



## Extended essay cover

Candidates must complete this page and then give this cover and their final version of the extended essay to their supervisor.

Candidate session number

Candidate name

School name

Examination session (May or November)

May

Year

2015

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: Visual Arts

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: How does James Turrell create an impact on the viewer by manipulating space with light?

### Candidate's declaration

*This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a mark of zero will be issued.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 23/02/2015

## Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) \_\_\_\_\_

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

has independently chosen and researched the theme of Light and space focusing on the work of James Turrell. Her mature approach to the extended essay has meant that she has delved into concepts behind the artist's work, linking to philosophers and other artists.

has responded well to deadlines and independently sought advice when needed. It is clear from our discussions that has been passionate about this essay and inspired by her visit to the Moma where she first saw the installation by James Turrell. has followed the research process well and thoroughly and the essay showed an excellent formal presentation with a broad bibliography. The language used in the essay is highly proficient and subject specific. Ideas are presented in a logical and coherent manner, and a reasoned argument is developed in relation to the research question. As an experience it has complemented her Higher Level Visual Arts course.

*This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a mark of zero will be issued.*

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

*As per the section entitled "Responsibilities of the Supervisor" in the EE guide, the recommended number of hours spent with candidates is between 3 and 5 hours. Schools will be contacted when the number of hours is left blank, or where 0 hours are stated and there lacks an explanation. Schools will also be contacted in the event that number of hours spent is significantly excessive compared to the recommendation.*

I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 5/3/15

**Assessment form (for examiner use only)**

Candidate session number		
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**Achievement level**

Criteria	Examiner 1 maximum	Examiner 2 maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	2	<input type="text" value="2"/>	<input type="text"/>
B introduction	2	<input type="text" value="2"/>	<input type="text"/>
C investigation	4	<input type="text" value="4"/>	<input type="text"/>
D knowledge and understanding	4	<input type="text" value="4"/>	<input type="text"/>
E reasoned argument	4	<input type="text" value="4"/>	<input type="text"/>
F analysis and evaluation	4	<input type="text" value="4"/>	<input type="text"/>
G use of subject language	4	<input type="text" value="4"/>	<input type="text"/>
H conclusion	2	<input type="text" value="2"/>	<input type="text"/>
I formal presentation	4	<input type="text" value="3"/>	<input type="text"/>
J abstract	2	<input type="text" value="2"/>	<input type="text"/>
K holistic judgment	4	<input type="text" value="3"/>	<input type="text"/>
Total out of 36	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text" value="34"/>	<input type="text"/>

Name of examiner 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Name of examiner 3: \_\_\_\_\_ Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

IB Assessment Centre use only: B: \_\_\_\_\_

IB Assessment Centre use only: A: \_\_\_\_\_

Extended Essay

How does James Turrell create an impact on the viewer  
by manipulating space with light?

Subject: Visual Arts

Word count: 3902

May 2015

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all pages require name of candidate # & should be secured.

**ABSTRACT** (word count: 261)

James Turrell is part of the California Light and Space Movement of the 1960s, and through his work he generates both an experience of perceptual exultation and introspective awareness.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the research question investigated is: **How does James Turrell create an impact on the viewer by manipulating space with light?**

The exploration of the artist's work is done by examining how his fascination for the immaterial luminescent entity sparked in him curiosity since he was a small child, and never abandoned him up until the present day. The approach is clear cut and focuses on an array of Turrell's works: *Space Division Constructions*, *Skyspaces*, *Ganzfelds*, *the Atein Reign* and *Roden Crater*. His treatment of colour and light are linked to his passionate research in the fields of spirituality, philosophy, psychology and science, from optics to astronomy: Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Chinese Taoist Lao-Tau's theory of practicing eternity, and the book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint* by Franz Brentano. Furthermore, Turrell's work is associated to that of other artists such as: Dan Flavin, Joseph Albers, Mark Rothko, Max Ernst. Specific arguments stem from a conversation with gallerist Francesca Minini and first hand visits to James Turrell's exhibitions at the Guggenheim Museum of New York and at Villa Panza di Biumo in Varese, Italy.

James Turrell creates an impact on the viewer through the use of light of different intensities and colour, along with the meticulous study of spaces that appear perceptually altered, shaped and manipulated by the immaterial entity. This creates an effect on the viewer, both visually and emotionally.

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<sup>1</sup> "James Turrell: A Retrospective." *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*. LACMA, n.d. Web. 23 June 2014. <<http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/james-turrell-retrospective>>.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout my life I have been exposed to artistic environments and grew up practicing my skills. However, when in August 2013 I came in contact with the work of James Turrell at the Guggenheim museum of New York, I instantly began nurturing a passion for what he does. The vast array of tonalities used in *Aten Reigns* visually attracted me and provoked an extrasensory experience, a powerful sense of uncertainty, and the intellectual desire to comprehend what I was looking at.

A few months later, I went to see his work at Villa Panza di Biumo in Varese, and my experience was once again exalting. Here, I had the opportunity to enter a Ganzfeld, a room with imperceptible boundaries, submersed in hue. A sensation of dizziness and contemplation arose within me. With no objects and no focus, my sense of self was heightened and my response to the intense colored light was ethereal, but at the same time quite physical.

