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**THE SAN FRANCISCO MUSEUM OF MODERN ART PRESENTS FIRST
MAJOR U.S. SURVEY OF WORKS BY OLAFUR ELIASSON**

As the centerpiece of its 2007 exhibition schedule, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present *Take your time: Olafur Eliasson* from September 8, 2007 to February 24, 2008. The first full-scale survey of projects by this contemporary Icelandic artist to appear in the United States, the exhibition gathers works from major public and private collections worldwide and spans Eliasson's diverse range of artistic production from 1993 to the present, including installations, large-scale immersive environments, freestanding



360° room for all colours, 2002; dimensions variable; installation view at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris; © 2006 Olafur Eliasson

sculpture, and photography. Organized by Madeleine Grynsztejn, Elise S. Haas Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture at SFMOMA, in close collaboration with the artist, *Take your time: Olafur Eliasson* will embark on an international tour following its San Francisco debut and is accompanied by an extensive catalogue—the first U.S. publication to assess fully Eliasson's practice and its critical context.

Eliasson is among the most influential and widely acclaimed artists of his generation. From light-filled environments to walk-in kaleidoscopes, his uniquely participatory works offer alluring spaces that harness optical cognition and meteorological elements, examine the intersection of nature and science, and explore the boundary between the organic and the artificial. Having been raised partly in Iceland, Eliasson's practice is informed by that country's primordial landscape and spectacular weather. He recontextualizes elements such as light, water, ice, fog, arctic moss, and lava rock to create altogether new circumstances that shift the viewer's consciousness and sense of place. By extension, his work prompts an intensive engagement with the world outside and a fresh consideration of everyday life.

Eliasson will create several new works for SFMOMA's presentation, including a walk-through tunnel structure on the Museum's thirty-eight-foot pedestrian sky bridge that will be visible from the atrium five stories below. Designed to convey an overarching, environmental effect, *Take your time: Olafur Eliasson* will retain the sense of immersion and boundlessness of the artist's most monumental pieces while presenting a chronological survey that occupies nearly ten thousand square feet.

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Eliasson was born in Denmark in 1967 to Icelandic parents and presently divides his time between his family's home in Copenhagen and his studio complex in Berlin. In the early 1990s he joined an emerging generation of artists who were seeking to expand upon conventional object making through the use of ephemeral and intangible materials—in Eliasson's case, light, wind, heat, and especially water, in all its various stages from liquid to solid. The crux of his practice was honed during his student days at Copenhagen's Royal Danish Academy of Arts, which he attended from 1989 through 1995. At the same time he was inspired by pioneers of the Light and Space movement of the 1960s, including Robert Irwin and James Turrell, and he was equally receptive to the European Arte Povera movement. It was also during his student days that he began an ongoing engagement with the philosophy of phenomenology and its focus on the workings of consciousness, especially visual perception, which led him to integrate visual phenomena as an artistic tool.

Eliasson had his first solo exhibition in Copenhagen in 1992 and was introduced to the American public in 1996 by Tanya Bonakdar Gallery in New York. But it was in 2003 that he captivated the art world with a massive environment called *The weather project*—a gigantic artificial sun installed inside the Turbine Hall at London's Tate Modern. Incorporating the artist's signature elements of light, mirrors, and mist, the monumental installation attracted enormous critical success and nearly two million visitors.

Though celebrated internationally as one of the most important artists working today, Olafur Eliasson's oeuvre has received less exposure in the United States. Some fifteen years have elapsed since the start of his career, and his multifaceted production on a variety of scales will at last be unified for American audiences in this presentation.

“As formally diverse as his work is, it centers fundamentally on an actively engaged spectator, casting the viewer in a principal role in the workings of his projects,” notes Grynsztejn. “Involving the viewer as a coproducer of the work is Eliasson's central tactic for encouraging individual awareness, reflection, and ultimately a greater consciousness of the larger workings of our world.”

With his many work titles that use the possessive pronoun *your*, Eliasson openly calls for a viewer who is an active participant. Many works require a kinetic involvement that implicates senses beyond mere sight: A blast of air, the warmth of a room, or the smell of arctic moss, for example, can provoke an encounter that is emotional as well as visual. Eliasson describes his artworks as “devices for the experience of reality,” and indeed his projects compel heightened experience, self-awareness, and action. In the process of interacting with this work, the mind becomes conscious of its own cognition. “Seeing yourself seeing” is how Eliasson describes this effect, and this idea is key to all of his work.

Essentially chronological, *Take your time: Olafur Eliasson* will allow viewers to understand the range of this artist's methodology, with each gallery building on the one preceding to demonstrate six fundamental aspects of his practice: a distinctive use of mirrors to displace the viewer's perception of both object and self; an exploration of light and optical phenomena via immersive environments that rely upon the viewer for full effect; the use of kaleidoscopic elements to bring the outdoors into the gallery, merging nature with culture; a deep attention to and manipulation of landscape referents; a disposition toward

scientific methods and materials, including the willful exposure of the creative process; and, finally, photographic suites of the Icelandic landscape.

