

TDG GALLERY — THE DISRUPTIVE GALLERY

FORCES

The Physics of Feeling

A Critical and Curatorial Framework

Serra · Turrell · Rothko · FORCES · Empathic Art

01

The Lineage: Three Artists, One Claim

Serra · Turrell · Rothko — making the abstract palpable

A Single Radical Proposition

There is a lineage in modern and contemporary art that does not pass through style, medium, or movement, but through a single radical proposition: that art can bring into bodily presence something that is usually left abstract, conceptual, or merely named.

Serra makes space palpable. Turrell makes perception palpable. Rothko makes emotion palpable. None of them depict these things. They construct the conditions under which these phenomena can be encountered as physical facts — as pressures, durations, densities, and dislocations registered in the body before they are named by the mind.

This is more radical than it may first appear. What they share is the refusal of pointing. Their works do not refer to experience. They are experience.

Richard Serra: Space as Material, Body as Content

Serra's central proposition is one of the most uncompromising in postwar sculpture: that space itself is a material, and that the viewer's body moving through space constitutes the work's content.

The Torqued Ellipses, the Spirals, the great tilted arcs of weathered Cor-ten steel do not depict spatial experience. They produce it. They take the volume of the room and make it into something that presses back.

Serra's philosophical roots are explicit: postminimalism, Merleau-Ponty's motor intentionality, Sartre's body-as-pivot. "Behavioral space" — meaning generated not by looking but by moving.

"I want to make the volume of the space tangible, so that it is understood immediately, physically, by your body."

Richard Serra,
Guggenheim Bilbao



RICHARD SERRA

Torqued Ellipses

1996–99 · Weathering steel

Installed at Dia:Beacon, New York. The viewer is absorbed into a curved steel corridor that shifts, tilts, and expands — the body navigating forces rather than contemplating form. Serra called this "behavioral space": meaning generated entirely through proprioception and movement, not looking.

THE SOURCE



Serra: Paintstick on paper, 1971– · Oil paintstick, black mass as force

THE RESPONSE



Gever: Double Rift I (after Serra), 2025 · Fluid simulation, triptych

Serra: Four Principles of Behavioral Space

SPACE AS MATERIAL

Space is not the backdrop against which things happen. It is the subject. Steel is only the vessel that contains, contracts, or moves the space.

BEHAVIORAL SPACE

Meaning is generated not by looking but by moving — through proprioception and motor intentionality, not interpretation or concept.

MOVEMENT AS SUBJECT

The Verb List (1967): sculpture shifted from nouns to verbs — to roll, fold, bend, twist, scatter. Categorical shift from object to force.

VIEWER AS CONTENT

"The content is you." The work's meaning resides not in steel or intention, but in the embodied, temporal, shifting experience of the person moving through it.

The Verb List (1967–68): From Object to Force

Serra's Verb List, held by MoMA, replaced the sculptor's traditional nouns — form, material, object — with verbs: to roll, to crease, to fold, to store, to bend, to shorten, to twist, to lift, to scatter.

This was not a stylistic gesture. It was a categorical shift from object to force, from form to action, from thing to process. Serra called drawing itself "a verb."

If sculpture was no longer about autonomous objects but about forces and actions in space, then the viewer's body — the only instrument capable of registering those forces — became indispensable. The pedestal is gone. The vitrine is gone. The frame is gone. Viewer and work occupy the same gravitational field.

“

The content is you.

Richard Serra, *The Guardian*

“

You're caught between your sensory experience and an attempt to reconstruct it in language, which always fails.

Richard Serra, Border Crossings

James Turrell: Perception as Object, Light as Thingness

If Serra gives space thingness, James Turrell gives perception thingness. His entire practice is a sustained experiment in making the mechanisms of seeing visible to the seer.

The medium is not light. Light is the tool. The medium is perception itself. Turrell trained in perceptual psychology at Pomona College. He is interested not in light's beauty but in its capacity to reveal the embodied, constructive nature of seeing.

In a Ganzfeld piece, the viewer enters a room flooded with homogeneous light. The absence of edges and spatial cues dissolves habitual coordinates of vision. Perception becomes the object of perception.

“First, I am dealing with no object. Perception is the object... You are looking at you looking.”

James Turrell,
Exploratorium



JAMES TURRELL

Ganzfeld: Breathing Light

2013 · LED light, architectural space

In Turrell's Ganzfeld rooms, homogeneous light floods the space from all directions. Without edges or shadows, the eye loses its reference points. Vision begins to perceive itself. Viewers report the sensation of the light becoming solid — a mass you could touch. Perception becomes the object of perception. The work does not represent anything. It is the mechanism of seeing made visible.



JAMES TURRELL

Aural

2009 · LED light, architectural chamber

Turrell's Skyspaces and Ganzfeld chambers share a single structural logic: the viewer sits in sustained attention as light slowly transforms. Over 10–20 minutes, the eye adapts, the nervous system slows, and ordinary perceptual habits dissolve. Duration is not atmosphere — it is the mechanism. Bodily knowing is slower than conceptual recognition. The body learns what the mind cannot rush.

Bodily Knowing: Sensing Yourself Sensing

Turrell's Skyspaces — architectural chambers with precisely cut apertures open to the sky — accomplish embodied knowing through duration. The visitor sits as light changes, and over minutes the sky flattens, thickens, appears to become a solid surface rather than an infinite depth.

