



# DAVID A. DOUGLAS INTERSECTIONS

ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART



# DAVID A. DOUGLAS INTERSECTIONS

Curated by Anke Van Wagenberg, PhD

June 14 - August 10, 2025

American University Museum  
at the Katzen Arts Center

Washington, DC

ALPER INITIATIVE FOR WASHINGTON ART



*Onancock Landscape with Ibby*, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 50 in. Private collection.

## FOREWORD

On behalf of the American University Museum and the Alper Initiative for Washington Art, I am pleased to introduce the art of David A. Douglas. Douglas has lived in this region his whole life. He has been teaching art to high school students here for thirty-two years, while quietly creating a stunning body of work.

Douglas makes his artistic living in the spaces between Realism and Surrealism, science and magic. The photographic side of Douglas composes with mundane, friendly, familiar images observed and captured from his surroundings... perhaps a window opening to the backyard or an abandoned toy... the "real." But the painter is inside lurking, and enters the picture unexpectedly with his unconscious imagination and a set of fine painterly tools. What begins as a comfortable narrative, in the hands of the artist becomes a mystery, an opening onto a magical place, a dreamscape.

How lucky are the students to have such a teacher? They learn from observing his overt artistic process the importance of clear observation and composition. At the same time, students see demonstrated before them the necessity of looking inward, to know one's self. These two ways of knowing meet at the intersection of human experience. They are inseparable. We make our world, consciously and unconsciously. We may as well make it beautiful, as David A. Douglas certainly has.

We are indebted to guest curator Anke Van Wagenberg for bringing together this exhibition and writing about it so beautifully. Thanks also to Nancy Sausser for her insightful observations of Douglas's process and to Scout Douglas Osborne, the artist's daughter, who gives us an up close and personal look at the artist that only a daughter can give.

Jack Rasmussen  
C. Nicholas Keating and Carleen B. Keating Director  
American University Museum at the Katzen Arts Center  
Washington, DC



# DAVID A. DOUGLAS: INTERSECTIONS

By Anke Van Wagenberg, PhD  
Senior Curator & Head of International Collaborations  
American Federation of Arts  
New York, NY

David A. Douglas is a Virginia-based, contemporary artist who has shown his work in the US and abroad for over 40 years. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in painting from Virginia Intermont College (now sadly closed) and his Master of Fine Arts degree in painting from James Madison University. His photo-encaus-tic works on panel blend photography with drawing and painting techniques incorporating traditional drawing and painting materials that provide depth and texture to the images, including the use of wax.

In his Artist Statement, Douglas says, “My art is a series of actions and reactions. Do one thing, look at it, and decide what to do next. It is how I have always worked, in drawing and painting, through photography, and now with the addition of the computer.”

Opposite: *Invented Virginia Landscape* (detail), 2024. Mixed media on panel, 75 x 75 in.

## “ART IS NEVER MADE IN A VACUUM”

—DAVID A. DOUGLAS, 2025

In my interview with Douglas on April 12, 2025, he stated, “I call myself a painter because that’s the way I was trained and that’s how my mind operates. I approach the computer with a painter’s mentality—only the tools through which I arrive at a resolution are different. I push around and build compositions with a keyboard, mouse, scanners, and printers the exact same way I push around oils on canvas. To me there is no difference. The work is no more about the medium than painting is about a paintbrush or a photograph about a camera.”

His process is a mix of different media from the most primitive to the most current. Arbitrarily, he may start with a 4 x 5-inch photograph, or a piece of metal, or a texture he finds interesting; then scans it into the computer in his Alexandria, Virginia studio. After some tinkering, he prints the piece digitally and next digitally paints and draws onto it, “mutilates” it, as he calls it, and cuts it apart, only to rework it all over again. Douglas uses the computer as a tool because he understands its artistic possibilities.

*The Washington Post* described Douglas’s work, “The artist creates a hyper-real universe where floors and walls radiate with jewel-like intensity and doors in rough industrial spaces give abruptly onto pastoral scenes. His spatial compositions are visual feasts that lead the eye in and out of doors to observe strange scenes. Douglas’s ability to portray people in imaginary spots and place them throughout interior and exterior environments creates a powerful collection of works.”



*Pine Ridge Church at Night*, 2005. Mixed media on panel, 44 x 44 in.



*The Seminary House*, 2019. Mixed media on panel, 65 x 50 in.

## “MAKING ART IS SERIOUS FUN”

–DAVID A. DOUGLAS, 2025

Nancy Sausser, Independent Curator and Exhibitions Director and Curator at McLean Project for the Arts, described the artist and his oeuvre as follows:

*Working at the intersection of drawing, painting and photography, David A. Douglas creates large-scale works that explore the power of place. Depicting personally significant landscapes and interior spaces on a monumental scale, Douglas offers the viewer the opportunity to enter his visual world and experience the potency that underlies each moment. Amplifying the inner beauty within the ordinary, Douglas' works resonate with the intensity of a poem, simply stated yet somehow glowing with life from the inside out.*

*Although the works appear to be photographs, Douglas' method incorporates drawing and painting techniques as well. Trained first as a painter, Douglas came to use photography in mid-career, primarily as an offshoot of his work as a teacher. Although he now collects his imagery through a camera lens, his pieces still come into being through a process much more akin to painting. Image fragments are brought together*

*with conscious attention focused on formal compositional elements. While drawn from specific and personally impactful subjects, a finished work will most likely be made of parts from multiple places at once and is a depiction more of the artists' vision rather than a specific place. In this way, Douglas imbues each scene with a luscious and beautifully confounding incongruity. These qualities are subtle. One has to look closely, but the reward is layered and sublime.*

*These images tell stories. Large enough to imaginatively enter, the places Douglas creates are deeply grounded in the natural world. But traces of humanity are featured as well, with houses, benches, clotheslines, random debris and even figures sparsely populating the environment. Viewed through a diffuse light, these additions seem both random and purposeful, capturing frozen moments, implying action and meaning, a sense of the past and the future.<sup>1</sup>*

As artist and storyteller, Douglas creates markers for viewers to follow. Questions are asked and open-ended answers are thoughtfully posed. What might

<sup>1</sup> Nancy Sausser, Independent Curator and Exhibition Director and Curator, McLean Project for the Arts. See also <https://www.davidadouglas.com/bio>



*Max's Room*, 2023. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 70 in.

be happening here? What makes me notice what I notice? What gives meaning to this randomness? What makes the ordinary extraordinary? Where am I, and how does it feel to be in this place? These works are deeply engaging and elementally familiar, comforting and disquieting, moments of life lived by artist and viewer alike.

For the American University Museum exhibition, Douglas has created new, colorful images that vary from quiet, light-infused interior spaces to captivating exterior scenes that place people in imaginary environments, evoking a dream-like quality.

In his own words, Douglas describes that the subject matter and content of his work are derived from what is right in front of him, "Ambitiously, though impossible, I attempt to construct each composition to explain the entirety of my world. Family, friends, and surroundings (past and present) are all stitched together. Once completed, each piece contains hundreds (if not thousands) of elements from my life. Primarily, I make decisions based upon the formal rather than the psychological, although I can't ignore organizing objects and figures because of their pictorial references and interrelationships. In the end, I want people to respond to



*Landscape at Time's End*, 2015. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 50 in. Private collection.



*Soft Landing*, 2020. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 70 in.

my pieces as artwork—not as some kind of computer-generated digital imagery, technologically manipulated into a photographic printable output. If someone is caught up in the method by which I produce something, rather than the image itself, then the meaning is lost. In the end, it is my intuition that I must trust. I have no pre-conceived idea about the work. I only know when it feels right to me.”

In my April 12, 2025 interview with the artist, we discussed his approach and the narrative aspects of his work. Douglas emphasized that he trusts his intuition and that there is no “grand plan” at the basis of his work. His approach is on the one hand very process driven, in a medium he has developed over the last thirty-five years. As a result, it is

a task to select pieces from an oeuvre containing over 300 works for an exhibition. A major influence is the fact that Douglas grew up in Washington, DC and from a young age was exposed to art and seeing all the great masters. He mentions Gauguin, Monet, Van Gogh, and Rothko. From looking at Rothko he learned to work in layers and applied it to his own unique approach. What he has in common with the old masters, perhaps unconsciously, is that he trusts his craftsmanship, and “wants it to look like it is well made.”

