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See Inside Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's Spectacular Installation That Spins Art Out of Its Atmosphere

The work takes a 19th-century idea and uses today's most cutting-edge technologies to bring it to life.

Jo Lawson-Tancred (<https://news.artnet.com/about/jo-lawson-tancred-14118>), August 16, 2023



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Atmospheric Memory* (2019). Photo: Zan Wimberley.

It's been a long time since art was restricted to walls and pedestals, but artists at the cutting-edge of immersive experiences are still finding new ways to create layered encounters with sound, movement, and touch. These elements have made *Atmospheric Memory* by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer an international hit with audiences.

The Mexican-Canadian artist invites visitors to step into a physical concept that was once just an idea in the mind of 19th century British philosopher and inventor Charles Babbage. "The air itself is one vast library on whose pages are for ever written all that man has ever said or woman whispered," wrote Babbage, marveling at how the atmosphere around us captures our every gesture and utterance, however small or mumbled. He even believed that air molecules stored this information, and that they could be the key to rewind the passage of time and experience these moments again.

Inspired by how this "vast library" might work in reality, Lozano-Hemmer has brought together a collection of interactive installations that each make use of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and robotics. One is *Cloud Display*, a screen made of 1,600 ultrasonic atomizers that uses water vapor to write any word spoken into its voice recognition system. Another, *Atmosphonia*, is a sound environment that plays waves of familiar sounds like wind, fire, water, birdsong, and bells while visualizing these tonal changes with LED lights.

Lozano-Hemmer is known for his "anti-monument" to victims of Covid-19 (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/rafael-lozano-hemmer-art21-extended-play-2077298>) and a light show over the U.S.-Mexico border (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/rafael-lozano-hemmer-art21-1913404>), but he believes that this work may be his most ambitious. "*Atmospheric Memory* explores [Babbage's] idea today, when the dream of perfect recollection is one of the defining conditions of our digital life, and the air that we breathe has become a battleground for the future of our planet," he said.

The work debuted in the U.K. at Manchester International Festival in 2019 and has since traveled to the Carolina Performing Arts theatre in the U.S. The latest stop on its global tour is Australia, where it is headlining the Sydney Science Festival at the Powerhouse Museum until August 20.

See more images from the installation below.



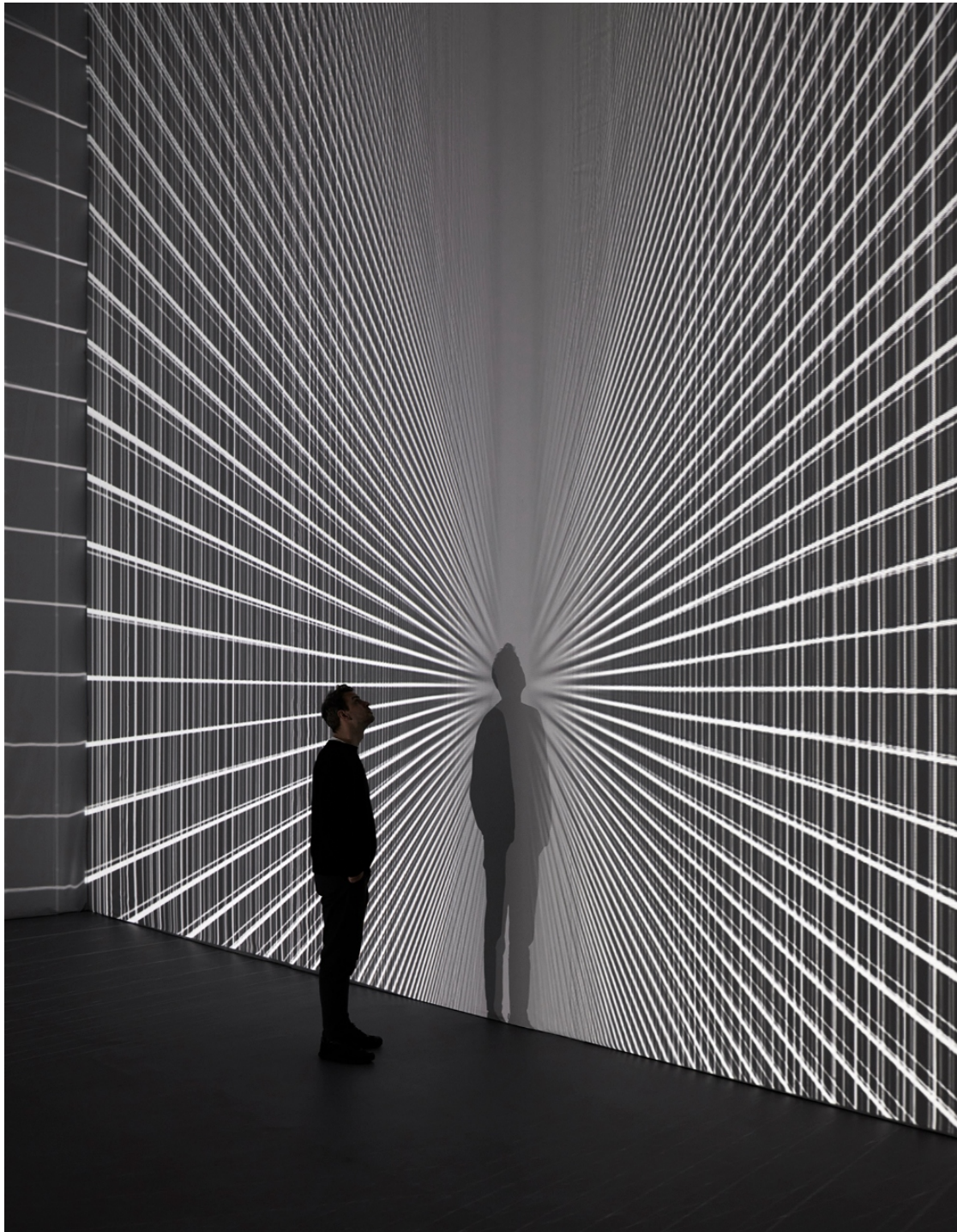
Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, *Atmospheric Memory* (2019). Photo: Zan Wimberley.



