

Josh Dorman *Higher Ground*



Welch Gallery · Georgia State University · 2020



# The Blessing of Babel

Michael Chabon

And all the people were one people, and spoke one tongue. They were subject to one king, and one law. Their manner of dress was uniform, and the food of their tables, in its stuff and style of preparation, was the same in every home. They sang one body of songs, followed one calendar of feast days, and told one cycle of tales and legends, into which variation crept only through carelessness or lapse of memory, because experience was everywhere uniformly expressed, and the people's power to interpret that experience was limited by the patterns and coloration of the solitary tongue. They possessed one vocabulary to speak of love, joy, regret, anger. Across all the face of the land of Shinar there was one culture, one people, one way.

And the people grew smug in their homogeneity, and complacent in their certainty of being understood. And the more readily they understood each other, the less cause they had for speaking,

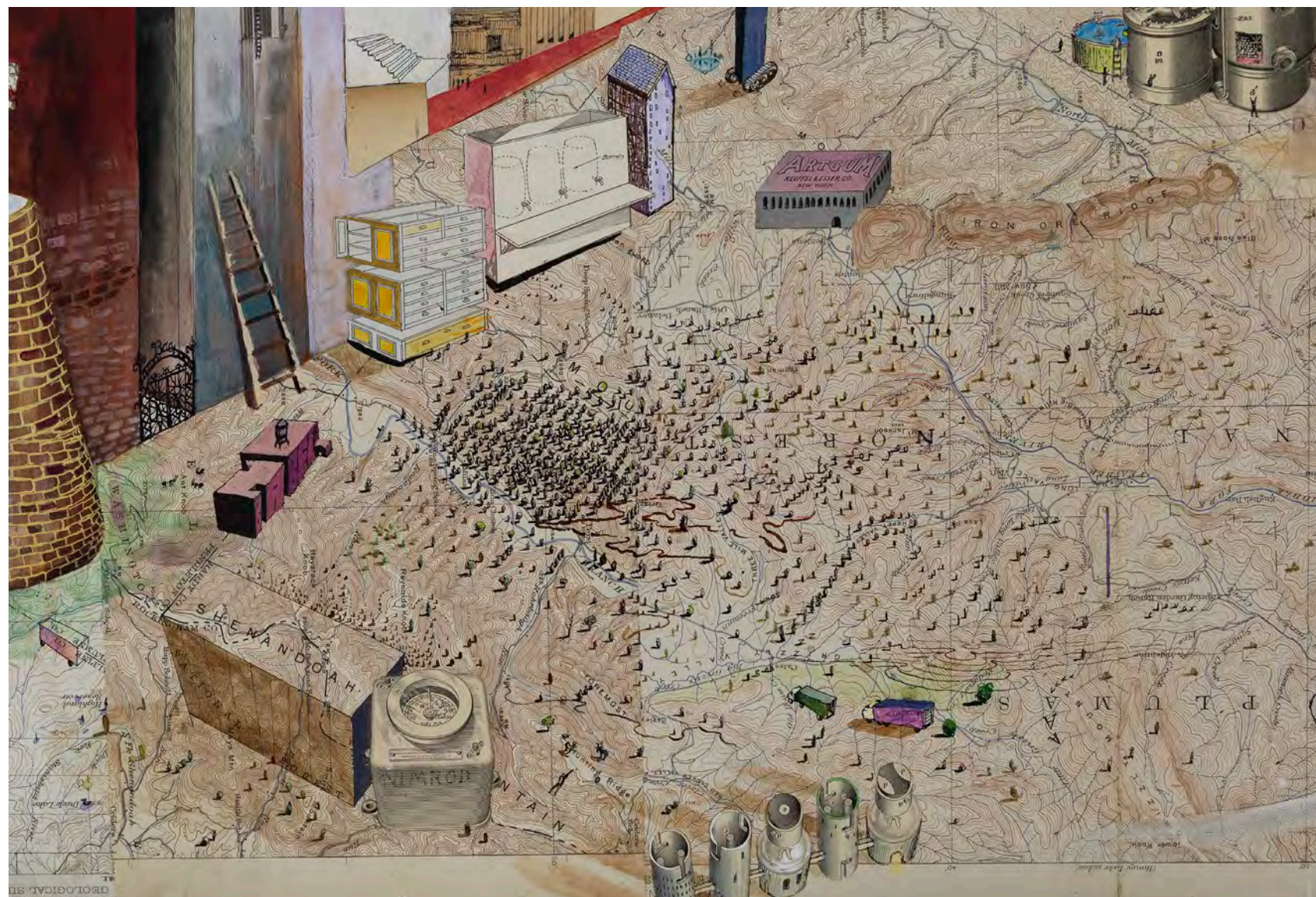
for the set of possible utterances, while in theory infinite, became in practice circumscribed by their ever-more uniform interpretations of an ever-diminishing number of novel experiences. The power of their words, like the charm of an amulet or the weight of a golden coin, was worn away through overuse. In their minds received ideas and conventional wisdom took the place of their own thoughts. And so, into the people's hearts, over the generations after Noah, there stole a mounting certainty that everything sayable had already been said. Everything that happened had happened before, and the story of what happened had been told before.

