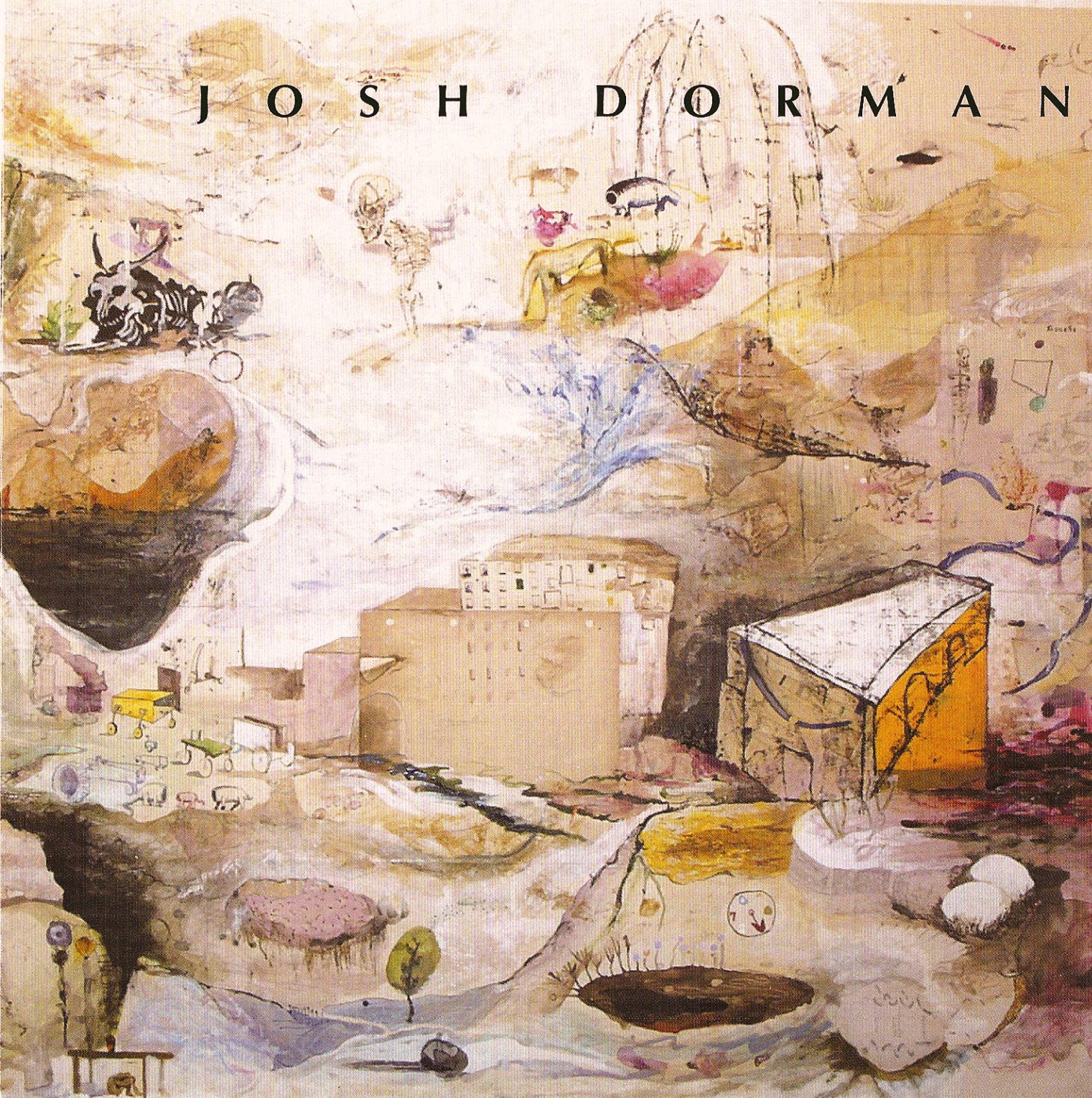
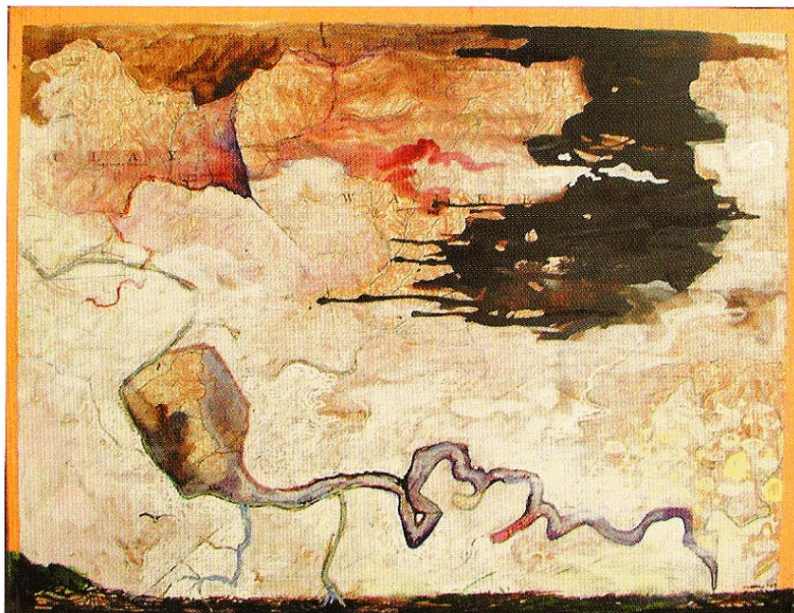


