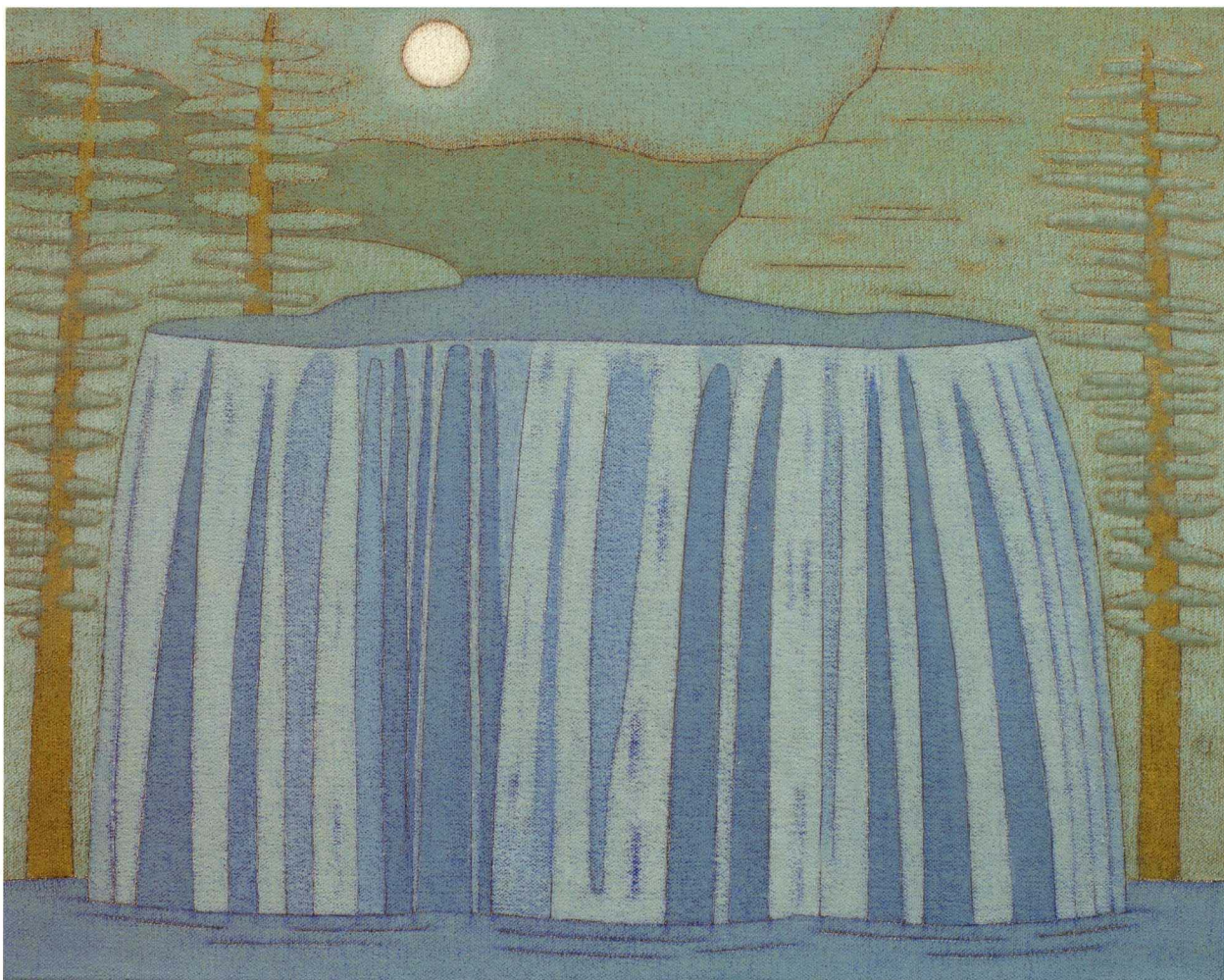


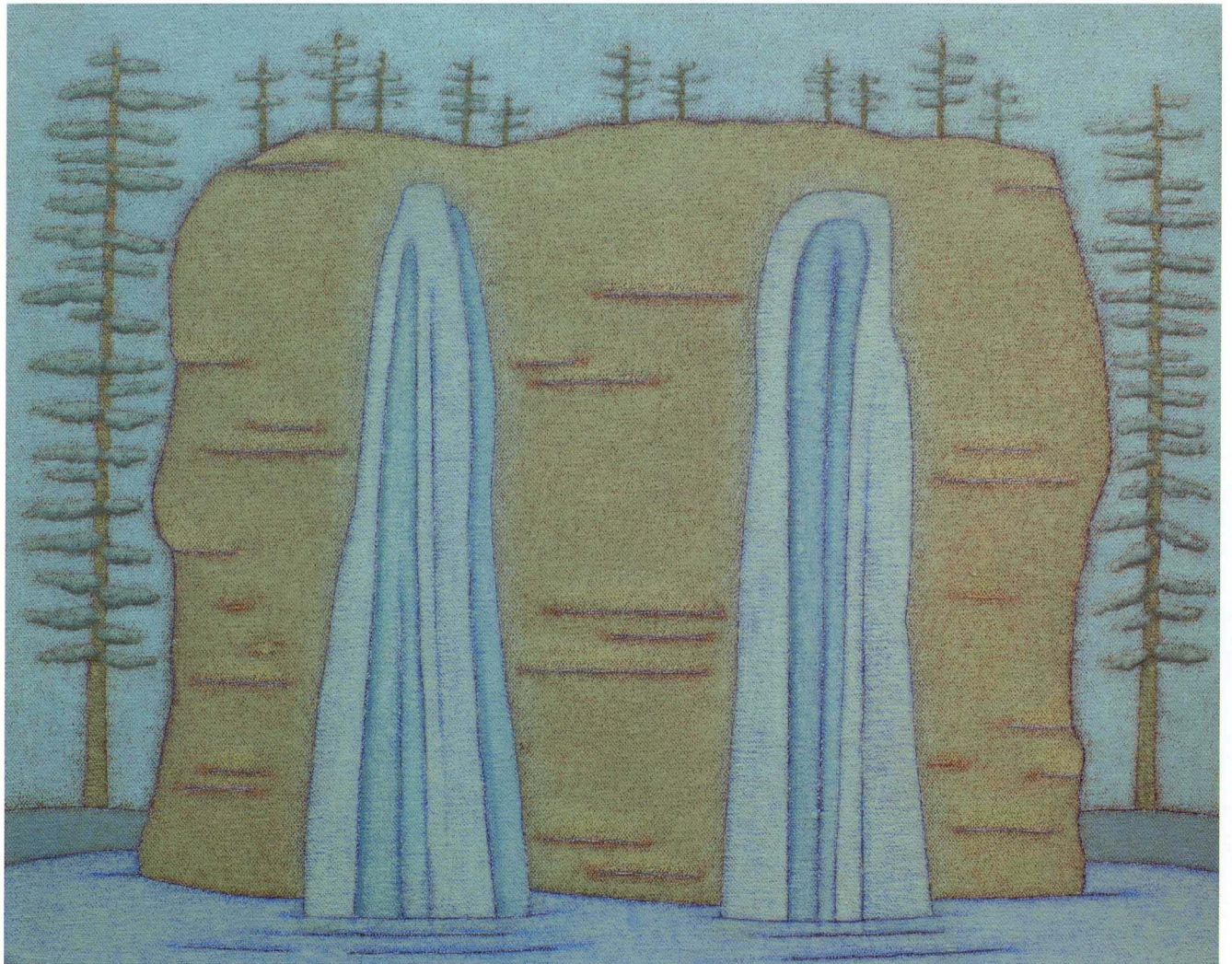
"John Dilg: Sources in Another World" Exhibition Brochure

Item Type	Other
Authors	Dilg, John;Dobbins, Hamlett
Publisher	Memphis, Tenn. : Art Department, Rhodes College
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Download date	2025-03-23 07:17:53
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/10267/23871



