MAD. SQ. ART 2008.
RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER
PULSE PARK

October 24 to November 17, 2008
Madison Square Park
Presented by the Madison Square Park Conservancy
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Since 2004, Mad. Sq. Art has delighted and amazed as only a young and thriving public art program can. Thanks to the wisdom of our advisors, the creativity of our artists and the support of our community, we have had the pleasure of witnessing artists both world-renowned and emerging capture the public’s imagination and leave their imprint on the park. After four years that saw us exhibit everything from sculpture to sound, video to site-specific installation, it was tempting to think we had seen every possible permutation of contemporary art in Madison Square Park. One of the joys of Mad. Sq. Art, however, is its endless capacity to surprise and inspire, to bring community together and broaden our horizons to the potential of public art. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is an artist who perfectly exemplifies exactly these kinds of wonderful possibilities with his interactive light installation *Pulse Park*.

Rafael was introduced to us by our expert committee of advisors, particularly by Martin Friedman and John Hanhardt, whose eloquent and insightful essay appears in this catalogue. A perpetual font of good ideas, the Mad. Sq. Art committee is forever pursuing ways to add new dimensions to the park’s artistic repertoire. In Rafael, they saw an artist who used the latest in digital technology to create spectacular transient environments; installations meant to be not simply witnessed but experienced, ones that brought people together through their dependence on participation. As thrilling as it was to feel Madison Square Park crackle with energy and anticipation on the opening night of *Pulse Park*, more gratifying yet were the lines that formed night after night, in good weather and bad, of excited visitors eager to add their heartbeat to Rafael’s beautiful architecture of light and movement.

For helping to make *Pulse Park* a reality, we owe our gratitude to the board of trustees of the Madison Square Park Conservancy who have supported the development of our free gallery without walls, as well as our esteemed Mad. Sq. Art advisory committee. Of course, none of this would be possible without the generosity of our donors, in particular Agnes Gund, Jill & Peter Kraus, The Leucada Foundation, The Toby D. Lewis Trust and The Henry Luce Foundation for their commitment to Mad. Sq. Art, as well as the Fundación/Colección Jumex for their sponsorship of *Pulse Park* and Haunch of Venison, bitforms gallery nyc, Galería OMR, Galerie Guy Bärtschi and the Speyer Family Foundation for so generously providing additional project support.

*Pulse Park* was Rafael’s first public art project in the United States, but I think it is safe to predict that it will not be his last. After getting to know him—his brilliance, his generosity, his infectious enthusiasm—I can speak for the entire Mad. Sq. Park family when I say we await his future successes with an eagerness borne of friendship and a great deal of pride.

Debbie Landau
President
by John Hanhardt

The cinema, the electronic media of video and television, digital, internet, and interactive technologies have come to dominate our global media culture. What began at the dawn of the last millennium with the invention of the cinema has advanced quickly and impacted all of the arts as artists explore different strategies for storytelling and recording and interpreting the world around them. The uncanny power of the moving image took hold of the public imagination as people marveled at how everyday life appears “larger than life” on the screen. As the proliferation of contemporary reality television suggests, we are fascinated by the possibility of looking inside other lives to understand who we are as human beings. As people walk along 23rd Street today, they talk on cell phones, text-message on their Blackberries, and stop to record still and moving images of their private selves and public fantasies, which they can transmit to friends and strangers anywhere in the world.

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s extraordinary installation Pulse Park, commissioned for Madison Square Park, gives us a new aesthetic experience that opens up for contemplation the public sphere of New York City. His work engages people from all walks of life, allowing the spectator intimate contact with a world that feels natural and not abstractly removed from our primary sense experiences. An artwork may tell us something about ourselves by connecting us to ancient myths or contemporary stories and places we know, or it may be a formal work of abstraction that brings us directly into contact with the materials the artist is using and the compositional strategies and textual qualities of the image. As we read a novel or poem, watch a film, play, or dance, we become aware of shared beliefs (or differences), a cathartic experience that releases us from...
the pressures of our daily routines. We hope to experience insights into our lives and the biological and cultural spaces we inhabit. Lozano-Hemmer’s projects offer a powerful and compelling reinterpretation of public art. They are not about remaking the art of the past but rather about creating an event, developed through new instruments, that gives all who participate insight into themselves and their bodies in relation to the other viewers.

