

Quentin James McCaffrey. The Distance of Desire

by MARGHERITA ARTONI • 8 SEPTEMBER 2026 • REVIEWS

There are places that seem to belong to us before we have ever inhabited them. We recognise them in the arrangement of a window, in the light crossing a room, in the presence of a rug or a vase of flowers. Something in these forms precedes memory and allows it to surface without giving it a precise image. Quentin James McCaffrey's paintings emerge within this uncertain territory, where familiarity and estrangement meet, and every environment holds the trace of a possible experience.



Quentin James McCaffrey, "Landscape with Sunbeam", 2026, oil on canvas over wood panel, 16 x 13 in. Courtesy Alison Jacques ® Quentin James McCaffrey, ph. JSP Art Photography

The new exhibition at Alison Jacques, the artist's first solo exhibition in the United Kingdom, brings together paintings in which imagined interiors acquire a particular emotional intensity. Rigorous perspectives, furniture, mirrors, curtains and openings onto distant landscapes compose environments suspended between different eras. Each element possesses an almost tactile precision, while the whole eludes any clearly defined temporal or geographical coordinates. The architecture seems to remember something the viewer cannot quite identify. McCaffrey deliberately avoids working from direct observation or photographic references. "When working too closely from a reference, it starts dictating the painting. I'm more interested in allowing the painting to arrive on its own", he says. The image therefore emerges through a slow process of construction, in which the painting develops its own internal relationships and objects take on the role of psychological presences: mirrors, flowers, rugs, antique furniture and paintings hanging on the walls.



Quentin James McCaffrey, "Mirror with View", 2026, oil on canvas over wood panel 16 x 13 in. Courtesy Alison Jacques ® Quentin James McCaffrey, ph. JSP Art Photography

From this the exhibition's central feeling emerges: a distance that fuels desire. The interiors draw the eye in and hold it there. A door offers a glimpse of a landscape; a window opens onto the outside; a mirror reflects a portion of the room hidden from the position from which we observe it. Access remains deferred. To see is to approach something that continues to elude us. McCaffrey situates himself within a lineage in which the domestic interior assumes a mental function. In the paintings of Vilhelm Hammershøi, the room becomes a form of silence; in Edward Hopper, a threshold between presence and distance; in Giorgio de Chirico, a device capable of altering our perception of reality. McCaffrey gathers these tensions and transfers them into spaces devoid of figures, where windows, doors and reflective surfaces articulate both a visual and psychological experience.



