

for art's sake

Interview by Lance Scott Walker
Photography by Gabriella Nissen

James Turrell

With a career as long and diverse as yours, with so many works in so many places all over the world, how do you approach a retrospective like the one coming up next year?

Basically, we're doing it in three museums, because each of the pieces I do are large, so if you want to do 18 works, that means you can do six large ones in three museums, so it's approaching it by taking a large general work, and each of the museums has different works out of the same period so that each of them is unique. And that helps cover things all the better.

How do you feel out a space? What do you look for in a space?

It depends on if I'm doing a piece that takes any light from outside. If not, it matters less except for size. If it has the ability to work with the light that I want to. The big thing is I need a little distance from you to be able to have this quality of at first seeing light in a very sort of physical and material way and then have it sort of dissolve into its more ephemeral qualities. Then you can see it in both ways at the same time, for a period of time. Since you have this quality of... sort of seeing the magical quality that it can have, but still seeing it as we see light, which we don't see it as a *thing*. So I give it *thingness*, but then I want to also remind you that it *is* something we feel. I've always felt that it was being ephemeral.

There's so many different ways that we perceive light of late, with computers in our lives the way they are. Do you feel like people are taking appropriate time with your works? Do you feel like they're taking less time with it, or more time with it, whenever they see your exhibits?

Well, you know, these are pieces that kind of unfold over a period of time. It's best if they take about an hour, so that's kind of been something that does change, but not that quickly. But it's changing as the sun does, so it's nice that people give it that time. And you know... if people don't, that's their business. This isn't an art that's for everybody.

Have there been any technological developments in the past decade that have changed the way you do things, that have changed your approach or your tools? It's certainly been a joy to get this new technology in light. It's really changed light and the ability to work with it in terms of coloration. I've always done that, but it was much more difficult to do before. I used tungsten and halogen light that was filtered, so now it's very much easier to do. And of course the computer control is nice, too, because instead of doing it the analog way, I can do it digitally. It's faster and smaller, so it's made the ability to do it with smaller fixtures that are less noticeable. There are ways that that's been a great advance, but I thought it would come along *sooner* when I was young. I didn't think it would take this long, but it takes a market. It takes the consumer to want it to be able to then get these things to use. I was thinking "we can get to the moon, but it's very difficult to change the color of light." That was back in the '60s. That's all changed now, and I lived to see it, so that's been wonderful.

And once it changed, it changed really fast.

Well, it *can* change, yeah. It has changed fast. In fact, it's just like right now we're in a situation much like computers, where the cost for these things is really just com-

ing down, and yet the ability of them is increasing a hundredfold. It's quite something. So that's easier to use in art. Because art is something that has a limited budget. You don't get everything you want, always. But then, this is something that... I've been alive at the right time to see this happen.

Where does your work at the Roden Crater stand? Do you think it will open this year or next?

No, it will be longer than that. This recent downturn has not been a pleasure for raising funds, but I'm not in any different place than the museums are. Museums are having difficulty staying in business, so... we're doing okay, but I'm not doing as well as I hoped.

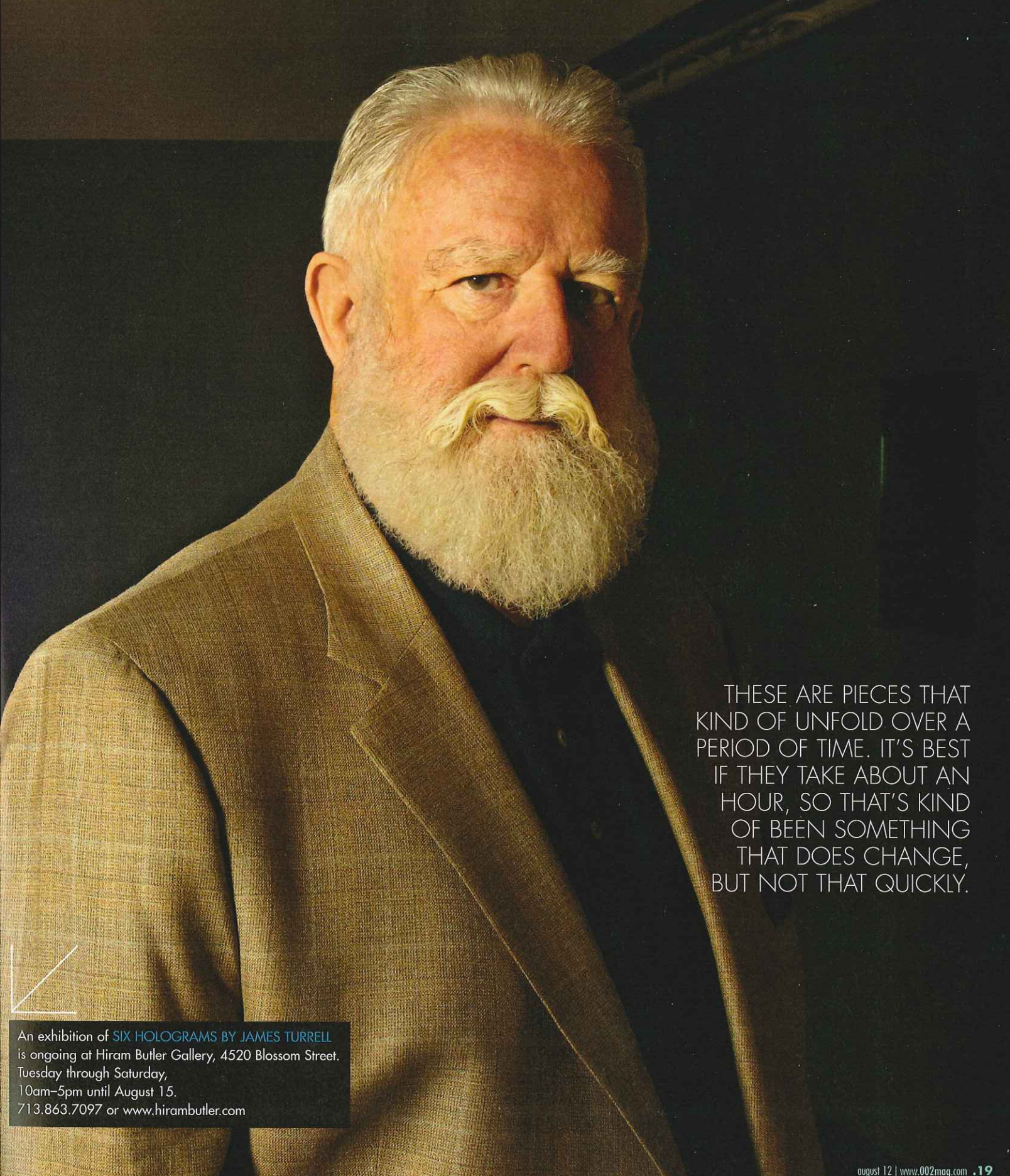
It'll be done when you're done.

Yes! [laughs] You *can* do big projects, but it's something that takes a lot of help, and people getting behind things to make them happen, and they're all under stress.

Folks are looking forward to it.

I can't wait to see it myself. I'm one of the ones that wants to see that open, too.





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An exhibition of **SIX HOLOGRAMS BY JAMES TURRELL**
is ongoing at Hiram Butler Gallery, 4520 Blossom Street.
Tuesday through Saturday,
10am-5pm until August 15.
713.863.7097 or www.hirambutler.com