

# Boundary

*A University of Michigan Thesis Integrative Project*

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This video installation *Boundary* is a metaphor for how it felt to be raised in a different culture than that of my original place of birth — nurture over nature. At an early age, I learned I was adopted and that I was racially Peruvian. I had a difficult time understanding this even though I believed that my adoptive father explained it relatively well. I grew up confused, was I Peruvian or Arab? I didn't know, and when people asked me what I was, I didn't know what to say. I usually said — and still say — I'm Peruvian. But how could I identify with a race I knew nothing about or had no connection with, except for being genetically connected?

The confusion grew, and eventually I tried to pick a side — Peruvian. When I was a child, I remember being asked what I was. The other children would stand up proud of what ethnicity they belonged to because they knew. I knew, but I didn't know — I didn't know how or why I belonged to something I've never touched or felt. I couldn't grasp what it meant to be Peruvian. I eventually retreated back within myself and decided even if I am something racially; it doesn't define who I am. I am what I was raised to be and then after that I can choose how to grow from there. I had this epiphany while I was in Japan and this played a major influence in the work I have produced.

The word “growth” created a distinct image in my mind (**Image 1**). I made a print, which I digitized, made negative, and surrounded it by a circle — like the circle that we fill every time on surveys and applications: please fill in your racial identity. It’s an inhuman thing to ask of someone. It’s a symbol of myself stretching beyond the boundaries of race and accepting I am something more. All individuals come to a point in their life where they stretch beyond what others expect of them — positively or negatively.

Why don’t you know Spanish? Why don’t you know salsa? I was asked this constantly growing up and I started to believe I was missing a piece of myself. Instead of Latino, I was called white washed. I found this disheartening and offensive. Why couldn’t I just be me? This led to my second process piece (**Image 2**). What if I take the notion of white wash and reposition it to black washed? White will represent the color of purity and the egg representing birth (my racial genetics and origin). Then black representing a color that is all colors and absorbs whatever light it comes into contact with. Black is a color of flexibility – endless possibilities as a void waiting to be filled wherever present. This illustrates the pureness of nature transformed by the new introduction of a black presence (nurture). Although, the amazing thing is that the purity remains under the black wash, still present like I will forever be racially Peruvian.

*Boundary* is simple and complex and the media I used are: concrete, ostrich eggs, black sand, projections, and paint (**Image 3**). There are four sculptures, slightly elevated appearing to be suspended by black sand. The base on which each egg sits is a 12” x 12” smooth concrete slab. The eggs stand upright in the center elevated by an

inch or so from the slab — each painted a bright satin white. The projector is placed low on the ground and covered by a cotton box.

The video images I created are projected on the eggs (**Image 5**). These projected images were composed of milk, sumi ink, and India ink. I created an apparatus, which is two feet by two feet. It holds about 2 inches of water and the inside is made of white vinyl. Directly in the middle of the container there is a small opening for the milk and ink to pour in. I used a valve which allows liquids out and not in. Using a tube and funnel, I controlled the liquids by pouring ink slowly into the milk. The images were captured in sixty frames per second so the footage could be slowed down. Gradually the small ink mass develops into a huge mass of ink. I recorded this event until it covered the entire white background (**Image 4**). In post-production, I superimposed the geometric ring that I placed in the first process image (**Image 1**). All the images are in different colors and none have the same growth. They flow as a formless movement as our lives exist over time.

Each part of this piece is integral. After the images the eggs come into context. The eggs represent nature as described, as well as the four stages in a person's life: birth, adolescence, middle age, and elderly till death (**Image 6**). They are all colored the same — yet the subtle nuances of their shells make them different and unique. The egg is a form that we all begin in, fragile and vulnerable, but ironically we have a protective covering.

