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Voice Array, by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, premiered in 2011 at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney.

A Digital Artist Combines Ghostly Light Shows And Beatboxing

RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER'S FOURTH SHOW AT BITFORMS KICKED OFF WITH A PERFORMANCE BY LEGENDARY BEATBOXER RAHZEL.

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Some of us know Cuban singer Omara Portuondo as a national legend, others know her as the beautiful singer in Wim Wenders' *Buena Vista Social Club*. For the next month, Portuondo can be heard at the New York digital art gallery Bitforms, though not in song. Rather, a single breath from her octogenarian lungs is being recirculated between a paper bag and a bellows, in a piece called *Last Breath*, by Mexican-

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In Lozano-Hemmer's fourth solo show at New York gallery Bitforms, *Last Breath* is joined by *Voice Array*, a piece where visitors speak into a recorder and watch as their words are transformed into flashes of light traveling across an array of 288 LEDs. As more participants speak into the box, their words are stored in the line, until the entire array is "full," at which point a speaker at the other end of the array spits out the first person's message. At the September 6th opening, *Voice Array* came alive thanks to legendary beatboxer Rahzel, the former member of The Roots also known as the Godfather of Noyze, who filled the array with lines of staccato sound, as though it were an epic, 288-track MPC.

Lozano-Hemmer believes that art--and digital art, in particular--is aware. It's our job to complete it by participating. "Pieces listen to us, they see us, they sense our presence and wait for us to inspire them, and not the other way around," he said in 2010. "As people populate the work and speak into it, and ultimately leave their recorded message behind, the project becomes alive," he says of *Voice Array*. "So in this sense, my artistic practice is about crowd-sourcing the content."

The 45-year-old Mexico City-born artist grew up in Montreal (today he splits his time between Spain and Canada). His work knits together ideas

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the microphone, and two super high-powered searchlights transformed their words into flashes of light across the city.

It's tempting to categorize Lozano-Hemmer as a "digital artist," given the impact he's had on the genre. But in a way, the cell phones, diodes, and scripting are his vocabulary, not his thesis--a way to draw out, archive, and distort the things humans say and do. He calls technology "the inevitable language of globalization," which is telling. At Bitforms this month, technology becomes a tool, used to capture the sound of basic human emotions, from outrage to joy, in a way that seems nearly primordial.

We missed out on the September 6th opening, but would love to hear from anyone who caught it. Lozano-Hemmer's show at Bitforms is on view until October 13.

[All images courtesy of the artist]

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