So, how does he work? It starts with raw material and the camera, even though Douglas does not consider himself a photographer, he is merely interested in photography. I had to pry an answer from the artist about the type of camera



*Max in His Pool*, 2007. Mixed media on panel, 44 x 44 in. Private collection.





he uses. He has used handmade simple pinhole cameras, vintage plastic cameras, cameras from the early history of photography, and high-end digital cameras from his collection of hundreds of cameras to gather what he calls the raw material for his work. He does not pay much attention to the camera type.

The pieces shown in the American University Museum exhibition are Douglas's composites mostly done in the Mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay area, and some are based on a trip to the Netherlands. Douglas's work is held in numerous public, private, and corporate collections, including the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, the Chrysler Museum of Art, Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, and the Academy Art Museum. His work has been shown in various group exhibitions with Chuck Close, Robert Mapplethorpe, Diane Arbus, Sally Mann, Lee Friedlander, and Hiroshi Sugimoto, among others. Douglas's first solo museum exhibition was held in 2013 at the Academy Art Museum in Maryland. David A. Douglas teaches at Episcopal High School in Alexandria, Virginia, where he lives with his family on campus.

*Strange Window*, 2025. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 74 in.

# A DAUGHTER'S REFLECTION

By Scout Douglas Osborne

This past December, my dad and I went to see *OSGEMEOS*, a new exhibit at the Hirshhorn Museum. This exhibit featured the largest display of work by the Pandolfo brothers ever to be showcased in the United States. My dad had been urging me to go. In fact, he had already seen it. "What's it like?" I asked. "I don't want to try and explain it," he replied. "You just need to see it." My dad was delighted to accompany me and see it all again. After walking through about half of this magical exhibit, we reached *The Moon Room*, a mixed-media installation featuring an illuminated moon tucked into a bed. The room, filled with paintings and found objects, was elevated by the sound of Pavarotti singing "Nessun dorma." After looking into the room for what was only a few minutes, my dad and I pulled back and simultaneously sighed, mirroring each other's thin glaze of tears in our eyes. I know it's expected, important even, to cultivate your own feelings about art, but I'd be lying if I said mine weren't directly influenced by my dad and the world he's shown me since the day I was born.

Growing up with an artist as a father was cool. Growing up with David Douglas as an artist father was unparalleled. Even as a little kid, I was so aware of how humbled he felt to exist amongst creators, both alive and long dead, whose job descriptions were the same as his. He was (is!) one of those unstuffy artist types who knew good music and could perfectly throw a football. I remember sneaking up to his attic studio in our family's first home, beckoned by the thumping sounds of Oingo Boingo, which often played while he worked. He'd stop what he was doing and we'd dance. He never felt the need to tell me about the piece he was working on, but I was there, in the presence of his craft, and that was enough.

Years passed and I steadily watched as my dad's artistic style and scale evolved. He took a job teaching high school art and by the time I was a freshman there, he had taught me how to frame, we had been to hundreds of art exhibits together, and even traveled to Spain for a show of his. When I entered my awkward preteen

years, I often found myself as the subject, quite literally front and center, of my dad's work. I remember wrestling with the feelings of embarrassment and dread as I watched him turn a simple portrait of me into a colossal and cosmic rectangle. But, as I've grown and have been able to process those clumsy feelings of adolescence, I now know that what my dad did by including me in his art was make me feel seen and beautiful at a time where those feelings were difficult to come by.

Going to high school with my dad presented itself as a gift I was more aware of. He was (is!) hip and present and helped hundreds of students fall in love with photography and drawing. For some, the Ainslie Arts Center was a safe haven and for others, it was a welcomed addition to their rigorous academic schedules. Either way, he joyously ushered us in with bracelets on his wrists and Bob Dylan blaring on the stereo. I took his Photo 1 class and climbed the ranks to AP Photo where I spent several semesters falling in love with photography. I was drawn to Sally



*Portrait of Scout in an African Landscape*, 2006. Mixed media on panel, 60 x 60 in.





*Max with the Hose*, 2005. Mixed media on panel, 48 x 96 in.

Opposite: *Scout in the Castle Yard*, 2006. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 50 in.

Mann, Annie Liebowitz, and portrait photography. I found my own place amongst their distinctive company, and I was good. And, unbeknownst to my dad, I was to be given the *George William Laird Award for Outstanding Photography* at my graduation ceremony. He was proud as I walked across the stage, and I was grateful to be turning into my father's daughter.

I went on to study art history in college, which brought me more joy than I ever thought looking at a painting could. I am a romantic, and reading and dissecting my way through the art realm solidified my passion for it. For the first time, my dad's and my cultural stargazing intertwined where the line between teacher and student blurred. I still had much to learn from him, and he had much

to learn from me, and that was a thrilling realization. Our conversations became long and deep and we could ask each other questions that only artists could answer.

In 2010, Patti Smith wrote a breathtaking memoir about her relationship with Robert Mapplethorpe. My dad and I devoured it and to this day still struggle naming a book that stuck with us in a more profound way. In her book *Just Kids* Patti Smith wrote, "But secretly I knew I had been transformed, moved by the revelation that human beings create art, that to be an artist was to see what others could not." Art has indeed transformed me, but my dad set me on the path of transformation, and for that I lay this reflection at his weathered and storied feet.



*Untitled*, 1980. Pen and ink on paper, 30 x 24 in.



*Untitled*, 1980. Pen and ink on paper, 30 x 24 in.



*Untitled*, 1980. Pen and ink on paper, 3 x 2 in.



*Untitled*, 1980. Pen and ink on paper, 3 x 2 in.





Above and opposite: Max Douglas (Great Uncle of David Douglas), *Untitled drawings*, circa 1940.  
Pencil on paper, various sizes.



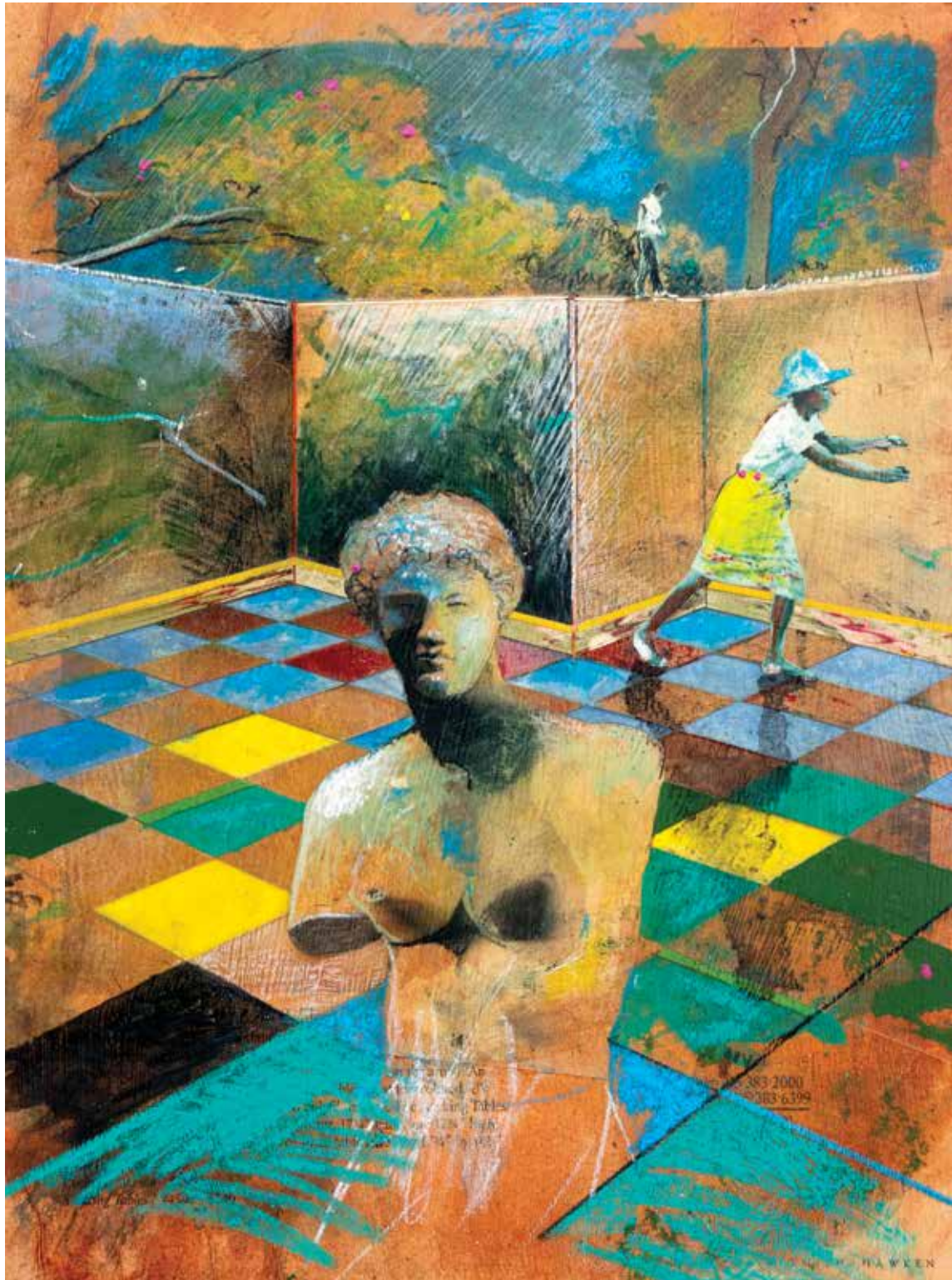
Max Douglas (Great Uncle of David Douglas), *Portrait of Joyce Douglas*, circa 1950. Pencil on paper, 24 x 18 in.



