



Association for Public Art

Association for Public Art
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online at: canarypromo.com/openair**

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Philadelphia's *Open Air* inspires Memorial Tributes, Marriage Proposals, Lullabies, Rants and More, Draws Participants from 92 Countries, and Welcomes Thousands of Visitors to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway

PHILADELPHIA — From September 20 to October 14, Philadelphia's skyline underwent an unforgettable nightly transformation: *Open Air*, created by artist **Rafael Lozano-Hemmer** and commissioned by the **Association for Public Art**, combined public art and mobile technology to create a spectacular interactive light experience with 24 powerful robotic searchlights directed by participants' voices and GPS locations. The *Open Air* iPhone app was **downloaded more than 7,000 times**, and an estimated **17,000 people visited the Benjamin Franklin Parkway** throughout the project, making it the largest crowd-sourced public art project ever seen in Philadelphia.

Thousands of people saw the lights from different vantage points throughout Philadelphia and held "viewing parties" at their offices, homes and apartment towers. An on-site survey at the project information center at Eakins Oval revealed the diversity of participation, including that 49 percent of the respondents were in the 18-29 age group, and 22 percent were over 50 years old.

As of October 21, nearly 63,000 people visited openairphilly.net, from 92 countries around the world; **close to 6,000 messages were recorded** in over 20 languages (including Russian, Portuguese, Hebrew and Cantonese), on subject matter varying from lullabies and marriage proposals to grammatical rants and sports scores. Many recordings were surprisingly personal and emotional: A young girl laments her parents' divorce ("I'm sorry your marriage is falling apart"), while a father memorializes his son ("It's been a year since we lost you. We love you very much"). One man speaks to his dearly departed relatives ("We're lighting up your doorstep in the heavens when we send you this message"), while another celebrates an important day ("I got married tonight!"). The project's pre-recorded archive, "Voices of Philly," compiled in collaboration with **WHYY**, features messages from **127 famous Philadelphians**, including poet Sonia Sanchez, Sun Ra, Louis Kahn, M. Night Shyamalan, Will Smith, Tina Fey, ?uestlove and many more; this archive remains available for listening on the project website.

"I was delighted to see that Philadelphians made *Open Air* into a platform for public self-expression," says **Lozano-Hemmer**. "As expected, we received thousands of messages with dedications, poems, songs and jokes, but I was quite impressed by the way people used the project as a sounding board for more political and controversial issues, things like gun control, legalizing drugs, gay marriage and thoughts on the

upcoming elections. Once more, we saw that when media is not censored or moderated, for the most part people respond by sending thoughtful and inspiring content. My favorite participants are those who spent time creating strange, experimental sound clips which I have yet to decipher.”

Adds **Penny Balkin Bach**, executive director of the Association for Public Art: “*Open Air* also reflected so well our changing ideas about public art and monumentality. For example, the nearby *Washington Monument* (1897) by Rudolf Siemering was created at a time when people had shared beliefs and values that were expressed in their public artworks. In today's diverse and often divided society, it's challenging for an artist to create — as Rafael did with *Open Air* — a new civic symbol and space to reveal and engage contemporary life. The advanced technology that made *Open Air* both massive and ephemeral also brought people together to enable their intimate and enjoyable experience of one another.”

Open Air fostered significant scientific research and opportunity. On October 12, **The Franklin Institute's** chief astronomer, **Derrick H. Pitts**, hosted a once-in-a-lifetime stargazing opportunity, “Planetarium on the Parkway,” using a special interface designed by the artist that directed *Open Air's* searchlights to point out stellar objects above the Parkway and illustrate the beauty of the night sky to more than 400 attendees. Also, in collaboration with Lozano-Hemmer, **Audubon Pennsylvania** and **Dr. J. Alan Clark** of Fordham University took advantage of the searchlights to conduct acoustical monitoring and spectrographic experiments related to bird migration.

Each night of *Open Air* kicked off with messages from local community groups, including project partners **Philadelphia Live Arts Festival** and **DesignPhiladelphia**; nonprofits **Project H.O.M.E.** and **William Way Community Center**; arts organizations **Art Sanctuary**, **UbuWeb** and **Grizzly Grizzly** gallery; and many more. In addition, *Open Air's* opening night celebration on September 20 featured performances by Grammy Award-winning musician and legendary beatboxer **Rahzel**, internationally renowned extreme vocalist **David Moss**, and Jamarr Hall and Kai Davis from the acclaimed **Philly Youth Poetry Movement**.

The project was funded in part by the inaugural round of the [Philadelphia Knight Arts Challenge](#) and presented in conjunction with the [2012 Philadelphia Live Arts Festival](#) and the [2012 DesignPhiladelphia Festival](#); although *Open Air* ended on October 14, the website [openairphilly.net](#) will remain in perpetuity, allowing visitors to send, listen to and rate messages, as well as view their own messages as virtual web designs.

For more information on the Association for Public Art, visit [associationforpublicart.org](#).

RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER (b. 1967, Mexico City) is an internationally recognized Mexican-Canadian artist currently living in Montreal. He has produced large-scale interactive art installations across the globe, including the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, the 2010 Light in Winter Festival in Melbourne, Australia, and the 50th Anniversary of the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 2009. His work in kinetic sculpture, responsive environments, video installation and photography has been shown in museums and biennials in four-dozen countries. Concurrent with *Open Air*, Lozano-Hemmer had an exhibition of his work at New York City's [bitforms gallery](#) and the San Francisco [Museum of Modern Art](#). The solo exhibition "Rafael Lozano-Hemmer: Trackers" is on view at the Fundación Telefónica, Buenos Aires, Argentina through Dec. 23. [lozano-hemmer.com](#)

THE ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC ART (aPA, formerly Fairmount Park Art Association) commissions, preserves, promotes and interprets public art in Philadelphia. Since its founding in 1872, aPA has worked with artists, communities and civic leaders to make encounters with art a part of everyday life, creating a Museum Without Walls that is free and accessible to residents and visitors. As the nation's first private nonprofit organization dedicated to integrating public art and urban planning, aPA has an unparalleled and pioneering history, characterized by artistic excellence, creative initiative, collaboration and civic engagement. Working closely with city agencies, aPA remains today a central resource and contributor to Philadelphia's enduring reputation as an important place to view and experience the evolution of public art. Through aPA's free, interactive public programs, website and publications, Philadelphians and visitors are invited to experience civic spaces enlivened by artists and art; to discover the city's vast collection of public art; and to connect to a shared cultural legacy. [associationforpublicart.org](#)

PARTNERS & SUPPORTERS of *Open Air* include: the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation; the National Endowment for the Arts; the City of Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy; Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation (GPTMC); Center City District; Parkway Council Foundation; Canadian and Mexican Consulates; Mexican Cultural Center; Audubon Pennsylvania; Park Towne Place Apartments - an Aimco Community; Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Rodin Museum; Sautter Crane Rental, The Victory Foundation; Independence Foundation; Prudent Management Associates; Theodore R. and Barbara B. Aronson; The Honickman Foundation; Independence Foundation; H.F. (Gerry) Lenfest; The Pincus Foundation; The Victory Foundation; 6abc; WHYY; Metro Philadelphia; Tierney; Clear Channel; Take One Production; Expert Events; Catering By Design; and individual donors, among others.

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To request high-resolution images, interviews and more information on *Open Air*, please contact:
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