

PETER SPENS
water, colour



10th - 15th May 2010
THE AIR GALLERY

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LONDON W1S 4NE

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The Speed of Light

My eldest daughter Ellie is very occupied by Albert Einstein and Relativity. I say, "Don't talk to me about the speed of light, that's my day job" and she looks suitably unimpressed. But Ellie talks about the schism between Newton's and Einstein's theories that time and space are relative and I draw parallels with observing a landscape. The relative positions of Sun, to cloud, to cloud shadow moving across and describing the contours of a landscape is something you can only experience through time, staying still and looking. The whole palette changes with the shift from sunlight to shade, the sky is reflected in the rhythm of rising and falling tides; a passing squall produces flocks of fragmented patterns on the water's surface. A moment later, with the wind dropped, it becomes mirror-like. Kinetic patterns, shifting sands, changing lights, relative motion. The photographer freezes a fraction of a second but a landscape painter observing on the spot is playing catch up with a huge physics experiment of interacting forces.

The Camel estuary series started with a phone call. "It's a shame that you don't do portraits", angled my friend James Abell in the spring of 2008, "because we are looking to commission a painting of William, Katie and Matthew before the hormones kick in." I explained that I paint what I see, would never work from photographs, but if we made the commitment to what might come out of working for a week in early July on Rock beach, then we had a runner. If nothing worthwhile emerged, at least the activity was restricted to the mornings and afternoons were free for body boarding. So we made our plans to capture a moment of childhood, ephemeral as the weather, before darkened bedroom replaced bucket and spade. My daughter Becky came as assistant and as chief keeper of the pose. Never work with children or animals unless you have such a helper to good humouredly marshal the subject matter back into the pose.

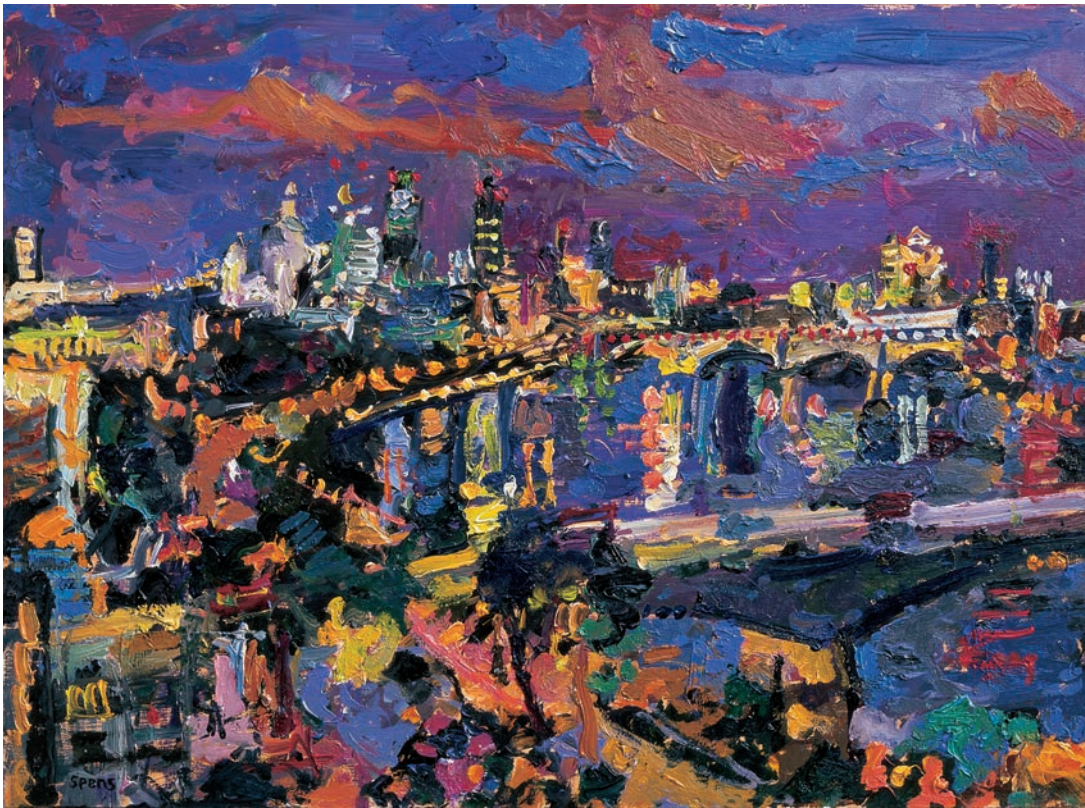
With the varied coastal climate, repeat conditions on successive days cannot be expected, but a solution to this is to have overcast and sunny day works on the go simultaneously to explore both lights. One piece bounces off the other, sunlight giving the major key with resolved patterns of light and shade whilst overcast conditions give the minor key of discrete local colour. The most recent painting in this show was a commission to paint the Camel Estuary. I started looking inland at its basin, sheltered next to the sailing school in Rock, at the end of October when it was busy with half term holidays. I returned to finish it in mid-November and found that all bar one of the boats had been removed to winter storage and even the jetty had been towed away. That week was also particularly blustery and I was attracted to a vantage point above Polzeath Beach which effectively shows the mouth of the estuary. It is renowned to surfers for the amplitude and constancy of its waves which from this point displayed the full drama of building and breaking under a tempestuous sky. Meteorologically that week, the conditions were consistent, alternating between Force 6/7 and Gale Force. Consequently Polzeath was painted with the board anchored by ropes to the back of the van to make the activity feasible.

