

GIZMODO



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Thursday 11:50am



NEW YORK CITY

Light Show Lets You Walk Through a NYC Tunnel For the First Time Ever

For the past 80 years, there's only been one way to see the inside of the Park Avenue Tunnel: By car, rocketing through the darkened chute towards Grand Central. But on Saturday, for the first time ever, the tunnel will be open to pedestrians, and host to an unusual art installation—one that reportedly has the NYPD worried.

As part of their [Summer Streets](#) festivities, the Department of Transportation has invited the Mexican-Canadian artist, [Rafael Lozano-Hemmer](#), to transform the Park Avenue Tunnel into an interactive installation. For a few brief hours between 7am and 1pm, you'll be able to walk into the tunnel without getting creamed by a cab.



Inside, Lozano-Hemmer and his team of thirty will have transformed the gloomy space into a light and sound show. The focal point of the shimmering installation will be a silver intercom box, placed at the center of the tunnel, where visitors are invited to say anything they want—whether it’s a poem, curse, or joke. A network of lights and loudspeakers will translate the message into light, letting it ripple down the space in a blast of pulsating light and sound.

Are city officials worried about the potentially offensive content of these messages, writ large across a public space? Certainly! In fact, according to [The Guardian](#), the NYPD originally insisted that Lozano-Hemmer create a delay in the system, which would’ve allowed them to censor the “saltier” remarks uttered by visitors.

The artist refused, of course. This new piece is similar to a few of Lozano-Hemmer’s other works, beginning with a 1999 piece that memorialized the student massacre in Mexico City’s Tlatelolco. Similarly to the New York installation, [Voz Alta](#) allowed people to speak into a microphone at the site of the massacre and see their messages translated into spotlights above Mexico City, while their messages were broadcast on an uncensored radio station simultaneously.

The whole point of the piece was to celebrate free speech. And while the Park Avenue Tunnel installation doesn't have quite as much political baggage, it was still important that it wasn't censored, as Lozano-Hemmer told [The New York Times](#):

I'm passionate about defending the eccentricity of these projects that all of a sudden are alien. They're strange. They're weird. And they make people have an opportunity to spend time in public space... [It] allows us to remember that we are on earth for a very brief period of time, and then we're going to die. And it helps us live perhaps more intensely. We're more alert to the fact that it ends, that we're getting recycled, that there is a flow.

We'll have footage from the installation next week, but [check it out](#) for yourself if you're in the city, from 7am to 1pm on August 3, 10, and 17.

