

Exploring the realms of possibility

American artist Nick McPhail's architecturally-inspired paintings use layers and blank space to examine our perceptions of the world around us.

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Interview by Hannah Valentine



Working on his paintings, drawings, and ceramics from his LA studio, Nick McPhail is inspired by the unique architecture of his Californian hometown, but he does not see realistic representation as the most important feature of his work. Instead, in luminously textured and coloured oil paintings, he encourages us to look with a fresh perspective on views that we might usually take for granted. Inspired by the way that collage uses layers to conceal and reveal certain elements, Nick overlays and overlaps his oil paints to explore the way that colour, light, and texture interact.

At Michigan State University, Nick began his university career by studying Audio Production before switching to Studio Art, and the

importance of the empty space is carefully considered. By highlighting certain elements and downplaying others, he explores how, very often, it is the things that seem the most blank and mundane that provide the most opportunity for thought. Nick regularly exhibits his paintings, both in galleries and in more unusual locations. Last year his collection 'Windows' was exhibited at Ochi Gallery in LA, while a permanent installation of his 12-foot-high acrylic painting has towered over the busy main road on Sunset Boulevard since 2019.

We talk to Nick about the importance of boredom, the appeal of architecture, and the meditative practice of art.



'Hill' 2019, 60 x 48in, oil on canvas

Talk us through your artistic process—your tools, your routines and your methods.

My routines change all the time, but I'm very strict about whatever routine I'm currently in. I always try to have a rigid schedule where my studio time is the top priority. I think it's vital as an artist to carve out

look for that is the really cheap metal eucalyptus that you can find in hardware stores. Leaving outlines around objects is a way to incorporate the aesthetics of collage into my paintings. One thing I like about collage is that each object or texture has its own outlined boundary, and I've spent a lot of time exploring ways to get that same feel in an oil painting. It adds a level of tension to the overall composition.

All of my work—paintings, drawings, ceramics—informs each other. The visual information and techniques that I use in one medium spills into the others, and the whole process becomes a cycle over time. It's not very separated, even though the works look quite different. My painting practice is very much about subtraction. I start with a solid colour underpainting which is usually a bright orange, pink, red or yellow. Oil paint can be very transparent, so I try to think about what colour and feeling I want to resonate underneath the painting as a whole. For me painting is a process of covering up the underpainting, making choices about what to leave visible, and to what extent.

Your paintings focus on buildings and other architectural aspects.

What is it about these elements that appeals to you?

I'm interested in how we interact with the architecture that surrounds us in the world. I explore how we remember these spaces and environments, and how we frame these scenes in our minds. When I look at architecture, I contemplate the factors that could have affected it and made it look the way it does—the different occupants, building laws, environmental factors, time and entropy, aesthetic choices and function, interaction over time with plants and the natural world. To me, it's all insanely complicated and interesting, but, at the same time, it is just a simple building.



'Entryway' 2020, 70 x 58in



'Canopy' 2020, 48 x 36in

Nick McPhail

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'Power Lines' 2019, 48 x 36in, oil on paper



Permanent installation on Sunset Blvd in Echo Park, Los Angeles, 2019. Acrylic on aluminium, 12ft x 10ft

'Windows' exhibition at Ochi Projects, Los Angeles, 2020

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'Garden' 2019, 21 x 17in, oil on paper

'Balcony' 2018, 24 x 18in, oil on canvas

'View' 2021, 24 x 18in

'Shadow' 2021, 24 x 18in

'Structure with Trees' 2019, 70 x 58in, oil on canvas

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