

Press Release

QUENTIN JAMES MCCAFFREY

3 September – 3 October 2026

Preview: Wednesday 2 September, 6-8 pm



Quentin James McCaffrey, *View*, 2026 © Quentin James McCaffrey.

Alison Jacques announces the first UK solo show of new paintings by American artist, Quentin James McCaffrey (b.1987, New York).

McCaffrey's work centres on carefully painted interior spaces. These rooms are imagined rather than real; spaces which feel believable but are invented, combining architectural details from different periods within a single, timeless setting. They evoke realms within or cast out of paradise, as well as the imaginary and the dreamlike. The paintings inhabit a subconscious place charged with longing, fear and desire, yet always viewed at a distance or through a reflection.

McCaffrey deliberately avoids working from direct studies or photographic reference: '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.' Rather than people, everyday objects act as psychological surrogates; mirrors, flowers, rugs, antique furniture, framed paintings, and potted plants become stand-ins for memory, emotion, and psychological presence.

This exhibition sees McCaffrey's paintings move in a more distilled direction. While his earlier works often accumulated a greater abundance of objects and visual information, these compositions have been carefully reduced, allowing space itself to take precedence. As McCaffrey states, 'The main themes remain similar, but the emphasis has shifted... My earlier paintings were much more concerned with interiority. In this body of work, I'm thinking more about the relationship between interior and exterior, and about interpretation.'

In these new paintings, slight variations in light and perspective create a quiet rhythm, recalling the progression of film stills. McCaffrey's mirrors return unexpected or impossible views, subtly shifting the architecture of the spaces they inhabit, while doorways frame landscapes that remain visible yet just beyond reach. Paintings of paintings, openings and mirrors become, in the artist's words, 'a kind of screen through which we interpret the world', creating layered viewpoints that blur the line between the observer and the observed.

McCaffrey's work revives highly traditional techniques — precise oil painting, linear perspective, and historical composition — while addressing contemporary concerns about perception, memory, and identity. His paintings do not rely on overt symbolism or narrative; instead, their emotional effect comes from atmosphere, spatial relationships, and subtle shifts of light, which often becomes the true subject of each painting. Sunbeams entering through windows or reflecting from mirrors create a quiet sense of suspended time, as McCaffrey states, 'I'm thinking about time outside as well as inside, where sometimes there are two timelines existing within a single painting.'

Key themes in McCaffrey's paintings are memory and accumulated history. Rooms become repositories of experience rather than merely physical spaces. These are psychological interiors which deliberately avoid narrative and invite slow looking.

McCaffrey's interest in perception is rooted in the connection he feels with the history of painting. References to tradition emerge through resonances rather than direct citation. He returns repeatedly to the artists of the Italian Quattrocento, particularly Giotto, Masaccio, and Piero della Francesca. McCaffrey states, 'There's something incredibly exciting about that monumental shift in perception. They still retain the symbolic structures of medieval painting, but suddenly they're organising space mathematically.' Equally formative are the domestic interiors of Dutch Golden Age painters, including Vermeer, Gerrit Dou, and Gerard ter Borch. However, rather than quoting these historical traditions, McCaffrey adopts their investigations using carefully centred perspectives and measured compositions to construct imagined spaces governed by their own internal logic. 'I view technique as an obstacle,' McCaffrey says. 'There is a real pleasure in rendering something beautiful and intimate, but one has to resist

letting that become the point. The challenge is to keep technique in service of the painting, rather than allowing it to become a performance of skill.'

Suspended between observation and invention, McCaffrey's paintings invite viewers into spaces that are at once familiar and quietly estranged. Their measured perspectives, distant vistas, and subtle interventions of light suggest that the world beyond the room is always shaped by the structures through which we perceive it. The paintings remain open, allowing meaning to emerge gradually through looking and through the subtle negotiation between interior and exterior, imagination and observation.

Quentin James McCaffrey lives and works in New York. He graduated from the New York Academy of Art in 2011 and attended The Macedonia Institute residency in 2022. McCaffrey is a two-time recipient of the Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant, awarded in 2020 and 2022. In 2025, McCaffrey participated in Last Night I Dreamed of Manderley, curated by Daniel Malarkey at Alison Jacques.

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