*Portrait of Scout at age 15, 2006. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 40 in.*



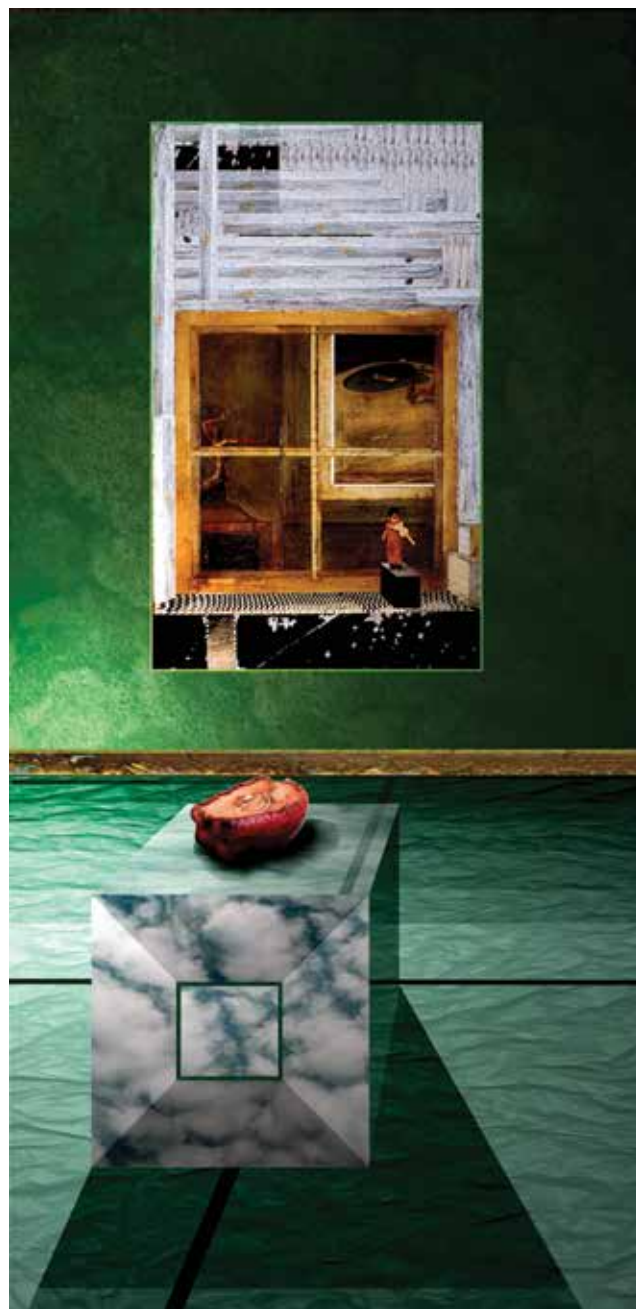
All: *Untitled*, 1985. Mixed media on panel, sizes range from 16 x 20 in. to 30 x 36 in.



*Untitled*, 1985. Mixed media on panel, 15 x 12 in.



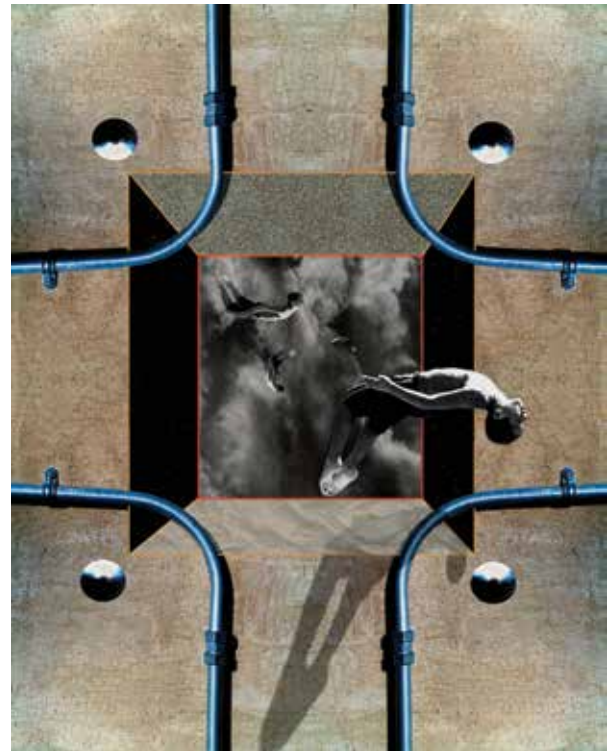
*Untitled*, 1990. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 50 x 24 in.



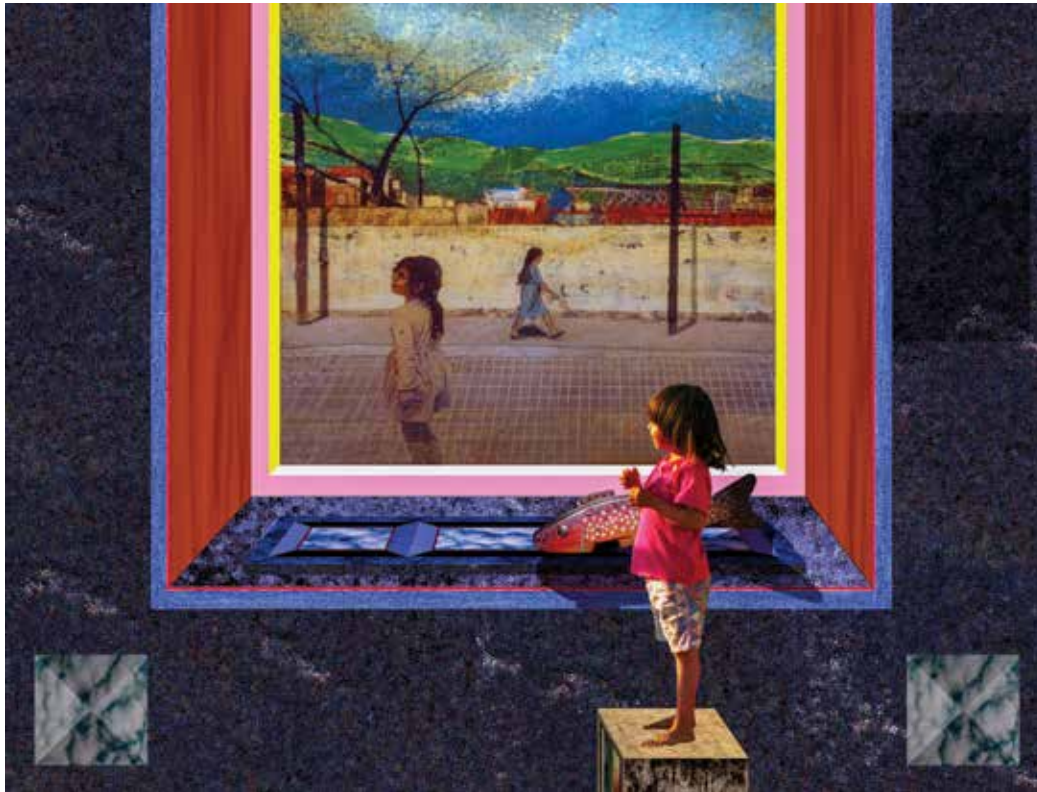
*Untitled*, 1990. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 50 x 24 in.



*Untitled, 1990.* Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 30 x 24 in.



