

ARTWORK **SKY GARDEN**

ARTIST **JAMES TURRELL**

INSTALLED 2004
SAN FRANCISCO FEDERAL BUILDING
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Light and color are the foundation of nearly every work of art. For James Turrell, however, these are not used simply to illuminate and articulate a subject—they *are* the subject. Turrell's artworks, shaped from his deep understanding of visual perception, sometime suggest volumes of light that are in fact voids or flat planes, and in other instances isolate and focus attention on the ever-changing qualities of the sky. These installations are not merely optical tricks. Turrell's work reveals the very process of seeing. There is no narrative, symbolism, or even image in his art. Rather, the viewer's process of perception is itself the artwork. Turrell's installations help viewers understand how light and color can radically transform their experience of the world.

Using neon light as his only material, Turrell created *Sky Garden* within a three-story opening in the south façade of the San Francisco Federal Building designed by Morphosis. This collaborative artwork builds upon Turrell's projects of the past four decades and extends them into the scale of the city. Yet *Sky Garden* is unlike other Turrell artworks, as viewers can experience it both from within, from without, and from great distances. Turrell plays with these myriad vantage points, creating different perceptual situations for each of them. During daylight hours, the architectural elements of *Sky Garden* are paramount, providing views of the sky and surrounding cityscape from the eleventh-floor terrace and a pair of suspended walkways. During twilight and after sundown, Turrell's work comes to life, saturating the space with colored light that seems almost palpable; its presence dramatically changes the way the volume of the open-air room is perceived. When viewers look out over the city from within the space, the color of the evening sky appears to change in relation to the slowly shifting colors of the neon lights. Seen at night from the exterior, *Sky Garden* creates a luminous, singular beacon. The three-story void appears as a glowing block of color set into the building. A ribbon of neon extends diagonally from the terrace up the face of the building, following a seam in its perforated metal skin. Another band of light is embedded in the plaza at street level, completing the geometric figure that begins high up on the façade. As the artwork's blue, indigo, and violet hues vary gradually, so too does the viewer's experience of the landmark building from locations throughout the city. **BG**





James Turrell was born in Los Angeles in 1943, raised in nearby Pasadena, and currently lives in Flagstaff, Arizona. He earned a BA in psychology and mathematics in 1965 from Pomona College in Claremont, California, then pursued graduate studies in the fine arts at the University of California, Irvine, and Claremont Graduate School, where he earned his MA in 1973.

Over the past forty years, Turrell's groundbreaking experiments with light and spatial perception have revolutionized the visual arts. Since 1979, he has been transforming Roden Crater—the cinder cone of an extinct volcano in the Painted Desert of Arizona—into a multi-chambered, naked-eye observatory of celestial phenomena. Turrell also has created three-dozen of his more modestly scaled viewing chambers—known as skyspaces—for museums and other collections around the world, including *Light Reign* (2003) at the Henry Art Gallery of the University of Washington in Seattle and *One Accord* (1995–99) for the Live Oaks Friends Meeting House in Houston.

Turrell's work has been featured in more than one hundred and forty solo exhibitions, such as *James Turrell: Knowing Light* (2003) and *James Turrell: Sensing Space* (1992) at the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle; *James Turrell: Spirit and Light* (1998) at the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston; and *James Turrell: Light Projections and Light Spaces* (1976) at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Among his many awards are fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts (1968), Guggenheim Foundation (1974), and MacArthur Foundation (1984).

MEDIUM CUSTOM ELECTRONICS, NEON

