

## TRAVEL

# "Rain Room" at MoMA Heralds Restoration Hardware's Bold Move Into Art Sales Biz

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Ransom International posing in front of "Rain Room" at the Museum of Modern Art

by Janelle Zara

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Gary Friedman, Chairman Emeritus, Creator and Curator of Restoration Hardware / Photo © Patrick McMullan

After debuting at the **Barbican** during **Frieze London** last year, **Ransom International's** "Rain Room" (2012) arrived at **MoMA** last week in time for **Frieze New York**. Now through July 28, thanks to the miracle of motion sensor technology, visitors can stroll through a high-tech, simulated deluge without feeling a drop of water, all to the ambient sounds of Hollywood composer **Max Richter**. Aside from the inherent spectacle and whimsy, what's really notable about this particular exhibit is that it comes to MoMA's "EXPO 1: NEW YORK" show on loan from Marin County, California-based chain of furniture retailers **Restoration Hardware**.

Following an eventful year — 2012 included a \$150-million initial public offering, former co-CEO **Gary Friedman's** resignation in light of a relationship with an employee ("consensual and ongoing," as of August 2012, according to [the New York Times](#)), and a [patent lawsuit over an iconic chair](#) — Restoration Hardware is embarking on a fresh start with the launch of **RH Contemporary Art**, a new fine art-focused division that will include an e-commerce site, an editorial publication, and a five-story space in the Meatpacking District that will show new work commissioned from emerging artists every eight weeks starting in September. At the division's helm is chairman emeritus Friedman and RHCA vice president **Holly Baxter**, to whom Friedman credits the discovery of RHCA's very first purchase. She found "Rain Room," which exists in an edition

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of six, even before its hours-long lines at the Barbican caught MoMA's attention.

"I said, 'Holly, you need to find something that reflects what we believe and what we love. We need to find something that the world has never seen,'" Friedman told ARTINFO at the installation's stateside debut. "She just got a digital CAD drawing that the artists had done, and I immediately saw it and loved it. I loved the whole concept of it. I said, 'Let's buy it!' It really was a reflection of our values and our beliefs. It's a lot about trust, it's a lot about believing, and it's a lot about thinking about you can transform any environment if you believe... There's something very powerful about that."

In September the gallery makes its debut with "Autonomy\*," the first U.S. survey of rAndom International's experimental, tech-driven interactive artwork with two new commissions. ("Rain Room" will likely be on tour, but the ephemeral, heat-activated images of "Self Portrait," 2010, will be on view.) Contrary to art-world convention, RHCA plans to buy commissions from artists directly, up-front, and in-full as part of its stated mission to "raise the visibility of international artists to collectors and viewers." The unique approach, however unorthodox, would provide the type of financial backing that would potentially launch the career of the kind of emerging or mid-career artist RHCA is looking to patronize. As far as price is concerned, the gallery has thus far established that "there will also be secondary market works available in some exhibitions, so the price range is quite broad in the gallery," according to a rep.

Friedman, who's enlisted the help of 20 international curators in his mission to find these artists, poses no pretense about his own curatorial vision. "When Holly and I were talking about entering the art world, I had said to Holly, 'Look, there are going to be a lot of people, and they're going to ask themselves, Why are these guys getting into the art world? They don't know anything about art,'" he explained. "I said, 'You know what? They're right.' We don't know a lot about art, but we know what we love and what we believe in... The artists that conceived ["Rain Room"] and had the creative courage to bring this to life — those are the kind of people we want to be advocates for."

"Rain Room" is on view as part of MoMA's "EXPO 1: NEW YORK" through July 28.

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