



## Poet, Visionary Richard Blanco to Be Artist in Residence at Colby College's Lunder Institute

Public Reading and Discussion to Take Place Feb. 27

WATERVILLE, Maine—Acclaimed poet and artistic visionary Richard Blanco, whose stirring words celebrated the 2013 Inauguration of President Barack Obama and whose creative spirit has been recognized around the world, will be in residence at the Colby College Lunder Institute for American Art starting this month. Blanco, the spring-semester artist in residence for the institute's inaugural year, will teach, work in community programs, and offer a public reading of his work during his time in Waterville.

Born into a family of Cuban exiles, Blanco, 50, writes about cultural identity and personal history. A professional civil engineer, he has published three critically acclaimed volumes of his poetry and composed several important works to commemorate events, including "One Today," which he wrote for Obama's swearing in. Another, "Boston Strong," was written in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings. He is also the author of a personal memoir of his childhood in Miami and co-creator of a blog about the Cuban diaspora. His latest work, a fine-press book titled *Boundaries*, is a collaborative project with photographer Jacob Hessler.

"Richard Blanco's luminous creative work and his dedication to forging community around artistic expression embody the mission of the Lunder Institute," said Colby

President David A. Greene. “His residency here is also deeply reflective of Colby’s tradition of welcoming artists, scholars, and thinkers who shape and reimagine American culture and traditions.”

President Obama selected Blanco in 2012 to serve as the fifth presidential inaugural poet in U.S. history, following in the footsteps of poets such as Robert Frost and Maya Angelou. He was the youngest, first Latino, immigrant, and gay person to serve in such a role. In *For All of Us, One Today: An Inaugural Poet’s Journey* (2013), he shared the emotional details of his experiences as presidential inaugural poet and reflected on his understanding of what it means to be an American.

Since the inauguration, Blanco, who lives in Bethel, Maine, has been named a Woodrow Wilson Visiting Fellow and has received honorary doctorates from Colby, Macalester, and the University of Rhode Island. In 2015 the Academy of American Poets named him its first Education Ambassador.

“Given my diverse background and careers, I’ve come to truly believe that a broad spectrum of knowledge, dialogue across disciplines, and civic engagement are all essential to learning and keys to success in any field as well as to a fulfilling life,” explains Blanco. “I share these values with Colby and the Lunder Institute, and I’m grateful to both for this residency that will allow us as partners to contribute to the enrichment of the student body and the community at-large.”

Blanco was awarded an honorary degree by Colby in 2014. At that time, his work was lauded by the College as a “generous and bright-hearted way of saying how it feels to be fully present in two or more places at once ... an inspiration in our country of immigrants.”

On Tuesday, Feb. 27 at 6 p.m., Blanco will read and discuss selections from *Boundaries* and other work centered on the meaning of home and the boundaries of race, gender, class, and ethnicity and challenge the dividing lines, historical and current, that shadow America. The event, in Colby’s Given Auditorium in the Bixler Art and Music Building, is free and open to the public.

In addition, Blanco will teach a course called “Teach This Poem: Poetry and Art in Education,” in which his students will work with area schoolchildren at the Alford Youth Center in Waterville. These children will then participate in a public reading of their poetry at the Colby museum May 8. Blanco’s engagement with the community will also include seminars for local teachers and small-group workshops at the Waterville Public Library and the South End Teen Center.

“We are delighted to welcome Richard Blanco to Colby,” notes Sharon Corwin, the Colby museum’s Carolyn Muzzy Director and Chief Curator. “His engagement offers just the type of creative dialogue that the Lunder Institute can foster between our Colby and Waterville communities.”

### **Lunder Institute for American Art**

Integrated into the academic mission of the College and the museum's program, the Lunder Institute is a research center for American art established by Peter and Paula Lunder. The institute creates a unique space for scholarship, creative works, dialogue, and mentorship among visiting scholars and artists, Colby faculty and students, and the central Maine community; facilitates institutional exchange in the United States and internationally; and trains future leaders in the field of American art through the Colby museum and partner institutions around the world. To advance critical and creative research in American art and related fields, the institute hosts a residential program for scholars and artists on campus and in downtown Waterville. Residencies are offered to graduate students, scholars, curators, and emerging and internationally renowned artists who may develop new site-specific works on campus and in the community.

### **The Colby College Museum of Art**

Founded in 1959, the Colby College Museum of Art comprises five wings, more than 9,000 works of art, and more than 38,000 square feet of exhibition space. Admission is always free and open to the public.

### **Colby College**

Founded in 1813, Colby is one of America's most selective colleges. Serving only undergraduates, Colby offers a rigorous academic program rooted in deep exploration of ideas and close interaction with world-class faculty scholars. Students pursue intellectual passions, choosing among 58 majors or developing their own. Colby's innovative and ambitious campaign, Dare Northward, will support deeper connections between the College and the world and a fully inclusive experience for all Colby students. Colby is home to a community of 2,000 dedicated and diverse students from more than 80 countries. Its Waterville, Maine, location provides unique access to world-class research institutions and civic engagement experiences.