Duration is the mechanism. Bodily knowing is slower than conceptual recognition. In the Dark Spaces at MASS MoCA, dim light may only become perceptible after ten or fifteen minutes of what initially appears as complete darkness.

“I like to use light as a material, but my medium is really perception. I want you to sense yourself sensing. To see yourself seeing.”

James Turrell,
Smithsonian Magazine, 2003

Duration as Mechanism

DARK SPACES — MASS MOCA

Dim light perceptible only after 10–15 minutes of apparent darkness. Retina adapts. Body slows. Somatic learning — the reorganisation of the perceptual apparatus.

THE VIEWER COMPLETES THE WORK

"It's not something I discover and then have captured for you. It's something you are there to discover yourself. You have to complete that yourself."

THINGNESS OF LIGHT

"I'm interested that light has thingness itself — not something that reveals other things, but a revelation in itself." Same structure as Serra on space, Rothko on emotion.

SKYSPACES

Architectural chambers open to the sky. As time passes, the sky flattens and thickens — becoming a solid surface. The viewer discovers they are co-creating the reality they see.

Mark Rothko: Emotion as Thingness, Painting as Encounter

Rothko is the bridge-figure in this lineage — the artist who gives emotion the same kind of thingness that Serra gives to space and Turrell gives to perception.

His paintings do not show you what sadness looks like. They create the conditions in which sadness — or ecstasy, or foreboding, or a nameless weight — can arrive in the body as a physical fact.

The weeping is not sentimental. It is evidence — proof that the work has produced a bodily event, an encounter with emotion as a force that moves through the body, not as a concept entertained by the mind.

“I'm not an abstractionist. I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions: tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on.”

Mark Rothko



MARK ROTHKO

Seagram Murals, Tate Modern

1958–59 · Oil on canvas

Rothko's Seagram Murals — originally commissioned for the Four Seasons restaurant, withdrawn by the artist, eventually gifted to Tate Modern — hang at the proximity he specified: no more than 18 inches. At that distance, the painting fills the visual field. Edges dissolve. The viewer enters the color-field rather than observing it. The weeping that occurs here is not sentimentality — it is evidence of a bodily encounter with emotion as force.

“

You've got sadness in you, I've got sadness in me — and my works of art are places where the two sadnesses can meet, and therefore both of us need to feel less sad.

Mark Rothko

The Rothko Chapel: Environment, Not Exhibition

Rothko's instructions for viewing were specific: the optimal distance was eighteen inches. At that proximity, the painting fills the visual field. The edges disappear. The viewer is, in a very real sense, inside the painting.

The Rothko Chapel in Houston — a non-denominational meditative space — is the ultimate extension of this logic: a room in which paintings are not displayed but inhabited. Fourteen canvases in dark plum, maroon, and black. Not images. An environment of darkness, immersion, and silence.

Christopher Rothko has written that inside the Chapel, the viewer encounters their own interior life.

“Silence is so accurate.”

Mark Rothko

Rothko as Bridge: From the Lineage to FORCES

Serra gives space thingness. Turrell gives perception thingness. Rothko gives emotion thingness — but through the fixed, luminous surface of oil paint on canvas. His medium is bounded: flat, static, hung on a wall.

FORCES inherits Rothko's ambition — to make emotion a physical fact in the body — and carries it into new territory: a dynamic, temporal, physics-based computational environment in which the forces that constitute feeling can be constructed, modulated, and encountered with a directness that painting, for all its depth, cannot achieve alone.

Each artist takes something that is normally experienced as a transparent medium and makes it opaque, present, and palpable.

02

THE PHILOSOPHICAL GROUND

Merleau-Ponty, the Embodied Subject, and the Postwar Art Lineage

Merleau-Ponty and the Body That Knows

Maurice Merleau-Ponty gave postwar art one of its most durable philosophical vocabularies by arguing that perception is not a detached optical act but a bodily mode of being in the world. In his phenomenology, the subject is not a mind looking out at external objects from a distance. The subject is embodied, situated, and already immersed in a field of sensation, movement, orientation, habit, and relation.

We meet the world through a body. We understand through movement, orientation, pressure, hesitation, proximity, immersion. The body does not come after perception. It is where perception begins.

Perception is not a detached optical act. It is a bodily mode of being in the world.

From Object to Encounter: The Postwar Shift

This philosophical turn became especially consequential after the war, when many artists began moving away from the self-contained image toward environments, structures, fields, and situations that could not be fully grasped from a single frontal viewpoint. What mattered increasingly was not only what the artwork looked like, but how it was encountered: through duration, bodily movement, changing perspective, changing light, and spatial uncertainty.

His thought offered a way to describe works that did not present themselves as pictures to decode, but as situations to be lived through.

Serra: The Body Measured by Sculpture

With Serra, the body does not simply measure sculpture. The body is measured by sculpture. One becomes aware of weight, tilt, compression, release, acceleration, deceleration, vertigo, and proximity.

The viewer does not stand outside the work as a neutral spectator. The viewer is implicated in the work's unfolding. Perception is not a passive reception of visual data, but an active, bodily negotiation with a world that exceeds any single viewpoint.

The Torqued Ellipses shift 'in unexpected ways as viewers walk through them.'