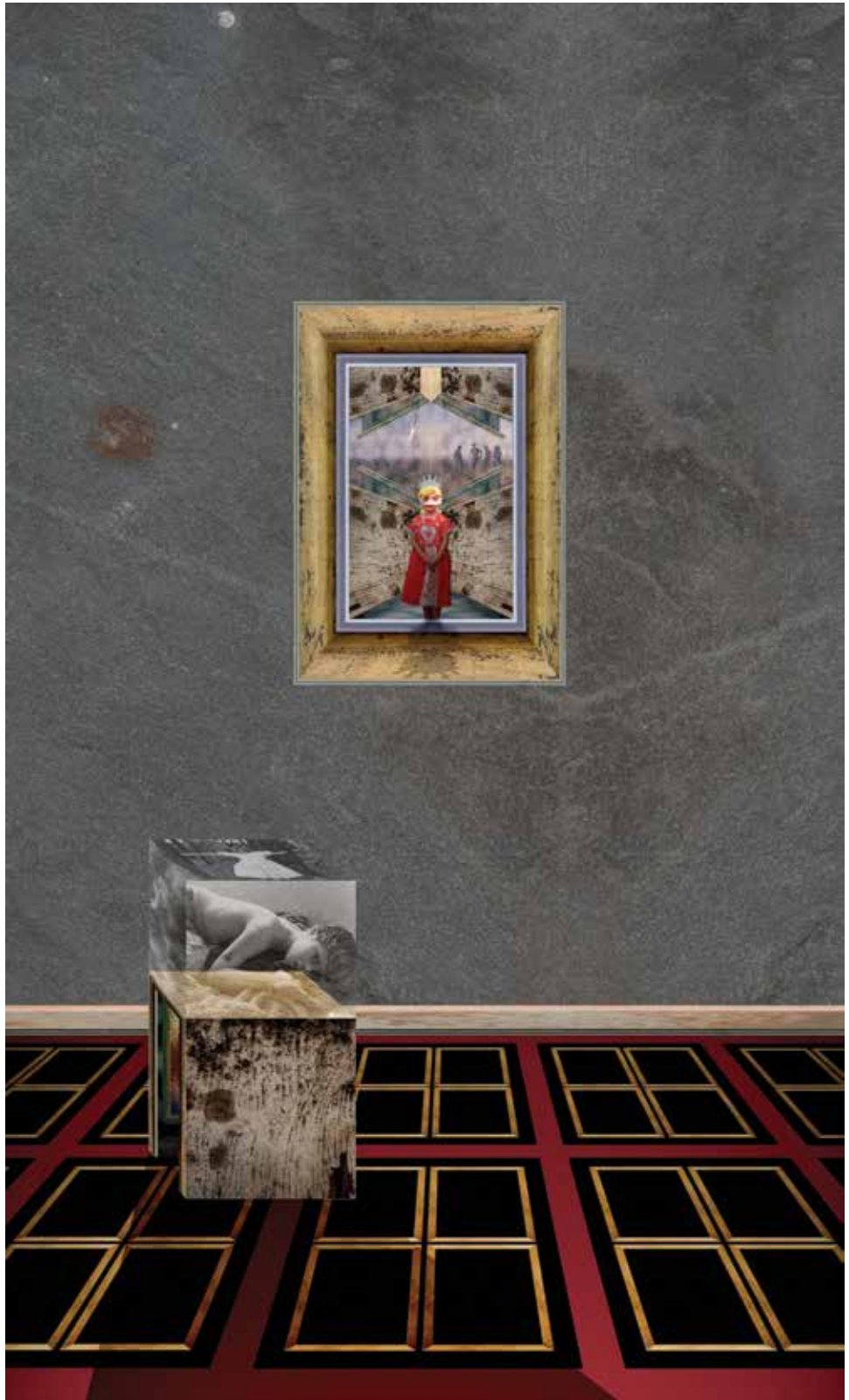
*Untitled, 1990.* Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 14 x 11 in.



*Untitled*, 1990. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 11 x 14 in.



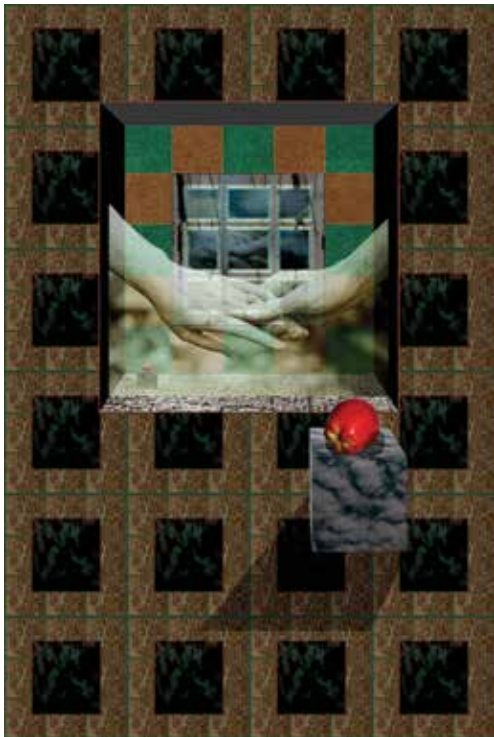
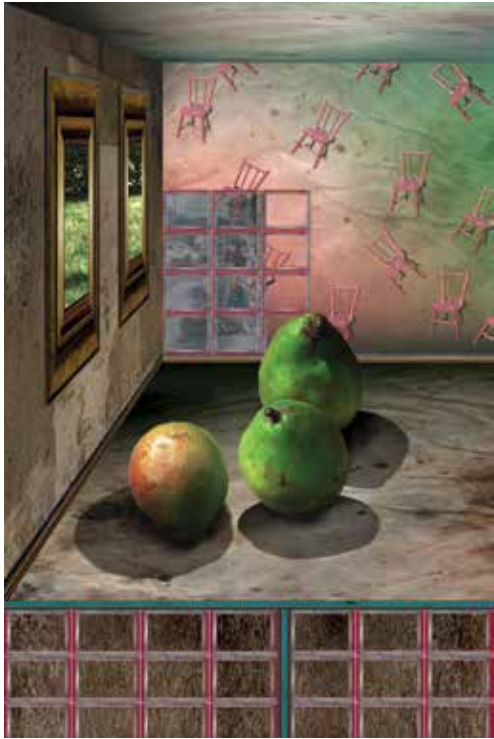
*Untitled*, 1990. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 12 x 16 in.



*Untitled*, 1990. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat, 36 x 24 in.



*Untitled*, 1990. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat, 36 x 24 in.



*Untitled, 1990.* Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 28 x 20 in.

Left, from top: *Untitled, 1990.* Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 28 x 20 in.

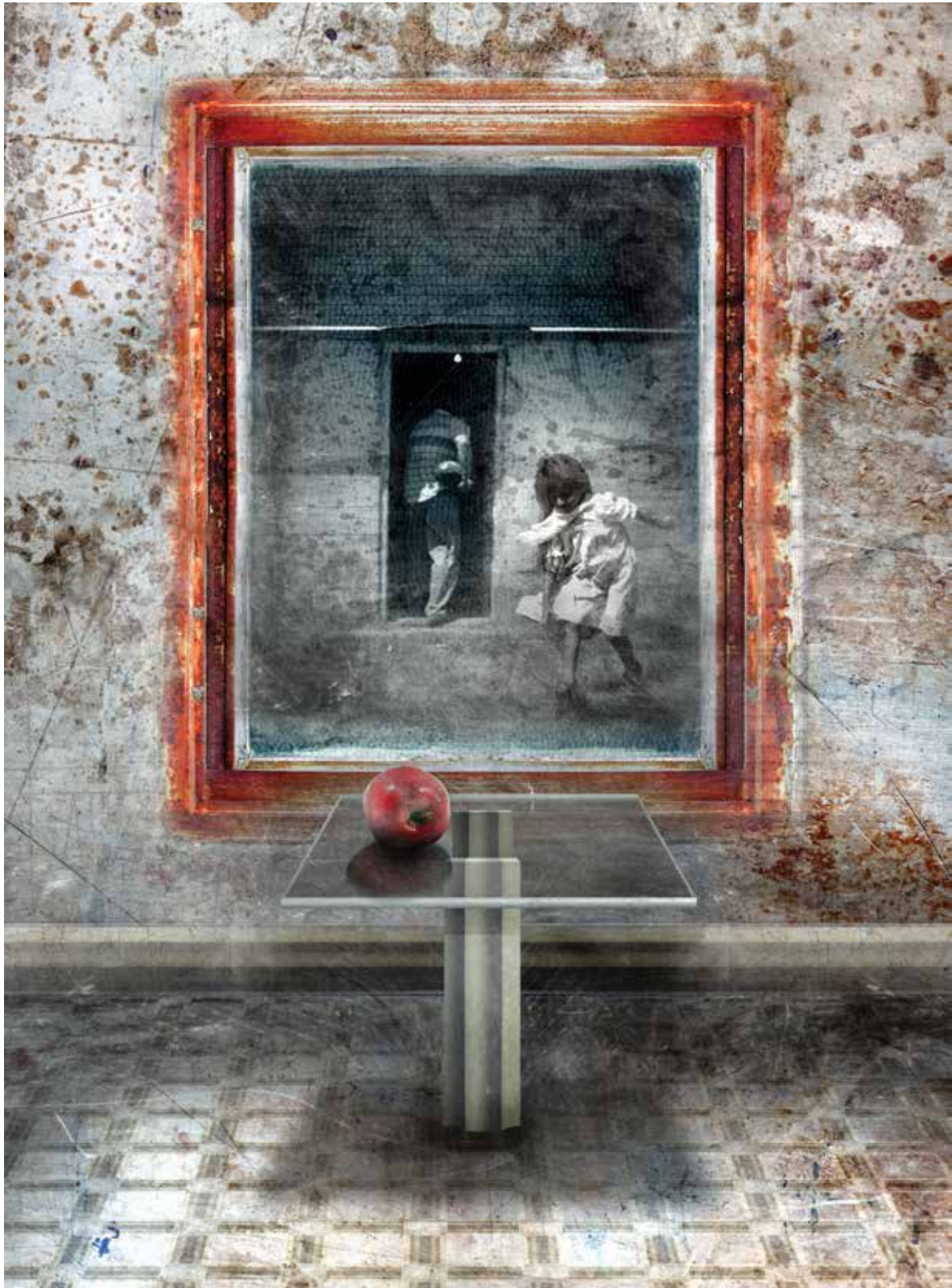
*Untitled, 1990.* Ultrachrome ink on archival mat paper, 28 x 20 in.



