

*being* JOHN McLEAN (1939 – 2019)  
Paintings

29 November 2019 – 24 January 2020

Christmas closure 24 December – 2 January

PRIVATE VIEW 28 November, Thursday, 6 – 8 PM

[View the Exhibition Catalogue online](#)



*Longformacus*, 2013; acrylic on canvas, 50 x 70 cm

Throughout his life **John McLean** (1939–2019) held an unfettered passion for colour and the art of abstraction which he engaged in as a painter for over 50 years. Art Space Gallery is delighted to present this memorial exhibition of his paintings.

This exhibition is not intended to be a retrospective, more a spontaneous bringing together of some of John's very best paintings, old and new, in a spirit of celebration. Spanning forty years or more, grand compositions will sit alongside small intimate and lyrical works and free-flowing works on paper. There is no claim to be comprehensive; it is more a call to all who care about painting to reaffirm John McLean as an important and inspirational figure in British art.

Large canvases made in Boston following a summer residency at the University of Saskatchewan's Emma Lake workshop in the early 80s and only recently returned from storage are the earliest works; the most

recent are the paintings made with the help of fellow artist and friend Hideatsu Shiba. Finished shortly before his death, when he was almost paralysed from Multiple Systems Atrophy Parkinson's disease, they hold the same exhilarating joy he had always found in the act of painting.

Stylistic changes have taken their course but colour and the tactile qualities of the medium are always at the root of McLean's art. In the large Boston paintings, the paint is fluid and applied exuberantly and spontaneously to the canvas; a response perhaps to the light on the prairie landscapes he experienced in Saskatchewan. Later work is more focused, sometimes hard edged and solid but always with a grasp of how shape, tone and hue can be choreographed into glorious relationships that shift and vibrate. His final pictures, which will include the last painting made, are explorations of light and dark where blocks of dark, evenly applied paint, are incised with a sharp chisel to let the light shine through and set against bursts of loose colour. Made when almost paralysed from Multiple Systems Atrophy Parkinson's they continue to exhibit an exhilarating joy he found throughout his life in the act of painting.



*Fable*, 2007; acrylic on canvas, 61 x 45 cm

Born in Liverpool to Scottish parents and raised in north-east Scotland, John was based in London since the early 1960s, save for spells in America. He studied at St Andrews University from 1957 to 1962 and at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London from 1963 to 1966, but as a painter he was, like many of his heroes - Braque, Miro, Gottlieb - self-taught. He was a tutor at various London Art Schools since 1966 and showed regularly in the UK and abroad since his first solo exhibition in 1975 at Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh. His work is included in major public, corporate and private collections worldwide including Tate, Arts Council of UK, British Council, Edinburgh City Art Gallery and many more.

Catalogue text by: **Elizabeth Cowling, John Elderfield, Andrew Lambirth, Duncan Mcmillan, Richard Morphet, Sarah Whitfield, and Chris Yetton.** A hard copy is available from the Gallery.

Gallery Hours: Tuesday - Saturday, 11 am – 6 pm during exhibitions