



AN: PAST PRESENT PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, AND COMBINED MEDIA BRUCE DORFMAN: PAST PRESENT PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, AND COMBINED MEDIA BRUCE DORFMAN: PAST PRESENT PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, AND COMBINED MEDIA

# Dorfman BruceDorfmanBruceDorfma

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# Bruce Dorfman Bruce Dorfman

PAST PRESENT

COMBINED MEDIA PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, and COMBINED MEDIA

## < *Sung*

1989

canvas, metal, wood,  
paper, acrylic

84 x 60 x 3 inches

## ^ *Apricot*

2016

paper, metal, pencil,  
gouache, acrylic

28 x 17 inches



## Bruce Dorfman | ABOUT MY WORK

For me, the act of artistic creation is a wholehearted affirmation of life. I make no separation between the many meanings of my art and whatever the many meanings of my life may be. Whatever goes on in my paintings is simply an extension of whatever else I do, think, and feel, from day to day and year to year.

The way my art looks, and the feelings my art reflects, is not the result of a self-conscious decision, but rather the result of a deeply felt need, and a given use of formal means. Both the need and the formal means are rooted in an extreme intensity of experience. I am very much driven by a vague, abstract notion, and ideal of beauty. I try to get some of this into my work through an ongoing process of strengthening and clarification. In all my art, I seek strength of statement through refinement and simplicity of form.

My art is never “about a subject.” Nor does it deal exclusively with some consideration or preoccupation about technique or form. Each work is a summation and consolidation of innermost feelings toward a particular experience at a given time. I do not seek to associate or identify with any particular approach, genre, or ‘school’ of art. Style and approach evolve through time, from one work to another.

Each and every work is inevitably new, with its own problems and joys. The problems are always in abundance, but the joys more than make up for them.

©BRUCE DORFMAN

Distributed on the occasion of a Gallery Talk given by the artist at the June Kelly Gallery, NYC, October 3, 2015, during the artist’s solo exhibition, September 4 – October 10, 2015.

### < *White Graphite*

1989

canvas, wood, metal,  
paper, acrylic

80 x 58½ x 3 inches



## STATEMENT FROM THE GALLERY DIRECTOR

Scott Knauer | Director of Galleries and Collections,  
Monmouth University

*“I am seeking. I am striving.*

*I am in it with all my heart.”*

*—Vincent van Gogh*

Many years ago, when I first met Bruce Dorfman, I met a man fully engaged in his art and in his life. Following that initial meeting I came away excited and inspired at not only the artwork that I had viewed, but also by the man himself.

As an artist and educator, Dorfman has been teaching at The Art Students League of New York since 1964. Dorfman's art has been exhibited widely. He has received numerous prestigious awards, grants, and fellowships, and his work has been written about in major publications. His work can also be found in a vast array of museums, corporate, public, and private collections worldwide.

This year, Monmouth University is honored to present “Bruce Dorfman – Past, Present: Paintings, Drawings, and Combined Media.” This very important survey will showcase Dorfman's works that were completed from the 1980s through 2016.

Over the course of the past year, it has been my distinct pleasure to curate this exhibition with Dorfman, and Monmouth University Professor of Art, Vincent DiMattio. As it was then, and as it is now, I continue to be inspired by Dorfman's total immersion in his art, his life, and the passion and beauty inherent within. This exhibition will provide a wonderful opportunity for the Monmouth University community and patrons from all across the country to visit, and view this tremendous body of work.

### > **Marco Polo**

1998–2013; canvas, metal, paper, fabric, wood, acrylic  
47 x 35 1/2 x 29 inches / 5 sides (forward-most work)

### **Maja and Francisco Goya**

canvas, metal, wood, fabric, wood, steel, acrylic  
69 x 34 x 17 inches / 4 sides (rear-most work)

### >> **Portuguese Doorway**

1993; paper, metal, wood, pencil, gouache, acrylic  
30 x 20 inches

## BRUCE DORFMAN: Artist & Mentor

Maureen Mullarkey | Studio Matters | September 19, 2015

*“An artist who seeks subject matter is like a person who can't get up in the morning until he understands the purpose of life.”*

*—Fairfield Porter*

Porter could easily have said the same about segments of art's audience. There lingers a tired complaint that unless some aspect of the human condition presents itself—some scene, narrative, or vignette—an artwork appears empty, dehumanized, self-absorbed.

