

ARTFORUM

John McAllister

RICHARD TELLES FINE ART

7380 Beverly Boulevard

September 12, 2015–October 17, 2015

By Mariko Munro

Inspired by its creator's recent trip to Japan, a large-scale, freestanding painted screen (or byobu) embraces the decorative nature of John McAllister's work by joining canvases to form an ornamental centerpiece. On one side, a flat interior scene stretches across all six panels—a suave living room with a slender table, vase of shapely flowers, two paintings, and lounging cat. Opulent oils in rose, cerise, and carnation pink dominate the composition, offset by the colors of the depicted paintings—a landscape with muddy olive foliage, a sea-foam stream, and cerulean sky; a coral and peach-hued still life. The screen's reverse features a shifting patterned “wallpaper” in muted mauve and taffy pink with two potted plants painted low as if set on the floor, and several depictions of postcard-size pictures seemingly affixed to the screen's surface. The final panel departs with a leaf-and-branch motif set against a dark plum ground, favoring a more graphic effect.



Within this single work McAllister incites a playful conversation addressing multiple layers of representation, continuing beyond the patrician setting (paintings within paintings) to the incorporation of frames within the canvases of the wall-hung works. Even the verbiage of his titles—the exhibition's, for example, “Sultry Spells Rapture”—employs homonyms, multiplying possibilities of interpretation with poetic effect. The byobu contributes to an elegant and fitting development in McAllister's work: He continues to utilize the dandyish language and technique of nineteenth-century French painting, a period which itself was influenced by the super-flat aesthetic of Japanese painting. He simultaneously luxuriates in a narrowed and sumptuous palette to a shimmering, immersive effect—color negatives set against a light box, or black light Matisse.