ALMINE RECH

James Turrell

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For the first time, Almine Rech Brussels is presenting a solo exhibition by James Turrell. Born in Los Angeles in 1943, James Turrell lives and works in Arizona.

After studying psychology and mathematics, he trained in art at the University of California at Irvine in 1965-66 and obtained an MA from the Claremont Graduate School in 1973. He presented his first "projection pieces" at the Pasadena Art Museum as early as 1967. These light projections into a corner of a room or flat against a wall laid the foundations for a body of work that is essentially based on the very matter of light as an artistic medium and on the question of the perception of matter as well as light and colour.

"My work deals with the concrete nature of light, the contact with it. Light is not ephemeral, it is material. Photons are matter, they produce a wave-like phenomenon, like water." (1)
Although Turrell's artistic approach was little understood at the time, the scientific component of his reflection caught the attention of the County Museum of Art in Los Angeles, which gave him the means to pursue his work through the "Art and Technology Program" together with artist Robert Irwin and perception psychologist Edward Wortz. He would notably create experimental spaces that were either completely black, soundproof or filled with coloured light and explore the impact on our perception. These works anticipate later works created in the seventies and eighties.

In 1979, James Turrell acquired an extinct volcano in the Arizona desert: Roden Crater. After excavation and layout work, he converted the site into an observatory: corridors and spherical spaces offering an itinerary determined by the course of the sun and the moon. Roden Crater being located on Native American land, Turrell naturally became interested in the Hopi Indians' "kivas", ceremonial chambers used by the Hopi to establish cosmic connections. In 1986 Turrell started work on his "autonomous structures", central-plan constructions freely inspired by Egyptian mastabas, classical domes and the utopian creations of architect Etienne-Louis Boullée.

The James Turrell exhibition at Almine Rech Brussels will be an opportunity to discover a projection piece from 1968 entitled "Acro Red" and an aperture piece from 1992. The exhibition will also feature two large-scale holograms, the last in a series that Turrell has decided to conclude, as well as "light transmission pieces" created with the help of a physicist by capturing light in the desert.

An unconventional and unclassifiable artist, James Turrell incites viewers to look within themselves and question their own perception.

— Françoise Claire Prodhon
(1) Excerpt from Rencontres 9: Almine Rech/ James Turrell, Éditions Almine Rech/ Images Modernes, 2005