Guggenheim

Turrell: The Body Sensing Itself

If Serra makes one aware of the body's negotiation with weight and space, Turrell makes one aware of perception itself. His installations suspend the viewer within luminous conditions where ordinary distinctions between object, edge, depth, and atmosphere begin to dissolve.

Turrell's environments produce a threshold state in which the viewer senses both the world and the body sensing the world.

My medium is actually perception. I want you to sense yourself sensing.

James Turrell

Rothko: Atmosphere as Bodily Condition

Mark Rothko is a more interpretive case, but still a powerful one. Modern scholarship finds phenomenology useful in explaining Rothko's ambition to collapse distance between painting and viewer — to create not a picture to observe but an enveloping affective field.

His paintings are not only surfaces to observe. They are atmospheres to enter. Their scale, saturation, vibration, and stillness act on the body before thought fully organizes the experience.

They are not arguments. They are conditions.

on Rothko's paintings



Five Positions: The Phenomenological Lineage

Artist / Thinker	Core Idea	What the Viewer Experiences	Stakes for FORCES
Merleau-Ponty	The subject is embodied. Perception is lived, bodily, and world-involving.	Orientation, movement, habit, bodily understanding.	Feeling is encountered as physical relation, not decoded as narrative.
Richard Serra	Perception unfolds through walking, turning, shifting bodily relation in space.	Weight, tilt, compression, instability, navigation.	Force, gravity, and spatial pressure as lived conditions.
James Turrell	Perception itself becomes the object of experience. Light reveals the act of seeing.	Immersion, disorientation, heightened self-awareness of perception.	An environment of felt emergence rather than fixed image.
Mark Rothko	Painting operates as atmosphere and resonance rather than image alone.	Saturation, stillness, emotional field, bodily absorption.	Emotional climate and pre-verbal affective encounter.
FORCES	Emotion as physical event. Pressure, gravity, torsion, friction, containment, release.	The viewer inhabits emotional physics as moving field.	Central project logic: emotion given thingness.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology offers a crucial lens for understanding the postwar shift from artwork as object to artwork as encounter. In Richard Serra, perception becomes a bodily negotiation with weight, balance, and spatial instability. In James Turrell, perception becomes aware of itself through light. In Mark Rothko, painting becomes atmosphere, resonance, and duration. FORCES enters this lineage by treating emotion not as an image to decode but as a physical event to undergo.

— Curatorial synthesis, FORCES: The Physics of Feeling, 2026

02



FORCES: Giving Emotion Thingness

A computational physics-based exhibition of affective force

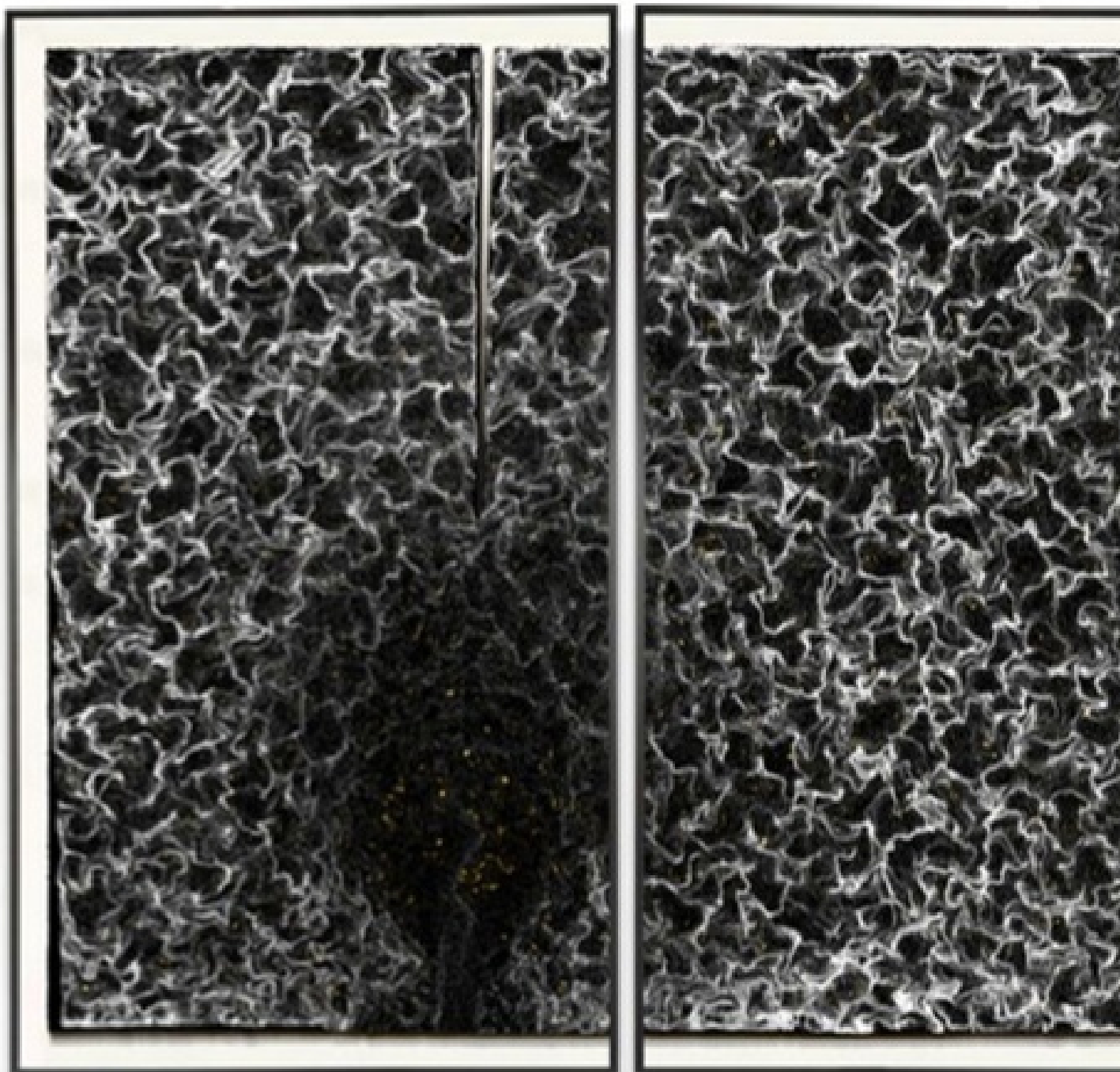
The Core Proposition: Emotion as Lived Force

