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Virgil Abloh to Deliver Keynote Address at Rhode Island School of Design 2021 Commencement

Abloh, architect Elizabeth Diller, OBEY Giant founder Shepard Fairey and playwright Lynn Nottage will receive honorary degrees

PROVIDENCE, RI – On Saturday, June 5, Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) will award degrees to 403 undergraduate and 212 graduate students, celebrating the achievements and perseverance of the Class of 2021. The day will begin with a fully virtual speaking and awards program at 10 am ET, followed by an in-person degree conferral at 2 pm ET on South Water Street in Providence. Due to continued COVID-19 health and safety protocols regarding allowable gathering sizes, families and friends are invited to watch both parts of the celebration remotely via Livestream at commencement.risd.edu.

As part of the morning's virtual speaking program, RISD will present four honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degrees to visionaries in contemporary culture. Artist and designer **Virgil Abloh** will accept an honorary degree and deliver the keynote address. Architect **Elizabeth Diller**, OBEY Giant founder **Shepard Fairey** [BFA 92 Illustration] and playwright **Lynn Nottage** will also accept honorary degrees and deliver virtual remarks.

In addition, a series of virtual and limited in-person end-of-year exhibitions and events are planned to highlight new work produced by graduating students. *Grad Show 2021* will be presented as a digital publication and an in-person exhibition at the RISD Museum's Chace Gallery and the WaterFire Arts Center—open to current students, faculty and staff. Launching on May 27, the *Grad Show 2021* digital publication will showcase the work of grad students across 16 disciplines. The *Senior Film/Animation/Video Virtual Film Festival* will be presented June 4-5, and Apparel Design's *Collection* show will be presented as a video launch, date to be announced.

The work of all seniors receiving undergraduate degrees will be featured by department throughout the spring semester in weekly shows at [Woods-Gerry Gallery](#), which will be open to current students, faculty and staff. Installation and work images are viewable [online](#) and will be featured in @RISD1877 Instagram Stories each week.

Virgil Abloh | honorary degree recipient + keynote speaker

Born in Rockford, IL, **Virgil Abloh** is an artist, architect, engineer, creative director, artistic director, industrial designer, fashion designer, musician, DJ and philanthropist. After earning a degree in civil engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he completed a master's degree in architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), Chicago. At IIT, while studying a design curriculum devised by Mies van der Rohe, Abloh began to craft the principles of his art practice. The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago presented a major traveling survey of his work in summer 2019—one of the best attended exhibitions in the museum's history. Currently, Abloh is the chief creative director and founder of Off-White™ and men's artistic director at Louis Vuitton.

Elizabeth Diller | honorary degree recipient

Elizabeth Diller is a partner at Diller Scofidio + Renfro (DS+R). She and partner Ricardo Scofidio were included on TIME's *100 Most Influential People* list, and she earned the first MacArthur Foundation Fellowship awarded in the field of architecture. DS+R completed two of the largest architecture and planning initiatives in New York City's recent history: the adaptive reuse of an obsolete, industrial rail infrastructure into the High Line, a 1.5-mile long public park, and the transformation of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts' half-century-old campus. Most recently, Diller led two other projects significant to New York: The Shed and the expansion of MoMA. She also co-created, -directed and -produced *The Mile-Long Opera*, an immersive choral work featuring 1,000 singers assembled along the length of the High Line. Diller is a professor of Architectural Design at Princeton University.

Shepard Fairey | honorary degree recipient

RISD alumnus **Shepard Fairey** [BFA 92 Illustration] is a contemporary street artist, graphic designer, activist, illustrator, DJ and founder of OBEY Giant Art and OBEY Clothing. In 1989, while still a student at RISD, he created the Andre the Giant has a Posse sticker, which later evolved into his OBEY GIANT art campaign. In 2008, his portrait of then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama became an internationally recognized emblem of hope. Since then, Fairey has hand-painted more than 105 public murals across five continents, becoming one of the world's most provocative artists and changing the way people view the urban landscape. Fairey's stickers, guerilla street art presence and public murals are recognized globally. His works are in the permanent collections of the Boston Institute of Contemporary Art, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery, the Victoria and Albert Museum and many others. Born in Charleston, SC, Fairey now resides in Los Angeles.

Lynn Nottage | honorary degree recipient

Lynn Nottage is a playwright and screenwriter and the first woman in history to win two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama. Her plays, which have been produced widely in the US and around the world, include *Floyd's*, *Sweat*, *Mlima's Tale*, *By the Way*, *Meet Vera Stark*, *Ruined*, *Intimate Apparel*, *Fabulation or the Re-Education of Undine Crumbs from the Table of Joy*, *Las Meninas*, *Mud*, *River*, *Stone*, *Por'knockers* and *POOF!* She has also written such musical librettos as *The Secret Life of Bees* and *MJ* (forthcoming); developed *This is Reading*, a performance installation presented in Reading, PA; and served as a writer and producer on the first season of the Netflix series *She's Gotta Have It*, directed by Spike Lee. Nottage is the recipient of a MacArthur "Genius Grant" Fellowship, a Steinberg "Mimi" Distinguished Playwright Award, a Doris Duke Artist Award and a PEN/Laura Pels Master Playwright Award, among others. She is a member of the Dramatists Guild and an associate professor at Columbia University School of the Arts.

About Rhode Island School of Design

RISD's mission, through its college and museum, is to educate students and the public in the creation and appreciation of works of art and design, to discover and transmit knowledge and to make lasting contributions to a global society through critical thinking, scholarship and innovation. The college's strategic plan *NEXT: RISD 2020-2027* sets an ambitious vision for educating students for the future and bringing creative practices to bear on the creation of just societies, a sustainable planet and new ways of making and knowing. RISD's immersive model of art and design education, which emphasizes critical making through studio-based learning and robust study in the liberal arts, prepares students to intervene in the critical challenges of our time. Working with exceptional faculty and in extraordinary specialized facilities, 2,225 students from 60 countries engage in 44 full-time bachelor's and master's degree programs. RISD's 30,000 alumni worldwide testify to the impact of this model of education, exemplifying the vital role artists and designers play in today's society. Founded in 1877, RISD (pronounced "RIZ-dee") and the RISD Museum help make Providence, RI among the most culturally active and creative cities in the region. Find more information at risd.edu.