

McDermott & McGough

TEAM GALLERY | 306 WINDWARD AVENUE

306 Windward Avenue, Venice

April 23–May 28

Three large paintings of domestic interiors fill the garage of this bungalow gallery. They depict well-appointed spaces—plush furniture, fresh flowers, and plants are the only occupants of these rooms. Where there are windows, curtains are drawn to cover them. A copy of Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948) hangs out on a red Eames chair in *Furnishings, Works of Art, and Other Status Symbols* (all works dated anachronistically, 1965/2017), and a short stack of midcentury crypto-homosexual magazines (*Male Figure*, *Grecian Guild Pictorial*, and *Tomorrow's Man*) touches the bottom edge of the pictorial field in *Chamber Comedy of Manners*. In each room, a painting or two by the midcentury illustrator and hairstylist George Quaintance is given pride of place. In short, these are queer realms, tying taste and titillation together.

Inside the garage's adjacent house, another sequence of paintings sets a broader social context, reproducing the web of language and images that hemmed queer lives in during the decades before gay liberation. Two works, *Absorbed in the Absolute* and *Cigarette Smoke Tinged Breath*, tell the tales of matinee idols Ramon Novarro and Montgomery Clift, respectively. In both, a black-and-white picture of the actor is paired with a smaller, blue-tinted inset image pointing to the cause of their deaths. In Clift's case it was alcohol, in Novarro's, a pair of murderous brothers the famed *Ben-Hur* actor hired as escorts. The visual that stands in for Novarro's grisly death is a soaped-up nude of one of the brothers, Paul Ferguson, painted by McDermott & McGough from a photograph taken by Chicago beefcake photographer and founder of the Leather Archives and Museum, Chuck Renslow. At the brothers' trial, a psychiatrist diagnosed Paul Ferguson as a self-loathing homosexual; to those of us who research pre-liberation LGBTQ lives, this is a woefully familiar story, one that suggests the far-reaching consequences of criminalizing desire.



McDermott & McGough, *Absorbed in the Absolute*, 1965/2017, oil on canvas, 18 x 14".

— *Andy Campbell*