A series painted both in greater tranquillity and closer to home was at Kenwood House. The local colour of rhododendron and magnolia blossoms overpowered the sunlight, its seed catalogue colours were at their most

dramatic against a grey sky. Barbara Hepworth's sculpture *Monolith Empyrean*, at the centre, acts as a mute human presence surrounded by this Technicolor display. The surrounding Hampstead Heath has fabulous trees and there is a particular spot where they frame a view of the City in the distance that has particularly occupied me in Summer, Autumn and approaching Spring when the blossom is just starting to pattern the scaffold of branches. I was willing the leaves to be patient and not to disturb the umbers of winter with their fresh greens so that I could finish the piece, but sadly to no avail. After a couple of days of warm weather and they burst forth regardless.

Brisk walkers breathing in the scent of spring looked on pityingly at the artist struggling home with easel and board, who had not even managed to capture the right season "Too slow again, he just can't keep up!"

Peter Spens, London 2010.



For further information, critical essays and to view previous shows, please visit www.cranleygallery.com





Sunny mornings, Rock Beach. 2008
Oil on board. 95.1 x 103 cms / 37⁷/₁₆ x 40¹/₂ ins





Full Moon, Dartmouth. 2009
Oil on board. 95.2 x 103 cms / 37¹/₂ x 40¹/₂ ins





Camel Estuary, November. 2009
Oil on board. 91 x 121 cms / 35⁵/₆ x 47³/₅ ins





August, Carbis Bay. 2007
Oil on board. 73.6 x 104 cms / 29 x 41 ins



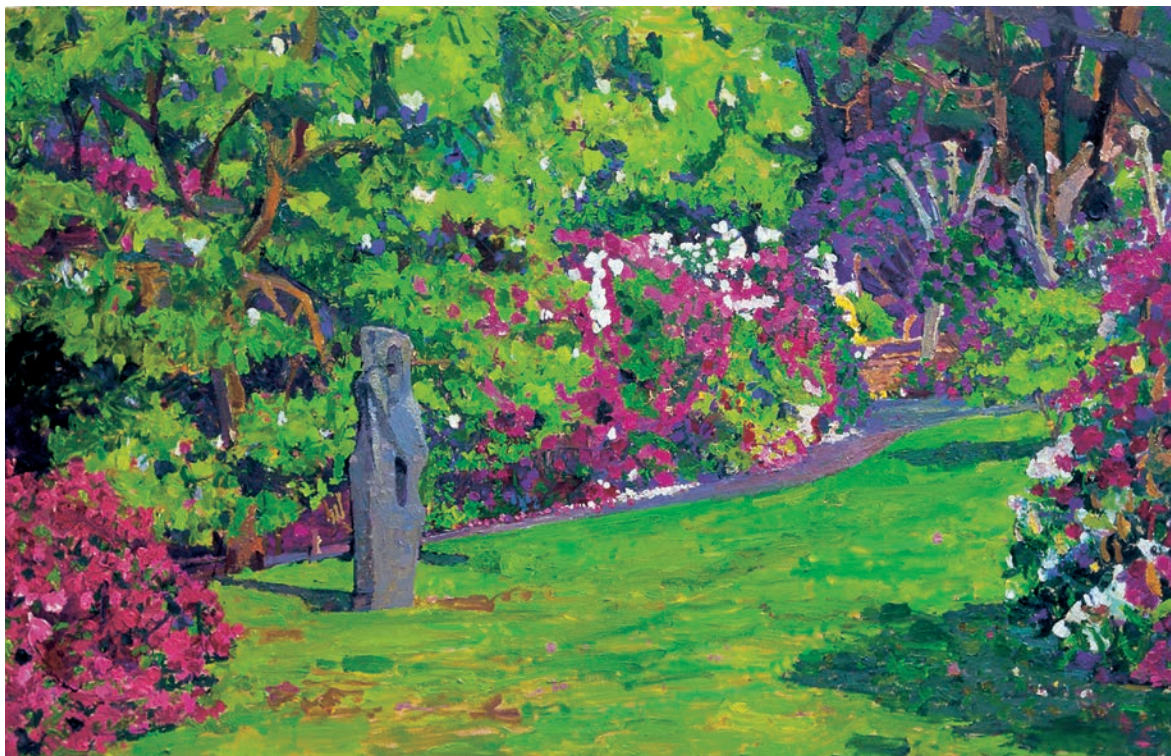


The City from Hampstead Heath, October. 2008
Oil on board. 98.3 x 122 / 38³/₄ x 48¹/₈ ins



