



Norman Lewis, *Untitled*, 1961, Oil on laid paper,  
23 1/4 x 35 in, 59.1 x 88.9 cm

52 WALKER ST | APR 10 - MAY 9, 2026

## *A slash of Blue / A sweep of Gray*

James Cohan is pleased to present *A slash of Blue / A sweep of Gray*, on view from April 10 through May 9, 2026, at the gallery's 52 Walker Street location. The gallery will host an opening reception on Friday, April 10 from 6-8 PM.

Conceived as a companion to Byron Kim's solo exhibition at 48 Walker Street, *A slash of Blue / A sweep of Gray* traces the enduring influence of the sky, clouds, and atmosphere on artists' practices from the early twentieth century to the present day. Moving across generations and mediums, the exhibition considers how artists have looked upward to grapple with perception, time, emotion, and the sublime—treating the sky not merely as subject matter but as a site of observation, abstraction, and reflection.

In dialogue with Kim's sustained engagement with color, light, and daily variation, *A slash of Blue / A sweep of Gray* situates contemporary approaches within a longer history of artists responding to the ever-shifting conditions of the atmosphere. Works range from intimate plein air paintings, in which the scale of the canvas heightens the personal, immediate quality of the encounter, to expansive explorations of the sky as a field for abstraction and formal inquiry.

*A slash of Blue / A sweep of Gray* takes its title from an 1861 poem by Emily Dickinson—a brief, luminous work in which the poet renders the sky as a composition in motion, marshaling its shifting colors with the economy and precision of a painter. What makes the poem so apt as a touchstone for this exhibition is the quality of its attention—the way Dickinson holds the sky still long enough to describe it, even as she conveys its relentless movement and change.

Among the historical anchors of this exhibition are works by Arthur Dove and Charles Burchfield, two of the most singular American painters of the early twentieth century, both of whom drew deeply on close observation of the

natural world. Dove, who is often credited as the first American abstract painter, described his method as one of “*extraction*,” distilling natural phenomena into their essential chromatic and formal energies. Burchfield, working in watercolor, developed an equally passionate and idiosyncratic relationship with the sky. For Burchfield, the sky was not merely observed but felt, a medium through which sound, mood, and cosmic energy could be expressed.

The exhibition traces twentieth-century experimentations with the sky as a generative space for the development of personal and political languages of abstraction. Beauford Delaney moved to Paris in 1953, seeking greater personal and artistic liberty amongst a community of African American expatriates that included Richard Wright and James Baldwin. There, he embraced abstraction, exploring color and light in an all-over calligraphic style, each composition an expression of ineffable emotion or cosmic profundity. Baldwin described Delaney’s shift from figuration to abstraction as a “*metamorphosis into freedom*.” Contemporaneous works by Norman Lewis and Felrath Hines, both founding members of Spiral, a Black artists’ collective formed in 1963, further extend the consciousness-expanding possibilities of the abstract sublime. As Hines noted, “*In my view, an artist’s work is to rearrange everyday phenomena so as to enlarge our perception of who we are and what goes on about us.*”

Norman Zammitt’s striated, abstract *Band Paintings*, with shifting horizontal registers, are the fullest realization of the artist’s quest to capture the way light and color interact in perception. The result of mathematical, formal, and spiritual inquiries, this series—begun in 1973—reflects Zammitt’s reverence for the skies of Los Angeles and New Mexico and his commitment to the poetics of experience while enacting chromatic progressions that evoke the presence of the sky at various moments throughout the day. Richard Pousette-Dart’s *Sky, Illumine*, 1985-86, likewise represents the culmination of the artist’s lifelong pursuit of spirituality in abstraction. Its heavily encrusted surface and cosmic composition, achieved with paint applied directly from the tube, reveal complex layers of color and emphasize texture and luminosity through varying peaks of paint.

Many of the contemporary painters featured in this exhibition subvert expectations of scale in their depictions of atmospheric events. Lois Dodd brings the plein air tradition into the present with small, intimately-scaled paintings almost always completed in a single outdoor sitting. Working with urgency to capture a specific quality of light before it shifts, Dodd returns repeatedly to familiar subjects—nocturnal skies over the Maine coast, light through windows, the geometry of branches against open sky—registering the ephemeral conditions of a particular moment with direct, unflinching attention. Angela Lane paints similarly postcard-size landscapes, aligning herself with the art historical tradition of depicting environments of celestial and mysterious phenomena. Robust pastoral beauty, bathed in soft light or cloaked in fog, is offset by dramatic eclipses, comets, or twin suns. These phenomena suggest a range of mirages and visions open to broad interpretation, which in Lane’s words “*leave the events in the paintings to be their own messengers.*” Working without a sketch or photograph, Daniella Portillo builds her small-scale skylscapes through an accumulative and erosive process. The artist layers paint and varnish, then scrapes and sands the surface back, repeating this cycle until an atmosphere emerges from within. Light is not imposed upon these paintings but constructed from inside them, rising through strata of color like a memory surfacing involuntarily.

Together, these works propose that the sky is not a passive backdrop but an active interlocutor, one that has drawn artists across generations into a shared reckoning. To look upward, this exhibition suggests, is always also to look inward: at the limits of perception, the persistence of longing, and the stubborn human need to make the transient legible. The sky endures as one of art’s most democratic and most humbling subjects, available to all and fully possessed by none.

Participating artists:

Dike Blair, Charles Burchfield, Tacita Dean, Beauford Delaney, Lois Dodd, Arthur Dove, Spencer Finch, Felrath Hines, Byron Kim, Angela Lane, Norman Lewis, Sylvia Plimack Mangold, Daniella Portillo, Richard Pousette-Dart, Norman Zammitt

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