J O S H D O R M A N





In the recent paintings of Josh Dorman, two pictorial conventions come into collision. Allusions to mapping and landscape painting abound, but neither is ultimately relied upon, except as familiar points of departure. Dorman's works are neither sentimentalized remembrances nor strict informational guides. Instead, Dorman uses the viewer's familiarity with landscape and cartography as a means by which to veer off into ambiguous, alluring and personal terrain.

Dorman's works can only obliquely be described as landscapes. There are distinct landscaped elements to the works and an immediate sense of a described territory, but they might more appropriately be termed "exploded view" landscapes. They are not blithe, sentimental depictions of a romanticized natural world. They are disemboweled geographies spilling forth with interior, hidden dimensions.

Many of Dorman's works from the last few years are realized with ink and acrylic laid upon antique topographical maps, obscuring much of the original ground but allowing a sufficient portion of the mapping to remain in evidence. In the real world, maps clarify, authentically describe, define locations, and delineate property. In Dorman's world, mapping adheres to little of this codified form. His interest lies less in imparting information and more in evoking sensation.

Often, it is the details that impart as many clues as the entirety of a work. A typically revealing gesture can be found in a work in which the map/ground shows where Pennsylvania and New Jersey meet. Winding through the center of the work, it's hard to miss the "Aware River," which might generally be the route through all of Dorman's work. Similarly, it ought to be taken as a clue that the works are usually bereft of people. There are no "characters" in the work, no objective narrative. It is a far more personal journey, for artist and viewer.

While the functionality of mapping has entirely lost its mooring, it is apparent that Dorman's interest is not about offering a way out, but rather a way in. Even his modestly-sized works seem large enough to wash over and swallow the viewer. They expand emotionally, a well-spring of anxious and ambiguous images, collaged and puréed into a mixture that often gives the impression of constant motion. They purposefully subvert the more typical tropes of landscape painting—foreground and background often seem to be parts of the same place—and there is rarely a discernible horizon line upon which to depend.

Despite the allusions to landscape and mapping, Dorman's works are much more about the difficulty of navigation, the perils of trying to define a location or describe a space. They incline toward the loose logic of the dream state, its mixture of imagery and its ultimate indeterminacy. Fossils, architecture turbulent skies, Dorman is offering up a site for delirious vertigo, the seismic suggestion that we see the forest and trees in the same glance...as well as the interior of the trees, the underside of the earth, the psychic pictorial terrain of the mind's eye or, as the artist himself has suggested, "cells, mushrooms, thunderheads, pebbles, cliffs, continents..."

A map can also be taken as the most generous of cartographical gestures: a guide for fellow travelers, describing the way, marking pitfalls, and directing the user to a safe and satisfying end point. As Dorman is not describing a literal path, it becomes a question of how much we can depend on his emotional path. How much solace and simpatico do we find in his depictions of emotional terrain? Can we relate to them? Are they accurate? If so, how accurate? Is his

above: *Hovering II*, 2003, ink on antique map on canvas, 12x16"
front cover: *Everything There Is*, 2005, ink and acrylic on antique maps and paper, on canvas, 40x50"





dream state our dream state?

It is art and partially a question of blind trust, but one must consider whether we are willing to accede as much to the artist as to any other intrepid explorer who braves the unknown. Should we trust the artist? How dependable are his instincts? Consider: when Lewis and Clark returned from their momentous journey of discovery almost exactly two hundred years ago, they had mapped previously-uncharted terrain from north of what is now Bismarck, ND to the Pacific Ocean.