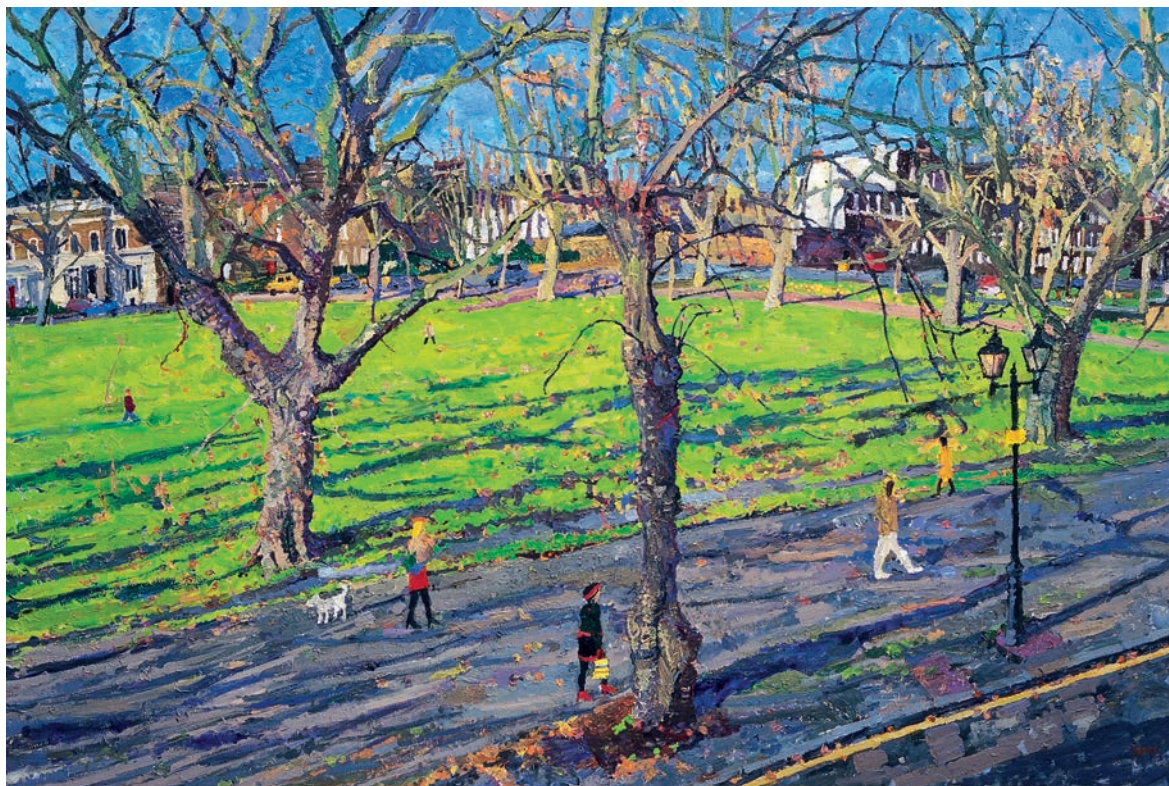


Hepworth & Rhododendrons, Kenwood House. 2009
Oil on board. 101.7 x 143 cms / 40 x 56²/₇ ins



