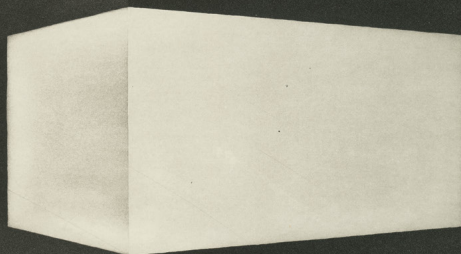


GRAPHISCHE SAMMLUNG

ETH zürich



LIGHT IN PAPER. PRINTS BY JAMES TURRELL

GRAPHISCHE SAMMLUNG
ETH ZÜRICH, RÄMISTRASSE 101

21 AUGUST—
10 NOVEMBER 2024

Light has always preoccupied artists and it has long had a significant role as a compositional device. However, in the twentieth century light also became a motif in its own right – to radical effect in the work of the internationally acclaimed artist James Turrell (born 1943), who creates installations from light and luminosity. One such work by Turrell will be inaugurated in autumn 2024 in the new home of Zurich's children's hospital (Kinderspital Zürich). In response to this significant event the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich is presenting a selection of its rich holdings of prints by Turrell.

Turrell first turned to print-making in 1984 thanks to a suggestion from his publisher, Peter Blum, and developed an ideal partnership with the renowned Zurich printer Peter Kneubühler (1944–1999). This was an extremely fortuitous meeting of minds. From the outset Turrell and Kneubühler saw eye to eye, which led not only to a long-term collaboration but also to friendship. Between 1984 and 1991 Turrell regularly visited Switzerland to work on prints with Kneubühler. In 2008 the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich became home to over 150 prints by Turrell. This body of work also includes proof prints and various states, all from the estate of the Peter Kneubühler Foundation. As such it provides an insight into a side of Turrell's artistic work that is not as widely known as his light installations.

Turrell's work is of particular interest today because it has become a nexus for a wide spectrum of disciplines, including natural sciences. There are points of contact with architecture, land art, astronomy, aviation and space exploration, physics, geosciences, medicine, perception psychology and mysticism. The present exhibition at the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich turns a multi-perspectival spotlight on this aspect of Turrell's work.

A PREFERENCE FOR AQUATINT

Turrell has a particular interest in aquatint printing, which he sometimes combines with other techniques. First a copper plate is dusted with the finest possible coating of rosin or asphalt particles, which are then melted to the surface of the plate by careful heating. During the subsequent etching process in an acid bath, the acid bites the metal surface between the particles of rosin, creating pits for the ink. The longer the plate is exposed to acid, the darker the areas of aquatint become in the print. Different tonal values can be achieved by a stepwise process of etching and 'stopping out' (applying an acid-resistant substance to the plate). The ensuing varied and finely nuanced areas – usually gradations of grey tones in Turrell's prints – fulfilled the artist's intentions, with the finished works taking on a distinctly three-dimensional appearance. The paper also serves as a compositional element, with pale areas of paper glowing like beacons of light in darkness.

