

## INNOVATION

# Simon Heijdens

BY SPENCER BAILEY

PORTRAIT BY PAUL PLEWS

"Contemporary culture is asking for architecture and urban planning to fit a very global lifestyle, with a very connected, 24-hour economy," says artist and designer Simon Heijdens, 36, who was born and raised in the Netherlands and since 2005 has lived in London. "The spaces that are programmed to deliver that are making for an increasingly perpetual and more static environment." With his works, Heijdens seeks to instill a little bit of serendipity into the world's increasingly uniform towns and cities.

Ten years ago, Heijdens—who studied at Design Academy Eindhoven and the Berlin University of the Arts—unveiled his "Tree" installation, which has been shown around the world since, from Moscow to Milan. (In March, as a commission from the South by Southwest festival, he installed it at the federal

courthouse in Austin, Texas.) For each of his "Tree" installations, Heijdens projects the white silhouette of a slender tree against a building's facade. The branches sway in response to a device that measures local wind conditions, and throughout the night, as pedestrians pass by, virtual leaves fall off the tree onto a growing pile. Another of Heijdens's installations, "Lightweeds" (2006), is a collection of digital plants that grow based on local sunshine, rainfall, and wind; when people walk by, the plants bend, lose seeds, and pollinate the most-traveled areas in the room.

In recent years, Heijdens's work has caught the attention of top curators and institutions. The Museum of Modern Art added "Lightweeds" to its permanent collection in 2008, and it's currently on display there through February 2015. Another piece, "Shade," was shown at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2011 and was added to the museum's permanent collection. As part of the Design Miami fair in December, Heijdens debuted a commission by champagne house Perrier-Jouët, "Phare No. 1-9," a series of 10 Nouveau-inspired glass vessels. Each piece responds to data from outdoor wind sensors by projecting a light beam through water with a photosensitive pink dye; it then produces a 3-D ripple effect from vessel to vessel.

"A lot of people call what I do 'interactive,' but I find that a really bad word for it," Heijdens says. "If anything, all of these works are very passive and not active. It's about using frictions that already exist. For instance, if somebody walks by these plants—and therefore makes the piece move throughout another part of the building—they should barely notice it."



Simon Heijdens in his London studio. (OPPOSITE, TOP TO BOTTOM) "Phare No. 1-9" (2013) at the Design Miami fair in December. "Lightweeds" (2006), as seen at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.



