Midway through a series of room-consuming installations in ‘Unstable Presence’ – Rafael Lozano-Hemmer’s exhibition tracking projects completed over the past 18 years – is a small glass vial. Suspended within it, engraved on elemental gold, are millions of nanopamphlets – produced by Cornell University’s NanoScale facility – that contain a fragment of On the Permanent Impression of Our Words and Actions on the Globe We Inhabit (1838) by mathematician, philosopher and inventor of the mechanical computer Charles Babbage. In the treatise, Babbage posits that the atmosphere is a vast repository of everything everyone has said and imagines how we could potentially ‘rewind’ the movement of each molecule of air to re-create those exact utterances, whispers and ‘sighs of mortality’. Released into the museum’s ventilation system, the vial’s pamphlets become inhalable texts for visitors to carry into the outside world.

Although the scale of Babbage Nanopamphlets (2015) is unique to this exhibition, the piece intones the show’s core concepts: language, embodied traces and the shifting legibility and reproducibility of data in transmission. Like Babbage, Lozano-Hemmer is a polymath, working at a speculative edge of scientific research into algorithm-based fabrication and networked digital infrastructures to create interactive installations. Curated by Lesley Johnstone, with François LeTourneux and Rudolf Frieling, the 21 projects that comprise ‘Unstable Presence’ are most compelling when they negotiate the uncertain terrain of participation and data extraction.

In Pulse Spiral (2008), for instance, visitors contribute their heartbeat to two sensors placed beneath an enormous artificial respiratory system. Each heartbeat, activating the bulbs, contributes their exhalations as they inhale the breath of those before them, which is kept circulating by means of the device’s mechanical bellows. The system seems to have the unsettling capacity to suffocate its occupants, even as it entertains them.

The works of ‘Unstable Presence’ both reproduce and re-engineer the variable and volatile structures that regulate our bodies. Yet, they do not offer, or even suggest, tactics to exist outside of them: to be opaque, undetectable, hidden amid grids and algorithms. Any liberatory potential in the momentary commons is kept circulating by means of the device’s mechanical bellows. The system seems to have the unsettling capacity to suffocate its occupants, even as it entertains them.

The more sinister implications of capturing and aggregating such biometric data are made explicit in Zoom Pavilion, completed in 2015 in collaboration with artist Krzysztof Wodiczko. Visitors enter a room in which 12 surveillance cameras record and project across the walls and ceiling the movements of those assembled, analyzing their spatial relationships in real time, as facial recognition algorithms register and compare every individual face in a viewable archive. With Vicious Circular Breathing (2013), Lozano-Hemmer again explores the idea of a perpetually shifting and potentially ominous biometric archive. Evoking both an enormous artificial respiratory system and musical wind instrument, the installation invites visitors to enter, at one end, a hermetically sealed glass box. Inside, they contribute their exhalations as they inhale the breath of those before them, which is kept circulating by means of the device’s mechanical bellows. The system seems to have the unsettling capacity to suffocate its occupants, even as it entertains them.

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Michael Nardone

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Michele Auder

Martos Gallery
New York, USA

Certain members of the so-called Resistance, struggling for meaning in the wake of the 2016 election, once argued that art would rediscover its purpose under Donald Trump. Joyce Carol Oates tweeted that artists would ‘thrive’ under oppression, a point echoed by *Time* magazine. Art would only get better, we were told — much as it supposedly had under Ronald Reagan in the mythic 1980s — and find in these troubling times its raison d’être. Two years in, I’m still waiting.

The largest work in Michel Auder’s second show at Martos Gallery, ‘And virtually everything said has been said incorrectly, and it’s been said wrong, or it’s been covered wrong by the press’, is a 2018 series of 91 photographs. Pinned along a dark hallway, each image is a 33 × 48 cm c-print, mostly depicting candid scenes from daily life, including men and women lounging in rooms, men playing in a river, a baby awaiting its diaper change, a bullet-ridden stop sign in the countryside. All are constituent elements of a domestic universe of deliberately uninteresting tableaux, set mostly within the obliterating confines of the woods — and far from the bonkers political landscape Auder has in mind, given the title is lifted from Trump’s assertion that he never saw an invoice from the porn star Stormy Daniels. Other images capture bits of cultural detritus across the art-historical spectrum, from classical fragments of male faces and genitals to a shot of a computer playing Jean-Luc Godard’s *La Chinoise* (The Chinese, 1967) to Alice Neel’s 1970 portrait of a shirtless Andy Warhol, whose presence in the show via Neel reads like a cue card; Trump frequently quotes The Philosophy of Andy Warhol on Twitter and, when Warhol was alive, Trump repeatedly tried to commission a portrait of his Tower. From Warhol, Trump learned the greatest lesson of art in the 20th century: ‘Good business is the best art.’ And only business seems to be getting better.

Nor was art going to under Trump, though it did find in him an apotheosis of the very strategies of performance and promotion it had developed over the last 50 years, particularly in his conceptual transformation from tabloid goon into totalizing event. (Quibble away.) It’s no surprise, given this, that Trump adores Warhol, whose presence in the show — and even reads like a cue card; Trump frequently quotes The Philosophy of Andy Warhol on Twitter and, when Warhol was alive, Trump repeatedly tried to commission a portrait of his Tower. From Warhol, Trump learned the greatest lesson of art in the 20th century: ‘Good business is the best art.’ And only business seems to be getting better.

Andrew Durbin

Shiv Kotecha

Manceaux’s references to digital and medieval image production consider the ways haptic and optic technologies have changed how we capture and record data. ‘Desiluminaciones’ flattens the ways in which these operations can be made functional: these are active sites of transmission and reception, reversal and appearance, of seeing — and seeing more.