

Life as a mathematical maze



Artist Román Torre and Mr. Ramón Blecua, Cultural Counselor of the Spanish Embassy

By **Mariam Hamdy** April 17, 2008, 2:00 am

It's easy to forget that regardless of their aesthetic or conceptual qualities, most artworks are born of a childlike curiosity. Such curiosity is currently on display at the International Media Art Forum for Youth (IMAFY), taking place at the Palace of Arts in the grounds of the Cairo Opera House.

The international group-show hosts an array of accomplished artists. Among the guest artists is Román Torre, a self-taught Spanish artist whose work has been widely exhibited since 2001. Torre presented an interactive installation entitled "Life Floor; a virtual module of the "Game of Life.

The "Game of Life is a theoretical simulation of life, based on a 'cellular automaton' devised by British mathematician John Horton Conway. It consists of an evolving pattern of two-dimensional grid of squares, with shaded or colored squares forming shapes against the background of blank or un-colored squares. These shapes evolve through time in an apparently random fashion according to mathematical algorithms.

Torre's presentation is a life-sized model of the 'Game' in which every step of cell evolution and interaction can be laid out on the floor of a room at the gallery. The cells create complex patterns and look like the primitive video games of the 1980s.

Torre constructed his module on a human scale to encourage interaction, whereby if one walks among the interacting cells, his/her shadow is recorded by a hidden infrared camera, causing the cells to change around in turn. The artwork is an interesting concept that requires more patience and imagination than your average painting.

After standing on Torre's floor for a while, the complexity of the emerging patterns springing from the implementation of a few mathematical rules becomes quite clear.

Many biologists, philosophers, economists and mathematicians consider the "Game of Life to be a method for observing patterns of emergence and self-organization. Torre was intrigued by this concept.

"Life repeats itself, and somehow we say and do the same things over and over, Torre told Daily News Egypt. "We don't realize how much our lives are governed by patterns.

Torre explained that the module's cells mirror how people would act in pattern-like situations, and so what appears to be a cold mathematical equation is actually a study of human behavior.

The systematic interactivity of the pattern of cells could give the impression of the absence of an in-control designer. Torre's intentions though are less blasphemous, and as a designer, he'd rather be a part of the process itself, content only with predicting how the cells would evolve, rather than act as a controlling factor.

Speaking of the notion of control, a strictly academic review of Torre's work might be a little inequitable. Is it art? Is it aesthetically moving? Does it possess any aesthetics at all? Is the work's title sufficient in explaining the work and perhaps Torre's dispositions?

All these questions create a fertile ground for a rich debate on the nature of art. "An artist's statement that explains and spoon-feeds the work, Torre noted, "encourages the passivity of the viewer and widens the gap between the public and the artist.



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"Art should compel you to think and ask questions. A medium, be it installation or paint, is just a vehicle to drive your idea to the public.

For Torre, art is just another vehicle of self-expression, and any reaction to his work or its content is more than welcome. Whether you agree with him or not, here's your chance to witness a singular, unusual and thought-provoking installation.



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