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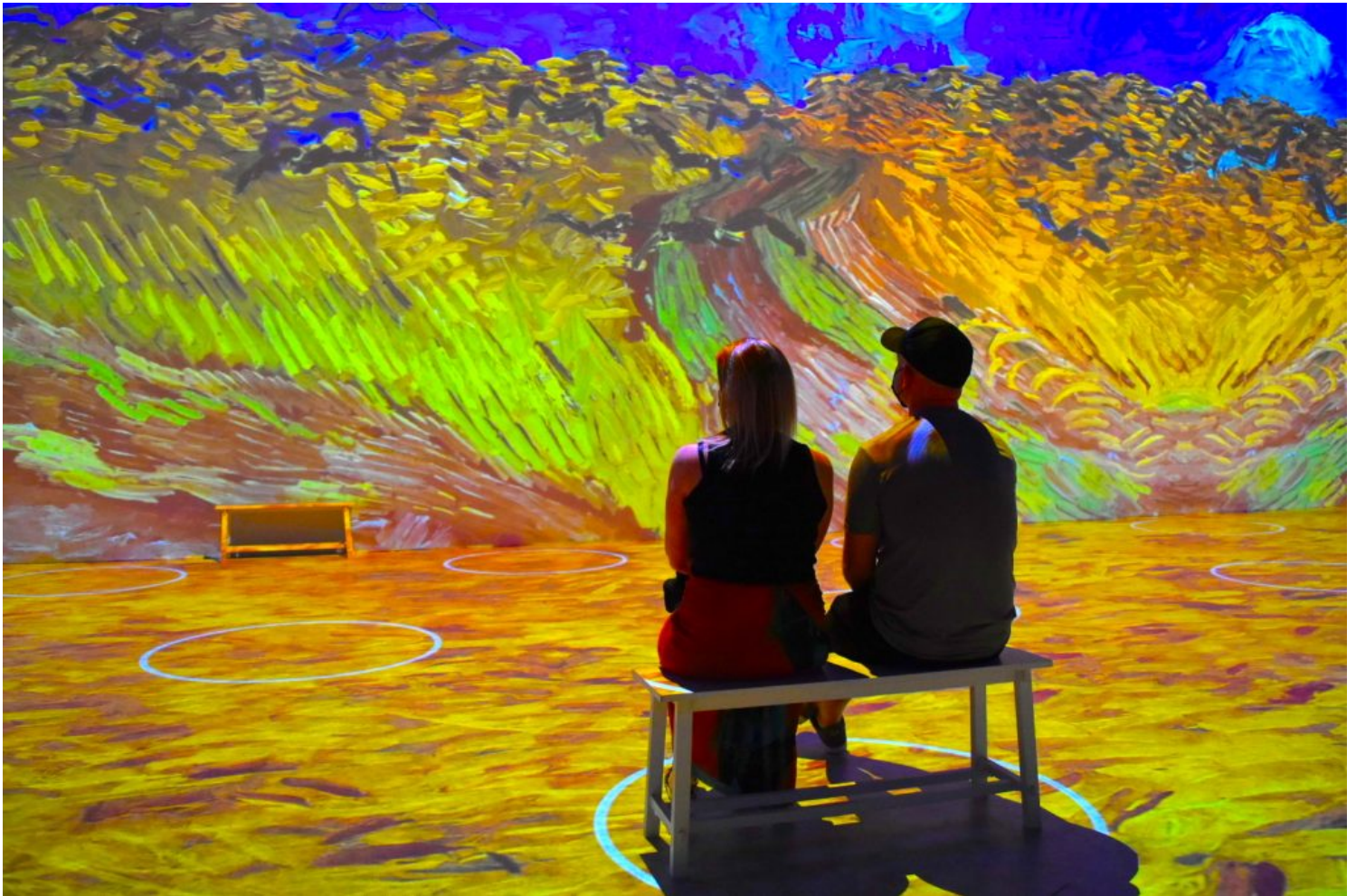
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The Company Behind the Wildly Popular 'Immersive Van Gogh' Experience Has Filed for Bankruptcy

