Square – are detected by its motion-sensitive technology.

A moving image of one of a thousand people – 200 of whom are from Northampton – filmed specially for the project will come to life on the ground in front of them, usually persuading them to stop to watch as the film subject reacts to their presence.

If it sounds complicated, it is... until you see Under Scan in action when it becomes clear how people are attracted and fascinated by the display.

During Under Scan's 10-day stay in Northampton, it is hoped thousands of people will take part and explore the video show, which was devised by Mexican artist, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer.

Now on a tour of the Midlands, Northampton is Under Scan's third stop. Previously, in Lincoln and Leicester, thousands of people whiled away several minutes

watching the images, antics and messages from others.

After the question of what it is, many people's next one will be why?

Mr Lozano-Hemmer said that Under Scan was a response to the increasingly Big Brother nature of society, where more and more of our movements are filmed and recorded by the authorities and CCTV.

This is particularly applicable in Northampton, which was the first place in the UK to be covered by a comprehensive network of CCTV cameras that now monitor virtually all the town centre.

Mr Lozano-Hemmer said: "I have never seen a country with as much CCTV surveillance as in Britain. It's unbelievable. The degree to which it is here is overwhelming.

"The whole idea of private space is disappearing. I'm not saying it's a totally bad thing, but inevitable and part of our society, but I do think it's ominous and problematic. It is interesting to make artwork using this technology.

"I hope it's something people can talk about."

Bafta-winning artist Mr Lozano-Hemmer designed and filmed the content of Under Scan last year on several trips to Northampton and other towns and cities in the region.

He filmed 200 people in Northampton, at places including the university, community centres and at a concert venue. People were asked to lie on the floor and do something for the cameras. The only request from Mr Lozano-Hemmer was that they made eye contact with the camera at some point.

He said: "Many are extremely creative. Some are just saying "hi", sending kisses, making a sign or dancing with you."

When a passer-by moves into Under Scan's scope, they are picked

FACT File

A CAMERA-BASED tracking system tells the main computer, based in a small office overlooking the Market Square, where people are walking and predicts the place where they will move to.

Then the system automatically points 14 robotically-controlled projectors to the location where they will intercept the trajectory of pedestrians and start a sequence of video footage for them.

Using projectors on motorised pan-tilt platforms, very large areas can be covered by a small number of projectors, and over different urban layouts.

Under Scan's projects can cover an area of up to 2,000 square metres and can spread 14 different portraits simultane-

ously over that area.

Because of the market stalls on Northampton's main square, only an area of 1,000 square metres will be covered during this display.

The 1,000 video portraits of people are stored in 14 custom-made media servers, that can be cued by a wireless link.

These servers can rotate, correct and scale each video sequence to compensate for any geometric distortions and the shapes and sizes of people's shadows.

The projector that casts the shadows is the brightest in the world (for the electronically minded, it has a 12kW HMI lamp that can generate 110,000 ANSI lumens of intensity).

■ A passer-by is fascinated by the movie projected into his own shadow during a previous display in Lincoln

display has you walking with shadows

up by one of 14 computers, which tracks and predicts their path in order to project one of the pre-filmed images at random in front of them.

Using complex video technology, the image is scaled up and down to fit that individual's shadow.

The moving projections can last several minutes or until the viewer decides to walk away.

Under Scan cost a total of £1 million, with each showing costing £200,000 to stage, and has been funded by Government body, the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA). Mr Lozano-Hemmer will receive £25,000 for his work on the project.

The 38-year-old electronic artist believes that, in our rushed world of hurrying from A to B, Under Scan will connect people once more with public spaces.

He said: "This project is designed to reactivate city and town centres, with representations of the people in the region.

"We've taken portraits of 1,000 people and made those portraits interactive. It is not just a case of waiting for them to light up, they look at you and react to your presence."

While some people may accuse EMDA of wasting a large amount of public money on Under Scan, Mr Lozano-Hemmer said the reaction had so far been overwhelmingly positive.

Tripping the light scan-tastic!



After its stay in Northampton, Under Scan will move on to Derby and Nottingham before embarking on a worldwide tour.

London, Tokyo, New York and Basle are cities already interested in hosting Under Scan.

Soon the images of 200 Northampton people will be played

at the feet of people in cities around the globe.

■ Under Scan will be in the Market Square in Northampton from tonight until Sunday, February 12.

It will be open to the public from 7pm until midnight, except for Friday and Saturday when it will be open until 2am.



■ Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (top right) will receive £25,000 for his role in the Under Scan project (above) which will be in Northampton for 10 days