# SF^{MO}MA

Team Media: In Action, in Contemplation

by Lindsey Westbrook

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer has made an audacious move. A renowned artist working across new media, architecture, theater, and performance, he has published the source code to forty-two of his works on a USB drive, which is being sold for $10 by his New York gallery. Many of the works belong to museums and private collections, raising some obvious questions about rights, distribution, and exactly *what* is on those drives: the works? partial versions of the works? instructions to make the works?

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Frequency and Volume, Relational Architecture 9* (2003); installation view at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2012
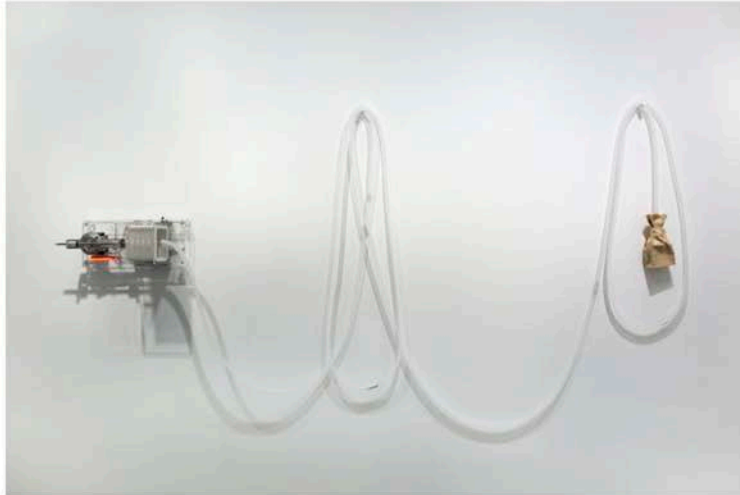
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Last Breath*, 2012

(/artwork/2014.114)

A lively discussion ensues. It's the monthly meeting of Team Media, where staff from all over the museum with media-related interests—curators, conservators, technicians, intellectual property managers, registrars, and members of the web and digital team—come together to discuss matters in media art. The team's activities are wide-ranging, from managing details related to SFMOMA's time-based holdings to developing guidelines that contribute to the larger field to sharing information gathered during travels. Instigated by Jill Sterrett, director of collections and conservation, Team Media began in 1994 with just three members, and now it regularly attracts more than fifteen interested individuals.

The Lozano-Hemmer announcement was made by Mark Hellar, a consultant who has been working with SFMOMA since 2007. He has deep skills in tracking artists' uses of new media, and the implications of those new uses for the museum. Among other activities, Hellar worked extensively with staff in the creation of a digital vault specifically for the media collection. Until 2007 the works were all on tape, but now they exist in many formats, and the new digital art server enables a different way of thinking about and managing the collected "object." Just one of the many innovations implemented with the help of Team Media.

Hellar has in his possession one of the Lozano-Hemmer thumb drives. Keir Winesmith, head of web and digital platforms, suggests that given his understanding of the works and the practicalities of their installation, the data on the drive is insufficient to re-create them. A decision is made to start compiling the code and see what exactly this thing *is*. Rudolf Frieling, curator of media arts, can't help speculating about that pesky matter of ownership: "I know what Jack Lane [former SFMOMA director] would say right now: 'But we *own* that!' The right of public display is still the privilege of whoever holds the 'title.'"

Next comes an intense discussion of the philosophy behind making the Collections Center, where much of the museum's collection is kept, open to the public for school groups and education programs. It's news to most that the museum would share knowledge of the location with outsiders.

Photo: Aurora Crispin

"We did a survey of which museums make their storage locations public," says Jill Sterrett, "and we came up with a surprising list: Harvard, MoMA, Cranbrook, Powerhouse. Some of them actually have the address on their websites. We'll have staff desks at key points near the vault doors, and there will continue to be layers of security between visitors and the collection." She goes on to assure the group, "In other words, folks, we can maintain our security standards while providing new ways of access. This is a real museum success story!"

The discussion turns now to how the team will introduce one another to the expanded museum's new spaces: the rooms where media works are made ready for gallery display, the black box for staging installations, (literally) cool and cold storage for film and photography, and the workroom where artists in residence can do their thing.

Media conservator Martina Haidvogl at work in the Collections Center; photo: Katherine Du Tiel

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Last but not least on the agenda: the impending visit of Julia Scher, renowned media artist, to organize the third installation of her work *Predictive Engineering*. Rudolf Frieling is interested to take the group's temperature regarding how much documentation the museum should undertake of Scher "in action" as she makes recordings, edits, and plans the installation. Will we use enough of the material to make the bother of taping it worthwhile? Will it compromise the efficiency of Scher's visit? Even if yes, is it still important to do ?

Rudolf Frieling, curator of media arts, interviews Julia Scher; photo: Katherine Du Tiel

Then it's five o'clock, and the meeting is over. It's the kind of meeting that we all wish we had more of—one that's not about making decisions and yelling "break!" but about careful thinking and philosophical discussion on matters that have practical application in the everyday.

SFMOMA also has a Team Architecture and Design, inspired by the success of Team Media. Read more about that in an upcoming story!

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