Press Kit

*Olafur Eliasson: Contact*

December 17th, 2014 – February 16th, 2015
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Fondation Louis Vuitton presents the exhibition *Olafur Eliasson: Contact*  
December 17th, 2014 – February 16th, 2015

Fondation Louis Vuitton is launching the second phase of its inaugural program with an expansive exhibition by Olafur Eliasson, from 17 December 2014 to 16 February 2015.

Entitled *Contact*, Olafur Eliasson’s exhibition explores “the relations between self, space, and universe” by creating a cosmos within the Fondation.

Eliasson’s first solo show in France since his 2002 exhibition at the Musée d’art Moderne de la ville de Paris, *Contact* envelops visitors in a choreography of moving light and shadows, seemingly transporting them into the darkness of outer space. A number of smaller optical devices distributed throughout specially built passageways continue the artist’s on-going investigations into the mechanisms of perception and the construction of space.

As Olafur Eliasson explains: “My exhibition addresses that which lies at the edge of our senses and knowledge, of our imagination and our expectations. It is about the horizon that divides, for each of us, the known from the unknown.”

On the roof, Olafur Eliasson has installed an apparatus that tracks the sun and, at certain hours of the day, directs light rays onto a multifaceted, geometric sculpture suspended within the building.

The exhibition interacts with the newly unveiled site-specific commission *Inside the horizon*. Including a unique sound composition designed by Samuli Kosminen and Olafur Eliasson, this commission is a vibrant interplay of daylight, yellow light, shadows, and reflections that offers constantly changing perspectives of the Fondation’s architecture, the surroundings, and other visitors.

*Olafur Eliasson, Contact*  
Chief Curator: Suzanne Pagé  
Curators: Laurence Bossé and Hans Ulrich Obrist, in cooperation with Claire Staebler
III — Contact, by Suzanne Pagé

The challenge Olafur Eliasson has accepted in being the first contemporary artist to exhibit at the Fondation Louis Vuitton is dual: there is, on the one hand, the architecture and, on the other, the established exhibition format, whose limits he explodes to “bring in the universe” by way of a total work of art.

The internationally renowned Danish-Icelandic artist was first introduced to a Parisian audience in 2002, at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and he has returned on several occasions since then. After a number of outstanding artworks and exhibitions—The weather project (2003) at Tate Modern, London, The New York City Waterfalls and Take your time at MoMA, New York (2008), Riverbed at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, in Copenhagen (2014)—here, with Contact, he has developed an ambitious vision that introduces novel formal propositions and far transcends the boundaries of art.

Olafur Eliasson often bases his work on cutting-edge advances in scientific thought, placing renewed emphasis on the situation of humanity in the world. Tapping into the visitors’ capacity for empathy, the artist strives to activate their participation, implicating them in a complex, multi-sensorial experience. The constant oscillation between shadow/light, presence/absence, and affirmation/doubt causes us to question our visual perceptions and, in consequence, our convictions.

To this end, the route through the exhibition is derived from the geometry of the circle and founded upon the underlying principle of circularity. By bringing viewers into “contact” with a meteorite, an extraterrestrial object with a magical, even symbolic, character, the exhibition begins with a gesture intended by the artist to place visitors in a state of perceptiveness that expands the “horizons of our imagination.”

From here, the show revolves around two large-scale installations, Map for unthought thoughts and Contact (also the title of the entire exhibition), as well as transitional passages punctuated by three glass spheres—optical devices opening onto the outside, and thereby incorporating the exterior into the interior space.

In Map for unthought thoughts, viewers are at the center of the piece. Their shadow glides along a semicircle that is extended into a full circumference by a mirror. This shadow, shifting in scale, seems to orbit like an asteroid.

At either end of the tunnel that follows, which is shaped according to the symbol for infinity, there is a transparent sphere. Covered with black sandpaper—created by spraying particles of sand directly onto the walls—this passageway arouses an odd physical sensation that further enhances the sense of simultaneous disorientation and confinement. Entering Contact, visitors move on the sloping floor as if they were traversing the top of a sphere or a planet. While they contemplate the light phenomenon in this space, reminiscent of one heavenly body transiting in front of another, it may occur to them that they are standing at the heart of an eclipse.

