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Pei-Ru Keh, "Philippe Parreno unveils new commission at the revamped MoMA" *Wallpaper*, October 17, 2019

Wallpaper*

Philippe Parreno unveils new commission at the revamped MoMA

The French artist has created a site-specific installation for the entrance of the New York art museum. Here, we go behind-the-scenes with an exclusive interview, and photographs captured by Parreno himself



Detail of *Echo*, 2019, by Philippe Parreno, installation view at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 2019 The Museum of Modern Art. Photography: Denis Doorly

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Philippe Parreno knows a thing or two about making an entrance. Since his memorable *Anywhen* commission for Tate Modern in 2016, the multi-disciplinary French artist has gone on to transform museum and exhibition spaces around the world into immersive, mystifying experiences that blend light, film and sound with a magical aplomb.

Parreno's latest undertaking is a new site-specific work for the revamped Museum of Modern Art, which reopens on 21 October. Starting off beside the original entrance of the museum, and spanning the newly expanded lobby and walkway, which extends through to 54th Street, Parreno's interactive piece, *Echo* heralds a new era for the institution.

'When [museum director] Glenn Lowry approached me, he said he was interested in doing something throughout the lobby, to make it a real public space,' explains Parreno. 'I think the idea came after I did the commission at Tate Modern – something that was there like a ghostly presence, something that will be present and something that will not be present. I took that as the thread throughout the project.'



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Echo, 2019, by Philippe Parreno, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © The artist. Photography:

‘Normally I’m occupied with exhibition making,’ the artist adds. ‘An exhibition is a display where we have a timeline or an architecture, where you hang a series of objects. So you can say that an exhibition always has a beginning and an end – it’s time-based. I thought this could be a different approach. For the first time, I’m going to reorganise myself around that notion of manifestation. All that will appear without a timeline.’

From this starting point, Parreno worked with coders to programme some of his favoured motifs and objects – marquees, hanging lamps, mirrored shutters and a screen – to function continuously over the two-year duration of the commission, spanning both night and day. ‘[I thought] about the object as a

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kind of creature,' he reflects. 'It would wake up, move, behave and then sleep and dream. I was trying to get an auto-poetic system [where there] was a set of rules that could be reinvented by the system.'

The kinetic aspects of the installation are informed by gleaning data from the surrounding site. Seismometers that have been installed throughout the building, to measure factors including the varying tensions in its structure, the velocity and direction of the wind, sounds both outside and inside, along with the number of people visiting the museum. These variables are perceived by the installation (which Parreno calls 'the creature') and produce unpredictable movements that really occur by chance.

Parreno states, 'I didn't want to use any mathematical equations or algorithms, so everything is really linked to perception. It's a creature that reflects what it perceives and when it perceives more than one thing, it produces another operation – the movement of a light or the strength of the light. It's an echo, which is the title of the work.'



Echo, 2019, by Philippe Parreno, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © The artist.
Photography: Philippe Parreno

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The aural component, a consistent element in Parreno's work, was also taken a step further through the creation of a soundtrack that will never repeat itself. Parreno explains, 'I worked with my sound designer Nicolas Becker, and we approached Venezuelan musician Arca to [perform] a song that Nicolas produced and the third layer was a start-up company based in London called Bronze, whose goal is to produce records that regenerate themselves when you play them, so the same concert will never be played twice. They take a granular approach; the sound particles can be redistributed according to the artist's vision along with other factors. Altogether, we've produced two years worth of soundtrack and whispers.'

The final result is a subtle, moving piece that flickers and makes sounds in a haunting and otherworldly manner. MoMA director Glenn D Lowry adds, 'Philippe's commissioned piece is remarkably well-suited not only to the architecture of the renovated and expanded lobby, but also to the ambitions and goals of the museum, as we endeavour to neither repeat ourselves nor remain static.'



Echo, 2019, by Philippe Parreno, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © The artist.
Photography: Philippe Parreno