



MARJORIE MORROW



Inspiration 2004 Mixed media & collage on flat canvas 7 x 9 inches

Cover Detail: **Evening Trees with Winter Garlic Patch** 2005-06 Mixed media & collage on canvas 50 x 40 inches

MARJORIE MORROW

Paintings & Drawings

Essay by Fatima Bercht

LIVELY FIELD IN LIGHT AND SHADOW

HIGH NOON, NEW YORK

LIVELY FIELD IN LIGHT AND SHADOW

Marjorie Morrow: Recent Paintings and Drawings

It is the cusp of winter in New York City: gritty, noisy, teeming with life, and as always beautiful. It is with a sensation of anticipation that artist Marjorie Morrow and her husband Alan Freedman escape the city to go to upstate New York, where they have had a second home for the past 14 years. I join the couple to learn more about her most recent work. Alan, a musician, drives the van across the George Washington Bridge, and then northwest, leaving the majestic Hudson River behind.

Their home is nestled in the Catskills, a chain of soft, rounded mountains, cut at times by stone ridges, lakes and meandering streams. As we arrive, the sun is setting. A few pink rays barely filter through the gray, cloudy sky. It is so quiet. The home is a small, old farmhouse. It sits not far from the road, in a clearing close to a vast razed cornfield. Here and there rows of leafless trees and shrubs subdivide the land. Along the other side of the house, there is a dark green forest of firs, hemlocks and blueberry bushes. It is like a tall, imposing, opaque wall.

As soon as we arrive, the artist takes me downstairs to the studio built into the hillside at the rear of the farmhouse. It is large, well illuminated and warm. She calls my attention to what is for her the most relevant feature of that room: a large picture window. It opens up to a view: a field that slopes down gently, past a line of naked trees and down into a valley. The ground is covered with snow, packed into ice. Now is all gray. On the other side of the valley, the hills keep rolling and merge in the distance into a mass of gentle curves, dark gray mountains that barely outline their presence against leaden clouds.

It is a landscape lacking epic geological features; it does not qualify even remotely as “hibernal picturesque.” I can not avoid perceiving it as a barren, deprived landscape. Yet, when I shift my eyes into the studio, I am jolted by brilliant color and raw energy, the vitality that emanates from the paintings and drawings displayed on the walls.

By the next evening, after spending many hours with her work, I find myself looking out the window again. Now the landscape no longer appears barren. I see that the trees are dancing against the orange moonlight, swaying in the wind, and the ground is cobalt blue, purple and silver.





Evening Trees with Winter Garlic Patch

Several of the works here, including this one, are based on Morrow's study of the scene she sees out her window. Winter, or even late fall, bares upstate New York's landscape to its most visible elements. The naked forms of trees, bushes and shrubbery become linear entities. This is the artist's favorite season in which to work. Returning over and over to the same place has afforded her the opportunity to study the scenes through myriad transformations provoked by daily and seasonal changes that affect the intensity of light. The landscape further mutates under various atmospheric conditions like rain, mist, snow and clouds.

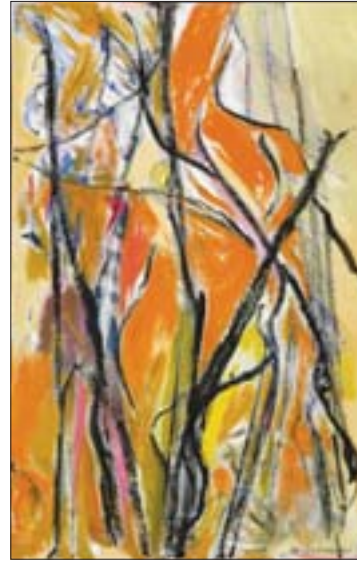
Evening Trees with Winter Garlic Patch, 2005-06, is a dynamic composition, the strong diagonal and vertical black lines creating a triangular structure which is superimposed on a round purple mass. There are areas of color: orange, ochre, pink, and mauve, as well as the white of the canvas, which shows through in places. These zones of color are interspersed with drawn organic forms that call to mind trees and branches. These pictorial and graphic resources appear in several paintings in the series, including *Orange Brambles*, *Deep Shadows*, and *Backlit Morning Trees*, all created in 2004-06.