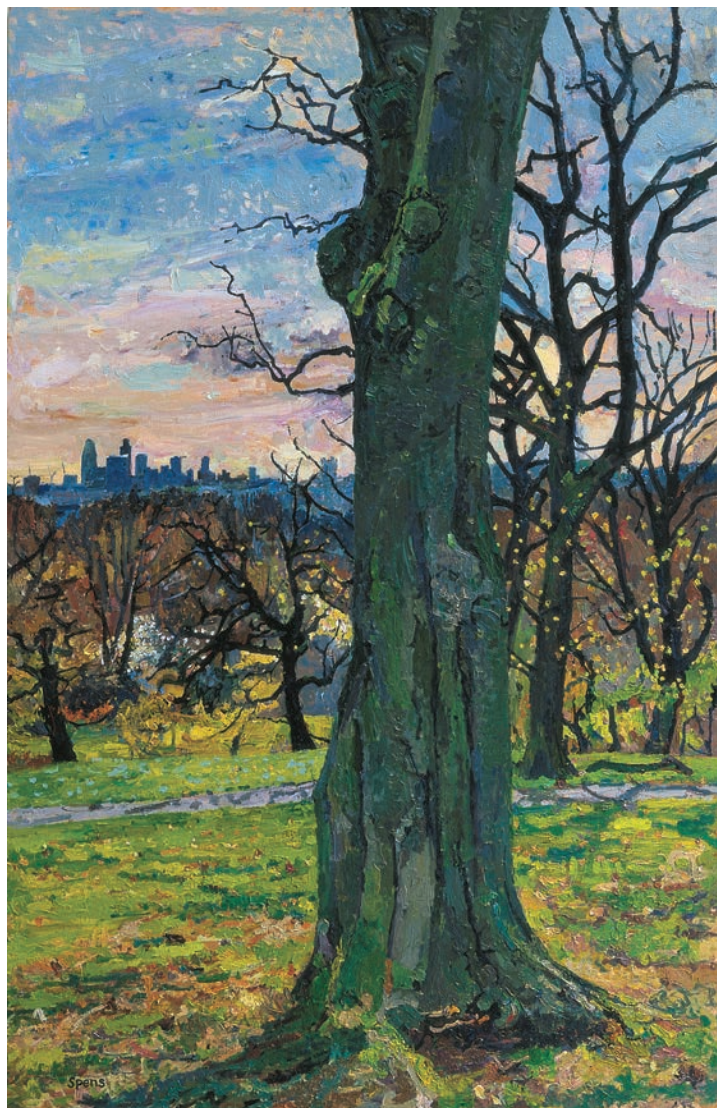


May, Kenwood House. 2007
Oil on board. 81.1 x 122 cms / 32 x 48¹/₈ ins





Autumn Highbury Place, grey sky. 2007
