

Olafur Eliasson, Take Your Time & Your Tempo

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Olafur ELIASSON

Take Your Time & Your Tempo

Peter DUBÉ

Few artists would have the audacity to name a site-specific work *The Weather Project*. The title carries a sort of demi-urgic conceit, a presumptuousness that can hardly avoid appearing hubristic. Those fortunate enough to have visited the Tate Modern's turbine hall during the appropriate period of 2003/2004 will know, however, that Olafur Eliasson's title was — to a remarkable extent — appropriately descriptive. It denoted the work's deep investment in the kind of physical and psychic *climate* with which it was charging the space.

This concern is present again in his recent exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). Entitled *Take Your Time*, the show brings together a body of works that aim, in the artist's words, to be "devices for the experience of reality."

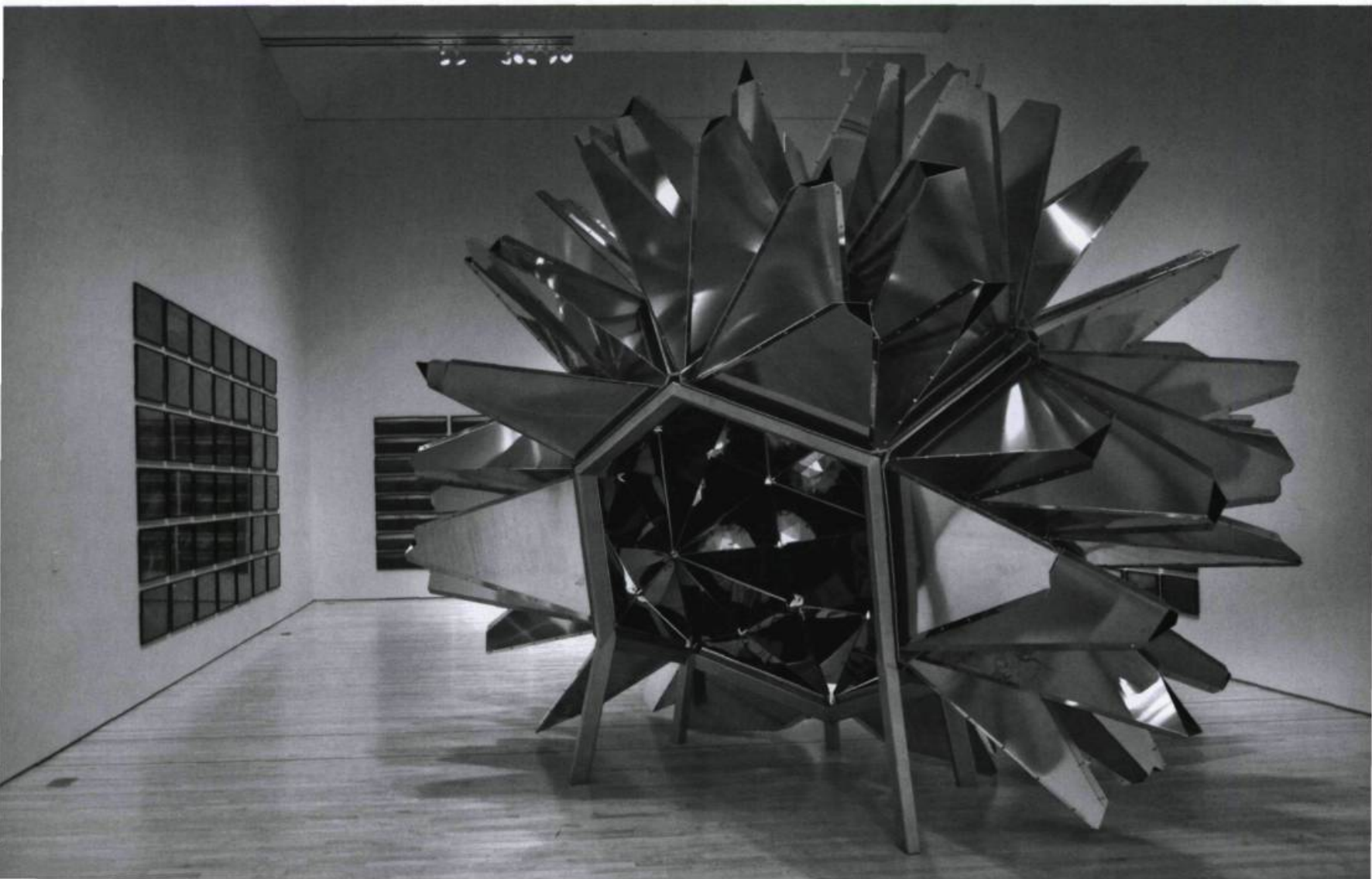
One encounters a disquieting example of the challenge to *normal* space immediately on exiting the elevator at the fifth-floor galleries where one is greeted by the 1997 work *Room for one Colour*. Here, a series of monochromatic light bulbs transform the vestibule into a morass of troubling yellow light that attenuates