Deep Shadows 2004-05 Mixed media & collage on canvas 36 x 30 inches

Morrow's paintings are the result of an intense process, which often starts with the making of small drawings. She reiterates the same subjects over and over—fields, limbs, clouds, mountains—until she achieves complete intimacy with them. This acquisition of knowledge allows the artist's perception to mature, and enables her to apprehend the essential nature of the things she observes. Therefore the paintings, though retaining recognizable references, are in essence abstractions, no longer renditions of a specific landscape or subject. They are about movement, rhythm, energy, tension.

"What this may say about me and my work," she reveals, "is that I do not get there easily. I expect to have some back and forth and struggle along the way. In that sense the process is important. I will get there to the resolution but not without expending energy and searching to do so. I accept that and I think that's who I am."



Orange Brambles

2005-06
Oil on canvas
28 x 18 inches



Backlit Morning Trees 2004-05 Mixed media on canvas 42 x 56 inches

The Color of Music

Generally speaking, colour is a power which directly influences the soul. Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.

Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*

Music is deeply ingrained in Morrow's life and creative process. It was the form of artistic expression encouraged in the two-stoplight Ohio town where she grew up. She learned to play the piano as a child and continues to enjoy it as a "bridge" to her art-making, a transition from daily life to a creative mode. "Music changes my mood in an instant. It gives me sustenance," she says.

The artist recognizes the strong connections between the languages of music and of her painting. She often speaks of using musical concepts in her art-making. "I would say I'm conducting or composing when I'm painting. I like the minor chords best," she says. "I'm especially attracted to introspective delvings."

In her pictorial compositions, Morrow strives to reconcile dissonant elements. This is particularly visible in her use of color. "I often use opposites on the color wheel; purple/yellow, orange/blue, red/green. The secondary colors of the wheel (purple/orange/green) may be my favorites, but it's the combination and choice you make that works or not. I'm drawn to close-value/close-intensity combinations, too."

In addition to color, she also uses forceful linear and graphic elements as part of her compositions. Often, these resources are employed as thematic or melodic modalities within the works. This is particularly visible in the series of works derived from her study of the limbs of trees and shrubs in winter.



Live Bush 2004 Mixed media on flat canvas 20 x 24 inches



'06 Limbs
2006
Charcoal on paper
7 1/2 x 10 inches

Winter Limbs

In a series of paintings Morrow has created since 2004, linear, black graphic entities play a prominent role. These configurations, mostly rendered in charcoal and oil stick, are derived from her study of backlit, winter-bare trees, shrubs, and grasses. In these paintings, lines are the elements that animate the foreground. Color tends to be diluted and in the background.

This series includes, for example, *Winter Sky*, *Winter Limbs*, as well as *Live Bush* and *Lake Trees*. Within each composition, some of the lines may suggest boughs or tendrils that sway gracefully in space, weaving in curvilinear movements. Others become graphic patterns of jagged, twisted lines, full of dramatic torsion and energy. There is a sense of chaos, directionlessness, aggressive motion. We are always reminded that the controlling force is the artist's hand. These drawings are about the artist's attempt to grasp nature's mutability. She has created a unique personal calligraphy.



Lake Trees
2004
Mixed media & collage on flat canvas
18 x 24 inches



Winter Sky, Winter Limbs
2004
Mixed media on flat canvas
20 x 24 inches



Kissing Clouds 2004 Mixed media on flat canvas 18 x 24 inches



'04 Limbs 2004 Mixed media on flat canvas 20 x 24 inches



In the Cornfield 2004-05 Mixed media & collage on canvas 34 x 52 inches

In the Cornfield

For the past several decades, Morrow has addressed both the urban and the natural landscape. She moved to New York in 1969, and the city has provided her with rich subjects for her paintings. These works are abstract as well, although containing references to fire escapes, overlapping and contrasting planes of buildings, and the play of light and shade. *Shadows of the Armory Flagpoles*, 1983, and *Changing 'Scape*, 1987, exemplify these themes. Throughout the years, the artist has also celebrated the scenery of rural Ohio to which she continues to return, usually by car, sketching the road along the way. New England has offered her other perspectives, including views of large bodies of water. Since establishing the Catskills home, she has dedicated herself almost exclusively to the study of the surrounding landscape.

