

Kayne Griffin Corcoran

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In James Turrell's Light at Kayne Griffin Corcoran



"Jump Start," 1990, by James Turrell
(Courtesy of the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran gallery)

Off a busy yet otherwise nondescript section of La Brea Avenue in Los Angeles, tucked behind a wall with a heavy metal door that encloses a serene green lawn, Kayne Griffin Corcoran gallery quietly does its business. In this case, its business is a collection of James Turrell's light-based works from this year and sculptures from the 1990s, along with a pair of two-dimensional works on Mylar from 1984 and 1992.

Turrell is a master at his craft, which — since the 1960s — has been light. A key figure in the Southern California Light and Space movement of the 1960s, Turrell has established a very successful career since then. He has enjoyed solo shows at the Whitney, the Stedelijk and MASS MOCA, won a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1974 and received the MacArthur Foundation's "genius grant" in 1984. In 2013, Turrell, who is 75 and based in Flagstaff, Arizona, had a highlight year. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and the Solomon Guggenheim Museum in New York all organized sizable retrospectives of his work.

Chang, Richard. "In James Turrell's Light at Kayne Griffin Corcoran." Blouin Artinfo. 22 June 2018. Web.

The exhibition of new and historic work is his seventh at Kayne Griffin Corcoran during the last 15 years. "James Turrell" starts with "Pramzius (12)," a diamond-shaped etched glass with light-emitting diodes inside, embedded in the gallery wall. Like all of his "Glass" works, the light slowly changes colors, evolving from blue to aqua to yellow, with the center of the piece often differing significantly in hue from the edges.

The next piece — in its own space in an adjacent gallery — is a circle titled "Chaos (98)." Light emanates from the etched glass and shifts from purple, red and pink to white, yellow, green and yellowish orange.

"Pluto," 2018, is a rectangle that offers substantial contrast between the center and the edges. A pink center with a red outline transforms into a purple center with a light green outline. Then, several minutes later, it's a green center with a peach outline. In all of these "Glass" works, the color variables number in the hundreds, and it's nearly impossible to predict what color combinations might come up during one sitting.

Turrell's territories of color are not always distinctly defined. They're like Mark Rothko's color fields — deep in some spaces and fuzzy at the edges. Yet Turrell's colors aren't static; they constantly change and evolve with time. In the second half of the exhibition are sculptures and two works on Mylar. The sculptures, dubbed "Autonomous Structures," look as if they don't belong on planet Earth.

"Jump Start," 1990, resembles a spaceship, or a habitat for survival in another galaxy. It's a white, circular structure made of cast plaster and wood, and it features an elevated level punctuated by tiny, circular windows.

"Cold Storage," 1989, looks like a three-level observatory, and "Transformative Space: Basilica for Santorini," 1991, is undoubtedly a church, with Turrell's signature dome roof topping each element.

Inside, pillars and clerestories reveal that the artist is truly serious about these models, underscoring the notion that they're only a start to something bigger later on.

The two mixed-media Mylar pieces are topographical, with geometric measurements, concentric waves and scribbled notes. They're simultaneously specific and abstract, as they don't indicate exactly what their subject matter is. However, they're probably related to Roden Crater, the 400,000-year-old extinct volcanic cinder cone in the western Painted Desert, northeast of Flagstaff. Turrell has been working at the crater since 1979, and has constructed a naked-eye observatory there, as well as installation art and several "Skyspaces," or rooms with openings in the ceilings and walls that change in appearance, according to the time of day.

There's virtually no explanatory text in this exhibition, and prices are nowhere to be seen. For the most part that's unobjectionable, since, upon further investigation, the light works range from \$350,000 to \$550,000, and the sculptures are \$250,000 each — most likely out of pocketbook range for most viewers.

Turrell has stated many times that his art is about experience and he wants observers to "see themselves see." On those grounds, he largely succeeds.

—Richard Chang