The challenge to artists who appropriate new technologies is to discover ways to fashion them into instruments that the artist controls. One can trace through all of Lozano-Hemmer’s major projects, including Body Movies (2001), Pulse Room (2006), and Pulse Park, an exploration of how we experience and sense our bodies within public spaces. The artist sets into motion lights, images, and sounds that reflect our position and our relationship to others sharing the environment with us. Lozano-Hemmer links our entire sensory being to the world, creating cybernetic stages of experience that establish a new ecology of art making. This is radically different from an earlier generation of interactive art, which can be characterized largely by the stimulus-response model. In other words, one does something—pushes a button or turns a dial—and something happens, a loud noise is heard or an image suddenly appears and changes. As amusing as this can be, it is often too predetermined, or preprogrammed by the artist, so that what happens feels curiously unsatisfying and static when repeated. Art should not exhaust itself in one viewing. There should be pleasures and insights with each new experience of the work. Lozano-Hemmer avoids falling into this cognitive trap by making his work subtle and expansive, as well as responsive to each individual viewer’s transaction. The artwork comes to life and is renewed by everyone who engages it.

Pulse Park, created for Madison Square Park, is one of a series of large-scale installations that Lozano-Hemmer has created for public spaces in cities around the world. He is at the vanguard of artists creating a new dimension of bodily experience through a sophisticated and complex manipulation of computer-controlled interactive technologies. The public artworks also fulfill what I see as Lozano-Hemmer’s creative goal to fashion an experience that is both private and public. He places each person into an event that is experienced by many others at the same time establishing a place of renewal and empowerment through reflection. Lozano-Hemmer achieves this by returning to a phenomenology of bodily perception, asking us to become aware of ourselves by renewing our senses as cognitive instruments, not as passive receptors. “We can glance with the whole body—just as we can feel the glance or gaze of the other with the same whole body,” observes Edward S. Casey in his phenomenological study *The World at a Glance*. In Lozano-Hemmer’s work, we experience with and through our whole body; this is not a reductive tactic but an opening up of ourselves to an enlarged sensory experience.
An earlier piece, *Body Movies*, offers a tantalizing connection to the invention of the cinema. The shadow play, the public spectacle of projecting shadows to create performances that were endowed with narrative meaning, created a new stage for illusion and magic and was a precursor of the cinema. The cinematic projection of the actor onto a larger-than-life screen gave new dramatic emphasis to the gestures and emotors of the performer. In *Body Movies*, Lozano-Hemmer created a large public-art project in which he deployed large xenon projectors powered by a computerized tracking system to project onto a wall images taken of individuals and groups within the community in which the piece is installed. Experienced at night, these 400- to 1,800-square-meter projections become the surfaces with which the spectators standing before the wall interact. Portraits measuring between two and 25 meters are revealed inside the projected shadows (silhouettes) of the spectators facing the large wall surface, creating a constantly shifting and changing ground of image and reference for the spectators. Much like the changing mass that is the space of public movement, the wall of the public space becomes a mirror onto which is reflected an image archive of people from all walks of life together with living presence of the actual viewer. *Body Movies* becomes a dialectical dance of visual impressions, a dialogue between friends and strangers as individuals, couples, and clusters of people reveal and then recompose themselves in relation to others within the space and images projected onto the wall.
(All photographs)
Pulse Park, 2008
Light fixtures and heart rate sensor
Pulse Room, first shown in 2006 and one of the highlights on the 2007 Venice Biennale, is the project that directly anticipates Pulse Park. In Pulse Room, rows of incandescent 300-watt light bulbs are uniformly distributed over the exhibition space. On a stand positioned on one side of the space is an interface with two sensors that a visitor holds. The computer detects the person’s pulse rate, which causes the closest bulb to pulsate in a rhythm that mimics the beat of the person’s heart. When the interface is released, the flashing sequences advance down the line of bulbs to then record the pulse of the next participant. The ceiling pulses with the record of up to a hundred participants, creating a visual display that echoes the flow of blood animated by the heart through each person’s body. Lozano-Hemmer has noted the inspiration of a number of artists and ideas in composing this work, including the minimalist music of Steve Reich and Glenn Branca, the theory of cybernetics, and a scene from Robert Gavaldon’s film Macario (1960) in which the protagonist, isolated in a cave, imagines people as lit candles.