Among this species of beholders, interest is tethered to subject matter. The art of a work is little more than a carrier for the anecdotal burden of the piece. Art itself is valued primarily as a reflection of, or window into, higher things.

Such an unhappy position to take—rather like being unable to listen to music without a libretto to go with it. Hostility to philosophical modernism still overflows onto the art that accompanied it. Much loveliness is missed in the spillage.

That brings me to Bruce Dorfman, an artist whose work has captivated me all the years I have known it. His latest exhibition opened September 4th at June Kelly Gallery in Soho. The enduring accomplishment of his art is evident in this handsome, intelligent show.

Since his works combine both painting and assemblage, Mr. Dorfman describes them as composite paintings. The qualifier places his work in a line of descent from Kurt Schwitters' initial *Merz* pieces, composed in the wake of World War I. These were collages and assemblages of found



objects, evocative fragments of things from everyday life selected for arrangement in what can be thought of as painting with materials.

Dorfman has contributed to the practice built on that precedent for several decades, extending its pictorial possibilities with great chromatic sensitivity. It is precisely his gift for color that makes painting central to the work and that integrates the two techniques into a satisfying whole. Color remains the decisive element in his work. Materials, chosen for the holding power of their shapes, are left as they come or painted over to suit the harmonies of a composition. The detail, below, gives you a clearer look at the delicate transparencies and undertones he achieves within each chromatic zone.

Tucked into the upper left corner of a detail of the work *Deep Past* is an image of Michael the Archangel torn from an old book of Russian icons. Its discreet presence—here, a droplet in a large rondel—hints at the source of the hieratic quality characteristic of my favorite Dorfman paintings: his signature vertical compositions. The heart of good pictorial art lies in its adjustment between the sense—sensation—of depth and the reality of a flat substrate. Dorfman negotiates that illusive balance with enviable agility. Your eye sinks into the surface of the materials. All invitation to movement is there, in the advance and recession of dimensional elements and in the spatial expressiveness of color. Yet the work in its entirety achieves a certain stillness. It is the poise associated with traditional icon painting. Looking at icons strictly as abstract compositions, they achieve their equilibrium through a hieratic scale of proportion that distributes color and shape according to weight. Dorfman does the same.

Phyllis Braff, writing in *The New York Times* of an earlier exhibition, described him quite well:

*“The precision with which he uses found objects sets Mr. Dorfman’s work apart. It is always clear that each item is playing multiple roles: establishing the essentials of the composition, providing tactile and reflective qualities and introducing suggestions of previous uses, personal history, or past events . . . There is an unexpected elegance in the way Mr. Dorfman makes adjustment to scale and gives the smaller compositions the character of something quite grand.”*

It should be no surprise that many distinguished artists have preferred to teach in those uncommon institutions that maintain similarity to the historic atelier system. As is natural among academics, the conceptual trumps the visual. But in the atelier—



◀ **Stonechime**  
1994–1995  
canvas, metal, wood,  
paper, acrylic  
96 x 44 x 3 inches

a workshop—art making remains, above all else, a labor. The Art Students League remains just such a place. And Bruce Dorfman has served it with distinction.

Dorfman began his own training there under Yasuo Kuniyoshi before going on to the University of Iowa in the late Fifties. He returned to the League as an instructor in 1964, and teaches there still. For half a century, Dorfman has provided ballast for artists drawn to painting’s means as a carrier of its own ends—beauty, paramount among them. This, during decades swollen with illusions about art’s grand aims and the artist’s visionary role.

Aesthetic modernism is too often faulted for what, in reality, is the result of the academy’s appropriation of art training. Blame the state of contemporary art on captivity of the atelier by the podium. Critical theory, reigning in the classroom, is no help inside the studio where the only ideas that matter are pictorial ones. And where words do not matter at all.

