

# MUSEUM OF ART

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

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## 'PAINTING AIR: SPENCER FINCH' OPENS AT THE MUSEUM OF ART RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

February 24 - July 29, 2012

PROVIDENCE, RI — The Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design announces *Painting Air: Spencer Finch*, a major exhibition by Brooklyn-based artist Spencer Finch. In this two-part show, the Museum debuts a large-scale installation by Finch, shown with more than 60 pieces—from ancient objects to late-20th-century art—selected by the artist from the Museum's collection. *Painting Air* opens Friday, February 24 and runs through July 29, 2012. The public is invited to a special **opening party** at the Museum on Wednesday, February 22, at 5:30 pm; the event is free, all are welcome.

"The Museum's invitation to Finch to create an exhibition highlighting works in our collection has its roots in Andy Warhol's *Raid the Icebox 1*, the seminal project mounted at the RISD Museum of Art in 1970. It's exciting to see how Finch's approach to the Museum's collection contrasts with Warhol's," says Museum Director John W. Smith.

The work of Impressionist painter Claude Monet (French, 1840-1926) serves as the aesthetic touchstone for both parts of the exhibition, and even informed its title. *Painting Air* comes from a statement Monet made in 1895: "I want to paint the air... and that is nothing short of impossible." Finch's new installation, *Painting Air* (2012), created for the exhibition, seeks to capture the movement and reflection the artist observed in a recent visit to Monet's water garden in Giverny. For both Finch (RISD MFA '89) and Monet, the pond at Giverny served as a laboratory in which they merge the experience of nature with the art-making process. Finch evokes his experience by suspending 100 transparent and highly reflective glass panels in the middle of an expansive, 150-linear-foot mural comprised of 34 colors. Light and color shift across the surfaces of the gently swaying panels, reflecting the painting and the movements of visitors, and transforming viewers' perspectives from one moment to the next.

"As abstract and ephemeral as some of Finch's projects appear to be, they are based in fact and scientific phenomena. He acutely observes natural occurrences, which he then filters through memory as well as literary, artistic, and scientific accounts. The results are often poetic, as he tries to make visible what cannot easily be seen," says Judith Tannenbaum, Richard Brown Baker Curator of Contemporary Art.

Another installation, *Sky (Over Franz Joseph Glacier, April 8, 2008, 10:40 am)* (2008), recalls Finch's visit to Franz Joseph Glacier in New Zealand. Using an industrial-sized ice machine and a pool, he not only embodies the



Spencer Finch, Study for *Painting Air*, 2011.

physical and cyclical activities of this natural phenomenon, but also produces a pure monochrome painting that precisely matches the intense blue color of the sky he observed above the vast glacier. In *Bee Purple* (2008/2012), Finch attempts to make visible to us a color that honeybees can see, but which is undetectable to the human eye. He further explores the relationships between art, science, and nature in, among other works, *8456 Shades of Blue (After Hume)* (2008), a set of 28 drawings inspired by Scottish empiricist and philosopher David Hume; *Walden Pond (Morning Effect, March 13, 2007)* (2007), a representative map of the colors and footprint of Walden Pond created from a collage of Monet scenes; and *Taxonomy of Clouds* (2006), 17 photographs that capture the unique beauty and shape of clouds, as reflected in puddles on the ground.



Claude Monet, *The Basin at Argenteuil*, 1874.  
Anonymous gift.

In another section, works from the collection that Finch chose for this exhibition start with a painting he encountered at the Museum in the late 1980s: Monet's *The Basin at Argenteuil* (1874), which Finch copied during his time as a graduate student. Finch's study of Monet's luminous composition proved to be a turning point that set him on the trajectory he has followed to this day, and the Museum is delighted to present this extraordinary work as part of *Painting Air*.

Using the permanent collection, Finch identifies relationships between art works as varied as Egon Schiele's intensely expressive watercolors and John Singer Sargent's fluid watercolors. He groups darkly-hued landscape paintings attributed to Romantic painters Ralph Blakelock and Albert Pinkham Ryder with a Bruce Nauman video, Japanese woodblock prints, and Seurat drawings to illustrate "tonalism," which is the representation of darkness—the inverse of Impressionism. And he celebrates the beginning of his own visual awareness in the early 1970s, using works that were created or acquired by the Museum in 1972, including works by Warhol, Joan Mitchell, Anni Albers, Harry Callahan, Richard Estes, Robert Ryman, and Salvador Dali. Other works—ranging from a Chinese Han Dynasty earthenware jar (ca. 206 BC-AD 220) to late 20th-century Op Art—are arranged in thematic groupings, revealing links or contrasts between artists, unexpected visual connections among disparate works, and his own personal sensibility. Finch's fresh take on the Museum's collections—his process made visible by the unique pairings and themes of objects he selected—invites visitors to make their own creative connections and discoveries with art.

## ABOUT SPENCER FINCH

Spencer Finch was born in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1962. He lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. In addition to *Painting Air: Spencer Finch* at the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design, the artist has a number of exhibitions on view around the world, including *Lunar* at the Art Institute of Chicago, October 2011-April 2012; *Rome* at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, September 2011-January 2012; and *More Light* at the Museum de Fundatie, Zwolle, The Netherlands, October 2011-January 2012.

## ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF ART RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Southeastern New England's only comprehensive art museum, the Museum of Art Rhode Island School of Design—also known as the RISD Museum of Art—was established in 1877. Its permanent collection of more than 86,000 objects includes paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, costume, furniture, and other works of art from every part of the world—including objects from ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome, and art of all periods from Asia, Europe, and the Americas, up to the latest in contemporary art. The RISD Museum also offers a wide array of educational and public programs to more than 100,000 visitors annually.

The RISD Museum of Art, with entrances at 224 Benefit Street and 20 North Main Street in Providence, RI, is open Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 am-5 pm, and 10 am-9 pm every Thursday. Free admission 5-9 pm on third Thursdays and all day the last Saturday of each month; pay-what-you-wish every Sunday, 10 am-1 pm. Closed January 1, July 4, Thanksgiving Day, and December 25. Admission is \$10 adults; \$7 seniors (age 62+); \$3 college students with valid ID and youths (ages 5-18); and free for Museum members, RISD and Brown University students and staff, and children under 5. For more information, call 401 454-6500 or visit [rismuseum.org](http://rismuseum.org).

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