And as the generation before the Flood had sunk into iniquity, wickedness and sin, so that generation's great-great-grandchildren now found themselves awash in a choking tide of monotony, conventionality, and cliché. Life came to have the

flavor of one's own mouth, the scent of one's own nostrils. A vague lassitude pervaded the earth. Habit took the place of inspiration, and desire and ambition turned to velleity and weak appetite. The people were going through through the motions, and over all the land of Shinar sullen silences were commonplace, and prolonged conversations inevitably trailed off into inconclusiveness and wistful glances toward the far horizon.

And the less the People had to say to each other, the more they feared to be alone, because it was only when they were in each other's company, when they were part of a single integrated whole, that the sheer volume of their ideas and utterances, however familiar, could drown out the hollow echo of shopworn notions that, when they were alone, rattled in their heads like seeds in a dried gourd. And so by slow and labored consensus they arrived at a plan to construct, of brick and mortar,

Cover:  
Tower of Babel  
90"x52", 2019





a city and a tower, so high and capacious that they might all live in it together, as a family under a roof, and thus never be left alone to endure the insistent feeble rattling of their own solitary thoughts.

**For a time the promise** of finding comfort in permanent, undifferentiated mass cohabitation rekindled ancient enthusiasms and energies among the people, and they set about building their tower with joy in their hearts. Because they spoke one language it was a simple matter to share their building plans, and collaborate with one another on construction. As they worked, raising up their common home coil by spiraling coil ever upward into the sky, they sang work songs, making their way through their language's repertoire until they had sung them all, and then starting over again at the beginning. And when it was time to break for the mid-day meal, they all sat down

wherever they happened to be, on the tower or the site that surrounded it, and spread their blankets, and opened their baskets, and ate the food they had packed, and chattered, contentedly enough, about tomorrow's work, and the new lives they imagined living when their tower was complete.

**But the people were numerous,** and so the tower must be tall and large to contain them all, and as the years required for its construction dragged on, the old malaise returned. Their ears wearied of their paltry store of work songs, and their palates were jaded by the limited offerings of their lunch pails, and once again the charm and value of the words they shared— and the experience those words defined—began to wear away. And so their progress slowed. People stopped reporting for service on the tower, parroting one of a number of stock excuses—an aching back, a sore shoulder, a sick lamb, an unruly child—that long practice of

apathy had coined. In time construction ceased. The city and the tower were abandoned.

**Now a great cloud of tedium** settled over the land of Shinar, deep and allpervading as the Flood, and everywhere was languor and sluggishness. One day was exactly as the next, and the people could not name the thing their hearts most desired—strangeness—for none of them had ever met a stranger.

**And the Lord looked down** on the people in their unhappiness, and pitied them. And in His mercy and kindness, and because He loved them most of all His creatures, the Lord said, Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. Therefore is the name of that city and tower called Babel, because there there the richness and novelty of life were worn away.\*

