

RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER
Musée d'art
contemporain, Montreal,
Canada

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 impressive hyperboloid structure of 300 incandescent light bulbs that cascade down the museum's rotunda. The sensors record each heartbeat, activating the bulbs to blink in sync so their light reverberates throughout the space. As its intensity amplifies, the pulse is joined in chorus by the 299 preceding heartbeats, which flash as an uncoordinated constellation of individual rhythms. Similarly, in *Voice Array* (2011), visitors offer their utterances into a recording device that translates the phonemes into beams of light and enters that utterance into its reservoir of voices. As the words echo around the room, they are joined by a polyphonic oral history of the installation's statements, resonating in a synaesthetic ensemble of noise and light.

The alluring interface environments of these two works entice participation, yet leave one questioning exactly what, and to what end, they have contributed their body's information.

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.

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 they articulate disperses, like Babbage's language, into the air.

Michael Nardone



ELSA-LOUISE MANCEAUX
Lodos Gallery, Mexico
City, Mexico

In 14th-century manuscript production, after the vellum was cut to size and the scribe transcribed his verse with ink pot and quill, it became popular to hire an illuminator – or a limner artist – to smooth the surface of the vellum down with a pumice stone and then apply gold-leaf and ultramarine pigment onto the pages. These 'illuminations' framed the text, made flourishes on initials and accented the miniature pastorals or Christian icons commonly found in these manuscripts. In the 21st century, illumination – at least as it works within a system of reading – is a reversal of this tradition. Our profane icons and textboxes are backlit and information appears in silhouette; I depress an icon on my phone's screen, it fades. The screen lights up for a moment and a new screen appears.

For 'Desiluminaciones' (Disilluminations) at Lodos Gallery, Elsa-Louise Manceaux has installed five paintings and four drawing-diptychs that refer to both technologies – illuminated manuscripts and illuminated screens – as generative touchstones for pictorial and graphic production. The show's title is a neologism that signals a reversal of light's potentially illuminating properties. The access to information that manuscripts and digital technologies allow – whether it be divine or profane – is, in Manceaux's work,



reconfigured to produce a different kind of epistemological loop. If, as Manceaux defines it, *desiluminación* is the act of ‘turning off something in order to turn on (to) something else’, then what we experience in our encounter with her pastel compositions is a volte-face, one which refocuses our attention to something previously unseen. Manceaux’s delicate treatment of material – acrylic, acrylic gouache, egg tempera and colour pencil – as well as of her substrate, the gallery’s walls, emphasizes this liminal energy. In each piece, illumination is linked not with knowable figures but with ghostly disembodiments: eyelids that drift, spectral visages rendered eyeless and agape.

In the first room, two large-scale paintings face one another: *Elevated Winks* (all works 2018) depicts several eyelids – crescent shapes in blue – hovering like a school of fish against a chalky, cerulean wash. In *Desiluminaciones*, a burst of pink brushstrokes extends from the centre of the canvas toward its edges. The burst itself, however, appears inside a curvy, anatomical sack: are these eyelashes or lens flares? Our attention is directed toward the bottom left of the canvas, where two brushstrokes touch the pink membrane of this ‘sack’, threatening to burst it open. Whereas *Winks* is embedded, flush, into the gallery’s median wall, *Desiluminaciones* protrudes several inches off it, as if it were pushing the former into its place. We stand between an optical operation: on the one side, a flash; on the other, the shutter.

In the second room, four drawing-diptychs, taped onto fibreboards, are installed at eye level. Mirroring the illuminator’s process, Manceaux has shaved relief frames for each diptych into the gallery’s wall. In *Primer paso, Columna, Conexión* (First Step, Column, Connection), she uses simple line drawings in pencil and watercolour to evoke disconnected features of a body made fleshless, focusing particularly on its curves and contours: the bending of joints, a series of floating smiles. On the verso, these shapes float independently, while on the recto, their connections have been drawn more concretely: there, a plump, animalistic hand presses into a swath of orange paint that runs across the bottom of the canvas. The pane spews a cloudy red flare upward, illuminating the hand that presses it.

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.

Shiv Kotecha

MICHEL 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, with its transgendering emphasis on the artist’s breasts. Sex recurs, sometimes to comic effect: a young Cindy Sherman stands alongside a giant photograph of a man’s genitals, with Sherman’s name inked across his protruding testicles. Auder, the gallery notes, ‘embraces [image] saturation’.

But I can only read within the work what its quietude omits: the man who gave the exhibition its title and the protagonist of the film playing in the show’s largest space, Donald Trump. *Trumped* (2018) is a slideshow of images of the president, various renaissance paintings, details of demons from tapestries and more scenes of home life, set to a low, droning soundtrack by Matthias Grübel. In the film, Auder’s protagonist – the dubious subject of

‘our’ ‘politics’ – fully asserts himself among images like those one might find in the exhibition: he is open-mouthed; he points; he rolls his squinting eyes. Trump takes up huge amounts of visual and mental real estate (the only real estate he ever succeeded in), peddling the only infinitely renewable resource known to man: his stupidity. Here, the peace afforded by the print-outs arranged in the hall leading to the film is disturbed – or, rather, Trumped – and Auder reminds us that, even in those private, delicate spaces we may describe as the ‘Trumpvoid’, when the president’s presence in our lives goes unacknowledged by those privileged enough to not be in his administration’s immediate sight, he is always there, lurking at or below the surface. And no, things – art or otherwise – are not 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 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.

Andrew Durbin

This page

Michel Auder,
Trumped, 2018,
video stills

Opposite page

Above
Elsa-Louise
Manceaux,
Desiluminaciones
(Disilluminations),
2018, acrylic, acrylic
gouache, flashé,
egg-tempera and
colour pencil on linen,
213 × 165 × 4 cm

Below

Rafael Lozano-
Hemmer, *Pulse Spiral*,
2008, installation view