Dorfman is an artist who understands that. The animated tactility of his work testifies to the obstinate fact that art comes to us from gifted hands in service to an eye. At the end of the day, sensibility is everything.

MAUREEN MULLARKEY is a painter who writes on art and culture. Her essays have appeared in various publications, among them: *The Nation*, *Crisis*, *Commonwealth*, *Hudson Review*, *Arts*, *The New Criterion*, *First Things*, *The Weekly Standard*, and the magazine *Antiques*. She was a columnist for *The New York Sun*. She is a senior contributor to *The Federalist*.

This article, on the occasion of Bruce Dorfman’s most recent solo exhibition at June Kelly Gallery, NYC, September 4 – October 10, 2015, is reprinted here in its entirety.

## Phyllis Braff | New York, 2016

BRUCE DORFMAN appreciates both the challenges and the potential visual pleasures of deeply exploring material, surface and space. Here he finds the core content for a studio practice that has long concentrated on creating strong sensual experiences for the viewer. It is an approach that aligns his career with the generation of creative people who came to recognize that painting need not refer to anything other than itself. The art is in the sensation provided by the artist.

Viewing Dorfman’s paintings means constantly reacting to their intrinsic visual and conceptual possibilities. Colors pop, providing velocity. Or they slow to suggest a meditative surface. Brushy pigment layers often thrust the senses into a timeless realm that constantly redefines itself. Tipping vertical elements might slash, dash, or insert a directional speed. In many instances a large field of color creates a broad expanse of a single tonality that absorbs and gives back a vibrating light. As the eye lingers, and vision adjusts, another level of comprehension might emerge. In *Windsock* and *Kizuki*, for example, subtle circles gradually become apparent. When both optical and psychological responses churn together, a piece inevitably produces a discernable energy.

Dorfman has long been absorbed in questioning what a painting might be. As an initial triggering event, he credits the impact of noticing how a Sung Dynasty painter could suggest the ambience of persimmons with just a few high impact strokes. Further insights evolved during formative studies in Italy when he observed what he calls the “concreteness” of Piero della Francesca. Here was art realized as something different than an attempt to copy the actual world. Shapes relate to a space invented by the artist, and they could imply weight as well. To the observer, it was art with its own internal integrity.

Questions about tangibility have become part of the edginess of Dorfman’s work, with forms that straddle a line between recognition and non-recognition occurring

frequently. Surfaces often integrate real elements, such as fabric folds, a ruler, a reproduction image, or a segment of product lettering, but just as often a three-dimensional unit is constructed from thickening pigment and other studio materials. One goal in introducing unexpected dimensions and testing illusions is the expansion of visual processes. Another is the dissolving of measurable space. There seems to be an interesting parallel with contemporary culture in this pull between the physical and the imagined.

Conscious of the fact that the work fuses many types of sources, Dorfman will often refer to his work as “composite paintings.” A sizeable number of these composite pieces now go beyond the canvas-on-stretcher tradition and are built in shapes such as ovals, circles, and irregularly angled forms. Often they are take on the perceptual characteristics of wall sculpture.

Such expanding and, at times, intentionally destabilizing practices seem to fit into a consistent pattern when seen in the context of a career spanning many decades. An exhibition concentrating on an overview demonstrates that Dorfman has long concentrated on providing unexpected provocations, starting with his earliest suggestions of vigorous paint action functioning exuberantly beneath the primary surface. It also reveals his strong interest in exploring possibilities for visual fields that might challenge predictable boundaries.

PHYLLIS BRAFF has been an art critic for *The New York Times* and has written essays and reviews for international art publications. Other publications include *Bibliography of Twentieth Century Art and Architecture*, *Bibliography of American Art and Architecture*, and essays for a number of monographs and exhibition catalogues. A former museum administrator and art curator, she has also taught art history and criticism. She also served as the president of the International Association of Art Critics – USA section.