Bridge from the future, the vortex presented in the next transitional space, appears to be a combination of mathematical model and sculpture, which visualizes the natural phenomenon of gyration—as in a hurricane or black hole—and refers back to the circularity that underpins, not only the construction of the room, but also the whole exhibition. This object evokes the energy and motion manifest, according to the artist, in the rapidly moving world.

The journey concludes with Big Bang Fountain, a stroboscopic apparatus that reveals periodic “liquid flashes”—referring back to Parallax planet, a work at the beginning of the
exhibition that already established a form of “contact” with water by way of an optical device. Finally, outside, a sun-tracker (World illuminator) installed above the upper shell of the building directs rays of light onto the sphere Dust particle, which in turn reflects speckles of light into the hall. Suspended at the very heart of the building, Dust particle resonates with Inside the horizon, outside in the Grotto*, and testifies to the relationship between humankind and the universe—reiterating the exhibition’s central theme.

Suzanne Pagé, Artistic Director, Fondation Louis Vuitton

* Olafur Eliasson’s recently opened commission Inside the horizon, located in the Grotto, will include a soundscape conceived by Samuli Kosminen and Eliasson. The sounds that make up the composition are distributed across multiple speakers, situated throughout the full length of the artwork. As the visitors walk along the passage, they connect the sound space through their movement. Additional sound elements by Kosminen and Eliasson will be audible at particular spots within the exhibition.
IV — Olafur Eliasson in conversation with Laurence Bossé and Hans Ulrich Obrist, 2014

Hans Ulrich Obrist (HUO):

In 1998, Laurence Bossé and I curated an exhibition at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAM) called “Nuit Blanche, scènes nordiques : les années 1990.” Your contribution to this group show was a project called The very large ice step experienced.

Laurence Bossé (LB):

It consisted of gigantic ice blocks that had been left to melt. They were simultaneously displayed in the MAM and in front of a group of apartment buildings in Nanterre, right outside of Paris. Could you tell us more about this piece, especially the tension between the inside and the outside, which has been a recurring mechanism in your work right up to your project for the Fondation Louis Vuitton today?

Olafur Eliasson (OE):

Paris has this productive mix of formal and informal planning, which has always caught my attention. For the Nuit Blanche show, we asked ourselves: what is the next step for this city? We ended up west of Paris, in Nanterre, right by La Défense. At the time, the area was a kind of utopian extension of Paris, intended to pave the way to the next century, which it managed to do more or less successfully. I conceived the project in relation to this context of urban success and failure. The ice blocks were placed in Nanterre without any indication that they were a work of art, although we did photograph them. At the same time, I showed ice blocks inside the MAM, which were replaced whenever they melted. Ice has this ephemeral and playful quality that makes it beautiful. Generally, I think that the success of an artwork does not depend on its location, on whether it is inside or outside, in a museum or in the street. Art can be anywhere. The context is always part of the artwork, rather than a limitation.

LB: This project was a very poetic prelude to your solo show at the MAM in 2002. You then decided to create a lava field at the entrance of the museum, which changed the exhibition into a remarkable sensorial experience.

OE: I remember there was a lot of room for experimentation at the museum at the time; room for taking risks, for making the impossible possible—just as there is at the Fondation Louis Vuitton today. Suzanne Pagé and the two of you, Laurence and Hans Ulrich, encouraged me to take over the museum and give it even greater dimension.

LB: This exhibition also marked a moment of transition in your work, because these pieces were immersive experiences, more immersive than they had ever been before.

OE: The show, Chaque matin je me sens différent, chaque soir je me sens le même, had a huge impact on my work. I did not just create the artworks; I also made every architectural decision: the thickness of the walls, the placement of the doors, the sequence of rooms, and the like. Since then, it has become normal for me to design everything associated with an exhibition. There is no longer a clear boundary between the space in which
the artwork is shown and the space itself. From then on, space, architecture, and artwork all became different sides of the same thing. Now, for my exhibition at the Fondation Louis Vuitton, I have been working within the context of Frank Gehry’s strong architecture. While Gehry follows highly complex principles, I’ve chosen to use simple geometry, eventually reducing my intervention to basic shapes that provide the exhibition with a “geometric metronome”. I’ve also created a number of spherical windows that allow glimpses of Gehry’s building. It was fascinating to work within this context, and on Inside the horizon, my artwork that is situated just outside the building, which reflects and refracts Gehry’s architecture.

