

SHANE CAMPBELL GALLERY

LA Weekly
September 2006

AFTERSCHOOL ART

By Tom Christie and Holly Myers

John McAllister's story has an appealing air of American romanticism, evoking the likes of Pollack and de Kooning. He grew up in Louisiana, where his exposure to art was limited to books and magazines. He studied photojournalism at the University of Texas-Austin, then struck out for the big city, picking up an education in art history while working as a night watchman at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Casper David Friedrich made a lasting impression, as did Frederic Church and Winslow Homer. In 2001, McAllister traveled to Italy, encountering Caravaggio, Bernini, Tintoretto, Veronese, and Titian. The trip cemented his resolve. "I came back from Italy," he says, "feeling I needed to do more in every way to make paintings that carried the same force as those I had seen."

So he returned to the books and clippings he'd accumulated in his photojournalism days, looking for a subject that would give his works presence and drama. He became captivated with a photograph of a house being consumed by lava, and that led him to images of fire and explosions. "I noticed how the effects of fire in a landscape were similar to those in Impressionist painting," he says. "In Monet's paintings of Rouen Cathedral, the light is eroding the stone edifice. When there is a fire, the erosion of solid structures is both visual and physical."

The subject of the paintings, he says now, is not fire per se but force: not just the image but the sensation of a momentous occurrence. "Force is a challenging and wonderful topic for painting," he says. "It emphasizes the incredible capacity of oil paint to describe and present movement and light. The paintings are large, beautifully rendered and unapologetically ambitious. "I want my artworks to be invested with intensity and grandeur," he says, "to carry with them the dynamic sensations of the events they depict."

2021 S WABASH AVE
CHICAGO IL 60616
+1 (312) 226 2223