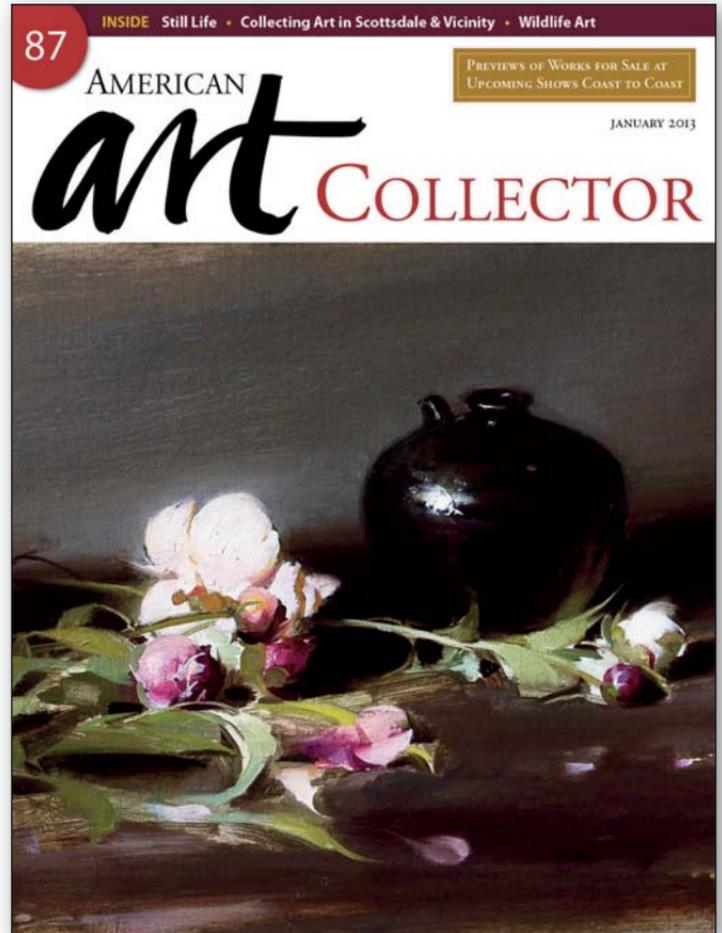


As seen in the
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 AMERICAN
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ASSEMBLED ALLUSIONS

JOSH DORMAN
 USES A COLLECTION OF
 MATERIALS TO GUIDE
 HIM WHEN CREATING
 MIXED-MEDIA COLLAGES
 THAT ARE WROUGHT WITH
 EMOTION AND HUMOR

By John O'Hern

Museums are seldom places where I spend a lot of time. I often storm through galleries to see “old friends” ignoring more famous and sometimes better work along the way. Occasionally, something will appear in the corner of my eye and I’ll take a detour. A dash to see Sargent’s *Daughters of Edward Darley Boit* in Boston, Seurat’s *La Grande Jatte* in Chicago, a 16th-century boxwood *Memento Mori* at The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, and all of the Claude Lorraine room in London are always favorite destinations.

Mountain Lion, mixed media on panel, 36 x 34".
 Courtesy Koplín Del Rio, Culver City, CA.







Strata, mixed media collage on panel, 33 x 19". Courtesy Koplín Del Río, Culver City, CA.



Josh Dorman and I recently shared stories of storming through The National Gallery in London. He had been there a few days earlier “Just breathing in the masterpieces.” He, too, heads for “old friends” and is sometimes surprised along the way. “I relate completely to that storming between galleries. At The

National Gallery, I felt myself saying very clearly to the Poussin room, ‘Yes, you are amazing, and I use you endlessly for teaching composition, but you are cold, and I have no time for you today.’ And funnily, I spent some quality time with Lorraine this visit, and even more oddly, with Rubens landscapes, which I’d

never looked at before,” he says.

As an artist, Dorman knows he has to draw the viewer in. “I need an overall structure that can be read from across a room,” he says. “Then I want the viewer to be pulled in... The composition needs to be legible and to make sense—not chaotic. I’m not interested



Closer Look, mixed media on panel, 21 x 33". Courtesy Koplin Del Rio, Culver City, CA.

in overall pattern but I want people be able to read some kind of scene."

His "scenes" are rich amalgams of materials, textures, obvious references, and obscure allusions. "Laying down the initial structure now is more improvisational," he says. "The materials guide me. Sometimes

they appear magically. I'll move a chair and uncover a book open to an image that has just the form I need." When the inspiration of combining particular forms has passed he moves on to another part of his composition. When I asked him about an odd quote taking up perhaps an inch or two of a 34-by-38-

inch panel, he couldn't remember it. "I think I may be one of the few artists who enjoys seeing my own artwork," he remarks. "I see small stuff I can't remember having done or where it came from."

