

Formal Analysis of *Rose Window at Saint Denis*

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Spencer Finch, *Rose Window at Saint-Denis (morning effect)*, 2022. LED fixtures, LED lamps, filters, diameter: 108 inches (274.3 cm). Photo: Matthew Herrmann.

Sometimes artists express their emotions and ideas by combining colors and light. Artists create a visual picture for the viewer and touch the deepest part of their soul. Spencer Finch uses this practice to share his perspective on the world through *Rose Window at Saint Denis (morning effect)* (2022). Having seen the rose window at Saint Denis in Paris, Finch wanted to replicate an essential part of the artwork, light, from the basilica in the Hill Art Foundation in New York City. Spencer Finch often uses this technique of “taking light” from one place, and “installing this light” in another place.¹ He does so throughout the entire *Lux and Lumen* exhibition at the Hill Art Foundation. What makes *Rose Window* special is that it has multiple meanings. By

¹Finch, Spencer. “A Celebration of Glass.” Interview by Mark Godfrey. Hill Art Foundation, September 9, 2022.

encouraging the viewer to interact with *Rose Window* physically, Spencer Finch conveys the duality of light and its reflection on the meaning of the work as a whole.

Rose Window is situated separately from the rest of the works in the exhibition. It is located in a gallery past *Painting Air* (2022). *Rose Window* is the only work in the space, providing a source of light for the entire room. Both sides of the room have floor to ceiling windows. In the day, the windows provide natural light, however at night *Rose Window* becomes the only light source.

Spencer Finch was born in 1962 in New Haven, Connecticut.² He received his degree in Comparative Literature from Hamilton College in 1985 and then pursued an M.F.A in sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design in 1989. He is currently 61 years old and continues to create works of art involving the interaction of space and the light in his Brooklyn studio.

To learn what message Spencer Finch attempts to convey through *Rose Window*, it is important to identify how elements of the artwork coexist cohesively. There are two ways to observe the artwork: by looking at it directly, or turning your back to it and looking at the illuminated wall. The viewer will have two completely different perceptions of the artwork depending on the way they look at it. This was Finch's intention.

When looking at the artwork directly, one may immediately focus on the contrast between the colorful artwork and the white wall. By observing the artwork closer, one notices that the ends of the tubes are white. Perhaps, Finch's intention was to create an illusion that the artwork is part of the wall, that it is embedded into it, similarly to the rose window at Saint Denis in Paris. These tubes are of different lengths: short, medium and long. The sections of the tubes are different colors: yellow, light blue, red, blue, pink, purple and cyan. Although it may seem

² Spencer Finch. Accessed February 4, 2023. <https://www.spencerfinch.com/>

that using a multitude of colors could create chaos, Finch arranges them in a pattern to create harmony. He carefully balances light and darker colors to emphasize the repeating pattern.

The details, patterns and colors of *Rose Window* are intentional. Despite the differences in color and size of the tubes, the piece is able to exist in harmony with its surroundings. Similarly, humans who are very different from each other are also able to exist in harmony. *Rose Window* can be seen as a window into human emotions. Colors such as blue and yellow are commonly known to represent sadness and happiness. However, people see colors such as purple and cyan differently, depending on their personal experiences. Despite different worldviews, humans are able to coexist as a whole. Every time you attempt to exclude a color from the installation, the installation becomes more plain. Similarly, when you attempt to exclude a certain group from society, valuable insight is lost and society becomes homogeneous.

When we turn around and face the wall on the opposite side of the installation, the experience of the work changes. The first thing the viewer may notice is their silhouette on the wall. A dark shadow contrasts with the white wall. Additionally, we are able to pick up different tints of the colors from *Rose Window* around the shadows. The colors are gentle and not as vibrant as when we look at the artwork directly. The light on the wall stretches across the room and illuminates the entire space.

Rose Window is the main source of light in the room. Similarly, human talents, humor and positivity are the only parts of human qualities that keep us positive and happy. The silhouette that we see on the wall is our emotional state. The closer we step to the window, the bigger the shadow becomes, to the point where we are not able to see our silhouette. This symbolizes that whenever humans are too submerged in their emotions, they are not able to see their full identity, as they are not able to see the whole picture.

In both ways that we see *Rose Window at Saint Denis*, color, light, and personal interaction are central to understanding the artwork. While looking at the work directly we see the whole array of emotions experienced by all humans, however while turning away from the work and looking at the wall, we are able to see the emotions we experience ourselves. Being able to shift between the two “worlds” is crucial to navigate the world of different human emotions.

Citations

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