



Cloud (H₂O), 2006
Light fixtures and LED light bulbs
(detail)

291 GRAND ST | FEB 22 - MAY 11, 2024

Spencer Finch: *H₂O*

“Since Luke Howard first created a nomenclature for clouds in 1803, the efforts to comprehend and quantify clouds have been both beautiful and quixotic, and clouds always seem to stay one step ahead of human understanding.”

- Spencer Finch

James Cohan is pleased to present *H₂O*, an exhibition of new and historic work by Spencer Finch, on view from February 22 through May 11, 2024, at the gallery’s 291 Grand Street location. This is Finch’s fifth solo exhibition with James Cohan. The gallery will host an opening reception with the artist on Thursday, February 22 from 6-8 PM.

Perception, the memory of visual phenomena, and the impossible attempts to precisely describe them are central to Spencer Finch’s installation work. This exhibition centers on *Cloud (H₂O)*, 2006, one of the earliest examples of this important facet of the artist’s practice. Hundreds of incandescent bulbs hang from the ceiling in a cloud-like formation, the bulbs functioning as models of the chemical formula of water - two hydrogen atoms and a single oxygen atom. Finch’s translation of a cloud broken down into its chemical state hints at water’s natural ability to exist in solid, liquid and gaseous states all at once, and serves as a potent reminder of the phenomenal possibilities of nature. *Cloud (H₂O)* illustrates Finch’s interest in the dichotomy between abstraction and representation, perception and imagination, physical and ephemeral. Like many of Finch’s works, the installation presents an alternative notion of representation – one that is simultaneously scientific and symbolic.

In addition to this early *Molecule* light installation, *H₂O* features a new textile work and a series of new

drawings. Together, these works deepen Finch's investigations into light, reflection, water, and the impermanence of human perception. The drawings, titled *Sunlight on the Gowanus Canal*, use gold leaf on paper to capture the reflections of light upon the water's surface. *Usuyuki III (I must go in, the fog is rising)*, 2024, uses hanging fabric to create a material representation of extreme weather conditions. Taken together, these works represent a dynamic expression of Finch's enduring interest in the ways in which matter and light are translated into a formal vocabulary rooted in minimalism, yet harnessed to an expressive and immersive effect.

Finch has returned repeatedly to water and clouds as subjects of his work, explored in materially and formally diverse ways. Making concrete the fleeting and ineffable nature of our experiences with the world around us lies at the heart of this preoccupation. The artist's *Tape Cloud* collages study the opacity and translucency of specific clouds using 3M "magic tape." Finch's hanging glass installations, such as *Thank You, Fog*, 2016, capture the sensation of being lost in a fog bank through a distinctly solid arrangement of hard-edged panes of glass coated to different degrees of opacity, this contrast heightening the viewer's awareness of the space between perceived reality and artistic representation. Numerous series of collages and drawings similarly attempt to capture what the artist describes as the "most fugitive of natural phenomena." *A Cloud Index*, 2022, Finch's commission for the glazed station canopy at Paddington Station in London, features 32 different types of clouds drawn in pastel by the artist and printed onto the glass panels, creating a picture of the sky in the tradition of English landscape paintings by Constable and Turner.

Finch's *Molecule* installations have been prominently featured in the artist's most important exhibitions to date. *Night Sky (Over the Painted Desert, Arizona, January 11, 2004)*, 2004, which was featured in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, is one of several works where Finch tries to depict the color of the sky at a particular place and time. *Moon Dust (Apollo 17)*, 2009, which debuted at the 53rd International Venice Biennale and is now on view at the Baltimore Museum of Art as well as at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, offers a poetic meditation on science, nature, and lunar travel, using hanging light fixtures to represent the molecular structure of a sample of moon dust gathered by the crew of the Apollo 17 mission. *Cosmic Latte*, 2017, a permanent commission for MASS MoCA, models the atomic molecules of pigments that Finch used to emulate the specific average color of the universe. Edition 2 of *Cloud (H₂O)*, 2005, is in the permanent collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.

Spencer Finch was born in 1962 in New Haven, CT, and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. He studied at the Rhode Island School of Design, Hamilton College, and Doshisha University in Kyoto, Japan, and has exhibited extensively in the US and internationally since the early 1990s. Recent major projects include *Bring me a sunset in a teacup*, a two-wall commission for Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2023); *Orion*, permanently installed at the San Francisco Airport, CA (2020); *Moon Dust (Apollo 17)*, Baltimore Museum of Art, MD (2019); *Fifteen Stones (Ryoanji)*, International Pavilion at the Fundació Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona, Spain (2018); *Lost Man Creek*, Public Art Fund, Brooklyn, NY (2016-2018); *Trying To Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning, 9/11 Memorial Museum*, New York, NY (2014), and *A Certain Slant of Light*, Morgan Library & Museum, New York, NY (2014). Significant recent solo exhibitions include the Utah Museum of Fine Arts, Salt Lake City, UT (2018-2019); MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA (2017); Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach, FL (2017); Seattle Art Museum, WA (2017), and Turner Contemporary, Margate, United Kingdom (2014); Finch was included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial, the 2008 Turin Triennale and the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009). His work can be found in many public collections including the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia; Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL; Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY; High Museum of Art, Atlanta, GA; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; Kemper Museum of Art, St Louis, MO; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Morgan Library, New York, NY; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, IL; Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY.

This exhibition is accompanied by a special presentation in the gallery's back room featuring new paintings and works on paper based on Finch's deep explorations of the color of Georges Seurat's iconic work *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte*, 1884-86.

For inquiries regarding Spencer Finch, please contact Emily Ruotolo at eruotolo@jamescohan.com or 212.714.9500.

For press inquiries, please contact Sarah Stengel at sstengel@jamescohan.com or 212.714.9500.