^ *Ecco Ecco*

2000

canvas, metal, wood, paper,  
acrylic

51 x 53 x 3 inches



^ *Assisi*

2002

canvas, metal, wood, paper,  
acrylic

52 x 50 x 4 inches



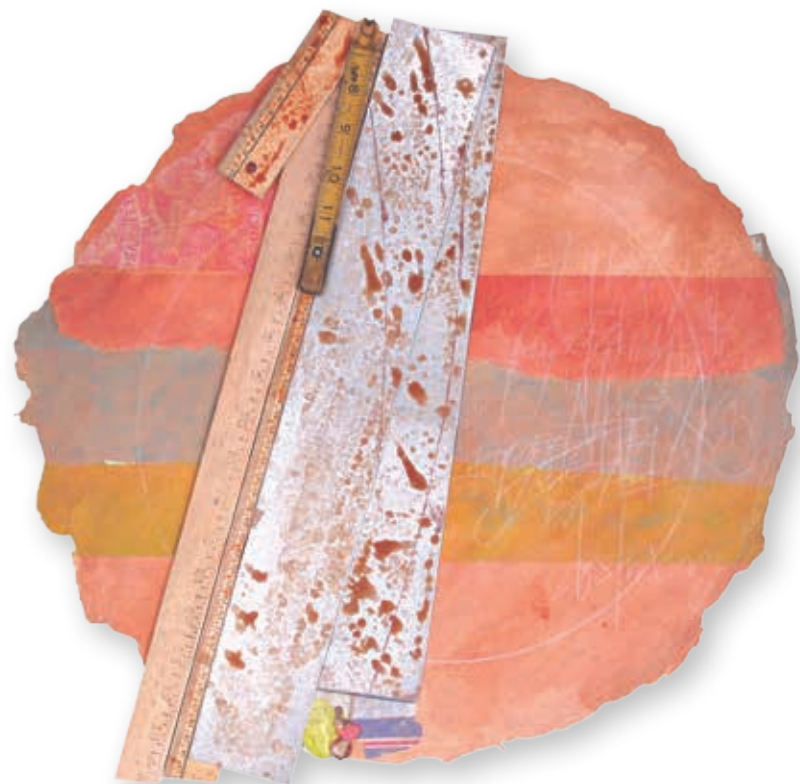
^ *Where It Was, As It Was*

2002

canvas, wood, metal, paper,  
fabric, acrylic

56 x 54 x 3 inches





< *Gust*  
2004  
paper, metal, wood,  
pencil, gouache, acrylic  
20 inches round



< *Green Pin*  
2007  
paper, metal, wood, pencil,  
gouache, acrylic  
12 inches round

