


The Parrish Art Museum's Façade Installation Is Out of This World

 Jon Winkler on Nov 13, 2024



If you're driving on Montauk Highway in Water Mill this fall and see a symphony of light emanating from the side of the road, don't worry, it's not a UFO — but it is technically from space. More specifically, the cosmos.

“Collider” is one of the newest installations at the Parrish Art Museum and is one of the boldest visual statements you'll find in the Hamptons. Designed by artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, the public artwork is displayed on the museum's south-facing façade every day from 4 p.m. to midnight and will remain on view through January 1, 2026. The exhibit features hundreds of small LED spotlights reacting in real-time to cosmic radiation from space and relays those onto the museum façade.

In a recent phone interview, Corinne Erni, Chief Curator at the Parrish, said “Collider” is the latest façade installation on display at the museum. While this is the first time Lozano-Hemmer’s work has appeared at the Parrish, Erni said she and the museum staff were keenly aware of his artistic innovations.

“I’ve seen quite a few projects of his and have always been fascinated by his work,” she explained. “It’s very beautiful, but also scientifically and technically high-end. They really connect with our heart, I would say. We decided that [the exhibition] should be something on the façade that interacts with the architecture, with nature, with the sky, with elements that have a very special place in the Hamptons.”

According to Erni, the museum has been hosting exhibitions on its faade since 2017. Previous displays have been crafted by the likes of Hank Willis Thomas, Martin Creed and Clifford



Ross. Erni added that she started talking with Lozano-Hemmer back in 2022 about a potential showcase when the Parrish building itself came up in discussion.

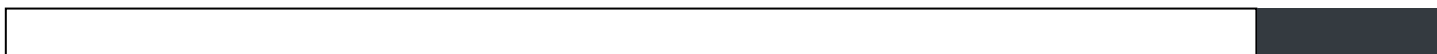
“I must’ve mentioned the façade to him and he felt like that was the perfect, sort-of screen of landscape,” she said. “A perfect background for an installation that he could play with.”

Chatting from his offices in Montreal, Lozano-Hemmer confirmed his fascination with the “almost barn-like” design of the museum the first time he laid eyes on it.

“One of the things that became apparent was that it’s an extremely elegant building,” he said. “We’re living in a time when other museums are trying very hard to stand out by virtue of contortions and different kinds of effects. Whereas with the Parrish, I felt the architecture was extremely responsive speaking to the other architecture in the area and the natural setting.”

“Collider” not only has an artistic spirit, but a scientific spirit as well. In the 1980s, before entering the art world, Lozano-Hemmer earned a degree in physical chemistry from Concordia University. For as much as he liked crafting unique expressions on different canvases, the artist was equally fascinated with the great big mysteries in the sky. Specifically, the cosmic rays and their relation to human survival.

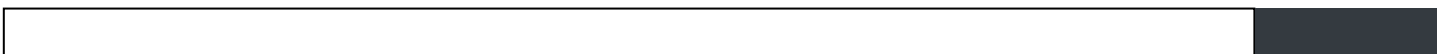
“One of the things about cosmic rays is that they’re invisible, and yet so critical to our survival,” he explained. “What I didn’t realize is that the arrival of these muons are actually responsible for the mutation in our genetic code. So, if it weren’t for the fact that the cosmic rays interfere with the perfect reproduction of our DNA, we wouldn’t have mutation and no evolution. Our survival as a species depends on these cosmic rays making slight rearrangements of our DNA for subsequent generations to be able to generate new features which may make us more adaptable.”



With that came the challenge for Lozano-Hemmer of adapting intergalactic beams of light to make them visible to visitors of the Parrish. Or, as Lozano-Hemmer put it, “How do we make people aware that this is constantly raining on them? The meaning of ‘Collider’ is a curtain of light which reacts to the live arrival of cosmic rays.”

The artist’s first crack at that challenge was “Translation Island,” his exhibition that ran from November 2023 to January 2024. Designed and displayed on Lulu Island, a deserted island located across the water from downtown Abu Dhabi, Lozano-Hemmer used sensors to translate the rays into a wall of flowing beams on 300 LED search lights.

The artist brought similar technology to the Parrish exhibition, setting-up low-power LED lights and using the canopy of the museum to have a more vivid display on the façade. He



added that the tricky process was making sure the reflecting light stayed on a surface instead of being a distracting spectacle interrupting the East End's night sky.

“If you really want to have a respectful communion with nature, the last thing you should do is put these passive searchlights up,” he added. “I think that being modern is trying to lessen the effect you have on the environment and I think we've got exactly that with the architecture of the Parrish. It grows in relationship to the landscape.”

Erni hopes to bring Lozano-Hemmer back to the Parrish in-person next spring to talk more about “Collider” and his past exhibitions. She believes that his work mixing art and technology is something to truly celebrate.

“The fact that he's able to capture something in real time that's happening in the cosmos, that's real science,” Erni said. “It's capturing something that we cannot control, that is really much bigger than us. That's what's so outstanding about his work, he's capturing something that is huge.”

“I try not to be prescriptive over what people should feel or whatever,” Lozano-Hemmer said. “But when you're in front of natural phenomena, I think about my own relationship with nature and how fragile we are and how little time we have on Earth and how we need to make good use of it. It's a very romantic encounter with the phenomena of nature and makes you feel like you're part of something bigger, which is the cosmos.”

See “Collider” on the façade of the Parrish Art Museum, 279 Montauk Highway, Water Mill, every evening from 4 p.m. to midnight. For more information, visit parrishart.org.

