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LISSON GALLERY

Press Release

Spencer Finch

Forever is composed of Nows

15 September – 28 October 2023

2/F, 27 Huqiu Road, Huangpu District, Shanghai

Media Preview: 15 September, 3pm – 4pm

Opening: 15 September, 4pm – 6pm

Lisson Gallery is delighted to present the first solo exhibition in China by the New York-based artist, Spencer Finch. The exhibition features new and recent work including an LED light installation, a series of pastel on paper works, watercolour drawings, and Pantone swatches with pencil on paper. Each work is a conceptually condensed chronicle of a journey or experience, often an interaction between the artist and nature: from the study of the opacity and translucency of a cloud, to the tracing of a bee's flight pattern as it pollinates flowers in a garden.

The title of the presentation, *Forever is composed of Nows*, is borrowed from an Emily Dickinson book of poems. The title reflects how – while each individual work in the exhibition is an observation of a defined moment or event – together, these snapshots create a panoptic whole, each a recording of Finch's extraordinary experiments, challenging himself to capture ineffable temporal and sensory experiences using a variety of everyday materials and tools.

Inspired by Monet's practice of planting a garden with the express intention of painting it, Finch's *Following a bee* (2021) is a series of drawings centered around a large bunch of zinnia flowers, planted for this purpose by the artist from seeds. Perched on a ladder above the flowers, Finch followed each bee's flight pattern as it cross-pollinated the zinnia, creating a line in acetate as a surrealistic trace of their journey. Finch then selected one each of the varieties of zinnias and matched the colours using pastel.

Alongside this is the LED work, *Reciting poetry at the greening of spring* (2023), produced following a recent visit to The Getty Center in Los Angeles where he saw the Chinese painter Wu Li's hanging scroll, *Reciting Poetry before the Yellowing of Autumn* (1674). Finch then recited two poems to the trees in Prospect Park, Brooklyn – *There's a little madness in the Spring* by Emily Dickinson, and *O sweet spontaneous* by E.E. Cummings – and, inspired by J. M. W. Turner's mastery of light and atmosphere, translated the hues he observed into a series of LED tubes filtered with bands of colour. Similarly, in *Cloud (cumulus, Glacier National Park)* (2023) Finch studied the opacity and translucency of a cloud using 3M 'magic tape' to articulate the subtle changes in cloud formation, serving as a poetic alternative to the hypnotic experience of gazing into the sky.

The exhibition also features two watercolour drawings, *Pacific Ocean Laguna Beach, LA 7/27/14* (2015) and *Atlantic Ocean from Isle au Haut* (2017), from an ongoing series based on observations of various bodies of water at different times of day, translating the immense, vast forces of nature into delicate, graceful lines. Alongside this are three works from the series titled, *Study for Ulysses (Coney Island)* (2023), titled after James Joyce's novel, which document a day of wandering as a series of fleeting colour sensations. From morning to night, Finch extracted and abstracted colours from his environment using the commercial colour-matching system Pantone. Arranged in the gallery, these works echo not only the artist's physical movements throughout the day, but also the journey of his mind – the shifts in hue and tone mirroring each new interruption or encounter in consciousness.

About the artist

Spencer Finch is best known for ethereal light installations that visualise his experience of natural phenomena. His investigations into the nature of light, colour, memory and perception manifest in watercolours, drawings, video and photographs. Compelled by what he describes as ‘the impossible desire to see oneself seeing’, Finch holds up an enchanting prism between the outer world and inner thought. He distills his observations of the world into glowing abstract colour but also diverts them through cultural and historical filters: in homage to Emily Dickinson’s 1862 poem *Before I got my eye put out*, he measured the sunlight in her Massachusetts garden then recreated the effect of a passing cloud by means of fluorescent tubes covered in gel and suspended theatre filters. He has painted the changing shades of grey on Sigmund Freud’s ceiling in Vienna, Austria, viewed from the psychoanalyst’s couch and later, in *102 Colors from My Dreams* (2002), recorded the colours he saw in his sleep then colour-matched inks to make a sequence of Rorschach blots. His monumental installation *Trying To Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning* (2014), on display at the National September 11 Memorial Museum in New York, features a mosaic of hand-painted shades of blue, while his Crossrail commission for Paddington Station in London, *A Cloud Index*, consists of a 120m long canopy depicting more than 32 cloud types.

Spencer Finch was born in New Haven, CT, USA in 1962 and lives and works in Brooklyn, NY, USA. He has a BA in comparative literature from Hamilton College, Clinton, NY, USA (1985) and an MFA in sculpture from the Rhode Island School of Design, RI, USA (1989). Solo exhibitions include 'Lux and Lumen', Hill Art Foundation, New York, USA (2022); Arcadia University, Spruance Gallery, Glenside, PA, USA (2019); ‘Fifteen Stones (Ryoanji)’, Fundacio Mies van der Rohe, Barcelona, Spain (2018); ‘Cosmic Latte’, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA, USA (2017); ‘Lost Man Creek’, Public Art Fund, New York, NY, USA (2016); Marfa Contemporary, TX, USA (2014), Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana, USA (2013), the Art Institute of Chicago, USA (2011), Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art, North Adams, USA (2007) and Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, Germany (2003). He participated in the Folkestone Triennial, UK (2011) and the 53rd Venice Biennale, Italy (2009). Public commissions include Crossrail, London, UK (2022); the Public Art Fund, New York, NY USA (2016); and The High Line, New York, NY, USA (2008).

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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