One of Eliasson's earliest and perhaps most affecting allusions to the spectator-as-subject is *Beauty* (1993), his first fully mature work. In a darkened room, a prismatic spotlight shines through a curtain of fine mist released from a perforated hose mounted on the ceiling. Depending on one's position in the gallery, a perfect rainbow appears or fades, and the viewer's involvement goes beyond the merely visual as moisture in the air condenses on the skin. Inherently subjective, *Beauty* is entirely the result of a physiological process occurring in the eye of the individual spectator, as the rainbow's appearance is entirely dependent upon and unique to each viewer's position in space.

Room for one colour (1997) makes spectators acutely aware of vision's active role in Eliasson's artwork. In this piece, a yellow light of deep chromatic density saturates the gallery space. As viewers register the intense yellow light, their retinas also compensate neurologically for the lack of other colors in the room. As a result, when one looks through the space, the walls of the next gallery appear to be drenched in deep purple (yellow's opposite and afterimage), although they are actually white. Eliasson makes the spectator's visual processing part of the aesthetic equation, opening his work to active corporeal vision and interweaving viewer and artwork.

With *Multiple grotto* (2004), the artist invites viewers to enter a huge metallic sculpture shaped like a crystalline form; the interior of this freestanding object resembles the inside of a kaleidoscope. Gazing outward through the structure's myriad openings, the viewer witnesses a seemingly boundless permutation of shapes and forms reminiscent of snowflakes or origami structures. As refracted vistas appear with every turn of the head, *Multiple grotto* challenges the spectator's often passive visual absorption of information and the traditionally static form of an artwork.

The deliberate disclosure of the functional mechanics behind his art's often dazzling effects is central to Eliasson's practice. Yet even the revelation of a work's material construction renders it no less magical. In *Notion motion* (2005), for example, the visitor enters a darkened room with a floor of wooden planks and a gray floor-to-ceiling scrim. Behind the scrim, and as yet concealed from the viewer, a spotlight is focused on a large, shallow basin of water. Certain planks in the floor are slightly raised, inviting one to step on them; this performative act triggers a device under the floor that creates a ripple effect on the water's surface, which is then projected onto the screen as an ephemeral composition of light and shadows—a moving abstract painting. A second entrance to the room reveals the equipment behind the scrim, purposefully divulging the source of the dramatic projection.

Model room (2003) brings the studio environment into the museum; a vast array of sculptural models and maquettes are hung from the ceiling and clustered on customized shelving units. Like many of Eliasson's larger works, these prototypes and studies borrow from the visual vocabulary of science: Möbius strips, mirrored geodesic domes, quasi-crystals made of foamcore and foil, kaleidoscopes, and intricate lattice shapes based on mathematic principles. A fundamental work in Eliasson's oeuvre, *Model room*

exposes and demystifies his creative process, which is shown to be fundamentally interrogatory rather than declarative.

Evolving in step with Eliasson's sculptural and installation projects is his photographic work. Featured in the survey are six major photographic suites that systematically capture aspects of Iceland's indigenous natural formations. *The aerial river series* (2000), a set of forty-two framed chromogenic prints, documents the length of a single waterway in its winding path from mountain to sea. *The inner cave series* (1998), a grid of thirty-six prints, forms an encyclopedic inventory of the openings of various caves—transitional places where the earth's hidden interior meets its visible exterior. *The waterfall series* (1996) comprises fifty prints produced using colored filters to emphasize the unique attributes of each waterfall pictured, simultaneously highlighting the sites' individuality and uniformity.

SFMOMA, in association with Thames & Hudson, will publish a richly illustrated, 276-page exhibition catalogue featuring original essays by Mieke Bal, Klaus Biesenbach and Roxana Marcoci, Daniel Birnbaum, Madeleine Grynsztejn, Pamela M. Lee, and Henry Urbach as well as a conversation between Eliasson and fellow artist Robert Irwin.

In conjunction with *Take your time: Olafur Eliasson*, SFMOMA's Education Department will present a series of related events and interpretive programs, including lectures, symposia, daily docent tours, public discussions featuring special guests, and a new segment of SFMOMA's award-winning *Making Sense of Modern Art* multimedia program.

Tour Schedule

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: September 8, 2007, to February 24, 2008

The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center: April 20 to June 30, 2008

Dallas Museum of Art: November 9, 2008, to March 15, 2009

Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia: summer 2009

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Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The Museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our Web site at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is supported by a broad array of contributors who are committed to helping advance its mission as a dynamic center for modern and contemporary art. Major annual support is provided by the Koret Foundation Funds, Evelyn and Walter Haas Jr. Fund, and Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co. Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic.

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