



# THE RAINBOW: CERTAIN PRINCIPLES OF LIGHT AND SHAPES BETWEEN FORMS

Michael Jones McKean

Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts

Omaha, Nebraska / Summer 2012

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# PROJECT STATEMENT

The Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts is pleased to present Michael Jones McKean's *The Rainbow: Certain Principles of Light and Shapes Between Forms*. The project creates a simple, but phenomenal visual event — a rainbow in the sky. The public artwork will produce temporary rainbows above the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts in Omaha, Nebraska using the most elemental materials: sunlight and rainwater. Twice per day with clear sun, for 20 minutes each, a rainbow will appear above Bemis Center's downtown building.

This commissioned artwork and exhibition represents extensive cross-disciplinary collaboration. Irrigation and rainwater harvesting experts from Omaha-based Lindsay Corporation and Watertronics, structural and mechanical engineers, atmospheric scientists, plumbing and electrical experts and Bemis Center staff have joined artist Michael Jones McKean in creating a wholly integrated system for this site-specific, temporary work.

McKean is a former artist-in-residence of the Bemis Center and current professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. Since 2002, he has conducted ongoing experiments leading to the production of this work. McKean's work will amplify the placeless, celebratory, seductive and elusive qualities of the spectacular event of a rainbow.

The artwork will solely utilize captured rainwater and will be powered with renewable sources. Leading up to the exhibition, extensive modifications to the Bemis Center's five-story, repurposed industrial warehouse took place — creating a completely self-contained water harvesting and large-scale storage system. Throughout the project cycle, collected and recaptured stormwater will be filtered and stored in six above-ground, 10,500 gallon water tanks. Within the gallery, a custom designed 60-horsepower pump supplies pressurized water to nine nozzles mounted to the 20,000 square foot roof of the Bemis Center. At timed intervals, in the morning and early evening, a dense water-wall will be projected above the building in which a rainbow will emerge. Based on atmospheric conditions, vantage point, available sunlight and the changing angle of the sun in the sky, each rainbow will have a singular character and quality. Depending on the position of the sun, one could see the rainbow from a thousand feet away or seemingly touch it with your hand.

Whether a majestic arch in the sky that appears after a short spring shower or a small, homespun rainbow created with a garden hose on a sunny day, a rainbow operates as an egalitarian visual experience. It is by nature temporary, undetermined, and wonderful. *The Rainbow* exists somewhere between real and representation, actual and artifice.

McKean is deeply interested in the rainbow as a complex form — ephemeral and steeped in mythology — that possesses an out-of-time existence as pure optical phenomena. The image of a rainbow extends through time, surpassing our known and archived histories, and operates as a constant unchanged form. Although the symbol of a rainbow has been co-opted, politicized, branded and commodified, an actual prismatic rainbow still has an ability to jolt us from the everyday. It feels hopeful, yearning, optimistic, ghost-like and meaningful. Whether perceived immediately as an artwork or not, the experience holds the power to connect diverse publics through an intangible, shared encounter.

Extending McKean's interest in objects and time scales, within Bemis Center's exhibition space he has grouped artifacts and sculptures that suggest specific histories, poetics and values. Among these objects are a 110 pound 5,000-year-old Campo de Cielo meteorite, a shell recovered from the deep Pacific Ocean, a Bristlecone pine tree (the oldest living thing on the planet, containing DNA sequencing to outlast all living things) and an American quilt completed in 1880. These objects are paired with a simple glass prism and light source that together cast a small perpetual spectrum. Of these eclectic objects, McKean says, "In tandem with the rainbow, these objects create a single sculpture. The rainbow is a reminder of a constant universal — something forever, simultaneously contemporary and ancient, not fixed in time like the materiality of artifacts and objects, never succumbing to the persistence of time. In the face of our earthbound landscape of shapes and forms, of geologic, evolutionary, archeological times scales, the rainbow is a kind of perfection, our oldest image."



*The Rainbow: Certain Principles of Light and Shapes Between Forms* is McKean's largest project to date. McKean's work connects seemingly disparate cultural histories to specific form. He constructs spaces of uncanny scale — failed epics, specific objects that serve as synecdoche for expansive narratives, or condensed moments of universal phenomena. He is known for operatic, epic sculptural installations and delicate tableaux alike. In both, he builds dense narrative spaces composed of real and represented cultural talismans that stretch to encompass the fullness of meaning and human sentiment.

