# Basel Special: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer "PREABSENCE" at House of Electronic Arts, Basel

June 23~2016

With "PREABSENCE", the first solo exhibition of Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer in Switzerland, HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel) presents 11 artworks that range from biometric portraits to data- driven installations.

The show will feature 3 world premieres, including Call on Water, a fountain that writes poems using plumes of water vapour.

Cameras, tracking systems and biometric techniques have now transformed the public space into a metered matrix where every activity can be registered, stored and analysed. Lozano-Hemmer makes use of this technology, but instead of tracking for pre-emptive control he uses it for connecting disparate planes of experience. By creating platforms for participation and self-representation he offers critical, playful and poetic installations that seek complicity and that by definition are out of control, ambiguous and indeterminate.

The show includes poignant political works such as *Level of Confidence* (2015) a face-recognition camera that constantly searches for the missing 43 students kidnapped by the Mexican government in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero. In the piece, military and police identification algorithms compare the image of the public with those of the students, finding which student's facial features look most like the participant's and giving a "level of confidence" on how accurate the match is, in percent. The project aims to make visible the tragic disappearance of the students, creating empathic links and, crucially, to generate income for the affected community, as Lozano-Hemmer directs all proceeds of the project to them.

Also on display will be *Pulse Room* (2006/2016), an installation where 127 of incandescent light bulbs blink to the heart rate of participants who hold a pulse sensor. Shown for the first time in Switzerland, the piece was exhibited in the first Mexican Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2007 and is currently in the collection of several Museums around the World, including MoMA in New York. In *Pulse Room* the visitors leave their digital traces behind in the installation and their presence lingers even when they are already absent. The technology makes them accomplices in a game comprising recording and playback, presence and absence.

Likewise, the sound piece *Microphone* (2008) consists of a vintage 2/3 microphone that has been modified so that inside its head is a tiny loudspeaker and a circuit board connected to a hidden control computer.
When a public member speaks into the microphone, it records his or her voice and immediately plays back the voice of a previous participant, as an echo from the past.

The piece *1984×1984* (2014) was conceived as an homage to George Orwell's dystopian novel, 30 years after his predicted date for the collapse of privacy, the work shows a grid of hundreds of thousands of random numbers extracted from addresses photographed by Google Street View. As the viewer walks in front of that immense variety of images, his or her silhouette is presented within the display and all the numbers inside it
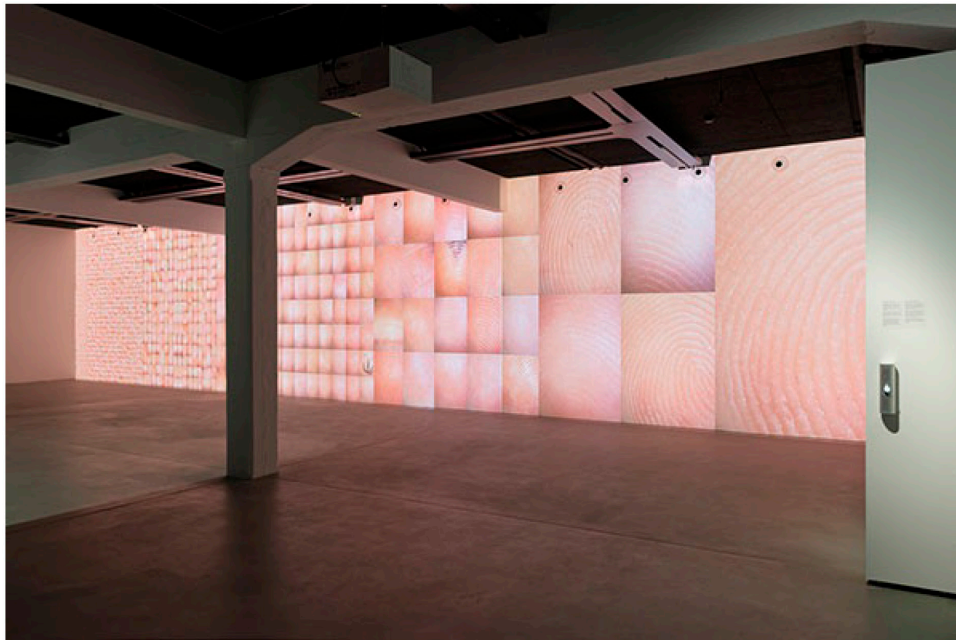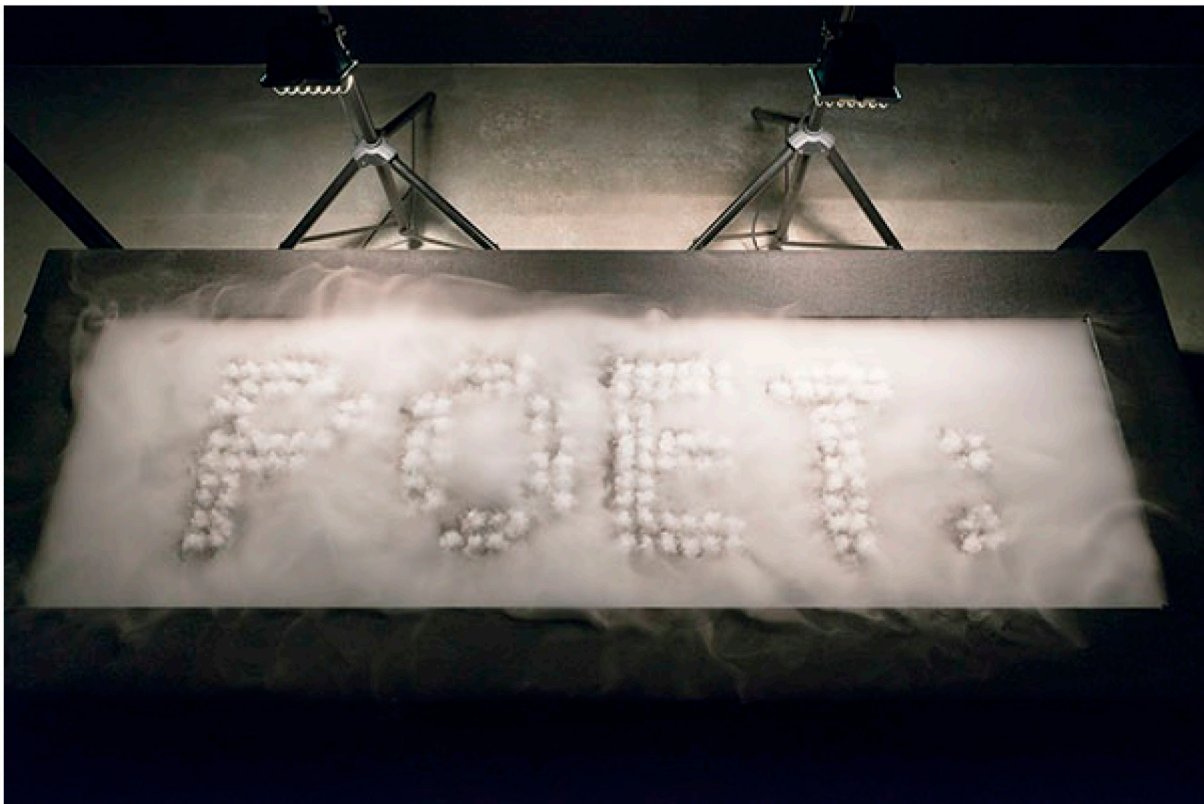
count down to the number 1984.

