



PHILADELPHIA TRIBUNE

## VOICE-FORMED LIGHT CANOPY TO COVER CITY

Written by **Bobbi Booker** Sunday, 26 August 2012 20:35



A simulated image of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's "Open Air," facing Philadelphia Museum of Art steps. — PHOTO/ RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

This fall, the region will witness the world premiere of the first major presentation under the Association for Public Art. "Open Air," by Mexican-Canadian media artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, will combine public art with mobile technology to create a spectacular, interactive experience that will illuminate the night sky from the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Created specifically for Philadelphia, the project is designed for personal contributions. Using a free mobile app developed by Lozano-Hemmer's studio, participants' voices and GPS positions will control 24 powerful robotic searchlights placed along a half-mile section of the Parkway, creating giant three-dimensional "light sculptures."

Forming a canopy of light over the city, the project will be seen up to 10 miles away each evening from 8 to 11 between Sept. 20 and Oct. 14. A dedicated project headquarters, including app download and free mobile loan stations, will be located at Eakins Oval, 24th Street and the Parkway.

"What we're going to do is place 24 of the world's brightest searchlights on the planet — 12 on Park Towne Place and 12 on the other side of the Parkway — and create with that a canopy of light," explained the artist. "We're going to create a mesh work of the whole Parkway, and then that mesh work is going to be controlled by people's voices."

A computer program will automatically analyze "Open Air" app users' GPS positions and voices for frequency, intonation and volume, and will convert these characteristics into searchlight formations in the sky over the Parkway. The lights will react, both in brightness and position, to each participant's voice and words as they are being spoken. Tens of thousands of individuals will be able to participate live during the project's duration, and hundreds of thousands more will experience the project as viewers.

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Lozano-Hemmer is an internationally recognized Mexican-Canadian artist currently living in Montreal. He has produced large-scale interactive art installations across the globe, including the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, the 2010 Light in Winter Festival in Melbourne, Australia, and the 50th anniversary of the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2009. His work in kinetic sculpture, responsive environments, video installation and photography has been shown in museums and biennials in four-dozen countries. He also represented Mexico in the 2007 Venice Biennale. Lozano-Hemmer's interest "is to create intimacy and not intimidation. While the project will be spectacular in scale, what matters to me is that individual participants can personalize their city with their contributions."

The Association for Public Art (aPA), formerly known as Fairmount Park Art Association, commissions, preserves, promotes and interprets public art in Philadelphia. Since its founding in 1872, aPA has worked with artists, communities and civic leaders to make encounters with art a part of everyday life, creating a museum without walls that is free and accessible to residents and visitors.

"The Association is dedicated to creating opportunities for artists to respond to the issues of our time, while redefining public space and encouraging public engagement and interaction," said executive director Penny Balkin Bach. "Our interest in the potential of new media as a framework for public art on an urban scale led us to Lozano-Hemmer, who is recognized internationally as a major figure in the evolving understanding of technology as a creative force. We're excited to bring him to Philadelphia to create a work that will transform the skyline, engage the public in a unique experience and bring international attention to the city."

"Open Air" is presented in conjunction with the 2012 Philadelphia Live Arts Festival and 2012 DesignPhiladelphia Festival. The iPhone app will be available starting Sept. 19. For more information, visit [openairphilly.net](http://openairphilly.net).