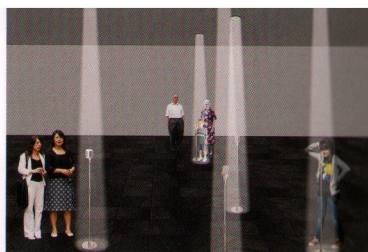
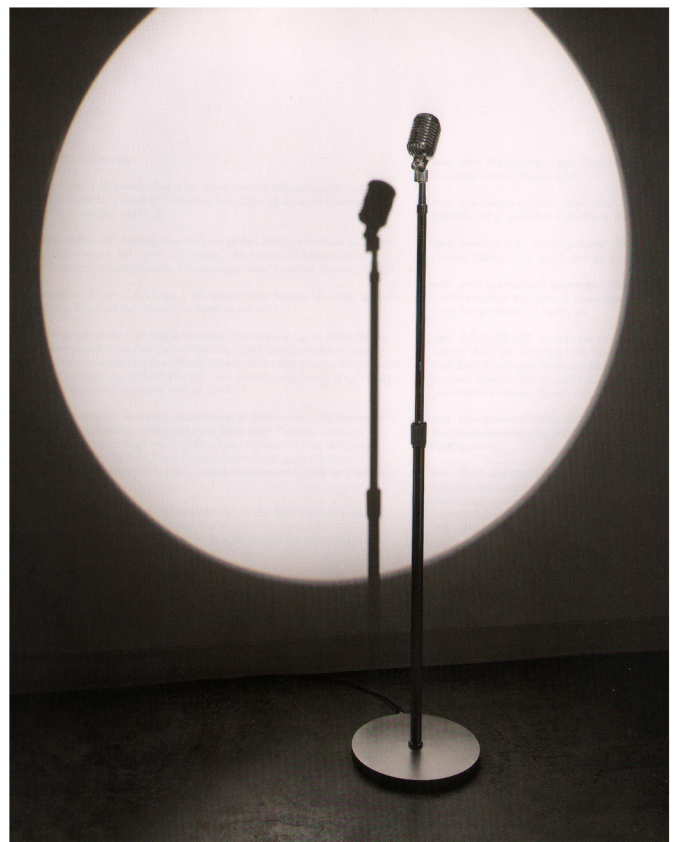


THE ART OF PARTICIPATION 1950 TO NOW

RAFAEL LOZANO- HEMMER

The forms of interaction that defined most media art of the 1990s produced many installations that were technically challenging yet lacked the qualities necessary to move and engage viewers on a deeper level. The Mexican media artist Lozano-Hemmer first became known in that decade for staging large-scale interactive installations, works that were not only technologically advanced, but also accessible, poetic, and open to the contribution of the public. Since 1997 his *Relational Architecture* series has addressed such interaction via the bodily presence of passersby (in *re:positioning fear* [1997], for example, which tracked and projected the shadows of visitors and incorporated real-time chats related to the topic of fear), databases (the textual tags projected onto visitors in *Subtitled Public* [2005]), and radio broadcast (as in *Frequency and Volume* [2003], which enabled viewers to use their bodies as surfaces and transmitters of information).

The spoken word, however, has a much stronger physical presence than any projected image or text. Nothing speaks louder than a person who steps up to a microphone onstage under a spotlight. The microphone is the embodiment of public speech, and Lozano-Hemmer's *Microphones* (2008; pls. 204–5) enacts the idea of an invisible stage. In this interactive installation vintage 1939 Shure microphones are placed on stands at different heights; each microphone has been modified so that its head contains a tiny loudspeaker and a circuit board connected to a network of hidden computers. When someone speaks into a microphone, it records his or her voice and immediately plays back a recording of a previous participant, as an echo of the past and a memory of all recordings made during the exhibition. The microphone “talks back,” creating a situation in which participants can overcome the urge to sound test the equipment and instead productively engage with the installation, leaving an acoustic trace or joining others in the aural equivalent of a surrealist game of “exquisite corpse.” All content is generated entirely by the participation of the public and is stored as a memento of a specific period in time. The gallery in turn becomes a stage, a recording studio, a listening device, a platform for interaction. —RF



Microphones 2008 / Interactive installation with modified microphones, computers, electronics, and custom software / Courtesy the artist