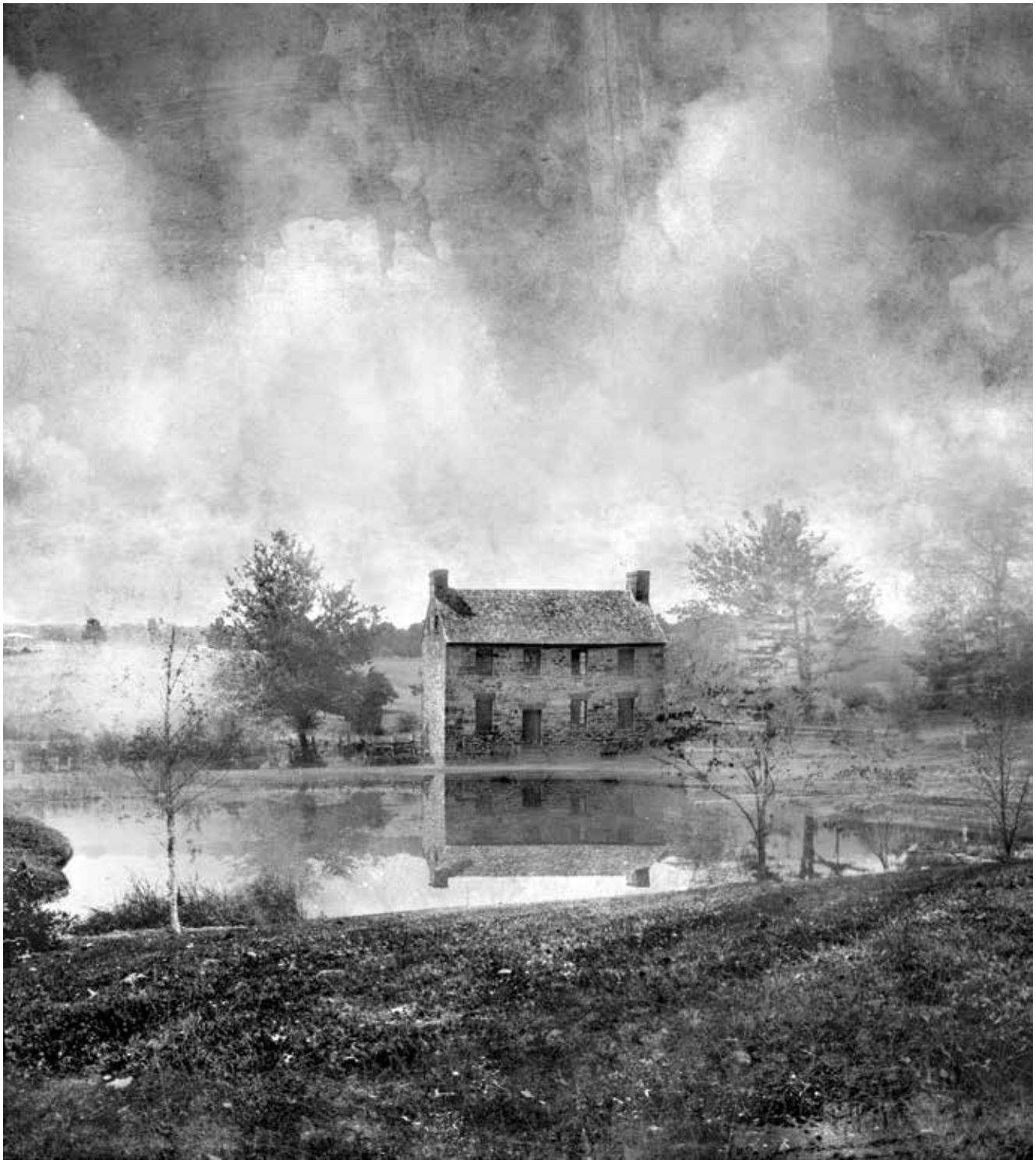
*Untitled*, 1995. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat, 26 x 34 in.



From left: *Untitled*, 1995. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat, 24 x 18 in.; *Untitled*, 1995. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat, 24 x 18 in.; *Untitled*, 1995. Ultrachrome ink on archival mat, 24 x 18 in.



*Pine Ridge*, 2000. Mixed media on panel, 36 x 24 in. Private collection.



*Invented Landscape at Bull Run, 2005. Mixed media on panel, 60 x 50 in. Courtesy of the Mittauer Family.*



*Untitled, 2002. Mixed media on panel, 40 x 36 in.*



*Landscape at Merv's, 2005. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 100 in.*



*Still Life with Tulip Magnolia*, 2008. Mixed media on panel, 15 x 20 in.



Right, from top: *Moving Through*, 2007. Mixed media on panel, 75 x 100 in. Private collection.

*Protecting Ellie*, 2008. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 70 in.

*Radio Flyer*, 2009. Mixed media on panel, 30 x 40 in. Private collection.





*Max in His Chair*, 2006. Mixed media on panel, 36 x 24 in.



*Painting the Slide*, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 24 x 40 in. Courtesy of the Loomis Family.





*Ibby Running at Jones Point*, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 100 in.



*The Magic Box*, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 80 in.



*Shooting with Helen Ann*, 2012. Mixed media on panel, 75 x 100. in.



*Portrait of Scout and MK*, 2005. Mixed media on panel, 96 x 60 in. Courtesy of the Chrysler Museum of Art.



*Beverly Drive Landscape*, 2005. Mixed media on panel, 30 x 40 in. Private collection.



*Untitled*, 2005. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 50 in.



*Untitled*, 2005. Mixed media on panel, 24 x 24 in. Private collection.



