

Kayne Griffin Corcoran

ARTFORUM

James Turrell



James Turrell, *Missed Approach*, 1990, plaster, wood, 15 1/2 × 33 3/4 × 33 3/4".

It was in Los Angeles that James Turrell first recognized the kinds of perceptual acuity possible in smoggy, irradiated air. His first light projects—experiments with incandescence filtering through jerry-rigged apertures in his Santa Monica studio in 1966—were harbingers of his subsequent tests of the fugitive, natural environment in increasingly architectural terms. His long-standing embrace by the city is understandable, but his apotheosis will unfold elsewhere: in an extinct volcano in the Painted Desert northeast of Flagstaff, Arizona, for the forty-year project of Roden Crater, a celestial-observatory complex. In his most recent presentation at Kayne Griffin Corcoran (his seventh with the gallery), Turrell was framed not as a conjurer of immaterial experience but as a builder or, at minimum, a designer of structures in support of this ambition. Appropriately set in the sprawling exhibition site capped by a permanent “Skyspace” Turrell installed when the gallery opened its current location in 2013, his eponymous show suggested the import of his built forms, represented in diminutive prototypes and tabletop maquettes alongside wall-bound renderings on Mylar.

He made this group of historic works, “Autonomous Structures,” between 1986 and 2013 to serve as containers, delimiting his otherwise amorphous ambient environments. Cast in undecorated plaster, which belies their capacious range of references and fundamental dissimilarities in style, the models for this series of works reference imaginary architectures (e.g., the late-eighteenth-century visionary projects of Étienne-Louis Boullée and Claude-Nicolas Ledoux) as well as completed buildings by the likes of Californian Irving Gill. Pre-Columbian temples and Mediterranean basilicas figure prominently, but iconographic strains of science fiction are even more integral. *Jump Start*, 1990, fabricated in cast plaster and wood, appears to be a shallow half dome perched upon three anchors; it

Hudson, Suzanne. "James Turrell." Artforum. October 2018. Web.

looks as if it could ascend at any moment. *Missed Approach*, 1990, a pyramid nestled within a large sphere, similarly (and oddly, given its geometric balance) intimates flight. Diminutive portals—little rectangular doorways or stairs leading into an unreachable beyond—are carved into the maquettes, suggesting affinities to the Roden Crater project (with its plans detailing interior chambers linked to those outside, and the whole gargantuan complex ultimately serving to reflect the light of the sun, moon, and stars) and to Turrell's "Skyspaces," 1974–, and "Ganzfelds," 1976–, where the artist immerses a space in light to thwart depth perception.

Scale is clearly a concern for Turrell, as indicated by his translations of large-scale pieces into domesticated environments, but so is duration. In the galleries next to the one housing "Autonomous Structures"—rooms that he retrofitted into serpentine corridors turned shelters for the occasion—Turrell created a series of shifting planes of swelling color extending from four new "Glass" works from 2018. Each is a unique shape and size—*Praamzius (12)* a diamond, *Chaos (98)* a circle, *Pluto* a rectangle, and *Jhuya 20(00)* a curved ellipse. For each, the artist programmed a distinct timed composition of colors, a two-and-a-half-hour loop that cycles through thousands of hues in subtle, hypnotic metamorphoses, as if in some high-tech version of a lava lamp. Enconced in the walls, these scrim-veiled prisms were thresholds, too. One sat before them, aware of their slowness and quiet. They are nontelevisions for the screen-filled collectors' houses into which they will migrate, where they will, in some kind of perpetuity, cast shadows of chartreuse and orange, magenta and pale blue, biding their time.

— Suzanne Hudson