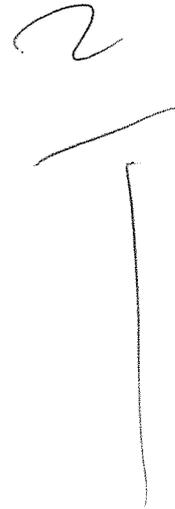
My thoughts began flowing into a sequence of questions: what am I feeling? What does this experience remind me of? I was immersed in the moment like never before, hence I did not search for answers.

James Turrell was a main proponent of the Light and Space movement in Southern California during the 1960's and 70's.<sup>2</sup> In his work he uses light to manipulate space like no one before. His creations are not only what you perceive through your senses, but an experience that goes beyond materiality and face value. What he

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<sup>2</sup> "James Turrell: A Retrospective." *Los Angeles County Museum of Art*. LACMA, n.d. Web. 23 June 2014. <<http://www.lacma.org/art/exhibition/james-turrell-retrospective>>.

does is worthy of exploration, as Turrell has created an innovative and sophisticated way of using light and colour. This is done through advanced technology and a careful arrangement of the exhibition space, so that what we see isn't the source of light, rather light itself. Hence, I decided to investigate: **how does James Turrell create an impact on the viewer by manipulating space with light?**



## LIGHT AND SPACE

As a result of the air attack of 1942 in Los Angeles, California, the local government stipulated that people should install blackout shades in order to conceal the windows at night. James Turrell was six years old and, to relieve a sense of closure and obscurity, he marked his territory; *"I took a pin and needle to these curtains and pierced them to make star patterns and the constellations...pulling down the curtains and darkening the room, you could see the stars in the middle of the day. They weren't just holes in the curtains, they were holes in reality."*<sup>3</sup>

This event clearly left a trace in his subconscious, as years later he created a series of work conducive to that experience. In *The Pleiades*, a sense of diffused vision recalls that of star gazing and the awe created when looking at the homonymous constellation. The journey into Turrell's installation begins by ascending a dark, inclined corridor, which leads to a room with a chair. Here one sits immersed in

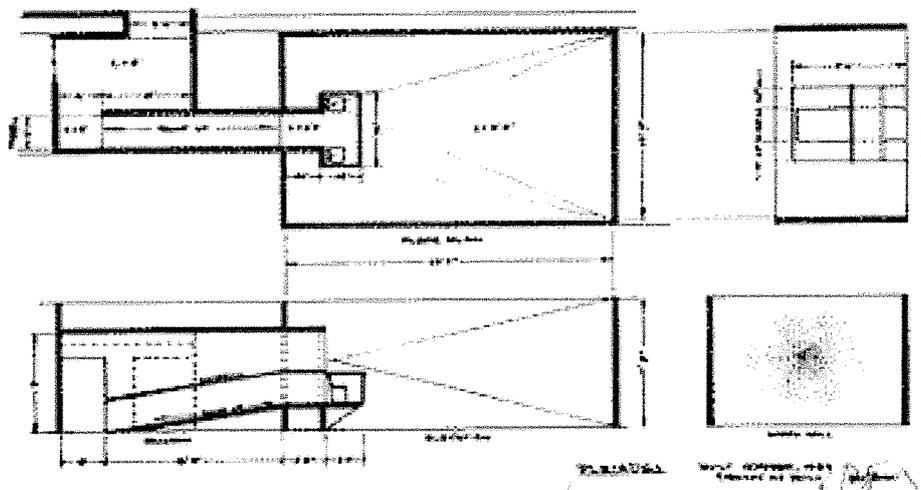


Image 1  
*Pleiades*

<sup>3</sup> Govan, Michael, Christine Y. Kim, Alison De Lima. Greene, E. C. Krupp, Florian Holzherr, and James Turrell. *James Turrell: A Retrospective*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013. 208. Print.

nothingness. Only as time passes, one begins to perceive a dim hue emerging from the foremost end.<sup>4</sup> Slowly, the surface starts shimmering with colour, which expands into indefinite boundaries. *The seeing that comes from 'out there' merges with the seeing that comes from 'in here.'*<sup>5</sup>

His childhood memory marks the beginning of an astounding career, the onset of an