*Portrait on an Anemone, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 60 x 50 in. Private collection.*



*Portrait of a Daisy, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 60 x 50 in.*



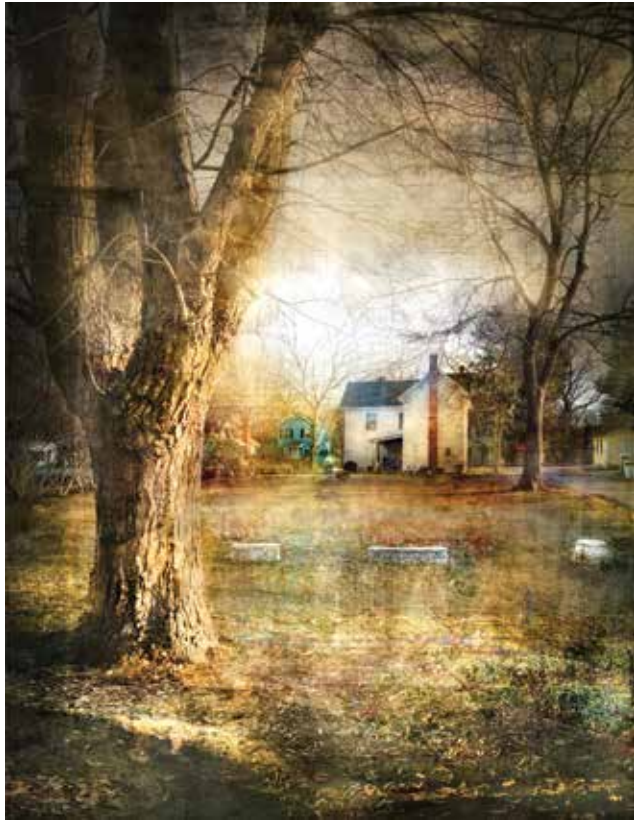
*Landscape at Bull Run, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 100 x 60 in. Private collection.*



*Landscape at the Guard House, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 60 x 50 in.*



*Quaker Schoolhouse, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 50 in. Private collection.*



*Primary Landscape, 2015. Mixed media on panel, 80 x 60 in.*



*Landscape at Mount Vernon, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 65 x 50 in.*



*The Path to Lolly's House, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 70 x 55 in.*



*The Way Home, 2010. Mixed media on panel, 75 x 60 in.  
Private collection.*



From top: *The Bird Watcher*, 2015.  
Mixed media on panel, 50 x 50 in.

*Searching for an Icon*, 2015.  
Mixed media on panel, 60 x 75 in.

Opposite: *The Octopus and the Pumpkin* (detail), 2015. Mixed  
media on panel, 70 x 80 in.







*Maple and Moose, 2024. Mixed media on panel, 65 x 50 in.*



*Spring Training*, 2022. Mixed media on panel, 70 x 50 in.



*South Street*, 2020. Mixed media on panel, 65 x 50 in.

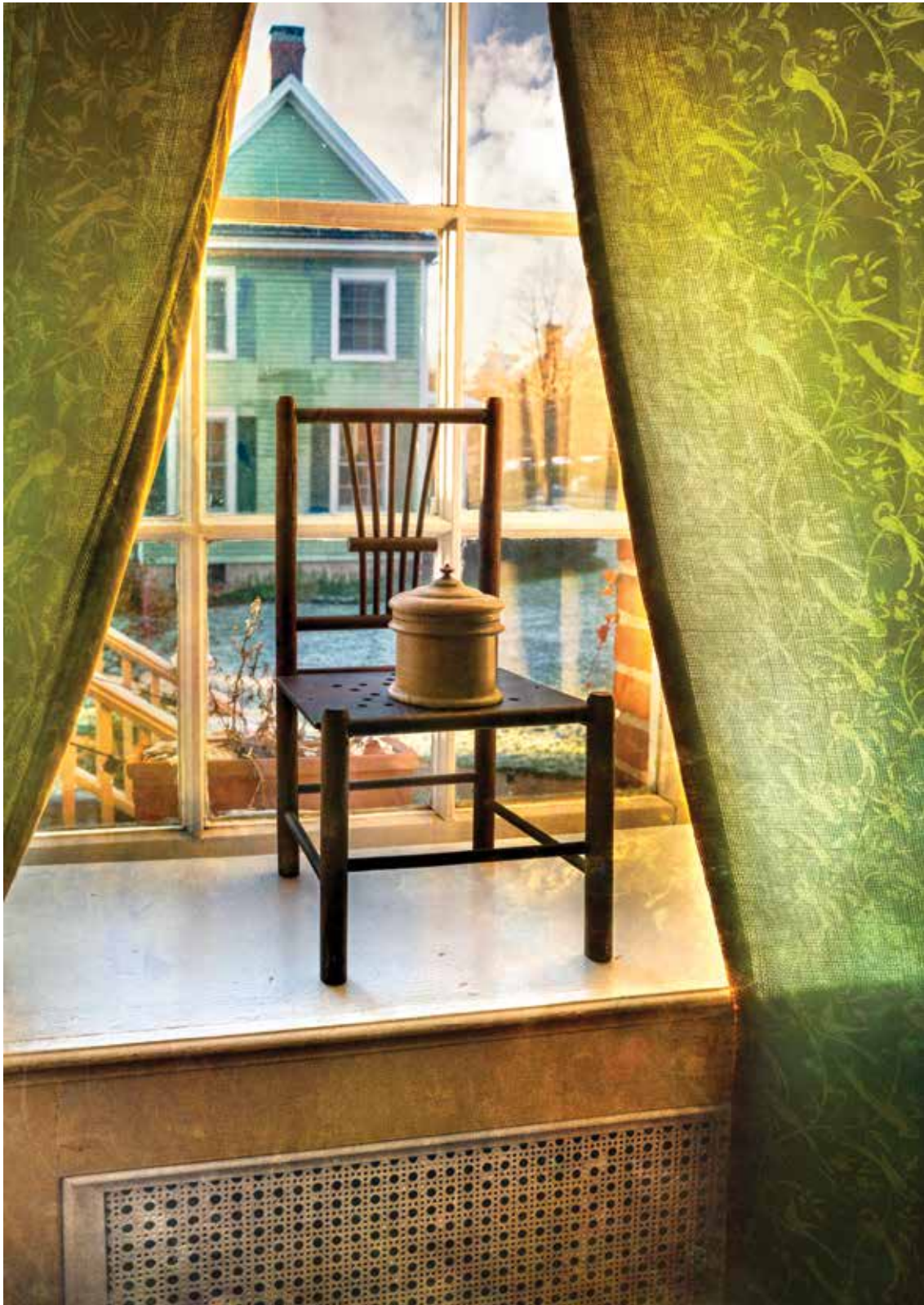




*Moving Day*, 2023. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 70 in.



*Morning Light*, 2023. Mixed media on panel, 68 x 50 in.



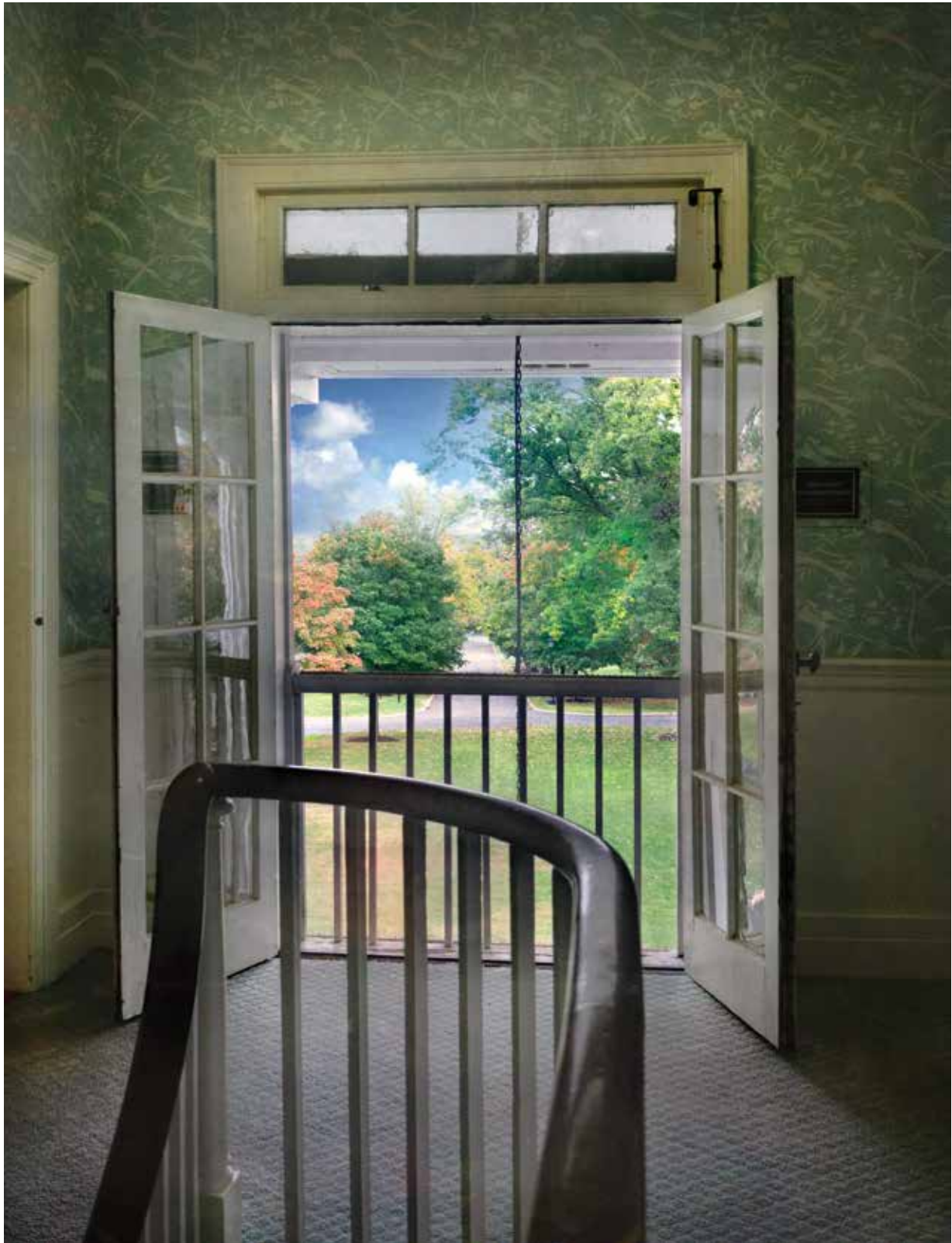
*The Tooth Fairy*, 2023. Mixed media on panel, 68 x 50 in.