HUO: This project is located in “The Grotto”. Before diving into the exhibition itself, could you tell us more about your vision of the grotto?

OE: Grottoes have been an important element in the landscape tradition, starting with Italian Renaissance garden design. Grottoes are also often seen as entrances to the underworld; a kind of entry into the subconscious. The work I’ve created for Gehry’s grotto is more like a shore that you walk along while following a ship on a river, however. I wanted to encourage the public to stroll about, which is why I made a series of forty-three columns that split up the view of the building into an almost stroboscopic sequence. My contribution to the grotto is very abstract, since it deals with light and reflections in a kaleidoscopic way and is highly dependent on the movement of the viewer. When you take a closer look, you discover the work’s micro-scale: very small pieces of yellow, handcrafted glass. Each piece of glass is different. The knowledge evident in the hands that made this work contrasts with the industrial nature of the building.

HUO: The kaleidoscope is an element that you have used a lot in your work.

OE: The kaleidoscope is something I have always been interested in and have often worked with. I especially like the idea of an architectural kaleidoscope, one that you can walk into, not with the wish to get out of the world that we know, but to get deeper into this world; to see the invisible. The kaleidoscope represents a tool through which we can look across the horizon of what we know. We tend to think of everything we see, everything we feel, everything we can verbalize as being within our reach, inside our horizon. What is on the other side of this horizon? This is the theme I would like to address.

LB: You give us a vision of reality and you instill doubt in the face of this reality at the same time.

HUO: Yes, in a sense the kaleidoscope is a metaphor for understanding the future. Each one of the reflected images can represent an alternative future. What is the future?

OE: I see exhibitions like this one as being thoughts from the future, ideas that have not yet been thought. Looking at art is a way of looking into the future. The philosopher Timothy Morton has commented that art is in front of thinking, and that artworks are thought from the future. The future is not abstract. It is in fact already here, and we’re walking right into it all the time.

HUO: Timothy Morton is an interesting reference in relation to your exhibition, which makes an obvious connection with the cosmos and with ecology. As a member of an object-oriented philosophy, he explores intersections between object-oriented thought and ecological studies. He looks at objects so massively distributed in space and time that they can actually go beyond localization, such as climate change. To quote him:
Ecological writing keeps insisting that we are “embedded” in nature. Nature is a surrounding medium that sustains our being. Due to the properties of the rhetoric that evokes the idea of a surrounding medium, ecological writing can never properly establish that this is nature and thus provide a compelling and consistent aesthetic basis for the new worldview that is meant to change society. It is a small operation, like tipping over a domino... Putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration.1

LB: This constitutes a fascinating starting point for your exhibition, Olafur.

OE: Very much so, and it really takes us to the genesis of the work. At the very beginning, there was a feeling, an intuition, and some verbalized ideas. Then the plans for the exhibition went through quite a few stages in which the idea was clarified and made more radical. Yet I think it’s important to see that it starts with something that we should not think of as a work of art, but rather as an idea for a work of art. Really the whole process was to go from thinking about something to doing something. For instance, I thought a lot about how I could make the colour black tangible. Originally I thought of using black cloth on the walls, but I quickly discarded this idea. Then I came across beautiful sandpaper with a texture that looks like diamond dust. The frictional quality of this paper is really nice, so I decided to rework the paper a bit and use it in the exhibition. This sandpaper is one of the things that grew out of the earlier, intuitive steps I was talking about. We went through thousands of micro-decisions in conceiving and building this show, which has the character of a Gesamtkunstwerk.