The concrete slab represents the cold realities underneath nature and nurture, and notably between the black sand and egg. I used black sand because my most vivid memory of it was when my mother took me to a black sand beach in Hawaii. It was her one dream, to visit a black sand beach. It was the last trip she went on, the last one

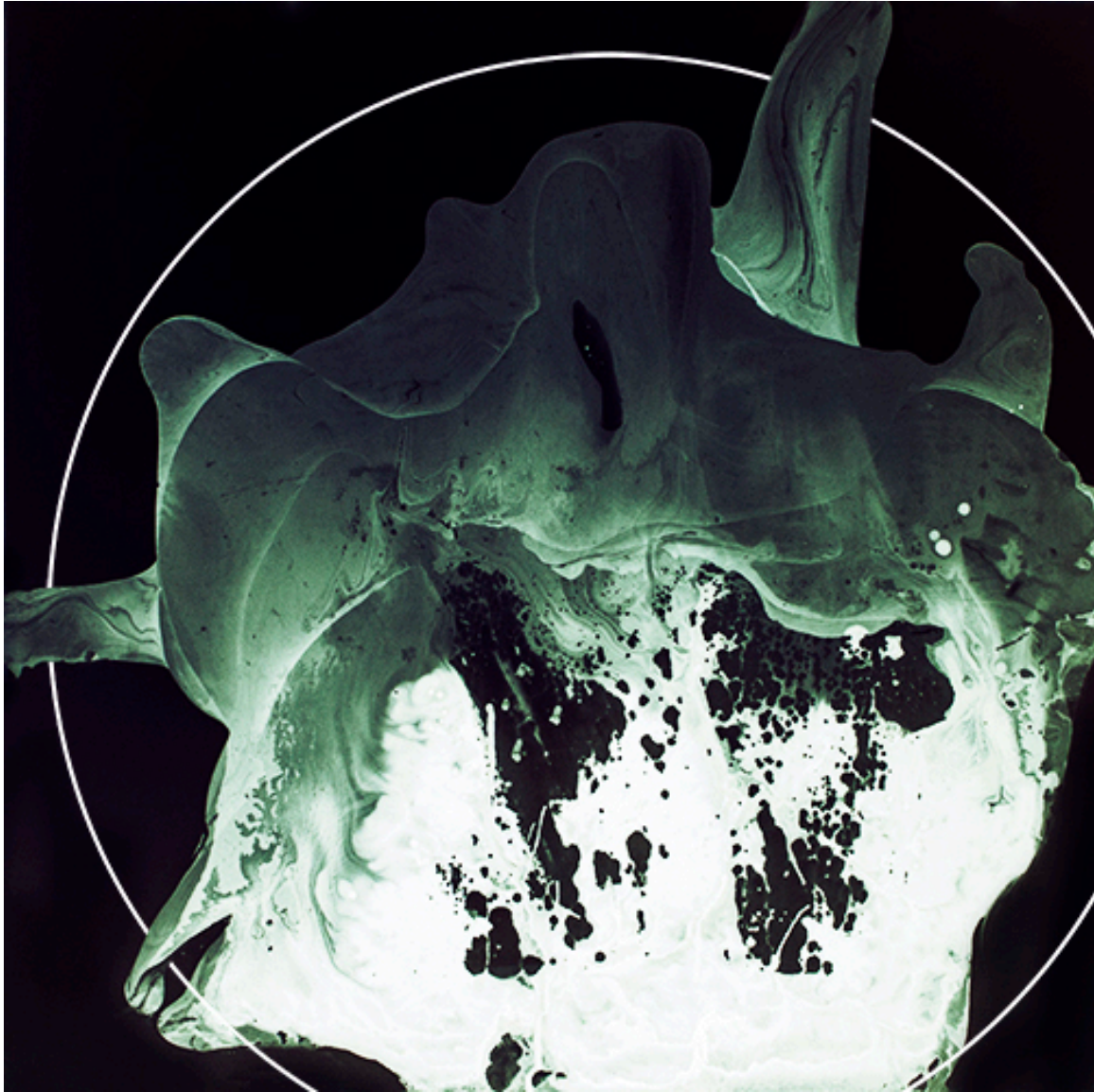
where she got to say, “I’ve experienced everything.” She passed away from cancer and I was there with her until she left this world. Black sand means to me, “The last thing you’ll ever see.” There are things we won’t see in our lifetime, because we let this barrier get in between us and what we desire. For me, I desire to see a world that doesn’t think in color — we must destroy the cold realities, so we can finally live amongst each other without attributing colors to one another. If color applies it only does so in the aura each person gives off.