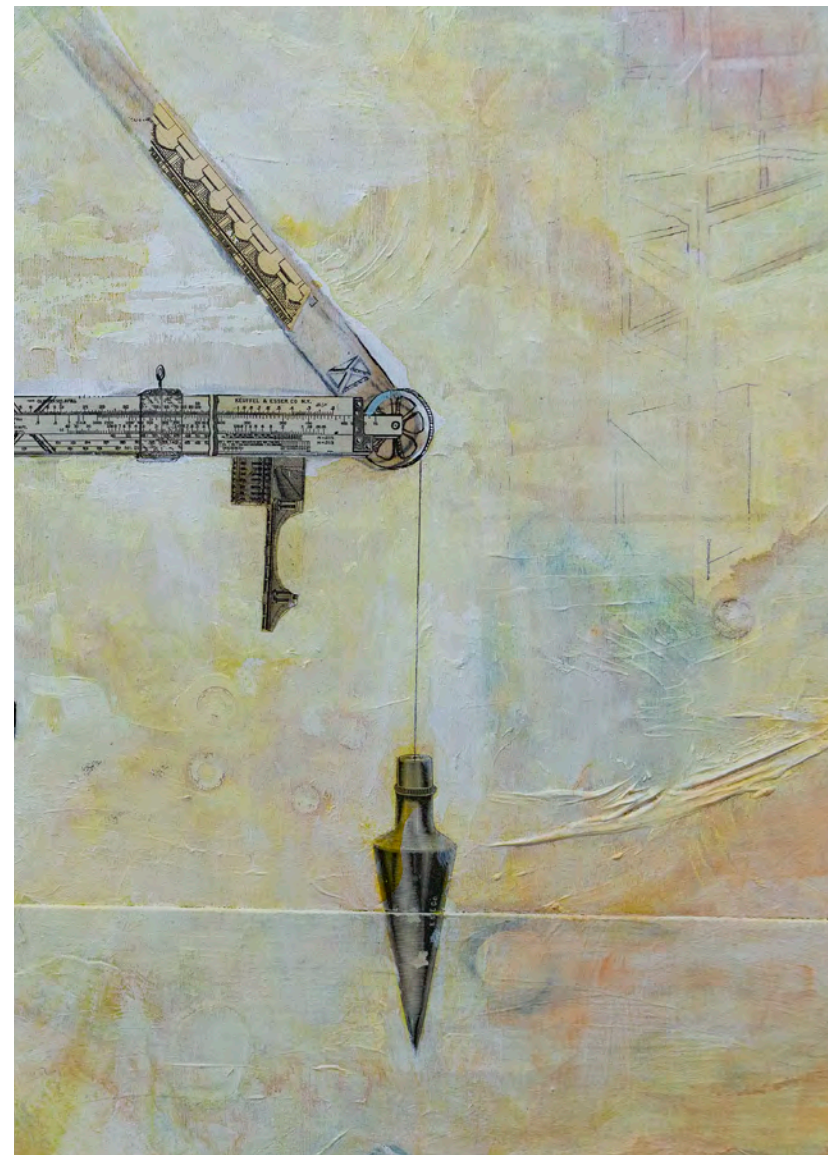
**And the Lord scattered them** abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth, so that henceforward some among them were and always would be strangers to others. And in His wisdom the Lord commanded them—over and over and over again—to love and honor strangers, and to welcome all those who come speaking strange speech, telling strange stories, singing strange songs, eating strange flesh and strange fruit spiced with unknown savors. And thus the people became many peoples, and their ways diverged and effloresced, from their hats to their houses, and the words of their new languages wrought changes in the way they pondered and perceived and explained Creation, and they knew the staggering diversity of which the human family was capable.

**And it was good.**  
Michael Chabon, 2019

\*Bab belah, "gate of wearing away," from הלב, "to wear away".

**Curatorial Statement**  
**Stephanie Kolpy**

*I first saw Josh Dorman's work in New York, Chelsea District in 2008. I instantly fell in love with his visual language and prophetic compositions that seemed to unbury past neglects of humankind. His use of historical signifiers—depictions of architectural, agricultural and scientific advancement, for example—have a way of making visible the timeline of human progress, while at the same time speaking to the dire implications of our technological achievements, and so-called dominion over the natural world. Dorman's current work continues to suggest a prophetic narrative playing out on a metaphorical stage, revealing tension between evolutionary timelines, both human and ecological. We see highly astute yet subtle references to our permanent alteration of the natural world, pointing to the devastating result of climate change and the disappearance of species, but through a veil of otherwise innocuous if not highly celebrated expressions of human ingenuity. This simultaneity of both triumph and failure in his compositions has a lasting effect, and sheds light on tension between human grief and human aspiration. Given the state of our current ecological crisis, and the enormous necessity for educating both students and the general public on this matter, Dorman's work is more relevant than ever.*



Overleaf:  
Tower of Babel (H)  
26"x36", 2019





1232  
Sunrise on the Ocean  
Caption  
K. ENGELHART  
NOTE  
83  
MUSIC

INDEPENDENT  
GENDUMBEL  
INSECTERES  
PANNINGC  
MINCH

JUMBO  
TRINE  
TOILET SOAP  
1/2 LBS  
IN THIS PACKAGE  
Man  
J.B.V.  
GLASGOW  
U.S.A.