HUO: We can again see this in relation to Timothy Morton’s theories, in particular his notion of mesh. He defines the ecological thought as a set of interconnections: infinite connections and infinitesimal differences, in a quite Latourian way. To quote Timothy Morton again:

The ecological thought does, indeed, consist in the ramifications of the “truly wonderful fact” of the mesh. All life forms are the mesh, and so are all the dead ones, as are their habitats, which are also made up of living and non-living beings. We know even more now about how life forms have shaped Earth (think of oil, of oxygen—the first climate change cataclysm). We drive around using crushed dinosaur parts. Iron is mostly a by-product of bacterial metabolism. So is oxygen. Mountains can be made of shells and fossilized bacteria. Death and the mesh go together in another sense, too, because natural selection implies extinction.2

LB: That idea is very relevant here because we can see the exhibition that you describe as a whole; as an interconnected kind of mesh. Could you tell us more?

OE: It is about everything being interconnected. Thinking of everything as being connected to everything else offers us a way to reconsider the system we live in; a system which otherwise favours highly individualistic, consumer-driven principles. One of the great issues hampering climate action, for example, is our inability to feel connected to something as massive and all-encompassing as the climate. The ideas of connectedness and interdependence are tools to turn ideas into action. Similarly, in order to make art,
we have to find ways to turn thinking into doing. We need to understand that an idea for an exhibition is not yet art. It is only art when it is action; when it is performed.

HUO: A great scholar in Berlin, Dorothea Von Hantelmann, is writing a book on the topic of exhibitions as rituals. I am fascinated by her current research because she was in a way inspired by anthropologist Margaret Mead. She argues that this very liberal ritual of the exhibition is a very individualized ritual that does not impose a temporality onto the viewer, who is free to spend anything from one minute to one year in the exhibition. So, there is a great sense of freedom built into it, but also a lack of connection. For example, many people only spend a few seconds in front of the Mona Lisa, but they don't really connect. Now, obviously, one way to make more connections happen is to create a more holistic experience. All your installations appeal very much to all of our senses. As you know indeed, Margaret Mead's main criticism of an exhibition is that it only appeals to the visual sense. Do you agree with this analysis of exhibitions as rituals?

OE: The danger with rituals is that they are, by definition, repetitive, which means that they are also predictable. I wonder if the ritualization of exhibitions is a result of the failure of the communicative system around art. Do museums actively cultivate the reconsideration of the rules and the ways of experiencing art? Do they not just leave that to the artists? I would place a great part of the responsibility on the institutions and their lack of innovative handling of their audiences. People come to the museum with the expectation that they are going to take an experience away with them, that they are going to leave again having consumed something. The message of a museum is “come to us and you will get something out of it”, because this is the commercial way of communicating an experience. Yet it would be much more rewarding to convince people that when they enter a museum, they are there to give something. Furthermore, we—artists and museums—should take something from people. It is such a rewarding experience for people to come to a museum and feel that they are actually considered so important that they can contribute by giving.

LB: It seems that at the moment you are envisioning a double space: one tangible and the other more fictive. It also seems that this exhibition has evolved a lot since you first began working on it…

OE: In the beginning I had an idea for an exhibition that was two shows in one. One was explicit and the other was inexplicit or subconscious. I think that this is still one of the main narratives, but now the subconscious part of the show has become the one inside the mirror. We are aware of it, but we cannot really go into it; we can only look at it in the reflection, through the mirror. The original idea, one of a conscious space and a subconscious space, lives on in the suggestion of a kind of parallel universe, which is resonating but disembodied because you cannot embody the space inside the mirror. I decided at a somewhat later stage that visitors should enter the first large-scale installation, *Map for unthought thoughts*, parallel to the mirror, which in theory presents its viewer with an option: should I go right, away from the mirror, or left, into the mirror? On the one hand, you have the impossible possibility of entering the mirror. On the other hand, there is also the sense that this round space is an infinite circle. Having first encountered the meteorite [*Touch, 2014*] and then proceeded through the dark entrance corridor, with only a circular window through which you can look out at the pool that surrounds the museum building, you enter *Map for unthought thoughts*, where your own shadow becomes the protagonist. It introduces the possibility of looking at your presence through your own absence.

