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**VOGUE**

**This James Turrell Installation Is The Best Meditation Chapel in New York**



A glimpse of the sky, framed by a sequence of colored LEDs, during a sunset viewing of James Turrell's *Meeting* at MoMA PS1.  
Photo: Courtesy of Laura Regensdorf

I am leaning back against a teak-paneled banquette, watching a cotton ball pelican drift across the sky. Thirty or so strangers, sat around the perimeter of this square-shaped room, all have their eyes fixed on a rectangular hole in the ceiling—like a high-def TV with one strange channel. The mood is hushed, almost ecclesiastical. A computer-programmed cycle of LEDs starts up, bathing the interior in chartreuse (mood-lifting, some say), fuchsia (energizing), and a blue-gray so pale it makes the sky look wan. A tiny plane zips through the lower left corner of the frame, like an errant summer fly. Finally, I think to myself—because there is suddenly so much space to think—I have found my meditation chapel.

Of course, this isn't a meditation chapel at all. We've come for a 45-minute sunset viewing of James Turrell's *Meeting*, a permanent installation inside a former classroom at MoMA PS1, in Long Island City, Queens. In 1979, when a thirtysomething Turrell lugged a jackhammer to the roof of the fledgling art space—pummeling through what turned out to be a 42-inch-thick slab of concrete—the California artist had previously created just one oculus work for a private commission in Italy. This one at PS1 was more personal. There was the nod, in design and in name,

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to his own Quaker roots; he even pitched a tent in the open-air room during construction. ("I lived outside inside PS1," Turrell put it.) The scale was intimate—and the infrastructure, until renovations in 1986 and 2016, occasionally problematic—but the impact was enormous, informing what turned out to be a series of such "Skyspaces." Here, the cut-out rectangle is less a viewfinder than a shapeshifting bridge. "The sky's no longer out there anymore," Turrell once explained, "but it seems to be brought close in touch with you and [the space] where you sit."



An installation view of James Turrell's *Meeting*, 1980-86/2016, at MoMA PS1.  
Photo: Pablo Enriquez / Courtesy of MoMA PS1

Or, as I sometimes feel during the slow-evolving sunset, *Meeting* catapults you into the ether. I imagine the windows that astronauts peer through, homesick for Earth. Later on, as darkness falls and the portal takes on a fuzzed-out gray, it reminds me of that staticky television in *Poltergeist*—ready for someone to walk right into, if only the room would rotate 90 degrees like some Fred Astaire dance number. It's almost alchemical, the way Turrell can take a chunk out of a building and spark a kind of mental road trip. Can you call this meditation, when your brain, empty of day-to-day narrative and attuned to shifting color fields, finally catches a moment to take stock and observe? Somewhere outside, subway brakes shriek, followed by the rumble of a faraway jet engine. I think I see a star stitched into the platinum sky.

Turrell's long-running interest in light and human perception has evolved with his embrace of LEDs (these were added to *Meeting* in 2016), and it's uncannily in step with what's happening in the wellness world. Yoga studios outfitted with colored-light sequences tout benefits associated with mood and circadian rhythm. Skin-care gurus

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bank on targeted LEDs to help treat acne and boost cell turnover. Turrell promises none of that, but his art has its own transformative power (to say nothing of its Instagram appeal—does that deflate the meditative lift? I wonder, phone reluctantly in hand). At a time when anxiety seems to blanket the country, it's no small feat to inspire a sense of marvel in your backyard.

"I . . . like the fact that PS1 then was a little bit rough," Turrell said in an oral history of the project, explaining that *Meeting* "just made such a pure sky out of New York, which was kind of unexpected." A slice of clouds between tall buildings—or a 45-minute window of time in an overscheduled day—has an outsize effect in the city. "It made [*Meeting*] more transcendent than it was ever intended to be," Turrell continued.

As the parade of colored light winds down, having warped the sky from familiar blue into shades of indigo and gunmetal and gray, the room settles back into a polite cream. The oculus, meanwhile, has transformed into a black felt rectangle seemingly tacked to the ceiling. People begin to unpeel their backs from the teak-clad walls, as though the carnival ride Gravitron were slowing to a halt and releasing its grip. I'm spinning, in a way, as we file back into the hall. And I'm ready to ride again.

—Laura Regensdorf