7 COME 11  
Come on Boys, the Number Seven Team  
7 Come 11  
Then  
Some Sets Can Be Played on Every Patch



Strange Birds 16"x16", 2019



Age of Ice 48"x38", 2018











*Scarlet Fever Dream*  
38"x48", 2018



*Ancient Site* 48"x38", 2018



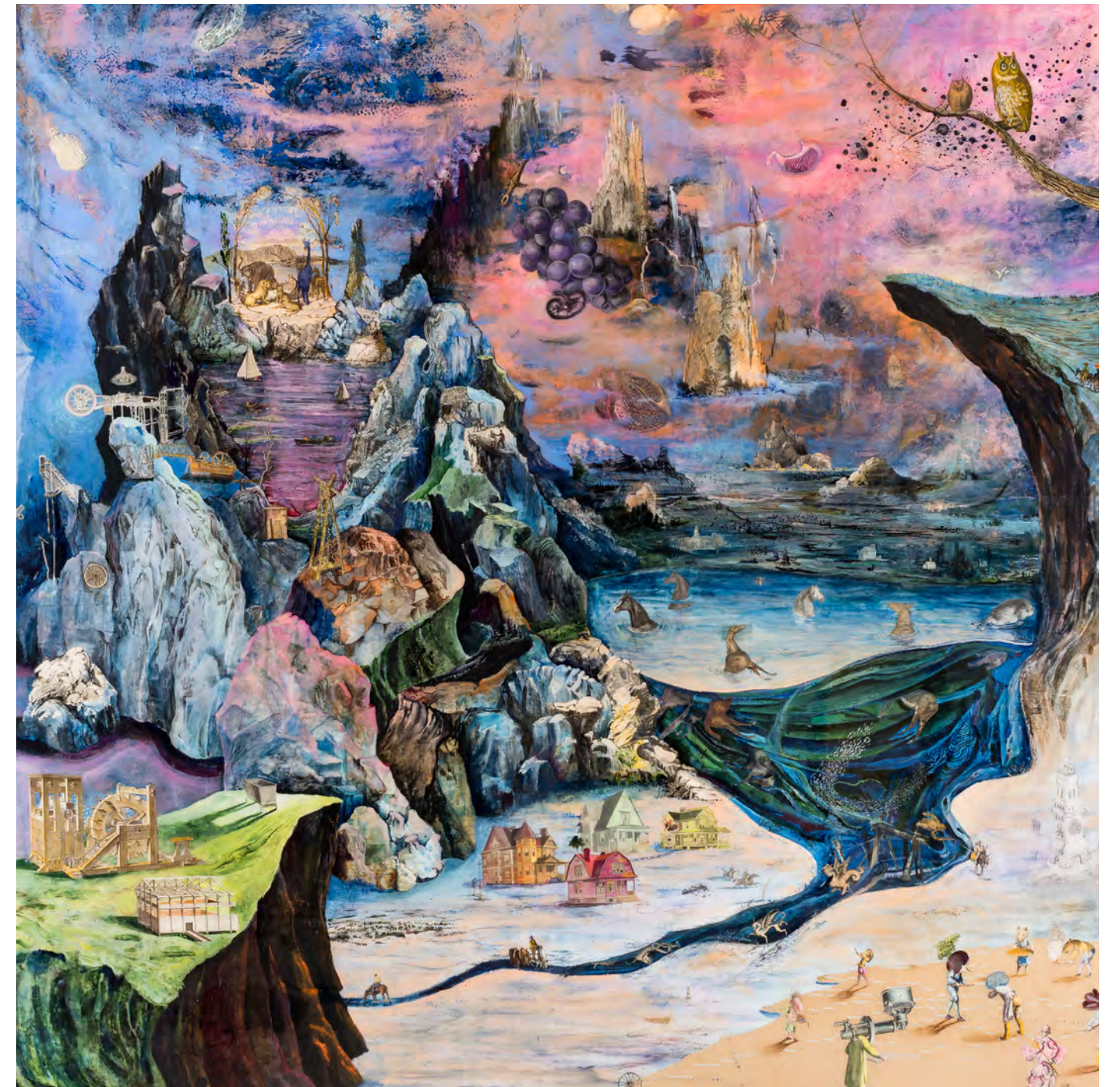


Momento Mori 56"x120", 2018





*Dazzle Ship 18"x18", 2018*