What inspired me to create such art was the artist Walter De Maria (**Image 7**). When I went to Naoshima in Japan and I experienced his art in person, it really spoke to me. I never really thought minimalist art was great. I always thought it was over-hyped art, it turned out I was wrong. Before entering I was asked to wait in this dark hallway, when I entered I saw a bright and vivid doorway before me. As I entered there was this sudden burst of natural light filling the room. I think it was this effect that made me feel like I was in heaven — it brought me closer to that. I nearly cried — I gasped. It brought me back to the day I lost my mother. It was as if everything flashed right before my eyes. In the very center sat an enormous black granite polished rock in a perfect sphere. Golden rods meticulously lined the concrete walls and concrete stairs lead up to the sphere. The black granite rock looked natural — yet it wasn’t. It felt that way to me because he positioned everything in a deliberate matter — orderly. I stayed in the installation for at least fifteen minutes moving up and down the stairs around the rock. It influenced me to see in an orderly way and attribute this sense of deliberateness to my artwork.

Another artist that had a profound effect on me was James Turrell. His work really pushed the idea of light as art (**Image 8**). His work utilizes digital projections and

natural light to create geometric shapes. The best work I experienced was where I walked into a pitch-black room (**Image 9**) — I sat on a bench and stared straight ahead, slowly but surely I saw a white square on a wall. I got up to approach it — it looked like a 2D painting. The installation assistants told us to put out our hands and touch it. We couldn't and it appeared to be an open endless space. They told us to turn around, and when we did, we were standing in a bright white room. It made me realize that images sometimes don't have to move if they are digital or there doesn't even have to be images — maybe just light. It creates this effect of nature and a new reality through the use of LEDs and unnatural materials. Even though we are reaching this new digital age, we can still find nature within it. There's this breath that you find in his work that keeps you looking at it, even though it's very static.

Both artists taught me one major thing. You don't have to illustrate literal meaning into your artwork for people to respond. An abstract image, minimal image, or even no image (just light) can recreate the feelings you are trying to get across. I responded to these artists' installations and I don't even know why everything was made a certain way. I had so many questions, but they couldn't be answered — there weren't even artist statements for the installation in the museum. My imagination was able to run around while I absorbed the atmosphere of each piece. I hope that my art doesn't just mean what I'm writing to everyone necessarily. I just hope it means something to someone, provokes thought, feelings or sparks a conversation between people.



**(Image 1)**

I moved ink on white vinyl and evaporated it with a hot production light. This is what resulted. The current image is a negative of the original.