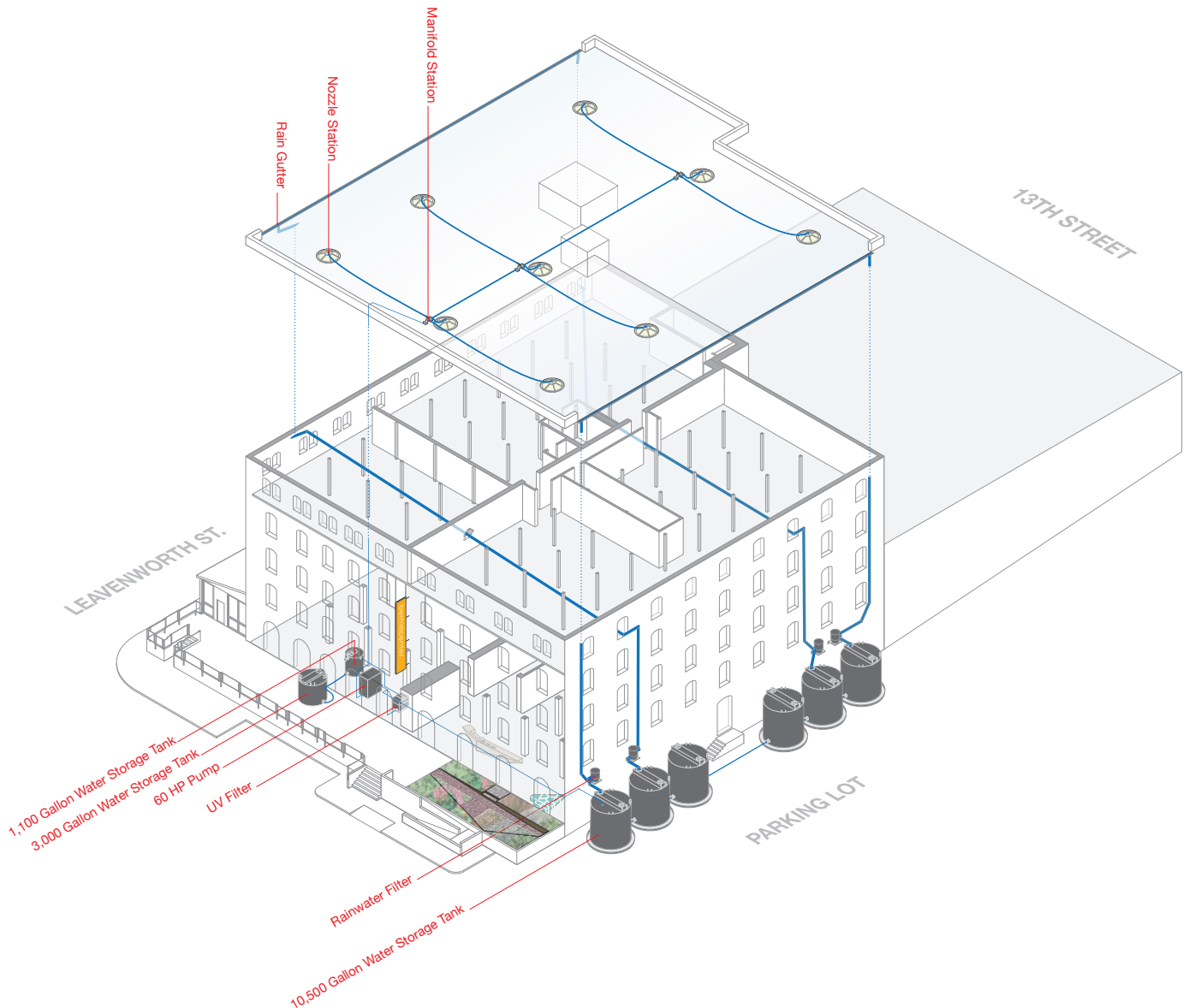
Through a specific, yet eclectic use of materials and techniques — spanning ancient meteorites and vintage boom boxes, to papier-mâché and auto body finishes — his work roams in the margins of theater, folklore, science, architecture, mysticism and sculpture-making itself. For McKean, the “gaps between these coordinates become poetically charged spaces, momentarily bonding disparate objects in crystalline unison. The results of this process form a psychic bridge allowing entrance to a world flickering across meaning, complexity, representation, and materiality.”

*The Rainbow* is a work of significant logistical complexity that realizes a silent, delicate and temporary visual experience. The work provides a direct and momentous experience of art, science, ecology and wonder.

A series of weekly tours and dialogues about the project will be free and open to the public. Additionally the concepts of the work will be explored in a series of focused panel discussions and events planned in conjunction with the project.

The Bemis Center will publish an exhibition and project catalogue, including essays that further illuminate these ideas. The exhibition catalogue, along with a project website, are designed by Project Projects. An iPhone and Android mobile app has been developed for the project by Mobile Roadie.

*The Rainbow: Certain Principles of Light and Shapes Between Forms* is curated by Hesse McGraw, Bemis Center chief curator.