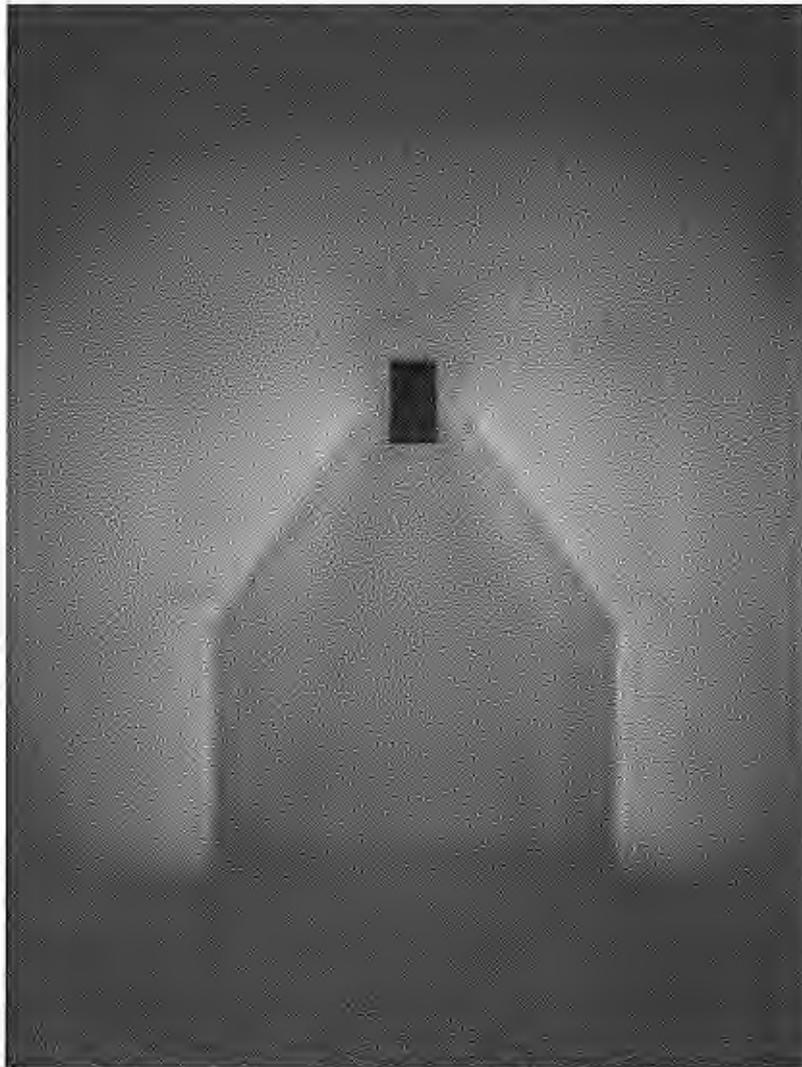


Image 2  
*Breathing Light* LACMA

artist with a profound fascination for light and its interaction with space. Throughout the years Turrell has created a large amount of work, developing a unique concept around the materiality of an immaterial agent. *"Light is not something that reveals as it is itself a revelation"*<sup>6</sup>. His artwork is the proof that a simple ridge of light can create space and

dimensionality, hence changing our perception of the world. This enables the artist to call himself a *"landscape painter"*.<sup>7</sup> Turrell's approach is clear and straight forward,

<sup>4</sup> Minini, Francesca. Personal interview. 9 June 2014.

<sup>5</sup> "The Mattress Factory Art Museum." *Mattress Factory RSS*. Mattress Factory, Ltd., n.d. Web. 22 June 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Govan, Michael, Christine Y. Kim, Alison De Lima. Greene, E. C. Krupp, Florian Holzherr, and James Turrell. *James Turrell: A Retrospective*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013. 13. Print.

*“with no object, no image, and no focus, what are you looking at? You are looking at you looking. This is in response to you seeing and the self-reflexive act of seeing yourself see.”<sup>8</sup>*

The artist removes all boundaries; unlike looking at a painting, where the observer and the artwork are two separate entities, in this case the two become one. Clear and definite sources of light, some revealed, others concealed, challenge one's personal limits of observation.

Another fundamental difference in how we perceive a painting, opposed to a light installation, is shaped by time. In the first case, one is presented with a physical entity, a fixed form. What varies can only be our perception, shaped by mood, interpretation, intellectual acquaintance. In the case of James Turrell's work, characterised by chromatic mutations, what we feel as spectators can be fueled by the same process, however we cannot retrace the exact configuration that enacted our reactions. It's a moveable feast, hence the only way to capture what we are living is in the present, through the quality of our attention. Only in our memory can we relive the experience; photographs and even videos cannot recreate the value of the sequence and of our interaction with it.

The immersive trait of Turrell's art is unique, even compared to others who use light as the main form of expression. Dan Flavin, for example, reveals the source, a fluorescent bulb, whilst in James Turrell's work the source is often invisible, so the senses are engaged on the medium itself and on its properties. There is a use and

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<sup>7</sup> "Videos." *James Turrell*. N.p., 21 June 2013. Web. 21 June 2014. min 50:12

<sup>8</sup> Turrell, James, and Carmen Giménez. *James Turrell: Guggenheim-Museum, New York, 21. June - 25. September 2013*. New York: Guggenheim-Museum, 2013. 31+. Print.

dimensioning of light that is completely abstract from the matter itself, however, at

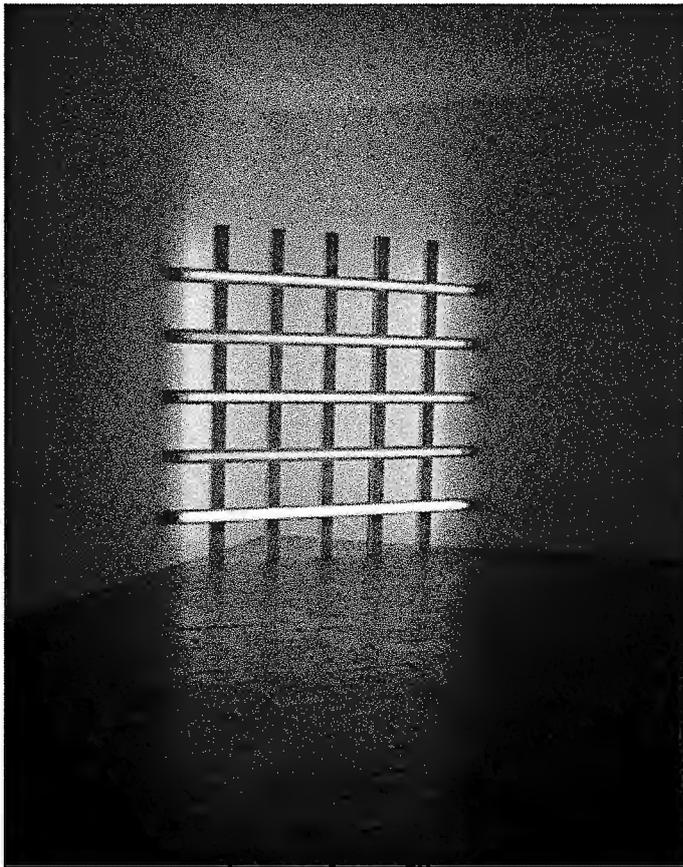


Image 3

*Dan Flavin-untitled (in honor of Harold Joachim)*

the same time, it is matter, as space is formed and boundaries are delineated. Once physical and emotional thresholds are crossed, you become one with the work of art. It is you and an ocean of hue. The walls appear to be flushed by colours that flow imperceptibly into one another, in an infinite web of interaction and metamorphosis. This effect arises