**(Image 2)**

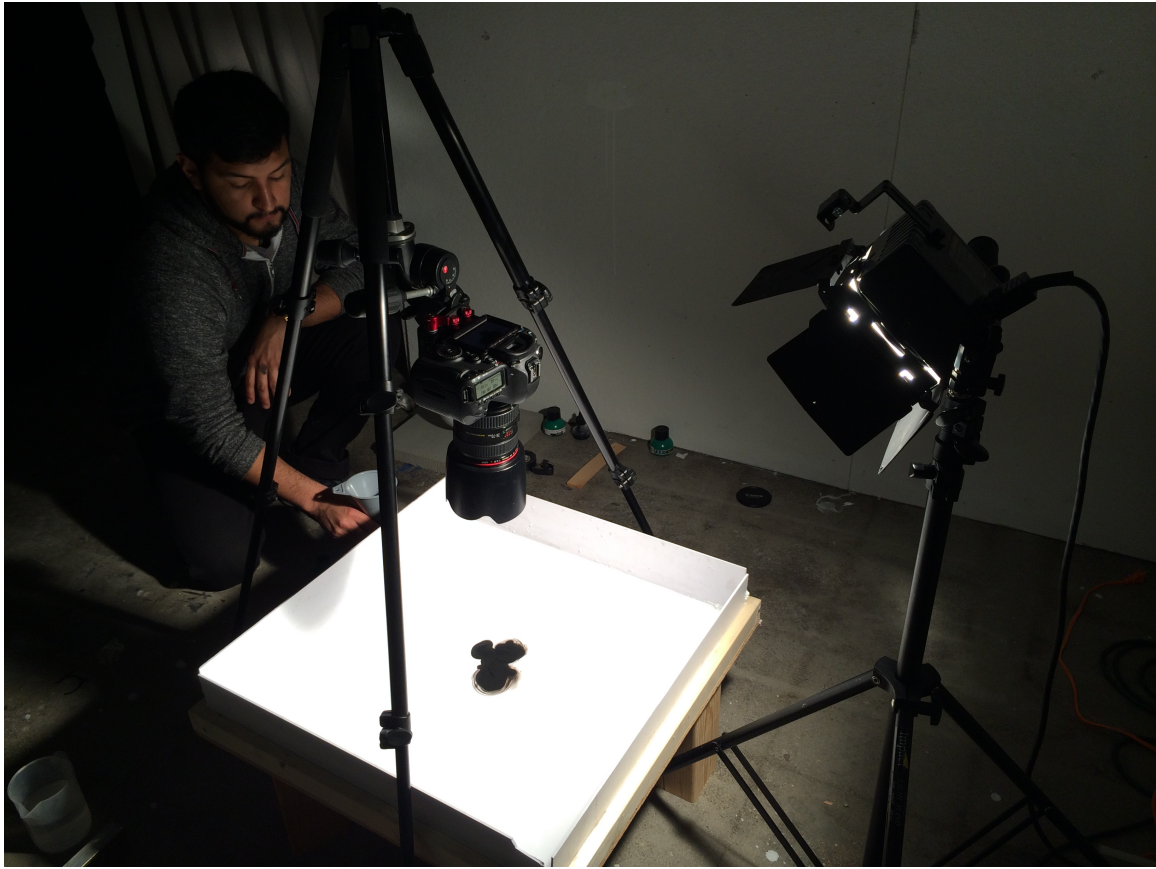
An egg made of resin with my exploration of mediums.



**(Image 3)**

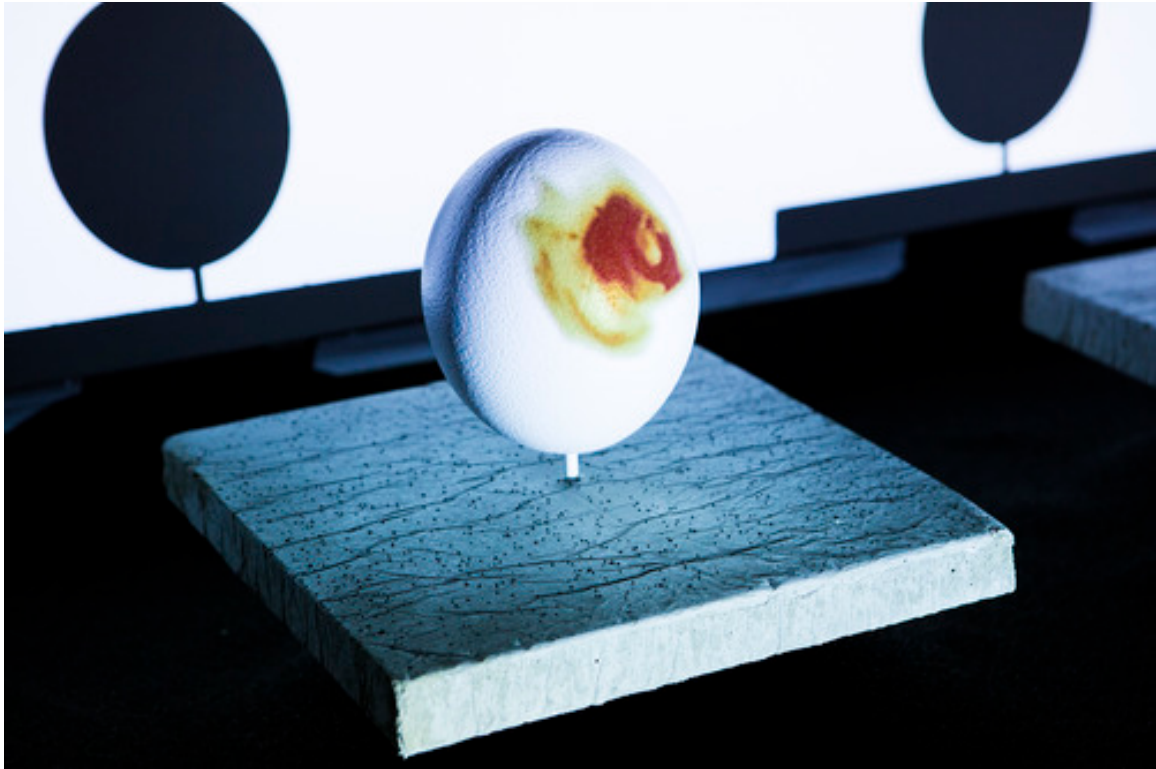
A concrete platform with painted egg. It is missing the mound of black sand underneath sculpture.





