

Breaths of the Ether

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Abstract

Breaths of the Ether

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Based on my memories of hazy cityscapes, the sensations of the contradictions in beauty in life, and spatial disorientations and other-worldliness, I have created three works that render blurred, mysterious, ethereal, and life-like objects on canvas in acrylic and video. These objects breathe and glow, and give the viewer a sense of space and one's relationship to one's environment from a detached and context-void perspective.

Introduction:

Inspired by city lights twinkling through the city fog and colorful bubbles in polluted river from my personal memories, I use brushwork impossible to bring into focus to depict in light and fog the feelings of existence and disorientation in life. Vibrant and artificial colors are used to relate my perception of the colors and landscapes of the world as well as sensations of apocalyptic joy and toxic beauty.

Influences:

I am influenced by James Turrell and Oliver Olafur Eliasson, particularly by the way that their works show the relationship between human beings, space, and environment. James Turrell's work "Virtuality squared" set a structure and LED light in space to create a void, confusing space for people to stand in. In this space, audiences are put into a void scene with nothing except colorful light and mist. All the stillness and instability seem combined together. Olafur Eliasson's exhibition "Weather Project" in the Tate Museum of London uses the sensory installation in different galleries and corridors to give the audience a contradictory experience.

Methodology:

My work for the MFA show at the Henry is two paintings (96"x60", acrylic on canvas), with a video projecting on an identical 96"x60" canvas in between them.

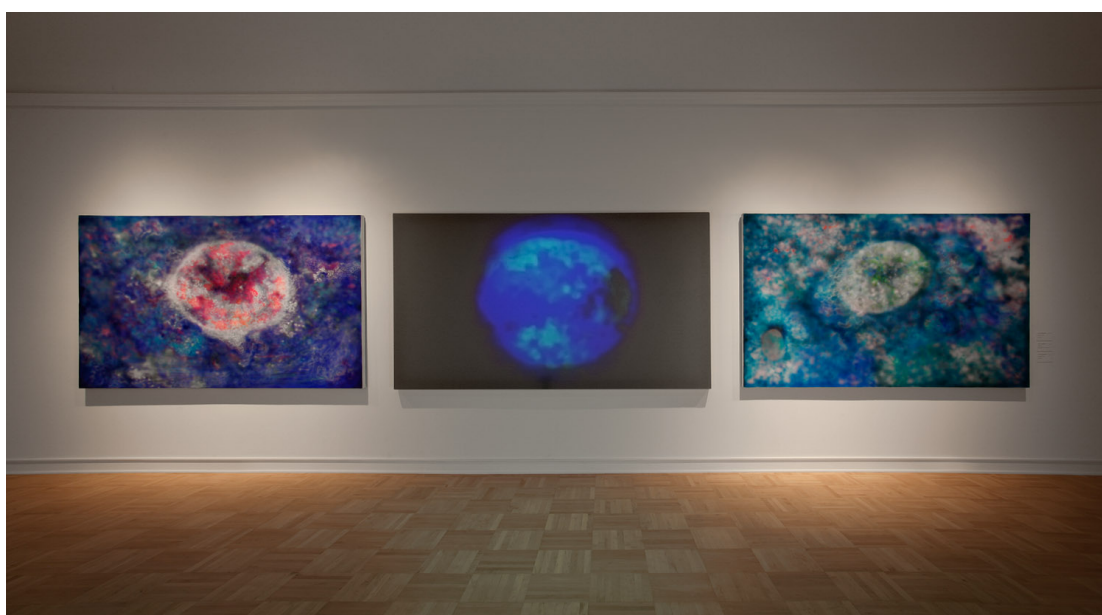


Photo credit: ©Mark Woods Photography.

Content:

In my previous depictions related to insects, fashion, feathers, fog, and even just simple lines, my work has constantly been searching for a sense of visual beauty, with clean colors and texture, combined with a sense of contradiction, instability, and fragility. From figures to lines, feathers, fog, I've found that I'm fascinated by two-sided or contradictory things. Something you find really beautiful, when you look closely often has some disturbing features, or a space you find elegant and peaceful, in the next moment may become ruined. I'm interested in these sorts of contradictions and instabilities—these comparisons—for instance moving and at rest, transient and everlasting, purity and filthiness, beauty and cruelty, fullness and emptiness. Digging deeper into this type of unstable beauty, along with decorations floating in the void, is the interest that drives my artwork. I created a scene that implies movement and that seems unstable or unsustainable in a transparent installation space.