from of an extensive research for the most appropriate technology to obtain the desired result:

colours merge through precise timing and coordination, modulated by a computer and projected from LED bulbs into seven blending colors.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Govan, Michael, Christine Y. Kim, Alison De Lima. Greene, E. C. Krupp, Florian Holzherr, and James Turrell. *James Turrell: A Retrospective*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013. 32. Print.

Both James Turrell and Dan Flavin rely on technology to express their artistic conceptions, that is through the use of a projector and neon lights, however, *unlike the minimalist sculptor, Turrell has radically avoided making objects and does not emphasize the process of creation or any underlying conceptual framework. As he claimed in 1988, "this is not Minimalism and it is not conceptual work; it's perceptual work."*<sup>10</sup>

For certain installations, such as *Ganzfelds*, the rooms used to present them are designed specifically to irradiate light and to give tonality and dimension to the architectural structure.

*"Ganzfeld" is a German word to describe the phenomenon of the total loss of depth*



Image 4  
James Turrell *Amrta*

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<sup>10</sup>Turrell, James, and Carmen Giménez. *James Turrell: Guggenheim-Museum, New York, 21. June - 25. September 2013*. New York: Guggenheim-Museum, 2013. 31+. Print.

*perception as in the experience of a white-out. Turrell artificially creates a similar experience through the controlled use of light, coved corners and an inclined floor.*<sup>11</sup>

The emphasis is on each individual's experience and all references to boundaries and physical entities are lost. James Turrell's work is not solely aesthetic but also extrasensory, hence great manipulative skills are required in order to create specific atmospheres. As stated by the artist: *"I am involved in the architecture of space...to control light I have to have a way to form it, so I use form almost like the stretch bar of a canvas...When I prepare walls I make them so perfect that you actually don't pay attention to them."*<sup>12</sup>

The feelings and sensations provoked in the viewer when entering a *Ganzfeld* are said by James Turrell to be similar to those experienced when entering a cloud, being submersed in a snowfall or diving. This is because *you have mutual density and have lost the sensation of gravity*<sup>13</sup>. You access a field of horizonless space. No definite boundaries are clearly visible.<sup>14</sup> The surrounding room appears to be infinite, as *Space is made more with where light is and light isn't, than by the physical, solid, concrete architecture of the space.*<sup>15</sup>

The chamber before entering the *Ganzfeld* is clean and simple, carefully calibrated, and accommodates a limited number of people at a time, making the occurrence the most dynamic possible. Here, viewers sit on a bench and must take their shoes off. Looking straight ahead, they see a coloured rectangle and a set of steps inviting to commence the journey.

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<sup>11</sup> "By Type." *James Turrell*. Jamesturrell.com, n.d. Web. 21 June 2014.

<sup>12</sup> Govan, Michael, Christine Y. Kim, Alison De Lima. Greene, E. C. Krupp, Florian Holzherr, and James Turrell. *James Turrell: A Retrospective*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013. 131. Print.

<sup>13</sup> "Videos." *James Turrell*. N.p., 21 June 2013. Web. 21 June 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Govan, Michael, Christine Y. Kim, Alison De Lima. Greene, E. C. Krupp, Florian Holzherr, and James Turrell. *James Turrell: A Retrospective*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013. 249. Print.

<sup>15</sup> "Videos." *James Turrell*. N.p., 21 June 2013. Web. 21 June 2014.

The shape that appears to be a matt, monochrome, painted surface, at a closer look unveils itself to be an aperture into an indefinite space of eternalised light. By stepping up into the room, a space of coloured luminescence, a corporeal sensation inundates the viewer. The continuous flux of chromatic tonalities create an atmosphere of dissolution. The light suddenly begins to fade and a sense of total submersion and disorientation take over. Through this technical feature, luminescence **literary** enters the body, and the mind extends beyond any physical confinement.

The tonalities are subtle and our pupils expand. As the eye opens, so do our senses; relinquishing control, all barriers are removed and we perceive colour and light in every cell of our body. The spectator is freed from any corporeal anchorage. Then, suddenly, a syncopated stroboscopic light flashes hard: eyes squint, head hurts, loss and disorientation take over, awakening the viewer from a dreamlike state.

From a feeling of total connectedness, one experiences detachment and separation. It is somehow invigorating, yet shocking and disturbing. In the installation there is nothing to focus on, nothing to hold on to. All personal points of reference are lost. The strip of neon light at the back of the room and the aperture at the entrance seem to dissolve, and so do the other people in the room. The stroboscopic flash lasts a few seconds, just enough to disturb the meditative state, the inner balance. The harmonious flux of thoughts is interrupted and our fragmented perception becomes the centrality of our attention. The after-effect lingers as the mind goes back to work.

