

Present

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James Turrell is an American artist who built his artistic career on the exploration of light and space. He is “considered one of the most influential contemporary light artists” (Cantz, 2009.). Turrell “considers the sky as his studio” (*Introduction*, “2018.”) this has derived from his time spent as a pilot and has given him opportunities to develop on what he has experienced within the air. Experiencing is part of Turrell’s work, to be in the presence (to an extent) is what makes his work complete. The important of experiencing peaks within his, Skyspaces. One of many off James beautiful Skyspaces is, “*Space That Sees*” (Fig;1) this is the work that I will be discussing throughout the essay. I will look at how James Turrell has adapted his style in to this work and works like it throughout his career and what comes along with them. Aiming to connect the path work of his works with the development of old and new, past and present. How Turrell planned this work to be viewed and interpreted by the audience within it will have priority throughout as it is the main feature of his Skyspaces along with his choice of medium. Other works that consist of similar mediums will also feature in comparison to *Space that Sees*.



Fig:1 “*Space that Sees*”.

James Turrell started to create “his master piece, Roden Crater” (*Passageways*, 2006.) in 1977. This is also a Skyspace but as it has been an ongoing process, Turrell’s “Skyspaces series, begun in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (WikiArt, 2016.) throughout the world with similar relationships to that of, Roden Crater. One of these being “*Space That Sees*” which was “erected in 1992 in the sculpture garden of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem” (Gonzalez, 2003). It is a large-scale installation constructed from grey and white concrete with a limestone interior which provides seated surroundings. Inside the structure is a wide-open room, with “a square opening cut into its ceiling” (WikiArt, 2016.) this creates the frame for the light of the sky to enter the space and to project on the walls of the structure. As the day light turns to a night sky the florescent light inside the space dims in accordance with it. This allows the viewers to see but also connects the exterior and interior spaces. Although the exterior at first is viewed as just the plain white cubed structure in an open area “surrounded by bushes and small trees planted sufficiently far from it” (Gonzalez, 2003.) this allows the attention to be drawn to and kept focused on the exterior of the bare construction, which holds more meaning than is first thought. The sky is the main body of the exterior, it makes it, but this is only apparent to the people who experience the presence within the space as Turrell says a “space where you feel a presence” (*Introduction*, 2018.). With the use of the artificial fluorescent lights Turrell bridges a gap of the old and the new. The technical or more modern side to the lights although they might be a simple use as they are part of our everyday, they are far from the natural light. The natural light being the sun and the main body of not only Turrells work but also our solar system. Turrell has a connection with the oldest form off an art space, that also uses the sun as an important part, this being Newgrange, which is one of Irelands oldest forms of art with its kerbstones “engraved with symbols called megalithic art” (*Newgrange.com.*) both artworks having been constructed with the sun in mind.

“My work is more about your seeing than it is about my seeing.” (*Introduction*, 2018.) This comes from Turrell himself and it gives us an insight to his intentions when creating his Skyspaces series. The purpose of his work is for the viewers is to see, to experience the presence of light in space. Taking this in to context with *Space that Sees*, what is to be seen is the natural pictures that are produced between the cloudy or sunny skies within the empty square cut in the ceiling of the cube. (Gonzalez, 2003.). For this experience to take place the viewer must approach the structure by the pathway that has been designed around the structure to give an outlook at it and then to lead to the entrance to the corridor. As they take on this journey from the outside to the inside, they must have the want and the curiosity to enter the dull corridor that leads them to the unknown, that is the room. The journey that takes place plays a part in the experiencing and therefore in the work of art. Upon them entering the room “Turrells artistic goal of giving viewers access to their own perception” (Cantz, 2009) is developed as they cross the threshold at the end of the corridor in to the room. Different stages of discovery take place within the viewer as they enter because of the previous unknown destination to the initial visual presentation of the light that is being seen. Turrells Skyspaces delivers to the viewers an “entire body” (Cantz, 2009.) experience but an extra emphasis is pushed towards the sense of sight as its attention is perked by the aperture. This stage is specially catered for inside, *Space that Sees* through the design particularly on the seating and walls around the perimeter of the room. The bench is butted against the wall that is at its widest at the bottom which then slopes back and narrows down for the space above. The slope that is created forms a back to the bench which then “allows the visitor to assume a posture of full rest” (Gonzalez, 2003) and therefore allows them to gaze up with ease. As the viewer is at full rest they can relax and then their senses can take full engagement within experiencing their own perception as Turrell had intended.