My latest work is a series work related to atmosphere and light. I've been living in an industrial city since I was a child. When I lived in Beijing, thousands of times I took a cab back to my apartment at night. From looking at the city from the cab's window, sparking neon light under the cold dark haze is my deepest impression about those days. For me, there's a special kind of aesthetic of city scenes: fancy, lost, dirty, toxic, but calming at the same time. Through the flashing lights in the atmosphere, I feel they are breathing and sense their heartbeats. It's the dialogue between the beautiful and the disturbing, between movement and stillness, between my environment and me. Each of the lights could look like different things: like a celestial body, or like an embryo. I paint the mist and haze on canvas and use out-of-focus brush strokes to depict void life in this colorful haze. I made it to look like light went through the painting to build a wispy mysterious scene; the objects look like some floccule in the water or air, or some microbial images. The color is cold tone and vibrant. Between two paintings, there is a video projecting on an identical 96"x60" canvas.

In the video within the same series, the breathing of incessantly sparkling and throbbing optical spots and metamorphosing blurs, as well as the pulsing and circulating sounds, all portray my searching for the relationship between our apparent individual existences in this reality and how our existences affect and bleed into one another. What appear to be out of focus embryos or celestial bodies or cells, created by filters of different colors of light, all come from the same piece of plastic blotted with dust and covered with colored haze.

I started the whole series of work by trying to draw colorful fog on a semi-transparent atmosphere by airbrush. Different densities of pigment and the definition of brush strokes can produce a sense of depth on frost mylar. When I use bright color between the dark color, it feels like there is light and space

inside of the flat, blurred surface. I tried this technique on different media such as acrylic board, paper, and canvas. When I was trying this painting on acrylic board, I accidentally used an LED spotlight flashing and shining through the back. The changing spot light made me very interested and excited. It made a very mysterious image on the acrylic board, looking like something related to life and full of uncertainty.

I expanded this painting onto the large-scale canvas, using vibrant color and multiple techniques to make them look blurred, indefinable, and un-focusable. The process of light going through the canvas and changing became a 10-minute video. The subject is where we exist and grow together, how we survive to breathe in the same air and affect each other. The light of life is blended into the toxic fog, making it hard to recognize where we are. The light in the video is going through the process of life with the breaths and heartbeats built in: growing, changing, living, fighting, melting, fading.

My work was influenced by James Turrell and Olafur Eliason, works about light and space. In Turrell's work *Breathing Light*, 2013, he built a room-sized space with homogeneous changing foggy light inside, large Ganzfeld installation. This work provides an enormous confusion to the audience; one feels like one stands in a weird spot in somewhere unknown in universe. It's void, floating, slowly changing its color, and there are no indications of what it is that makes this happen. There is nothing to predict or define; where you are is only the personal perception, affected by the space and light.

