NEW PARK AT WALKER ART CENTER TO FEATURE SKYSPACE
BY SCULPTOR JAMES TURRELL

“What Turrell has wrought is, indeed, a monumental sculpture that combines ancient principles of archaeoastronomy with modern insights from the labs of perceptual psychologists. There is nothing like it on the face of the earth.”—Paul Trachtman, Smithsonian, on Turrell’s Roden Crater project

A newly commissioned outdoor sculpture by James Turrell, designed for viewing the sky, will be part of a new four-acre park that will be situated on the northwestern corner of the Walker Art Center’s expanded campus. The work, entered through an underground tunnel, will be unveiled when the Walker opens its expanded facility in spring 2005. The park, designed by landscape architect Michel Desvigne, will open following the Guthrie Theater’s move to the Minneapolis riverfront scheduled for 2006.

Turrell’s ongoing series of Skyspace structures are not sculptures in the traditional sense. Taking shape as a 23-foot-square room engineered into the new underground parking ramp, the Walker’s Skyspace will be a sleek white chamber lined with heated benches, open to the elements and only visible above ground as a simple cube. This will be a space for experiencing the changing appearance of the sky as it appears through an 11-foot-square aperture in the ceiling. Whether “framing” the Prussian blue of a chilly fall night or the blazing azure of high summer, the Skyspace will respond to the ambient light outside, making the sky appear as a living painting, as if it’s just within reach.

Turrell earned his reputation in 1960s California as a “light-and-space” artist, concerned with the use of light itself as a material, and often conjuring ghostly geometric forms that can present

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potent perceptual illusions. The artist’s early studies in psychology and mathematics have also
led him to consider the effects of sensory deprivation on spatial perception—an unwelcome area
of research for anyone unfortunate enough to be caught in a “white-out” blizzard. Yet
Turrell—who has also turned his hand to cattle ranching and airplane restoration—is best known
for his Roden Crater project. Begun in 1974, this evolving project is an epic undertaking to alter a
volcanic crater near Flagstaff, Arizona, into an elaborate astronomical and celestial observatory.

Turrell imbues his Skyspaces with a meditative dimension, hoping that these structures can
reconnect us to a more primitive experience of the sky, the stars, and the earth. As he has
described: “We light the night sky because of a fear of darkness or what happens in darkness. We
then cut off access to inhabiting and living in this bigger territory. I think that’s a profound
psychological enclosure. So, I’m interested in those ideas that extend out and change the reality
of the sense of territory that we humans have.”

The Walker Art Center is located one block off Highway I–94 at the corner of
Lyndale Avenue South and Vineland Place in Minneapolis.
For public information, call 612.375.7622.
http://www.walkerart.org