FORCES: The Physics of Feeling inherits from Serra, Turrell, and Rothko — but advances a new proposition. Emotion is not best understood as narrative, symbol, or image. It is a lived field of forces — encountered as pressure, density, drag, turbulence, suspension, containment, friction, and release.

These are not metaphors. They are the actual structural languages through which feeling moves through the body. FORCES constructs environments in which these forces are made palpable as aesthetic phenomena.

“Giving emotions thingness — making them present the way a physical force is present, with weight, density, edge, atmosphere, and occupation of space.”

FORCES curatorial framework

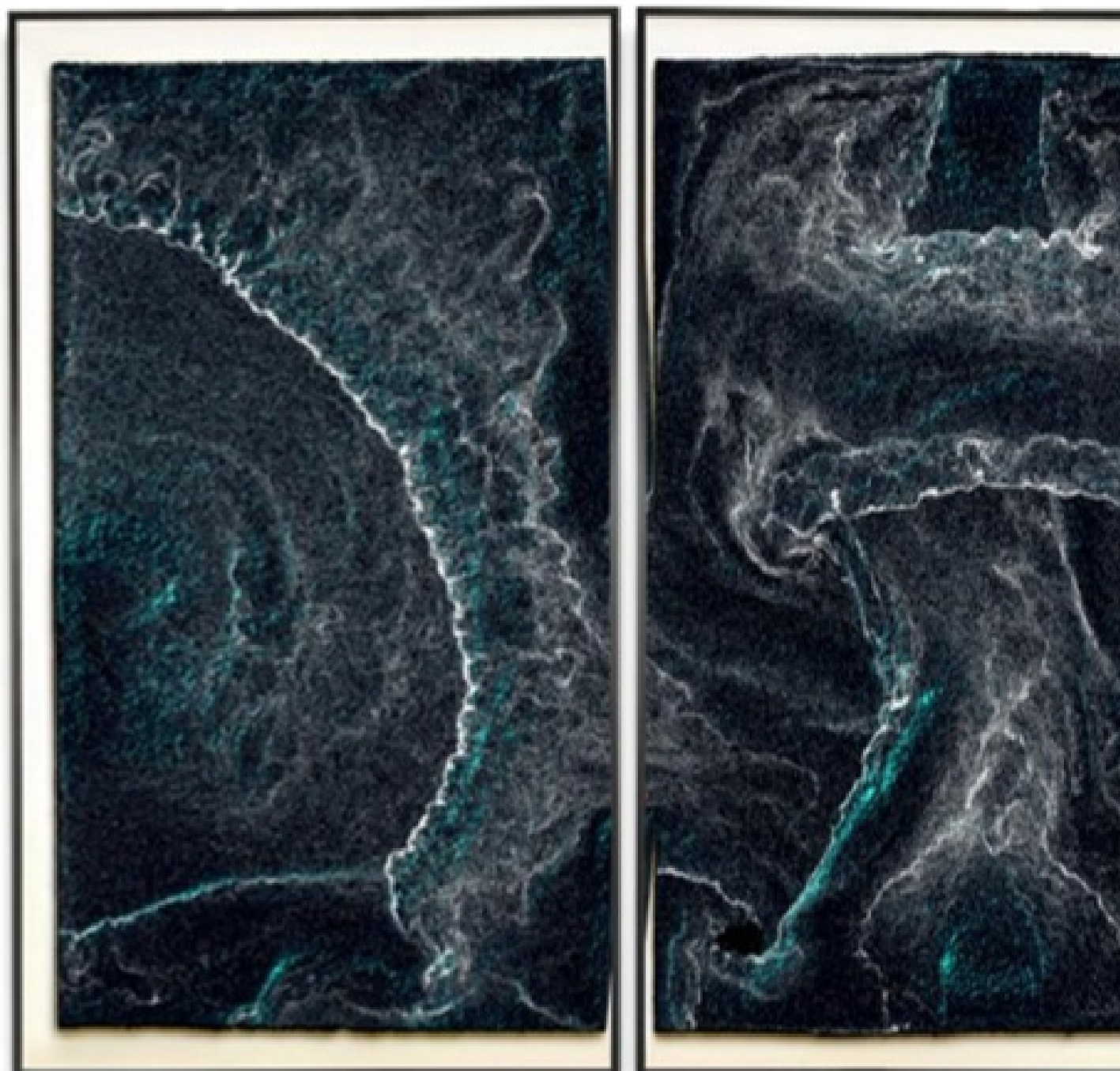


EYAL GEVER

Double Rift I (after Serra)

2025 · High-resolution fluid simulation, triptych

The rift in Serra's steel — the gap between two curved plates — becomes a force-field in fluid simulation. The turbulence accumulates at the edges of absence. As in Serra, the viewer is inside the structure: not looking at a shape, but enclosed by a field of pressure that has no front or back. The content is the body meeting the rift.

