ALMINE RECH

John McAllister
some rhapsodies radiant

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Almine Rech is pleased to present some rhapsodies radiant, an exhibition of paintings by American artist John McAllister. In his second solo exhibition with the gallery, McAllister presents 11 new works of oil on canvas inspired by his frequent outings into the wilderness of New England, where he lives and works.

John McAllister's distinctive palette of neon hues transforms classical pastoral scenes of nature into intense and ecstatic compositions, where dense forest, rolling hills, and sky begin to blend into a single, impressionistic whole. With this, the artist attempts to relay what he describes as the "electric void" experienced in nature, at once characterized by a mesmerizing beauty and terrifying carelessness, which can only ever be simulated through representation as stylized images or feeling.

Through warm and abrasive colors, applied with a splotchy, yet controlled mark-making, the 11 works on display attempt to harness a feeling of rhapsodic immersion: they invite the viewer into the densest depth of landscapes to the point of total absorption, where the haze of one's periphery begins to blend nature's shapes and colors. This is accentuated in the two tondos in the exhibition; a classical technique of Renaissance painting, where the absence of edges gives the feeling of the eyes soft focus when daydreaming or lost in thoughts. Regarding McAllister's paintings is both mesmerizing and soothing; hot and cold, perspective and intimacy are constantly at play to produce psychological effects in the viewer.

Historically informed yet contemporary and almost "graphic" in style, McAllister's work cites a long visual tradition of "fantastical" landscape painting, from the most cathartic to the banal. Probing the ubiquity of this motif, the paintings can be read as a reflection of how the human eye processes complex packages of visual information, such as thousands of leaves and flowers shimmering and radiating in the landscape. These works underscore the artist's approach to painting as a "low-resolution medium," which, in its inherent abstraction of visuality, creates a conscious joy of viewing closely and viewing beyond. Painting is a medium where the eye and the brain are always assembling the data of color of light, and the self-consciousness of this process of "filling in the blanks" is what makes it so pleasurable. This form of immanent viewing, a heterogeneous assemblage of impressions, stands in deep contrast to digital photography, in which the camera flattens everything and "decides" on how things are rendered. McAllister positions painting where these forms of visualities can be negotiated. Finally, his new body of work is a departure from his earlier paintings, where motifs of nature were consciously enclosed by painted patterned frames, thus highlighting their status as images. By removing this stylized frame, the artist lets these motifs work on us just as they are, and prompts a reflection on the inherent power, and limitation, of the medium of painting, somewhere between impression and image.

– Jeppe Ugelvig, curator and critic