

Olafur Eliasson is at Istanbul Modern with “Your unexpected encounter”

June 7, 2024-February 9, 2025

Istanbul Modern is hosting a comprehensive selection of works from the 30-year career of the Icelandic-Danish artist Olafur Eliasson, whose projects have garnered worldwide acclaim. Organized with the main sponsorship of the Eczacıbaşı Group and VitrA, "Olafur Eliasson: Your unexpected encounter" is the artist's first solo exhibition in Türkiye.

“Olafur Eliasson: Your unexpected encounter” opens at Istanbul Modern on June 7. The exhibition offers an opportunity to explore the artist's three-decade-long practice and the themes central to it.

Sponsored by the Eczacıbaşı Group and VitrA, the comprehensive exhibition features nearly 40 works, including new productions. Curated by Öykü Özsoy Sağnak, Nilay Dursun, and Ümit Mesci from the museum's curatorial team, the exhibition focuses on water, light, color, perception, movement, geometry, and the environment.

Eliasson emphasizes that his works are only complete when viewers engage with them and considers this active participation to be an important component of his work. Through the audience's dynamic process of discovery, the phenomena Eliasson presents—whether in varied contexts or scales—frequently results in unique experiences.

PRESS RELEASE

“Your unexpected encounter”

The exhibition begins with the permanent installation "Your unexpected journey," designed by the artist specifically for Istanbul Modern's new building. Located in the stairway, the work's reflective circular surfaces, juxtaposed against the building's right angles, create the possibility of continuously evolving encounters as viewers move up and down the stairs.

Eliasson's works in the Temporary Exhibition Gallery on the second floor of the museum showcase the artist's deep and longstanding interest in perception, color, light, and geometry, as well as his ongoing engagement with environmental topics. Although the artworks, which include installations, sculptures, and photographs, are grouped thematically in the exhibition, the artist engages with multiple subjects and concepts, elucidating the relationships and permeabilities between different disciplines.

Created specifically for the exhibition, "Dusk to dawn, Bosphorus," connects viewers to the museum site, bringing the changing colors of the Bosphorus into the gallery space. The work, which includes hand-blown glass panels stacked on driftwood, combines Eliasson's interest in the natural properties of color, light, and water. It provides a preview of other color experiments that arrive later in the exhibit.

The site-specific work "Sunset kaleidoscope" continues to traverse the boundaries between inside and outside. Looking out to the Bosphorus, the view is transformed by movement, bringing a unique narrative of the history of the city and the contemporary space within the exhibition.

Light and its ephemeral properties stand out as prominent subjects in the exhibition. Lenses, reflective surfaces, projections, colored glass, and kaleidoscopes featured in Eliasson's works allow the artist to conduct experiments with perception, space, and geometry.

Forming part of the artist's ongoing "Colour experiments" series, the artist's watercolor works are formed around the basis of developing a new color theory and reflect his productions on the axis of water, environment, and color.

Eliasson's career-long investigation into how we perceive and co-create our environments is further explored with a number of artworks that address the climate crisis. The photo series "The glacier melt series 1999/2019" demonstrates the striking rate at which Iceland's glaciers are retreating, while also connecting Istanbul with Iceland—a country which is formative to Eliasson's practice.

PRESS CONFERENCE

The exhibition opening was preceded by a press conference attended by Oya Eczacıbaşı, Chair of the Board of Istanbul; Atalay Gümrah, CEO and President of the Eczacıbaşı Group, and the artist Olafur Eliasson.

Oya Eczacıbaşı: We are thrilled to bring Olafur Eliasson to our audience on our museum's twentieth anniversary

"We are delighted to organize Olafur Eliasson's first solo exhibition in Türkiye and thrilled to present this comprehensive selection to our audience on our museum's twentieth anniversary. The artist's site-specific installation 'Your unexpected journey,' created for the main stairwell of our new building, which has welcomed nearly one million visitors since its opening and received numerous international awards, has been an iconic feature of our museum since the very first day." Oya Eczacıbaşı drew attention to Istanbul Modern's mission of hosting international and comprehensive contemporary art exhibitions that reflect contemporary transformations and added, "In the exhibition 'Olafur Eliasson: Your unexpected encounter,' we present a selection from the artist's 30-year career, as well as new productions created with Istanbul Modern's unique location in mind. For Eliasson, one of the most important issues of our time is the climate crisis. I think it's meaningful to open the artist's exhibition right after June 5 World Environment Day."