Tinted hue intimately interacts with human beings, without interruption. By manipulating this immaterial entity, James Turrell engages us both physically and emotionally.

In his *Ganzfelds*, Turrell eliminates any apparent interplay. As viewers, we find ourselves in a space of undetectable dimension, flooded by an aura of pure and effulgent hue. The mutation of colours into one another occurs with impeccable synergy, and the transition is discernible only after it has occurred. This is fundamental, as it doesn't draw the spectator's attention to any precise moment or tonality. When combined, the properties of chromatic luminescence are different from those of paint, where, for example, if you mix yellow and blue you obtain green; if you simultaneously use a blue and yellow projector, white appears. Hence, the difference is between the colour that comes from light, as opposed to what is reflected off a coloured surface; one form is material and the other isn't.<sup>16</sup> Coloured paint is physical and palpable; once it is applied to a surface, it will persist through time, and when primary colours are mixed, we know what to expect. Luminescence, on the other hand, is incorporeal. It is visible due to a process, not as a substance itself. This is why colour obtains an intrinsic value in the work of James Turrell: it makes the atmosphere within an area materialize, nonetheless its presence is ambiguous, as the moments of transactions within the projected sequence are eliminated from our field of vision, due to its occurrence within a calibrated time frame.

Conversely, in Josef Albers' *Homage to the Square*, the viewers' attention is absorbed by the coloured overlapping squares, and, upon closer inspection, what appeared devoid of dimension reveals a remarkable perceptual complexity, directing the eye towards the moment of interaction between two colours, on how they affect each other.<sup>17</sup> Hence, the crucial diversity amongst the work of these two artists is not

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<sup>16</sup> Videos." *James Turrell*. N.p., 21 June 2013. Web. 21 June 2014. min 18:45

<sup>17</sup> "Josef Albers Study for Homage to the Square 1964." *'Study for Homage to the Square', Josef Albers: Display Caption*. TATE, Dec. 2012. Web. 22 June 2014.

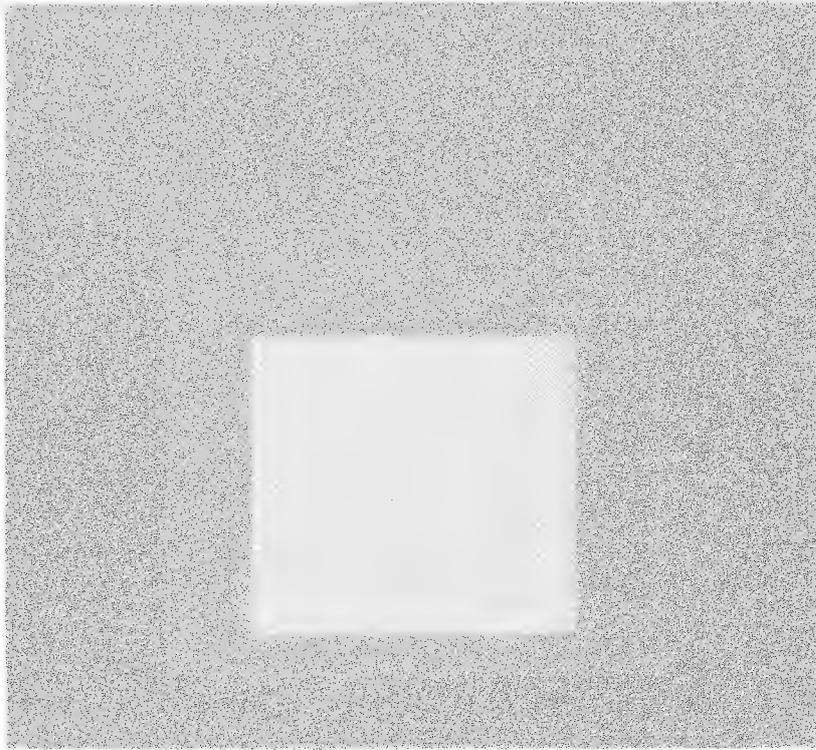


Image 5  
Josef Albers *Homages to the Square*

so much that one uses paint and the other projectors, as light can be unveiled through the use of both these mediums. The distinction is that the second artist focuses one's attention on solid planes of colour that

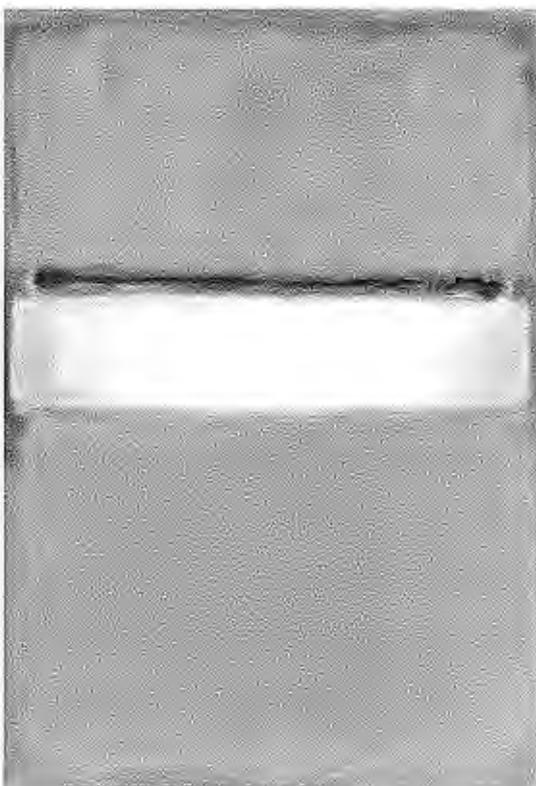


Image 6  
Mark Rothko *White center*

he juxtaposes, creating a reaction between them. At a closer look, a sizzling line is formed where the two pigments meet, whilst in the first artist's work this juncture is undetectable. Also Mark Rothko, in his paintings, depicts the fusion of chroma.

