

John McAllister*Adrift gleaming serenest rustling air***Opening:** 22 October 2020, 11 am – 6 pm**Exhibition:** 23 October – 5 December 2020

“These new paintings allow you to become absorbed, they are a place where your thoughts can wander,” says John McAllister, “you can drift in and out without being told what to think.” Don’t just look at nature. Smell it, feel it, get absorbed by it. “It’s a release to be absorbed,” he states. As you can safely do, without even going outside, through the sheer force of his art. “Like sitting in the shade looking out into the comforting heat allowing the color to mesmerize and soothe. The sound of a fan gently blowing while looking through a window into the afternoon sunshine, your eyes wandering through the landscape outside and occasionally catching some of the reflection from the glass and letting you back in.”

“Having the landscape at a glance, holding it in your mind” is something we could easily do for hours in a painting as in the immersive environment of *much adrift seemed serenest sea*. As his brilliant colors convey the resonance of emotions, or rather, his affection with nature with such intensity, McAllister gives his landscapes an almost meta-real presence. The formats are often exhilarating, intoxicating in McAllister’s articulation of pattern and light. We sometimes only see a narrow focus – a small glade, a mound or even a still life of a freshly picked bouquet. However, he offers a wide range, from celebrating these more quiet, introspective everyday vistas to broad landscapes like technicolour symphonies. A liberation of our senses by interweaving color, space, depth and perspective. For us, his paintings become a vital distraction, a soothing balm. “They are an escape hatch. Not to a specific place but merely an escape for escape’s sake. It’s a somewhere,” as he puts it, “a portal of sanity.”

Although the paintings do not show any signs of activity or any link to contemporary time and materiality, they share a clear inspiration. “You can’t be bored with nature,” British painter David Hockney replied when asked why he started embracing this ancient subject. Having interrogated and explored key landscape traditions such as from Japan – we find McAllister’s fascination with Japanese prints or *Byōbu* folding screens, similar outlines compartmentalizing colors in the manner of cloisonné enamels – and studying the paintings of the Impressionist and Modern nature masters while working in museum, he first breathed the never-ending Californian summer in person during his autodidactic educational explorations. His hometown (notably named Florence, MA) is now a more isolated environment, where he rides to his studio everyday by bike. Although located in Massachusetts, he still suggests a luxurious nature, a tropical sun that sets aglow everything around it, to express the joy and serenity experienced outdoors.

But while, for instance, Claude Monet laid out a setting for his paintings in his Giverny garden, John McAllister carefully orchestrates a paradise drawn from his mental impressions, where he can transcend the category of nature in his own unique way. None of McAllister's radiant landscapes are made *en plein-air*, they are free compositions based on the feeling he absorbs outside "by osmosis". His paintings of trees, bushes and entire wildflower meadows in blossom are ecstatic reveries, an extrapolation of the seen.

"Paint is supposed to dissolve the substantial quality of the physical world," he says. Although any kind of domesticity is gone, McAllister's psychedelic-looking worlds meet with a graphic clarity. The vivid, unexpected orange and ultra-violet of his palette exaggerate greatly according to the emotive qualities of how colors affect us. They are warm and inviting, but also abrasive and piercing. "Don't copy nature too literally," Paul Gauguin, known for his singular landscapes, advised. "Art is abstraction; draw art as you dream in nature's presence."

Many of the new paintings are devoted to depictions of water – a reinvention of Claude Monet, Gustav Klimt's quilt-like surfaces or even Edvard Munch's areal views of purple mountain lakes. Seemingly the same water landscape from multiple sides, perhaps in changing light conditions. However, what we see here is a transition. McAllister's paintings are not about an existing reference, they are about surface. You look at it and into it at the same time, it is flat yet deep, a contradiction that goes along with the core contradiction of painting. "This kind of electric void that I feel in particular over the ocean or large bodies of water, where you feel both the soft beauty and terrifying carelessness of nature." They are offering this possibility of escape, a connection between the external world and the life of the soul.

While some seascape panoramas coax our eyes to move around the center, we also see entire compositions that are in round shape, reminiscent of a mirror (and of Monet's *Water-Lilies*). These tondos mimic the daydream quality of thoughts. Having no rectangle or square's edge they convey the feeling of a calm periphery haze. The way our eyes have a soft focus while you are lost in thoughts. (Squint a little and you can easily see John McAllister's berry-dotted paintings as an abstract painting. A passing comment he made is that his paintings could remind one of a bowl full of *Fruity Pebbles*.)

In a current world where everything feels limited as if trapped in a computer loop, he creates something limitless. By sharing this powerful relationship between him and nature, McAllister allows us to see and feel it through his eyes - and invites us to follow him to his "place to be". – *gvm*

John McAllister was born in 1973 in Slidell, Louisiana. He lives and works in Northampton, Massachusetts.

In February 2021 John McAllister will have a two person show with Birdie Lusch at Parts & Labor in Beacon, New York. In June 2021 he will be exhibiting alongside Donald Baechler, André Butzer, Inka Essenhigh and

Raymond Pettibon in the show *Expedition* at the Brattleboro Museum of Art, Vermont. Further he will be part of a group show at Almine Rech Gallery in New York.

John McAllister has had solo exhibitions at James Fuentes Gallery, New York City, NY; Almine Rech Gallery, Brussels, Belgium/Paris, France; Hagiwara Projects, Tokyo, Japan; Richard Telles Fine Art, Los Angeles, CA; Carl Freedman Gallery, London, U.K. McAllister's work has been included in group exhibitions at international venues such as Le Consortium, Dijon, France; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, CA; MAMCO; Geneva, Switzerland; Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA and the Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL.

McAllister's work is included in the collections of the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, CA; The Rubell Family Collection, Miami, FL; the HNA Group Inc. Collection, Hong Kong; Collection of Martin Eisenberg, NY; Collection of César and Mima Reyes, Puerto Rico; Collection of Joseph Mimran; and other notable private collections.