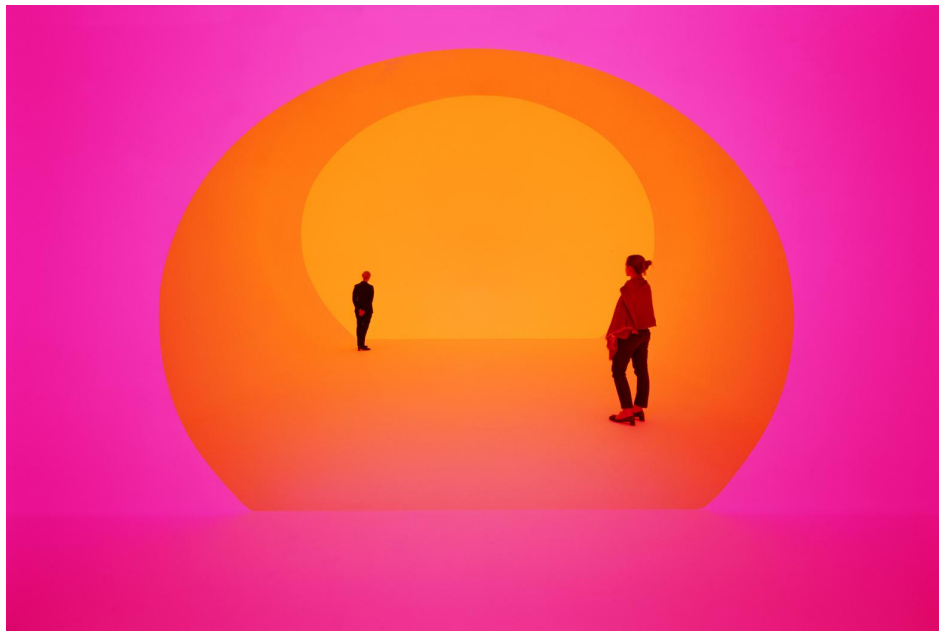


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## What Happens in This James Turrell Installation Stays in This James Turrell Installation



Turrell's *Akhob*. Courtesy of Louis Vuitton North America

The artist's project in Las Vegas admits only six people at a time, making for an exclusive experience of pure light and color. Supported by Louis Vuitton

A stone's throw from the sensory overload of Elvis-themed wedding chapels and mega-shows on the Vegas Strip (not to mention such special pleasures as swim-up blackjack), hides an appointment-only James Turrell installation titled *Akhob*. Occupying the entire top floor of the Louis Vuitton Maison City Center, this permanent work—something of an ocular spa—holds no more than six people at a time and operates on a 25-minute cycle. But while seemingly primed for Insta-fame, no photography is allowed. The Museum of Ice Cream or Chuck E. Cheese this is decidedly not. The idea of *Akhob* is to actually be there, having an in-person, out-of-body visual adventure.

*Akhob* is open to the public free of charge, and offers an immersive viewing experience comparable (one imagines) to the inviting white light of near-death experience—though not at all dangerous. Turrell's environment is its own high-wattage oasis, an elegant argument for profound ephemerality. The experience begins with visitors taking a minute or so in a dim antechamber, allowing their eyes to acclimate. Viewers then ascend a semicircular staircase that leads to a semicircular door, framing a view of another semicircular door—hinting at infinitude—and step into a space bathed in a deep cerulean glow that yields the sensation of submersion (*Akhob's* title originates with an ancient Egyptian word for pure water).

*Akhob* also features bright pink light that seems curiously cool despite its hot hue, a pink that manages to morph seamlessly into purple without conjuring up a Barbie Dreamhouse. Ethereal juxtapositions such as blood red and magenta, or tangerine and violet, combine as they might as the sun rises or sets, but completely without shadow: no clouds, no backdrop, no foreground, but hard-edged lines established by floors, walls, and doors engineered to resemble hard-edged neo-geo compositions. Changes in color occur so gradually as to seem not to be changing at all, though the installation spans a precisely calibrated rainbow. Eschewing all external points of reference, *Akhob* takes on the sort of spiritual quality for which Turrell's signature *Skyspaces* are famous: holes in ceilings that literally frame an open view to the sky, which morphs continually and at roughly the same pace as the windowless Vegas installation.

*Akhob* constitutes Turrell's largest exploration to date of the Ganzfeld effect, light's equivalent of surround-sound. This is a phenomenon of visual perception best understood by staring at an unstructured uniform field of color. Here, that field is neither pastel nor neon, but verges fuzzily on both. Spectacular as it is, it's also something of an amuse-gueule for Turrell's masterwork *Roden Crater*, a constructed site from which to optimally observe celestial events, which has been under construction in a defunct cinder volcano in the Arizona desert since 1977. With the Crater's South Space scheduled for completion by the end of the year, *Akhob* offers in the meantime a gratis opportunity to feel appropriately tiny in relation to the cosmos, and to play a refreshingly minor role in the general passage of time.

—Sarah Valdez