

# sculpture

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ceiving and because light also alludes to something beyond itself, foreshadowing a conversation about the metaphysical. The immersion in baths, beams, and chambers of variable or fixed light, the lapse of time required to physically absorb the changes in the light and in our shifting perception of it, the long walk to cover the square footage of the exhibition layout all add up to an entirely other experience than a usual museum tour. You cannot peruse a James Turrell installation; you have to commit to encountering it.

In a darkened room, a single white cube seems to float in the far corner. The luminous form is hard to read. Is it cut into the wall or protruding out? Sitting at about chest height, the form wavers internally but is crisply outlined by the darkness. *Afrum (White)* (1966), a projected light corner, introduces us to the recurring parameters of Turrell's work: an ambiguous space shape of light that is subject to our difficulty in grasping its physical appearance.

A wall that has had its corners softened with curved edges seems to house or hold a rectangular panel out from its surface. From behind it, a warm pink light emanates. Or is it a cool white light in the form of a rectangular outline surrounded by the hot pink? The pink and the white pulse; the panel goes alternately darker and then lighter as the eyes refocus and readjust. The fluorescent light and shallow space of *Raemar Pink White* (1969) conspire to make the actual physicality of the light, the panel, and the space hard to stabilize.

Stepping up the stairs and into the chamber of *Breathing Light* (2013), the viewer is entirely enveloped in a reddish glow. A central lozenge form occupies most of the farthest wall. Walking closer, this form might be cut into the wall, or it could be a panel suspended in front of it, or maybe it's just a light. As the LED-lit space is traversed, the colors begin to change, heading into a deep, almost cerulean blue. That's when you might notice the massive after-effects of green or orange tints when you blink. The brain is trying to balance the effects of the color saturation. When you finally turn around, the embedded banks of lights in the back wall are clear to see, and the wall outside begins to behave strangely and change into various other colors. The immersion is total, and the effects are stunning.

It is particularly fitting that this multi-venue retrospective was launched by LACMA in the city where the Light and Space movement has its roots. When Turrell created the "Mendota Stoppages" in 1966, he simply leased a hotel and, by sealing off rooms and blocking external light, made art by projecting or allowing light from natural and artificial sources to enter the darkened spaces. Direct, ephemeral, and involving the entire environment, these spaces carved into by light presented the viewer with a number of issues that Turrell is still exploring: particularly, how perception grapples with light and how words are quickly exhausted in the fullness of it.

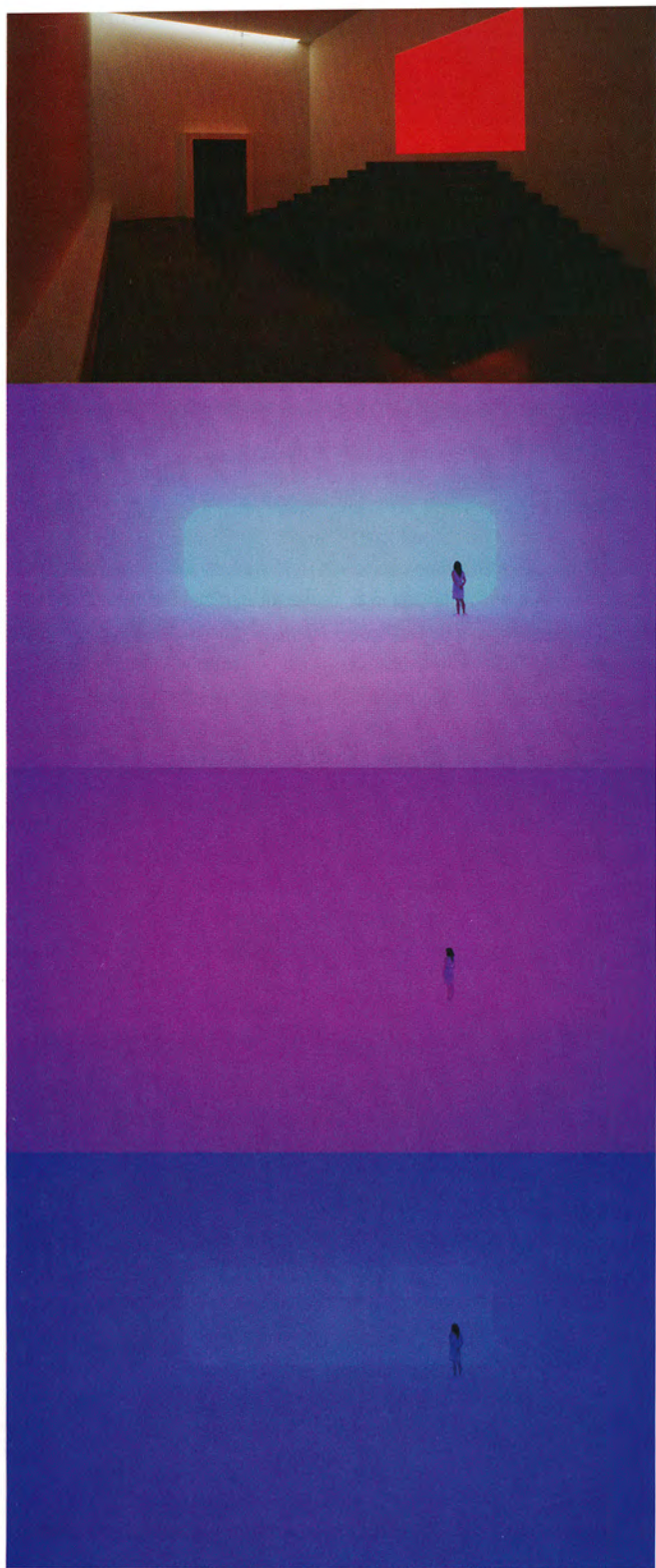
"James Turrell: A Retrospective" (which remains on view at LACMA through April 6) covers about 50 years of the artist's output. It includes geometric light projections, prints, drawings, installations, and light chambers, as well as recent works with holograms. One significant part of the exhibition is devoted to *Roden Crater*, the site-

## LOS ANGELES

### James Turrell

#### Los Angeles County Museum of Art

James Turrell's ongoing exploration of light as art is grounded in the phenomenological even as it touches on the philosophical. Immanence comes quickly to mind because the consistency or quiddity of his work is keyed to the viewer's act of per-



Left: James Turrell, *Breathing Light*, 2013. LED light, 4 views of installation. Below: Future Cities Lab, *Data-grove* (detail), 2012. LEDs, LCD panels, IR sensors, Arduino, plywood, polypropylene, acrylic, and galvanized steel, from artMRKT.

specific project being carved out of the land near Flagstaff, Arizona. Presented in the form of a scale model with overhead plans and drawings, photographs, and films, the scope of this ambitious project is hard to imagine, but it's amazing to try.

—John O'Brien