

JOSH DORMAN'S NEW PAINTINGS

Josh Dorman's Red Hook, Brooklyn studio is on the second floor of a two-story 19th century brick warehouse near the harbor. When he opens the door-sized cast iron shutters he looks out on the tin of an abandoned sugar factory. His window is recessed and allows in only a shaft of New York river light. Dorman turns from the view to work under harsh spotlights in his small cave. One of his forebears Albert Pinkham Ryder painted his allegories in a Manhattan hotel room. Another forebear Arthur Dove worked in a defunct Long Island post office.

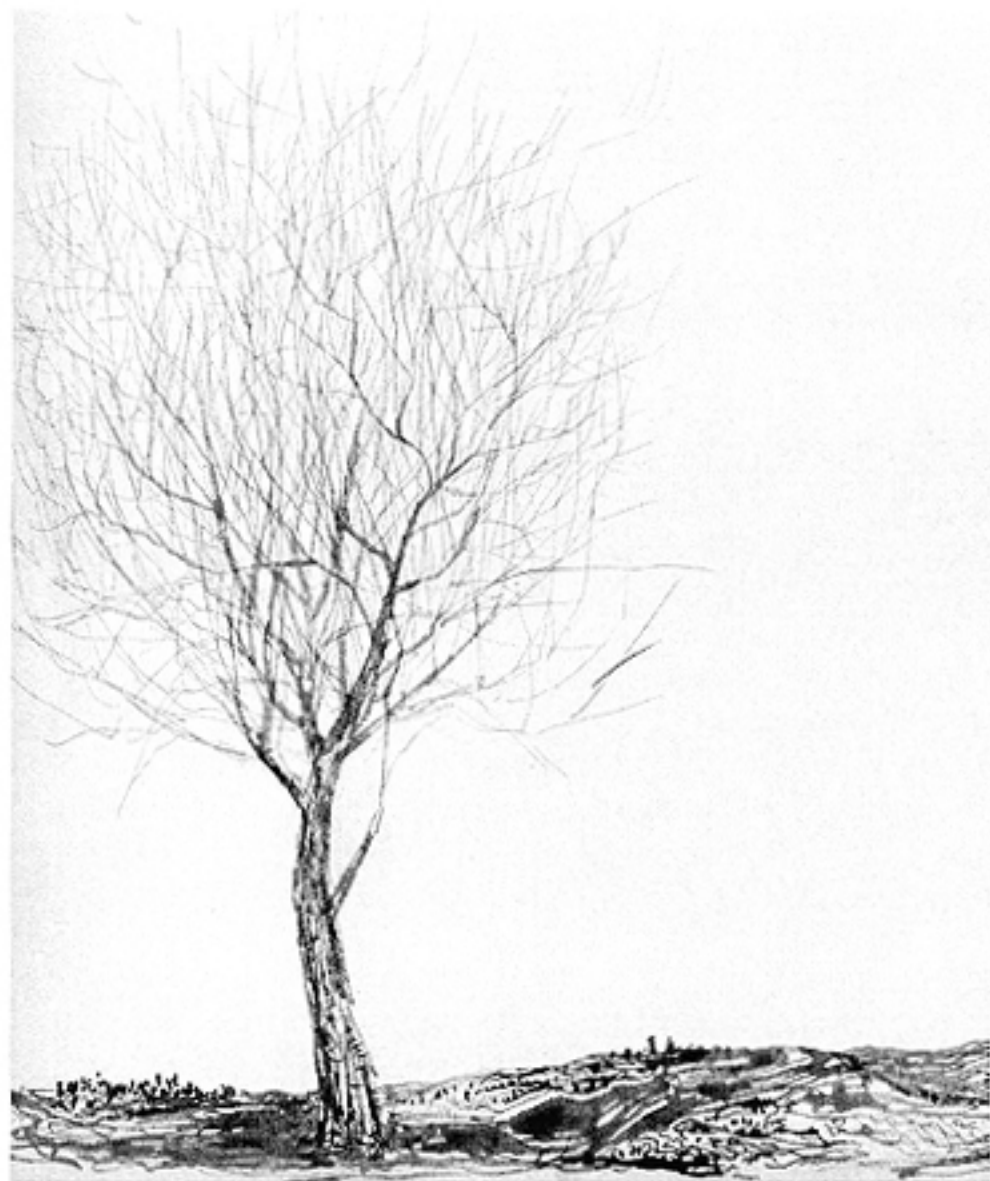
For much of his young life as a painter Dorman has worked small. He once kept a painting diary, one palm-sized painting a day for a year. He has painted to powerful effect at numerous sizes under 8" x 10". Recently Dorman has stepped up to the 2 to 3 foot range. He usually keeps several paintings "going" at once, a little here, a little there until after weeks and sometimes months he brings one then another to completion. As before he is inspired by landscape.

Landscape. Here is where things get tricky. Dorman does not paint landscapes to the life. You can't drive north or west for two hours, park at a knoll and look down upon a Dorman view. But the elements you will see most anywhere in Upstate, New York

or in Vermont are present: trees, clouds, various skies, fields, a road and bushes. He collects these with a quick pen on trips and returns to his studio to combine elements as he sees fit. Does he paint fantasies? No, not even when a chair flies through the air. It is as logical as any object in a dream.

Painting is spirit into matter so that from matter flows spirit. For Dorman as for Ryder, Dove, Pollock in the drip paintings, de Kooning in his highway/landscapes, Joan Mitchell in her gardens and contemporaneously Bill Jensen, Gregory Amenoff and Diane Green landscape—its essential shapes and contours—supplies the spirit. The matter, under Dorman's hand, is variously scumbled and precisely wristed in. As an American he is heir to the confluence of representation and abstraction, there in the brushwork of numerous American painters since the beginning of the 20th century. The lights and darks of time of day, awe, really, at its rich emotional tones is part of this inheritance.

While Dorman has worked these past months he has kept at hand a postcard of Sassetta's incomparable "The Journey of the Magi." One is always on my desk. When I am bored or in despair over life and art I make a beeline to the MET and spend a few moments before Sassetta's small panel,



It overrides my bitterest moods. Dorman seems to have found in its severity and bright flow of pilgrims an order and ground from which to proceed. This has helped him take big steps without resort to painterly bombast. In resisting the bravura he has stayed true to his great gift, intimacy. You can enter Dorman's world without pause. His paintings have an off-hand

confidence, a quiet certitude that embraces before you know it and you're there. "I can't get over," as the poet James Schuyler wrote about what he saw out the window late on the last day of February, "how it all works together." In exactly this way Josh Dorman's new paintings are surprising and satisfyingly right. They call forth a similar exclamation of wonder.

William Corbett