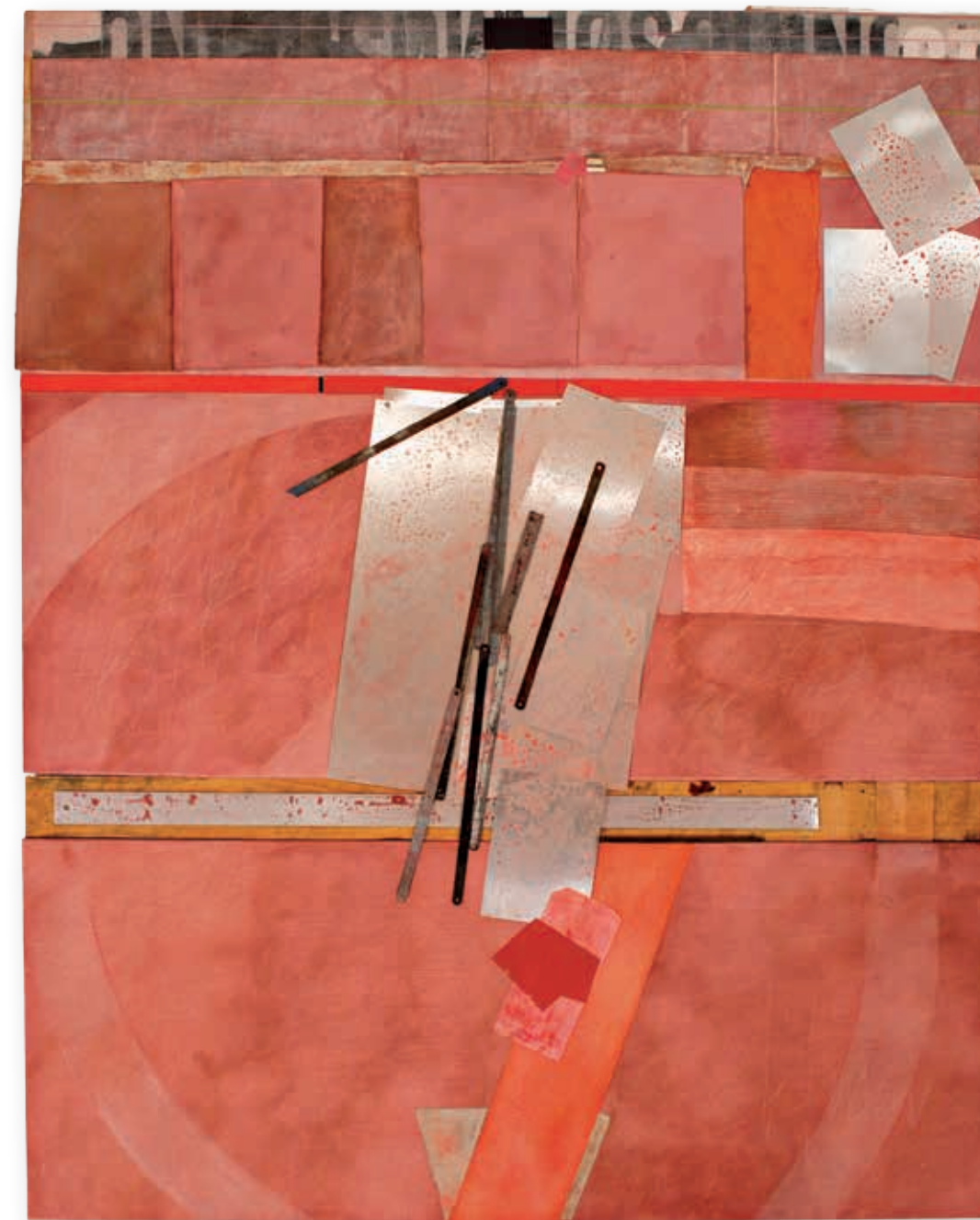


^ *Song Poem*  
2004  
canvas, wood, metal, paper,  
and acrylic  
48 1/2 x 48 x 6 inches





▲ *Propellor*  
 2007  
 canvas, metal, wood, paper,  
 fabric, acrylic  
 55 x 71 x 4 inches



▲ *Terracotta Lift (Emil)*  
 2007  
 canvas, wood, metal, paper,  
 acrylic  
 58 x 46 x 3 inches





▲ *Torso*  
2009  
paper, pencil, gouache, acrylic  
24 x 18 inches



▲ *Odessa*  
2012-2015  
canvas, metal, paper, fabric,  
acrylic  
58 x 59 x 3 inches