The show features eleven pieces in a variety of media, from sound-sculptures to data-driven displays. Many of the pieces depend on participation to exist and their content is entirely "crowdsourced".
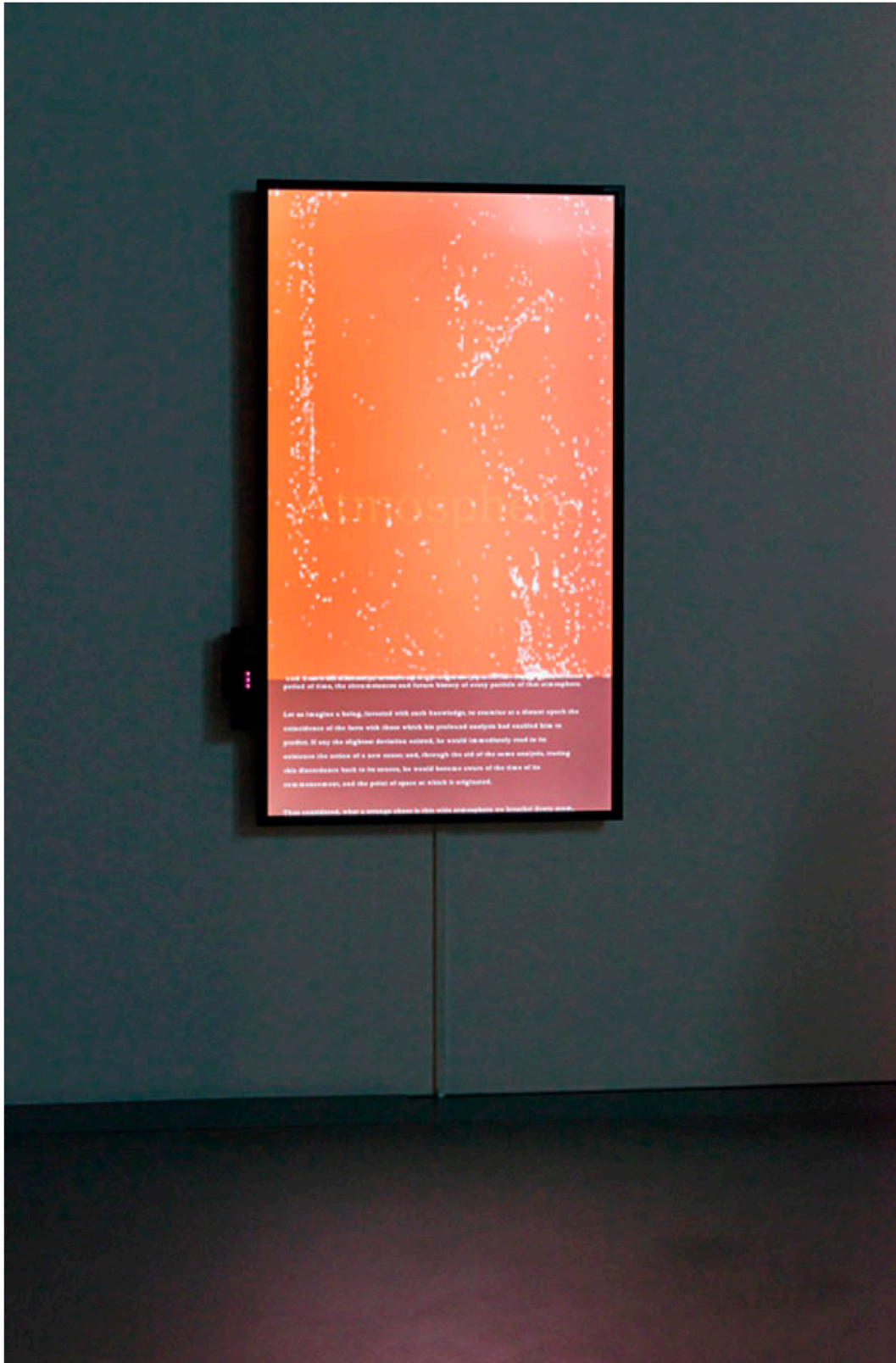
"PREABSENCE" includes the World premiere of *Call on