

JAMES TURRELL AT VENET FOUNDATION

Bernar Venet's CV includes the following entry next to the year 1989: "*Acquires a factory and watermill in Le Muy...*" A reader could easily miss the magnitude of those words. They reference a property known as Les Serres, a serene, wooded hamlet in southeastern France where a major **James Turrell** exhibit will occur this summer. Venet spent 20 years transforming this "factory and watermill" into what is today the Venet Foundation, a one-of-a-kind exhibition space for one of the world's most monumental collections of art.



The Factory at Les Serres

In itself, the property at Les Serres is a work of art. The history of industry at the location goes back to 1737, when an industrialist named Panescorche applied to the local lord of Louis XV for the rights to operate a sawmill there. Over the course of centuries multiple structures have come and gone and the surrounding wilderness has been transformed time and again. In the 1950s, finally an inventor named Marcel Paulvé acquired the property and proved to the world that industry and nature could beneficially co-exist.

Paulvé ran a thriving factory on the property, and also took heroic steps to restore the original wilderness. Such was his success that the property is now listed as a local heritage site. It's a model of industrial environmental stewardship. Today, the property houses an entirely different sort of factory, a "mental studio" for the artist Bernar Venet. It's also the home of the Venet Foundation, which encompasses the art collection of Dian and Bernar Venet as well as rotating exhibition spaces for important works of art.



The Stella Chapel at the Venet Foundation, Les Serres, Var, France

The Venet Collection

Venet calls the 9-acre property at Les Serres a "total work of art." The inspiration for it came from Donald Judd's Foundation in Marfa, Texas. Judd created his Marfa foundation because so often the exhibition spaces in museums and galleries misinterpret the artworks they show. Venet agreed with Judd that only by constructing specialized exhibition spaces could an artist ever truly create the intended viewer experience.

Venet transformed the various factory buildings at Les Serres into custom exhibition spaces for specific works of art then designed a sculpture garden for his own monumental works of outdoor sculpture. Today the Foundation features an art collection that includes the biggest names in Modern art, including Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Sol LeWitt, Carl Andre, Robert Morris, and dozens of others. The property also houses the Stella Chapel, a site personally designed and created by Frank Stella for the exhibition of six of his "Large Reliefs."



James Turrell's Elliptic, Ecliptic, exterior view, as seen in 1999 at Penzance, Cornwall, England.

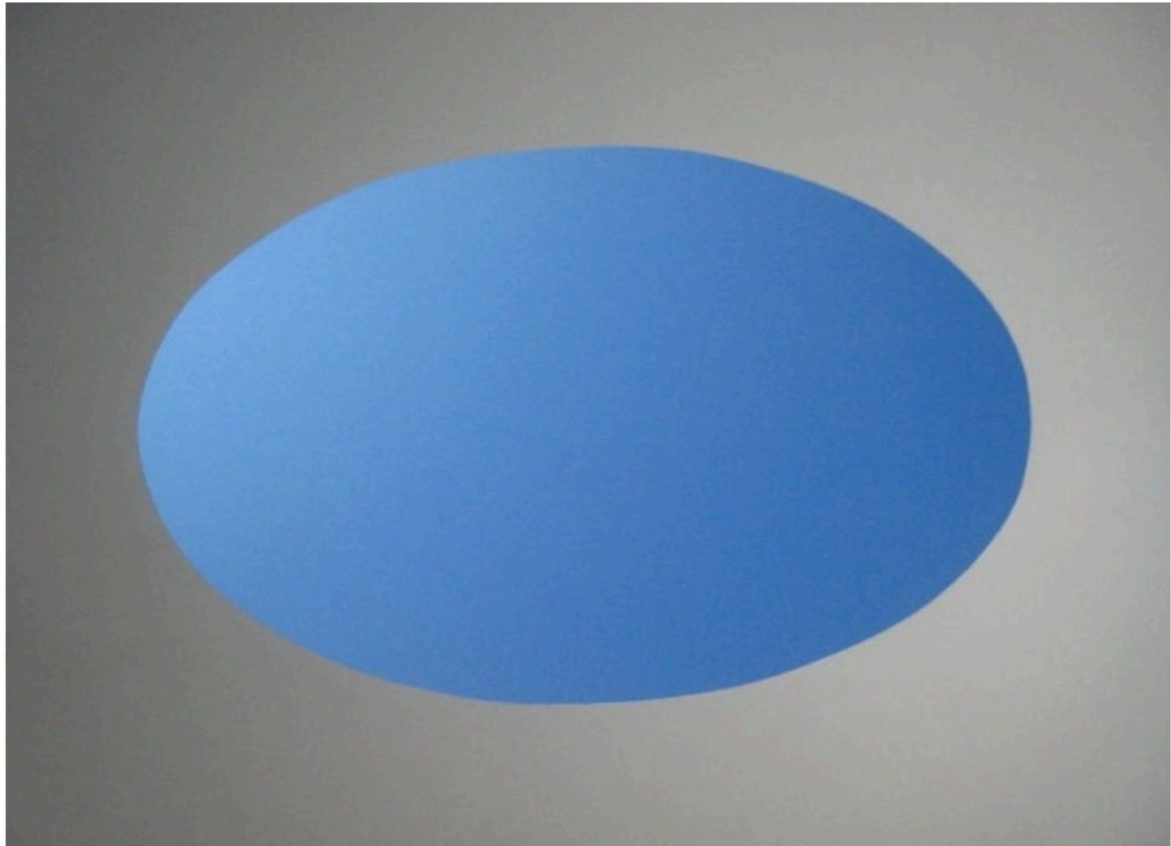
James Turrell : Inspire the Light

Every summer the Venet Foundation features a unique exhibition. This summer the foundation presents two works by the American Light and Space artist James Turrell. Turrell's works create vantage points from which viewers can contemplate phenomena related to natural and incandescent light. Sometimes he manufactures interior spaces and uses light to transform the environment in such a way that it envelops viewers, allowing them to escape all outside interference and just be absorbed in the aesthetic experience. Other times Turrell creates outdoor exhibits that invite viewers into a place from which nature's aura can be viewed without distraction.

The first of Turrell's works being exhibited this summer at Les Serres is a skyspace titled Elliptic Ecliptic. The work consists of an egg-shaped structure offering viewers a view of the changing sky through an ovular opening in the ceiling.

The second piece is a work called Prana, a Hindu expression referencing the "vital energy" of the universe. Turrell has had other works with this title including an installation in which viewers were surrounded by hanging lights that changed color in reaction to viewers' breath.

In this summer's manifestation of Prana, viewers enter an environment sealed off from outside light. Within the space colored fog faintly obscures a distant, soft, rectangular red light. As the viewer's eyes adjust to the environment it becomes apparent that the rectangle is actually what Turrell calls an "aperture," a hole cut into the wall, and the red light is reflecting through the aperture illuminating the fog.



James Turrell's Elliptic, Ecliptic, interior view, as seen in 1999 at Penzance, Cornwall, England.

How To Visit

James Turrell: Inspire the Light is scheduled to run from July through October 2016. Tours are only available on specific days. Call the Venet Foundation before planning your visit. Reservations are required. A month's advance reservation is recommended. Admission is free. No public transportation goes to the site. Parking is available. Pets are restricted. Visit the [foundation's website](#) to schedule a tour.

Featured Image: *The Stella Chapel at the Venet Foundation, Les Serres, Var, France*