visual detail and creates a disorienting encounter with an otherwise ordinary interior. The exploration of the possibilities of light and colour is present in other pieces as well, among them *Yellow versus Purple* and *360° room for all colours*. The latter installation elaborates on the investigation in a particularly vivid way through a circular room in which the visitor stands surrounded by a wall across which surges the full spectrum of colour. Eliasson takes light and colour in a less orderly direction in his kaleidoscopic *One-way colour tunnel*, created specifically for SFMOMA's turret bridge, in which prismatic waves wash over the spec-

tator as she moves across.

Amidst so much chromatic display, however, the artist doesn't neglect its opposite number; darkness provides a counterpoint in several works. *Notion Motion* (2005) is a darkened space equipped with a motion-sensitive mechanism that transforms the viewers' movements into an undulating pattern on a screen filling one wall. *Beauty*, a breathtaking installation from 2005, achieves its effect via a very restrained use of space and materials; in another black room, a fine mist of water falls from above and is pierced by an oblique spotlight. The ethereal effect is modified as one

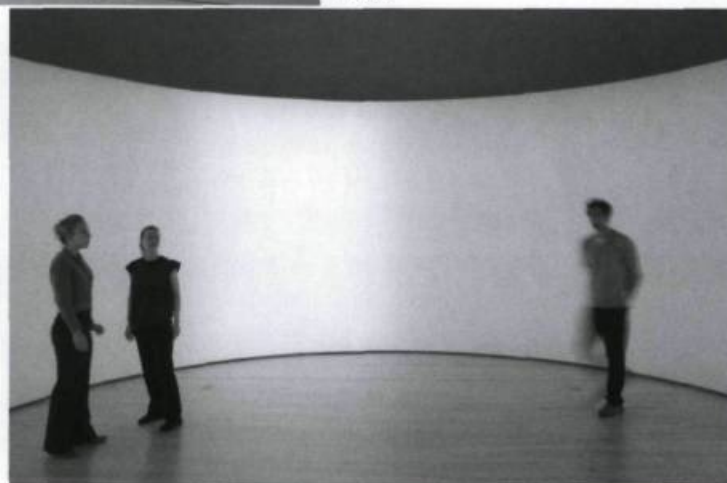
Olafur ELIASSON, *Multiple grotto*, 2004. Stainless steel. 180 x 180 x 180 in. (457.2 x 457.2 x 457.2 cm). San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Accessions Committee Fund purchase. Photo: Ian Reeves, courtesy SFMOMA; © 2007 Olafur Eliasson.



