

DISPATCH / SHORT STORIES ABOUT DESIGN

Cinema of Unease:

A Festival of Arts installation brings people down to size by dwarfing them with their own shadow.

SHADOW PUPPETS are normally the preserve of the young, but *Body Movies*, an expansive public art project staged for the International Festival of the Arts on the Wellington waterfront, takes the concept up-scale. The night-time installation is designed to transform public space with giant shadows and portraits. Passers-by interact with 1,000 to 1,800 square metres of projection space. Varying from life size right through to gigantic, their shadows mess with scale, and also engage with architectural and social space.

Mexican-Canadian artist Lozano-Hemmer says that he is excited about installing the work in on the Cable St façade of Te Papa, because it is the best "natural theatre" environment he has worked with so far. "The scale is right, the relationship between the building and the public space in front is good." The Montreal-based artist describes how increasingly buildings and public spaces are becoming homogenised. Citing Winston Churchill's dictum, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us," Lozano-Hemmer suggests that buildings no longer relate to the people that occupy them. Instead, "they are becoming representative of a desire to optimise budgets," rather than connect people. His work *Body Movies* introduces a touch of human eccentricity into public spaces. The work creates "an anti-monument of alien presence and embodied relationships."

The work's title came about because Lozano-Hemmer was listening a lot to the Beastie Boys' 1998 single *Body Movin'*. The song's lyrics are an apt metaphor for the tomfoolery that happens on screen with this work. Initially, Lozano-Hemmer was thinking about fear, and using expressionistic and ominous shadows, but quickly realised that the way people interact with the work was often rooted in humour. The work amplifies people's gestures and creates a plurality of movies, capturing the often intimate, playful and sophisticated body language that we all have. The concept of a giant Magna-doodle comes to mind; both for the sense of child's play and for the sense that the scene can be written and re-written a thousand times. The project creates a tableau for shadow drawing on a monstrous scale. Moreover, it gives over the tools for drawing to the audience. "The project doesn't exist unless there are people already using the space." Wellington's high pedestrian count will act in the work's favour.