JOHN DILG: SOURCES IN ANOTHER WORLD

2012 oct 26 — dec 5, clough-hanson gallery
rhodes college, memphis, tennessee



“And then you see it and you are instantly transfixed. There, in the middle of a memorable and imposing emptiness stands an eminence of exceptional nobility and grandeur, 1,150 feet high, a mile and a half long, five and a half miles around... You know this rock. You know it in a way that has nothing to do with calendars and the covers of souvenir books. Your knowledge of this rock is grounded in something much more elemental... In some odd way that you don’t understand and that you can’t begin to articulate you feel an acquaintance with it—a familiarity on an unfamiliar level. Somewhere in the deep sediment of your being some long-dormant fragment of primordial memory, some little severed tail of DNA, has twitched or stirred. It is a motion much too faint to be understood or interpreted, but somehow you feel certain that this large, brooding, hypnotic presence has an importance to you at the species level—perhaps even at a sort of tadpole level – and that in some way your visit here is more than happenstance.”¹

Bill Bryson describing Uluru in his book *In a Sunburned Country*.

John Dilg’s intimate canvases manage to tap into the same primal power that is innate to his subject matter: abstracted majestic forms like the human head, California’s sequoia forests, powerful waterfalls, or Yosemite’s Half Dome. The exhibition *Sources in Another World* collects a variety of imagery that draws from the figure, architecture, and the landscape. The artist uses his particular visual language to create a variety of subtly nuanced, archetypal natural forms. While these peculiar paintings offer surprises at every turn, we are left feeling as though we are seeing something that has always been there, waiting for us.

These small paintings possess a monumental quality. A quality that is matched only by the artist’s sensitivity to every aspect of image making. The carefully composed images usually begin as a series of diminutive ballpoint pen thumbnails on scraps of paper, usually between one and three inches squared. They go through a variety of drafts until they arrive at a particular rightness. The artist then translates the images in the thumbnail sketches by drawing onto primed canvas using charcoal. After going through a series of permutations, the drawing eventually arrives at its final state. These delicate lines remain embedded in the finished painting. They wander through the compositions, sliding in and out to define the forms while holding the image together.

The rich color in Dilg’s paintings is informed by a lifetime spent in the landscape of the Midwest. Like the Inuit people who are said to have have a hundred words

for snow, Dilg’s paintings innumerate myriad subtle shifts in the greens, blues, and siennas found in the prairie. The artist’s sensitive touch produces gradually layered passages that are completely devoid of brush strokes. It is as if the colors have somehow been gently coaxed into being. The delicately layered colors often reveal the slightest hint—just a whisper—of under-painting. In *Night Falls* (2012) the viewer finds the pale, burnt green of the sky gently scumble over a thin layer of warm brown. The facets of the waterfall-turned-mountain (or is it a glacier?) are crafted using nearly a dozen carefully modulated blue hues. The artist carefully selects just the right intensity, tint, or tone.

The show at Rhodes College also presents a number of salon-style clusters that include source material as well as Dilg’s own paintings. In part, these clusters illustrate and provide insights into the connections and kinship between the artist and the visual materials he surrounds himself with in his studio and his home (i.e. paintings from friends, students, and colleagues, as well as vernacular signs, and thrift store paintings). In them we find the strength of a shared visual vocabulary. Additionally, they highlight the importance of being a part of a larger community. The artist understands community as it relates to a group of individuals as well as the visual language of a particular place and time.

John Dilg’s understated, quiet paintings are like haikus from a master poet. The parts have been carefully chosen by a wise soul who has been crafting images for a long time. Through his patient process, he provides his viewers with the barest essentials, displaying uncommon restraint and revealing an elegance that is rarer still.² The deliberate quality of the composition, line, and color of each painting gives the sense that the artist sits attentively with them for a long time in an effort to get these little gems exactly where he wants them. There is a powerful stillness to them. It is as if time very gradually slows to a glacial pace and we are given a glimpse at the moment where the timeline stands perfectly still. Through the process of viewing the painting, we are able to wander with the artist, sharing in his quiet wonder. These striking paintings stick with you long after leaving the gallery, in the same way slow walks in the woods do: they generously provide a quiet, contemplative space.

