

A Piece of Sky and Colors that a Painting Could Not Show More Beautifully Art and Nature Merge in an Unusual Way at James Turrell's Skyspace Lech

There are places where the sky does not just meet the earth, but two worlds come together. One such special place is located near the town of Oberlech at an altitude of 1780 meters above sea level. Here in Tannegg, in the natural surroundings of Arlberg and its spectacular Alpine scenery, one finds Skyspace Lech, an underground space of color and light created by American artist James Turrell. Merging the experience of art and nature, the work could hardly be more artificial and simultaneously more enrapturing. Offering a view of the sky through an opening its domed roof, Skyspace is entered through a fifteen-meter-long tunnel accessible from a hiking trail and a ski slope. The historical Walser settlement of Bürstegg as well as the striking Biberkopf Mountain are visible along a single axis. The interior of the elliptical and almost sacral space is clad with granite and has a bench running along its entire wall. At dawn and dusk this sacred realm beneath the dome with its eye to the sky is illuminated with light and color. With gentle alterations in tone, the Skyspace breathes color, shifting almost imperceptibly from a soft misty tonality to intense glowing hues. James Turrell's works do not consist of tangible objects. His work is not about light; they are light, as the artist himself has consistently emphasized. Born in 1943 and having grown up in the glistening sun of California, Turrell is considered a pioneer of light art and is among a number of west coast artists who worked with "light and space" from early on. For over fifty years, Turrell has been engaged in artistic research on the theme of light, and today he belongs to the most renowned international artists in the field of Light Art. In Vorarlberg, the artist garnered attention when he was commissioned to illuminate the new Zumthor building of Kunsthaus Bregenz in 1997 for its opening.

Bringing the Sky Closer

For Turrell, light is much more than a medium that makes the world visible. A major influence on the artist were his experiences as a pilot, and he received his pilot license at the age of 16. His fascination for light phenomena observed in the sky are evident in his

work, as when Turrell tries to bring the sky closer to us in his Skyspaces. "We are not aware that we ourselves give the sky its color," says the artist.

Turrell has created 90 such light spaces across the globe. At Skyspace Lech, he brings together the Skyspace concept together with elements of his series of Ganzfeld spaces, in which the outer limits of the room dissolve and the eye finds nothing to hold on to. When the opening that offers a view of the sky through the dome over the "sensing room" is covered during inclement weather by the outer sheath of the dome, a Ganzfeld effect is generated in the ceiling. Making perception itself into art, James Turrell sharpens our senses. Seeing becomes a self-reflective act. Visitors individually experience the colors in their own deeply subjective manner—colors that a painting could not show more beautifully.