

GRAVITY ALWAYS WINS
SPENCER FINCH

Spencer Finch was born in New Haven, Connecticut in 1962. He received a BA in comparative literature at Hamilton College in 1985 and an MFA in sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1989.

His first retrospective *What Time is it on the Sun?* was exhibited at MASS MoCA in 2007. He has also exhibited at the Pulitzer Foundation, St Louis; ArtPace, San Antonio; Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, Germany; and the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford.

His work has been presented in many significant group exhibitions including the Barbican Centre Art Gallery in London; the Jewish Museum, New York; Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

His work is held in collections of the High Museum of Art, Atlanta; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main; and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

The artist lives and works in Brooklyn and is represented by Yvon Lambert, Paris; Lisson Gallery, London; Postmasters, New York; Nordenhake Gallery, Berlin and Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago.

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25 October 2008 – 4 January 2009

Dundee Contemporary Arts is pleased to present a major new exhibition by American artist Spencer Finch, whose work has been exhibited in galleries and museums throughout the world. Utilising a range of media and investigative processes, Finch distills his experiences through drawing, paint, coloured filters, light fittings and installations. Spencer Finch's work investigates the nature of light, colour, memory and perception.

Gravity Always Wins consists of both new and existing work that transforms the gallery spaces at DCA. The exhibition merges scientific method and poetic sensibility. Finch has continued to develop work that explores the tension between the objective investigations of science and the subjectivity of perception and lived experience.

A starting point for the exhibition began through conversation around the Scottish Enlightenment. Finch was particularly drawn to the writing of philosopher, historian and economist David Hume. Hume considered the scientific method of the English physicist Sir Isaac Newton and work around the nature of knowledge developed by the English philosopher John Locke. Furthering these ideas Hume attempted to describe how the mind works in acquiring knowledge.

Gravity Always Wins is largely investigative. Two new works: SKY (OVER FRANZ JOSEF GLACIER, APRIL 8, 2008, 10:40 AM), 2008 and 8456 SHADES OF BLUE (AFTER HUME), 2008 are genuine but inherently futile attempts to re-create and investigate natural sciences and perception. In the first instance a machine re-creates the colour of the sky over a glacier while in the second, a large drawing by Finch considers the many variations of blue that are capable of being perceived in a work that references Hume's philosophy of sensory experience.

EXHIBITION NOTES

GALLERY 1

SUNLIGHT IN AN EMPTY ROOM (PASSING CLOUD FOR EMILY DICKINSON, AMHERST, MA, AUGUST 28, 2004), 2004

Fluorescent lights, filters, clothes pegs

Dimensions variable/reconfigured for DCA

Courtesy of MMK, Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt Am Main, Germany

On a summer afternoon in 2004 Finch recorded the light in the yard of Emily Dickinson's home in Amherst, Massachusetts. Finch took multiple readings of clouds as they passed overhead and created shade. The New England sunlight is replicated with two rows of fifty fluorescent tubes, each row including a precise mix of three distinct colour temperatures. To create the optical effect of a cloud, Finch made a twelve-foot-high by fifteen foot long mass of translucent blue, grey and violet filters held together with clothes pegs, which are hung in front of the bank of lights.

GALLERY 2

NIGHT SKY (OVER THE PAINTED DESERT, ARIZONA, JANUARY 11, 2004), 2004

85 light fixtures and 401 incandescent lamps

Dimensions variable/reconfigured for DCA

Courtesy of the artist

Working outside in a motel parking lot with a flashlight in Arizona's Painted Desert, Finch mixed a variety of paints to match the colour of the night sky. After weighing the physical mass of each pigment in the mixture (Mars black, cobalt blue, manganese violet, and titanium white), the artist calculated the molecular ratio of each colour in the combination. With 401 incandescent bulbs of varied sizes, each bulb representing a particular atom, the artist created electrified models of each pigment's molecular structure. The proportions of the different types of molecules in the sculpture exactly correspond to those of the original colour mix.

SKY (OVER FRANZ JOSEF GLACIER, APRIL 8, 2008, 10:40 AM), 2008

Ink, water and mixed media, dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist

This work uses the form of a glacial ecosystem to create a monochrome pool that is the precise colour of the sky over a glacier in New Zealand, as recorded by the artist in April 2008.

8456 SHADES OF BLUE (AFTER HUME), 2008

Watercolour on paper

399 x 590 cm

Courtesy of the artist

This drawing is inspired by a passage in the book 'An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding' written by the Scottish empiricist and philosopher David Hume in 1748.