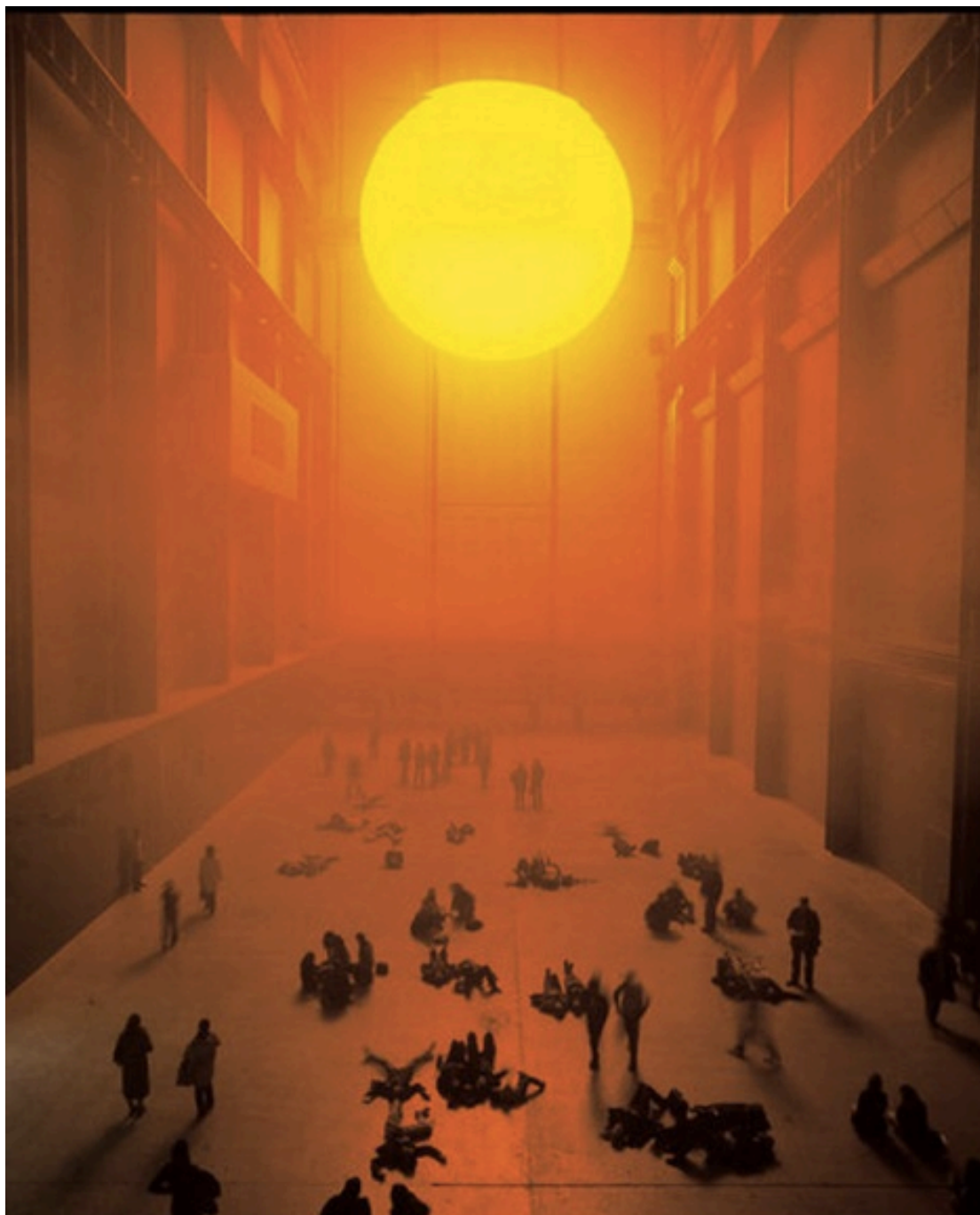
Through light, space can be formed without physical material like concrete or steel. We can actually stop the penetration of vision with where light is and where it isn't. Like the atmosphere, we can't see through it to the stars that are there during the day. But as soon as that light is dimmed around the self, then this penetration of vision goes out. So I am very interested in this feeling, using the eyes to penetrate the space.

James Turrell. (Kwon, 40)