Oil on board. 73.6 x 104 cms / 29 x 41 ins



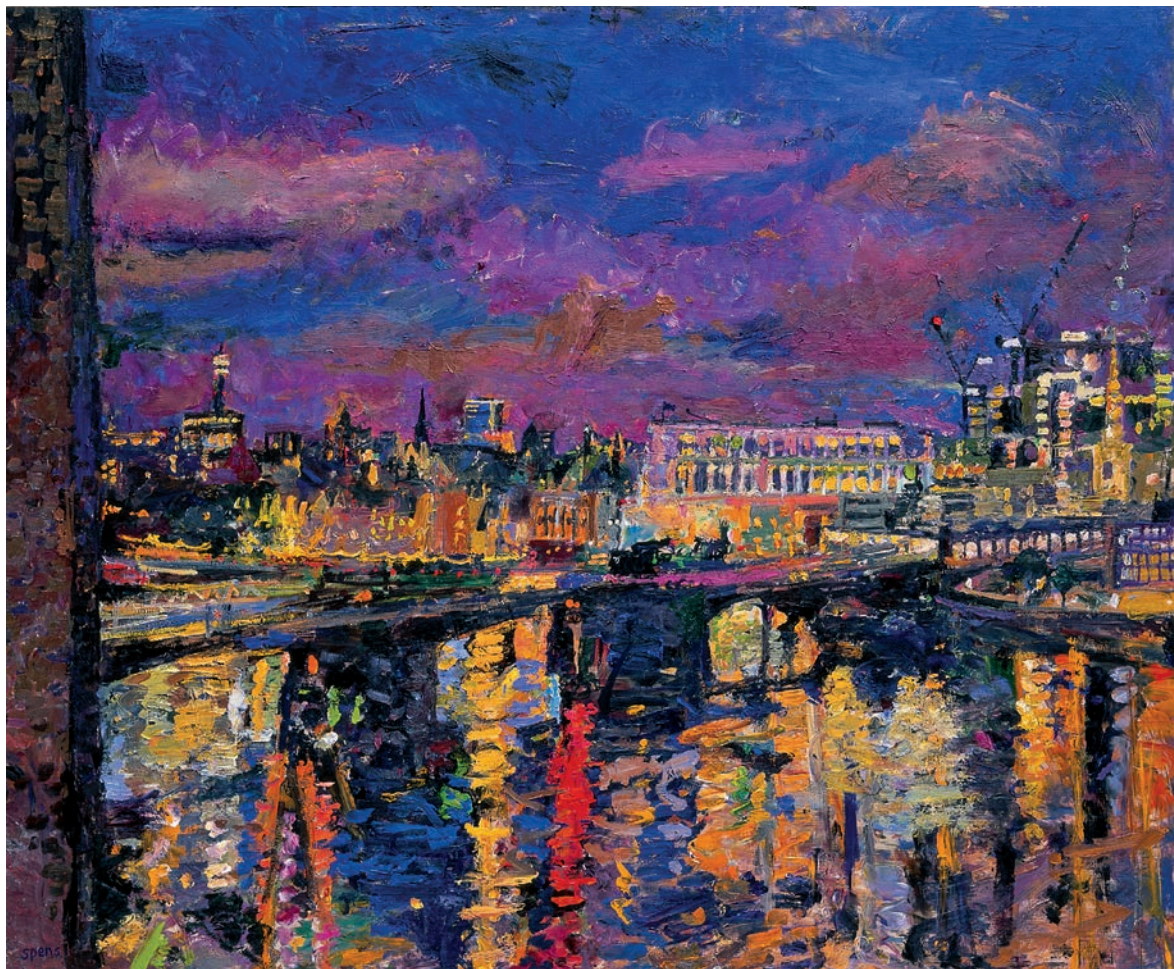


St Pauls from 7th Floor, Tate Modern. 2007
Oil on board. 119.4 x 74.1 cms / 47 x 29¹/₄ ins





