

James Turrell

General Site Plan Roden Crater

1986

Photo emulsion on wax and Mylar with ink

Courtesy of the Lannan Foundation

Turrell, who has been an airplane pilot since he was sixteen years old, discovered the site for his Land Art sculpture in 1974 after flying across the American West for two years in search of a suitable feature. Roden Crater, located in the San Francisco volcanic field east of Flagstaff, Arizona, was a clean and symmetrical cinder cone with enough land around it to ensure that visitors would have an unencumbered view when approaching.

The project has involved piercing the cinder cone with multiple tunnels that align with celestial events such as the winter and summer solstices. The rim of the crater has been leveled in order that, when viewers lie prone in the center of the crater, the sky appears to be an inverted bowl, an optical phenomenon known as “celestial vaulting.”

Many of Turrell’s conceptual drawings of the project, which guide its engineering, are drawn on aerial views of the crater. Aerial photographs are often used for depicting large Land Art projects.

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