*The Asian Room*, 2024. Mixed media on panel, 61 x 50 in.



*The Ghost*, 2020. Mixed media on panel, 70 x 50 in.



*View from Hoxton House, 2020. Mixed media on panel, 65 x 50 in. Episcopal High School Collection.*





*Phone Home*, 2024. Mixed media on panel, 70 x 50 in.

Opposite: *The Secret Room*, 2023. Mixed media on panel, 67 x 50 in.

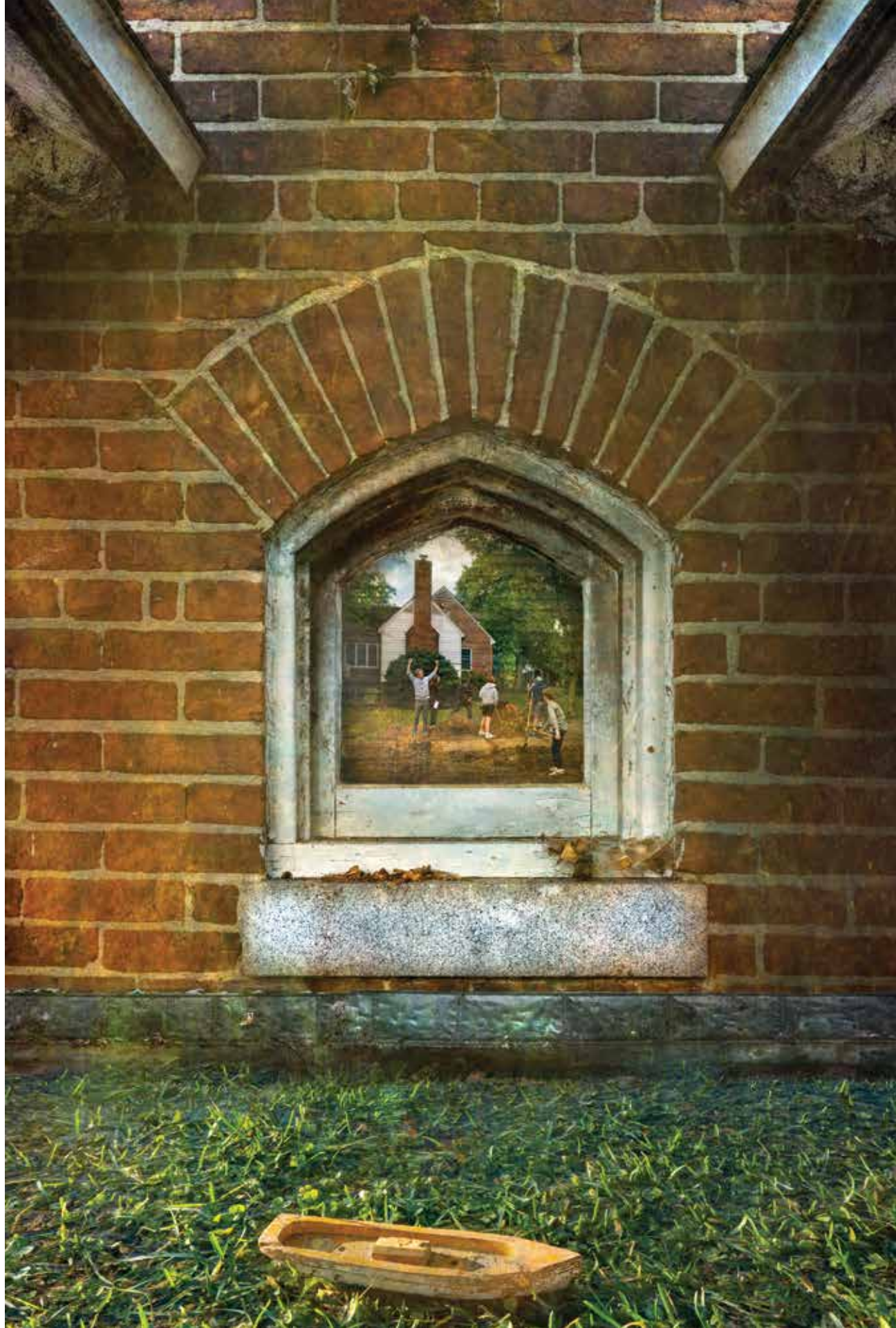
*Max's Room*, 2023. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 70 in.







*Boats and Birds*, 2023.  
Mixed media on panel,  
76 x 50 in.



*Work Crew*, 2024.  
Mixed media on panel,  
70 x 50 in.



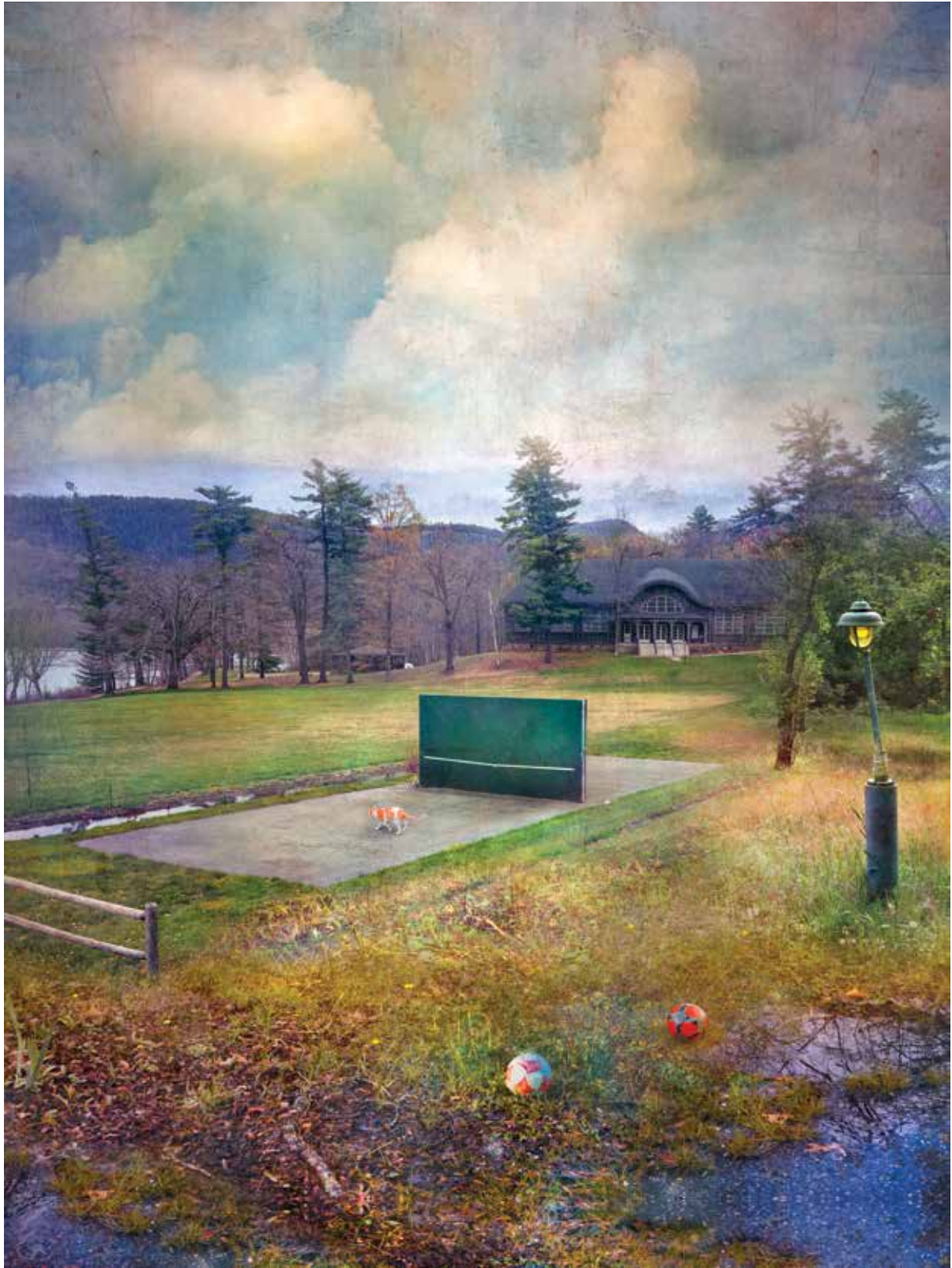


*Waiting for Nightfall*, 2020. Mixed media on panel, 64 x 60 in.



