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"Appropriating the Weather: Olafur Eliasson and Climate Control"

Hornby, Louise

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This article focuses on works by the Danish artist Olafur Eliasson, who has recently produced a number of large-scale and immersive installations, such as Ice Watch (2014) and, most famously, The Weather Project (2003). His human-made environments situate the human subject and human experience at their center, inviting the spectator to experience atmospheres and environments anew. Relying on the disorienting and defamiliarizing effects of enlarged scale and colored fog, Eliasson tools his art to increase the spectators' awareness both of their environment and of their position as phenomenological subjects within it. The works' emphasis on an ecology of individual encounter and feeling situate the experiencing subject at their center, providing an analogue to the human centering that marks the era of the Anthropocene. While Bruno Latour has claimed that Eliasson's attempts at climate control are not consistent with a desire to control the elements, I argue instead that Eliasson's environments are fully orchestrated affairs that share the technologies and efforts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' militarization of climate control. Their phenomenological embrace, which has become a hallmark of much immersive art, relies on a stripe of self-centering that turns art into an occasion for feeling, foreclosing on critique. Eliasson's spectacles are containers for experience, refusing the possibility of a radical externality that is uncontrolled or the possibility of atmospheres that exist beyond their human witness. (Text from author's abstract)

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