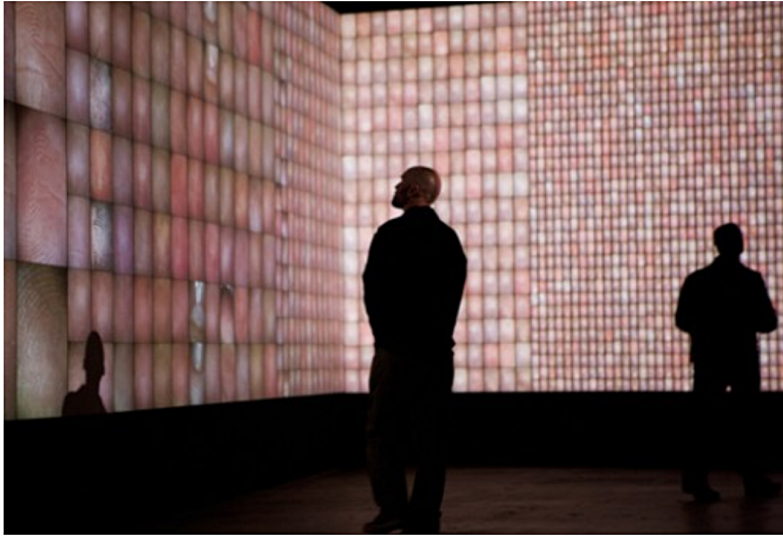


Art 2.1 | New Frontier at Sundance 2013: “Pulse Index” and “Coral RKV”

February 12th, 2013 by [Nettrice Gaskins](#)



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. “Pulse Index,” 2010; “Time Lapse,” Site Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2012. Photo by Kate Russel.

What we see today is an art which seeks a more immediate contact with people than the museum makes possible... we are witnessing, as I see it, a triple transformation—in the making of art, in the institutions of art, in the audience of art. —[Arthur Danto](#), 1997

In this third post of my 2013 [New Frontier](#) [see the [first](#) and [second](#) posts] series I revisit Nicolas Bourriaud’s theory of [relational aesthetics](#) based on contemporary artworks that focus on human relationality. In Bourriaud’s system, art is meant to model possible universes of authentic human sociability. Relational aesthetics takes the dynamic social environment as its subject and envisions the gallery as a site of human exchange, renewed sociability, and social interaction. Bourriaud writes, “Herein lies the most burning issue to do with art today: is it still possible to generate relationships with the world, in a practical field art-history traditionally earmarked for their ‘representation’?”



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. “Pulse Index” at New Frontier, (2013). Photos by Nettrice Gaskins.

New Frontier engaged this idea by presenting Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s [Pulse Index](#), one of a few interactive and social installations on display for the Sundance festival. This piece records participants’ fingerprints at the same time as it detects their heart rates. To participate, I put my finger into a custom-made sensor equipped with a powerful digital microscope and a heart rate device. A fingerprint immediately appeared on the largest cell of the display that pulsated to my heart beat. As more people contributed their fingerprints my recording traveled upwards and across until it disappeared altogether—creating along the way a [Fibonacci pattern](#). Fibonacci patterns can be found everywhere in nature, from the clusters of florets in a sunflower to the bracts of a pinecone. These patterns are applicable to the growth of every living thing, including fingerprints.

In relational aesthetics-based artwork, viewers experience a constructed social environment that becomes the art. The task of the artist is to create (augmented, interactive) space as a conduit for this social experience. To that end, Lozano-Hemmer created a space that scans individual audience member's heart rates and fingerprints, making these biological representations the actual art. Another artist, [Lynette Wallworth](#), offered a different kind of social environment in an adjoining room.



Lynette Wallworth. "Coral Rekindling Venus," 2013. Image courtesy of New Frontier and the artist.

Wallworth's [Coral Rekindling Venus](#) screened in a small portable dome and will be a part of [Sundance USA](#) in various locations across the country. *Coral RKV* film screenings were booked solid, but I managed to get a ticket to experience it in the specially constructed full-dome planetarium at New Frontier. Inside the dome there were only cushions and beanbags on the floor. We had to lie down to view the film from below, which simulated the effect of being immersed in a planetarium or, as I imagined, in a submarine entering the ocean and descending downward into the unseen depths of the world's coral reefs.

As examples of relational aesthetics, *Pulse Index* and *Coral Rekindling Venus* each provide different types of social environments: the interactive gallery space, the augmented gallery space, and small portable dome planetarium. The experience of contributing personal fingerprints and pulses—or becoming immersed in a underwater world—becomes the art on display, under the direction of the artist who acts as a sort of experience conductor. It was great to be invited to go along for the ride.