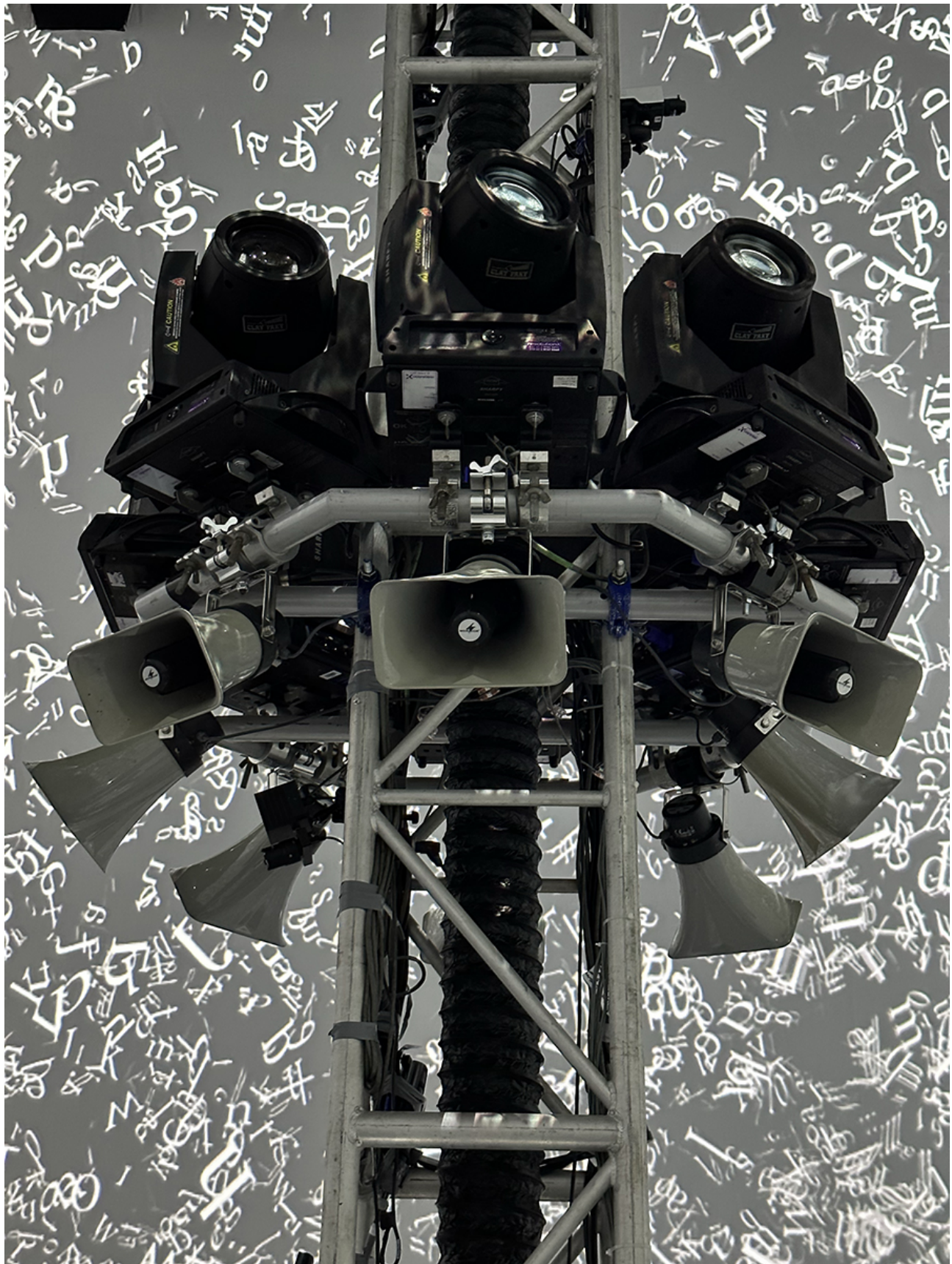


ATMOSPHERIC MEMORY ___ BY RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

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Renowned for his groundbreaking work at the intersection of architecture and performance art, Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is a prominent Mexican-Canadian media artist. His reputation is built upon his ability to create immersive platforms for public engagement and his skill in reshaping social environments using a diverse range of cutting-edge technologies.

Atmospheric Memory is a major exhibition, featuring an array of artworks ingeniously crafted to harness cutting-edge technology. The exhibition's core lies in Lozano-Hemmer's mastery of translating atmospheric vibrations into tangible experiences, offering visitors the opportunity to visually perceive, audibly engage, and even physically touch the resonance of the air surrounding them. Presented in the UK and US, this iteration of the exhibition is a unique collaboration between Lozano-Hemmer and Powerhouse, Australia, tailored to respond to the museum's globally acclaimed collection.

Under the astute curation of José Luis de Vicente, this sensory experience draws inspiration from the visionary musings of Charles Babbage, a 19th-century pioneer in computing and philosophy. Babbage's profound belief in the air's potential to hold every sound, movement, and uttered word has served as the creative foundation for Lozano-Hemmer's innovative endeavours.

Nancy Bugeja spoke with José Luis de Vicente, spotlighting the theme of surveillance — an unforeseen tangent that finds resonance with Babbage's prophetic writings.

There are evident parallels between Babbage's foresight and the unsettling reality of contemporary surveillance.

"It was really striking for us when we began the project that Babbage's original idea, and this comes from the foundational figure of computing, which is to imagine how early this idea came up in somebody's mind that potentially everything that we ever say remains resonating in the air and we can use technology to get it back. What injustices could we solve? What important memories would we recover? But it became clear to us when we were starting to talk about the project as technologies like Amazon's Echo had been released, that this idea, one that was kind of like a utopian dream, had become a bit of a totalitarian nightmare."

"This exhibition unravels the implications of surveillance capitalism, where our every move becomes the currency of power."

José Luis de Vicente continues, "There is this huge repository of our actions: our desires, our dreams, our personal stories, our breakups, our memories, that remain there under the control of very few, preserved potentially for an indefinite, maybe infinite amount of time."

We're reminded that in the last 20 years, we as a society have been producing huge vast amounts of data, and most of this data remains in the hands of very few stakeholders. They own it, they've commodified it, mercantilised it, and now in the age of artificial intelligence have actually been used to construct these new pools of knowledge that artificial intelligence has produced. And it's only possible because our actions have, as Babbage imagined, kept resonating in the air. The air here being the centralised seats of power, which are the data centres of the industry.

“So when Shoshana Zuboff, calling the idea of surveillance capitalism, it’s one of the ways in which the main stakeholders of technology today produce value and capture value, by constantly keeping an eye on us and either selling us advertising or training big artificial intelligence models with all of these and producing large learning, large language models that are literally power on our world or visual motors.”

Central to *Atmospheric Memory* is an interactive environment designed to translate atmospheric vibrations into tangible sights, sounds, and even tactile sensations. This avant-garde endeavour, inspired by Babbage’s musings, serves as a profound exploration of how technology can unlock the hidden memories woven into the fabric of the air, inspiring contemplation and conversation, and facilitates active participation with the dynamic interplay between innovation and responsibility.

The exhibition was on display at Powerhouse Ultimo until 20 August 2023.

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Powerhouse

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Conversation with Nancy Bugeja.

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