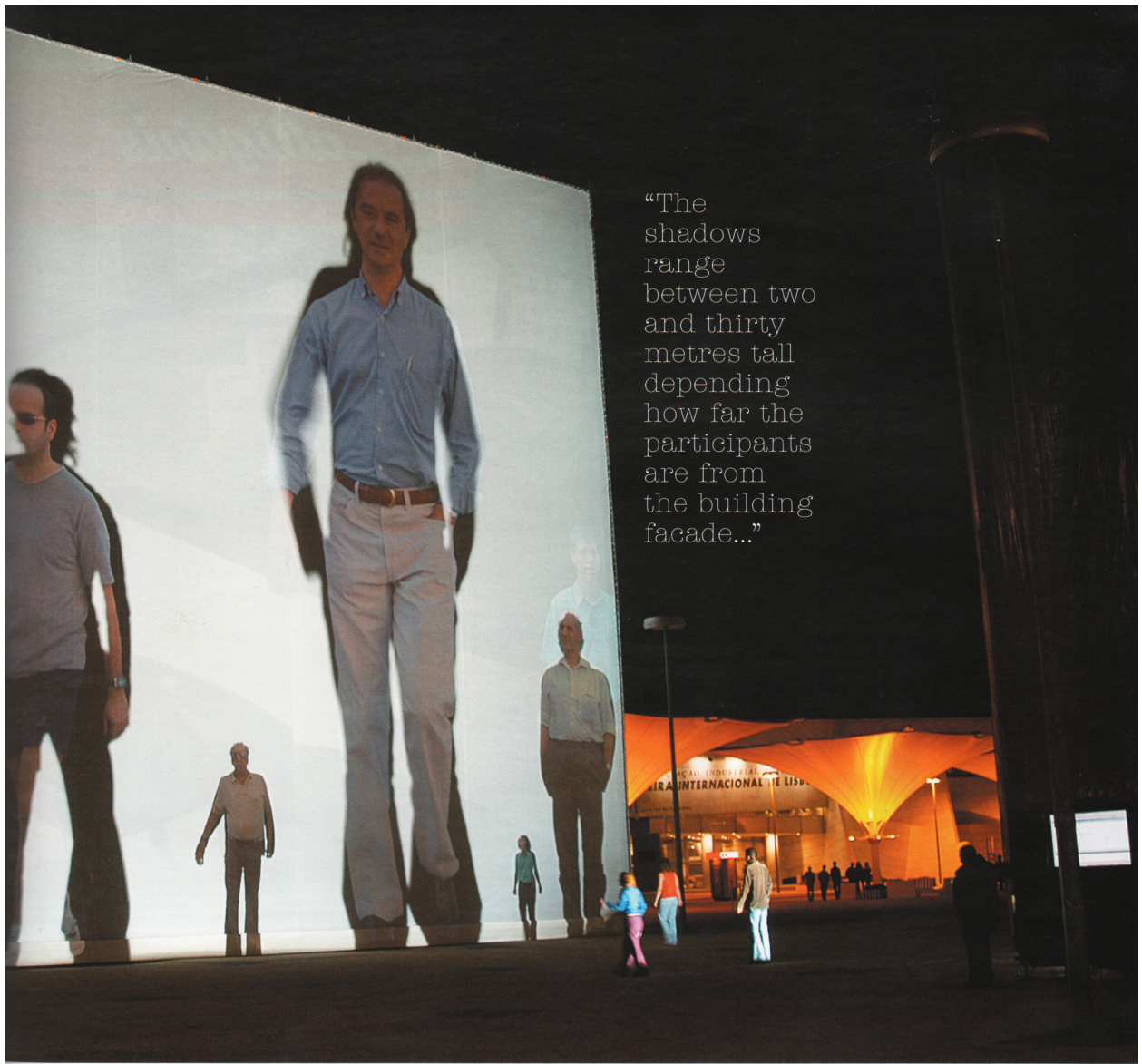
Each night during the Festival, between 9pm and 1am, powerful projectors will illuminate Te Papa's facade with photo portraits, but those portraits are washed out by 10,000 watt lamps placed at ground level. As soon as people walk into the plaza area in front of the work however, their shadows loom up on the wall behind them on a massive scale, and in those shadows the original photo portraits are revealed. While the work is quite "heavy on technology" says the artist, the "interaction with it is quite natural," and the visual effects are completely intuitive.

Wellington visitors can match and manipulate their shadow's shape, position or size to mimic and engage with the portraits, and with each other. Their silhouettes range between 2 and 30 metres high, depending on how far the participants are from the building façade. Over 60 participants can take part in the work at once, creating an almost global sense of collective experience as well as scope for individual participation. "Every time we show this piece, the behaviours are totally different," says Lozano-Hemmer, "Ranging from playful parading to erotic performances to aggressive stances." On average about half the participants try to match the portraits by enlarging or reducing their shadows, while the other half is more interested in playing with each other's shadow." He adds, "In Rotterdam, participants started using props after a few days. Breakdancers appeared. People brought umbrellas, and their pets. A man in a wheelchair projected his shadow 22 metres high and he seems to derive a lot of pleasure from crushing everybody around him."

This fusion of public art, technology and light makes a direct visual reference to the 1675 engraving *The Shadow Dance* by Samuel van Hoogstraten. The engraving depicts a scene with a minute light source positioned at ground level, casting silhouette shadows creating both monstrous and angelic characters on the walls behind. That alter-ego mentality has been alive and well for centuries then, and we have nothing to fear from the giant shadows set to creep through Te Papa's public plaza from 22 February until 16 March. **HMS**

OPPOSITE: Visitors to an installation of *Body Movies* play with scale and optical illusions. Photographic portraits are revealed when covered by shadows. When the photographic images are all covered by the shadow of a participant, as at top, the image changes to a new set of portraits.





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