

# Olafur eliasson | artist biography



A general visit to an art gallery consists of being able to view a series of objects hanging from the wall or placed upon a stand. However, Olafur Eliasson takes the role of seeing an object within a gallery space to a whole new level. Eliasson creates what is known to be as installation art. This modern art form is described as an artwork that must be walked through by the viewers to be able to experience it completely. Installation art is set up in a certain area for a short period of time and is preserved only through memory and photographs. Olafur believes that his work is not completed until the visitor may experience his or her subjective perception and mediation. Many of his works use the possessive pronoun “ your” eg: Your Sun Machine (1997, Marc Foxx Gallery), Your Natural Denudation Inverted (1999, Carnegie Museum of Art,), Your Black Horizon and Your space Embracer, (2004, West of Rome). With this, he is implying that the spectator must engage to the piece and make the connection as part of the aesthetics of the installation.

“ I see potential in the spectator – in the receiver, the reader, the participator, the viewer, the user.’ – Olafur Eliasson. To Eliasson, this is the perfect strategy to have the viewer take part in individual awareness, reflect on the piece and meditate.

Olafur Eliasson was born in Copenhagen, Denmark in 1967. He is Danish-Icelandic and is known to be one of the most famous contemporary artists of our time. His Icelandic nationality is the mold of his influence. Iceland’s landscapes and Eliasson’s works are very similar aesthetically speaking in the sense that they both share the same elements. He uses materials such as wind, light, and water (solid, fog, and ice) that are typical to that of

Iceland's landscape. Olafur's works have been known to “mimic” nature's unique power. He studied at the Royal Danish Academy and majored in Fine Arts. Eliasson created the Studio Olafur Eliasson in Berlin in 1995; he used this space for research and development. His early pieces were usually photographs of the Icelandic landscape which he later explains helped him have a financial role to support his future installations. Olafur's artwork mainly consists of geometric forms and analytical lines which enhance the space and light that is being used. Eliasson combines light, movement and color in his exhibitions along with the viewer. His work invites his audience to participate into the public realm where they may find their own moments of self discovery.

“When I make something, which maybe is a work of art, I want this to be in the world. I want it to be sincerely and honestly and responsibly in the world. I want it to have an impact somehow.”

Eliasson explains his intentions for his artwork. As every artist should, they should feel like they would make a significant impact with the worlds. However, while doing research, I've noticed that Eliasson's intention as an artist is to make space tangible. He creates playful works that demonstrate time and dimension. An example of this are his infamous New York City waterfalls. In these pieces he proves the time it takes for water to fall by placing such large artificial waterfalls in a large city such as New York. While the waterfalls represent time, ultimately, it is the viewer who can determine this depending on the distance and angle. Olafur creates a bridge to make his audience think about their surroundings, and how some objects and environments we perceive on a daily basis are usually seen to be self-

evident. Eliasson's work has also been known to mimic and recreate forces of nature and explore human perception. He does this while working with lights, shadows, stone, water, mist, or fog to create a specific environment. Eliasson feels that all these elements serve a purpose for his installations. For example, the simple use of light can cast a shadow upon a wall for the viewer and can project two-dimensional shapes on a white wall which would create the illusion of a three-dimensional space.

His work sometimes consist of horizon lines which not only are an example of mimicking nature, but also make the whole piece three-dimensional and give off a sense of confusion. Eliasson calls this “illusory architecture” which is when space creates an illusion, even though one is aware of the walls and space surrounding you. Some work that includes a lot of illusory architecture is the piece *Take Your Time* (2008) which fit the idea very well. The viewer feels as if they would like to inhabit the space for a while. The installation uses monofrequency lights to completely cover the room in shades of yellow and black and intimately involves its inhabitants. Another room, *Beauty* (1993) consists of a dark room covered in black tiles where a mist falls from the ceiling and creates a rainbow curtain to walk through. What's so spectacular about this piece is that it's different every time and for every person. Upon visiting the installation, what one person sees as yellow, could be seen as violet for the other person; no matter how close these two people may be, the outcome will always be different. With this piece, one can really say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Another room invites you to completely immerse yourself within the color spectrum, *360° Room For All Colours* (2002). The circular room blankets the audience with a display of

light that race around the cylindrical wall. The colors overlap and create an endless amount of shades of color. The installation manages to rearrange your visual senses from being dependant on one's vision until you realize that your other senses take part in enjoying the artwork. This

piece covers the viewer with nature's color palette, which is referencing to Eliasson's photography from the Icelandic landscape.

The Weather Project (2003) at Tate Modern Museum in London consists of a giant sun made of over 200 yellow lamps in a semi-circle reflected over mirrors on the ceiling. The mist that covers the museum is made up of water and sugar. The installation itself attracted over two million people whom would behave oddly in front of the ceiling mirrors. Eliasson described this works as “ seeing yourself seeing.” This is one thing I've noticed about Olafur Eliasson's work, is that it evokes feelings and sensation. All art has a way with creating emotions. Within the functions of art, there is always a concept. As a society, most people may appreciate photography or film more because we make connections and find it easier to relate to and we're forced to see what the artist sees. This is why I think installation art is probably not recognized as much as photography within society. However, the function for art is solely to be art, otherwise, it's just a design. Installations and exhibition art are meant to tell a story or evoke emotion, which is what Eliasson's work does in such a simple manner. The work of Olafur Eliasson has given people the idea to “ see double.” He creates his installations with the intention of expressing vision through the audience's experience with spatial design. With this, the viewer is usually confused about his or her surroundings which may lead towards reflection on ones life.

Olafur Eliasson's work is known to be eccentric and has a geometric use of projections of light and mirrors, analytical lines and natural elements to confuse the viewer's perception of place and oneself. Eliasson also creates a foreground sense in each of his works. When Eliasson transforms a gallery into a space of nature, he creates a deep connection with space for the viewer that lets his or her think about their own senses and life. His work challenges one's mind and makes you think about what you feel when you see the work at first and what you may already know. This creates a battle with perception and self. His works are known to be thought out works of experiences that make one wonder about what they are seeing, and if what they are seeing is really there. This is why I think Olafur Eliasson stands out the most in the world of environmental installation. He creates installations that make people question about their own spatial awareness, and I think it's something a person would have to experience first hand to fully understand.

#### Citations

<http://eliasson.com.au/>. "Take Your Time.". 2010. [http://www.artdaily.com/index.asp?int\\_sec=2&int\\_new=24332](http://www.artdaily.com/index.asp?int_sec=2&int_new=24332). "Art Daily ". 2010.

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