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Nick McPhail: 'Windows'
Light and Color Filtered Through Architecture
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Nick McPhail's paintings present aspects of the vernacular Los Angeles landscape that are often overlooked, focusing on moments and places that pass by unnoticed. Though the final works are paintings, McPhail starts with photographs of architectural details as well as dwellings surrounded by foliage. He transfers the basic composition of his photographs into drawings, then uses the drawings as a point of departure for the paintings. The paintings are created in layers as McPhail begins with a colorful underpainting that resonates through the subsequent layers, creating an internal glow. The overpainting is gestural, made with a thick brush that reflects a mood rather than an exact representation. In these works, the urban landscape of Los Angeles resonates as something both familiar and otherworldly.

The paintings illustrate how light and color are filtered through architecture and how intersecting planes create space and dimension. *Entryway* (all works 2019) is a painting of three rectangles on a washy light-purple and blue slab. The rectangles are the walls and doorway that define the closed entryway to a home. On the other side of these walls and hanging over them are trees. The actual color of the walls is unknown, but in McPhail's depiction pink hues emerge from the gray and blue-green facade. The image could be a driveway leading to a walled off home, yet for McPhail, who or what exists beyond the walls is less interesting than how they catch the sun and reflect the color of the day.

Structure with Trees is a painting of a towering yellow office building on stilts elevated off the ground. Seen from the distance, the building is bordered by green trees that appear to grow out of concrete pylons. An aqua blue sky is reflected in a horizontal stripe of glass windows that encircles the building. The painting is satisfyingly geometric and perfectly proportioned in the way the architecture frames the natural elements.

Hill has a similar compositional strategy. The underpainting, a thin, orangy-yellow layer, emanates throughout the image. Here, McPhail presents a street view looking into the distance and down a hill. The bottom third of the painting is the street— painted in a transparent gray. In

the middle section, McPhail details a modern home and a car partially blocked by the apex of the hill. Part of the home is in deep shadow, while the sunlit facade is a whitish blue. The house is surrounded by rounded green trees. In the distance is another building, the color of the underpainting. Branches dangle into the upper third of the image. The painting reflects how three-dimensional space is flattened by photography and McPhail happily emphasizes this illusion. Some of the paintings, like the 8 x 10-inch *View* present fragments, something the eye catches and the camera records in passing. The corner of a building seen through the trees. The moment is familiar and fleeting simultaneously.

Although none of McPhail's paintings contain people, the works are all about the human presence. People shape gardens, build buildings, drive and park cars and populate the city. Their absence gives McPhail a freedom to experiment and to become a voyeur who wanders through the urban landscape, imagining how the shapes and colors of the city co-exist. McPhail creates private moments in public spaces and his loose style of painting allows the works to thrive in the place where abstraction meets representation. He plays with perspectives and vantage points, creating a knowing, insider's view of a specific aspect of Los Angeles. Though unpopulated, the images are not sad or lonely. They radiate with an internal glow that reflects the magical aura that is Los Angeles.

<https://artnowla.com/2020/02/12/nick-mcphail-windows/>