

Houston's new "Undercurrents" exhibit is worth the trip underground

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Jay R. Jordan

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One of several microphones featured in the "Undercurrents" exhibit at the Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern. Photo: Jay R. Jordan/Axios

The Buffalo Bayou Park Cistern's "[Undercurrents](#)" is Houston's coolest new interactive art installation.

Why it matters: The exhibit gives Houstonians a unique opportunity to engage with the [historic space's](#) haunting acoustics and breathtaking views.

Catch up quick: The work features a mile-long LED lighting installation that crosses and encircles more than 220 concrete pillars that support the underground structure.

The lights hover just over the water line near the bottom of the pillars, creating a prismatic echo chamber of light.

How it works: Every few minutes, poems play in sync with a visual show through the network of lights.

Multimedia artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer selected works from Texas poets that represent the spirit of coming together during times of turmoil, he said.

The intrigue: The exhibit also gets visitors involved in a big way.

- Along the perimeter are several microphones connected to the grid where visitors can record a phrase (up to 15 seconds long) that gets "sent" into the network of lights.
- Sometimes your message returns to you, or it may be sent to another microphone like a message in a bottle.
- Based on the words you use, the recording may be coupled with a special message.

What they're saying: The exhibit "aims to create a choral work where live voice messages from participants are mixed with poetry," Lozano-Hemmer said in a statement about the exhibit.



Jay's thought bubble: When I toured "Undercurrents" last week, I was astonished by the intricacy and detail that went into bringing the exhibit to life.

- After watching a few visitors try the microphone feature — including one couple that offered up "6-7" into the void — I said "Axios" into one of the microphones.
- A light zipped from my position and circled a few pillars before exploding into a full-on display that incorporated the entire 87,500-square-foot space.

Pro tip: Having some phrases up your sleeve beforehand isn't a bad idea, but it's not necessary. Arrive openminded and with about 30 minutes to take in the full experience.

Be sure to also bring sunglasses with you for when you emerge into the sunlight.

If you go: The exhibit is open Wednesday through Sunday until Jan. 24, 2027.

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