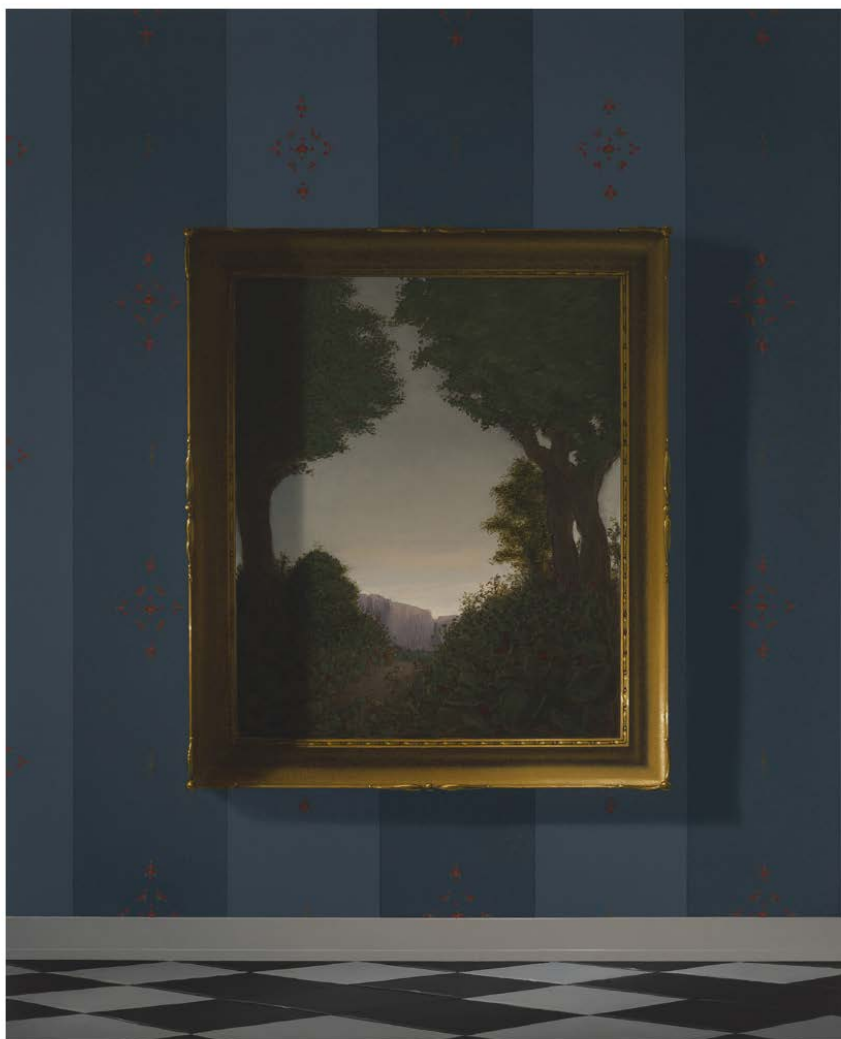
Quentin James McCaffrey, "View", 2026, oil on canvas over wood panel.
Courtesy Alison Jacques ® Quentin James McCaffrey, ph. JSP Art Photography

In *Mirror with View* (2026), the reflection expands the field of vision and introduces an elsewhere within the scene. The mirrored surface alters our perception of the architecture, offering an unexpected perspective. What lies beyond the limits of the room suddenly appears close, while nevertheless retaining its inaccessibility. In *Landscape with Sunbeam* (2026), light establishes a relationship between interior and landscape. The beam of light captures a moment on the verge of transformation: the scene possesses the stillness of something that has already happened and the anticipation of something that remains possible. Light becomes a perceptual measure of duration.



Quentin James McCaffrey, "Mirror with Sunbeam", 2026, oil on canvas over wood panel 13 x 11 in. Courtesy Alison Jacques ® Quentin James McCaffrey, ph. JSP Art Photography

The absence of the human figure intensifies this suspension. No one directly inhabits the spaces, yet everything suggests a presence. An antique piece of furniture, a curtain, a vase of flowers, a painting hanging on the wall become traces of a life that has remained offstage. The objects preserve an emotional imprint without revealing its origin. Anna Kristensen described McCaffrey's painting as a condition of "arrested time", a state of stillness in which the immobility of the interiors makes perceptible what takes place beyond their boundaries. In the new series, this suspension takes on a more rarefied form. The reduction of elements concentrates attention on the relationships between space, light and openings, making the act of seeing itself the central experience. McCaffrey describes his interest in "the relationship between interior and exterior, and about interpretation". The structure of the paintings translates this idea into visual terms. The interior becomes the point from which the outside world is perceived and imagined; doors, windows and mirrors function as devices through which what we see is filtered.



Quentin James McCaffrey, "Landscape", 2026, oil on canvas over wood panel 13
x 11 in. Courtesy Alison Jacques ® Quentin James McCaffrey, ph. JSP Art
Photography

The pictorial tradition to which the artist looks reinforces this investigation. In the Old Italian masters, from Giotto to Masaccio and Piero della Francesca, he recognises the moment when space becomes a structure of vision. In the Dutch painters of the Seventeenth century, such as Vermeer, Gerrit Dou and Gerard ter Borch, he finds the ability to transform the domestic interior into a perceptual and psychological dimension. Centred perspectives, measured geometries and calibrated luminosity are absorbed into the construction of contemporary images. Technical precision might initially direct the eye towards the surface and the rendering of materials. Yet virtuosity remains subordinate to atmosphere and to the structure of the image. McCaffrey describes technique as an “obstacle”, emphasising the need to keep it in the service of the painting and its intimate dimension.