Like Albers, bold colours, geometrical and simple shapes are his main focus, however he puts many layers of colour on canvas and blends the boundaries with his brush stroke.

That is where the eye falls, to then move into the full chromatic fields, reaching the height

of what he defines a spiritual experience. Similarly to Turrell, Albers uses uniform

colours, whilst the third artist combines the tonalities and the moment of interaction is immediately perceivable.

In the series of *Skyspaces*, structures with square, rectangular, circular or elliptical apertures in the ceiling, James Turrell frames fragments of the sky, bringing it into a well defined space. Essentially, he brings the sky down on Earth. The first *Skyspace* is found in the Einstein garden, in Los angeles, California, and consists of a 6 by 6



Image 7  
James Turrell *Skyspace-Other Horizon*

meter stand-alone structure. Since then, the artist has developed them in shape, size and form, however their common and fundamental feature is that they all enclose a part of the universe and render it into a dimensioned vault. In this manner all points of reference, such as mountains, buildings and other man made or natural

elements are eliminated, clearing our visual field of any distraction. The viewer's attention is solely focused on the sky and the architectural space, which is the

means to an end. This allows the spectator to dissociate from everything else and observe the flux of day into night. As Clifford Einstein stated: *"It's not a painting to put in your house: it is a house, a manifestation, a door to the sky, a choice of sight, an experience, a dream."* It was like possessing a treasure that must be meticulously kept.<sup>18</sup>

By framing a *piece of reality that small fragment can become the universe*<sup>19</sup>.

We are invited to look at things beyond their face value, where the limit can be what we physically see. A personal challenge is set as we play with our perception based on our imagination, which is fuelled by what we view. *"This sense of disquilibria can at once be exciting as well as terrifying. It is not dissimilar from the luminous emptiness or filled void, spoken of in terms of satori, enlightenment, or experiences mentioned in near-death experiences"*<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> LIDO. *James Turrell. Il Cielo in Terra*. By Armin Kratzert and Florian Holzherr. Perf. James Turrell, Michael Govan, Jarl Mohn, Clifford Einstein, Mandy Einstein, Tom Macgrath, Donald M. Hess. Villa Panza Di Biumo, Varese, 2013. Transcript.

<sup>19</sup> LIDO. *James Turrell. Il Cielo in Terra*. By Armin Kratzert and Florian Holzherr. Perf. James Turrell, Michael Govan, Jarl Mohn, Clifford Einstein, Mandy Einstein, Tom Macgrath, Donald M. Hess. Villa Panza Di Biumo, Varese, 2013. Transcript.

<sup>20</sup> Turrell, James, and Carmen Giménez. *James Turrell: Guggenheim-Museum, New York, 21. June - 25. September 2013*. New York: Guggenheim-Museum, 2013. 51. Print.

## PHILOSOPHY AND AESTHETICS

*In the 1960's and 1970's, James Turrell studied with leading scientists, astronomers, and psychologists working at the edge of their disciplines, experimenting with biofeedback, alpha training, meditation, but also Quaker silence and Asian spirituality.*<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the intrinsic concepts and philosophically rooted theories that underlie his work, are the result of interdisciplinary knowledge that lays the ground and supports the artist's comparison of his creations to the experience of *enlightenment*.<sup>22</sup> In James Turrell's *Ganzfelds*, as viewers, we undergo an intense process of introspection. However, as Franz Brentano questioned in 1874, in his book *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint: Can one's mental experience be uninterpreted, not always about something: a thing, an object, or an image? Look around, and you will notice that suddenly your attention is captured by what you visually see: a bench, a chair, a tree, what you smell, and what you hear. Hence would it be possible to detach from conscious experience? We seem to naturally respond to what we know and acquaint through sensory inputs. Nonetheless, when we are presented with something ambiguous and mysterious, we suddenly become aware of our unconscious being.*

Conversely, Turrell tries to detach us from our usual experience of consciousness. His use of colour, void space and absence of focus in the *Ganzfelds*, create both an *artistically powerful and cognitively demanding experience*.

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<sup>21</sup>Turrell, James, and Carmen Giménez. *James Turrell: Guggenheim-Museum, New York, 21. June- 25. September 2013*. New York: Guggenheim-Museum, 2013. 51. Print.

<sup>22</sup>Turrell, James, and Carmen Giménez. *James Turrell: Guggenheim-Museum, New York, 21. June - 25. September 2013*. New York: Guggenheim-Museum, 2013. 51. Print.

His knowledge, which is the result of a thorough and incessant process of research and learning, coupled with his talent, take the spectator beyond the physical realm. It's the union of the two aspects, the intellectual and the creative, that make the appreciation of his work so unique. According to each person's capacities of self-analysis, the atmospheric hue will generate different responses within. The theme of light, and its importance, has been subject of *meditant's inner experience across many spiritual traditions. In the fifth century BCE the Chinese Taoist philosopher Lao-Tau wrote: "use your own light and return to the source of light. This is called practicing eternity."*<sup>23</sup> As James Turrell believes, enlightenment and a true understanding of the world, can solely be achieved through introspection, meditation and detachment from the physical world.