Water* a fountain that creates breathable poetry using an array of ultrasonic atomizers. Salient poems by Octavio Paz are written in mid-air, as words ascend from a pool in the form of fine water vapor.
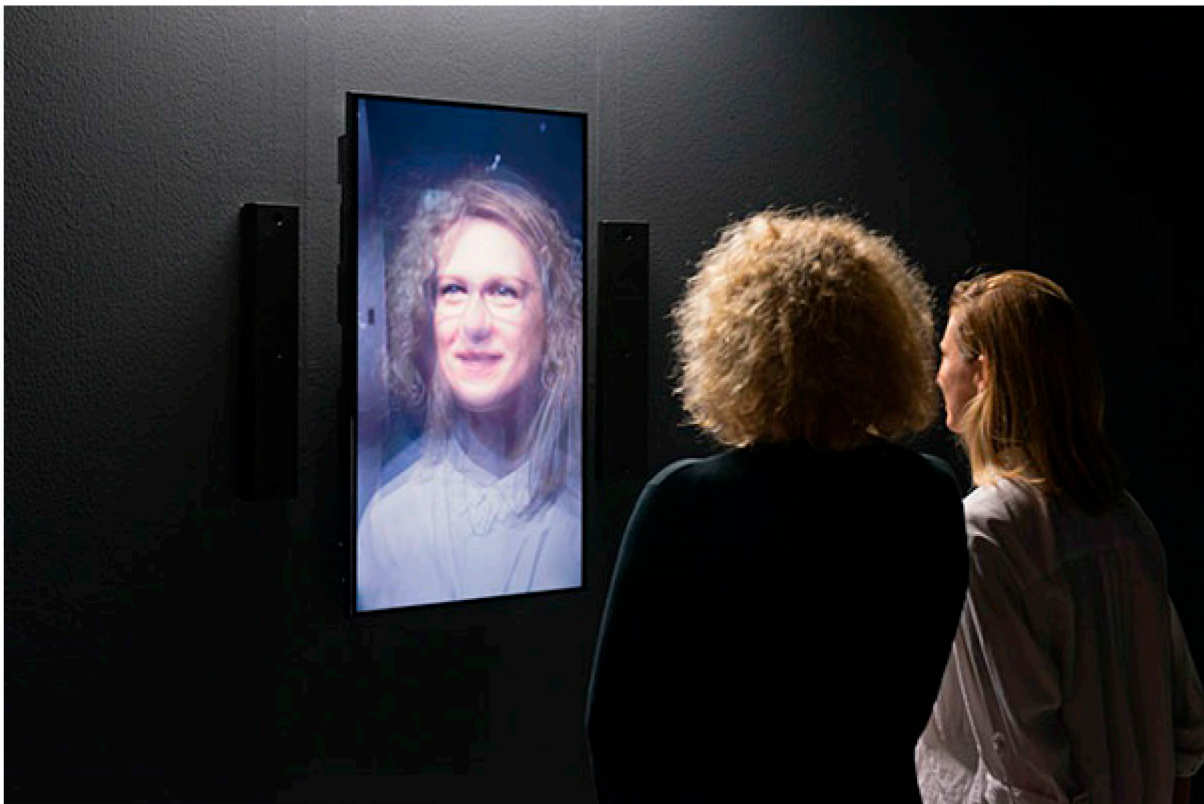
at House of Electronic Arts, Basel
until 28 August 2016