*Verge 48"x48", 2018*



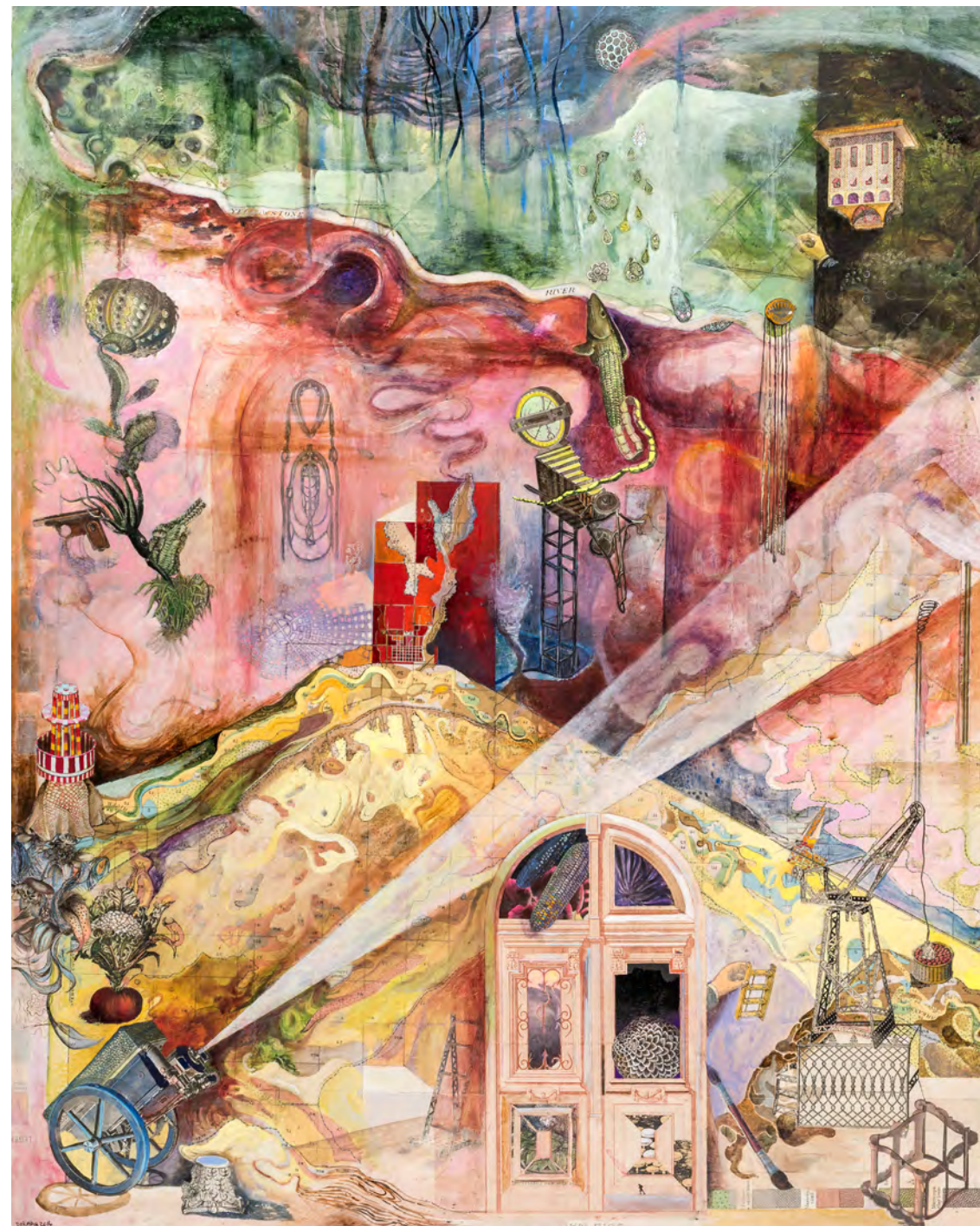


Brink  
380"x24", 2018





Empty Promised Land 24"x30", 2018



Nineveh 30"x40", 2018



Untitled 34 5"x12", 2019



