

**John McAllister**

## shining serenest-like wilds whirl

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MASSIMODECARLO is delighted to present John McAllister's exhibition *shining serenest-like wilds whirl*, a series of paintings of landscapes under different conditions. McAllister creates landscapes through intuitive explorations within nature, using the enigmatic play of light and colour to conjure up scenes of beauty and emotional resonance that focus on the phenomenological elements of nature rather than the illustrative. Many of the works in this exhibition were conceived in pairs, showing the same landscape both in bloom and alive with fire. The exhibition itself is also divided in two, presented as a paired exhibition across two of our gallery spaces at MASSIMODECARLO Hong Kong and MASSIMODECARLO Beijing. The two types of landscape in *shining serenest-like wilds whirl* present nature in moments of transition, both accentuated by human beings' persistent desire to create an ideal landscape and impose their ingenuity upon it. McAllister's arcadian landscapes hint at human interference as plants with far-flung origins intermingle with native species, while their counterpart infernos show how nature can react when our efforts to mould it are pushed too far.

A preoccupation in McAllister's paintings are states of being and gazing, how a painting and how nature act in a similar way as you experience them. McAllister's paintings encourage us into the same state of reverie and wonder that nature inspires, the active act of gazing into a painting as our eyes trip over their different elements and our thoughts begin to wander. Like in nature, where we might focus on a particular flower before stepping back to take in the vista, McAllister's paintings allow us to breathe in and relish in the scene. As you focus in, the artist's precisely defined mark-making and the artifice that has made this swathe of beauty possible, becomes apparent. When the beauty of nature is so overwhelming that it stops us in our tracks is the jumping off point of McAllister's dreamlike scenes. Not just the delight in a pleasing view, but how we experience our surroundings grounded in that moment; how the sun beats on your face and the sound of rustling leaves in the trees. From here, McAllister starts to paint, conjured from memories of those moments, bypassing sketches from life in

favour of working directly with colour onto the canvas. The works' titles are born in much the same way; verbs and onomatopoeic words sparked during the act of painting. Just as each person's eyes is drawn to and lingers on different aspects of a painting, these grammarless titles' meanings change depending on where you pause while reading them.

*Shining serenest-like wilds whirl* is a return to the subject McAllister first tackled in an exhibition in 2008, fires. On one hand, the artist views fires in this context as 'just another season', the consistency with which forest fires return and grow every year meaning they are becoming a common feature of today's landscape. They are also the most 'active' form of landscape; fires are immediate, their edges are almost imperceptible both physically and temporally and when they are out, they are entirely extinct. You cannot draw a fire in the way you can depict a still and calm landscape; *fiery fraught alight wrought* is overexposed, blurred - bright white obscures the canvas, mimicking the blind spot left in your eye after staring at something very bright.

Fires can be mesmerising, inspiring reverie while watching the glow of a candlelight, as in *dazed dozy gathered glowing*, or gazing into a fire from the hearthside. At a large-scale, fires are terrifying and life-destroying, yet even then we find ourselves unable to look away. Reflected in the exhibition's title, we are both compelled and repulsed: fires 'shine' to attract us yet threaten to frenziedly 'whirl' and consume. While McAllister first explored fire scenes as a metaphor for painting itself - both must destroy what is beneath it to come into being, paint obliterates a canvas, fire consumes whatever comes into its path - the pertinent timing of McAllister's return to the subject ultimately reflects uncontrollable chaos, the current eco-biological and political anxieties, which are distressing yet hard to look away from.

Within the exhibition spaces *shining serenest-like wilds whirl* creates a total environment across a spectrum of states of nature and harmonious colour, akin to being immersed in nature. But, unlike losing oneself in nature, which happens externally to the body, McAllister's paintings encourage internal

reverie, as our mind pieces together the dense tapestry of carefully placed brushstrokes and prismatic palette as representative of something else, sparking thoughts and allusions to land at the complete scene of beauty in the picture we see in front of us.

### **John McAllister**

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

John McAllister, deeply drawn to the enigmatic play of light, immersed himself in its exploration through the medium of painting. His journey from California to New York proved pivotal, especially his encounter with Post-Impressionist masters at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The works of Pierre Bonnard and Henri Matisse drew him into the tradition of twentieth-century artists who strive to capture the immemorial elements of light.

In his landscapes, instead of sketching specific scenes and points of view in the natural world, McAllister creates imagined vistas inspired by the sense of the sublime experienced in the beauty of nature. The artist engages in an ever-evolving dialogue with his environment; formed as close by as the flowers planted in his garden beyond his studio door, to riding his bike for miles through the wilderness in his surrounding Massachusetts. Back in the studio he creates scenes that possess the kind of harmonious beauty only possible with a considerate understanding of the delicate balance between the oppositional forces in nature and its constant state of flux: the fleetingness of a single ray of light against the ubiquitous being of the sun: the endless cycle of creative growth into hibernation and decay.

McAllister's almost electric tonalities paint vivid and blooming scenes that embody the essence of

pleasure and delight that coexist in painting and nature. His canvases defy conventional perspective, merging flat surfaces with illusions of depth set against intricate backdrops reminiscent of textiles and wallpapers. Each painting - whether a still life, landscape, or detailed interior - offers a poetic glimpse into a world where naivety flirts with decadence.

McAllister's works are included in public collections such as The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; The Rubell Family Collection, Miami and Le Consortium, Dijon, FR.