



Artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's Vectorial Elevation lights up the sky over English Bay Thursday. » Story, D5

## CULTURAL OLYMPIAD



Montreal-based artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer performs Vectorial Elevation, which features 20 beams of 10,000-watt light moving silently through the air, on Thursday.

# 'Ballet' of light dances through the night sky

Robotically controlled beams will illuminate the air above English Bay every night until Feb. 28

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Artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer prays for clouds. He's not asking for rain, but for enough low-lying clouds to create a canopy over Vancouver. That way, the underside can double as a ceiling for the performance of the dancing lights in *Vectorial Elevation*.

He didn't get his wish for cloudy skies Thursday night, but a crowd oohed and aahed in appreciation when a ballet of lights began dancing over English Bay with the launch of the project at 6:30 p.m.

The light installation will brighten the sky over the bay every night until dawn, right up to the last day of the 2010 Winter Olympics on Sunday, Feb. 28.



The pattern of the lights changes every 10 seconds in response to geometric designs submitted from the public via the Internet.

On Thursday night, Lozano-Hemmer dedicated the first lighting design to Joe Fortes, Vancouver's first lifeguard, who presided over English Bay in the early 20th century.

"In fact, the word ballet is nice," he said in an earlier interview. "We think of it as a choreography of light."

Producing the light are 20 robotically controlled, 10,000-watt Zenon lights installed at Vanier Park and Sunset Beach.

The bright white lights are programmed not to shine in any apartment windows or interfere with any wildlife. An eagle's nest in Vanier Park, for example, won't be affected.

*Vectorial Elevation* is silent. The lights will consume about a tenth of the energy used at a hockey game.

Lozano-Hemmer said if it's cloudy, the lights won't be seen from as far away as on a clear night. But the water droplets in the clouds will focus the intensity of the light.

"On a day like this, it looks awesome," he said in an interview last fall during an exceptionally rainy and overcast day. "When the lights impact the

bottom of the cloud, it looks like little dots in the sky that are a constellation of movement. We are an enemy of perfectly clear skies."

Lozano-Hemmer is a digital artist whose works include public installations and kinetic, interactive sculpture. *Vectorial Elevation* was created for millennium celebrations in Mexico City in 2000 and has illuminated the sky above other cities, including Dublin and Lyon. *Vectorial Elevation* is part of the Cultural Olympiad's Digital Edition and the city's Olympic and Paralympic Public Art Program.

Some West End residents may have expected *Vectorial Elevation* to be a public spectacle comparable to fireworks nights, but Lozano-Hemmer said his work is different. Instead of a high point or crescendo, there is

a constant flow of moving lights throughout the night. "English Bay is an absolute stunning place for this installation — not just because of the reflection on the water. The pedestrian and bike pathways to me symbolize the citizens taking over the city — and there isn't a shopping opportunity in any of these places ... That's very rare. To have English Bay in the core of a big city is really unique," he said. "I want to highlight that."

Lozano-Hemmer describes *Vectorial Elevation* as an anti-monument. It isn't site-specific since it can travel to different cities around the world. But it does have what he calls a relationship-specific quality that varies according to the location and the occasion. He expects its reception in Vancouver during the Olympics will be different from how it was seen in Mexico

City for the arrival of the millennium 10 years ago.

"The monument tries to represent power or history or big capital 'P' politics. I'm more interested in temporary installations and the relationships of people with each other. A monument is always a monologue so I call it an anti-monument because I want to emphasize the fact that it is a dialogue, that it's alive, and that the moment that those lights are shut down, the project is over.

"In that sense it is less totalizing or pretentious. It is just trying, for a brief period, to say that this is a festive time in Vancouver's history."

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