

Color Coding

Music and DNA get sequenced. So does light. Artist Leo Villareal, inspired by cellular automata and artificial intelligence, programs the LEDs in his sculptures to look as though they have lives of their own. His most recent piece, *Horizon*, spans 24 feet, consists of nine tubes filled with 3,888 light-emitting diodes, and produces a million colors. Using the tenets of basic object-oriented programming, Villareal applies a simple set of rules to each light. These instructions (for example, move left until another illuminated LED is encountered, then blink) are combined to create a kinetic rainbow. "Our brains are coded to recognize patterned light, to match it to something we know," says Villareal, who studied art at Yale and virtual reality at Interval Research Corporation. "Sometimes a piece looks like a hive of bees or the shimmering surface of water." A solo exhibit of Villareal's work is on view through June 26 at Conner Contemporary Art gallery in Washington, DC. — Jennifer Hillner



Light-emitting dude:
Artist Leo Villareal
in his New York studio.