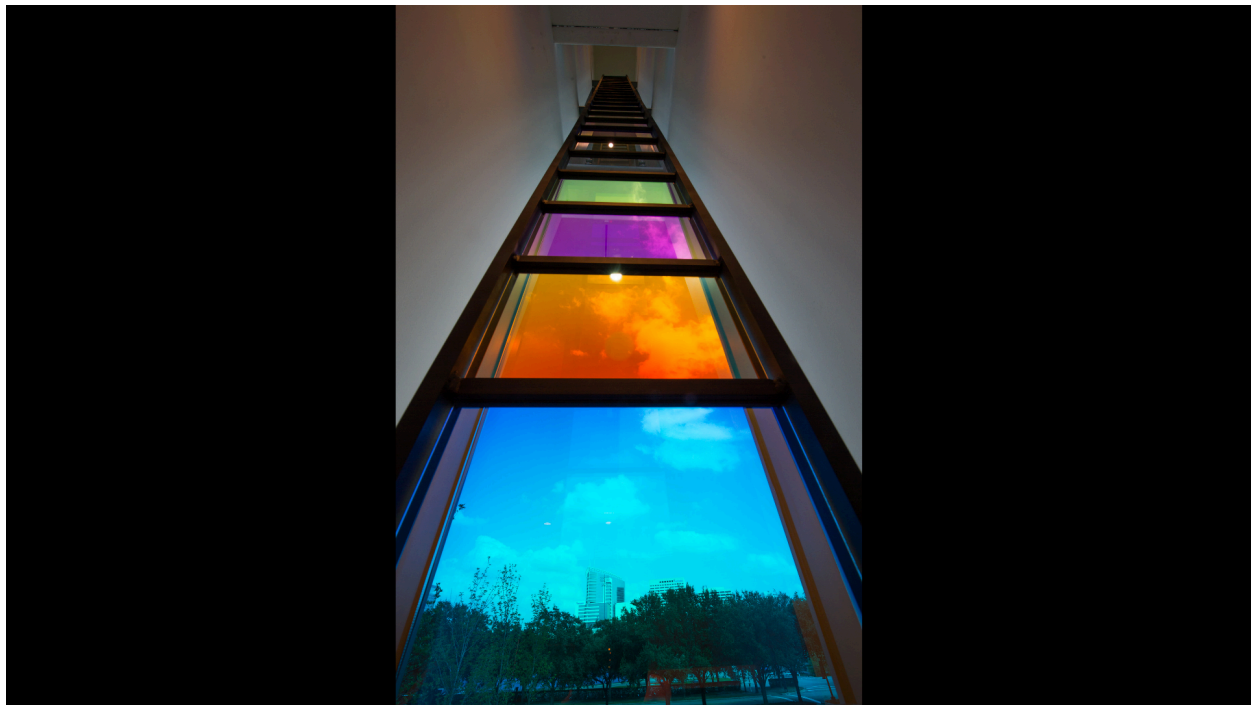


‘Black Ladder’ illuminates Glasscock School’s Anderson–Clarke Center with colorful light

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A new permanent art installation at the Anderson–Clarke Center, home of Rice’s Susanne M. Glasscock School of Continuing Studies, highlights the multiple ways in which light challenges the perception of color, form and structure.

“Black Ladder,” a 30-foot-tall sculpture created by French–American artist Stephen Dean, was installed this month in the center’s main stairwell window, which is set into the front façade on the east side of the building. Dean’s sculpture employs varied panels of dichroic glass framed within the form of a ladder and fills the width and height of the window. It was made possible by a gift from Rice alumnus and former Rice administrator Russell Pitman ’58.



Reminiscent of a cathedral’s stained glass window, the sculpture filters natural light through its glass during the day and projects an array of color onto the floors and wall. Each glass panel is composed of multiple colors and has both reflective and translucent qualities. After dark, the sculpture is lit and visible to those within the building and passers–by outside. The installation complements the Glasscock School’s other prominent art installation, “In Play,” which sits on the center’s front lawn and was created by Houston–based international artist Joseph Havel, director of the Glassell School of Art.

Born in Paris, Dean works in multiple media, including film, sculpture and drawing. Working across these media, he often uses color as a mechanism to alter spatial relationships. “Black Ladder” is Dean’s largest and only public ladder–based installation. He visited Houston in early August to oversee the ladder’s installation.

“All aspects of my work engage color,” Dean said. “I’m also interested in new materials and color in different cultural contexts — how the significance of color is different in India, here, in Brazil and certain parts of Europe. It’s an ongoing investigation into color and how we relate to it.”

Dean said people relate to ladders in several different ways. “A ladder is one of the simplest structures. It’s like a linear drawing, a very essential shape and object. In a way, I think I may be more interested in that universality than a representation of reaching upward. Anybody can relate to a ladder in one way or another, regardless of their background.”

The ladder, a symbol of movement and possibilities, appears to reflect both its physical location in a stairwell and the mission of the Glasscock School to serve as a conduit for personal and professional development growth.

Glasscock School Dean Mary McIntire '75 noted the symbolic significance of the installation: “It is a fitting image for what continuing education means to the thousands of people who take our courses and who will visit the building every year,” she said. “Lifelong learning is a way of ascending, whether to meet career goals or to enhance personal growth. The ladder captures that aspiration so well.”

Rice Public Art Director Molly Hubbard said Dean’s work is a welcome and fitting addition to the university’s public art collection. “We have James Turrell’s ‘Twilight Epiphany’ Skyspace, we have Leo Villareal’s ‘Radiant Pathway’ at the BioScience Research Collaborative and now we have Stephen Dean’s installation, so we have this attention to light and perception that’s really exciting.”

Houston gallery owner Robert McClain helped Hubbard make the initial connection with Dean. McClain said Dean jumped at the opportunity to work on a Rice-based project. “He (Dean) was just saying that everybody in New York talks about the Rice University collection,” McClain said. “There’s such regard and respect for the kind of projects being done here.”

Dean’s work has been exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Miami Art Museum and the SITE Santa Fe Biennial. His works are in many public and private collections, including the Whitney Museum of American Art, the National Gallery of Art, the Guggenheim Museum and the Progressive Corporation.