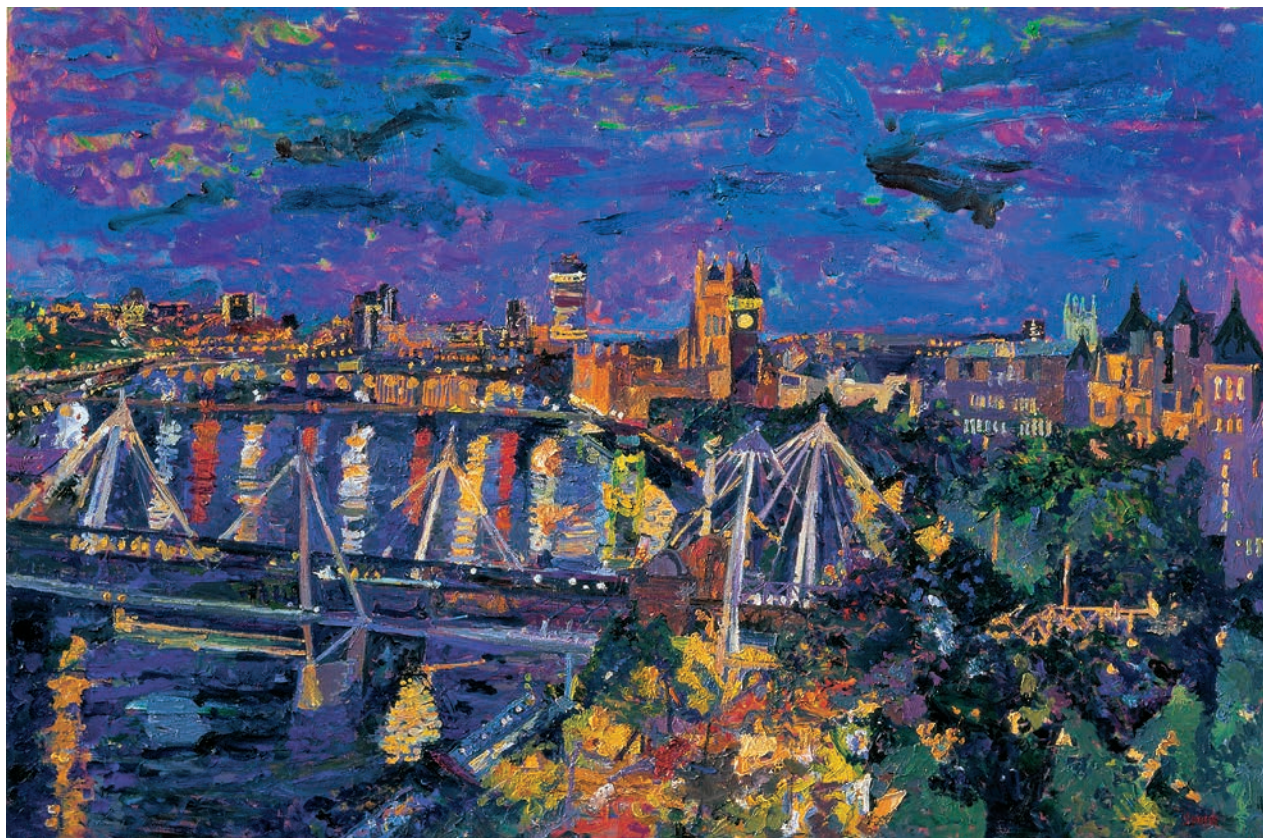
Morning, the City from 80 Strand. 2009
Oil on board. 112.8 x 122 cms / 44²/₅ x 48¹/₅ ins





