



UNDERSTANDING AND MISUNDERSTANDING RAFAEL LOZANO- HEMMER'S PLEASE EMPTY YOUR POCKETS

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I first saw Rafael Lozano Hemmer's work *Please Empty Your Pockets* at Art Basel Miami Beach three years ago, when I noticed a long line of people waiting to put a small personal possession onto a scanner that was attached to a white conveyor belt. I was curious, so I went closer to see what was happening. There were numerous overlapping images projected on the conveyor

belt: phones, sets of keys and good luck charms. Joining the line, I added my own prescription bottle to be scanned, and watched as its image emerged in combination with the images of other people's stuff. I left the experience with two or three ideas about what was going on.

The piece reminded me at first of sending my belongings through the X-ray machine at an airport. Only it wasn't in an airport, there were no guards around, and there was something infinitely more intriguing about it than any experience I've had with the TSA. Still, it was unsettling. This first impression was a bit out of synch, though, because I'd misread the title. I thought the title read, "Empty Your Pockets." Lozano-Hemmer's "Please" changes everything. What I had taken to be a command was really a request. This wasn't TSA, it was an invitation.

Lozano-Hemmer connects *Please Empty Your Pockets* to the 1940 Adolfo Bioy Casares novella *The Invention of Morel*. Reading the novella last weekend helped me see the Lozano-Hemmer work in a new way. Ideas about absence and presence are more important to Lozano-Hemmer's piece than I'd recognized. When a viewer places an object on the conveyor belt, the projected image of the object is left behind and added to a database of up to 600,000 other scanned images

that are mixed and re-mixed with images scanned in the past and images that will be scanned the future. So placing an object under Lozano-Hemmer's scanner projects it both backwards into the past and forward into the future.

Somewhere, right now, my prescription bottle is sharing virtual space and real time with thousands of personal possessions that meant enough to people that they kept them close.