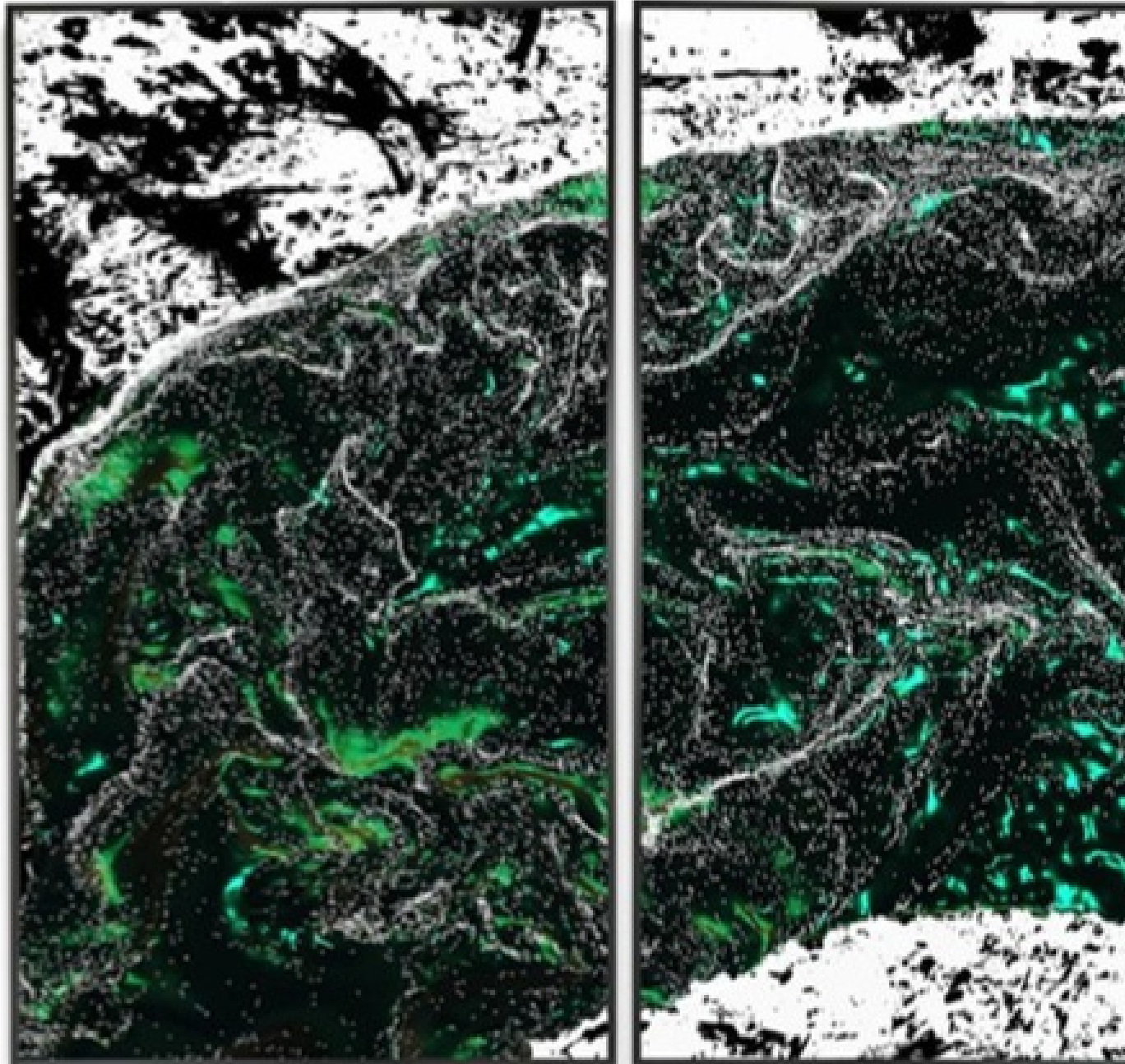


EYAL GEVER

Quadruple Rift I (after Serra)

2025 · High-resolution fluid simulation, triptych

Four rifts. Four axes of force — turbulence pooling at each edge of absence. The physics simulation builds what Serra's Cor-ten steel produces: an environment in which the body cannot find a neutral position. Every orientation is a pressure. The emotion is not depicted. It is constructed, field by field, in real time.



EYAL GEVER

Circular River I (after Serra)

2026 · High-resolution fluid simulation, triptych

Serra's Torqued Ellipses curve inward — the viewer spirals without arriving at a center. Circular River I translates this into fluid time: turbulence circling a vortex that never collapses. A force-field of perpetual arrival without resolution. The body knows this feeling before it names it: the gravity of a thing that will not let you go.