"Suppose a person to have enjoyed his sight for thirty years, and to have become perfectly acquainted with colours of all kinds, except one particular shade of blue, for instance, which it never has been his fortune to meet with. Let all the different shades of that colour, except that single one, be placed before him, descending gradually from the deepest to the lightest; it is plain, that he will perceive a blank, where that shade is wanting, and will be sensible, that there is a greater distance in that place between the contiguous colours than in any other."

TWO EXAMPLES OF MOLECULAR ORBITAL THEORY (PRUSSIAN BLUE), 2005

Fluorescent lights, filters, acrylic paint

Dimensions variable/reconfigured for DCA

Courtesy of the artist

This two room installation investigates perception. Although each of the rooms appear to be the same blue hue, the colour is achieved via different methods. The room to the left is created by a combination of white paint and fluorescent lamps masked with blue filters. The walls of the room to the right are painted with white paint mixed with Prussian blue pigment and lit with unfiltered light.

EDITED CONVERSATION

Between Spencer Finch and Judith Winter, October 2008

Where did the title *Gravity Always Wins* come from?

From a Radiohead song. Of course in that context it is about plastic surgery, while my interest in gravity is a bit more general and theoretical.

In the first gallery you have installed the work **SUNLIGHT IN AN EMPTY ROOM** that replicates the experience of light in the garden of the poet Emily Dickinson. Can you say more about the method of calculating the light?

I use a colorimeter and light meter to measure the color and intensity of the light, and then re-create those light conditions in the gallery using the original readings. The colorimeter gives a numerical CIE reading of two coordinates, which can then be matched by altering the color of the filters.

What is a C.I.E reading?

C.I.E stands for Commission Internationale de l'Eclairage, which is the international authority on light. They created a standardized system for quantifying the color of light in 1931. Using this system I am able to give XYZ coordinates to specific light conditions, and thereby re-create them.

The work has been installed in a number of locations. How does the work change in different contexts? Do you envisage that the audience will have a very different experience of the cloud in Dundee?

Well the physical effect should be the same wherever the work is installed, because I am using scientific instruments.

What prompted you to make a machine that re-created the sky over a glacier? Can you say more about the experience that instigated the work?

While I was hiking on the glacier I became really fascinated by the idea of

the closed system of evaporation, precipitation and melting in that environment. Also the sky over the glacier was really really beautiful and I decided I wanted to make a picture of it. I matched the color of the sky by mixing different inks and water in a white bucket, and these proportions are used to create the blue of the pool. The ice machine, the pump, the plumbing and the rest of the contraption are necessary for providing the representational context for the blue monochrome, which is actually a landscape painting.

The work on paper seems to be another form of exploration - philosophical and scientific. Can you say more about the method of creating the drawing?

Each of the 28 panels of the drawing shows a different shade of blue, diluted one drop at a time with about 300 drops. Each time one drop of water is added to the paint I release a drop on the drawing so the tone becomes gradually lighter.

The 28 panels are formed by using seven different blues individually, and then each in combination with the other six blues, as shown here:

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
AB	BC	CD	DE	EF	FG	
AC	BD	CE	DF	EG		
AD	BE	CF	DG			
AE	BF	CG				
AF	BG					
AG						

A = Indathrene Blue
B = Cobalt Blue Deep
C = Prussian Blue
D = Winsor Blue (Green)
E = Indigo
F = Manganese Blue
G = Cobalt Turquoise

FURTHER READING

Susan Cross, *What Time is it on the Sun?* Spencer Finch, MASS MoCA, ISBN 0-9764276-5-6

Mark Godfrey, *Measures and Pleasures*, Parkett No. 79, ISBN: 9783907582398

Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*,
University of California Press, ISBN-10: 0520037278

JW Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, MIT Press, ISBN-10: 0262570211

Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, Harvard University Press, ISBN-10: 0674018249

Martin Kemp, *The Science of Art: Optical Themes in Western Art from Brunelleschi to Seurat*, Yale University Press, ISBN-10: 0300052413

Richard Hamblyn, *The Invention of Clouds*, Picador, ISBN 0 330 39194 1

PUBLICATION

What Time is it on the Sun? retrospective publication produced by MASS MoCA is available from DCA shop.

LIMITED EDITION

DCA will produce a limited edition work with the artist to accompany the exhibition *Gravity Always Wins*. For further details please contact the print studio annis.fitzhugh@dca.org.uk.

TALKS, EVENTS & ASSOCIATED CINEMA SCREENINGS

A number of talks and events have been organised to coincide with the exhibition.

DCA has developed a programme of cinema screenings that are selected in conjunction with the artist. Sometimes these are directly related to the exhibition, through related concerns or are films that have inspired the artist's formative practice.

Further details can be found on our website: www.dca.org.uk