

Central Garden

Robert Irwin
American, 1997
Mixed media (construction and plant materials), 134,000 sq. ft.
99.SI.38

Background Information

Visual artist Robert Irwin designed the garden at the Getty Center. In the Central Garden, which Irwin has playfully termed "a sculpture in the form of a garden aspiring to be art," viewers can experience a maze-like

configuration of plants, stones, and water. Here visitors get completely immersed in the sensation of being within the work of art. The sense of smell, touch, and sound are juxtaposed with the colors and textures of the garden. All of the foliage and materials of the garden were selected to accentuate the interplay of light, color, and reflection. A statement by Irwin, "Always changing, never twice the same," is carved into the plaza floor, reminding visitors of the ever-changing nature of this living work of art. In this way, Irwin subverts the idea that a work of art should be painted on a canvas. Rather, nature can be art.



About the Artist

Robert Irwin (born 1928)

Originally a painter, artist Robert Irwin was born September 12, 1928, in Long Beach, California. Robert Irwin's ideas of art reflected his interest in developing an opportunity for cultural innovation and a way to communicate and interact with society. Since the 1970s, Irwin has focused on creating immersive experiences by focusing on the site itself. He left his studio work and focused on [installation art](#), artworks in

which the artist transforms space, creating a new environment that is intended to directly involve the viewer. Robert Irwin's installation pieces deal with light and space in both outdoor and interior spaces. Irwin moved on to landscape projects where he creates an experience based on the physicality of the space, transferring what he learned about line, color, and light from his paintings onto that of the built environment—thus guiding the visitor through an experience of sights, sounds, and scents. He currently lives and works in San Diego, California.

Central Garden, Robert Irwin

Questions for Teaching

Take the time to look closely at the images of the garden. What do you notice about the garden?

Have you ever planted flowers, plants, seeds, or even an entire garden? Think about the location of the garden. What were the buildings around the garden? Did the garden enhance or fit into the surrounding architectural buildings? Why or why not?

Robert Irwin, the artist who designed the garden, thought about how the garden fits into the city of Los Angeles and how it relates to the buildings that surround it. Look at the types of **lines** in surrounding buildings. Where do you see similar lines in the garden?

Irwin considered the *Central Garden* a living work of art—a sculpture that you can walk through and experience differently with each visit. Irwin carefully selected plants and flowers native to California, and stones and other things that would add just the right colors and **textures** so he could fill the garden with geometric **shapes** and **patterns**. What **shapes** and **colors** do you see? Do you notice any **patterns**? Where?

Take a virtual walk through Irwin's garden for a closer look. As you stroll down the zigzag path, explore! Check out your surroundings by looking up, down, to your left and right. *If* you could touch what you see, how would it feel? This is called **texture**. What kinds of **textures** do you notice?

At the bottom of the garden, Irwin engraved the statement, "Always changing, never twice the same." The garden changes a lot during the seasons. Many of the trees are filling in with new leaves because it is spring in the image. What other parts of the garden do you imagine might change in different seasons? How would the changes in the garden affect its surrounding buildings? Discuss your ideas with a classmate.