The company, Lighthouse Immersive, is based in Canada but has opened permanent locations for immersive digital light shows across the U.S.

Sarah Cascone (<https://news.artnet.com/about/sarah-cascone-25>), August 1, 2023



Inside "Immersive Van Gogh." Photo by Ben Davis.

In 2021, as the world slowly emerged from pandemic lockdown, perhaps the biggest cultural phenomena to rise from the ashes of COVID-19 (<https://news.artnet.com/multimedia/art-angle-podcast-van-gogh-1980386>) was the craze for digitally animated projected light shows (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/van-gogh-experience-companies-1930533>) based on masterpieces by art-historical greats such as Frida Kahlo (<http://www.artnet.com/artists/frida-kahlo/>),

Gustav Klimt (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/gustav-klimt/>), Claude Monet (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/claude-monet/>), and, of course, Vincent van Gogh (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/vincent-van-gogh/>).

Now, Lighthouse Immersive (<https://lighthouseimmersive.com/>), Inc., the Toronto-based company behind the best-known exhibition in the genre—“Immersive Van Gogh (<https://www.immersivevangogh.com/>),” from the same director who did the one famously featured in Emily in Paris (<https://news.artnet.com/opinion/simon-de-pury-emily-in-paris-1931141>),—has filed for Chapter 15 bankruptcy in Delaware, Bloomberg (<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2023-07-31/semiconductor-subsidies-how-the-us-europe-and-asia-can-avoid-a-chip-war?sref=P6xXtEaF>) reports. The July 28 filing is a strategy to protect the company's U.S. assets during insolvency proceedings in Ontario.

“Immersive Van Gogh” touched down in New York (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/immersive-van-gogh-nyc-1976602>) in June 2021 after runs in Paris, Chicago, and Toronto. Originally designed by Massimiliano Siccardi with an original score from Italian composer Luca Longobardi, the New York production also brought on Broadway producer David Korins, who staged the original *Hamilton*, to add some extra sparkle to the *Starry Night*.

Its impressive production values and successful marketing campaign (including weed nights (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/immersive-van-gogh-experience-partnering-cannabis-lifestyle-purveyor-pair-weed-friendly-nights-1997628>)) saw it sell 250,000 advance tickets as exhibitions proliferated across the U.S. and overseas. A contestant on The Bachelor (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/bachelor-immersive-van-gogh-2065851>), even called a visit to the Los Angeles location “the most romantic moment of my life.”



“Immersive Van Gogh” in Chicago. Photo courtesy of Lighthouse Immersive.

By May 2022, there were over five million tickets sold (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/investors-immersive-art-experiences-2136126>),—or one for every 90 Americans. Today, there are permanent Lighthouse Art Space venues in Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Columbus, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, Las Vegas, Minneapolis, Nashville, San Antonio, and Toronto.

