

## Rain Room

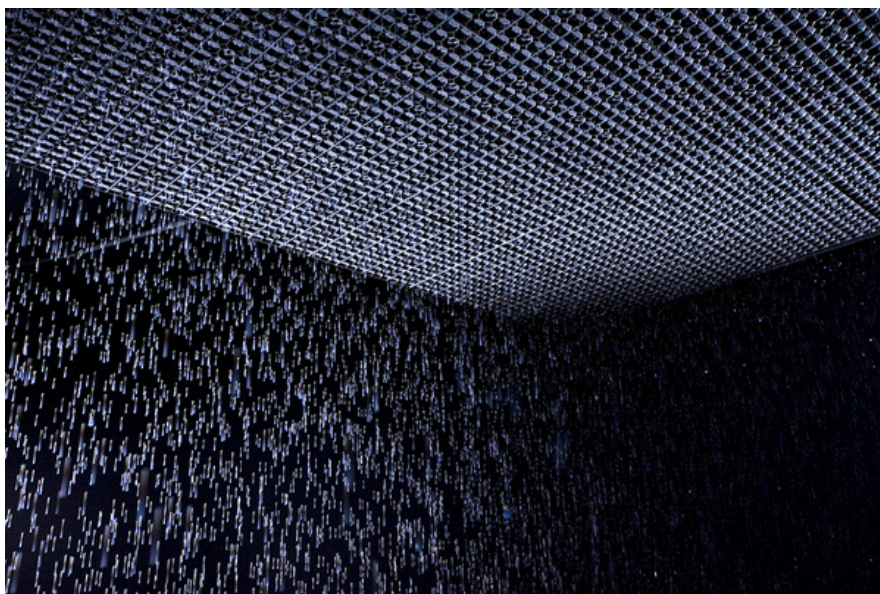
Random International  
Barbican Art Gallery  
Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS , United Kingdom  
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## A Disneyland Illusion

by Daniel Barnes

The prospect of walking into a room that is filled with one hundred square metres of torrential rain is not one that most of us would relish: but the prospect of playing god and controlling the rain is another thing altogether. Random International's *Rain Room* latches on to this dichotomy by creating both a challenge and a source of euphoria with a deluge of rain that you can walk through without getting wet.

As you enter the Barbican's Curve Gallery, an attendant assures you that you will not get wet and advises you not to use any electrical equipment within the installation. This seemingly contradictory advice instantly builds trepidation, which is then instantly intensified by the descent into the darkness of the Curve. As if experiencing death as it is told by those who survive, you are compelled to edge slowly through the murky tunnel towards a light that glows ever brighter and clearer.



The first achievement of the *Rain Room* is this sense of intrigue and anticipation. It has been designed site-specifically for the Barbican's linear Curve Gallery, which is little more than a corridor, so that there is nothing to see for the first two thirds of the installation. Random International, a design collective that was formed at the Royal College of Art in 2002, uses the latest technologies to make viewers engage with the physicality of

their bodies in space.

The eventual revelation of the rain itself has the sobering effect of a bump on the head. A glaring floodlight at the exit rips through the darkness, showing the glistening droplets of water cascade from floor to ceiling; each individual droplet has its own moment of clarity as it splashes to the ground. The room has a misty, grey quality to it and the rain falls so heavily that it forms thin columns, illuminated and yet shrouded in semi-darkness. In and of itself, the *Rain Room* makes a very decent visual installation: gallons of water contained within an enclosed, partially lit space, with no obvious source or ultimate destination, effectively creates the atmosphere of a rainy night in a deserted urban space.



Although you are told that the rain will stop as soon as you walk into it, there is a deep apprehension as you stand on the threshold of this storm. The *Rain Room* dares you to go against your instincts, to challenge your sense of self-preservation; wilfully walking into this field of rain demands the suspension of rational considerations in favour of faith.

But once in the thick of it, the experience is magical, somewhere between god-like transcendence and Disneyland illusion. As if by divine intervention, the rain stops wherever you stand; a dramatic sweep of your arms causes entire swathes of rain to clear, and yet as you look around it appears as if it is raining on everyone else. The experience is immersive and personal, as you feel momentarily as if you are in control of the elements: which makes it all the more difficult to drag yourself back outside into London's unstoppable winter.

--Daniel Barnes

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