Moreover, fascinated by the cognition of reality, and in order to account for the significance of the *subject matter of actuality* in his art, James Turrell asserts: "*I make spaces that apprehend light for our perception, and in some way gather it, or seem to hold it. So in that way it's a little bit like Plato's cave. We sit in the cave with our backs to reality, looking at the reflection of reality on the cave wall. As an analogy to how we perceive, and the imperfections of perception, I think this is very interesting.*"<sup>24</sup>

The Allegory describes the illusion of reality, manifested in shadows that are only projections of more perfect forms. Turrell focuses on the reality of the projected light - not its capacity to create shadows, but as a thing in itself.<sup>25</sup> Plato portrays his rationalistic view of the human being through the Allegory of the Cave. He imagines

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<sup>23</sup> Turrell, James, and Carmen Giménez. *James Turrell: Guggenheim-Museum, New York, 21. June - 25. September 2013*. New York: Guggenheim-Museum, 2013. 54. Print.

<sup>24</sup> Whittaker, Richard. "Interviewsand Articles." *Conversations.org: Greeting the Light, by Richard Whittaker*. Works & Conversations Magazine, 13 Feb. 1999. Web. 21 June 2014.

<sup>25</sup> Govan, Michael, Christine Y. Kim, Alison De Lima. Greene, E. C. Krupp, Florian Holzherr, and James Turrell. *James Turrell: A Retrospective*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013. 28. Print.

a group of people chained in a cave for their entire existence who, isolated, have no idea of what the world outside looks like. The only figures they see are reflections of people and animals who, passing in front of a fire, create projections onto the rock wall in front of them. The philosopher is represented as a prisoner who is released from the cave, and has the possibility to see the world outside and realize it's not even close to what he had imagined by looking at the shadows.

Hence, the Allegory of the Cave allows us to further understand Turrell's inspirations. Nonetheless, experiencing the incorporeal when submersed in his chambers of light, renders each instant hardly describable in words. Like James Turrell said, it is for you as an individual to experience, meaning there is no unified response, as it must be unique for each person.

When relating to Plato's allegory, the most evident link with James Turrell's work is the *Roden Crater*. This project, set in an extinct volcanic cinder cone at an elevation of 5,400 feet, in the San Francisco Volcanic Field near Arizona's Painted Desert and the Grand Canyon, was discovered by the artist in 1974, and identified as the site that *will bring the light of the heavens down to earth, linking visitors with the celestial movements of planets, stars and distant galaxies.*<sup>26</sup> Turrell's fascination with the interplay of light and space led him to explore the design of ancient observatories as places of enhanced visual and spiritual perception: *"I admire Borobudur, Angkor Wat, Pagan, Machu Picchu, the Mayan pyramids, the Egyptian pyramids, Herodium, Old Sarum, Newgrange and the Maes Howe. These places and structures have*

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<sup>26</sup> "About." *RODEN CRATER*. The Skystone Foundation, n.d. Web. 22 June 2014.

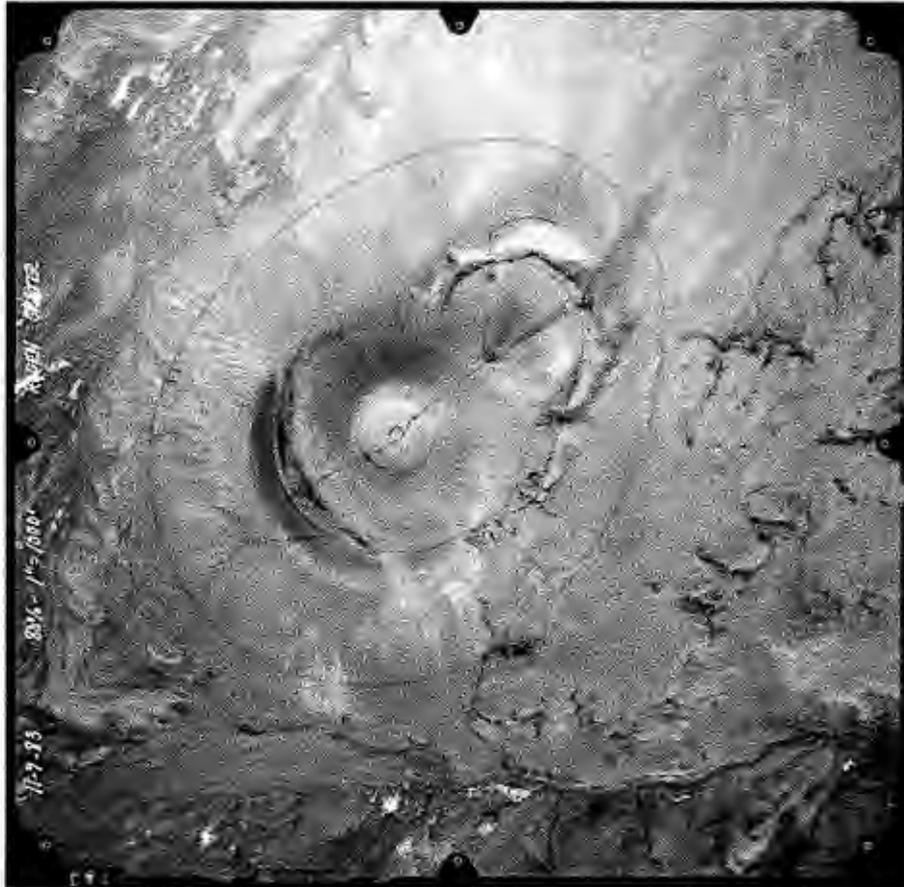


Image 8  
James Turrell *Roden Crater*

*certainly influenced my thinking. These thoughts will find concurrence in Roden Crater.*<sup>27</sup>

The discovery of this landmark is the result of the artist's extensive flights in search of the perfect crater. He

spent numerous hours each day mid

air, focusing on and examining the interplay of the haze with the shimmering light, especially during dawn and dusk.