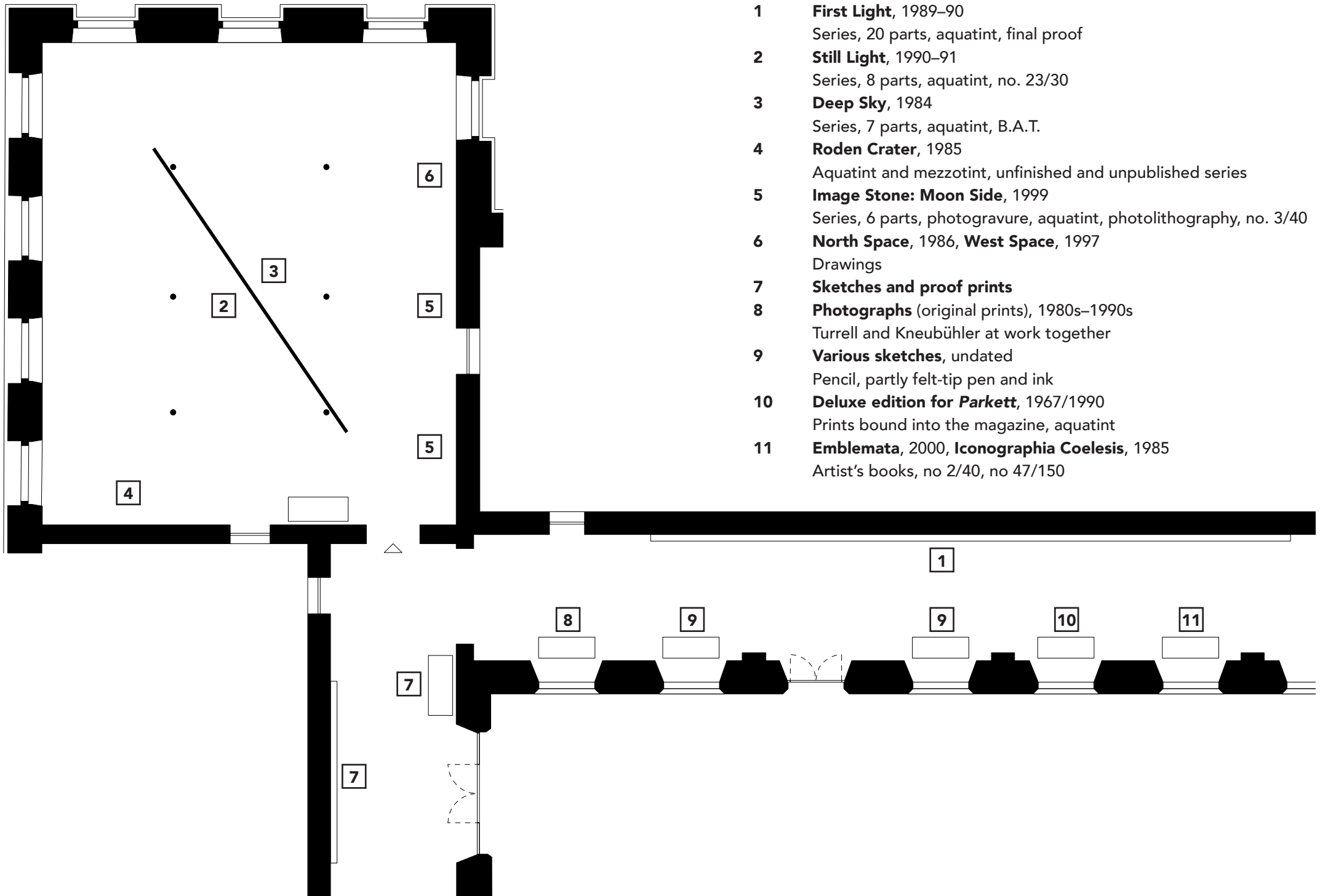
Almost all of the prints in the present exhibition were made in close collaboration with the Zurich master printer Peter Kneubühler. As Turrell himself put it: 'Peter became the confidant in getting light out of the paper.' He compared their relationship to playing jazz: the players start out with an initial idea without fully knowing where it will ultimately take them.¹ Their work together was documented in a number of photographs, some of which are on display in the exhibition. [8]

[1] FIRST LIGHT (1989–90) AND [2] STILL LIGHT (1990–91)

Some of Turrell's prints have arisen in connection with three-dimensional works, as in the case of the two series *First Light* and *Still Light*, where the topic of light is already heralded in the title. The motifs in these series relate to certain light installations. Some of these installations were realized by Turrell in the late 1960s and have since been widely shown in exhibitions. In these early works he created perfect illusions of light bodies apparently floating in front of a wall or in a corner or even forming an opening in a ceiling. Turrell achieves a comparable effect within the two-dimensional realms of his printed works.

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James Turrell, 'Peter Became the Confidant in Getting Light out of the Paper', in *Kupfer Druck. Peter Kneubühler*, Baden 1990, pp. 124–27, here pp. 125–26.



[3] DEEP SKY (1984) AND [4] RODEN CRATER (1985)

Turrell's magnum opus is *Roden Crater*, a landscape project that has been ongoing for several decades. In 1977, with support from the DIA Foundation, he bought a stretch of desert in Arizona that includes a dormant volcano. Since then he has progressively excavated it, creating open spaces, tunnels, and shafts. Precisely placed apertures provide views of the sky and the sun by day and of the planets and constellations by night.

