

# CLEAR

**Bringing together works by twenty-three artists with subjects that approach the celestial as a concept through a variety of transitory, crystalline, or reflective devices, this exhibition combines art history, science, and esotericism.**

**In the following text, Aaron Moulton, curator of the exhibition, describes the central themes of the show and discusses several works in depth.**





*Let's pretend the glass has got all soft like gauze, so that we can get through. Why, it's turning into a sort of mist now, I declare! It'll be easy enough to get through. . . . And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist.*

—Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871)

The summer exhibition in Beverly Hills offered a reframing of the California Light and Space Movement through the lens of science fiction, with the aura of esoteric intrigue and conspiracy theories. Occurring in the late 1960s in Southern California, this beloved moment in art history was a response to the austerity of Minimalism, at a time when artists were venturing outside the white cube environment of the gallery and moving into the vastness of nature. The exhibition's title, *CLEAR*, provided an easy association with this cultural moment's pure materiality and innovative uses of the resins, plastics, prisms, and translucence that were part of the movement.

James Turrell is an artist of this generation who has elevated the experience of art to another dimension by grappling scale and

perception with unprecedented mastery. Many viewers who have experienced the transcendence possible in his *Perceptual Cell* works reportedly forget about being in a museum or even in a body. Instead, the viewer becomes a pure sensory receptor, an oversized pupil gazing into a sublime wash of synesthetic color. The disruption between mind and body that can occur there questions the nature of the out-of-body experience that art can induce.

California is also the seat of the New Age movement from the '60s and '70s, which could be declared America's most recent spiritual awakening. Transcendental Meditation, The Source Family, and Scientology all became natural references to the show's title, emphasizing concepts that define clarity in spiritual terms of the mind and body. In the end, the exhibition was about how the Light and Space Movement helped define the aesthetics for, or even acted as a gateway to, astral projection. This, like the catchall notion of the word *clear*, becomes a very open gift of possible interpretations and applications. Nearly every religion across cultures, time, and space offers a design and outcome for defining the essence that makes us tick, and many question whether there are in fact moments of transference between our physical and spiritual beings.

The exhibition layout was designed in a way that led one through the experience of astral projection, divided in ways that prompted the viewer to think about the physical and the astral body and their respective planes. Artist Jason Metcalf produced *A Silver Cord* (2014), a work that literally connected the various rooms of the exhibition. The work was made in response to the theory that one-third of all accounts from people who have experienced astral projection report a silver cord that tethers the individual to their physical body while they are floating in the astral plane. This cord is often used to pull the person back to their physical being, in the hospital bed or whatever transcendental experience from which they might have emerged. Metcalf's work was both the first and last thing viewers encountered in the exhibition.

The entry gallery featured certain themes that directly addressed the physical body as it confronts the notion of astral projection through imagining worlds parallel to our own or wormholing through the looking glass. Cosmic photography, such as the works of Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff, and Lisa Oppenheim, highlighted the ultimate distance between the eye and an object, while framing extremes of light and space. In terms of scale and imagery,

***CLEAR*, through a science-fictional approach, pulls together artists with diverse perspectives to offer a peek into a transcendent universe. By the usage of light, liquids, and color, the message is conveyed leaving observers not only intrigued but inspired.**

Shonette Reed, *Hellion Magazine*,  
August 2, 2014

these works gave the sense of being in a spaceship and looking through windows toward the earth (Gursky), out at the celestial vault (Ruff), or directly into our sun, our origin of light, depicted as an abstract sundial (Oppenheim).

Dan Colen's hulking frosty green spiral of broken backboards encircled a mirrored fold in the universe like a star gate. A mirror installation in the corner was a new work from Douglas Gordon, entitled *Everything Is Nothing without Its Reflection: A Photographic Pantomime* (2013). Gordon made a Rorschach-like display of photographs with corresponding mirror pairs. Images ranged from references to iconic work from the artist's past to private vacation pics of him sneaking a kiss from his wife on a vaporetto or a personal moment of beauty captured. In this work, the mirror functions as an indexical memory holder.