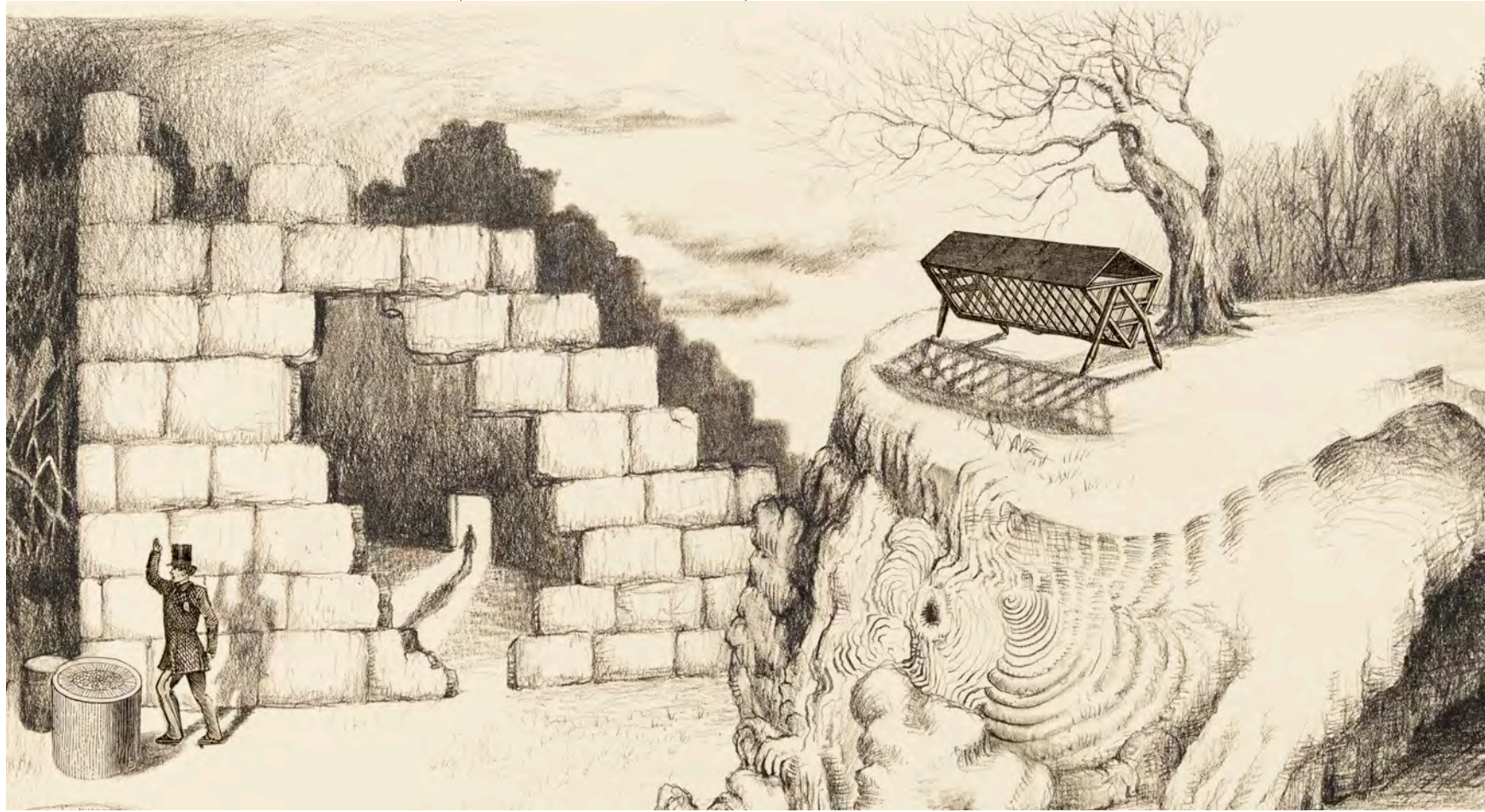
DORMAN 2009



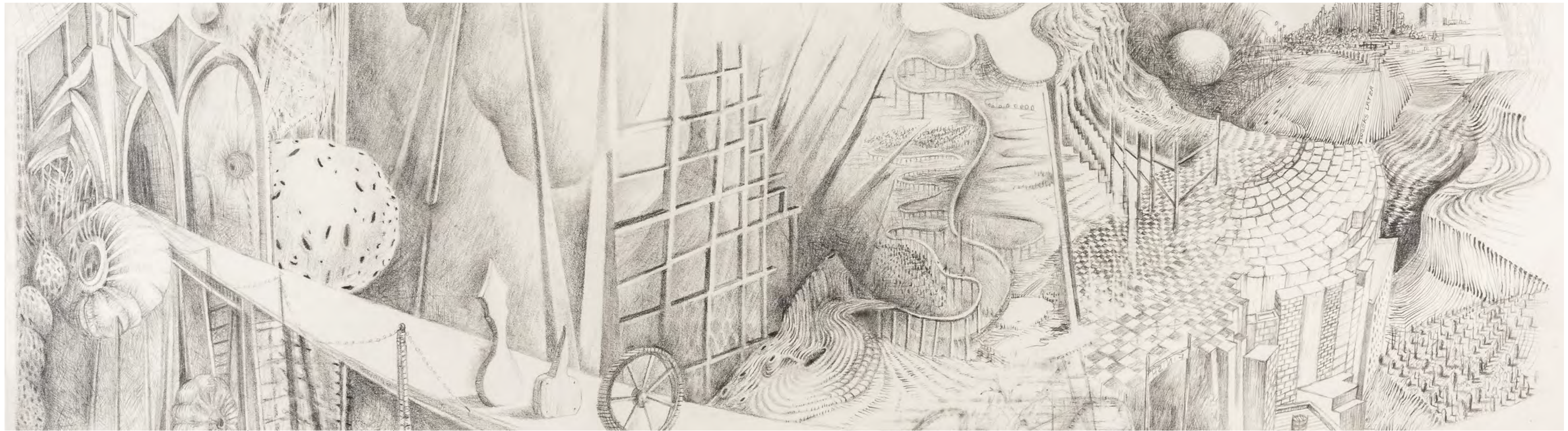
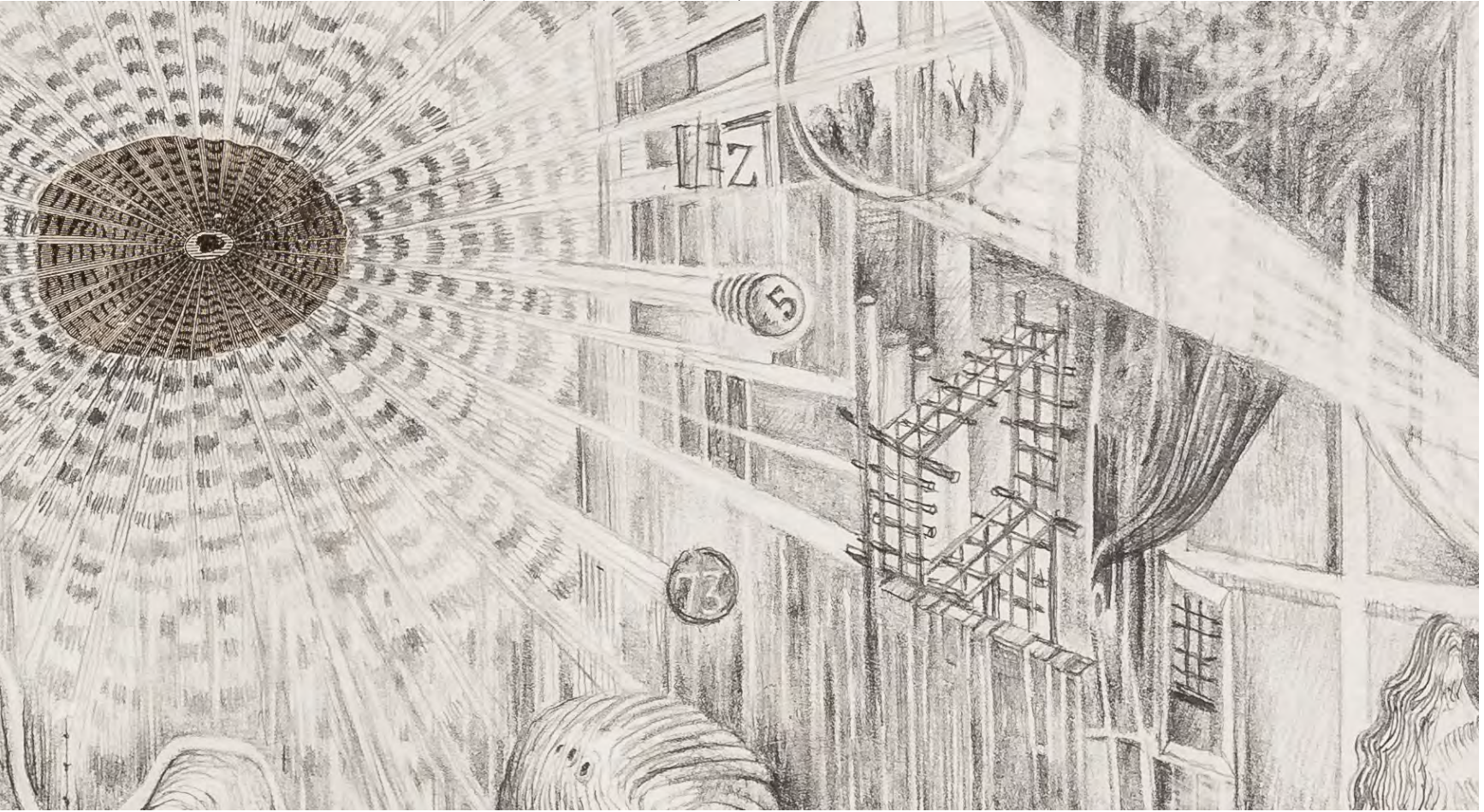
Untitled 25 5"x12", 2019