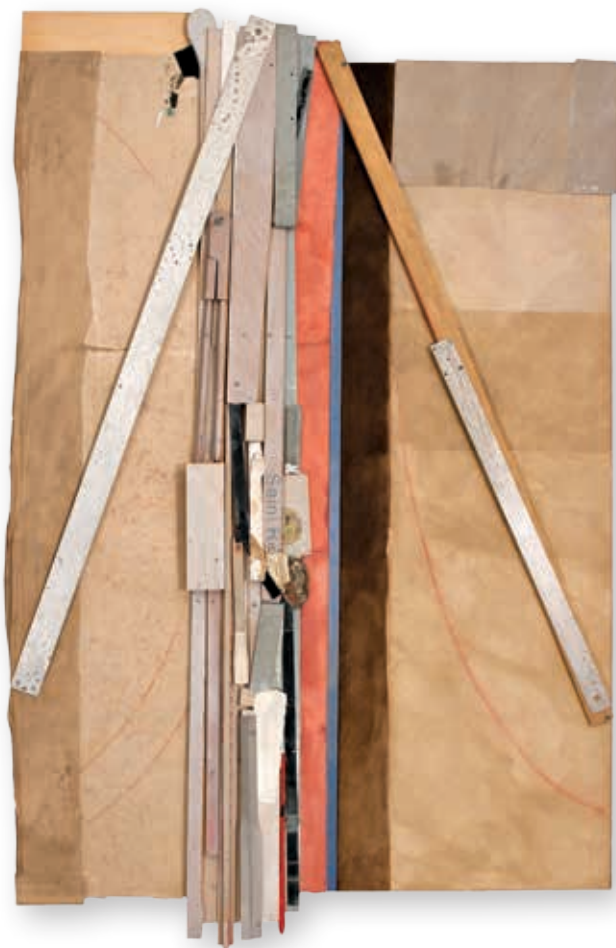
^ *Deep Past*  
2011  
canvas, metal, wood, paper,  
and acrylic  
55 x 48 x 6 inches

< *Deep Past* (detail)





^ **Flite II**  
2012  
paper, metal, pencil, gouache,  
acrylic  
12½ x 9 inches



^ **Chinatown**  
2013-2015  
canvas, wood, metal, paper,  
fabric, acrylic  
63 x 40 x 3 inches

> **Chinatown** (detail)







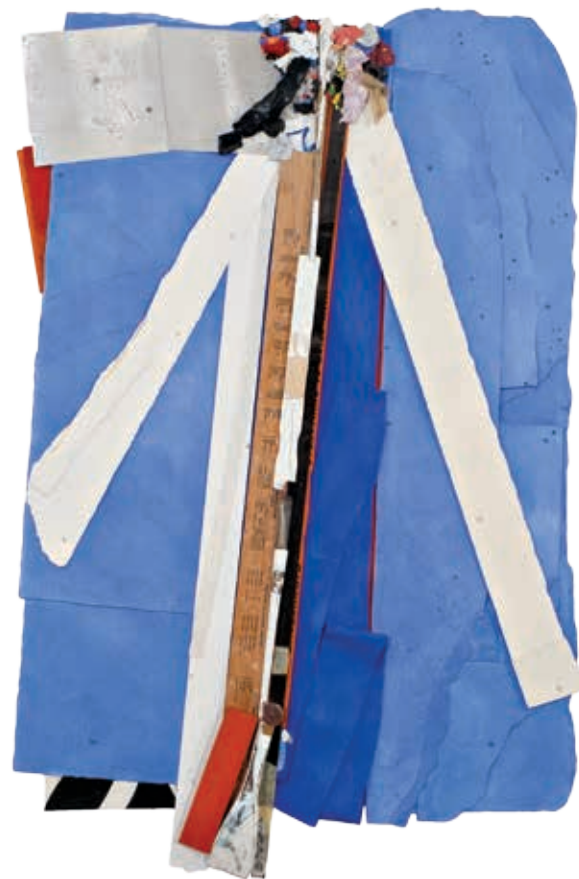
^ *Flite IV*

2012  
paper, metal, wood, pencil,  
gouache, acrylic  
9.5 x 6 inches



^ *Flite IX*

2015  
canvas, wood, metal,  
paper, acrylic  
58 x 45 x 6 inches



^ *Flite X*

2015  
canvas, wood, metal,  
paper, acrylic  
58 x 45 x 6 inches



^ *Flite VIII*

2015  
canvas, wood, metal, paper,  
acrylic  
58 x 45 x 6 inches





## Bruce Dorfman | BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Bruce Dorfman has had fifty-three solo exhibitions throughout the United States and abroad. His work has been presented in numerous museum and university collections and gallery group exhibitions worldwide, including currently "Ways and Means: A New Look at Process in Art," July 18-October 7, 2016 at UBS Art Gallery, NYC, and recently, "Making / Breaking Traditions: Teachers of Ai Weiwei" at the Phylliss Harriman Mason Gallery, ASL, NYC (2014); the University of Iowa Museum of Art at The Figge Museum, Iowa (January-June, 2015); and "The International School," The Museum at Convento Santo Antonio, Loule, Portugal (August-October, 2015).