"Basel special: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer 'Preabsence' at House of Electronic Arts, Basel." *Mousse Magazine*. 23 June 2016: Web. 23 June 2016. (english)
http://moussemagazine.it/rafael-lozano-hemmer-house-of-electronic-arts-2016/

"Basel special: Rafael Lozano-Hemmer 'Preabsence' at House of Electronic Arts, Basel." *Mousse Magazine*. 23 June 2016: Web. 23 June 2016. (english)
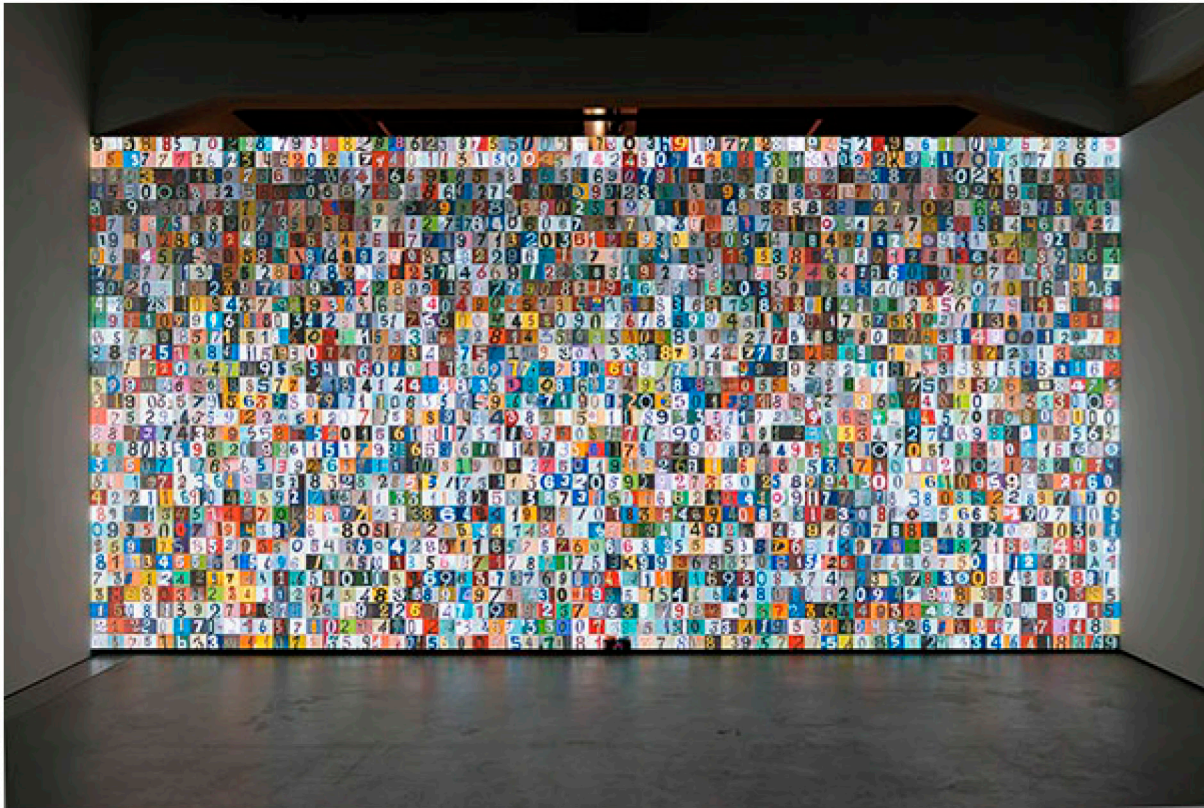http://moussemagazine.it/rafael-lozano-hemmer-house-of-electronic-arts-2016/

Rafael Lozano-Hemmer "PREABSENCE" installation views at House of Electronic Arts, Basel, 2016

Courtesy: the artist; bitforms, New York; Carroll/Fletcher, London; Max Estrella, Madrid; Art Bärtschi & Cie, Geneva. © HeK (House of Electronic Arts Basel). Photo: Franz Wamhof