

Collect Magazine: 'James Turrell', by Sara White Wilson, issue N°14, September 2013, pp. 51-57





James Turrell

The stunning, large-scale light installations of American artist James Turrell are honoured across three simultaneous and complementary exhibitions in 2013, including a major retrospective at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) that carries into April 2014.

“I use light as a material to work the medium of perception, basically the work really has no object because perception is the object. And there is no image because I am not interested in associative thought.”

James Turrell





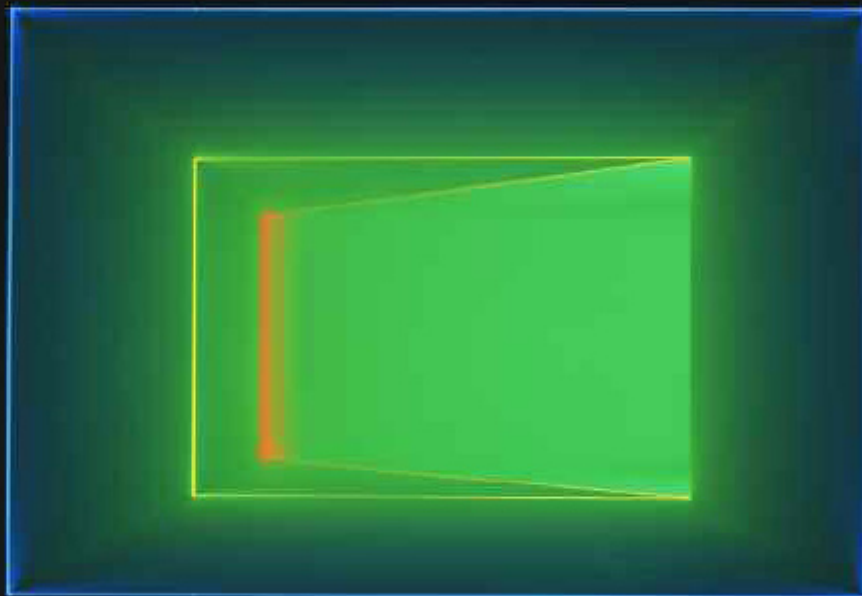
In contemporary art, where originality rather than craft seems to be king, James Turrell is not only a true original but also a stellar craftsman – of light. His art practice focuses on the viewers' perception, the experience of seeing shapes, shadows and dimension; his medium is the interplay of light and space. Viewing his work demands time and the choice to be present to the experience of viewing it. Many adore his work for its spiritual, philosophical and mathematical dimensions; others, for its strikingly beautiful, if not soothing, simplicity.

Nine light installations representing five decades of Turrell's career are permanently showcased at the James Turrell Museum of the Hess Art Collection in Colomé (Salta Province), Argentina. The museum, the only one worldwide dedicated specifically to the work of James Turrell based on a plan created by Turrell himself, opened in 2009

with the support of one of his long-time collectors Donald Hess. "It's beautiful when someone realises such an idea in such a secluded place, away from the tourist routes of the art world. It is exactly the type of place that I like," James Turrell has said of the museum.

In another open space, Turrell has been intriguing the art elite for decades with his masterwork in process, Roden Crater, which was begun in 1979 and is not yet open to the public. It is a site-specific intervention into the landscape, a natural cinder cone crater located outside of Flagstaff, Arizona, that is being turned into a massive naked-eye observatory.

For those with no intention to visit Argentina or Arizona in the near future, 2013 is the ideal year to see the work of James Turrell in key enclosed



urban spaces; in fact, he is most well-known for this type for work, in which he encloses the viewer in order to control their perception of light, sometimes referred to as 'perceptual environments'.

In May and June 2013, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York concurrently opened three independently curated exhibitions highlighting the achievements of James Turrell: a retrospective in Los Angeles, work from the extensive permanent collection and commissions in Houston and a monumental site-specific installation in New York, which closed in September. The LACMA retrospective, however, runs into 2014 and presents one of the most complete overviews of his career to date. A section is devoted to Roden Crater, which is presented through models, plans,

photographs, and films. After Los Angeles, the retrospective will travel to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem (June 1 – October 18, 2014) and the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra (December 2014 – April 2015).

Born in Los Angeles in 1943 to a Quaker mother and father (Turrell himself is a birthright and practicing Quaker), Turrell attended Pomona College, where his studies concentrated on perceptual psychology and mathematics. In 1966, Turrell began experimenting with light in his Santa Monica studio, the Mendota Hotel, at a time when the so-called 'Light and Space' group of artists in Los Angeles, including Robert Irwin and Doug Wheeler, was coming into prominence. In 1973 he received a master's degree in art from Claremont Graduate School. His long-standing gallery representative in France, Almine Rech, director of the Almine Rech

Gallery in Paris, first met James Turrell in 1989. "He is a man with vision," she describes. "James is one of the major artists of the 1960s and 1970s, as part of the very important conceptual and minimalist art movements born at that time; yet, he writes the chapter of what is called 'perceptual art'. There is the Californian aspect of light and space and the importance given to colour, while the conceptual and minimalist movement of the east coast is stricter, and evacuates the perception and emotion that Californian artists seek to enlighten." In a poetic manner, she describes the objective of James Turrell's work thusly: "To put the beholder into orbit..." x

JAMES TURRELL: A Retrospective
 Until April 6, 2014
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)
 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90016
 T. +1 323 857 6000
www.lacma.org