His objective was to find a space to house a new creation, a natural environment that has that *"powerful quality"*<sup>28</sup> that only the artist can sense, but surely it's that powerful and impalpable quality that deeply touches the spectator while visiting his installations. The perceptual experience is mesmerising, nonetheless James Turrell's works withhold extrasensory features that are difficult to describe in words, but have proven to create resonance.

<sup>27</sup> "About." *RODEN CRATER*. The Skystone Foundation, n.d. Web. 22 June 2014.

<sup>28</sup> "James Turrell's Roden Crater." *Vimeo*. "James Turrell: A Retrospective" Now on View at LACMA through April 6, 2014., n.d. Web. 23 June 2014. <<http://vimeo.com/67926427>>.

With such a rooted emphasis of spacial division and interaction between light and architectural compounds, in 1979 James Turrell started *devising a series of mostly subterranean chambers and passageways meticulously oriented around celestial events, enabling a direct and profound experience of the sun, moon, and stars, and with it a new understanding of the place of human consciousness amidst the cosmos.*<sup>29</sup>

James Turrell doesn't manipulate natural and rural landscapes in order to create something completely new, but interferes with what he finds. Nonetheless, studies in the desert and the exploration and division of spaces on behalf of artists and cultures throughout the centuries, *have* been of great inspiration. For example, the creations of french Surrealist Max Ernst, whose work was impacted by the *expressive landscape of red rock and mesas in nearby Sedona.*<sup>30</sup>

In the Roden Crater, the main focus becomes the sky that appears as a vault, delineated by the *Skyspaces* present in the different chambers, where the role of natural light is of fundamental importance. This is also the case in other of James Turrell's installations. The *Atein Reign*, designed for the Guggenheim Museum in New York, consists in six interlocking cones lined with coloured LEDs that irradiate in conjunction with daylight which flows through the cusp of the rotunda designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>31</sup> Nature, and the luminescent artificial synergy, are at the centre of the artist's creations, as is the elliptical configuration which is prevalent throughout his work. This is because he feels a great connection with the universe. "All orbits

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<sup>29</sup> "James Turrell Exhibition Website." *James Turrell Exhibition Website*. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation (SRGF), 21 June 2013. Web. 21 June 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Govan, Michael, Christine Y. Kim, Alison De Lima. Greene, E. C. Krupp, Florian Holzherr, and James Turrell. *James Turrell: A Retrospective*. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2013.24.Print.

<sup>31</sup> "James Turrell Exhibition Website." *James Turrell Exhibition Website*. The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation (SRGF), 21 June 2013. Web. 21 June 2014.

and planets are elliptical, even the earth is ellipsoid, it's not a sphere".<sup>32</sup> James Turrell has kept everything in its purest form, circular and oblong, and this stems from the desire to interfere the least possible with the natural environment. This is predominant in the Roden Crater.

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<sup>32</sup>"James Turrell and Frank Lloyd Wright's Shared Vision at the Guggenheim." *YouTube*. YouTube, 3 July 2013. Web. 21 June 2014.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, James Turrell is not only an artist, but an explorer of the human condition. His work is suggestive, powerful and penetrating. As a viewer, one is captured by the intensity revealed by the use of coloured hue and the careful calibration of architectural structures in his installations. The somehow mysterious interaction between luminescence and space, appeals to our senses and emotions. This is because, in his installations, the observer becomes the centre of his own attention. Nonetheless, <sup>being art</sup> something subjective, individuals might present opposing views, rendering some arguments explored throughout the essay debatable. Also, not having referred to all of Turrell's exhibitions, questions concerning how he manipulates space with light could be left unresolved. As the *Roden Crater* is unfinished, hence not yet open to the general public, when addressing its impact on the viewer, I could only rely on the artist's feedback and other secondary sources. Some friends of the artist, collectors and journalists have been granted access, whilst concerning the rest of us, a worldwide challenge has been launched by Turrell himself: "If you visit all the spaces, then you'll be our guest at *Roden Crater*."<sup>33</sup> This means seeing his 82 installations across the globe. However, by taking into consideration what was investigated in the essay, it can be stated that James Turrell's capability to manipulate space with light appeals to the viewer by creating a sense of depth, dimension, and by provoking within feelings of ambiguity, confusion, disorder and self contemplation.

a mature &  
well-presented  
essay

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<sup>33</sup> Sutton, Benjamin. "In the Air – Art+Auction's Gossip Column." *Wanna Visit Roden Crater? You Just Need to Complete the 82-Stop Tour De Turrell*. Blouin Artinfo, 31 July 2013. Web. 22 June 2014.

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**Image 6-Rothko, Mark.** *White Center*. 1950. Painting. Mark Rothko Foundation. *Mark*

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**Image 8-Roden Crater.** N.d. San Francisco Volcanic Field. *Roden Crater*. Web. 21 June

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