Atalay Gümrah: Another way in our commitment to building a sustainable relationship with our planet, intersecting with art

Emphasizing that they embrace sustainability as both a business approach and a lifestyle, the Eczacıbaşı Group CEO Atalay Gümrah said, "Our support for this exhibition is another way for us to continue our commitment to enhancing social welfare and building a sustainable relationship with our planet, which intersects with art. We are honored to contribute to Olafur Eliasson's exhibition, whose work addresses sustainability and the climate crisis, raising awareness and engaging viewers in a dynamic process of discovery. In this exhibition, which features a comprehensive selection from Eliasson's 30-year career, we observe the artist's relationship with the environment. Art enthusiasts will encounter the unique interpretations of Olafur Eliasson, who creates projects worldwide to raise awareness about the climate crisis, and will enjoy unforgettable experiences."

Olafur Eliasson: Without this encounter with Istanbul 30 years ago, I would not be the artist I am today

Olafur Eliasson, who participated in the 5th International Istanbul Biennial organized in 1997 under the title "On Life, Beauty, Translations and Other Difficulties" curated by Rosa Martínez with his work "Beauty," said that he is excited to return to Istanbul with his exhibition "Your unexpected encounter." "Without that encounter with Istanbul almost three decades ago, I would not be the artist I am today, so it is exciting to return to Istanbul, a city that has a lot of personal significance for me. I am particularly intrigued by the city's unique position on the Bosphorus, which is an important point of connection for maritime traffic. Navigation, orientation, and the sea have been crucial themes in my art over the years, but they have a special meaning here—in the new, permanent work I created for Istanbul Modern and in my exhibition 'Your unexpected encounter.' Visitors can take their time inside the museum, orienting themselves among the artworks, and then turn their attention to the outside, where ships pass by the gallery en route to destinations around the world," Eliasson said.

Öykü Özsoy Sağnak: This encounter will provide the audience with an unforgettable experience

Istanbul Modern Chief Curator Öykü Özsoy Sağnak pointed out that Olafur Eliasson's works possess a playful and captivating character that prompts viewers to reconsider how they perceive and interact with the world. "When we encounter these works, we become aware of realities beyond our own senses, movements, the people around us, and what we perceive with our eyes alone. For this reason, Olafur Eliasson often uses the pronoun 'your' when naming his works and exhibitions imagining that we will have unexpected, surprising encounters while experiencing his works. We're excited to present Olafur Eliasson's first solo exhibition in Türkiye. The world Olafur Eliasson constructs with his works will provide an unforgettable experience for viewers of all ages," Özsoy Sağnak said.

Workshops for children and young people

As with every exhibition, Istanbul Modern's Education and Social Projects department is organizing workshops for different age groups in conjunction with "Your unexpected encounter." Istanbul Modern Shop, where the exhibition catalogue will be on view, will feature a selection of creative and sustainable products inspired by Eliasson's work.

Meeting with Eliasson

Olafur Eliasson's talk organized in conjunction with his exhibition "Your unexpected encounter" will take place on Friday, June 7, at 19.00.

"Olafur Eliasson: Your unexpected encounter" will be on view from June 7, 2024, to February 9, 2025.

About Olafur Eliasson

The works of artist Olafur Eliasson (b. 1967) explore the relevance of art in the world at large. Since 1997, his wide-ranging solo shows—featuring installations, paintings, sculptures, photography, and film—have appeared in major museums around the globe. In 2003, he represented Denmark at the 50th Venice Biennale, and later that year he installed “The weather project” at Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall, London. Eliasson’s projects in public space include “The New York City Waterfalls,” 2008; “Fjordenhus,” 2018; and “Ice Watch,” 2014. In 2012, Eliasson founded the social business Little Sun, and in 2014, he and Sebastian Behmann founded Studio Other Spaces, an office for art and architecture. In 2019, Eliasson was named UNDP Goodwill Ambassador for climate action.

Located in Berlin, Studio Olafur Eliasson comprises a large team of craftspeople, architects, archivists, researchers, administrators, cooks, art historians, and specialized technicians. Eliasson and his studio not only artistically analyze themes surrounding sustainability and climate advocacy, but also take measures to reduce their carbon footprint throughout the production and development of exhibitions.