*The Secret Place Andrew's Project*, 2020. Mixed media on panel, 60 x 73 in.

Opposite: *Large Study of Landscape at Mount Vernon* (detail), 2020. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 50 in.



*This is Silver Bay, 2025. Mixed media on panel, 95 x 70 in.*



*Early Morning in the Valley*, 2020. Mixed media on panel, 75 x 71 in.

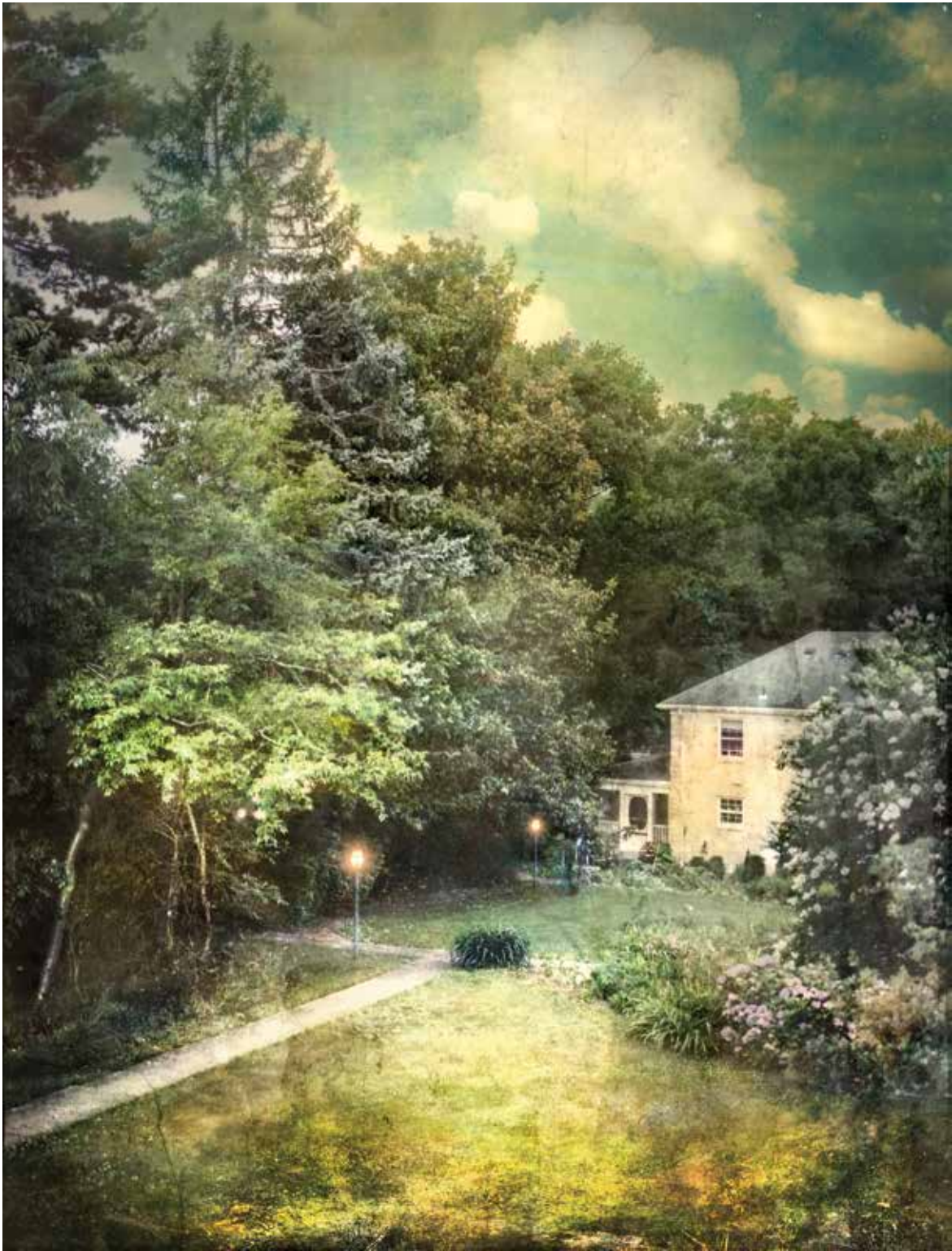






*Little Green Bench*, 2024. Mixed media on panel, 67 x 50 in.

Pages 70-71: *Black Forest* (detail), 2024. Mixed media on panel, 50 x 70 in.



*Marcy's Yard*, 2018. Mixed media on panel, 90 x 70 in. Courtesy of the Halm Family.



Lanier

Max Douglas

## A PERSONAL NOTE ON FAMILY AND MUSEUMS



David A. Douglas.

I grew up in Alexandria, Virginia just a few houses away from where both my mother and father were born. My great uncle Max Douglas, who lived with my grandparents just around the corner, was a very talented artist (see pages 20-22 and 74). My oldest memory is going up the narrow, steep steps to my great uncle's studio in the attic of their home when I was just five years old. I can still smell the oil paint and see the easels and art supplies, and the wonderful, organized mess. The massive etching press in the corner of the vaulted ceiling room stood there like an invitation to come in. I decided right then and there that I would be an artist, whatever that was and however you became one.

All of the museums in Washington, DC were a very important part of my art education and still are to this day. It is my free, inspirational stomping ground. I take my students on a regular basis and often go back to see the exhibitions several times with friends and family. I meet my daughter and my grandchildren there to wander through these fantastic repositories of the human experience. My daughter, Scout, and I have a long-standing tradition of sending each other a phone snapped photograph of Raphael's *Alba Madonna* from the West Wing of the National Gallery of Art. It is a true favorite of ours.

My father was a DC policeman and walked his beat in the neighborhood of The Phillips Collection. When he was on his midnight shift, he liked to visit the guards of the museum. In the basement where they gathered around the coffee pot with their cigarettes, there was always a painting hanging over this shabby table. Once, a Van Gogh hung in this dimly lit cellar, and it left a lasting impression on my father. Years later, my father left the police department and opened up a custom framing shop that sold art supplies and eventually evolved into a contracting, interior design, and remodeling business. But, it never lost its roots and would always have paint brushes, canvases, and paints on the shelves. Working in his shop, I learned many of the skills I use as an artist, such as the mounting and presentation of the work in this exhibition.

– David A. Douglas



Big Bob (Artist's father). Photographer and date unknown. 18 x 12 in.

Opposite: Max Douglas, *Family*, 1940. Drypoint etching, 3 x 2 in.

# ALPER INITIATIVE

First published in conjunction with the exhibition

*David A. Douglas: Intersections*

June 14–August 10, 2025

Alper Initiative for Washington Art

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[www.american.edu/cas/museum](http://www.american.edu/cas/museum)

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All artwork by David A. Douglas and all works are in the artist's collection, unless otherwise noted.

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Front cover: *The Tooth Fairy* (detail), 2023. Mixed media on panel, 68 x 50 in.

Inside front cover: *No Diving* (detail), 2020. Mixed media on panel, 65 x 50 in. Private collection.

Back cover: *Portrait of Scout Sleeping*, 2008. Mixed media on panel, 90 x 60 in.

ALPER  
INITIATIVE for  
WASHINGTON  
ART

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY MUSEUM • WASHINGTON, DC



# FOR WASHINGTON ART

## MISSION STATEMENT

The Alper Initiative for Washington Art promotes an understanding and appreciation of the art and artists of the Washington Metropolitan Area. We provide and staff a dedicated space located within the American University Museum to present exhibitions, programs, and resources for the study and encouragement of our creative community.

