

ART

## Climate Control: The *Rain Room* at MoMA

by Leslie Camhi



Random International, *Rain Room*, 2012  
Photo: Courtesy of the Random International

It's been an uncannily cold, wet spring in New York, but there's no need to bring your umbrella when visiting the *Rain Room*, an interactive installation opening this Sunday at the Museum of Modern Art. A work of art and engineering by the London and Berlin-based collective Random International, the *Rain Room* is housed in a large-scale temporary gallery erected next door to the museum proper. There, a series of sensors installed in ceiling panels are filling the space with a simulated downpour that magically pauses just over the heads of people walking through it. The effect, an experience of virtual rain, is both fun and oddly unnerving. If you've ever been caught in a sudden squall, you'll recognize certain elements—the deafening clatter of thousands of droplets, the rising mists—alongside new ones provoked by the work's extreme illumination. (Low-lying rainbows and a staccato sparkle contribute to the "rain's" general air of unreality.) But an essential component—the physical experience of wetness—is largely absent.

"We could have programmed it to rain only over visitors' heads," said **Stuart Wood**, who cofounded Random International in 2005 with fellow Royal College of Art colleagues **Hannes Koch** and **Florian Ortkrass**. "But that would have made it a bit cruel," he added.

The *Rain Room* is part of "EXPO 1: New York," a festival of new ideas in art and ecology that includes an exhibition at MoMA PS1, whose director **Klaus Biesenbach** curated the project, and numerous activities taking place under a geodesic dome in Rockaway Beach, Queens. Yet, while the *Rain Room* clearly addresses our fantasies of controlling the weather, the questions it raises are also broadly existential. This is rain for a world where relationships live and die on the Internet. When we can no longer reach out and touch the rain, feel its wetness on our palms or cheeks, what kind of community is possible?

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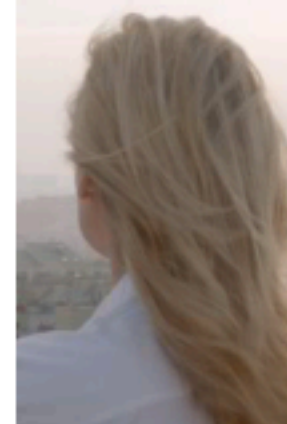
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Pat McGrath

"Everything goes into fashion," Pat McGrath once told *Vogue*. "It isn't just makeup. . . . It's film, TV, history of art, books, clubs. The culture." As a makeup artist today, McGrath enjoys a fame rivaling that of many of the designers who enlist her for dozens of shows during a typical fashion week. From film noir to the Ballet Russes, her inspirations are boundless.

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