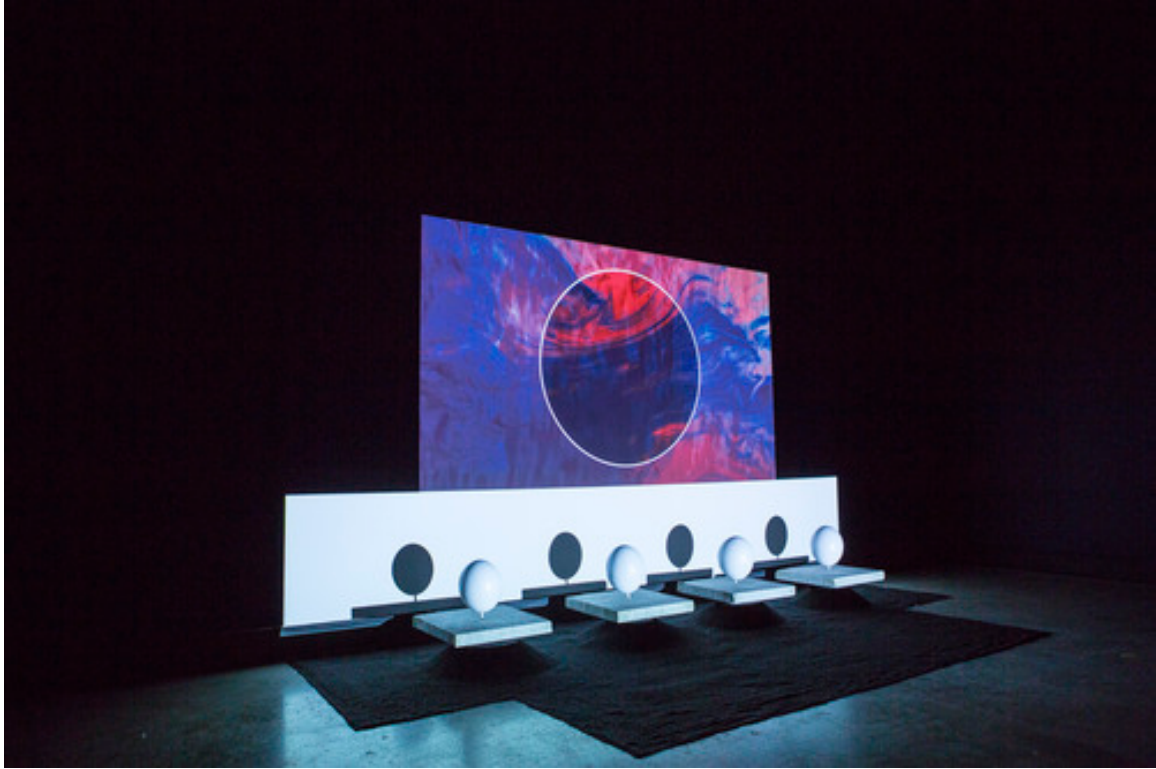
**(Image 4)**

Here I am working with the white tub I made. There is one production light and a camera elevated above. I used a 70mm lens so no glare could be seen in the image.



**(Image 5)**

A real Ostrich egg with a foreign digital presence shining on to it.