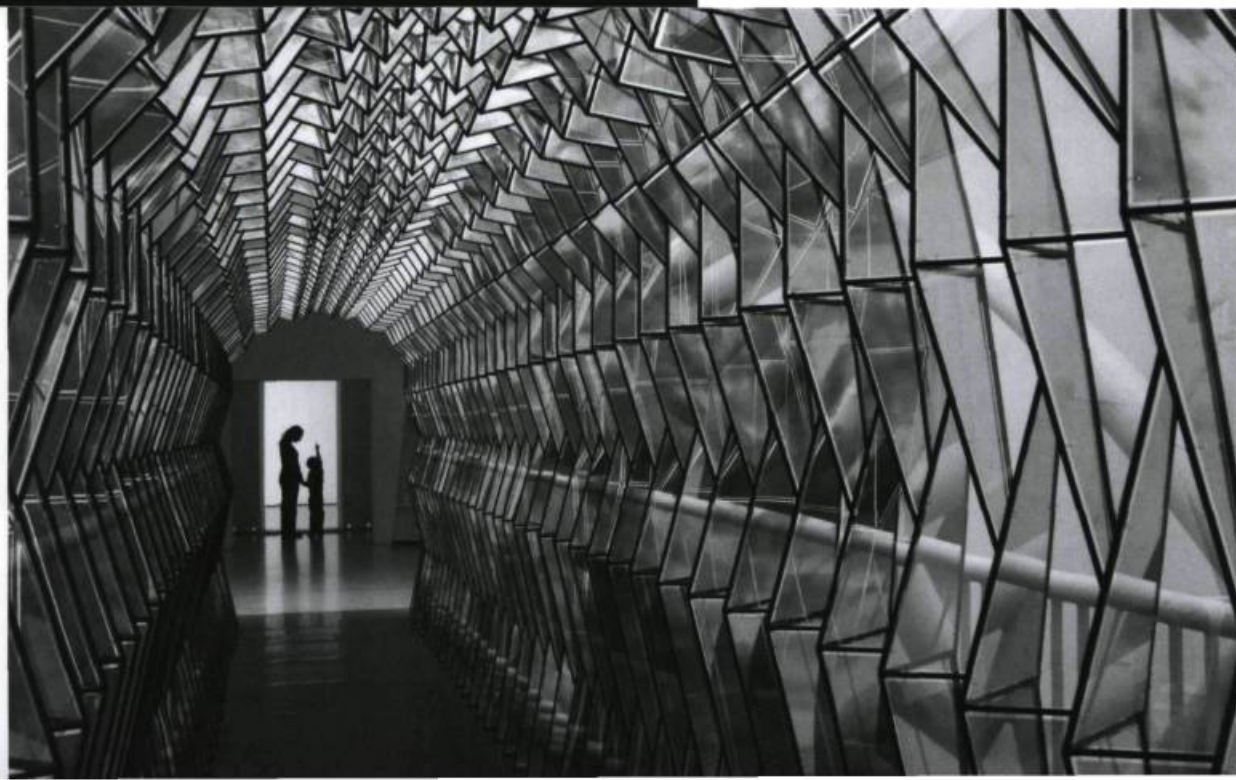


Olafur ELIASSON, *Room for one colour*, 1997. Monofrequency lights. Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; and neugerriemerschneider, Berlin. Photo: Ian Reeves, courtesy SFMOMA; © 2007 Olafur Eliasson.

Olafur ELIASSON, *360° room for all colours*, 2002. Stainless steel, projection foil, fluorescent lights, wood, and control unit. 126 x 321 x 321 in. (320 x 815.3 x 815.3 cm). Private collection, courtesy Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York. Photo: Ian Reeves, courtesy SFMOMA; © 2007 Olafur Eliasson.



←←
Olafur ELIASSON, *Notion motion*, 2005. HMI spotlights, tripods, water, projection foil, wood, nylon, and sponge. Dimensions variable. Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, on loan from the H+M Mecenaat. Photo: Ian Reeves, courtesy SFMOMA; © 2007 Olafur Eliasson.



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Olafur ELIASSON, *One-way colour tunnel*, 2007. Stainless steel, color-effect acrylic, and acrylic mirror. 100 3/4 x 70 7/8 x 413 3/8 in. (256 x 180 x 1,050 cm). Courtesy the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; and neugerriemerschneider, Berlin. Photo: Ian Reeves, courtesy SFMOMA; © 2007 Olafur Eliasson.

moves around it, but regardless of the angle, one is overwhelmed by the impression of fragility, ephemerality and sheer sensual pleasure.

A new installation, *Your mobile expectations: BMW H₂R project*, (2007/2008), presented on a separate floor of the museum, transforms temperature into an almost plastic element. A hydrogen-powered race car is shrouded in a skin made of steel and multiple layers of ice and installed in a refrigerated room. The effect, at once beautiful and unsettling, poses pointed questions about the culture of the automobile, global warming and social attitudes toward both that are underlined by the physical discomfort experienced by the visitor and heightened by the real need for the blankets provided at the entrance.

The most prominent common

thread uniting Eliasson's many (and diverse) works presented at SFMOMA is the deployment of absolutely basic elements of our experience of being in the world: volume, movement, light, darkness, colour, temperature and so on, and a drive to realign these fundamentals in ways that provoke or highlight our awareness of them. Uses that deliberately, troublingly, make us *come to terms with them*. They are, in fact, as the artist claims "devices for the experience of reality" but could also be described as devices intended to *transform or enlarge* our experience of reality given how eccentric an encounter they provide. Which brings us back to the weather, that thing which surrounds us all the time—our environment. In the end Eliasson's work, one might argue, is *about* what surrounds us and making us more

conscious of it, more involved with it. He highlights the fact that our environment is where we *live*, and depending on what we make of it, what we *risk*. ←

Olafur Eliasson: Take Your Time
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Peter DUBÉ is a novelist, short story writer, essayist and cultural critic. He is the author of the chapbook *Vortex Faction Manifesto* (Vortex Editions, 2001), the novel *Hovering World* (DC Books, 2002) and *At the Bottom of the Sky*, a collection of linked short stories (DC Books, 2007). In addition to his fictional work, his essays and critical writings have been widely published in journals such as *CV Photo*, *ESSE* and *Hour* and in exhibition publications for various galleries, among them SKOL, Occurrence, Quartier Éphémère and the Leonard and Bina Ellen Gallery of Concordia University.

Olafur ELIASSON, *Model room*, 2003. Chipboard display cabinets, mixed-media models, maquettes, and prototypes. Dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist; Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York; and neugerriemschneider, Berlin. Photo: Ian Reeves, courtesy SFMOMA; © 2007 Olafur Eliasson.