Quentin James Mccaffrey, “Bouquet” 2026, oil on canvas over wood panel 10 x 8 in. Courtesy Alison Jacques ® Quentin James McCaffrey, ph. JSP Art Photography

In *The True Veil* (2026), composed of eleven panels, this investigation takes on a sequential form. Each panel presents a variation on the visual experience and belongs to a broader sense of duration. The title evokes a surface that both separates and allows us to see: the veil filters what appears, allowing only part of what exists beyond it to emerge. Here, the emotional logic of the entire cycle comes into focus. The veil introduces distance, the mirror multiplies it, the door suggests passage and light records duration. Architectural elements and everyday objects thus become concrete forms of waiting, absence and desire. In the end, what remains is a nostalgia directed towards something we may never have possessed. It is desire in its quietest form, born before a possibility glimpsed yet still beyond reach. There is also a subtle unease: every perfectly ordered interior seems to harbour something beyond our knowledge. McCaffrey paints the experience of standing before a threshold. The world appears close, legible, familiar; then a reflection diverts our vision, a door opens onto an elsewhere, a shift in light alters the scene. The room becomes an interior condition. This is where the painting finds its most intimate force: in constructing images capable of making us desire something we do not yet know how to name. Before these suspended interiors, looking means recognising a part of ourselves precisely at the moment when it appears most distant.

Info:

Quentin James McCaffrey

3/09/2026 – 3/10/2026

Alison Jacques

22 Cork Street, London

alisonjacques.com



Margherita Artoni

Margherita Artoni is a contemporary art critic and curator working between Italy and the United States. She began collaborating with Flash Art and has written for Segno, Juliet, Artribune, Exibart, Inside Art, ArteIN, part of cult(ure), The Art Fuse, and Whitehot Magazine. She has directed galleries in Turin (NEOCHROME, EDGE ArtSpace) and New York (TEAM Gallery), and curated projects and exhibitions with international artists such as Rashid Johnson, Theaster Gates, Ali Banisadr, Angel Otero, Tim Rollins & K.O.S., Laura Owens, and Mika Tajima. She has also curated projects for NADA New York and MIART.

Quentin James McCaffrey: The Architecture of Memory

Margherita Artoni (/authors/margherita-artoni/) - Monday, August 31, 2026



In an age saturated by images, Quentin James McCaffrey's paintings propose a slower and a more contemplative mode of attention. Through carefully constructed interiors, architectural fragments and charged arrangements of objects, his practice investigates the relationship between perception, memory and imagination.

McCaffrey's paintings occupy an ambiguous territory between recognition and invention. His interiors appear familiar while resisting a precise location, evoking spaces that seem remembered rather than observed. Like a Proustian fragment of memory, they are activated less by the reconstruction of a specific place than by atmosphere, sensation and the subtle return of impressions that have remained beneath consciousness.

His recent exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery further revealed the artist's exploration of interior spaces as psychological landscapes, where architecture becomes a structure of recollection and projection. His forthcoming solo exhibition at Alison Jacques in London continues this investigation through imagined rooms, reflections and environments suspended between the real and the dreamlike.

Within these carefully composed settings, objects acquire a particular presence. Furniture, mirrors, flowers, framed images and architectural details do not simply occupy the painted surface; they establish relationships between absence and presence, intimacy and distance. An object can function as a synecdoche: a fragment that evokes a larger reality, carrying traces of memory, desire and human experience beyond its physical existence.

Colour plays a central role in McCaffrey's practice. His restrained and carefully balanced palettes create atmospheres in which light, architecture and surface converge. Colour does not merely describe an environment; it determines its emotional register, shaping the psychological experience of the image.