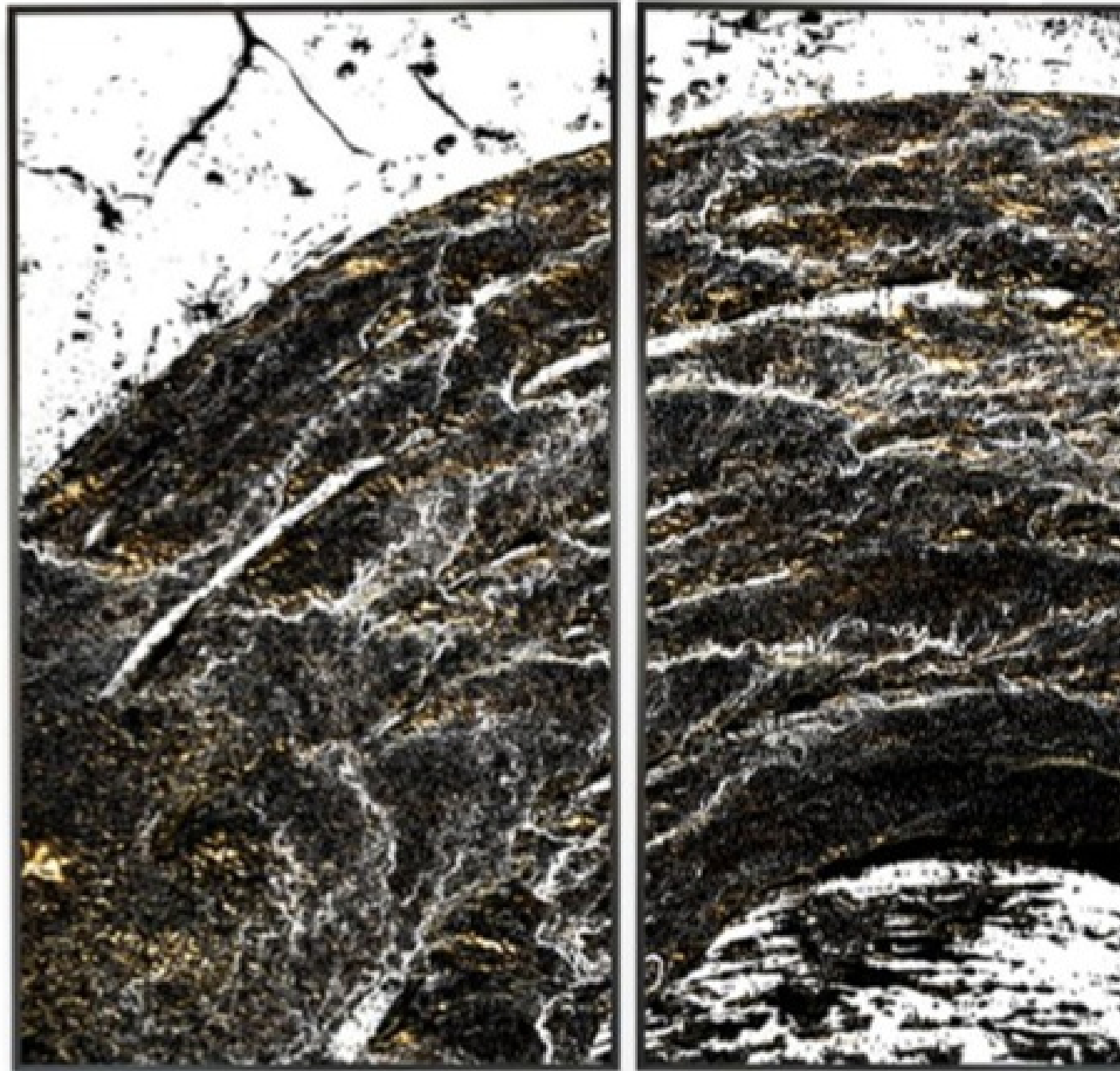


EYAL GEVER

Whirlpool I (after Serra)

2026 · High-resolution fluid simulation, Samsung Wall

The whirlpool is the purest force-geometry in FORCES: radial inward pull, turbulence at the rim, stillness at the eye. It is the physics of grief, of obsession, of fixation — a center that draws everything toward it without releasing it. The spiral is not metaphor. It is the actual structural shape of certain feelings in the body.



EYAL GEVER

Path and Edges I (after Serra)

2025 · High-resolution fluid simulation, triptych

Serra's Verb List includes: to curve, to surround, to enclose, to bound. Path and Edges I is the translation of these verbs into a fluid field — the edge of the arc holds more turbulence than its center, just as the peripheral gaze in Serra's sculptures holds more perceptual information than the frontal view. The body learns before the eye reports.

Three Negations: What FORCES Is Not

NOT ILLUSTRATION

The works do not depict emotional states or translate psychological categories into visual form. No faces, no gestures, no narratives of loss or triumph. The work does not point toward experience — it is experience.

NOT NARRATIVE

The works do not tell stories, do not unfold dramatic arcs, do not invite the viewer to identify with a character or follow a plot. There is no before and after — only the perpetual present of the force-field.

NOT PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMBOL

The works do not use colours, shapes, or movements as coded stand-ins for named emotions. FORCES operates at the level of force — below naming, before language, at the level of the body's pre-cognitive intensity.

The Physics Vocabulary of Feeling

PRESSURE

The felt weight of a situation before language names it

DENSITY

The thickness or thinness of emotional atmosphere

DRAG

Resistance — the friction of grief or difficult relation

TORSION

Twisting forces — ambivalence, irresolution, conflict

SUSPENSION

The condition of waiting — uncertainty held in the body

RELEASE

The sudden dissolution of force — relief, catharsis, opening

Duration: The Mechanism, Not the Atmosphere

Bodily knowing is slower than conceptual recognition. The mind names quickly — it sees a dark, heavy, downward-pulling field and immediately generates the word "grief" or "weight." But the body knows differently. The body knows through duration, through sustained exposure, through the gradual accumulation of sensory information that reorganises the nervous system's baseline state.

FORCES asks the viewer to stay. It asks for patience. It asks for silence. Duration is not atmosphere — not a mood-setting device or an aesthetic luxury. It is the mechanism through which the work accomplishes its fundamental aim: the migration of emotional knowledge from concept to body, from naming to feeling, from thinking about to being with.

The viewer who stays for thirty seconds receives a different work than the viewer who stays for ten minutes.

The Viewer Completes the Work

The content is you.

Serra's axiom — extended into FORCES

The meaning of the work is not encoded in the image. It emerges through embodied attunement over time — through the specific, unrepeatable, physiologically singular encounter between this body, in this state, at this moment, and the force-field the work constructs.

Two viewers in the same room will have different experiences — not because the work is vague or ambiguous, but because its meaning is constituted in the meeting between its forces and the viewer's embodied state. This is not relativism. It is phenomenological rigour.

FORCES: The Phenomenological Claim

FORCES proposes that emotion is not primarily image or narrative, but a lived field of forces that becomes real through embodied perception over time.

FORCES curatorial framework — catalogue statement

The technology is not the point. The point is the body, the duration, and the encounter.

03



Phenomenological Grounding

Merleau-Ponty · Dewey / Shusterman · Massumi / Berlant · Warburg

Merleau-Ponty: The Embodied Subject

The foundational philosopher for the FORCES project is Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) is the most rigorous account of embodied consciousness in the Western tradition.

The body is not a passive receiver of stimuli. It is the primary organ of world-formation. The body's fundamental relation to space is not geometric but existential. Merleau-Ponty calls this the body's "I can" — its motor intentionality, its capacity to orient within a meaningful environment without reflective thought.

Serra's sculptures operationalise this insight with extraordinary precision.

“The life of consciousness is subtended by an 'intentional arc' which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation.”

Merleau-Ponty,
Phenomenology of Perception

Affect Theory: Force Before the Name

BRIAN MASSUMI

Affect is pre-cognitive intensity — a charge that moves through the body and alters its nervous system state before naming occurs. "Intensity owned and recognised" only after the fact.

LAUREN BERLANT

Affect structures attachment to objects, situations, and worlds. Cruel optimism, impasse, and the slow duration of emotional life as aesthetic phenomena.

SIANNE NGAI

Explores minor, ugly feelings — aesthetic states that resist narrative resolution. Tone, atmosphere, and duration as primary aesthetic categories.

IN FORCES

The exhibition constructs affective conditions — fields of pressure, density, downward pull — that address the body at the level of intensity, before naming occurs.

Arts of Resonance: A New Category

Mimetic arts — drama, cinema, figurative painting — the viewer empathises into an alterity, entering imaginatively into the experience of a depicted character or situation.

Arts of immanence — music, abstract painting, architecture — the viewer learns through immersive play with qualities (rhythm, colour, volume, texture) rather than representations.

