



boundary

JOHN DODGE: Off Normal

John W. Dodge paints what he sees. And as a life-long resident of Canaryville, a neighborhood just south of Bridgeport, populated by stacks upon stacks of wooden pallets piled high in dirt lots behind rusty chain-link fences, shuttered corner taverns and the like, what he observes is Chicago, east of Back of the Yards but vaguely prevalent throughout the city.

On the surface, these works on canvas or panel are about surface, the topology of urban decay and its texture which speak to layers of personal and historical memory. Not traditional landscapes romanticizing the working class roots that Upton Sinclair politicized or Carl Sandburg waxed poetic but more myopic in his abstraction of process as imagery to evoke the quotidian surroundings that go unnoticed yet bear witness to bygone eras of blood, sweat, and tears.

A man of few words, Dodge is just as laconic when he paints. Like his forebears, his blue-collar work ethic proudly emerges from these paintings as the fruits of his labor. So he scratches to reveal beneath the surface, to glorify the hidden and the forgotten. For him, beauty is through the power and struggle of hard work that rubs away the shiny and brand new into something worn and comfortable. Yet his practice also references such representational context by paying homage to where he grew up and still lives and remembers through the formalistic language of abstraction.

Larry Lee and Susannah Papish, June 2017