HUO: Could you walk us through the parcours?
First, there is the context: the Jardin d’Acclimatation in the Bois de Boulogne, where the Fondation is located. Then you go through the whole process of entering the museum—coming in, buying a ticket, going down the escalators, and so on. Your experience of the entrance sequence, whether liberating or traumatizing, affects your experience of the exhibition. Is it encouraging or discouraging? Although, of course, coming to this building produces a sensation of liberation because the place makes such a spectacular proposal.

You then enter the exhibition through a dark, rounded corridor. A series of these curved passages connect, in an orbit-like manner, the larger spaces with each other and the rest of the building. The meteorite strikes a cosmic chord; the reversed flow of the water seen in the first glass sphere is about antigravity. Later, there are other optical devices. The feeling they create is very pure and simple, like a night train. A kaleidoscopic night train.

From out of the darkness, you come into a large semi-circular installation, Map for unthought thoughts, which consists of five layers of crisscrossing bars that together form a pattern based on fivefold-symmetry, a moving light source, and a mirror wall. Moving about the space, you will be able to map out distances with your body and your movements.

Then you proceed into another dark, curved passageway—the Double infinity space, with glass spheres at either end. Inside, the walls have been covered with the black sandpaper that I referred to earlier. At first glance, it will just look black, but once you touch it, you will realize it is actually rough. Maybe it will even feel as if you were going through infinity. This leads into another installation, Contact, which is pitch black except for a single luminous horizon line; it likely feels as if you had been plunged into the darkness of outer space to become an inhabitant of an eclipsed sun.

Another curved passageway guides you out, past a large model—I think of it as a model of a black hole—to end at Big Bang Fountain, in the last space. Finally, high up on the outside of the building, I have installed a heliostat, or sun-tracker, which I developed in my studio in Berlin. For a few hours each day, this machine directs sunlight down into the building, into the so-called Canyon, where it illuminates Dust particle, a complex glass polyhedron.

Most importantly, the exhibition offers a sequence of events that should not be seen separately. These are not autonomous works of art, disconnected from the overall narrative. Some might not even be works of art at all if they are taken in isolation.

Also, when strolling through the exhibition, the visitors draw a curve, a kind of circle. It’s a real trajectory inside the grotto.

I would like to encourage visitors to think of themselves as if they were asteroids; to feel themselves floating through the space, meeting the artworks, meeting other visitors, and seeing them fly by. I want visitors to enjoy this temporal sequence and to try to take ownership of it by gradually slowing it down or speeding it up. It is about feeling your own presence, taking charts of your own trajectory, your own orbit, in your new “asteroid” self.
V — Biographical Timeline

Olafur Eliasson was born in Copenhagen in 1967 to Icelandic parents. He has exhibited internationally since 1997. In 2003, he represented Denmark at the 50th Venice Biennale and, later that year, installed *The weather project* at Tate Modern, London. *Take your time: Olafur Eliasson*, a survey exhibition organised by SFMoMA in 2007, travelled until 2010 to various venues, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York. *Innen Stadt Aussen* (Inner City Out), at Martin-Gropius-Bau in 2010, involved interventions across Berlin as well as in the museum. Similarly, in 2011, *Seu corpo da obra* (Your body of work) engaged with three institutions around São Paulo – SESC Pompeia, SESC Belenzinho, and Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo – and featured additional works around the city. Eliasson’s projects in public space include *Green river*, carried out at various locations between 1998 and 2001, and the Serpentine Gallery Pavilion 2007, designed together with Kjetil Thorsen. *The New York City Waterfalls*, commissioned by Public Art Fund, were installed on shorelines of Manhattan and Brooklyn during the summer of 2008. *Your rainbow panorama*, a 150-metre-long circular walkway with coloured glass panes situated on top of ARoS Museum in Aarhus, Denmark, opened in May 2011. Harpa Reykjavik Concert Hall and Conference Centre, for which Eliasson created the facade in collaboration with Henning Larsen Architects, was inaugurated in August 2011 and awarded the European Union Prize for Contemporary Architecture Mies van der Rohe Award in 2013.

