OPEN NEW DESIGNS FOR PUBLIC SPACE

View of Body Movies,
Hauptplatz, Linz, Austria, 2002

PHOTO: RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

The Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer also has a mission to "foster eccentric readings of the city" through projects that interrupt the "narratives of the urban realm," displacing people from their familiar environments and prompting them to develop their own "readings and subtitles." His aims are underscored by a concern that people no longer feel represented by cities, asserting that images that proliferate on billboards and hoardings signify a globalized and homogenous view of life as seen through the lens of corporations who employ strategic marketing tools to portray a specific message. "Cities are saturated with images and messages but they rarely show diversity and do not relate on an intimate level with the public," he explains. In his installations the public is the performer. "The challenge is to develop anti-monumental strategies for engaging the public; interventions that create platforms for people to both participate in and take over public space by amplifying them to an urban scale." Dividing his time between Madrid and Québec, Lozano-Hemmer develops electronic art works that range dramatically in scale. He has produced work for the Istanbul Biennial, the Ars Electronica in Austria and the Museo de Monterrey in Mexico. In November 2003, for the inauguration of the Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media in Japan, Lozano-Hemmer produced Amodal Suspension, the largest interactive artwork in the world. Inviting people to send text messages over the Internet or by cell phone he then converted them into patterns of flashing lights in the sky, "turning the Japanese city of Yamaguchi into a giant communication switchboard." His most physically engaging project to date, Body Movies, which was staged in Schowburg Square, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, during the 2001 Cultural Capital of Europe events, and in Hauptplatz, Linz, Austria, and Williamson Square, Liverpool, United Kingdom in 2002. Lozano-Hemmer refers to the work, which features screens up to 75 feet in height and 200 feet in width, installed in well-trafficked areas of the city center as "Relational Architecture." Thousands of portraits, photographed on the streets of the cities where the project is to be shown, are projected onto the screens in succession but are over-exposed by the powerful light source shone onto them making them shadows. As people cross in front of the lights their silhouettes also appear in tandem with the preexisting portraits, up to 100-feet in height. As the images change, the public is encouraged to match their shadow with those featured on the screen. More than 60 people can take part at any one time enhancing the collective experience of being in public space. "My work does not push a message, but it does not exist without public participation," explains Lozano-Hemmer. "Because they are temporary they are not subsumed into the everyday patterns of life and therefore their presence invites surprising results as people begin to play intuitively with the shadows and control the space with their bodies."

Ryan, Zoë. " Temp Work" in OPEN — New Designs For Public Space. New York: Van Halen Institute, 2004, p.100-101.