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Analyzing Spencer Finch's *Manhattan Light Study* to Examine How Color and Light
Cofunction in Mimicking Natural Light and Building a Sense of Perspective

Manhattan Light Study (morning becomes afternoon, afternoon becomes morning) (2022) by Spencer Finch is a unique artwork that conveys a message through the use of time, color, and light. Spencer Finch is an artist best known for his light installations that engage with concepts of perception and natural phenomena. In the exhibition *Lux and Lumen: Spencer Finch*, Finch explores how natural light (lux) transforms to sacred light (lumen). One of the works in the show is *Manhattan Light Study*. Finch's exploration and use of various mediums, like glass and space, in many of his pieces create an immersive experience for viewers. *Manhattan Light Study* mimics natural light where color varies at different times of day, suggesting that light builds a sense of color perspective.



Spencer Finch, *Manhattan Light Study* (morning becomes afternoon, afternoon becomes morning), 2022.
Powder coated aluminum, plexiglass, filters. Two boxes, 18 x 18 x 12 inches (45.7 x 45.7 x 30.5 cm) each.

The piece consists of two square boxes made of foam core that are suspended from the ceiling with wire, resting in front of a window. The boxes contain colored filters: one blue and one yellow. Looking through the blue filtered box shifts the morning light to early afternoon light and looking through the yellow filtered box shifts the afternoon light to the light of the morning. The experience of being able to rapidly change the way our vision is tinted affects our perspective and view of the world on a physical and metaphorical level. When first viewing the installation, the shape, space, and color are obvious at first glance. After more extended viewing, elements of depth, balance, and proportion become apparent. There is an equal distribution of each frame/square. These two pieces have a symmetrical balance just with different colors. There is variety present due to the several elements of color, height, and interactivensess.

In *Manhattan Light Study*, the use of color and time highlights the importance behind mediums in artwork to create an immersive experience for viewers. The piece is a matter of perception in time as color varies at different times of day, mimicking natural light. The *Manhattan Light Study* draws attention to light that permeates and colors our environment, “emphasizing the changes in hue that occur, variations that are rather dramatic yet most often not consciously conveyed.”¹ Color is used to depict, describe, influence, and create emphasis on subjects of arts. Light and color are two essential mediums that give meaning and interpretation to the piece.

The colors around us can affect our emotions. There is a relationship between color and emotions present in art works. The blue and yellow in *Manhattan Light Study* create different moods. Blue, a cool color, is meant to calm and soothe. In relation to this connection of the blue filtered box turning morning light to afternoon light, blue is meant to give a sense of relaxation

¹ Susan Cross, “An Introduction to the Work of Spencer Finch”, 11.

and be reminded of the heat and sunshine.² Yellow, a warm color, is bright and evokes a sense of happiness and energy. In *Manhattan Light Study*, the yellow filtered box turns afternoon light to morning light. This fits daylight, as the morning is the start of the day and revolves around optimism and sunlight. Therefore, looking at yellow gives feelings and thoughts of warmth. When looking through these two boxes, spectators are able to change their perception and conjure thoughts and personal experiences to the time of day. The colors yellow and blue were chosen in *Manhattan Light Study* to evoke specific emotions from viewers to further influence their point of view of the work.

Light is a medium in art that affects our ability to perceive art work while also providing emphasis on features to recognize and discover. Without light there is no perception of color, thus highlighting the significance light holds in accordance to art work. Colors may be perceived differently depending on the light shone upon them, as color is a reflection of light. The position of light can change feelings that arise from viewing an art piece. It accentuates the mechanics of color into artwork, bringing awareness to how color and light changes a perspective, etc.

Manhattan Light Study is a translation of light through color.

Although the blue box shifts morning light to afternoon light and the yellow box shifts afternoon to morning light, this same experience does not occur for every viewer. These colors and views are up to interpretation as the full color shift is not relative to every person.

Manhattan Light Study is an installation that resembles a time machine. Looking through the two filtered boxes attached to the window transports viewers to a different time of day, shifting morning to afternoon and afternoon to morning. The use of color and light as mediums helps to achieve this sensation. The installation builds a sense of color perspective as it mimics

² Lauren Flanagan. "Understanding Warm and Cool Colors." The Spruce. December 13, 2019. <https://www.thespruce.com/understanding-warm-and-cool-colors-1976480>.

natural light where color varies at different times of day. Light and color both work together with time to accomplish this sense and give meaning to the artwork.

Bibliography

Cross, Susan. "An Introduction to the Work of Spencer Finch."

Flanagan, Lauren. "Understanding Warm and Cool Colors." The Spruce. December 13, 2019.

<https://www.thespruce.com/understanding-warm-and-cool-colors-1976480>.