



**Contact:**        **DKC Public Relations**  
Chris Canning  
202-552-5442  
[chris\\_canning@dkcnews.com](mailto:chris_canning@dkcnews.com)

**PLANET WORD MUSEUM ANNOUNCES *SPEAKING WILLOW*, AN INTERACTIVE INSTALLATION BY  
WORLD-RENOWNED CONTEMPORARY ARTIST RAFAEL LOZANO-HEMMER**

*A sound sculpture in the shape of a weeping willow tree will adorn the courtyard entrance to the historic Franklin School building when the museum opens to visitors in 2020.*

March 15, 2019 (Washington, D.C.) - Today, [Planet Word](#), a revolutionary museum dedicated to the power and fun of language and how words shape the human experience, announced a new commission by contemporary artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer titled *Speaking Willow*. The interactive sound and light sculpture – commissioned by museum founder, Ann Friedman, in partnership with [Public Art Fund](#) – will utilize innovative speaker array technology to create a polyphonic echo of the world’s languages, engaging visitors and welcoming them to the museum at the entrance to the Franklin School building.

The installation, in the shape of a 20-foot weeping willow tree, will feature 500 individual hanging speakers, each containing a sound archive of recordings in a distinct language. These recordings, curated by Planet Word in collaboration with the artist’s studio, include a variety of notable and historically significant speeches, poems, and other emblematic voices. Playback of these recordings will be activated by the movement of visitors underneath *Speaking Willow*’s branches.

“I am delighted to be working with Rafael, whose design for *Speaking Willow* perfectly matched my desire for a beautiful, interactive, language-related artwork for the new courtyard entrance,” said Ms. Friedman. “Now, even before visitors enter the museum doors, they will get a taste of the fun and surprise with words that awaits them inside.”

The artist, Mr. Lozano-Hemmer, is known for creating platforms for public participation, by integrating technologies such as robotics, telematic networks, or computerized surveillance into his art. His work has been featured prominently around the world, including his current monographic exhibition [Pulse](#) at the Hirshhorn Museum, his traveling mid-career retrospective co-produced by the MAC Museum in Montreal and SFMOMA in San Francisco, and *Vectorial Elevation*, an installation in which 800,000 participants created searchlight sculptures above Mexico City, Dublin, and Vancouver.

"Despite its large-scale, this project is designed to create intimate, organic interaction with visitors entering Planet Word. The piece makes tangible the languages spoken by over 99% of the world's population, in the form of a diverse array of voices that are activated as someone strolls under the tree." said Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. "I am grateful to Ann Friedman and the Public Art Fund for making this ambitious project possible."

Fabricated in steel, the trunks and branches of *Speaking Willow* will carry data cables that emerge from the structure and hang vertically, swaying in the wind. The speakers will hang from oscillating branches, between 7-14 feet from the ground, remaining silent until computerized sensors detect visitors' movement and initiate playback of the recorded content as they pass through the courtyard.

Although artificial, the tree will be covered in living vine, ivy and other evergreen climbing plants, adding a natural and organic appearance to the technologically advanced structure. Facing the speaking tree will be a quartz gray steel gate that will serve as a reference to the historical wrought iron gates that decorate the Franklin School, but offer a modern update.

"Rafael Lozano-Hemmer is celebrated for a practice that melds technology, sculpture, and performance to create unique platforms for public participation, catalyzing new social dynamics and rendering even the most complex ideas as vital, tangible experiences. *Speaking Willow* embodies the formal sophistication, intellectual rigor, and generosity at the heart of Rafael's work, and is brilliantly conceived as a beacon for Planet Word, a museum that will introduce a broad audience to the wonder of language in all of its forms," says Nicholas Baume, Director and Chief Curator of Public Art Fund. "In addition to our core changing exhibition program in New York City, Public Art Fund is delighted to be working with key partners to commission permanent works that bring the dynamism of the world's most interesting artists to significant public spaces. We're thrilled that Rafael's commission for Planet World, led by Ann Friedman, is the first in this new initiative to be announced."

The Franklin School, a five-story, 50,000-square-foot modern Renaissance building designed by Adolf Cluss in 1869, will house Planet Word and will prove to be a dynamic backdrop for this state-of-the-art installation. *Speaking Willow* is also an ode to the building's history, as the Franklin School was the site of Alexander Graham Bell's first wireless transmission of the human voice using a Photophone, a precursor to fiberoptic technology, in 1880.

###

### **About Planet Word**

Planet Word is a non-profit museum that will be dedicated to the power and fun of language. Founded by philanthropist Ann Friedman, the museum will invite visitors of all ages to experience what words mean to the human experience in a fun, technologically-advanced, immersive environment. Scheduled to open in early 2020, it will be housed on three floors in the Franklin School Building at 13<sup>th</sup> and K streets, a National Historic Landmark with a rich history in public education and the site of the first wireless voice transmission by Alexander Graham Bell in 1880. Planet Word is overseen by a Board of Directors that includes leaders in media, real estate, technology, the arts, museums, and education, led by Chair Ann Friedman. Renovation of The Franklin School is being overseen by Beyer Blinder Belle. The general contractor is Whiting-Turner, and the museum galleries are being designed by Local Projects. For more information, visit [PlanetWordMuseum.org](http://PlanetWordMuseum.org).

### **About the Artist**

Lozano-Hemmer was born in Mexico City in 1967. In 1989, he received a Bachelor of Science in physical chemistry from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. In 2003, he founded the studio Antimodular Research in Montreal, which is composed of 15 programmers, engineers, architects and artists from around the world. Lozano-Hemmer was the first artist to represent Mexico at the Venice Biennale in 2007, and he has recently had solo exhibitions at the MUAC Museum in Mexico City, the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal, and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney. His work is in the

collection of the Hirshhorn, as well as MoMA, Guggenheim, Museo del Barrio in New York, the Tate and Science Museum in London, CIFO in Miami, Jumex and MUAC in Mexico City, SFMOMA in San Francisco, and many others. More than two dozen permanent architectural commissions are currently being developed around the world, and his large-scale interactive installations have been created for public spaces in Mexico City, New York, Barcelona and Berlin. For more information, visit [Lozano-Hemmer.com](http://Lozano-Hemmer.com).

### **About Public Art Fund**

Public Art Fund has presented dynamic exhibitions by the world's most compelling and significant artists in New York City and beyond for more than 40 years. These projects set the standard for excellence in the field, giving urban space new meaning, while engaging diverse audiences and making culture accessible to all. In addition to this core program, Public Art Fund also offers consulting services that bring strategic planning, curatorial, and project management expertise to the world's leading cultural institutions, corporations, and civic organizations through **Public Art Fund: Creative Partnerships**. Amplifying the impact of partners' own initiatives, Public Art Fund commissions permanent installations and temporary exhibitions in line with the unique vision of its partners and the specific parameters of each site, resulting in new artworks that activate public spaces and create engaged constituencies through the power of public art. For more information, visit [PublicArtFund.org](http://PublicArtFund.org).