Across his paintings, recurring motifs, reflections and images within images form a distinctive visual language. These elements operate as thresholds between the visible world and an interior dimension, where details become signs and fragments suggest narratives that extend beyond what is immediately presented.

In the context of contemporary image culture, McCaffrey's work affirms painting as a space of duration, ambiguity and presence. His paintings invite a sustained encounter in which meaning emerges gradually, through attention, memory and the experience of looking.

Margherita Artoni (MA): Your paintings often depict carefully constructed interior spaces that feel familiar yet impossible to locate. These environments evoke psychological territories where architecture, memory and imagination intersect. They suggest places recalled through sensation rather than directly observed. How do you understand the relationship between physical space and inner space in your practice? How does an environment become transformed into a carrier of memory, desire and emotional experience?



Quentin James McCaffrey View, 2026 Oil on canvas over wood panel 12 3/4 x 13 x 11/2 inches qmccaffrey162

Quentin James McCaffrey (QJM): I work from my imagination therefore the paintings come from my psyche. Composing intuitively, I try to clear my mind while working. This allows the interiors in my paintings to translate to a psychological interior. The exterior, or its effects, are obscured or distorted in most of the paintings. This creates and defines a tension between the interior and exterior.

The space that is built in the paintings acts as a stage or scene. Artists whose work often inhabits an enigmatic space, such as Magritte, Gertrude Abercrombie, Vermeer, or Giotto, clearly define the “stage” of the painting. These settings are simple invented planes on which the elements of the paintings are composed. I see a similarity in my work and think there is something in this way of working that charges the space depicted and allows it a level of intrigue.

MA: Objects occupy a significant role within your compositions. Mirrors, rugs, flowers, furniture and architectural details contribute to the atmosphere of each painting, creating subtle relationships between intimacy and distance, presence and absence. Do you think of objects as forms of synecdoche — fragments capable of containing or suggesting a larger reality beyond themselves? How can an everyday object become a vehicle for memory, desire or psychological meaning within the painted image?

QJM: When constructing a painting I don't think about the semiotics of the elements within it. I'm considering formal elements such as composition and value. I think that because I don't use specific references such as working from life or images it allows the objects to be symbolic. The context of the elements in the painting and their relationships to each other also plays a role.

MA: Your paintings reveal a remarkable chromatic coherence. Colour creates atmospheres in which architectural forms, objects and empty spaces acquire a particular emotional intensity. It guides the viewer's perception of the painted world and establishes its psychological register. How do you approach colour within your practice? Does it emerge intuitively through the act of painting, or does it function as a structural element through which you construct relationships of mood, tension and meaning?

QJM: Often as I compose an image I will have an intuitive sense of what dominant colors suit that piece. Other times I see the image in my mind and it has a sense of color inherently. As I work, I consider the colors I have used so far when making decisions about further elements. If I have painted a wall taking up the majority of the picture plane, color decisions for objects sitting in front of it will be made in relation to what I have already painted.

This will continue for each element of the painting and I will adjust as I begin to see the painting as a whole. A discussion about color in painting is also tied to palette and the physical realities of paint and technique.



Quentin James McCaffrey Mirror with Sunbeam, 2023 Oil on canvas over wood panel 13 1/2 h x 11 w x 1 1/2 d inch qmccaffrey 069

MA: Over time, your work has developed a distinctive visual vocabulary of interiors, architectural structures, reflections and recurring motifs. This language feels both carefully formed and continuously discovered. How did you forge the iconography that defines your practice today? When you think about these recurring elements, do you consider them as signs whose meaning evolves through repetition and context?

How does the relationship between signifier, image and memory develop during the process of painting? How do you compose in the studio? Do you work on one painting at a time or across several works simultaneously? Do you create preparatory studies? Does distance or interruption allow a work to reveal itself more fully?

QJM: I grew up around a lot of antiques and art in domestic spaces. The relationships between these objects and spaces have had a strong effect on me. Since studying in Italy and looking at painters I admire, I have become attached to some enduring themes, formats and techniques. This has synthesized into the elements that reoccur in my work.

