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#IF13: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer 'Art is not about communication; it's about communion'

by [Melissa Chipman](#)



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, "Body Movies, Relational Architecture 6", 2001. Shown here: Ars Electronica Festival, Linz, Austria, 2002. Photo by: Antimodular Research.

One of the problems with trying to talk about the visual and performance artists that present at IdeaFestival is that their presentations are so visual and experiential. It's hard to convey the reaction of an audience to the things that they experience as a group.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's art defies narrative explanation, for the most part. He creates interactive art pieces for grand public areas. Some of his smaller pieces are currently installed in the 21c Museum Hotel. Go and experience them for yourself.

From the IF Blog:

Mexican-Canadian artist [Rafael Lozano-Hemmer](#) kicks off the final day of IdeaFestival 2013 by talking about the intersection of art and community.

Lozano-Hemmer creates interactive, public art installations, in which participants can both “observe and be observed.” An installation in Australia, which displays shadows of portraits on a large wall, is both playful and dark, allowing people to distort their own shape and size and interact with other shadows people. (Maybe you need to [see this](#) to understand).

He sees art as a powerful social tool, with an obligation to speak truth to power. In a 2008 project, Lozano-Hemmer set up a megaphone in Zocalo Square in Mexico City, where 300 protesters had been massacred in 1968. Citizens would come up to the megaphone to voice opinions about anything from government corruption, tributes to loved ones lost, and even marriage proposals. The voices were broadcast live, giving voice to an often-silenced public.

Yet another example of the social implications of a creative mind.



Lozano-Hemmer's installations hover at the intersection between technology and art. Perhaps the most interesting part of his projects is that he very often uses technology used for surveillance (sensors, hidden cameras, motion detectors) to create connection and intimacy between the viewers and participants.

The viewers become the "content" of his artwork by being captured by his cameras or projectors.

Lorenzo-Hemmer says that when it is hard to persuade a city planner to understand how an interactive art piece can create community and connection, he compares it to a public fountain. Everyone understands fountains.

When an audience member asked him about what he was trying to "communicate" with his art, he said, "I don't want to be a jerk... is that a bad word to say?" He went on to explain that art was not about communication, that it was about communion. Art is inexplicable, he said. It's about joy. "I don't want to impose stories on anyone," he said.

Later in the day, Kris Kimmel said that that was the best definition of art he'd ever heard.

Art is useless, but not worthless @errafael #IF13

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