

SEGURA PUBLISHING COMPANY

JAMES TURRELL

*Extracted from Craig Adcock's essay,
The Roden Crater Project, 1989*

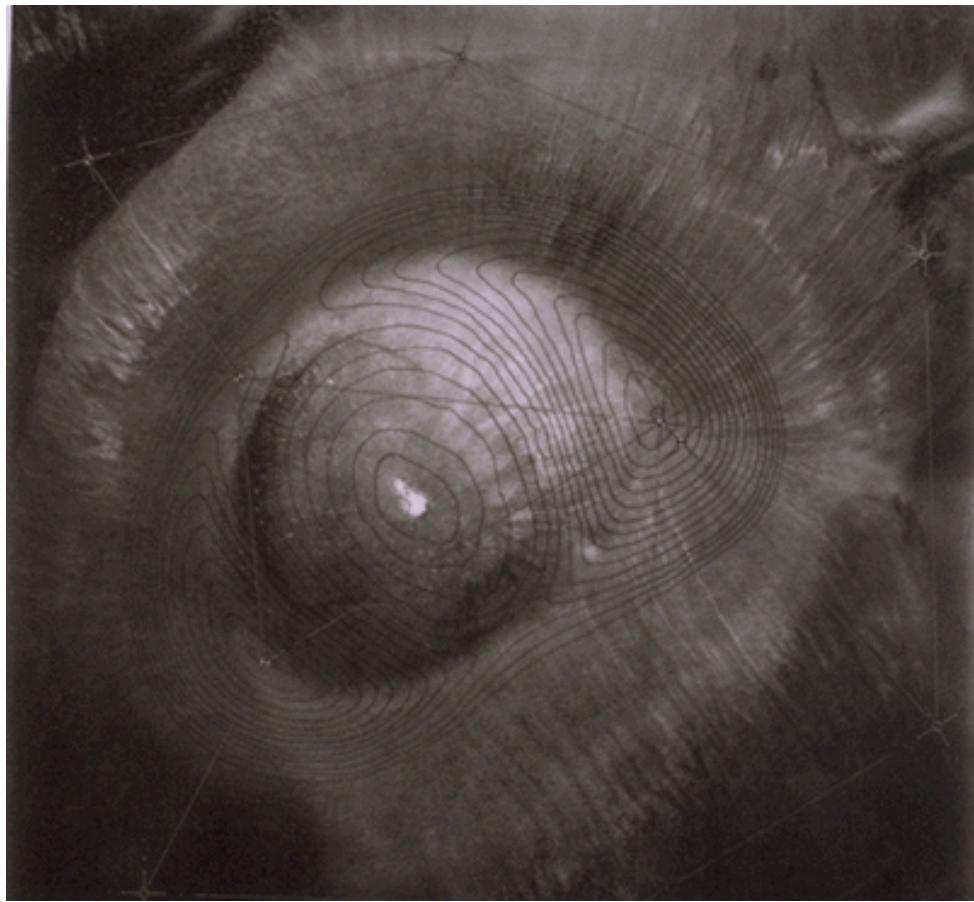
In 1975, Turrell lost his studio. This event was an inconvenience, but it did provide him with an impetus for beginning a work that he had been thinking about since the early 1970s, namely, the construction of a large outdoor sculpture that would shape the visual phenomena of celestial vaulting and the related concave earth illusion. After making an aerial survey of the western United States in 1975, Turrell chose Roden Crater, a cinder cone on the eastern edge of the San Francisco volcanic plateau, as an ideal location for engendering the multiple visual phenomena he was after.



Roden Crater 1, Suite of 4 Photolithographs with Shellac, Edition of 20, 15" x 16" each.

He plans to reshape the top of the crater by transforming it into a hemispherical dish with a rim all at one height. The modified bowl will function as a huge Skyspace and manipulate the phenomenon of celestial vaulting. In addition to reshaping the crater bowl, he will construct a number of underground chambers inside the mountain. As the principal sources for his light--the sun, moon and stars--move through the sky, the sculptural spaces inside the cinder cone will respond. Sometimes they will evolve slowly over long periods of time, sometimes in a matter of moments.

At diametrical positions near the edge of a lava cliff that fans out around the fumarole, or secondary vent, on the northeastern flank of the crater, four underground chambers will be oriented toward the cardinal directions. From a position near the eastern space, a combined ramp and shallow stairway will lead up to the top of the fumarole. At the fumarole, another series of interior spaces will become available. Turrell explains that these linked sculptural rooms "will have spaces that you can enter into as well as look into. When you look back, the space you have just left will be altered and charged by the juxtaposition." A tunnel, 1,035 feet long, will lead up from the fumarole to the inside of the crater bowl. At the top of the tunnel, we will come out into an oval chamber that will function like a Skyspace. As we step up stairs and come out into the crater bowl, the sky will balloon upward and seem to attach itself to the rim of the crater. It will become a shallow celestial vault with a diameter of some 3,000 feet. As we then walk up from the bottom of the bowl to the upper margin of the crater, the sky will detach itself from the rim and seem to spring outward to the far horizon, creating a much larger vault stretching from horizon to horizon sixty to one-hundred miles away depending on the direction. Similar dramatic disclosures will be effected by comparable tunnel spaces and chambers on the western side of the crater.