The vocabulary of my work is a pastiche of western art and interiors. It represents many times and places as filtered through my imagination and process. I see the present, or any point in time, as an accumulation of the past up until that point.

In the studio I am working on many paintings at once. Usually all the paintings for a body of work will be made simultaneously and will move together towards their finished state. This way of working allows me to consider the composition or cohesion of a body of work as a whole.

I begin paintings with a small thumbnail sketch and move quickly to a schematic translation of it onto the painting surface. I try to make as many decisions as possible on the painting as something is gained by the process and decisions I make while working. As I work, paint needs to dry and I do not always know the next action to take. This time allows me to work on different paintings while I consider what to do.

MA: Your paintings emerge from a highly personal vision of space, memory and perception. They reveal a particular way of seeing, yet once an image enters the world it becomes open to the experiences and associations of others. Do you feel a responsibility toward the vision that your paintings communicate? What role can the artist's vision occupy today as a way of revealing forms of experience that might otherwise remain unseen?

QJM: My role is to shepherd the work into existence and to create the conditions to allow the work to be seen in a suitable context. I think it is dangerous to prescribe an experience or interpretation. I'll only say that the scale of my work and the intimacy it requires allows for a type of encounter that I hope for viewers.

MA: At a moment when images are produced and circulated with unprecedented speed, painting continues to insist on duration, attention and material presence. What can painting still offer that cannot be reduced to the circulation of images? What possibilities do you believe remain unexplored within the medium?

QJM: To make a painting is to build an idea or image in a physical reality, inseparable from material, through process. This is an alchemy that allows something greater or different to emerge from its parts. Despite the profusion of images, this has not changed. Through contrast, the unique attributes of painting may be further valued. What makes artwork new and interesting is an artist's honest and singular engagement with content, materials and process. As long as people are compelled to do this, which they are, previously unseen work will be revealed.

Main Image: Quentin James McCaffrey Sunset, 2023 Oil on canvas over wood panel 10h x 8 w x 1 1/2 d inches qmccaffrey 043



CONTEMPORARY ART MAGAZINE
SINCE 1980

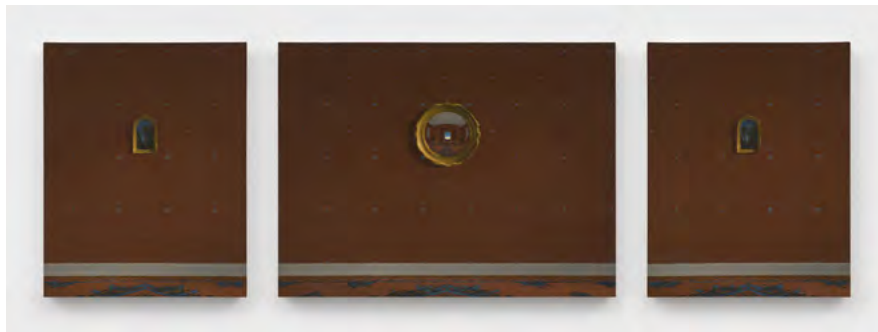
JULIET

The Gifts: Sequences and Visual Silences by Quentin James McCaffrey

By: MARGHERITA ARTONI
27 FEBRUARY 2026

SEQUENCES-AND-VISUAL-SILENCES-BY-QUENTIN-JAMES-MCCAFFREY/) REVIEWS ([HTTPS://WWW.JULIET-ARTMAGAZINE.COM/EN/CATEGORY/REVIEWS/](https://www.juliet-artmagazine.com/en/category/reviews/))

In his second solo exhibition at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery in New York, *The Gifts*, Quentin James McCaffrey presents a series of paintings situated within meticulously orchestr environments, where rugs, bouquets, miniatures, draperies and reflective surfaces assume a structural role. These are not homes but conceptual configurations in which e element defines proportions, angles and optical trajectories. Order is essential, devoid of superfluous ornamentation, while lighting establishes relationships and connections among forms.



