

Into The Light

Feb 20th, 2009 | [By Sam](#) | Category: [bRILLIANT Blog](#)

(Part II)

By Jacob Roeschley



Suzanne Deal Booth, James Turrell, and David Booth at the Dimensional Fund Advisors lobby.

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Deal Booth first met Turrell in the 1980s as a graduate student at New York University's Institute of Fine Art. Recommended by de Menil, Turrell employed Deal Booth as his assistant to build a "skyspace" for the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center in Queens. As Deal Booth remembers it, Turrell, an artistic visionary, blew out a ceiling on the museum's third floor. "That was my weekend job for almost three months," Booth recalls with a laugh. "Going out to Queens and helping him, carrying two-by-fours and operating heavy equipment that I probably shouldn't have been." The work resulted in Meeting: a shrine-like chamber with a rectangle cut into the ceiling, eliciting a unique interaction between natural and artificial light. "It has been a very successful, emblematic, iconic piece for him and his entire career," Deal Booth adds.

The work's title may have been a coincidence, but its significance should not go unnoticed. After more than two decades, Deal Booth and Turrell find themselves in a starkly different relationship: from student and teacher to patron and artist, respectively. Turrell, already an accomplished artist by the time they met, has continued his artistic vision and become a prominent and highly solicited artist.

Meanwhile, it is Deal Booth who has undergone a more dramatic metamorphosis between their first meeting and today. No longer the green graduate student looking to get her foot in the door, Deal Booth is working to bring Turrell's work to the Lone Star State. Two of his permanent displays can be found at the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. A lifelong Quaker, Turrell also created a skyspace for the Live Oak Friends Meeting House for the Society of Friends in Houston. One of his upcoming projects, commissioned by Deal Booth, is a "skyplane" at her alma mater, Rice University. The outdoor installation will serve as a focal point in the middle of campus. Deal Booth projects the work's completion by 2012, when Turrell's retrospective exhibition is scheduled to arrive in Houston.

fohplogo "She [Suzanne] worked very hard as a young woman," Turrell says. "Now she's in a very different position, following in the footsteps of some of these wonderful Texas patrons and collectors [such as] Dominique de Menil and Isabel Brown Wilson. Now, there's a new generation who's doing that."

Deal Booth's contributions to the arts and cultural communities extend beyond that of a mere art lover. Her transition from an artist's apprentice to patron serves as an example of her overarching mission—like a modern Medici—to advance a cultural and artistic exchange throughout the world. "Shared heritage is something that creates a greater basis of understanding of other cultures," she shares. "So, I, along with [the Friends of Heritage Preservation], have made a real considerate effort that we think addresses how we're all part of the same universe."