The success (<https://news.artnet.com/opinion/maurizio-cattelan-toilet-immersive-van-gogh-record-2011094>) of “Immersive Van Gogh” eager to stage easily replicable exhibitions with low insurance premiums compared to traditional art shows physically including high-value canvases.

With at least five competing Van Gogh outfits (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/immersive-van-gogh-guide-1974038>), the New York Better Business Bureau even went so far as to issue a warning (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/immersive-van-gogh-better-business-bureau-1951887>) to consumers that Fever’s “Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience” was not the “Immersive Van Gogh” light show (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/immersive-van-gogh-experiences-1983011>) featured on the popular Netflix series starring Lily Collins (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/emily-in-paris-season-3-balloon-museum-2241253>).



In a scene from episode five, season one of *Emily In Paris*, (left to right) Lily Collins as Emily and Lucas Bravo as Gabriel visit “Immersive Van Gogh.” Photo by Stephanie Branch Netflix © 2020

And then there were the knock-offs for other artists—including living master David Hockney (<https://www.artnet.com/artists/david-hockney/>), whose immersive animated light show (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/david-hockney-put-a-personal-touch-on-the-new-immersive-experience-based-on-his-work-coming-to-london-2211347>). “Bigger and Closer (<https://lightroom.uk/whats-on/david-hockney/>)” got mixed reviews (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/david-hockney-bigger-and-closer-light-immersive-show-2260379>), when it opened in February. Lighthouse alone has also staged productions of “Immersive Frida Kahlo (<https://www.immersive-frida.com/>)” (with the artist’s family’s blessing (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/artists-family-signs-immersive-frida-kahlo-2070495>)), “Immersive Monet and the Impressionists (<https://www.immersivemonet.com/>),” “Immersive Vatican (<https://immersivetvatican.com/>),” and “Immersive Shevchenko (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/immersive-shevchenko-2082159>),” featuring Ukrainian artist Taras Shevchenko.

Lighthouse’s website boasts sales of over seven million tickets in 21 North American cities. But over the last two years, demand for so-called “immersive” digital projections of beloved artworks seems to have waned, perhaps due to an over-saturation of the market.

“Immersive Van Gogh” is still on view in Vegas (through January 7, 2024), Detroit (through October 1), Toronto (through October 29), and Chicago, where it is part of a two-for-one showing with “Mozart Immersive (<https://mozartimmersive.com/>)” (through

September 4). There are currently no sold-out dates at any of the venues. The company's only other current offering is "[Immersive Disney Animation](https://lighthouseimmersive.com/disney/) (<https://lighthouseimmersive.com/disney/>)," now on view in 12 cities.



A credit for Lighthouse Immersive, the company behind "Immersive Van Gogh," within the experience. Photo by Ben Davis.

There also also plenty of tickets available to the immersive Van Gogh show that reopened July 1 at the [Indianapolis Museum of Art Galleries](https://discovernewfields.org/do-and-see/places-to-go/indianapolis-museum-art) (<https://discovernewfields.org/do-and-see/places-to-go/indianapolis-museum-art>) at [Newfields](https://discovernewfields.org/) (<https://discovernewfields.org/>). In 2020, the institution announced controversial plans to replace its contemporary art floor with [a permanent immersive digital art gallery](https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ima-newfields-van-gogh-1919299) (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/ima-newfields-van-gogh-1919299>) called the [Lume](https://discovernewfields.org/lume) (<https://discovernewfields.org/lume>). It launched, of course, with the company's homage to the famous Dutch Postimpressionist, the touring version of which is called "[Van Gogh Alive](https://grande-experiences.com/van-gogh-alive/) (<https://grande-experiences.com/van-gogh-alive/>)."

While there aren't any Van Gogh immersive experiences on view in New York City, "[Beyond Van Gogh: The Immersive Experience](https://www.beyondvangogh.com/) (<https://www.beyondvangogh.com/>)," opened in [Westbury, Long Island](https://vangoghlongisland.com/) (<https://vangoghlongisland.com/>), in March, and is on view through September 4. (Once again, there appears to be no shortage of available tickets at the moment.)

Tickets to Lighthouse Immersive exhibitions, reports [ARTnews](https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/lighthouse-immersive-van-gogh-exhibit-files-chapter-15-bankruptcy-1234675783/) (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/lighthouse-immersive-van-gogh-exhibit-files-chapter-15-bankruptcy-1234675783/>), started at \$22 to \$37.

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