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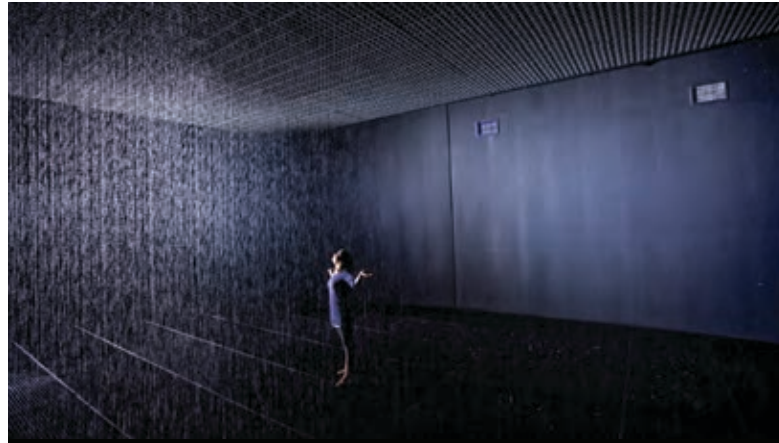
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Engineering rain that doesn't get you wet

By Leo Kent

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As I write this it is raining, when I interviewed Hannes Koch of design-art collective Random International it was raining, in fact, for the last six months it has been raining. Strange then, that a new installation at the Barbican called Rain Room is attracting so many visitors. In this room, not surprisingly, it rains but the clever twist is that as you walk around the space not a single drop touches you.

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Rain tech

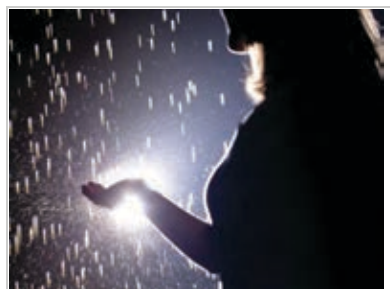
Koch explains, "It uses a very sophisticated tracking system which recognizes the presence of the human body or multiple human bodies in the space and then tells the system not to rain on people and it switches off the rain around those people. If you fill the space with about 30 people it is pretty likely to stop raining entirely."

“ It will rain down in shapes and so forth, it is going to be quite incredible ”

The tracking system is made up of 3D depth cameras either side of the installation that communicate with the water valves. When you enter the installation, the cameras ascertain your size and shape and force the valves directly above you to close – this all happens at very high speeds.

With 1,000 litres of water falling per minute, this is not a shy drizzle but a proper downpour, which makes it all the more remarkable that you don't get wet.

Rain Room emerged from another installation they were working on which they decided to abandon. Koch says, "We were thinking about doing some printing with



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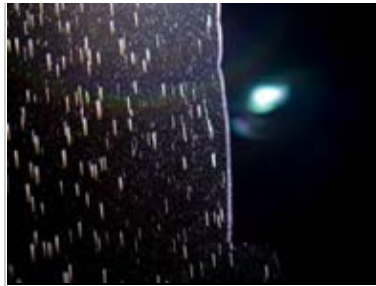
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water on a water reactive substrate...essentially dropping images from a very high height until we realised it was quite boring.”

The experience

Instead they utilised the complex systems they had created for that project by incorporating them into Rain Room. Ultimately, Koch says, “The main thing was the curiosity of how the experience would be to stand in torrential rain and be dry. That was the most interesting image and experience we imagined and wanted to create.”



Movement sensors make sure visitors do not get wet despite "walking in the rain".

“ It uses a very sophisticated tracking system which recognizes the presence of the human body or multiple human bodies in the space ”

While it resides at the Curve exhibition space in the Barbican, Rain Room is also going to be used as a backdrop to a dance performance. Koch says, “We are doing a special performance with choreographer Wayne McGregor from Random Dance, who we have worked with for a number of years.

Changing perceptions

“We thought it would be really interesting to offer this as a stage. Max Richter has written music for the piece. He wrote the score for Waltz With Bashir, so he is a very cinematic composer which really works with the theatrical notions of the installation to bring out a slightly different aspect. At these performances the rain will do stuff which it doesn't do at the moment to make it a piece in its own right, it will rain down in shapes and so forth, it is going to be quite incredible.”

Much of Random International's creations are designed to change the perception of digital-based work as a 'cold' medium by allowing the audience to interact with the installations. As with Rain Room, their 2008 work Audience, which gained them international recognition, equally relied on the participation of the public. In this piece, motorized mirrors moved in synchronization with the viewer. As with Rain Room the piece would be nothing without the spectator's involvement.



The exhibition merges craft and technology in a devastatingly precise manner.

Watch Hans Koch speaking on the visualization of information: