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Friends of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden enable the purchase of a work by Olafur Eliasson for the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon

The Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson (born in 1967 in Copenhagen) has created a new work for the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon (Royal Cabinet of Mathematical and Physical Instruments) of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden (Dresden State Art Collections, SKD). Starting October 16, 2026, the work, titled “Euphorisches Licht für den Mathematisch-Physikalischen Salon” (“Euphoric Light for the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon”), will be on permanent display at the world’s oldest museum of historical clocks and scientific instruments. It is a light installation in the form of a circular, luminous rainbow.

The acquisition was made possible by the 45 donors within the 2,600-member organization MUSEIS SAXONICIS USUI – Freunde der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden e.V. Thanks to their support, contemporary art acquisitions can be made annually for the SKD’s 15 museums.

Following acquisitions of works by, among others, Wolfgang Tillmans and Hito Steyerl for the Albertinum (2018 and 2022), Edmund de Waal for the Porzellansammlung (Porcelain Collection, 2019), Olaf Nicolai for the Grünes Gewölbe (Green Vault, 2022), an Elon Musk marionette for the Puppentheatersammlung (Puppet Theater Collection, 2024), and most recently the “Foot Power” procession as part of the exhibition festival “William Kentridge: Listen to the Echo” (2025), the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon will receive a work this year.

For the museum, Olafur Eliasson has created a two-meter-wide circle of light that radiates hues ranging from violet and deep blue to vivid red. In the darkest gallery of the museum, the Globe Room, the work is now on display. This circular rainbow is formed when light from a full-spectrum LED strikes a prismatic glass ring. The ring refracts the light into the individual wavelengths of the color spectrum.

The installation thus alludes to a phenomenon that can only be partially perceived in nature: physically speaking, rainbows are always complete circles. They appear as arcs, however, because the horizon limits our view of them. Eliasson's work also stands in direct relation to the historical celestial globes in the room. These depict the entire starry sky as a sphere, rather than just the section we can see from our vantage point. Like the artwork, the globes make visible what lies beneath the horizon.

In his work, Olafur Eliasson focuses primarily on physical phenomena in nature, such as light, water, movement, and reflection. In many pieces from his extensive body of work, he explores the question of how light itself can be made perceptible. To this end, he makes use of optical devices such as lenses, mirrors, and prisms. He became famous, for example, for "The weather project" (2003)—an artificial sun in the center of the Turbine Hall at the Tate Modern in London.

Olafur Eliasson: "There could be no better home for 'Euphorisches Licht für den Mathematisch-Physikalischen Salon' than among the myriad worlds on view in the museum's Globe Room. I am impressed by how the museum is dedicated not to the story of technological innovation, but is rather guided by an almost artistic attention to craftsmanship, to the marvelous and the curious, and to phenomena that cannot simply be described quantitatively – in a word, the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon encapsulates a certain euphoria. It is a great pleasure for me to be contributing a new work of art to the permanent collection of this truly unique place."

Bernd Ebert, Director General of the SKD and Director (ad interim) of the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon: "I am delighted that, thanks to the support of the MSU, we have succeeded in bringing the internationally renowned artist Olafur Eliasson to Dresden. His work has a truly captivating effect and invites viewers to lose themselves in the colors of the rainbow. In doing so, Eliasson builds a bridge between the historical collection and contemporary art.. The historical instruments used to measure space and time, combined with Olafur Eliasson's artistic approach to making nature's optical phenomena visible and understandable, attest to the boundless urge to better understand the world around us and to grasp it in its entirety."

Petra von Crailsheim, Chairperson, MUSEIS SAXONICIS USUI – Freunde der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden e.V.: "We are deeply grateful that this work by Olafur Eliasson is coming to the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon. His 'Euphoric light' demonstrates what becomes possible when private commitment opens up new perspectives: together with our donors, we can permanently bring contemporary works to Dresden that engage in a dialogue with the SKD's historical collections. I hope that 'Euphoric light' will delight visitors, stimulate their curiosity, and spark conversations about art, science, and our perception of the world. Perhaps it will even inspire them to become patrons of the arts in Dresden."

Michael Korey, Senior Curator and Deputy Director of the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon:

“Today is truly a great day for the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon! Optical instruments play a central role here: Huge burning lenses and impressive reflecting telescopes have defined the collection since its founding in the Dresden Zwinger in 1728. Eliasson’s work enriches the collection also in this regard: Using only analog optical means it brings the ethereal phenomenon of the rainbow close to the viewer’s eye, capturing it in the museum with brilliant clarity.”

On **Saturday, October 17, 2026, at 2:30 pm and at 4 pm** a **Curator’s Talk** on the new work will take place (in German) with Senior Curator Michael Korey in the Mathematisch-Physikalischer Salon (free of charge with museum admission). As the number of participants is limited, registration at besucherservice@skd.museum is mandatory.

High-resolution press images may be downloaded free of charge at www.skd.museum/presse.

«Leeres_Feld»

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