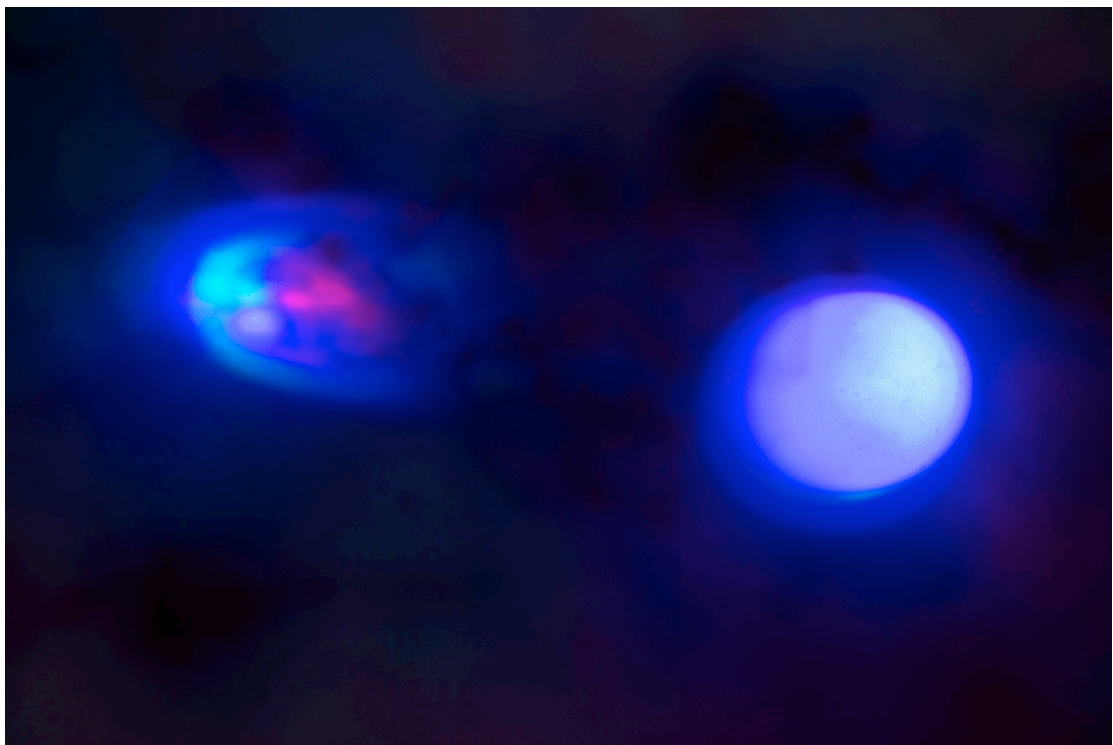
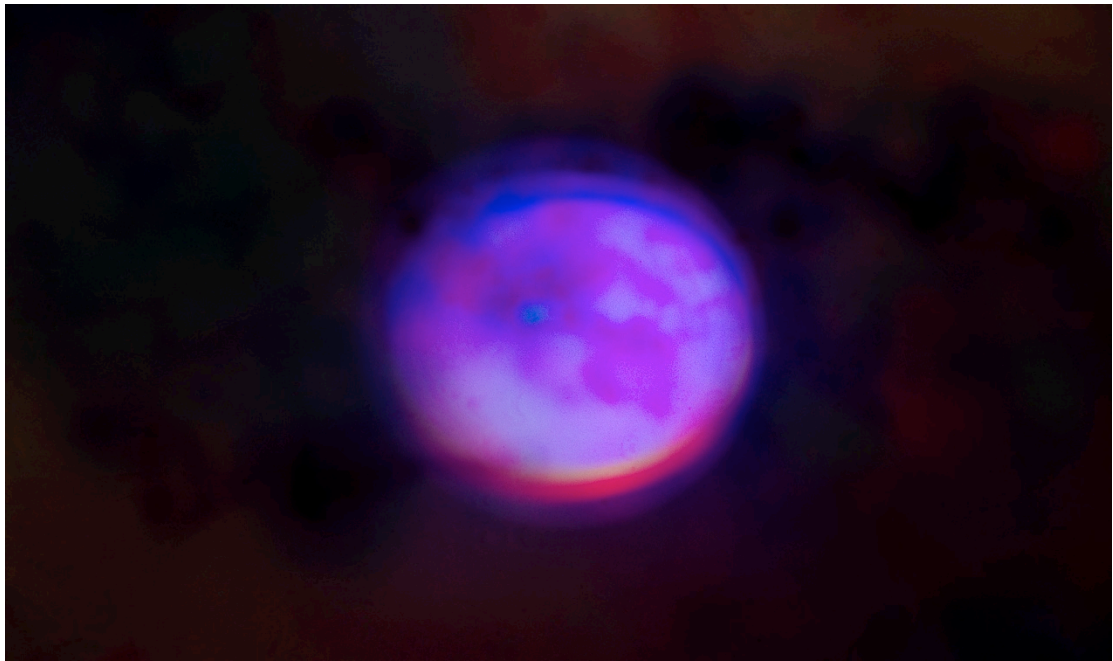
In Olafur Eliasson's *The Weather Project*, 2003, the whole exhibition space was filled by mist; the boundary, the ceiling of the room, is disappeared, replaced by a reflection of the space below. In the end of the hall is "a giant semi-circular form made up of hundreds of mono-frequency lamps. The arc repeated in the mirror overhead produces a sphere of dazzling radiance linking the real space with the reflection. Generally used in street lighting, mono-frequency lamps emit light at such a narrow frequency that colours other than yellow and black are invisible, thus transforming the visual field around the sun into a vast duotone landscape" (Olafur Eliasson the Weather Project: About the Installation).

