

## **Pulse Corniche in Abu Dhabi**

*See Abu Dhabi transformed with amazing light art installations*



**Rock down to Electric Avenue this week (aka the Corniche). Our cityscape will transform into a canvas for an artist with electrifying vision.**

Abu Dhabi is a vibrant city full of colour and life, and for 10 nights only from January 8 to 17, it will be positively electric!

The Guggenheim and the Manarat Al Saadiyat Museum's culminating art installation to bring the 'Seeing Through the Light' exhibition to a close with a bang is named Pulse Corniche, and it is the work of a Mexican-Canadian artist named Rafael Lozano-Hemmer.

Maisa Al Qassimi, programmes manager for Guggenheim Abu Dhabi explains the importance of the outdoor installation as, 'An important way to take Guggenheim Abu Dhabi's concepts out of the Seeing Through Light exhibition space and into the capital to lend the exhibition another dimension and wider audiences to connect with. Our public programmes are growing in diversity and it is therefore important that our first preview is supported by such multifaceted engagement.'

Rafael is bringing his talents to the capital to create an installation which utilises the collective energy of capital residents, but don't worry, it's nothing too physical. To be part of this art installation you need only have a pulse.

*Pulse Corniche* is an artwork that can better be described as an interactive canopy of powerful light beams that are projected into the sky by some of the world's strongest robotic searchlights. Their brightness and orientation is controlled by the heart-rate of visitors to the Abu Dhabi's Corniche who participate by holding sensors placed near the artwork. The strength and reach of the searchlights ensures that the illuminated rhythms of participants' hearts will be visible at night from across the city and will generate a stream of glimmering light along the capital's waterfront.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer was born in Mexico City and currently lives in Montreal. His large-scale artworks are often described as 'social sculpture' or 'interactive art' and have appeared in public spaces, museums and galleries from Zurich to New York, to Shanghai.

We can now add Abu Dhabi to the distinguished catalogue of cities that have been Rafael's canvases, and the capital is buzzing with excitement at his arrival.

TOAD caught up with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer to allow him to convey the complexity of his artwork in his own words.

**Please tell us a little about your amazing work.**

I don't make my art with a single goal or aspiration. I work from intuition. My approach is experimental, without planned or expected results.

**Which artwork do you consider most significant in your body of work?**

*Voz Alta* was a memorial for the Tlatelolco student massacre in Mexico City. This installation featured a modified megaphone where people could speak freely on the plaza where the massacre took place. Their voices were converted into flashes of light that illuminated the night sky as well as into FM waves, so everyone with a radio could listen live to what people were saying.

**Why Abu Dhabi for this interactive art installation?**

Despite having never been to Abu Dhabi, I envision the Corniche as the perfect place to stage this project because of its size, infrastructure, and the reflection of light on the water.

**What do you hope people will take away from their visit to Pulse Corniche?**

I hope participants feel a sense of the personalization of public space, a memory of how their heartbeat illuminated the city and a moment of connection to others.

**Can you tell me what goes into planning an artwork such as this?**

We will be using 80,000 Watts of Xenon lighting. The light beams will be visible over a 15km radius. Due to the vast length of the Corniche, the canopy of light will only be impressive when viewed right at the Corniche Plaza. While the project does use the brightest searchlights in the world, the installation is meant to create a sense of intimacy not intimidation: anyone who expects a spectacular show will be disappointed because the work does not have the cathartic narrative typical of a fireworks display. Also the lights scan the sky slowly and in very narrow beams so the effect will be very subtle. Finally, the project's environmental footprint is negligible compared to other activities: a single football match uses 10 times more electricity than we will use in the entire duration of the show.

**How did you begin working with technology as an artistic medium?**

Right after I graduated from university with a chemistry degree, I began developing 'technological theatres' with friends who were composers, engineers, choreographers and writers. We eventually started touring within 'media art' festivals where technology is not seen as something that is novel, but rather something that is inherent to our globalised society. I believe that technology is inevitable.

**I read that your parents owned a nightclub. Did this have an influence on your artwork?**

Yes, of course. My use of light is not spiritual, perceptual or formal like the work of the other artists that I admire in the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi pre-

opening exhibition. On one hand, my use of light is inspired by the artificial and carnivalesque lighting found similar to that in nightclubs.

*By Liz Totton*

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