Some of the prints loosely relate to this project – such as *Deep Sky*, the first series that Turrell realized using printing as his medium. Two of these sheets represent landscapes beneath starry skies, others are more abstract depictions of light and shadows. In the *Roden Crater* series of prints the crater is seen from a bird's-eye view. The same motif occurs on each sheet, rendered in different grey tones. This series was never completed and published or released for sale.

[5] IMAGE STONE: MOON SIDE (1999)

Image Stone: Moon Side is the only series in the exhibition that Turrell did not print with Peter Kneubühler, who died in 1999, but with Joe Freye. The motif in this series is the Sun | Moon Chamber at *Roden Crater*, which – in combination with the East Portal and the Alpha (East) Tunnel of the crater – functions like a vast camera obscura. Light entering by the East Portal is transmitted via the tunnel to the west side of the monumental image stone in the Sun | Moon Chamber. The architecture of this configuration (like that of the whole *Roden Crater*) has been conceived by Turrell in close collaboration with astronomers. It is precisely calibrated so that the light is transmitted in this manner annually during the southernmost sunset and every 18.61 years, marking the occurrence of a Major Lunar Standstill. A Major Lunar Standstill ensues when the moon rises and sets at its most extreme northerly and southerly positions on the horizon. As it happens the latest occurrence of this rare event commenced in June 2024, shortly before the opening of the present exhibition. Turrell, who has long been fascinated by this phenomenon, created not only an architectural complex to 'capture' it in the desert but also this series of prints on the same subject.

[7] SKETCHES AND PROOF PRINTS

One section of the exhibition focuses on the stages that lead to the production of a finished print. This focus is only possible because, besides finished prints, a number of sketches, proof prints and *bon-à-tirer* sheets (B.A.T. or final proofs) also came to the ETH collection from the Peter Kneubühler Foundation. The two examples of *West Chamber* (1987), for instance, convey a vivid impression of how Turrell developed his prints in close consultation with Kneubühler. A comparison of the trial proof and the definitive version clearly shows that Turrell ultimately decided on a more intense blue for the finished work. In addition the ink was wiped away more assiduously along the fine lines, ensuring that they have a whiter sheen than in the trial proof. One motif in the print references an aerial view of Turrell's gigantic *Roden Crater* landscape project. The other motif on this sheet refers to the period early on in Turrell's career when he leased a building (formerly the Mendota Hotel) in Ocean Park, California. Having darkened all the rooms, he then allowed carefully controlled shafts of light to enter in just a few, specific places. The ensuing *Mendota Stoppages* (1969–74) are recognised as Turrell's first light works.

SHORT BIOGRAPHY

James Turrell was born in Los Angeles in 1943. Having initially graduated in psychology in California (1965), he completed a degree in art at Claremont Graduate School in California in 1973. In 1966, in Santa Monica, he embarked on the first of his light works. In 1968 and 1969 he participated in the Art and Technology Program at Los Angeles County Museum of Art. There, among other things, Turrell – together with the artist Robert Irwin and the perception psychologist Dr Edward Wortz – engaged in research into the optical phenomenon known as the Ganzfeld effect. In the 1970s he repeatedly took to the skies to search for a suitable site for a predominantly below-ground light installation. In the end he found what he wanted northeast of Flagstaff, Arizona, where he is still working on his best known project: *Roden Crater*. Over the years Turrell has received various awards, e.g. a Guggenheim Fellowship (1974), the title of Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres (France, 1991), and the United States National Medal of Arts (2014). The artist lives and works in Flagstaff, Arizona.

LIGHT IN PAPER: PRINTS BY JAMES TURRELL
21 August–10 November 2024

Graphische Sammlung ETH Zürich

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On 5 and 6 November 2024 an international interdisciplinary conference will be held in conjunction with the exhibition. How do geoscientists respond to James Turrell's prints? What pictorial strategies does Turrell deploy in his work and how do these relate to architecture and landscape architecture? The findings of the conference will form the basis of a comprehensive volume of proceedings with in-depth essays and contributions. This volume will be published with much appreciated support from the Thomas und Doris Ammann Stiftung.

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Graphische Sammlung

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Collection catalogue online: www.e-gs.ethz.ch

Opening times

Daily: 10:00–17:00, admission free

N.B.: Closed on 9 September 2024 from midday onwards and on 8 November 2024

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