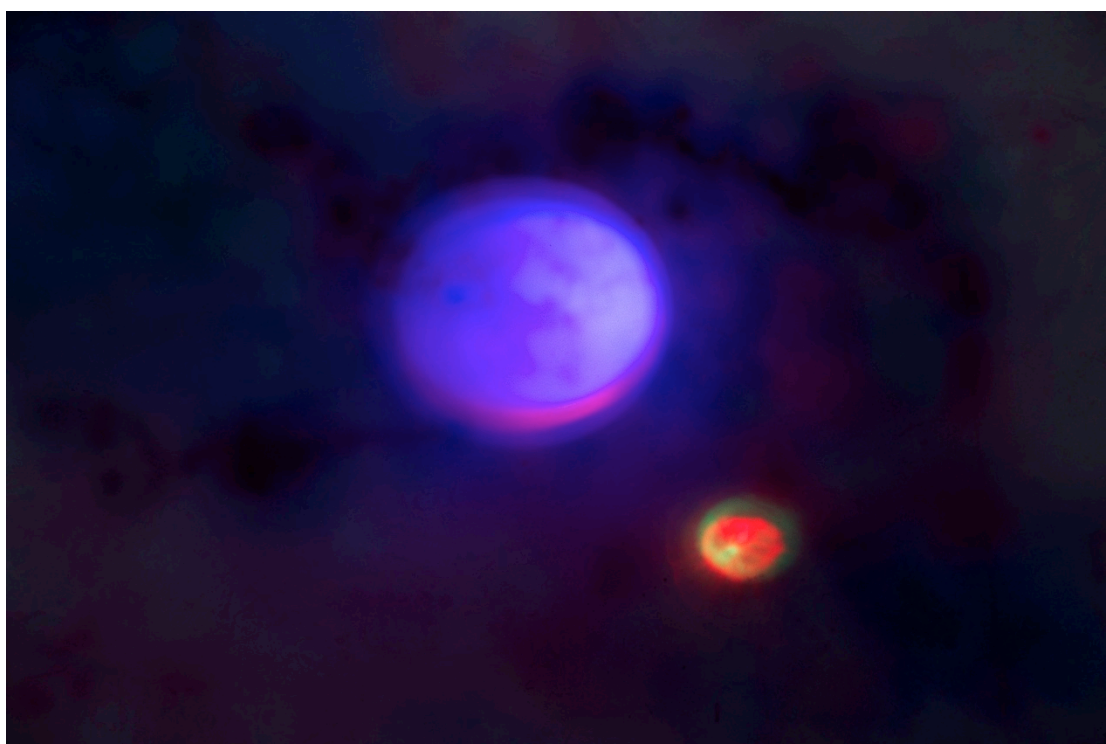
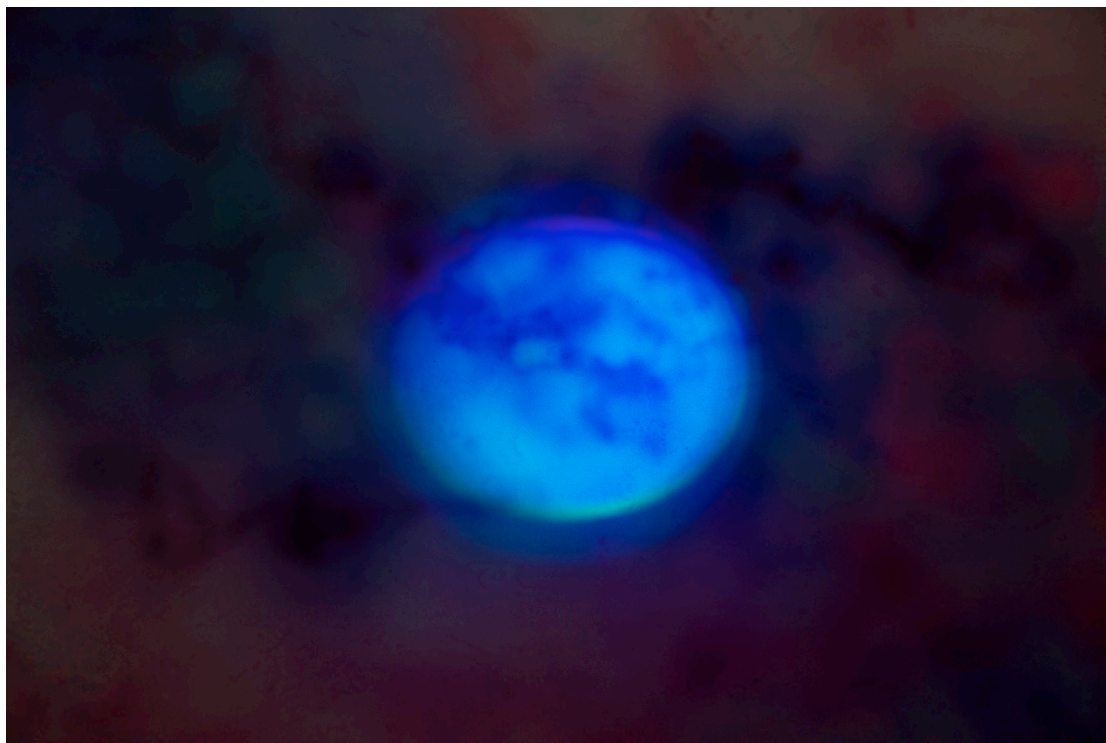
Like James Turrell's work, this work gives the audience the very strong illusion of existence and nothingness, and compels one to think of the relationship between us and the world. People are surprised and cheered or scared by the giant artificial sun light. How you see yourself in the space, what is the relationship between you and the light, how our activities will be affected by the space and light are the questions raised by both Turrell and Eliasson. Their work focuses on giving the audience a strong personal experience and memory, to change their way of activity in the museum.