Night, Southwark Bridge from Tate Modern. 2007
Oil on board. 111.4 x 122 cms / 43⁷/₈ x 48 ins



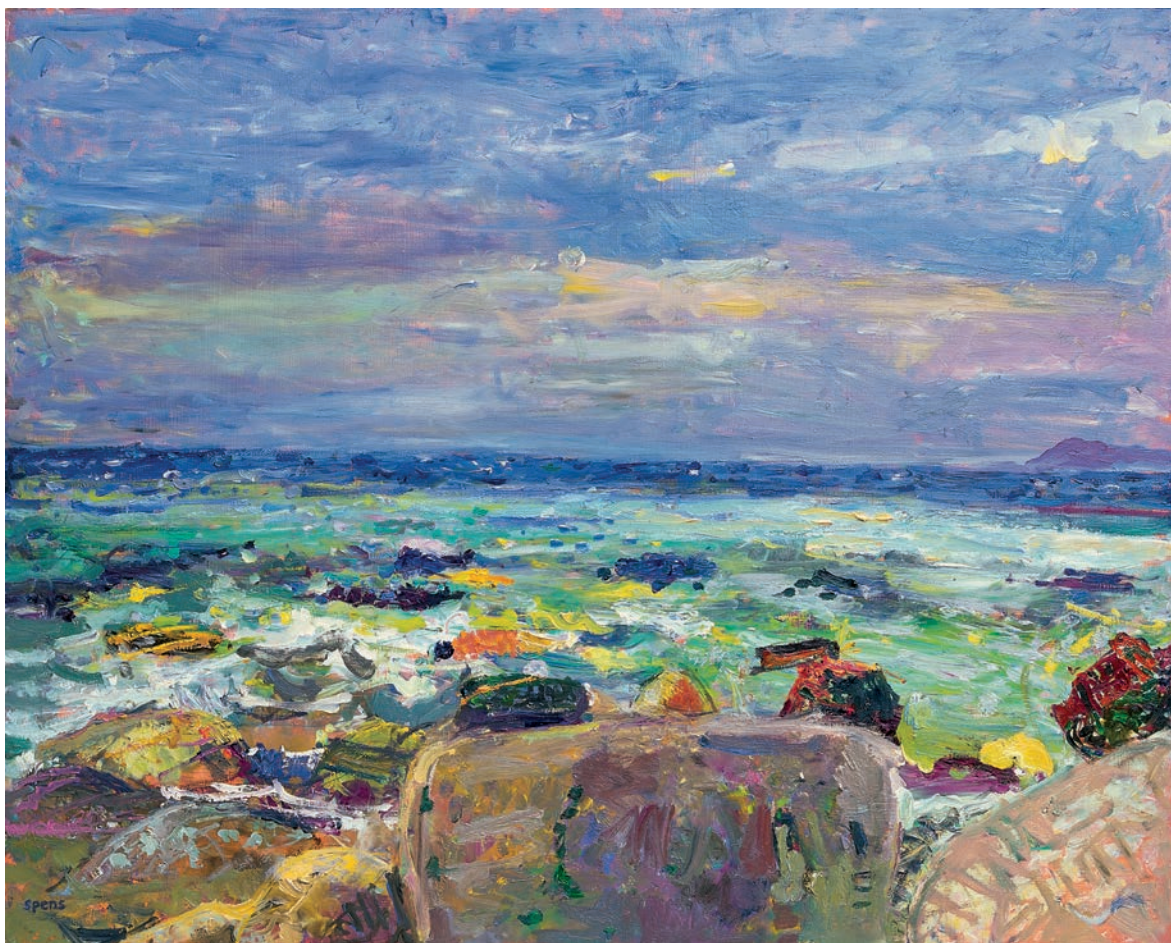


Night, Westminster from 80 Strand. 2009
Oil on board. 101.8 x 153 cms / 40 x 60 ins



