T ⌖ EXIT FULL SCREEN

RANDOM INTERNATIONAL

Installed at the Museum of Modern Art this past summer, "Rain Room" was a sensation. Nearly 75,000 visitors waited up to nine hours for a few minutes inside a darkened space, engulfed in a downpour — everywhere except the place where they stood. "We really didn't expect impatient New Yorkers would make such a fuss about it," said Hannes Koch, who, with Florian Ortkrass and Stuart Wood, founded the London- and Berlin-based collective rAndom International, which dreamed up the project.

The deluge got even stronger for rAndom's next piece, "Tower: Instant Structure for Schacht XII," created as a site-specific installation at this year's Ruhrtriennale art festival in Essen, Germany. Sixty-two feet in the air, a frame is suspended from one of the monolithic buildings in a former coal mine complex (a Unesco Heritage Site). The frame is a sort of shower head, from which nearly 8,000 gallons of water rush down per minute, an unambiguous reference to the millions of gallons a year that must be pumped from the site to keep the region from sinking. The torrent creates architecture: a misty rectangular tower that appears and disappears at random intervals, as the water switches on and off. "You're exposed to something really powerful — the microclimate in there, the storm," Koch says. But don't expect pictures; visitors (and their electronics) get soaked.
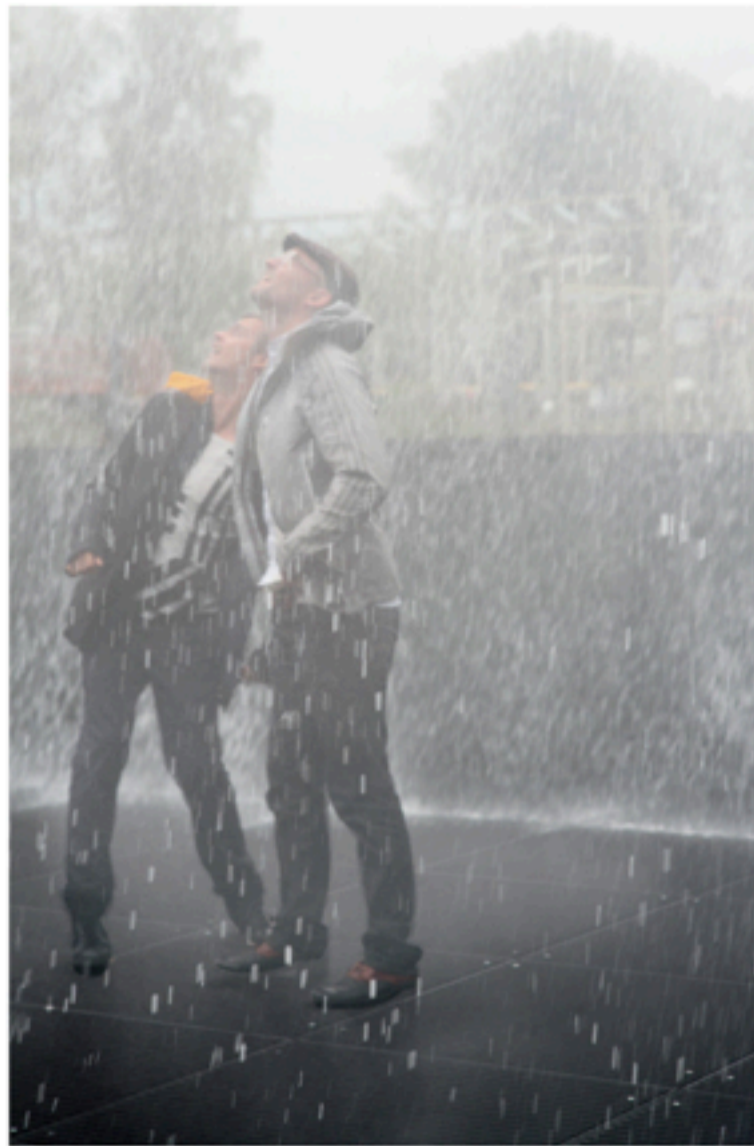
Hannes Koch and Florian Ortkrass, trapped by the downpour of "Tower: instant Structure for Schacht XII," their new installation in Essen, Germany.

𝕿 THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLE MAGAZINE

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For These Young Visionaries, Design is an Illusion

By *ANDREW BLUM*

Pick up an iPhone 5 and you are holding 727,040 pixels in your hand. Individually, they have no smell, no texture, no meaning. They make no sound; the faint hiss of old televisions has disappeared. Only in sum do pixels become more — information, images and art; a world engorged with screens. But how can an artist or designer make something more interesting than that everyday digital reality? How do you create something technological that transcends technology? In essence, how do you get people to look up from their own devices?

The artists featured here manipulate light and sound — water, even — to resensitize us to technological wonder. They deploy custom electronics, LEDs and thermal sensors the way Renaissance painters used perspective: as tools to better reflect the world around them. Their work isn't always interactive, but it's never static. The results often defy categorization, if not reason: stalactites built of light, a musical instrument made out of a bridge, a building that's actually a waterfall. They mainly labor in large, collaborative studios, and perhaps not surprisingly they are all younger than 40.

What separates these blinky lights from the schlock of the Starship Enterprise (or an in-flight catalog) is their emphasis on our experience. These are objects that come alive as subjects. They put the retina before the pixel. They heed Picasso's warning about those "enormous new mechanical brains": "They are useless. They can only give you answers."