Flanking Gordon's work on either side was a new silver painting by artist Jacob Kassay and the US debut of Michael Craig-Martin's *An Oak Tree* (1973), a conceptual artwork that presents an oak tree as a glass of water and has proven itself to be a cornerstone in art history. Alongside the Gordon, these works questioned the mirror as a gateway to a parallel universe, and if the viewer was to invoke the world of Lewis Carroll, then perhaps the glass would soften, like mercury. In Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, Alice considers whether "mirror milk" would taste the same as regular milk, a basic way to think about chirality or sameness, such as identical twins, your hands before you, or even your reflection in the mirror. While they may look exactly the same, at a molecular level, they are not.

The second room in the installation was meant to represent the moment of having passed through the silvery gauze of the mirror: The lighting and the works themselves were moody about translucence and ethereality. Reflections were not reciprocated in the mirrors of Olafur Eliasson or Richard Artschwager. Julien Bismuth's *Abime* (2014) dissolved much of the paint on the arched vault of the gallery wall, scraping it away like crude X-ray vision to reveal a pristine large white square.

If we could ascend into the astral plane, presumably we would have an extrasensory awareness akin to a third eye. Works such as Jorinde Voigt's large-scale drawings detailing how desire moves us through space or Mark Lombardi's enormous map documenting the biggest banking scandal in history offer a hypothetical ability to observe things occurring across planes. Transparency took on other troubling forms in works like Kirsten Pieroth's *Essences* (2014), where the artist boiled important books and manuals that influenced her development or reflected who she is as a person, attempting to alchemically distill the knowledge in pure liquid form. Important documents like her passport, driver's license, and high school diploma sat alongside other seminal and obscure texts, all

bottled in a library of found jars.

The doppelgänger, the parallel self, or even the self as alien were necessary positions to address, as the astral experience ultimately suggests a moment of twinning. Gianni Motti's 6-hour-long film showed the artist striding through an underground tunnel on a quest to find his "other" in the place where science and technology might be opening the door to "him." The CERN Large Hadron Collider is the largest science experiment in the history of our civilization, consisting of a 30-kilometer-long underground tunnel where scientists are accelerating particles to light speeds and smashing them into each other in an attempt to replicate the big bang. The fear of the scientific community and popular imagination is that in chasing down the origins of the universe, we might also create dark matter, which could suck the earth into its own manmade bellybutton. Piero Golia's *Untitled (Clone)* (2011) gave that a tangible form in the shape of a lamp, similar to the one found atop The Standard Hotel in Los Angeles, which turns on whenever Golia is in LA and off when he is away. The work gave an excellent commentary about presence based on absence or actual presence, since the viewer is somehow constantly aware of his position in time and space through this surrogate.

Thinking progressively beyond the historical parameters and narrative of the Light and Space Movement allowed the conversation to gravitate toward other narratives within culture, in particular, the spiritual terrain that accompanies the concept of astral projection. The so-called backdoor narrative to the exhibition was focused around a single work, entitled *Cosmic Egg* (1984–94), by the artist and famed clairvoyant Ingo Swann. Swann's importance in history and esoteric communities lies in his developments around the concept of "remote viewing," a term coined and pioneered by Swann in the early '70s while working closely with the Stanford Research Institute.

During the Cold War, American intelligence gathering found that the Soviets were developing "psychotronic" weaponry—harnessing the powers of the mind, such as telekinesis and ESP, to create "PSI spies" or X-men. The legitimacy of this information remains unclear, however it fertilized the ground for developing such weaponry stateside. The CIA was impressed with Ingo Swann's ability to purportedly leave his body through extreme mental focus and view locations as remote as behind the Iron Curtain, the moon, or Europa (the earthlike moon off of Jupiter). This culminated in what was later declassified as the "Stargate Project." In 1995, this research group was dissolved due to inconclusive findings, however Swann remains a fixture in American lore and the New Age community as the face of remote viewing and, in terms of this exhibition, the one who could consciously traverse the astral plane.



**The exhibition proposes that the Light and Space Movement helped define the aesthetics for, or even acted as a gateway to, astral projection.**

Aaron Moulton