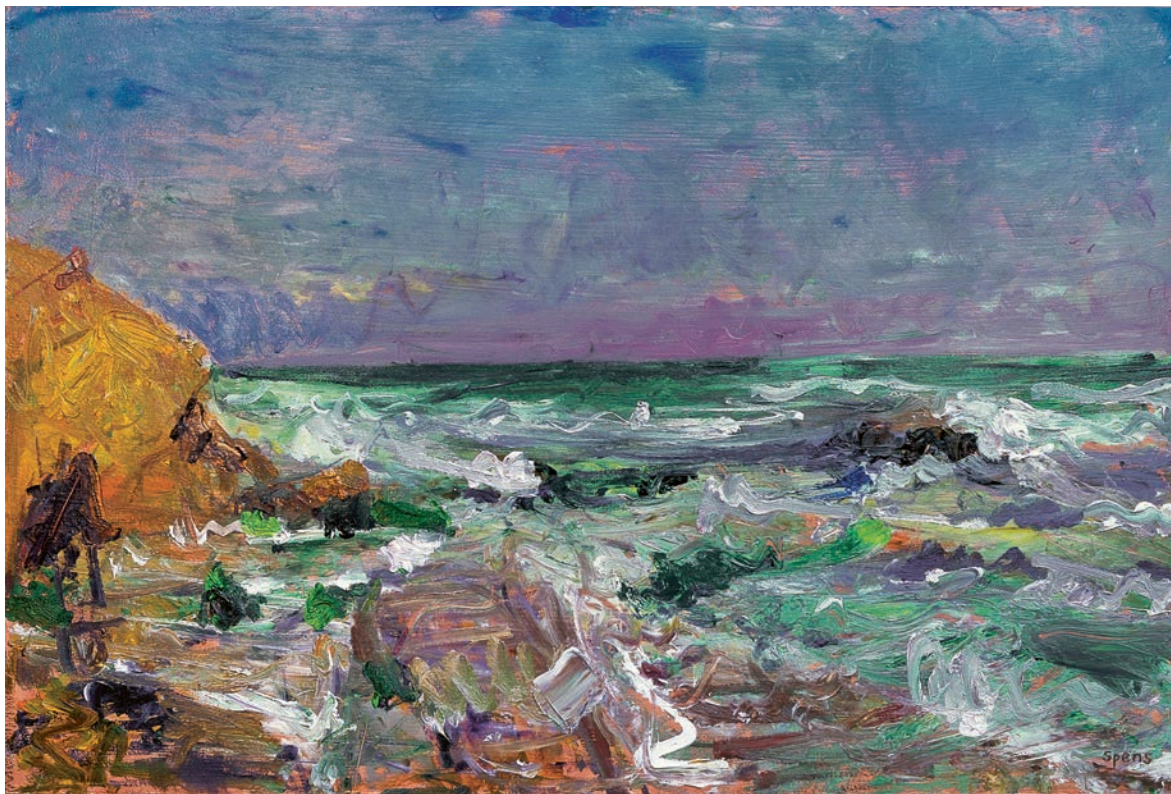






August, Rinsey. 2007 | 30
Oil on board. 60.9 x 76 cms / 24 x 30 ins











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2000 'Cities and the Sea', Gallery 27. London
 2001 'Skylines', Gallery 27. London
 2003 'Open to the Sky', Gallery 27. London
 2005 'Changing Formations', Gallery 27. London
 2006 'Floating London', Guildhall Art Gallery. London
 2008 'Observatory', Air Gallery. London
 2009 Art London 2009, Roman Black Gallery, BDC London
 2010 'water, colour', Air Gallery. London