Hamlett Dobbins
Director, Clough-Hanson Gallery

Cover: *On Another Planet*, 2012, Oil on canvas, 16x20"

Inside Flap: *Half Dome, Devil’s Tower, From the Prairie*, 2012, 14x11"

Back: *Night Falls*, 2012, Oil on canvas, 16x20"

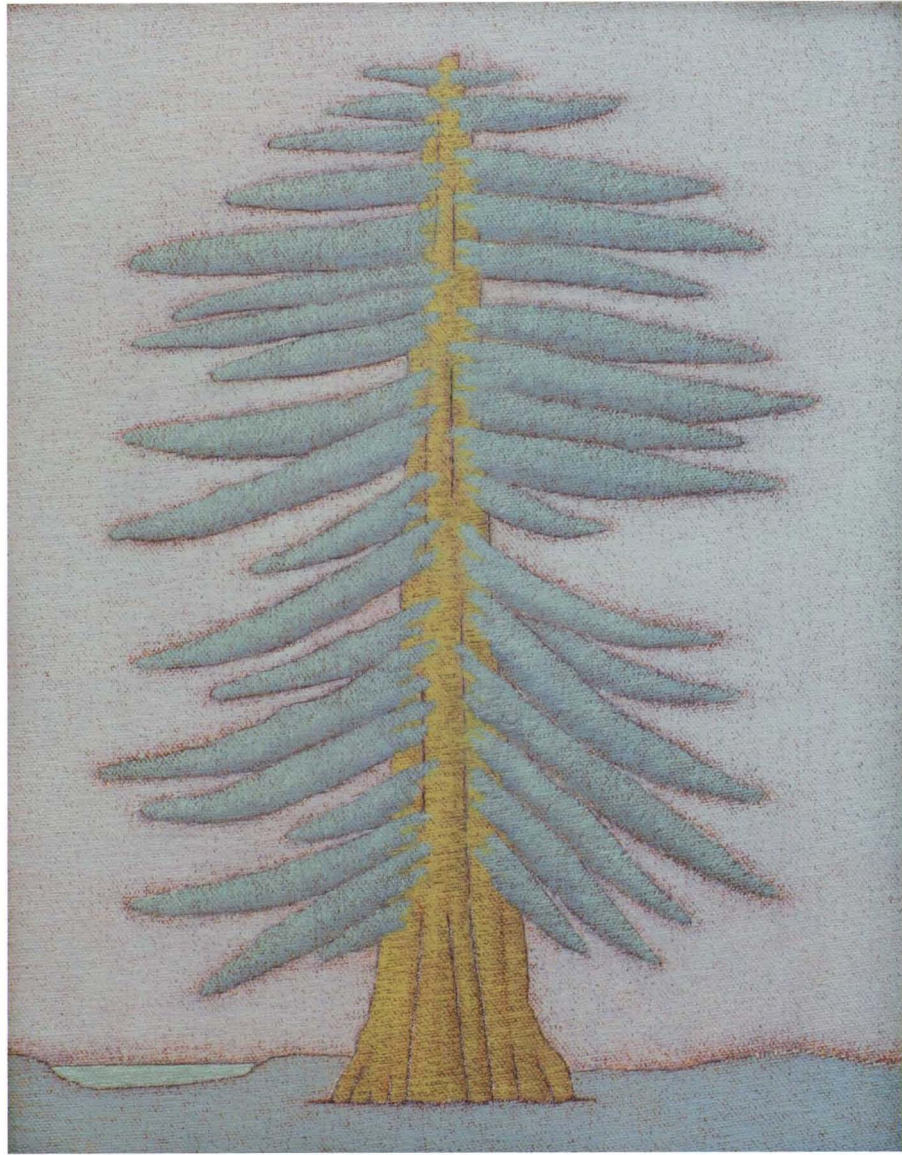
Inside Left: *Double Wound*, 2012, Oil on canvas, 16x20"

