

EXHIBITION: **James Turrell**
14th December 2004 – 20th February 2005

Organices: IVAM-Institut Valencia d'Art Modern

Curator: Ana M^a Torres

"First, I am dealing with no object. Perception is the object. Secondly, I am dealing with no image, because I want to avoid associative, symbolic thought. Thirdly, I am dealing with no focus or particular place to look. With no object, no image, and no focus, what are you looking at? You are looking at your looking."
(James Turrell, *Air Mass*, p. 26).

The exhibition of the American artist James Turrell at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, IVAM, in Valencia shows Turrell's exploration of light through his sophisticated understanding of observation and sight and presents five new light installations created especially for the IVAM.

This exhibition was curated, as was the catalogue organized and edited, by the Spanish architect Ana María Torres. The exhibition is presented at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, in Valencia, in conjunction with the book-length catalogue

surveying over 600 works by James Turrell. As suggested by the artist, the work may be divided into sixteen categories: *The Mendota*, *Projections*, *Shallow Spaces*, *Wedgeworks*, *Veils*, *Space Divisions*, *Structural Cuts*, *Dark Spaces*, *Perceptual Cells*, *Ganzfelds*, *Landforms*, *Projects*, *Magnatrons*, *Performances*, print series, and the *Roden Crater*. The new catalogue, produced and published by the IVAM, offers the possibility of understanding the different aspects of light and sight examined in each of Turrell's works. The historical importance of Turrell's work lies in his ability to delve deeply into how light is experienced and his capacity to isolate these aspects and present them to the viewer through each work. Rather than explain to the viewer what he has discovered, his work allows the viewer to discover it experientially. The artist's ideas are expressed in the curator's introductory essay and in a text that provides a synthesis of various conversations that James Turrell and Ana María Torres had in 2004. Essays by Kosme de Barañano, professor of art history and former director of the IVAM, Denis Pelli, professor of psychology and neuroscience, and Javier Seguí, a doctor in architecture, each document how Turrell's work affects kindred disciplines.

James Turrell, born in Los Angeles, California, in 1943, describes himself as a sculptor of light. He has isolated aspects of light, creating objectless art that seems to be made of solid light. The results are highly subjective, depending entirely on an individual viewer's experience with the work. Turrell, who now lives in Arizona, has been the recipient of Guggenheim and MacArthur Fellowships.

Unique to Turrell's work is how completely it is left up to the viewer to decide where to locate him or herself in relation to the surrounding space. There is no image, no particular place to look. Turrell states: "*The idea of the Boddhisattva, one who comes back and entices others to the journey, is to some degree the task of the artist. The Boddhisattva entices you to enter that passage, to take the journey. This is where I began to appreciate an art that could be a non-vicarious act, a seeing whose subject was you seeing.*"

Turrell's journey began when he pierced the wartime blackout curtains in his childhood room to create stars when he was six. In 1965 he altered the spaces of the Mendota Hotel, where he lived, at Main and Hill Streets in Los Angeles. He refinished the walls to be seamless, so that it would be possible to experience the light in the room without any frame of reference. *"It was evening. Across the wall of his studio passed a progression of colorful abstract forms, frequently interrupted by startling images from reality: a passerby, a palm tree, a traffic light switching from red to yellow to green"* (Edy de Wilde, in *Occluded Front*). Turrell's reputation was established with this radical yet immediately comprehensible work.

Turrell's major work is the *Roden Crater* project, the extinct volcano in the Arizona desert that he has been shaping into an observatory for three decades. Over the last 20 years Turrell has also worked on various other architectural projects. Turrell's work with existing architecture explores an ambivalence towards boundaries. His recent lit-room pieces bring to mind his experiments in the Mendota Hotel, in which witnesses report difficulty in distinguishing where light ends and structure begins. As the artist explained, *"I want to address the light that we see in dreams and the spaces that seem to come from those dreams and which are familiar to those who inhabit those places."*

Jones-Jones, 1967, and *Carn*, 1967, from the *Projections* series, are the first light installations that the visitor will encounter in Gallery 1 at the IVAM. *"I first started to make these forms in the corner. They seemed to look like objects that would form up in three dimensions. But if you look at them carefully, you realize they won't truly form up in three dimensions. They take on kind of hypothetical physicality, a physicality that forms up in another dimension."* These remarks by Turrell are from an interview with curator Ana María Torres in 2004. Further, as the artist and critic John Coplans wrote, these pieces engender transparency without conventional employment of material.

The works in this exhibition explore the spectrum of light and light's many different qualities. Each work is a self-contained entity and activates space in its own particular way. *Porterville*, 2004, from the *Wedgeworks* series, *Catching Breath*, 2004, from the *Space Divisions* series, *Penuma*, 2004, and *Aural*, 2004, from the *Ganzfeld* series are new light installations created especially for this exhibition at the IVAM.

In these pieces the light not only has a texture but also takes on substance and position. In discussion with the curator the artist explained: "*They have different levels of transparency. Here it is very transparent and here it is very opaque. And here you have this view into deeper space, and here it closes up like there is nothing there at all.*" In *Porterville*, 2004, the artist created multiple subdivisions of space using different types of light – fluorescent, LED and neon. In *Catching Breath*, 2004, a *Space Divisions* piece, a curved wall defines the sensing space.