

Justin McAllister: *Mirror-Signals*

April 4 - May 9, 2009

Opening reception: Saturday, April 4th, from 6 to 8pm



Josée Bienvenu Gallery is pleased to present *Mirror-Signals*, Justin McAllister's first solo exhibition with the gallery. The exhibition focuses on paintings and drawings of fires that were set and documented by the artist in northeastern Pennsylvania during the summers of 2007 and 2008.

Burning garbage (couches, La-Z-Boy chairs, piles of tree limbs and paper waste) is a common practice in rural communities, in the form of "controlled burns". The risk associated with setting the fires is an exhilarating aesthetic experience on its own that Justin McAllister translates into paintings. The works celebrate joyful bonfires, where objects seem to be on the brink of dissolving without ever quite relinquishing their recognizably solid origins. Nothing becomes more abstract than the reality of a fire.

Bonfires and campfires are sites of bonding and exchange. Beacons and day beacons were used for centuries to communicate and to signal travelers. At the core of their function was the ability to quickly send a message over great distances. Imagining a scenario that involves the use of this archaic technology as the result of a loss of current ones, the paintings suggest an unknown cultural failure on a grand scale.

This feel of estrangement creates a romantic narrative for the work to develop in. The paintings reference the Hudson River School, its loaded iconography rich in symbolism and its masterful technique. Like playing with fire, embracing today, a seemingly exhausted and forbidden mode of making art is dangerous and attractive. The headlights of cars passing in the background are warning signals of the awareness that the paintings are not swept up in the nostalgia for the majestic landscapes but rather are theaters of manipulated information, mirror-signals of our time.

Justin McAllister was born in Buffalo NY. He received his MFA from Yale University School of Art in 2004 and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. He has had solo shows at Envoy Gallery in New York, and Torch Gallery in Amsterdam.