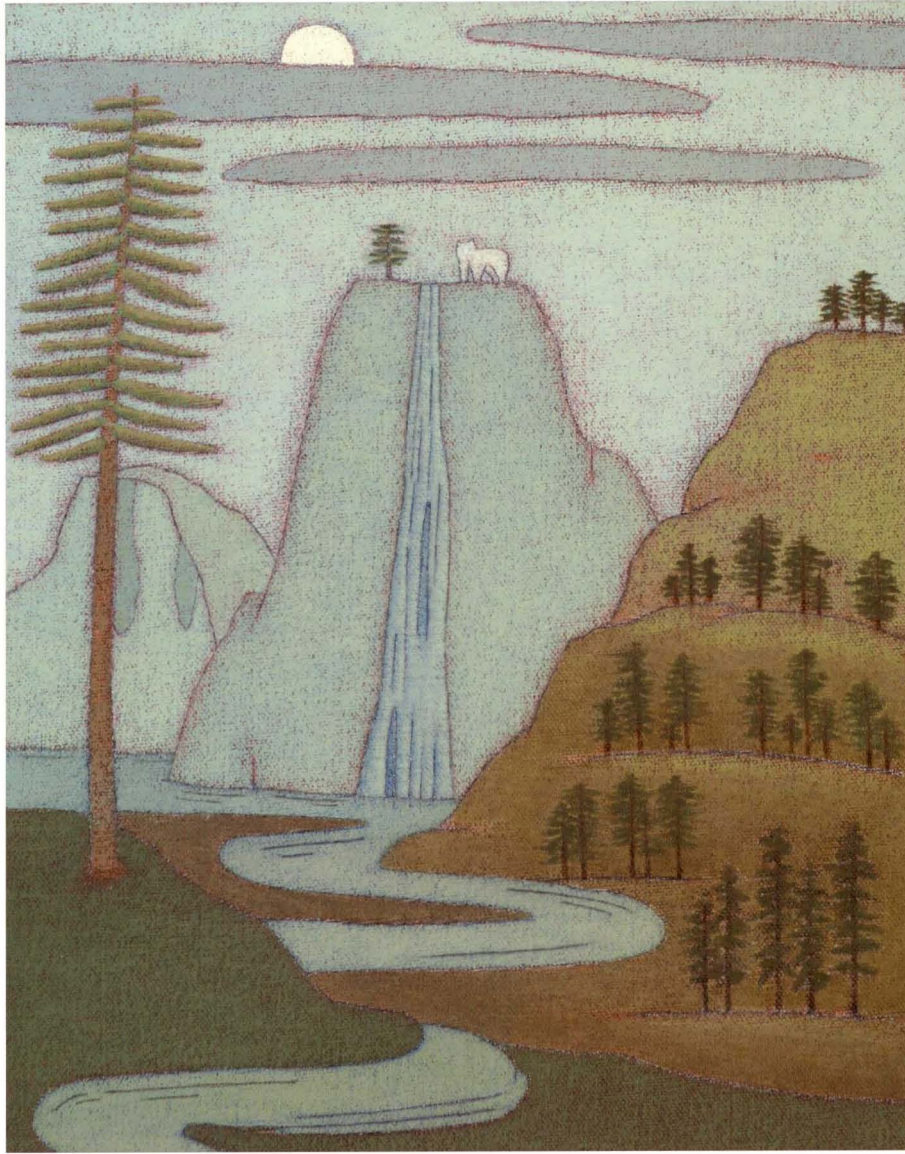
Inside Right: *Driving Through*, 2012, Oil on canvas, 14x11"

Images courtesy the artist and Luise Ross Gallery, New York. Photos by Sarah Phyllis Smith.

¹ Bill Bryson, *In a Sunburned Country* (New York: Broadway Books, 2000), 255-256.

² *Patient Process* was the title of an exhibition that Donald Doe and Lesley Wright organized for the Faulconer Gallery at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa in 2001. It featured among others: John Dilg, Julia Fish and Thomas Nozkowski.







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