## ABOUT THE ARTIST

Michael Jones McKean (Truk Island, Micronesia, 1976) is an internationally recognized American artist. He is the recipient of numerous awards, most recently a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Nancy Graves Foundation Award and an Artadia Award. McKean has been in residence at The Core Program at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; The International Studio and Curatorial Program, New York City; The Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center; the Bemis Center; The Archie Bray Foundation, Helena, Montana; and ThreeWalls, Chicago, Illinois.

McKean's work has been shown extensively nationally and internationally including recent exhibitions at Parisian Laundry, Montreal, Canada; the Quebec City Biennial, Quebec, Canada; Grand Arts, Kansas City, Missouri; DiverseWorks, Houston, Texas; Horton Gallery, New York, New York; Project Gentili, Prato, Italy; Gentili Apri, Berlin, Germany; Shenkar University, Tel Aviv, Israel; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; and Three Walls, Chicago, Illinois.

McKean's work is represented by Horton Gallery in New York City and Gentili Apri in Berlin, Germany. He is an Associate Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University where he has taught in the Sculpture and Extended Media Department since 2006.



3



4

## ABOUT THE BEMIS CENTER

The Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts was founded in 1981 by artists, for artists. Bemis Center's sole mission is to support artists of exceptional talent. In this spirit, the Bemis Center seeks to perpetually give the institution to artists working at the forefront of contemporary culture. Our international artist-in-residence program, exhibitions, projects and community arts programs provide direct support to artists' process and catalyze their work to engage and challenge the public.



5



6



## PROJECT HISTORY

Beginning in 2002, McKean began a series of rainbow experiments, initially using off the shelf equipment and gradually increasing scale to commercial irrigation equipment. Intensive research on the logistics of presenting the project at the Bemis Center began in 2008, leading to a 1/6-scale test in Richmond, Virginia in 2009 and a partial scale test at the Bemis Center in August of 2010. The project was tested at full scale in October 2011 in partnership with Lindsay Corporation. The project's public launch will commence in early June 2012, once the storage tanks have filled.

Engineering, rainwater harvesting and lead sponsorship of *The Rainbow* is provided by Omaha-based Lindsay Corporation, an irrigation and water management system provider and Lindsay's subsidiary, Watertronics, which manufactures SkyHarvester water harvesting systems. Additional major engineering and planning support has been provided by Rybin Plumbing & Heating, Professor Joseph A. Zehnder, Davis Erection and Crane Rental & Rigging, Education Power | Robert Webber, North Sea Films, Mobile Roadie, and Tyler Austin.



## PROJECT PARTNERS

Lindsay Corporation | *Engineering, rainwater harvesting*  
 Rybin Plumbing & Heating | *Plumbing*  
 Davis Erection and Crane Rental & Rigging | *Structural engineering, rigging, crane services*  
 Joseph A. Zehnder, professor and chair, Dept. of Atmospheric Sciences, Creighton University | *Atmospheric science*  
 Mobile Roadie | *Mobile app development*  
 North Sea Films | *Documentation*  
 Education Power | Robert Webber | *Electrical*  
 Tyler Austin | *3D Modeling*  
 Project Projects | *Website and publication design*



# THE RAINBOW LEAD SPONSOR

Lindsay Corporation

# THE RAINBOW SPONSORS

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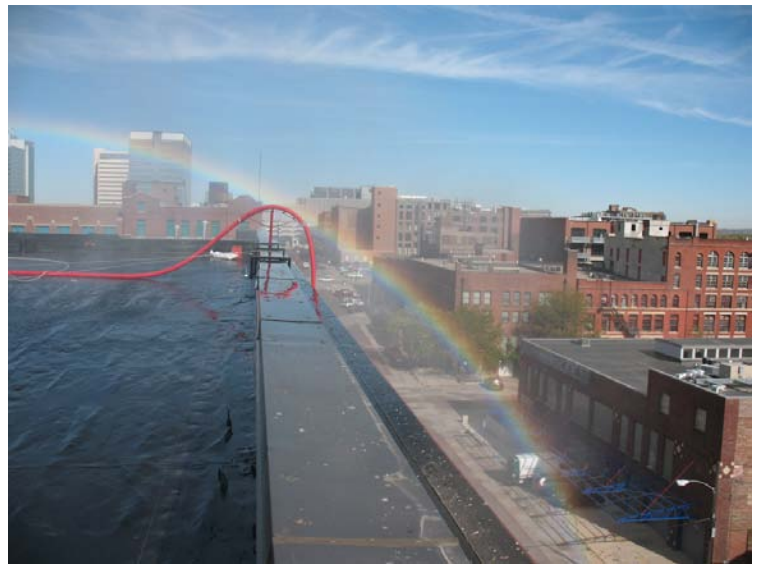
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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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10