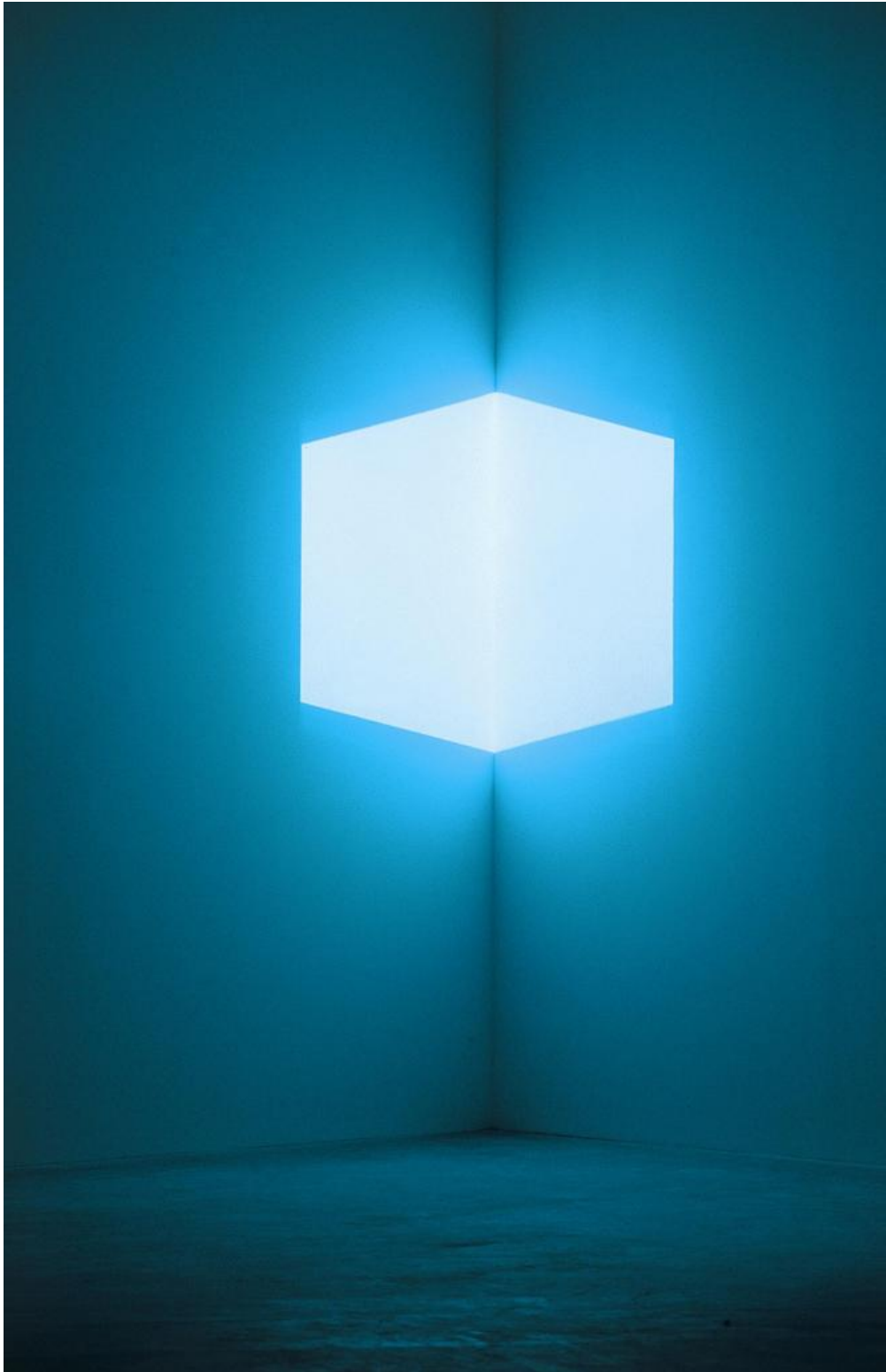
**(Image 6)**

The projections are images of free flowing colors describing the feelings throughout time



**(Image 7)**

Walter De Maria's installation in Chichu Museum.



**(Image 8)**

James Turrell's projection in Chichu Museum.



**(Image 9)**

A picture of James Turrell's entrance to the dark room on Naoshima Island. Photographs were not allowed in this exhibit.