

Electronic art at Biennale introduces whole new arena

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Mexico-born Canadian artist Rafael Lozano Hemmer at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale on Sunday.— Photo: S. Anandan

: He's an artist who doesn't want to have any control over the public art works he has created.

In fact, he would want people to interact with his works to shape their course.

Electronic artist Rafael Lozano Hemmer, born Mexican but living in Canada, enjoys the uncertainty that characterise his interactive installations of architecture and the beauty of public participation and performance that the works entail.

A nerd, as he describes himself, Mr. Lozano Hemmer works with a lot of data and information and is interested in 'perverting' contemporary control technology—electronic surveillance, telematic networks and the like—and animatronics to turn on their heads meta-narratives of security, patriotism and heroism.

Using sensor networks to create shadow plays, as in the live body movies he's fashioned since 2001 where people play with their own shadows or with the live scanned images of selected participants, he facilitates the making of fantastic subterranean narratives that are carnivalesque and subversive.

"It is interesting to watch people self-censor, too. The absolute freedom they enjoy with the work and the space they occupy often inspires them to show some obscene motions and gestures for a few seconds, but they swiftly control themselves," he says, talking of 'anti-monuments and sub-sculptures'.

'*Pan-anthem*', his interactive work at the Kochi-Muziris Biennale displayed at David Hall in Fort Kochi, comes alive when there's a viewer. On the far left of the installation are speakers (with motion sensors that are activated in human presence) playing anthems of nations with low military spending and as the viewer moves rightward, anthems of nations with high per capita defence expenditure are played. "The work is a confluence of national anthems, used to visualise this peculiar defence statistics. It throws up interesting revelations such as the fact that India, known for its huge defence spending, is not so militaristic considering that its per capita military expenditure is not so high. The same installation can also be used to show per capital GDP of nations," said the grand nephew of author, Indophile and former Mexican Ambassador to India Octavio Paz.

Mr. Lozano Hemmer brought this piece to the Kochi Biennale as its curator Jitish Kallat nudged him to present a work that has global dimensions.

Quizzed on his fetish for high-end sensor technology and robotics, he says the circumstances of control is the reality of the times we live in. "I bet Pol Pot was the last person to remain out of technology. If we are connected 24X7, to work with technology is natural, rather unavoidable. In Canada where I live, people spend 8 full hours in a day in front of the

computer screen. For me to use technology is a way to be coherent with the times.” He work will travel from KMB to Poland. And the artist is now flying to Abu Dhabi to create a work using robotics for a branch of the Guggenheim Museum slated to open there.

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