

# POSTMASTERS

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NORTH ADAMS, MA

## Spencer Finch

MASS MOCA

What better subject for a summer exhibition in a museum located near the picturesque Berkshires than the art of Spencer Finch, which deals in the observation of weather and natural light? Here, Finch shows four installations produced this year, two of them being exhibited for the first time, and a new assemblage involving filtered fluorescent light, all of them—as is now customary for the artist—alluding to the environmental conditions of specific times and places. (A selection of earlier works—drawings, watercolors, lightbulb and neon assemblages—is also on show).

Facing Mass MOCA's courtyard entrance is *CIE 529/418 (candlelight)*, 2007, a wall inset with six stained-glass windows in different monochrome shades (the title refers to a degree of color and intensity). While dull-looking from outside, seen from inside the gallery, *CIE* turns sunlight into intense, radiant color. In another room is *A Few Days Are All We Have (Sky, January 1–June 17, 2007)*, 2007. This set of colored gels, titled after a poem by James Schuyler and covering seven windows, filters local sunlight to approximate that of Finch's whereabouts. The length of a darkened section of each individual filter or group of filters—marking the days from January 1 through June 17 of this year—indicates the time between dawn and dusk, while their brightness corresponds with that measured on site.

*West (Sunset in my motel room, Monument Valley, January 26, 2007, 5:36–6:06 pm)*, 2007, consists of nine television monitors showing stills from John Ford's epic western *The Searchers* (1956), which was filmed at Monument Valley. Viewing the monitors from behind, so that only the images' reflected glow is visible, we see a changing light that supposedly matches that which illuminated Finch's chamber on the date indicated. Facing them, we observe nine different selections of images. These change once a minute, taking us through an edited version of the whole film in half an hour, and as day and film come to an end, the screens fade, one by one, to black. *Two hours, Two minutes, Two seconds (Wind on Walden Pond, March 12, 2007)*, 2007, is a battery of forty-four large fans, mounted four high (here, as in the other installations on show, we may walk inside the work). Controlled by a computerized dimming system, these reproduce the direction and speed of the winds at the pond Henry David Thoreau made famous by his two-year, two-month, two-day visit.

Finch's recent installations are his most satisfying works to date because they actually *show*, rather than merely represent, the mutability and variety of naturally occurring conditions. That one is encouraged to view most of these works from various angles adds to their conceptual as well as visual complexity; Finch has both a genuine feel for natural rhythms and the technical ingenuity to re-create them. Employing mechanical and other artificial systems of the kind we

habitually denounce as obstructing our view of nature, he turns them instead to the clarification and emphasis of elemental beauty. It may be necessary to read the labels of these works to grasp Finch's approach, but they are otherwise entirely accessible. As seen by this uncommonly literal artist, nature retains its poetry.

—David Carrier



Spencer Finch,  
*CIE 529/418*  
*(Candlelight)*, 2007.  
sandblasted glass.  
dimensions variable.  
Installation view.