Dorfman is the recipient of many awards, grants, and fellowships, including New York State Council on the Arts; Fulbright Fellowship; Rockefeller Foundation; U.S. Department of State; Arts East Foundation, Washington, DC; New York World's Fair Invitational; National Academy of Design; Des Moines Art Center; Butler Institute of American Art; and Atelier Mourlot, Paris, France. Dorfman was the recipient of a major grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation, 2007-2008. His work has been written about extensively including, most recently, in *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, *ARTnews*, *City Arts*, and *Magasinet Kunst*. His art has also received critical attention in a wide range of periodicals, catalogs, and monographs.

Dorfman has been teaching at the Art Students League of New York since 1964, and taught at the League summer school in Woodstock, NY, from 1964 to 1972. Dorfman has also taught at the New School, Syracuse University, the Everson Museum, and was Artist-in-Residence at the Norton Museum, Florida from 1993 to 1996. He has been a guest-artist and lecturer at museums and art institutions in Venezuela, Portugal, and France.

Dorfman studied at the Art Students League of New York with Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Arnold Blanch, and Charles H. Alston. He is a graduate of the University of Iowa, where he studied with Stuart Edie, Mauricio Lasansky, and art historian Roy Seiber.

### < Look Into White

2015

canvas, wood, metal, paper,

fabric, pencil, acrylic

60 x 38 x 5 inches

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**White Graphite**, 1989, canvas, wood, metal, paper, acrylic; 80 x 58½ x 3 inches

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**Marco Polo**, 1998–2013; canvas, metal, paper, fabric, wood, acrylic; 47 x 35½ x 29 inches/5 sides (forward–most work);

**Maja and Francisco Goya**; canvas, metal, wood, fabric, wood, steel, acrylic; 69 x 34 x 17 inches/4 sides (rear–most work)

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**Portuguese Doorway**, 1993; paper, metal, wood, pencil, gouache, acrylic; 30 x 20 inches

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**Stonechime**, 1994–1995; canvas, metal, wood, paper, acrylic; 96 x 44 x 3 inches

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**Flite IX**, 2015; canvas, wood, metal, paper, acrylic; 58 x 45 x 6 inches

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**Flite X**, 2015; canvas, wood, metal, paper, acrylic; 58 x 45 x 6 inches

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**Flite VIII**, 2015; canvas, wood, metal, paper, acrylic; 58 x 45 x 6 inches

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**Look Into White**, 2015; canvas, wood, metal, paper, fabric, pencil, acrylic; 60 x 38 x 5 inches

inside back cover:

**Molly Bloom**, 2012–2015; canvas, metal, paper, acrylic; 66 x 47 x 6 inches

back cover:

**Purple and Purple**, 2015; canvas, wood, metal, paper, fabric, pencil, acrylic; 60 x 39 x 5 inches

## COLOPHON

Published for the opening of *Bruce Dorfman: Past, Present – Paintings, Drawings, and Combined Media* presented by the Department of Art and Design, Monmouth University, West Long Branch, New Jersey.

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### > Molly Bloom

2012–2015

canvas, metal, paper, acrylic

66 x 47 x 6 inches



MONMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY





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INGS, and COMBINED MEDIA  
PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, and COMBINED MEDIA

## ▲ *Purple and Purple*

2015

canvas, wood, metal, paper,  
fabric, pencil, acrylic;  
60 x 39 x 5 inches

## ▲ *Purple and Purple*

2015

canvas, wood, metal, paper,  
fabric, pencil, acrylic;  
60 x 39 x 5 inches

# Bruce

P A S T

PAINTINGS, DRAWINGS, and COMBINED MEDIA