Quentin James McCaffrey, *Mirror with Landscapes*, 2026. Oil on canvas over wood panel. Center panel: 12" x 16" x 1 1/2"; Side Panels: 12" x 9 5/8" x 1 1/2" each. Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

The exhibition unfolds through subtle mutations: each work reveals minimal oscillations relative to the preceding one, generating a progressive flow that examines space, time semantic value rather than narrating stories. Recurring motifs do not assert identity but modulate perception through sometimes infinitesimal variations. This creates a dialogue between sign and content — meaning and signifier — in which the compositional plane remains coherent while symbolic charge evolves. Domestic architectures allow ephemeral traces and remnants of memory to surface, persisting beyond immediate sensory apprehension. The absence of bodies emphasizes the active function of space.



Quentin James McCaffrey, *Mirror with Landscapes*, 2026. Oil on canvas over wood panel. Center panel: 12" x 16" x 1 1/2"; Side Panels: 12" x 9 5/8" x 1 1/2" each. Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

These environments act as fields of tension between opacity and refraction, closure and openness, articulating an intimate balance without diachronic hierarchy. Measured tonalities produce contemplative atmospheres, avoiding theatricality, while the perspectival structure guides the gaze toward targeted focal points, limiting peripheral distractions. References to tradition emerge through resonances rather than direct citation: the coexistence of different temporalities evokes the enigma of René Magritte, particularly *L'Empire des lumières*. At the same time, the descriptive finesse recalls seventeenth-century Flemish interiors. These echoes translate into a contemporary visual grammar rooted in rigor simplicity.

CONTACT ([HTTPS://WWW.JULIET-ARTMAGAZINE.COM/EN/CONTACT/](https://www.juliet-artmagazine.com/en/contact/))
 ([HTTPS://WWW.JULIET-ARTMAGAZINE.COM/THE-GIFTS-SEQUENZE-E-SILENZI-VISIVI-DI-QUENTIN-JAMES-MCCAFFREY/](https://www.juliet-artmagazine.com/the-gifts-sequence-e-silenzi-visivi-di-quentin-james-mccaffrey/))


Quentin James McCaffrey, *Mirror with drapery*, 2026. Oil on canvas over wood panel. 13 1/2h" x 11w". Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

The gifts, the eponymous work, composed of eleven parts, arranges the wall as a modulated sequence: objects, reflections and glimmers create continuity without linear narra The “gifts” gain density through serial placement, constructing a visual duration akin to a silent musical rhythm. Mirrors, large and small, flat and convex, gilded and w modulate dimensional realms and cognitive intersections. In *Mirror with sunbeams*, the central panel, placed on the floor, reflects the opposite wall, creating rooms within room *Mirror with view*, the simulacrum introduces windows to twilight skies and distant lands, opening an elsewhere perceptible only through contemplation. In *Mirror with drapery* partially drawn veil suggests deferred access, while in *Mirror with sunrise*, the dawn appears as a tonal gradation, recording change without declaring it.



Quentin James McCaffrey, *Mirror with sunset*, 2026. Oil on canvas over wood panel. 12 3/4h" x 13w". Nicelle Beauchene Gallery.

Each interior becomes a topography of energy, with calibrated chromaticities producing subtle microclimates and strategic orientations. Simultaneously, the absence of figures heightens the vitality of the horizon itself. The continuous scanning of micro-modifications transforms, in an almost Proustian way, the perception of time and meaning, making viewing a suspended experience. With *The Gifts*, Quentin James McCaffrey consolidates his position on the international stage through a language that combines technical precision with theoretical awareness. The exhibition demonstrates his ability to transform everyday elements into poetic-visual devices, where measure, discipline and expansion toward the beyond define a singular and deeply emotional aesthetic immersion.

Info:

Quentin James McCaffrey. *The Gifts*, 2026.