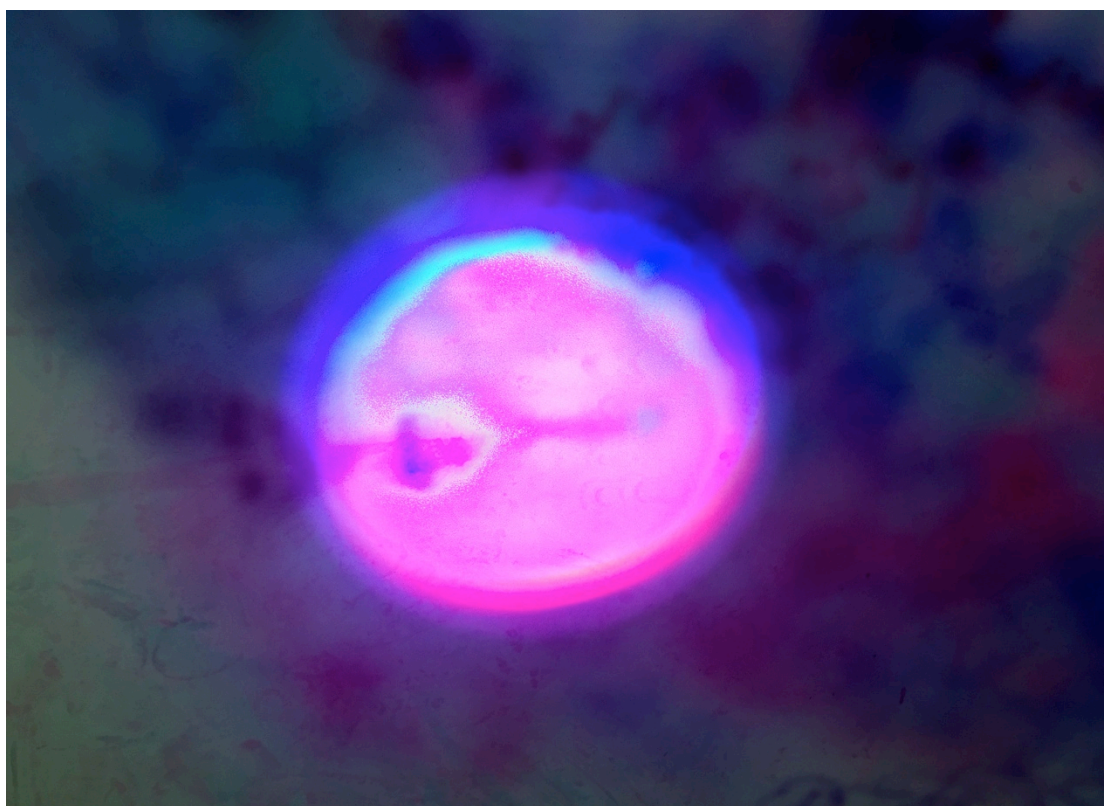
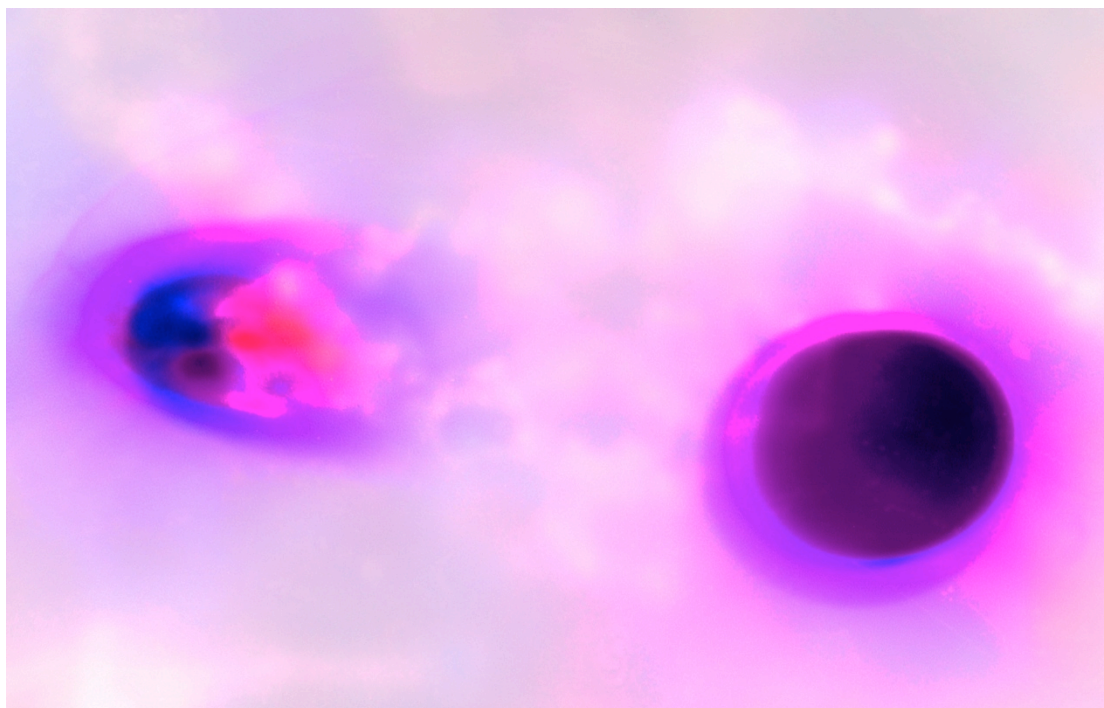
What I want to deliver in my MFA thesis show is this personal experience, which combines my memory and the disorientation in the atmosphere. It brings out the question: where we are, can we really feel the space around us? What are we producing to this world? I wish to convey my perception of the ineffable mutual influence between individuals as we coexist and grow together.

