

# Wilde

## PRESS RELEASE

RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER

*EXCUSE YOU!*

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WILDE | BASEL

The impact of the human species on its environment, which led to creating a term such as *Anthropocene*, is now quantifiable thanks to increasingly precise instruments for measuring, plotting, and visualizing data. These technologies, which make it possible to collect and cross-reference in real-time information of a very diverse nature on a planetary scale and beyond, have been at the heart of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's artistic practice for many years. He uses and diverts them to reveal their aesthetic potential and their symbolic and political significance.

Therefore, the human being is at the center of his reflection, not only as an observable variable but also as a producer, more or less conscious, more or less consenting, of numerous data that serve to map and track individual behavior. *Performance Review* (2013) collects several hundred people's fingerprints captured by surveillance equipment. Once reserved for areas requiring a high degree of protection, such as the banking sector, this technology has become so commonplace that it is associated with operating smartphones, a device to which we entrust the tiniest details of our lives. *Password Breach* (2021) displays on 64 small screens the leaked passwords collected from several famous online data thefts (Panama Papers, Ashley Madison, RockYou2021, etc.). It serves as a reminder that the protection and confidentiality of this information are never fully guaranteed.

Unauthorized access to this private data does not always require a high level of computer knowledge (123456, Password, or Qwerty are still popular passwords). This is despite the fact that recent scandals reveal the existence of the American PRISM program or the Pegasus spyware, highlighting how certain governments set up hacking programs on an international scale for more or less avowed reasons. From this perspective, *Thermal Drift* (2022) uses means that are a priori inaccessible to the average citizen, thermal cameras for military use that testify, as the artist describes it, to the existence of an asymmetrical technological power that is urgent to reappropriate. But the interactive work, which makes it possible to visualize the emission and dispersion of the heat emitted by a human body, also invites us to reconsider the beings we are in their true measure, namely clusters of particles. *Hormonium* (2022) goes even further, visualizing hormonal cycles as they take place at different times of the day or night. And as the artist humorously points out, addressing a teenager is often equivalent to confronting an uncontrollable flood of hormones for the adult.

However, the human body remains essentially composed of water, a natural resource to which universal access is increasingly restricted under the pressure of private interests. *Botella de Castigos* (2022) presents itself as a clock whose seconds correspond to bottles of water displayed on a screen, some identifiable with known brands, others generated by artificial intelligence. *All the Waters* (2022) deals with a similar subject: a robotic arm traces with water on a heated steel plate, the dreamy sounding names (Aquavita, Polar Spring, Belles Roches, Pure Life, etc.) invented to try to make us forget the high environmental cost of this industry.

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Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's work is always closely linked to the place it is presented. Beyond the homage to Marcel Duchamp, *Descending a Parametric Staircase* (2018) also visually echoes the gallery's architecture and its large concentric staircase. And it is to Duchamp, that we owe the still famous phrase "it is the viewer who makes the work," a concept that applies, for example, to the interactive installation *Bilateral Time Slicer* (2016). With its biometric system, the work divides the members of the public into visual and temporal "slices." As in the Aztec three-face masks, the central part corresponds to the most recent portrait, while the furthest band represents the oldest portrait. Therefore, it is the viewer who "makes" the work, insofar as it would not exist without him, but, paradoxically, he has no control over it. The injunction made to the viewer upon arrival in the exhibition can be perceived differently: is it an apology for our actions towards the world we inhabit or, on the contrary, for our inability to act to preserve it?

P.-Y. Desaiwe

**Rafael Lozano-Hemmer** was born in 1967 in Mexico City and lives and works in Montréal, Canada. In 1989, he received a Bachelor of Science in Physical Chemistry from Concordia University in Montréal, Canada. Though he did not pursue the sciences as a direct career, it has influenced his work in many ways, providing conceptual inspiration and practical approaches to create his work. Lozano-Hemmer is considered one of the most relevant electronic artists of our time. Since his emergence in the 1990s, he has mixed the disparate fields of digital media, robotics, medical science, performance art, and lived experience into interactive artworks. He is known for creating large-scale interactive installations in public spaces at the intersection of architecture and performance. Lozano-Hemmer was the first artist to officially represent Mexico at the Venice Biennale in 2007. He has also shown at Art Biennials and Triennials in Havana, Istanbul, Montréal, and many others. Recently, he has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Brooklyn Museum (New York, USA), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, USA), Fundación Casa de Mexico en España (Madrid, Spain), Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo (Mexico City, Mexico), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (USA), MUAC Museum (Mexico City, Mexico), Museum of Contemporary Art (Montreal, Canada) and Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney, Australia). Collections holding his work include the MoMA in New York, the Tate in London, and the AGO in Toronto. Lozano-Hemmer has received two BAFTA British Academy Awards for Interactive Art, a Golden Nica at the Prix Ars Electronica, "Artist of the year" Rave Award from Wired Magazine, and a Rockefeller fellowship, to only name a few.

**Pierre-Yves Desaiwe** is an art historian at the University of Liège and curator for contemporary art at the Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels. He is an exhibition curator, a teacher at the Ecole nationale supérieure des arts visuels (La Cambre, Brussels), has chaired the Belgian Association of Art Critics (ABCA), and contributes regularly to publications on contemporary art (correspondent in Belgium for Flash Art). As a member of the Digital Arts Commission of the Ministry of Culture, he is interested in the relationship between art and technology, in particular in the use of digital media for artistic purposes.

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