11



12

- Cover 28 October 2011 test | Photo Hesse McGraw
- 1. 15 August 2010 test | Photo Chris Machian | minorwhite studios
- 2. Axonometric rendering 2012 | Tyler Austin
- 3. McKean conceptual sketch
- 4. 13 August 2009 McKean test | Photo Michael Jones McKean
- 5. 15 August 2010 test | Photo Michael Jones McKean
- 6. 28 October 2011 test | Photo Alex Priest
- 7. 15 August 2010 test | Photo Michael Jones McKean
- 8. 20 April 2012 install | Photo Alex Priest
- 9. 1 May 2012 install | Photo Larry Gawel
- 10. 28 October 2011 test | Photo Tom Korus | Lindsay Corporation
- 11. 15 August 2010 test | Photo Michael Jones McKean
- 12. 15 August 2010 test | Photo Chris Machian | minorwhite studios

All photos courtesy of the artist and Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

# SELECTED PRESS

Artist Makes Rainbow Machine | [Buzzfeed.com](#) | 5.18.11

Artist Builds Rainbow-Making Machine | [FoxNews.com](#) | 2.21.2011

Va. Professor to Debut Rainbow Machine | [Kathy Banks, NBCWashington.com](#) | 2.21.2011

Public Art Rainbows Have Nothing to Hide | [Rebecca Ansert, Greenpublicart.com](#) | 1.4.2011

The Man-Made Rainbow Machine | [Swiss Miss](#) | 12.30.2010

Solar Rainbow Machine | [Greenmuze.com](#) | 12.27.2010

Rainbow Created By Solar-Powered Machine, Developed By VCU Professor | [The Tech Journal](#) | 12.27.2010

Professor Invents a Solar-Powered Rainbow Machine | [Stephen Messenger, TreeHugger.com](#) | 12.26.2010

The Man-Made Rainbow Machine | [Kyle VanHemert, Gizmodo.com](#) | 12.23.2010

Rainbows on Demand | [ScienceFriday.com](#) | 12.22.2010

Solar-Powered Machine Creates Rainbows From Recycled Rainwater | [Bridgette Meinhold, Inhabitat.com](#) | 12.20.2010

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of the Fox News website. It includes the Fox News logo, a search bar, and a list of menu items: Home, Video, Politics, U.S., Opinion, Entertainment, SciTech, Health, and Travel. Below this, there are sub-menu items for SciTech: Home, Archaeology, Dinosaurs, Planet Earth, Wild Nature, Air & Space, Science, Tech, and Gadgets. A 'WATCH LIVE' button is also visible.

PLANET EARTH - SCITECH

## Artist Builds Rainbow-Making Machine

Published February 21, 2011 | Associated Press

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RICHMOND, VA. — It's hard to think about rainbows in winter, but as the sun peeks through the overcast skies and the ground begins to thaw, an art project eight years in the making will soon bring the colors of spring to the masses.

[Michael Jones McKean](#), an artist and assistant professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, has created a machine that uses a large-scale sprinkler system and the sun to create rainbows nearly four football fields in length -- when Mother Nature is cooperating, of course.

"When you've gone through six or seven months of hard winter, all of us have felt this moment when the ground starts to warm and the smell changes, and the sun is sort of pitched a little bit higher in the sky," said McKean.



-- Walks of Life

The Eyes Have It --

### Rainbows on Demand

Posted on December 22, 2010 by Katherine

Artist [Michael Jones McKean](#) is playing God -- or at least playing weatherman -- with his new project, "Proposal for Certain Principles of Light and Shapes Between Forms." Don't let the academic title fool you...he's figured out a way to *spontaneously create a rainbow*. Using a system of hoses and pumps spraying mist into the air, McKean creates rainbow-ready atmospheric conditions through an artificial mixture of moisture and sunlight. No word, yet, on the pot of gold.



The screenshot shows a webpage from Inhabitat.com. The header includes the Inhabitat logo and a navigation menu with links for 'about', 'mission', 'submit a story', 'shop', 'advertise with us', 'support us', 'press', and 'contact'. Below the header is a main content area featuring an article titled 'Solar-Powered Machine Creates Rainbows From Recycled Rainwater' by Bridgette Meinhold, dated 12/20/10. The article has 503 likes and 99 tweets. To the right of the article is a 'FEATURED AUTHOR' section for Bridgette Meinhold, who has 1636 articles. Below the article is an 'INHABITAT PHOTO GALLERY' with a 'NEXT IMAGE' button. The bottom of the page shows social media sharing options for Facebook, Twitter, and RSS.