The complexities of memory are the work of Michael Verde, founder of Memory



Thelma, mixed media, 34 x 36". Courtesy Mary Ryan Gallery, New York, NY

Bridge, The Foundation for Alzheimer's and Cultural Memory. Verde felt that Dorman's work resonated with the project and its philosophy. Verde spoke to people with dementia about their lives, real and imagined, while Dorman made notes and drawings to incorporate into a series of works based on the experience. He realized that he as an artist and the people to whom he was listening "occupy interior worlds that don't always match up with everyday reality...My aim was to listen to their stories and memories and free associations and weave them into some sort of visual picture." The elements in the accompanying work *Thelma* relate to her

story but bring additional depths and open additional paths because of the words or forms that come along with them—the quote I asked him about, for instance.

Also, after completing *Thelma*, he began to realize how the experience had influenced his work. He began collaging more and using things he hadn't used before.

He engages in what he calls a "ridiculous debate" with himself about being logical or breaking the logic on purpose, about being too obvious. To end the debate "I stop—and glue something down," he says.

"Part of the reason I started collage in the first place was that when I looked at old maps

I found forms in the topographic lines like we look for animals in the clouds," explains Dorman. "I really trust in not having my hand feel evident and feel more honest coming on stuff by accident. I trust in the process with almost a religious faith."

Dorman believes profoundly that "everything is related." He finds forms on a microscopic scale that are repeated in life on a cosmic scale and is fascinated by fractal forms that "echo infinitely."

His collection of pre-photographic textbooks, topographic maps, manuals, and documents are endlessly helpful. When we talked, he was working on a painting he had

been “battling with for months. The original is totally buried.” He needed some figures and found just what he needed: “poorly drawn diagrams of figures doing exercises in a book I found in a used book shop on the Swedish System of Educational Gymnastics published in 1890.”

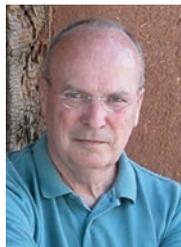
He feels “indebted to the people who made images. They come from a different era before photography and photocopies. I must use the actual thing,” he continues. “The engravings of animals were the only way people knew what a hippopotamus looks like, for instance. That was a different kind of knowledge.

“It matters to me that the materials be of another era because I want the work to feel like it’s not of this time,” he continues.

“The themes in my work are subconscious. I think most people know I’m not supposed to provide any answers,” says Dorman. “I have faith that it has meaning and inherent emotional power and have no interest in analyzing it or understanding it. I’m pushing the humor more now but I don’t want it to be funny.” He seemed pleased when I told him I smile at some of the more obvious allusions or juxtapositions while I ponder the rest.

Haruki Murakami, one of Dorman’s favorite writers, wrote something that could apply to them both: “Many people tell me that they don’t know what to feel when they finish one of my books because the story was dark, or complicated, or strange. But while they were reading it, they were inside my world and they were happy. That’s good.” ●

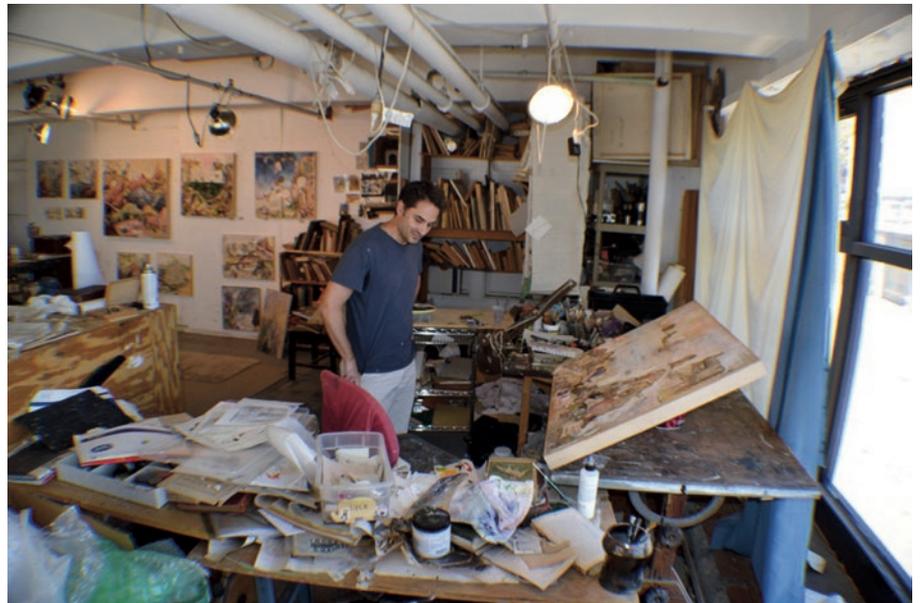
John O’Hern, who has retired after 30 years in the museum business, specifically as the Executive Director and Curator of the Arnot Art Museum, Elmira, N.Y., is the originator of the internationally acclaimed



Re-presenting Representation exhibitions which promote realism in its many guises. John was chair of the Artists Panel of the New York State Council on the Arts. He writes for gallery publications around the world, including regular monthly features on Art Market Insights and on Sculpture in Western Art Collector magazine.



Little Babel, mixed media on panel, 18 x 17¾". Courtesy Koplín Del Río, Culver City, CA.



A look inside Josh Dorman’s studio provides a glimpse into his process of creating his mixed-media artwork.

PHOTO BY JOHN MARTIN