In 2012, Eliasson launched his Little Sun project at Tate Modern as part of the London 2012 Festival. Developed by the artist in cooperation with engineer Frederik Ottesen, Little Sun refers to both a small, solar-powered LED lamp and a global project to provide clean, affordable light to communities without access to electricity.

Olafur Eliasson lives and works in Copenhagen and Berlin.

Samuli Kosminen is one of Finland’s top drummers/percussionists. As a musician, composer, and producer, Kosminen has collaborated with numerous renowned Finnish, Icelandic, and international rock, pop, jazz and electronic music artists. He has been featured on over eighty albums. As an explorer of flea-market percussion, beat devices, melody-making toys, clunky machines and tuneful data processors, Kosminen has discovered new and strange dimensions of rhythm and sound.

Additional sound elements by Kosminen and Eliasson will be audible at particular spots within the exhibition.
VI — Bibliography

Selected catalogues

— Birnbaum, Daniel; Lüscher, Regula; Eliasson, Olafur... [et al.]. Innen Stadt Außen: [exhibition, Berlin, 28 April -9 August 2010]. Köln: W. König, 2010. 9783865607652


Monographs


— Eliasson, Olafur. Olafur Eliasson: Contact is content. Berlin: Distanz Verlag, 2014. 9783954760848


— Eliasson, Olafur; Iwama, Asako; Koch, Andreas. TYT [Take Your Time], vol. 5: The Kitchen. Berlin: Studio Olafur Eliasson, 2013. 9783865607003
VII — Surrounding the Exhibition

The Exhibition catalogue

The catalogue of the exhibition Olafur Eliasson: Contact offers two editions: a limited edition of 300 copies, and a main edition. It was designed by Irma Boom, with contributions by Peter Coles, Caroline Jones, Bruno Latour, Cia Rinne, Richard Sennett, and a conversation between the artist, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and Laurence Bossé.

Co-published by Fondation Louis Vuitton et Flammarion, in French and English editions.

200 pages (current edition: 65 euros, limited edition: 95 euros)

On the occasion of this exhibition, Olafur Eliasson and Fondation Louis Vuitton have produced a special limited edition of Little Sun Fondation Louis Vuitton lamp.

Little Sun is a social business and global project founded by artist Olafur Eliasson and engineer Frederik Ottesen to get clean, reliable, affordable light to the 1.2 billion people in the world living in off-grid areas without electricity. The project’s first product, the Little Sun solar LED lamp, is sold all over the world. Purchasing Little Suns in areas of the world with electricity makes the lamps available in off-grid areas at reduced, locally affordable prices, where they provide a clean alternative to toxic and expensive fuel-based lighting such as kerosene lanterns. Little Sun addresses the need for light in a sustainable way that benefits off-grid communities by working with local entrepreneurs, creating local jobs, and generating local profits. The Little Sun project was officially launched in July 2012 at London’s Tate Modern. Since then, more than 200,000 Little Sun lamps have been distributed worldwide, with almost half going to off-grid areas.

A thousand numbered pieces are available at the Fondation bookshop, along with a signed certificate, for 122 euros.
VII. Practical Information

To book tickets
Visit the website
fondationlouisvuitton.fr

Access
Adress:
8, avenue du Mahatma Gandhi
Bois de Boulogne,
75116 Paris

Opening hours
From 20 December 2014 to 4 January 2015 (school holidays)
Open every day 10am – 8pm, and late night Friday until 11pm

Opening hours (outside school holidays)
Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 12 noon–7pm, and late night Friday until 11pm
Saturdays and Sundays 11am – 8pm

Closed on Tuesdays.
Closed on 25 December 2014 and 1 January 2015.

Ticket prices
Full rate: 14 euros
Reduced rate: 10 and 5 euros
Family rate: 32 euros
(2 adults + 1 to 4 children aged under 18)
Disabled visitors requiring special access: free

Tickets give entry to all the areas of the Fondation and to the Jardin d’Acclimatation

Visitor information
+32 01 40 69 96 00

Mobile application
Application FLV, with exclusive artists interviews. Available free on Smartphones, in French and English on the AppStore and Google Play.

VIII. Press enquiries

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