gulfnews.com

Feel the pulse of Abu Dhabi

An interactive installation will use rhythms of hearts to transform the waterfront of Abu Dhabi into fleeting, ever changing architecture of activated light

By Jyoti Kalsi
Published: January 7, 2015

Image Credit: James Ewing

Open Air, Relational Architecture 19, commissioned by the Association for Public Art, Philadelphia, was created by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in 2012

Kalsi, Jyoti. "Feel the pulse of Abu Dhabi." *Gulf News*. N.p., 7 Jan. 2015. Web. 12 Feb. 2015. (english)
http://gulfnews.com/arts-entertainment/performing-visual-arts/feel-the-pulse-of-abu-dhabi-1.1437640

Visitors to the Abu Dhabi Corniche have the opportunity to not only experience, but also be part of a unique interactive artwork, Pulse Corniche, happening every evening in the East Plaza until January 17. The site-specific installation, designed especially for Abu Dhabi by Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, is an interactive canopy of powerful light beams projected into the sky by some of the world's strongest robotic searchlights.

What is special about this artwork is that the brightness and orientation of the lights — and hence the patterns created in the sky, are controlled by the heartbeats of visitors who choose to participate in the work. Participation is easy. All you have to do is to hold a sensor that is placed in the centre of the plaza.

The sensor converts the electrical activity of your heart into a unique lighting sequence. As more and more people join in, beautiful patterns are created by the crisscrossing beams of light piercing the sky, with the intensity and direction of the beams projecting the different biometric rhythms of each participant.

The result is an immersive, intimate experience of glimmering light along the Abu Dhabi waterfront. The illuminated rhythms of numerous hearts are visible at night within a 15-kilometre radius, transforming the public space into a fleeting, ever changing architecture of activated light and movement. The dancing lights in the sky quite literally represent the pulse of the city; and through this poetic expression of vital signs that are the most symbolic human biometric, the work amplifies the presence of every individual to an urban scale.

Kalsi, Jyoti. "Feel the pulse of Abu Dhabi." *Gulf News*. N.p., 7 Jan. 2015. Web. 12 Feb. 2015. (english)
http://gulfnews.com/arts-entertainment/performing-visual-arts/feel-the-pulse-of-abu-dhabi-1.1437640

Lozano-Hemmer has a Bachelor's degree in Physical Chemistry, but rather than pursuing a career in science, he chose to use science for creating art. The artist, who was born in Mexico and is now based in Montreal, describes his work as being at the intersection of architecture and performance art. His focus is on developing audiovisual platforms for public interaction that disrupt our homogenised, controlled urban spaces to explore urban issues of self and collective representation, interdependence, privacy and perceptions of absence and presence.

To create these interventions, he uses various technologies that pervade every facet of our lives today such as robotics, real-time computer graphics, film projections, positional sound, internet links, cellphone interfaces, ultrasonic sensors, LED screens, cameras and tracking systems. His work highlights the seductive and inclusive aspects of technology, but also speaks about its intrusive and intimidating facet.

But despite the cutting-edge technology involved, Lozano-Hemmer's work is organic in nature because it relies on public participation and is hence unpredictable and dynamic.

The installation on the Abu Dhabi waterfront marks the culmination of a series of interactive public artworks that Lozano-Hemmer has showcased in various formats in cities around the world. The series began with Pulse Room, created for the 2007 Venice Biennale, featuring a room full of flashing light bulbs activated by the heart beats of individual participants.

Kalsi, Jyoti. "Feel the pulse of Abu Dhabi." *Gulf News*. N.p., 7 Jan. 2015. Web. 12 Feb. 2015. (english)
http://gulfnews.com/arts-entertainment/performing-visual-arts/feel-the-pulse-of-abu-dhabi-1.1437640

“In this series I wanted to render tangible the intimate biometric information of the participants and amplify it to have a colossal scale. I want to create a platform for people to self-represent, to personalise the public space, for them to take over their city and interrupt the existing narratives of urban power. This specific work was conceived with the vast scale of the Abu Dhabi Corniche in mind. While the project does use the brightest searchlights in the world, the installation is meant to create a sense of intimacy not intimidation. The lights scan the sky slowly and in very narrow beams so the effect will be very subtle and quiet — a set of light patterns emerging from personal interaction. It would be great if people see the project as a way of connecting to themselves — their biorhythms, or about connecting to their city and to others around them,” the artist says.

Pulse Corniche is part of a public programme of talks, workshops, performances and art events organised by the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi alongside its inaugural exhibition Seeing Through Light: Selections from the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Collection, which will run at Manarat Al Saadiyat until January 19. This show introduces the future museum’s curatorial vision through a theme-based collection presentation that examines light as a primary aesthetic principle in art.

The exhibition unfolds through five sections that explore light in various iterations as Activated, Celestial, Perceptual, Reflected and Transcendent. It features paintings, sculptures, video art and immersive installations that allow visitors to experience light in all

Kalsi, Jyoti. “Feel the pulse of Abu Dhabi.” *Gulf News*. N.p., 7 Jan. 2015. Web. 12 Feb. 2015. (english)
http://gulfnews.com/arts-entertainment/performing-visual-arts/feel-the-pulse-of-abu-dhabi-1.1437640

of its spatial, sensory and perceptual phenomena.

The artists represented range from pioneers of light art such as Robert Irwin, Dan Flavin and Otto Piene to leading contemporary artists such as Yayoi Kusama, Bharti Kher and Angela Bulloch; and from Middle Eastern artists such as Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmian and Samia Halaby to Ghada Amer and Rachid Koraichi from the younger generation.

Pulse Corniche is part of the “Activated Light” segment of the exhibition, featuring artists whose work depends on advanced technologies to activate light. It is a fun way to involve the public and create awareness and understanding about this contemporary art form, as well as of the vision of the future museum.

“It was important for us in conceiving the show that we bring in an artwork that does not actually happen in the space, because this is very much how the programming will work for the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi once it is open to the public. We want people to understand that art happens all around you and that there are experiential events that you can participate in,” Susan Davidson, Senior Curator, Collections and Exhibitions, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum says.

Opening tomorrow at 6.15pm, Pulse Corniche can be viewed every evening at the Abu Dhabi Corniche – East Plaza until January 17.

Seeing Through Light: Selections from the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Collection, will run at Manarat Al Saadiyat in the Saadiyat Cultural District, Abu Dhabi, until January 19.

Kalsi, Jyoti. “Feel the pulse of Abu Dhabi.” *Gulf News*. N.p., 7 Jan. 2015. Web. 12 Feb. 2015. (english)
http://gulfnews.com/arts-entertainment/performing-visual-arts/feel-the-pulse-of-abu-dhabi-1.1437640