

ARTFORUM

John McAllister

CARL FREEDMAN GALLERY

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John McAllister, *bestir duskbright*, 2017, oil on canvas, 72 x 61".

Looking fairly flat in reproduction, John McAllister's paintings reveal, in person, a delicate concern with spatial conventions. Recurrent motifs include linear, Matissean still lifes, landscapes, *mise en abymes*, and striped or hatched patterns, often merging into an implied surface as wallpaper or parquet flooring. But these are not merely reframed Matisse, or neon Nabis. Slackening the tight calibration and push-pull dynamics of The Red Studio-era Matisse, McAllister often situates the main compositional tension in the relations between the rectangular framing devices. A shallow illusionistic depth is established between two or three layers of pictured reality. Detail is then freed up, the component objects becoming less anchored within the overall play of compositional forces. Fronds, palms, and flowers cluster in loose tangles, decorative yet alive (*bestir duskbright*, all works 2017).

McAllister's limited palette also acts as a unifying principle. In a number of images, a narrow range of violets, mauves, and grays on a fluorescent-pink ground describe a crepuscular nature that's both distanced and artificial—a sort of Kenneth Anger pastoral. Within the paintings' shallow plastic depth, minor tonal shifts take on greater significance, as do such subtle touches as the reality effect created by the softening or refraction of an object seen through water in a vase (amidst bliss be, for instance, and among spectral sounds).

In the panoramic burst into dazzling daze, the background pattern of repeated triangles is pushed out to the edge of the canvas, a floral idyll filling the viewer's field of vision. In these larger landscapes, reticence and sophistication give way to an enveloping painterly generosity.

— Patrick Price