

Two works by the American artist James Turrell on view at the Venet Foundation



James Turrell, Albion Barn © All Rights Reserved.

LE MUY.- [The Venet Foundation](#) is featuring two works by the American artist James Turrell (*1943) as part of its summer exhibition.

Turrell's light appears thanks to concealed devices that the artist plans out and constructs with great precision. That light reproduces natural phenomena that the artist builds up and stages like a dramatist. Darkness, silence, and the presentation of a perceptual manifestation that is both inexplicable to the eye and beyond human understanding eventually lead to abandoning oneself to contemplation and confronting the sublime.

The first work by James Turrell featured this summer at the Foundation is called Elliptic, Ecliptic, and belongs to a series of skyspaces, buildings (in this case egg-shaped) in which viewers are invited to take a seat and observe the sky through a narrow space freed of all visual pollution and illuminated by a device that the artist conceals in the structure. Like Yves Klein, who sought to paint the sky, Turrell sculpts it in space and color by tinting its surroundings. The concentration within a confining space of the color blue, which runs from the lightest at the start of the day to the darkest at night, brings out its intensity and the immensity of the infinite. Freed from all context, the sky is an abstract monochrome that the viewer contemplates, a monochrome defined by its outlines but whose depth is unknown, even unexplainable.

Elliptic, Ecliptic is a long-term installation at the Venet Foundation, like the Stella Chapel created by Frank Stella for the inauguration of the site in 2014.

As in Marfa, Texas (home in particular to the Chinati and Judd foundations), the Venet Foundation requires artwork to be displayed in ideal conditions. Everything here - the natural setting, the architecture, the way the works are installed or hung - is in the service of the artists. Described by Georges Didi-Huberman as a temple, Turrell's skyspace stands in the Foundation's sculpture park opposite the Stella Chapel. It underscores the tropism of contemporary artists to elaborate monuments with sacred connotations and place themselves within a secular history the substance of which they retain while rewriting the codes.

The second work by Turrell, Prana, is on view in the Venet Foundation's Contemporary Gallery, which was designed by Berthier and Llamata. The piece consists of a space that is hermetically sealed off from all exterior light. At the end of this space can be seen a red rectangle that actually conceals its exact nature. What seems to be an object painted in a pure pigment or a light projection of some sort proves to be, on close inspection, an opening (an aperture in Turrell's terminology) onto a light reflection. Behind the frame cut into the wall, all notions of space melt away in a kind of abyss clouded by a flaming red hue that suggests the inside of a seething volcano.

Prana, the piece's title, comes from Sanskrit. The term is borrowed from Hinduism. According to the Upanishads, prana is a universal vital energy that suffuses everything and which living beings absorb through the air they breathe. In Turrell's work, this energy appears suspended in the air thanks to a colored fog whose pulse dies away as the eye grows used to the room's darkness. What remains after a few minutes is the source of the fog, the pure-colored rectangle that persists like an inexhaustible source.