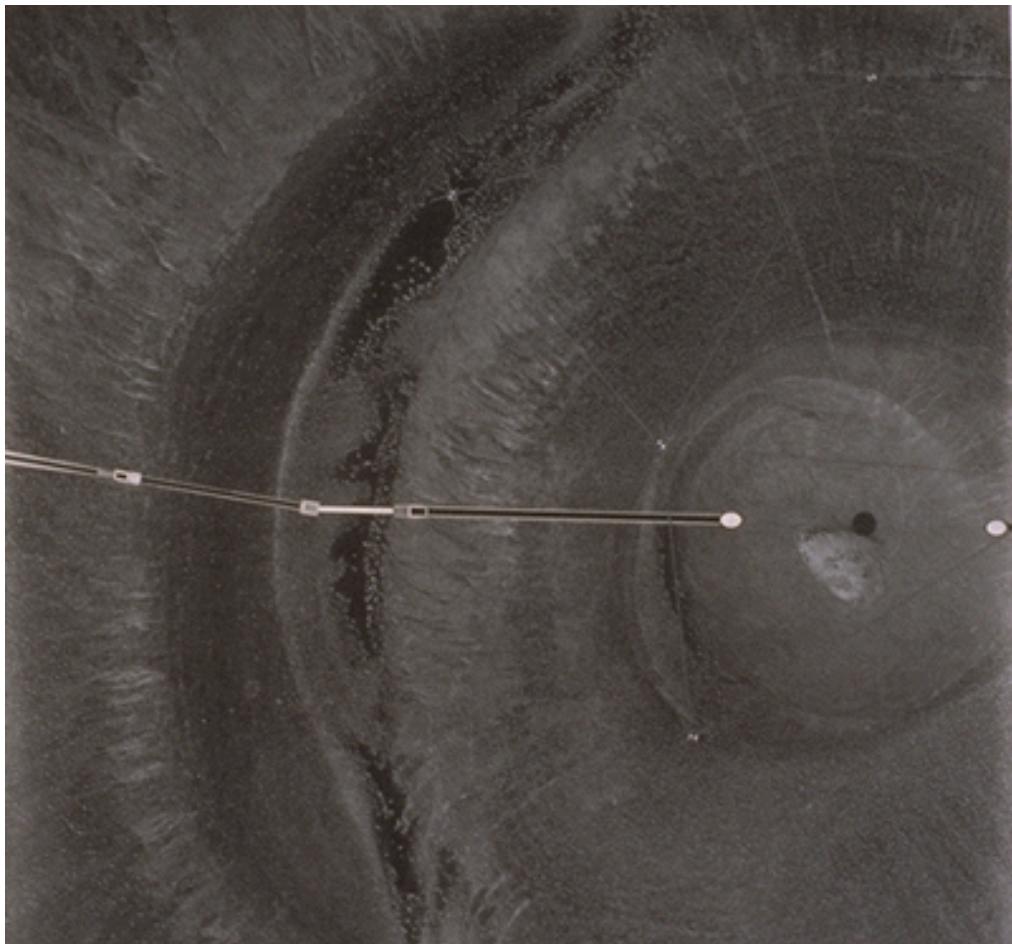


Roden Crater 2, Suite of 4 Photolithographs with Shellac, Edition of 20, 15" x 16" each.

At Roden Crater, the art is fundamentally tied to the volcano as a natural entity. The massive cinder cone is itself an impressive object, but Turrell's art will incorporate complex intellectual pattern into its already commanding presence. The natural beauty of light used as sculptural material will be conjoined with the physical power and spatial amplitude of the desert landscape in Turrell's interactive approach to light and his attention to the site-specific relationships of interior and exterior spaces.

The complexities of light and space available at the crater will be further compounded by periodic astronomical image events. In these terms, the project will not only function as an interactive light environment, but also as a naked-eye observatory. When an image is focused by an aperture into a space, it will

alter the light atmosphere hanging inside that space; the light coming through the sharp edges of the opening will cause one quality to disappear, while creating another. Not only will we be able to see the interior volumes and their architecturally defined light images evolve under constantly changing conditions, we will also be able to turn our attention outward to the celestial objects that are the sources for these interior visual qualities and events.



Roden Crater 3, Suite of 4 Photolithographs with Shellac, Edition of 20, 15" x 16" each.

Roden Crate will order basic human interactions with light and space--and also with time. It will affect not only the intensity, but also the protensity--the extension through time--of perceptual experience. The modifications to the cinder cone will be informed by the works Turrell has been producing since the

beginning of his career: the light inside the spaces will be like the Skyspaces, but they will be hewn from the natural materials of the volcano and surfaced with the sand stone of the surrounding desert.

Turrell's Roden Crater Project is an interactive sculptural environment; its subject matter is light and space. At its most profound levels, the completed project will allow us to stand in the present and look into both the past and the future. Light, in one of its aspects, is time. The crater will focus our attention on infinite reaches that are both geologic and astronomical, both personal and psychological. The entire project with its myriad interior and exterior spaces functions in terms of the light in the sky. In these terms, the crater is designed to work closely with what is already available in the sky, but it goes beyond worldly givens into areas of autonomous, unbounded seeing. The sunrise and the sunset can range from a bright orange glow at the horizon set against a dark background of sky and earth through all the ambers, salmon pinks, silver yellows, purples and reds familiar to anyone who has ever watched a morning or an evening. These displays are pure acts of nature. Their isolation and intensification in the spaces Turrell has planned for the Roden Crater Project are pure acts of art, and they fundamentally change our perception of sky color. They collapse the familiar clichés so often used to describe beautiful twilights. As Turrell puts it, the light has its own ineffable quality: "What takes place while looking at the light in a Skyspace is akin to wordless thought. But this thought is not at all unthinking or without intelligence. It's just that it has a different return than words." It is a place where artificial spaces merge with nature and art melds with the affective spaces of individual consciousness.



Roden Crater41, Suite of 4
Photolithographs with Shellac, Edition of
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