In Pulse Park, Lozano-Hemmer expands on the original concept to create a dynamic and evocative electronic installation of 200 narrow-beam theatrical spotlights, and one heart-rate-sensor sculpture, that create a matrix of light across the Oval Lawn of Madison Square Park. The sensor sculpture installed at the south end of the park measures the participants’ systolic and diastolic heart rates. This biometric data feeds into computers, which drive the pulses of light, which then move sequentially down the rows of spotlights as each person holds the sensor. Pulse Park is public sculpture seen as an interaction between the participant and a technology that drives and creates the sweeping arc of lights. sculpture is historically about the figurative form and the embodied sense of self. Over the last century, artists have redefined sculpture with new materials reshaped to create visual experiences through our emotional, physical, and material sense of the artwork. Lozano-Hemmer has opened up further the place and space of the sculptural text, joining the visual and physical, the “whenabouts in the name of space,” into an extension of our inner biological selves. We become entranced and engaged as we see our hearts, pumping life-giving blood through our bodies, energizing and making visible a poetic and public mapping of ourselves. It is an art about life and renewal, and it is a wonderful gift from the artist to the people of the city of New York.


John G. Hanhardt is Consulting Senior Curator for Film and Media Arts at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Since beginning his career at the Department of Film at the Museum of Modern Art, he has curated film and media arts at the Walker Art Center, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Guggenheim Museum.

(All photographs)
Pulse Park, 2008
Light fixtures and heart rate sensor
RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2008  Wavefunction, Kuczyk Foundation, Poznan, Poland
       Under Scan, Trafalgar Square, London
bitforms gallery, New York City
       Frequency and Volume, The Curve, Barbican Centre, London
       Under Scan, Barcliffe Centre, Birmingham, UK
       Body Movies, Queen City, 400th anniversary, Parc de la Cité, Québec, Canada
       Recording, Edith Russ Haus für Medienkunst, Oldenburg, Germany
Body Movies, The Papsa Museum, Wellington, New Zealand

2007  Some Things Happen More Often Than All Of The Time, Mexican Pavilion, 52nd Biennale di Venezia, Venice
       Pulse Front, Luminato Festival, Toronto

2006  Body Movies, Museum of Art, HK Arts Development Council, Hong Kong
       bitforms gallery, New York City
       Under Scan, public art commission, East Midlands Development Agency, East Midlands
       Voz Alta, Memorial for the Tlatelolco student massacre, Mexico City
       Body Movies, Te Papa Museum, Wellington, New Zealand

2005  Subsculptures, Galerie Guy Bärtschi, Geneva
       Under Scan, public art commission, East Midlands Development Agency, Lincoln, Brayford University Campus
       Subtitled Public, Sala de Arte Publico Siqueiros, Mexico City
       OMR Gallery, Mexico City
       Vectorial Elevation, EU expansion celebrations, O’Connell Street, Dublin

2004  OMRI Gallery, Mexico City
       Vectorial Elevation, FU expansion celebrations, O’Connell Street, Dublin
       Ill Communication, Dundee Contemporary Art, Dundee

