

The New York Times

Copyright © 2003 The New York Times

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2003

ART

Electronic Messages Become A Beacon In the Darkness

The night sky over Yamaguchi, Japan, will glow this month with the light from electronic messages transmitted over the Internet. "Amodal Suspension," a public artwork by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, a Mexican-Canadian electronic artist based in Montreal, allows visitors to the project's Web site (www.amodal.net) to send short text messages that are then beamed into the sky by 20 computer-controlled searchlights at the Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media. The project, commissioned for the center's opening on Nov. 1, will run through Nov. 24.

Unlike skywriting, the airborne messages cannot be read as text. Instead, each message is converted into a luminous code that is displayed by a single searchlight, as shown below in an image from a test last week. Frequently used letters will brighten the beam used to project a message, and spaces between words will darken it. Web site visitors can use an interactive 3-D model of the project to send and receive messages in English or Japanese. Messages can also be sent from cellular telephones.

Mr. Lozano-Hemmer said the work's title is meant to suggest that people will use different methods, or modes, to send messages that will be suspended over the city. But he said the work would also demonstrate how technology, which can connect people, might also have the effect of suspending communication. "It's a piece about loneliness," he said. Although the beams do not effectively convey a message's meaning, they are meant to be beautiful. "In losing that efficiency," he said, "we gain poetry."

Matthew Mirapaul