Although as similar as *Newgrange* and *Space that sees* are with the use of the mediums they do not hold the same connections in which they are used as one might think. Turrells spaces are often seen as a sacred place or of religious meaning but they do not belong to this category. Whereas

Newgrange is seen as having a “religious and ceremonial importance” (Newgrange.com). Both designed around the sun and appreciating it and using it in similar ways of filling a space with light but using this light to extract different meanings and there for feelings and emotions to the viewers that it is delivered to. I take *Newgrange* as an example because of its historical importance and its extraordinary construction but there are many other beautiful structures and sculptures that have been designed and constructed with the natural sun light or artificial light as its sole importance. Just like the sun there are many other natural materials and mediums used to create pieces. One practitioner that uses many natural materials is Andy Goldsworthy. He constructs cairns out of stone and forms shapes out of sticks and leaves and then he records this over time which gives a sense of how the natural environment has changed these or in many cases claims them as it dismantles them. One piece that he constructed that is very similar although first visually different to Turrells *Space that Sees* is Andy's *Pool of Light* (Fig:2). Goldsworthy was commissioned to make work from fallen trees due to a storm in France in 1999. In 2001 he “decided to make one large cairn” (Goldsworthy, 2004) from the trees. What makes this work very similar to that of Turrells is the planning that went in to the placing of the wood “in such a way that the edge of each log would at morning and evening split the light into sun and shadow.” (Goldsworthy, 2004). This work lets the viewer see the effects of the light on a surface like in *Space that Sees* but Turrell wants the light to be seen rather than it to be used to see.



Fig:2 “*Pool of Light*”

From developing my own work within the studio, I have experimented with light within a box and I took an interest to how it was displayed and then how it changed due to the angle it was projected from. Producing experiments and studies on this involved research and this is how I found James Turrell, his light art and Skyspace series. So, I had already started a small part of research in to his mediums. Gathering information on the Skyspaces and Turrells work was straight forward as there is plenty of books on him and his career in the Edward Murphy library. Although to find specific information and discussions on *Space that Sees* itself was not so easy in the book department. There was plenty on many of his works and on multiple pieces but not the one I wanted. Yes, to pick another of his beautiful works would be possible but my attention and interest was pulled towards *Space that Sees*. One article in particular that I found on Jstor that was partly focused on *Space that Sees* was by Valerie Gonzalez. In this short article she discussed and compared, *The Comares Hall* and *Space That Sees* in detail from the exterior to the detail within the interior of the two structures. Although the aim was on the “two buildings containing a single main room” (Gonzalez, 2003.). Each construction was giving an equal discussion on each point and to see how it was viewed and interpreted by the author was interesting and helped to get an understanding of the space with out being in the presence of it. As James focus is on light and space, I looked at the use of these and found books on the art of these and Turrell has featured in a lot of them. Most of his early work is recorded and then *Roden Crater* which is considered to be is master piece features frequently although it is still an ongoing process but *Space that Sees* does not. From looking at space and light I have gotten an insight to how they can be both used to create wonderful works of art and this has led me to look at these mediums to continue my work in this area. Most of the sources I looked at was inspired by Turrell and his artistic approach within is work. The one thing that did run parallel within their opinions was that of how he “takes light itself and makes it material” (Butterfield, 1993) there was a sense of praise for Turrell and how he produced his work.

As I have been producing studio work around light and space and I have gathered information on James Turrell and his work for this essay I have gained a better understanding for the two areas and

how they can be displayed and interpreted. There is no doubt that James Turrell is “one of the most influential contemporary light artists” (Cantz, 2009) and this is apparent by the mass production of his work worldwide. For James to have gained an interest in light and space through his time spent flying and then wanting to explore these areas and therefore aiming to creating it in to a present experience for the viewers, he has succeeded. This is clearly displayed in his Skyspace series and in particular for me in, *Space that Sees*. Although to date I have not experienced the presence of this space I have received a great understanding of it and how it has incorporated an essence of old and new within its walls. The work Turrell has delivered to his viewers within these walls has been inspirational to many and it is apparent through many other practitioners works, like wise it is clear to see that Turrell himself has been inspired by past works of art and their creators. I have enjoyed gaining an insight to James Turrell and his *Space that Sees* and I look forward to pursuing in this pathway.

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Fig:1 *"Space That Sees"* <http://www.midnighteast.com/mag/?p=29717> Accessed 11/04/18

Fig:2 *"Pool of Light"* <http://www.refugedart.fr/ANDY-GOLDSWORTHY.php?rr=1339496529>

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