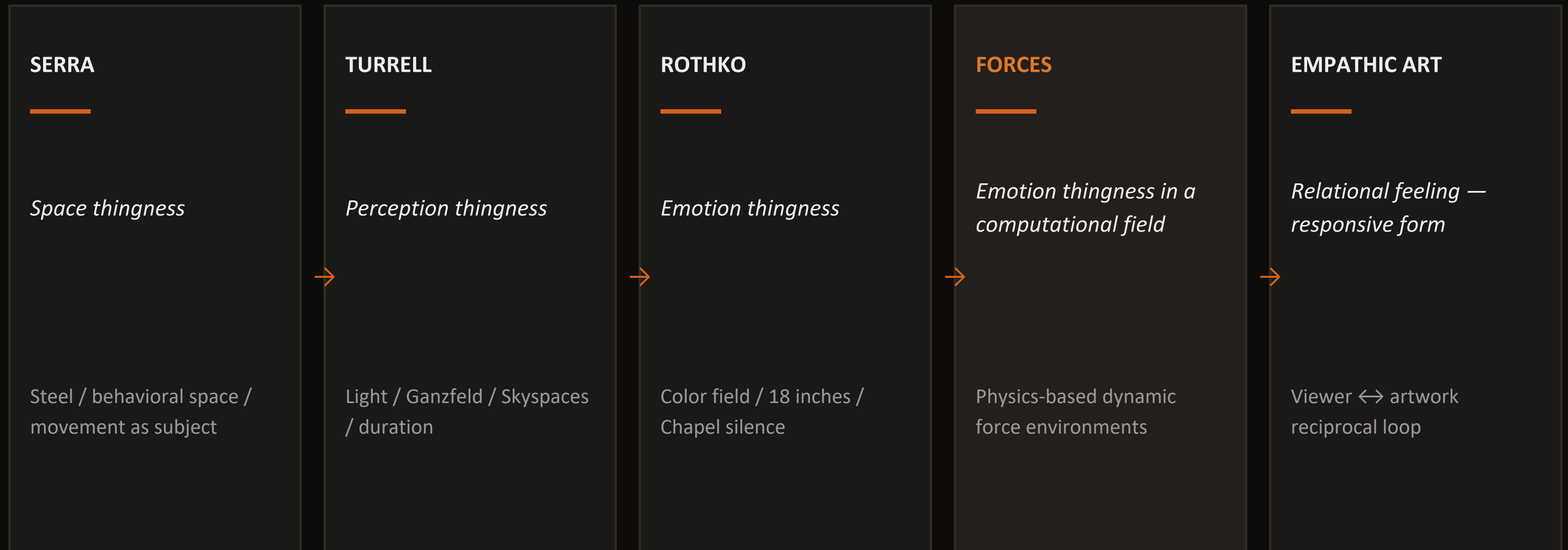
Arts of resonance — FORCES — the work resonates with the viewer's nervous system, producing sympathetic vibrations in the body's own affective register. No depiction. No symbol. No projected alterity. Only the direct, physical, irreducibly personal encounter between force-field and body. The encounter is not transmitted. It is co-produced.

04

The Arc: Serra → FORCES → Empathic Art

Progressive intensification — making the abstract palpable

The Progressive Lineage



Three Phenomenological Claims

SERRA

Space is not a neutral container. It is not the backdrop against which things happen. Meaning emerges through embodied orientation and navigation. The body and space co-constitute one another.

FORCES

Emotion is not primarily image or narrative. It is a lived field of forces — pressure, density, drag, turbulence, suspension, friction, release — that becomes real through embodied perception over time.

EMPATHIC ART

Aesthetic experience is reciprocal. Not a one-directional flow from artwork to viewer but a continuous, mutually constitutive process. The viewer is not the audience. The viewer is the work's other half.

Empathic Art: The Reciprocal Loop

The step from FORCES to Empathic Art is the step from encounter to relation. In FORCES, the viewer enters a constructed field of affective force. The work is a situation; the viewer is a participant. The work does not change in response to the viewer.

Empathic Art removes this final asymmetry. The viewer's embodied state — physiological signals, movement, breathing, proximity, duration of attention — participates in shaping the work itself. The feedback loop is real and continuous.

This is not interactivity in the conventional sense. It is resonance: the dynamic, reciprocal attunement of two living systems — one biological, one computational — each shaping and being shaped by the other.

*“Artwork ↔ Viewer.
The work senses.
The work responds.
Experience is co-created.”*

TDG Gallery — Empathic Art

05

Curatorial Statement

TDG Gallery — The Disruptive Gallery · 2026

From the Curator / Exhibition Director

These three artists matter now because the world is saturated with depiction and starved of encounter. We are surrounded by images of emotion — curated, filtered, narrativised, hashtagged — and almost entirely deprived of the conditions in which emotion can be met as a bodily fact.

The screen delivers sensation at speed. But sensation at speed is not feeling. Feeling requires duration. Feeling requires the body. Feeling requires silence.

FORCES: The Physics of Feeling is my attempt to honour the lineage of Serra, Turrell, and Rothko and to extend it.

FORCES gives feeling thingness. It makes emotion present as pressure, density, atmosphere, and duration rather than as image alone.

“

The forces are already in you.

The work asks only that you stay long enough to meet them.

—

Duration is the medium. Silence is what protects the migration from spectacle to embodiment.



APPENDIX

Verified Quote Sheet · Comparison Table

Verified Quote Sheet

SERRA

"The content is you!"

Source: The Guardian

SERRA

"I consider space to be a material. It's just as important as the steel."

Source: MoMA press release

TURRELL

"Perception is the object... You are looking at you looking."

Source: Exploratorium

TURRELL

"I want you to sense yourself sensing. To see yourself seeing."

Source: Smithsonian Magazine, 2003

ROTHKO

"I'm not an abstractionist... I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions: tragedy, ecstasy, doom."

Source: Widely attributed

ROTHKO

"Silence is so accurate."

Source: Attributed to Mark Rothko



Five Positions: A Systematic Comparison

	SERRA	TURRELL	ROTHKO	FORCES	EMPATHIC ART
Primary Subject	Space	Perception	Emotion	Emotion as force-field	Relational feeling
What Becomes Tangible	Volume, spatial pressure	The act of seeing	Tragedy, ecstasy, doom	Pressure, density, drag	The viewer ↔ work relation
Core Proposition	Space is a material	Perception is the object	Art is a meeting place	Emotion is a lived field	Experience is reciprocal
Role of the Body	Navigator / content	Perceiver of its own seeing	Receiver at 18 inches	Attunement instrument	Co-author / co-creator
Role of Time	Walking-time	Adaptation: 10–15 min	Contemplation at 18"	Duration as mechanism	Continuous feedback loop