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LEO VILLAREAL: WORLD'S LARGEST LIGHT SCULPTURE

Leo Villareal is an abstract modernist for a digital century. The Bay Lights, with its 1.8-mile-long span, will be Leo Villareal's most ambitious project to date. The Bay Lights is a monumental tour de force seven times the scale of the Eiffel Tower's 100th Anniversary lighting. The world's largest light sculpture at 1.8 miles wide and 500 feet high the work is part of the Bay Bridge 75th anniversary. Whether it amounts to more than a super sized Christmas light show is debatable, but it certainly is bigger and offers more complex effects. The work is composed of the 25,000 individually programmed LEDs with integrators and 48,000 Bridge Clips. The abstract illuminations of The Bay Lights are controlled by the artist's custom-made computer software and draw their inspiration from Bay Bridge's environment. One of the biggest challenges is making sure the Bay Lights work from every perspective — from the vantage point at the foot of the bridge or across the Bay in Sausalito. The final product will feature simultaneous layers of various sequences played in random order for a random amount of time. "You will never see the exact same progression twice," explains Villareal. "You might recognize certain sets of patterns, but there is no beginning, middle, or end."

Controlled by a computer program, the thousands of lights go on and off, generating all kinds of patterns. In most of Villareal's work you get impressions of falling snow, fireworks, swarming fireflies, a Las Vegas light fountain and stars in the night sky moving according to some divine choreography. Rings rise and fall; clustered forms swirl; dark rectangles framed by light expand over and over; circles grow into great moonlike spheres. Different patterns happen simultaneously, and the computer shuffles the subprograms so that no one sequence ever repeats. It is hard to tear away. You keep watching to see what will happen next. The sculpture was to debut in 2012, but delays in securing permits and raising funds forced a postponement.

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730 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK NY 10019
TEL 646 336 7183
FAX 646 336 7185
WWW.GERINGLOPEZ.COM

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Since September, expert electrical crews tied into harnesses have been working late at night to install the lights on the span's vertical cables. The LED artist and his team have now finished installing lights along the suspension cables spanning a 1.8-mile section of the Bay Bridge, which connects San Francisco and the East Bay, almost a month ago. Right now, he's tweaking the software algorithms that dictate the movement patterns of the lights. In a press release Villareal said of these surroundings: "We have traffic moving back and forth, we have boats underneath, the oscillations of the waves, the weather, light, and air. I take input from all of those things."artist Leo Villareal will create complex algorithms and patterns in a dazzling display across the bridge's west span. This is art that is primarily concerned with light, movement and the rhythms of contemporary life. In fact the work of Villareal is so seductive, so blissfully trippy, so brightly rapturous that it practically turns press and art criticism into an adverb generator. It distills the present, taking our cultural fascination with Bright Lights, Big City, and reducing it to a minimal essence. The lights are only on the west-facing side and won't distract drivers so the work will be visible only from the north side of the bridge, most easily to those walking along the San Francisco shoreline. Pier 14, just south of the Ferry Building, provides an ideal vantage point for San Franciscans to watch. For non-locals, a live, multi-camera streaming video of the The Bay Lights' launch will be shown on March 5th at 8.30PM at thebaylights.org.