20/02/2026 – 28/03/2026

[www.nicellebeauchene.com](https://nicellebeauchene.com/) (<https://nicellebeauchene.com/>)

Margherita Artoni is a contemporary art critic and curator working between Italy and the United States. She began collaborating with Flash Art and has written for *Segno*, *Juliet*, *Artribune*, *Exibart*, *Inside Art*, *ArteIN*, *part of cult(ure)*, *The Art Fuse*, and *Whitehot Magazine*. She has directed galleries in Turin (NEO-CHROME, EDGE ArtSpace) and New York (TEAM Gallery), developing exhibition programs with international artists such as Rashid Johnson, Theaster Gates, Ali Banisadr, Angel Otero, Tim Rollins & K.O.S., Laura Owens, and Mika Tajima. She has also curated projects for NADA New York and MIART.

The Best Booths at Independent New York, From Monumental Paintings to Tender Photographs

BY ANGELICA VILLA | May 12, 2023



Mirror with Fountain, 2023, Oil on canvas over wood panel, 16 x 13 x 1 1/2 inches

Quentin James McCaffrey at Nicelle Beauchene

Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, which relocated to Tribeca from the Lower East Side in 2020, has a showcase of works by three emerging painters: Jordan Kasey, Quentin James McCaffrey, and Willie Stewart. Each artist's work shares a common theme of depicting domestic spaces. Kasey tightly crops the statuesque bodies in her bold canvases, enclosing them in spaces that could be read as either intimate or claustrophobic. McCaffrey's subtly rendered wallpapered rooms, presented in the artist's gallery debut last December, are devoid of figures yet filled with plants, mirrors, and miniature paintings that seem to stand in for missing personages. But it was Stewart, whose quiet still-lives that draw from Pop art and the Pictures Generation, that stood out.



Quentin James McCaffrey
Landscape with Saint | oil on wood panel, 10 x 8 inches



Quentin James McCaffrey
Landscapes and Houseplant | oil on wood panel, 16 x 13 inches



Quentin James McCaffrey
Landscape with Pillows | oil on wood panel, 14 x 11 inches

Quentin James McCaffrey

New York, NY
917.881.5631 (Hesse Flatow)
@_quentinjames

b. 1987 New York, NY

Education

- 2011 MFA, New York Academy of Art, New York, NY
- 2009 BA, Taylor University, Upland, IN

Solo Exhibitions

- 2021 *False Azure*, Hesse Flatow East, Amagansett, NY
- A Day at the Beach*, Marlborough Gallery, New York, NY
- I have an ideal*, 1969, New York, NY
- Night Watch*, Winter Street Gallery, Edgartown, MA
- 2020 *Promises*, Hesse Flatow, New York, NY
- INTERIORS: hello from the living room*, 1969, New York, NY
- Home Bound*, Treistle Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
- Last World*, Hesse Flatow, New York, NY
- Edition #2*, Showhouse Jay Jay, Antwerp, Belgium (online)

Award

- 2020 Grant, The Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation

Publications

- 2021 "The Future Is Collaborative: A New Fair Embraces Unlikely Pairings and Profit-Sharing," *Hyperallergic*
- 2020 Alfred Mac Adam, "Interiors: hello from the living room," *Brooklyn Rail*

Represented by

Hesse Flatow, New York, NY

In Western painting, the domestic interior has been a place for investigating the psyche and intimate relationships. My paintings draw from quattrocento Italian painting and seventeenth-century Dutch interiors in their use of simple geometry and symbolism, as well as in their stoicism. Drawing a parallel between intimate personal experience and imperfect historical narratives, I compare the domestic and psychological interior and how they are mutually symbolic and influential. Referencing the nostalgia of nineteenth-century academic painting, my paintings allow a space for questioning the forgetful serenity often depicted, and acknowledge an undercurrent of a more complex reality. I use cultural appropriation in Western art and decoration as a general symbol for unconscious personal development in postimperial international society. As development of society and the psyche straddle pastiche, compilation, and imitation, the lack of clarity of self becomes evidence of the internal psychological void and human state of fragility and vulnerability.

McCaffrey



97