2003  Two Origins, Zocalo Square, Mexico
       Amodal Suspension, opening project of the Yamaguchi Center for Art and Media, Yamaguchi, Japan
       Relational Architectures, Laboratorio Arta Alameda, Mexico
       Body Movies, Duisburg Akzente, Duisburg

2002  Igo Orígenes, Place du Capitole, Printemps de Septembre Festival, Toulouse
       Vectorial Elevation, Opening project of Artium, Basque Contemporary Art Museum, Vitoria-Gasteiz
       Body Movies, Cultural Capital of Europe Festival, V2 Grounding, Rotterdam
       Airport Cluster Foto/Graphik, Galerie Kaethe Kollwitz, Berlin

2001  Vectorial Elevation, Zocalo Square, Mexico
       Re:Positioning Fear, 3rd Internationale Biennale Film + Architektur, Graz

2000  On the Same Hand but in a Different Vein, Galerie Stornaway, Montreal

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

       Prospect!, New Orleans Biennale, NOMA Museum, New Orleans
       YOUpVerse, 3rd International Biennale of Contemporary Art, Centro Andaluza de Arte Contemporaneo de Sevilla, Sevilla, Spain
       Pulse Spiral, Center for Contemporary Culture - Melnikov Garish, Moscow, Russia
       Turn and Molen, 5th Seoul International Media Art Biennale, Seoul Museum of Art, South Korea

       Auto Emotion, Power Plant, Toronto

2006  Zones of Contact, Biennale of Sydney, Art Gallery of New South Wales
       Elektra Festival, Musée d’Art Contemporain, Montreal, Quebec
       Art Meets Media, ICC, Tokyo

2005  Techniques of the Visible, Shanghai Biennale, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai
       Open, New Designs for Open Space, Van Alen Institute, New York
       Communication, Dundee Contemporary Art, Dundee

2002  E-phos Festival, Athens
       Liverpool Biennale, FACT, Liverpool
       OK Centrum, Ars Electronica Festival, Linz
       6th International Festival for Architecture in Video, Florence
       Emoção Artificielle, Itau Cultural, Sao Paulo
       Egoofugal, 7th International Istanbul Biennial, Istanbul

2001  Media Arts Festival, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo
       Intersactiva00, Museo de Arte Contemporaneo, Mérida
       7th Bienal de la Habana, Havana
       OK Center, Ars Electronica Festival, Linz

1999  Interactive Urban Landscapes, Copenhagen
       Art Futura Festival, Sofia

1997  Remote Sensations, Ars Electronica Festival, Linz
PREVIOUS MAD. SQ. ART EXHIBITIONS.

       Richard Deacon Assembly
2007  Bill Fontana Panoramic Echoes
       Roy Lichtenstein Coronated, Defunct, Erratic
       William Wegman Around the Park
2006  Ursula von Rydingsvard Bowl with Fins, Czara z Babekami, Damski Czepek
2005  Jane Higstein Eleven Works
2005  Sel LeWitt Circle with Towers, Curved Wall with Towers
2004  Mark di Suvero Aesop's Fables, Double Tetrahedron, Beyond
2003  Wim Delvoye Gothic
2002  Dan Graham Bisected Triangle, Interior Curve
       Mark Dion Urban Wildlife Observation Unit
       Dalziel + Scullion Voyager
2001  Nawa Rawanchaikul Taxi
       Teresa Fernandez Bamboo Cinema
       Tobias Rehberger Tsutsumu
2000  Tony Oursler The Influence Machine

From 2000-2003, exhibitions were organized by the Public Art Fund on behalf of the Campaign for The New Madison Square Park.

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MAD. SQ. PK. CONSERVANCY

The Madison Square Park Conservancy, dedicated to keeping
Madison Square Park a bright, beautiful and lively public park, is
a public/private partnership with New York City Parks & Recreation.
The Conservancy raises the funds that support lush and brilliant
horticulture, park maintenance and security. The Conservancy also
offers a variety of cultural programs for park users of all ages,
including Mad. Sq. Art.

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