

Artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer remembers Mexican massacre victims

Montrealer uses student photographs to trigger empathy

By Jeanette Kelly Mar 27, 2015

One of this year's Governor General's Visual Arts award winners, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, is launching a new art project.

The Mexican-born Montrealer wants to remind us of the kidnapping and murder of 43 Mexican students from the Ayotzinapa Normalista school in Iguala, Mexico.

His work, "Level of Confidence", was released yesterday on the six-month anniversary of that disappearance.

It projects the student ID photos of the young men on a flat screen. A face-recognition camera attached to the flat screen tirelessly scans the faces of viewers to see if any of them match those of the missing students.

"It spits out what the best match is and gives you a level of confidence. For example, it might say 33 per cent sure you are one of these students. It will never reach 100 per cent because we now know they were massacred" says Lozano-Hemmer.



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer uses a face-recognition camera and student ID photos of the 43 murdered Mexican students to remind us of their disappearance. (Photo courtesy Lozano-Hemmer Studio)

Normally this software is used by police to look for criminals and terrorists. But Lozano-Hemmer and his collaborators have programmed the software to ceaselessly search for the students.

"That's the poetry of this piece. The tragic part of this piece is that they will never be found. But here is a piece of software, a camera, that will never stop trying."

Lozano-Hemmer is releasing the project software for free download. He hopes it will be picked up around the world and set up in museums, galleries and cultural centres as a way to both remember the students and make viewers reflect on similarities between the students and themselves.

"I'm just hoping to highlight their absence, to not forget them and more importantly to personalize their loss. As you're looking at yourself in this mirror of despair and loss, you see within yourself their faces and their features."

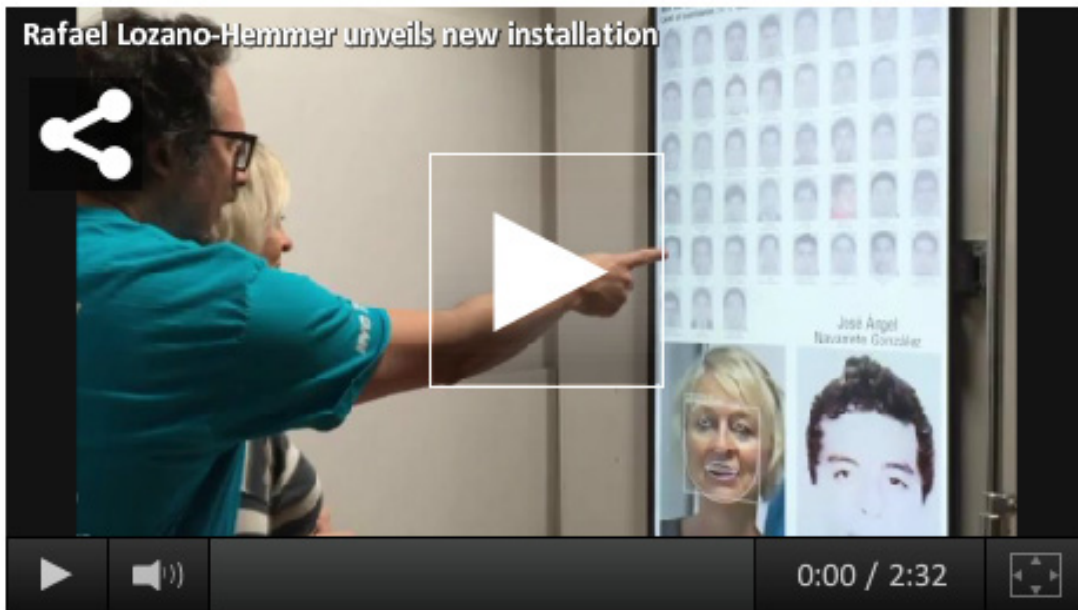
He's also interested in its potential to create memorials for people missing in other tragedies.

"It's not just about the Ayotzinapa students. Pretty much every country has its dark history of missing people. So, for instance, right here in Canada we have an almost tragic and brutal situation with missing aboriginal women."

Lozano-Hemmer hopes someone will reprogram his open source software to look for example for Canada's missing aboriginal women.

"Level of Confidence" is up now at the FOFA Gallery at Concordia University in Montreal.

More than a dozen Mexican universities and museums have requested it and it is also showing at a university in Argentina as well as at Lozano-Hemmer's exhibition at Art Bartschi Gallery in Geneva, Switzerland.



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer unveils new installation 2:32



GG Award winning artist launches new project to remember Mexican student massacre 5:14