

**Analysis of Spencer Finch's *Manhattan Light Study: (Morning becomes Afternoon,  
Afternoon becomes Morning)***

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Spencer Finch's *Manhattan Light Study (Morning becomes Afternoon, Afternoon becomes Morning)* (2022) currently on display at the Hill Art Foundation centers around the interconnection of space and time, and their amorphous characteristics through elements like visual balance, negative space, and geometry.



Spencer Finch, *Manhattan Light Study (Morning becomes Afternoon, Afternoon becomes Morning)*, 2022. Two boxes; Powder coated aluminum, plexiglass, filters. Each: 18 x 18 x 12 inches (45.7 x 45.7 x 30.5 cm). Photo: Matthew Herrmann.

Upon first glance, the installation seems minimal and straightforward. Two white equally sized boxes hang together facing the Chelsea neighborhood. The boxes are made from powder coated aluminum, plexiglass, filters and have a size of 18 x 18 x 12 inches. They both hang directly on the window panel at around eye level. The left box has a blue filter, while the right box has a yellow filter. One box transforms morning light into afternoon light and the second box transforms afternoon light into morning light.

Spencer Finch is best known for his exploration of light and color in combination with time and space.<sup>1</sup> Using these almost unquantifiable-like elements, Finch uses various types of art media—such as watercolor, drawing, photography, glass, and much more—to create

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<sup>1</sup> Beverley Hall Smith. "Looking at the Masters: Spencer Finch" *The Chestertown Spy*. September 16, 2021. <https://chestertownspy.org/2021/09/16/looking-at-the-masters-spencer-finch/>.

intersections for people to ponder. Born in 1962 in New Haven, CT, Finch has gone far and wide with his work. With work in London, Barcelona, Venice, and other places around the world, Finch has continued to impress audiences with his focus on atmosphere, light, and time. His *Lux and Lumen* exhibition, currently on display at the Hill Art Foundation, specifically examines these three aspects.<sup>2</sup> As I was researching Finch's *Manhattan Light Study* I came across his *Berlin Light Study (Afternoon becomes morning, morning becomes afternoon)* (2013) piece installed at Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin.



Spencer Finch, *Berlin Light Study (Afternoon becomes morning, morning becomes afternoon)*, 2013. Filters, foam core, tape. Each 17 ¾ x 17 ¾ x 11 ¾ inches (45 x 45 x 30 cm).

During his *Lux and Lumen* exhibition walkthrough, Finch explains that *Manhattan Light Study* is inspired by *Berlin Light Study* because of the constant role light can play around the world. He notes that because of the time zone difference the piece is reversed but still hints at his idea of capturing changing light.<sup>3</sup> These two pieces serve as a reminder that light is relative and that it is constantly changing.

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<sup>2</sup> “*Lux and Lumen*”. Hill Art Foundation. September 16, 2022. <https://hillartfoundation.org/art/exhibitions/view/lux-and-lumen/>.

<sup>3</sup> *Walkthrough of Lux and Lumen*, narrated by Spencer Finch.

With a clear intention of simulating day times for a viewer, Finch designed his artwork to invite viewers to bring their head into the boxes and experience the light change through the colored filters.<sup>4</sup> The shade of blue and yellow is derived from the light measured in the afternoon and morning using a colorimeter. The only variable in this piece is the color of the filters, placing an emphasis on time's paradoxically steady yet fluctuating features.

Time is also referenced in the artwork's visual symmetrical balance. It is seen in the pair of boxes used, the height, the distance between both, size, and levelness. Through geometry, Finch's choice to make the boxes three dimensional alludes to the complexity of time and space. He enforces this idea by making *Making Light Study* site-specific to Hill Art's Chelsea neighborhood view. Without the view, *Manhattan Light Study* is incomplete. The movement from the streets below directs viewers beyond the artwork and into their surrounding space. *Manhattan Light Study* doesn't in any way obstruct the view of the window, instead it adapts to its environment.

As I conclude my analysis on Spencer Finch's *Manhattan Light Study*, I have learned that although easily forgettable, light is a complicated constant. It changes in subtle ways throughout the day while coating everything we see with its own glow. When I first saw this art piece I never thought about the depth of questioning it focused on time and space; I mainly focused on the intractability that it offered. As I researched, I found that behind it sat a much deeper significance and theme, and I am glad to have focussed on Spencer Finch's *Manhattan Light Study*.

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<sup>4</sup> *Walkthrough of Lux and Lumen*.

## Bibliography

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*Walkthrough of Lux and Lumen*. Narrated by Spencer Finch.

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