

MEGAN MULROONEY

Tommy May

Conjuror

September 12 – October 24, 2026

Megan Mulrooney is pleased to present *Conjuror*, an exhibition of new paintings by Tommy May. On view from September 12 – October 24, 2026, the show explores the subtle shifts of light that unfold across the open ocean's horizon at sunrise and sunset. This is May's first solo exhibition at the gallery.

Conjuror takes its title from May's father's fishing boat. The paintings originated last summer during long hauls out for tuna that the two would take together, leaving the dock at Martha's Vineyard at four in the morning, the dark, abyssal water below flecked with a bioluminescent glow. Motoring out past West Chop and the Elizabeth Islands archipelago beyond it, then past Noman's Land, May would watch night give way to sunrise before finally losing sight of land altogether, chasing instead an ever-fleeting horizon, where sky and water endlessly transform in tandem. The exhibition follows that same trajectory, from the radiating blues of predawn through to full daylight. Moving through *Conjuror* therefore becomes its own kind of journey, one that unfolds like the horizon itself – in two directions at once, through space and through time.

The horizon recurs in meditation, art, literature, and religion – nearly every account we have of how people orient themselves in the world. It is a phenomenon universally recognized yet forever beyond our physical reach: you can watch it, sail toward it, paint it, but never arrive at it or hold it still. In this sense the horizon exists less as a tangible boundary than as an emotional and psychological construct, something deeply felt rather than possessed. Indeed, each of May's paintings carries its own atmosphere, sensibility and mood as he captures moments in the ever-shifting horizon.

May's paintings extend a lineage of artists who have looked to the same source: the particular light of the Atlantic coast, where the sun falls on the ocean on either side of the island and is thrown back up onto the clouds and the land. Agnes Pelton's early, luminous abstractions, and the work of Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Lee Krasner, and Jackson Pollock, all drew from this same daily phenomenon of light arriving and receding. What unites them, in May's words, is "the temporal light which reliably begins and ends each day," and his own paintings, built up in slow washes of color, try to make that legacy, and that reliability, permanent.

May builds his paintings up in thirty to fifty layers of translucent acrylic washes. A real sunset lasts minutes; a painting of one, in his hands, takes weeks of thin layers to reach the desired effect. "I often paint outside in the environment I am responding to," he explains, "allowing the elements to take part in the growth of the paintings. This could be an uneven, grassy area that directs the washes in unexpected directions, or a shadow cast by a nearby tree that informs my color choices."

Nevertheless, the paintings hold onto duration more than place. The horizon is something the eye keeps returning to but never reaches, and May's process runs on the same logic: weeks of thin washes, one on top of the last, standing in for a sunset that takes minutes to disappear.

Tommy May (b. 1994, Alexandria, VA) received his BFA from The Savannah College of Art and Design in 2022. Recent exhibitions include Airlight, Half Gallery, New York; Not a Figure in Sight, Half Gallery, New York; and 36 Paintings, Harper's, Easthampton. May also maintains a curatorial practice, having recently curated Afterimage at Megan Mulrooney.

