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RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

Carroll / Fletcher, London

In 1969, Alvin Lucier sat in a room and recorded himself speaking. Using two tape recorders, he played the track back and taped the recording of his voice again, repeating the process until the resonant frequencies of the space caused his speech to descend into a slowed, warbling song, reverberating with white noise. The spirit of Lucier's *I am sitting in a room* – and his spatial research via formant frequencies – finds new life in Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's impressive *Voice Array* (2011), installed in the back room at Carroll/Fletcher. Where Lucier's was an individual experiment, layering a single lonely voice until it became cacophonous, Lozano-Hemmer logged the aural life of a public gallery space. He invited his audience to record themselves as they entered, playing the voices over and over until an archive of awkward whispers built up, forming a kind of acoustic memory bank, the simultaneous chatter obscuring all meaning.

1,856 LED lights glittered and throbbed in long lines across the wall as each new voice added a layer to the sonic scrum. But as each sound entered, another was pushed out. Like a tomb to an unknown voice, they – whoever 'they' were – receive their own ceremonial goodbye as the system, now full with a new presence, must push another out. The departing sound receives a solo as it is destroyed and deleted from the archive – aired, then forgotten, like an aural *memento mori*. Like the titular 'sound-sweep' of J.G. Ballard's 1960 short story, Lozano-Hemmer ekes out and airs the mundane noise of gallery life – the recorder at the gallery entrance like the 'sonovac' used to draw out 'dead residues of sound that had accumulated during the day', showing them to be inscribed into the very architecture, soaked into the walls.

This theme of simultaneous loss, dispersal and preservation is extended eerily in the next room: *Last Breath* (2012) is a strangely corporeal monument to the voice itself – or, at least, the means of its delivery. It ceaselessly pumps a breath from the legendary singer Omara Portuondo (of Buena Vista Social Club) through a homemade-looking machine, which inflates and sucks empty a humble paper bag. The machine even 'sighs' 158 times per day – to match the average respiratory frequency for an adult at rest. As with *Voice Array*, Lozano-Hemmer sets machinic rhythms against bodily chaos: leftover voices haunt the gallery; breaths are caught in a strange system of mechanical certainty. *Last Breath* plays on the futility of attempting to archive life – Portuondo is still alive, yet Lozano-Hemmer seems to have already embalmed a part of her – which always escapes through the gaps.

In Carroll / Fletcher's front space, a sea of flat, black speakers spread across one wall, each labelled as a country. As though they were individual pixels (an idea Lozano-Hemmer has discussed previously), the speakers in *Pan-Anthem* (2014) build a stark yet wry portrait of our nationalized, fragmented world. Set to play the country's national anthem as a visitor approached, they were organized along the walls according to national military spending per capita, with demilitarized countries like Andorra singing out at the other end of the wall to China, Russia and, of course, the 'Star Spangled Banner', which blurred with the anthems of Israel, UAE and Saudi Arabia, audible from eight metres away (the full length of the gallery).

Sound does not respect borders: it seeps, bleeds and soaks through them. *Pan-Anthem* stews the sonic symbols of nations together, using military might, the force through which borders are most ruthlessly maintained, as the metric to blend them. Just as a pixel is a carrier of information made sensible via a greater whole, so Lozano-Hemmer's speakers produce broader portraits, bringing disparate, competing sounds together, composing through simultaneity.

Throughout this remarkable exhibition, Lozano-Hemmer's work invited close proximity: *Last Breath* has an uncanny, almost medical intensity and *Pan Anthem* requires closeness and curiosity to trigger the work. In *Sphere Packing* (2014), orbs hang from the ceiling, in varying sizes, each containing the entire *oeuvre* of composers such as Ligeti, Mahler and Mozart. From a metre or so away, the room merely buzzes. But up close, with your ear skimming the orbs' surfaces, glimpses of symphonies emerge: moments of meaning amidst the ambient buzz.

BASIA LEWANDOWSKA CUMMINGS

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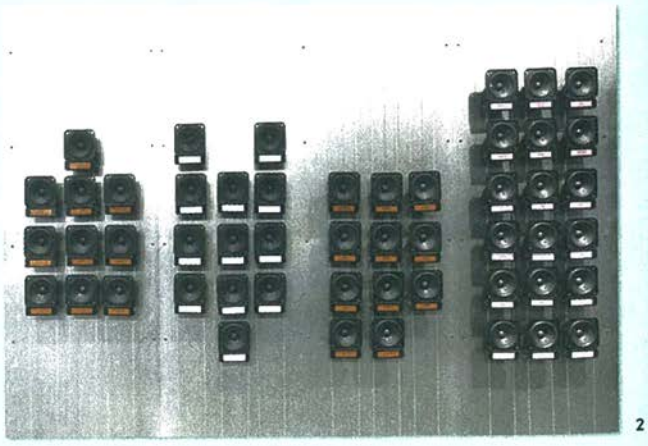

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1
Grace Schwindt
Only a Free Individual Can Create a Free Society, 2014,
HD video still

2
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
Pan-Anthem (detail),
2014, 300 speakers with built-in sound playback, power supply cables, ultrasonic range finders, IR sensors, steel

3
Timur Si-Qin
'Premier Machinic Funerary: Part II', 2014,
installation view

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