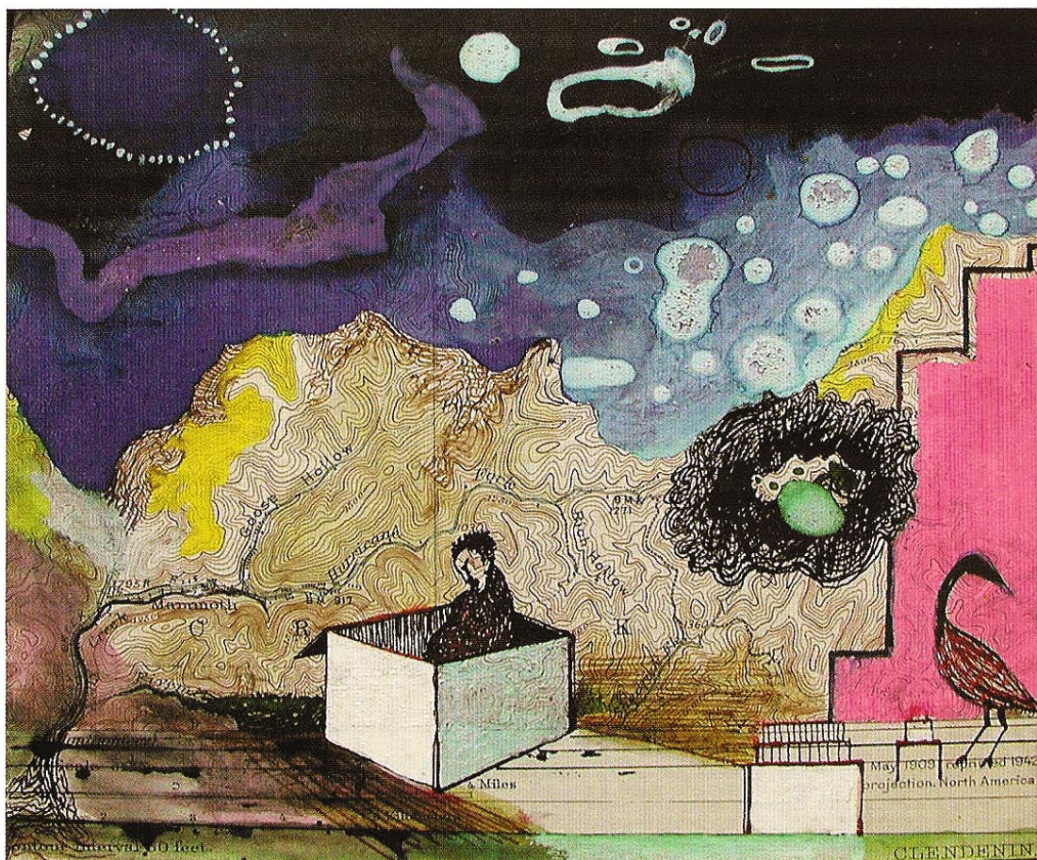
It was found in the years that followed that Meriwether Lewis' maps of the territory—accomplished with nothing more than a single compass and dead reckoning—were never more than four miles off the actual. If one trusts the artist at least as much as the cartographer, “within four miles”—without a compass and with only imaginative reckoning—is not a bad distance from whatever truth is being pursued.

John Massier
Visual Arts Curator

above: *Peaceable Valley (detail)*, 2003, ink on antique maps on panel, 12x16"
left: *Phila/Aware River*, 2005, ink on antique map, 24x18"
next page: *Red Mountain*, 2005, in, antique maps, and paper on panel, 14x14"



JOSH DORMAN was born in Baltimore in 1966. He graduated Skidmore College in 1988, then received his MFA from Queen's College in 1992. Dorman's work has been exhibited in solo shows at galleries including George Billis Gallery in Los Angeles, George Billis Gallery in Los Angeles, 55 Mercer in New York City and Galerie Françoise in Baltimore, and in various group shows, most recently at The Drawing Center, The National Academy Museum, The Islip Museum (Long Island), Lohin-Geduld Gallery in Chelsea, and Geoffrey Young Gallery in Great Barrington. He will have a solo exhibition at Pierogi Gallery in Brooklyn in November 2005. He works in a studio in Long Island City, and has been granted residencies at Yaddo and the Millay Colony. He has taught in and around New York, including Skidmore College, City University and Rider University. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.



In Clendenin, 2003
ink on antique map on apert
6x8"

JOSH DORMAN • July 9 to August 31, 2005

Exhibition generously sponsored by Barbara P. Baird

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