Untitled 38 5"x12", 2019



Radiate 5"x12", 2018



Rotations 5"x12", 2018



Webs 5"x12", 2018



By the Ancient City 1 5"x12", 2018



Crowfish 5"x12", 2018



Reaper 5"x12", 2018



Bridgejumpers 5"x12", 2018



A Closer Look 21"x31", 2019







*Emerald Pool 12"x12", 2019*





String Theory 22"x33", 2019





God of War 12"x8", 2019

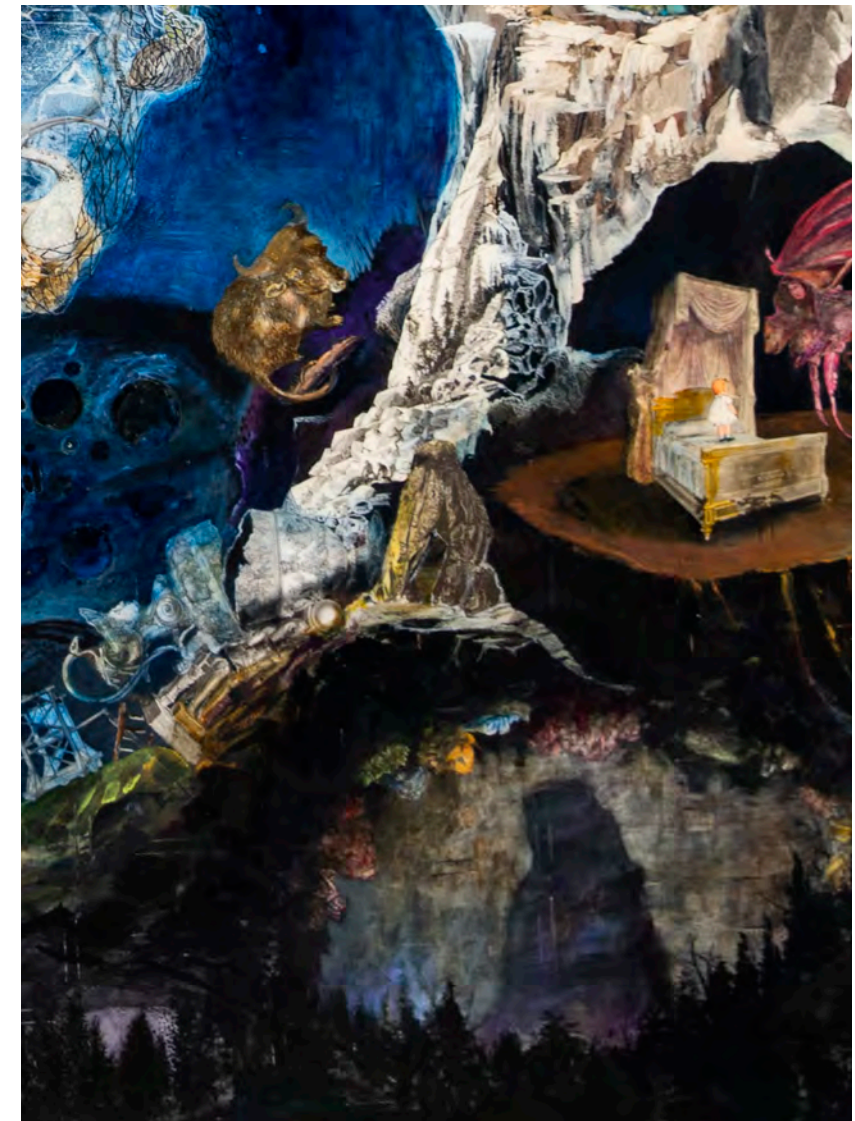


What We've Lost 24"x20", 2019





*How Will This End (Net in Blue) 48"x48", 2019*





*Trapped  
in Amber*  
24"x30", 2019







Red on the Inside 22"x30", 2019







*Natural Selection*  
78"x78", 2018



**Josh Dorman**

**Artist's Statement**

Josh Dorman's work by a painting called NIGHT FISHING. It's one of his wood panel paintings – collage, ink and acrylic – and depicts an underwater scene: a bulging white net in black, puce, green, blue water. In the net are parts of fishes, a shrunken whale, an outsized seahorse, a squid, and a coagulum of unidentifiable plant and organic matter. Josh Dorman's work by a painting called NIGHT FISHING. It's one of his wood panel paintings – collage, ink and acrylic – and depicts an underwater scene: a bulging white net in black, puce, green, blue water. In the net are parts of fishes, a shrunken whale, an outsized seahorse, a squid, and a coagulum of unidentifiable plant and organic matter.

**studio  
photo?  
Josh  
photo?**

*Artist's website*

***www.joshdorman.net***

*Josh Dorman's work is represented by*

***Ryan Lee Gallery in New York City.***

*For sales inquiries, contact Jeffrey Lee at*

***jeff@ryanleegallery.com***



