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Interior Weather

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp



[Olafur Eliasson](#)
[The Weather Project](#)
 2003
[Tate Modern, London](#)

In the 1960s and 1970s, Los Angeles invented the "Light and Space" movement. Artists like Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, James Turrell and Doug Wheeler made the balmy Southern California climate -- its blue sky and green Pacific Ocean, cloudless days and mild weather -- into their own site-specific art history. This particular branch of environmental art then lay quiescent for 30 years or so, until the international art world discovered the "weather art" of the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967).

Perhaps best known for his dramatic 2003 installation in the Tate Moderns imposing Turbine Hall, Eliasson has developed an increasingly high profile with installations at galleries and museums around the world. One of his most recent projects was installed in Pasadena this spring and remains on view through May 31. It is the first of a series of special artists projects launched by Galleria Emi Fontana of Milan under the rubric "West of Rome."



[The Jamie Residence, Pasadena.](#)
 Photo Gene Oqami. [Arcspace.com](#)

For his project, which is titled "Meant to be lived in (Today I am feeling prismatic)," Eliasson chose a prototypical Southern California house -- a modernist "shoebox" cantilevered over a steeply sloping hillside and fitted with large windows to take in the view and bring in natural light. Called the Jamie Residence, the house was built in 2000 by L.A. architects Escher-GuneWardena. For Eliasson's project, the obliging homeowner not only moved out for the duration but also allowed the artist to make substantial alterations to his swanky abode.

Eliasson eliminated everything light and bright about the house. He closed off windows and covered the floor with thick black rubber, which muffles sound and slightly alters a visitors sense of balance. Despite the bright sun outside, the interior of the house is completely dark. The only illumination comes from Eliasson's sculptures, more or less dedicated to the technology of optics. Each is completely unique, though by turns they resemble the contraptions seen in an optometrists office or something used by a special-effects crew.



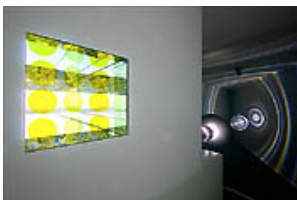
[Olafur Eliasson, "Meant to be lived in \(Today I am feeling prismatic\)."](#)
[Installation view at the Jamie Residence, Pasadena](#)



[Olafur Eliasson, "Meant to be lived in \(Today I am feeling prismatic\)."](#)
[Installation view](#)



[Olafur Eliasson, "Meant to be lived in \(Today I am feeling prismatic\)."](#)
[Installation view](#)



The very first sculpture features a circular disc radiant with soft hues of the rainbow and supported by a wooden hemispherical base so that it casts shadows on the ceiling. One cannot help but think of Robert Irwin's glowing discs of light. Yet, Eliasson is extending the ideas of those original Light and Space artists, as becomes clear in the adjacent room where a light is projected through a sequentially smaller disc to illuminate a circle of suspended glass and cast what one might call reverse shadows of white and silver.

In another room, light is projected through a series of floor-to-ceiling bars of Plexiglas to prismatic effect. In a third room, a base supports a multicolored glass cylinder that throws upon the ceiling a reflection that appears to be a pulsing, fiery eye. (The *f/x* in the *Lord of the Rings* movie comes to mind.)

The light and shadows theme reverberates in different ways in different rooms but the overall feeling of the installation is intentionally claustrophobic. One feels slightly suffocated after a short time and the only relief is a piece called *Kaleidoscope*. It is the single window left in the house and it is focused on a view of downtown L.A. that is boxed in mirrors. When looking through, one is also seeing up and down and the impression of infinite vertical space is counteracted by a string of floating yellow discs. Although it is positioned in a narrow corridor and at an unusual height, one longs to look out of this window, to gain relief from the surrounding darkness and be rewarded by the reflections jazzing around in the mirrored box.

Eliasson has taken the phenomenological triumphs of his L.A. predecessors and added his own psychodynamic spin. In London, he brought dazzling light to a place that is often clouded and cold. In Pasadena, everything that is expected of a modern, Southern California domestic space has been canceled, thwarted and inverted so that viewers are left disoriented, dazed and confused. In this remarkable installation, Eliasson has taken the principles of the Light and Space movement and presented them as their opposites: Darkness and Confinement.

Meant to be lived in remains on view through May 31, 2005, at the Jamie Residence, 1472 Inverness Drive, Pasadena, Ca. 91103.

Viewing hours are Thursday to Saturday, 11 am to 6 pm, and Sunday from 12 noon to 5 pm. Admission is free.

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