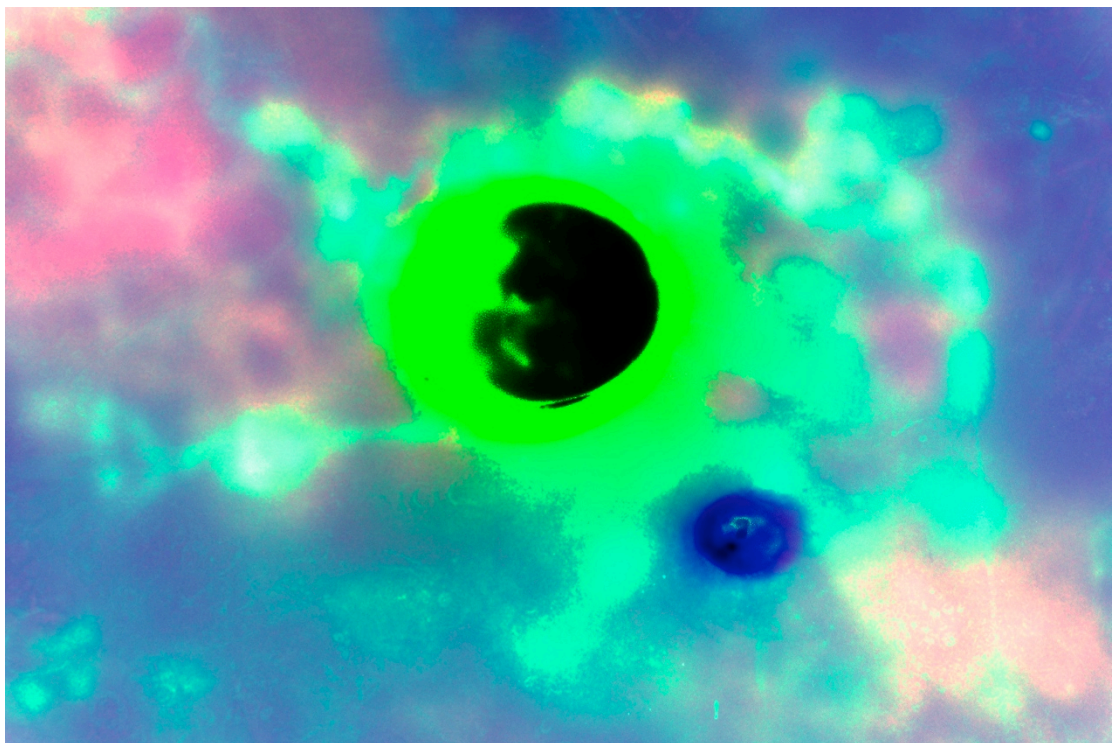
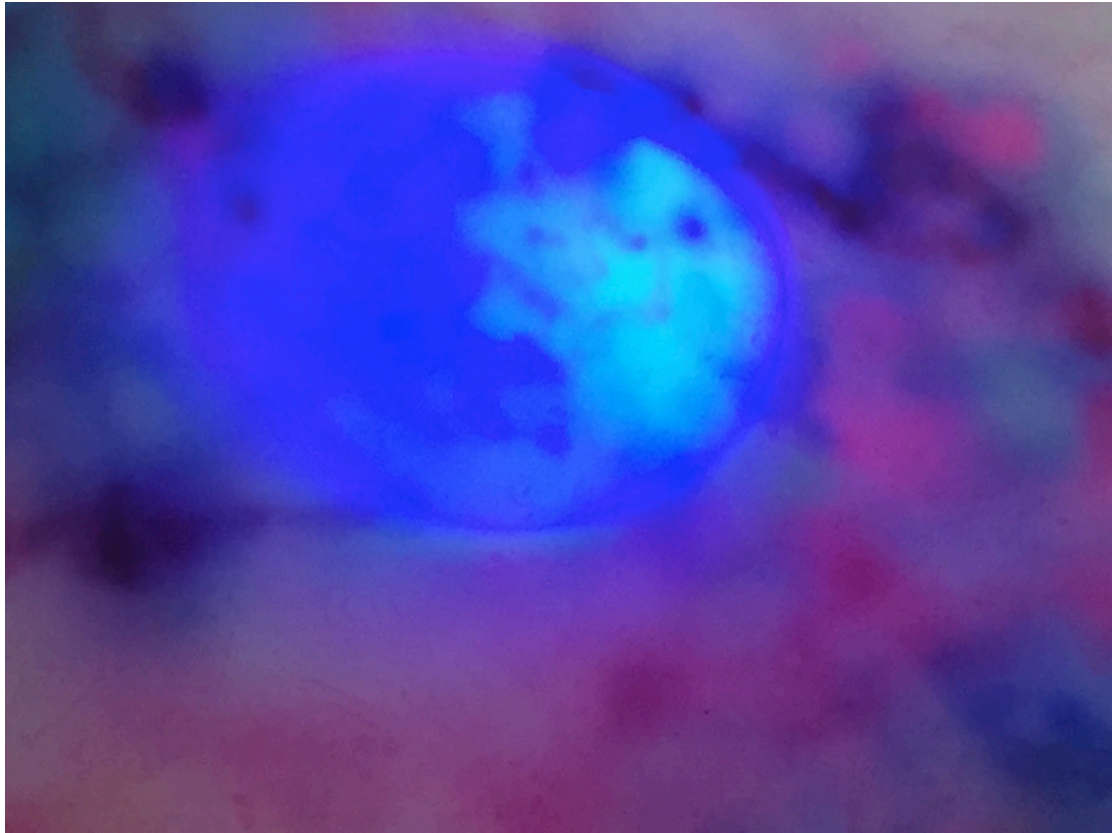


Olafur Eliasson
The Weather Project 2003
Installation view, Turbine Hall at Tate Modern
Photo: Tate Photography
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