The selection presented here includes her most recent works, several of which derive from her study of open fields of corn and hay. We immediately understand them as landscapes, thanks to the horizontal division of the canvas between earth and sky.

This element can be observed in paintings like *Night Field* and *Lively Field*, *Skittering Clouds*, both painted in 2005-06. In addition, these large works convey a sense of fast movement, of time collapsed, as one's gaze speeds through illusory space toward the horizon line. Time is conveyed by the progression of the marks that run diagonally to the focal point.



Shadows of the Armory Flagpoles

1983
Acrylic & charcoal on canvas
36 x 84 inches



Changing 'Scape

1987
Acrylic & charcoal on canvas
78 x 50 inches





The feelings evoked by the two paintings are very different. *Night Field* is a nocturnal interpretation of a cornfield after the harvest, filled with dark-hued colors: purple, violet, ultramarine blue, black, with highlights in orange and carmine. *Lively Field*, as its title suggests, is more lyrical, full of movement and the sense of growth and vegetation. It emanates light because of the use of yellow and ochres, giving the sense of the intensity of the sun at its zenith. In both paintings, a small piece of burlap reiterates the flatness of the canvas, reminding the viewer that these works are paintings.

In all her works, linear graphic elements play a key role. At times, they may be seen as references to actual forms taken from life. However, many are totally abstract, like the particular shape of a bent vertical line that appears in several paintings. For Morrow all these strong black, incised lines are highly personal marks. For her, they are a means to assert her will, to exist, to claim her own space. In fact, as early as 1974, these tracks or markings can be found in her paintings and etchings.

Previous Page:

Night Field

2005-06
Mixed media on canvas
50 x 40 inches

Lively Field, Skittering Clouds

2005-06
Mixed media on canvas
50 x 40 inches

Gnarly Apple Tree

2005
Pastel, charcoal, paint on paper
30 x 22 inches

Ripe Ear

2005
Pastel, charcoal, paint on paper
30 x 22 inches

Main Tree

2005
Pastel, charcoal, paint on paper
30 x 22 inches

Silks, Stalk

2005
Pastel, charcoal, paint on paper
30 x 22 inches

Ear '05

2005
Pastel, charcoal, paint on paper
30 x 22 inches





February Hillside

2006
Acrylic on canvas
12 x 10 inches

Rich Month

2006
Acrylic & charcoal on canvas
12 x 10 inches



Winter Trees

2006
Acrylic & collage on canvas
12 x 10 inches

Branches Close

2006
Acrylic & charcoal on canvas
12 x 10 inches



Color Field 2005 Mixed media & collage on canvas 10 x 15 inches



Essex River Edge 2003 Oil & collage on canvas 20 x 26 inches

River Flow

The present selection also highlights a recent series of paintings that depict the Ipswich River in Massachusetts. When she arrived at the river, it was shrouded in mist and fog. Occasionally boulders and floating tree limbs would resolve themselves out of the fog. Working in a way that was new for her, Morrow used charcoal and paint to sketch what she saw onto canvas strips. She sought to capture the effect of water coursing beneath clouds of mist and at the same time to grasp the pattern of its movement. In the studio, she glued the fabric segments onto larger canvases, and then worked the outer areas with oils, incorporating the sketches into the larger image. Her color palette in these paintings is almost monochromatic, making extensive use of white tinged with light greys and blues, at times contrasted with thick black paint. Perhaps these works are the most eloquent witnesses to Morrow's gift of capturing the evanescence of life.

FATIMA BERCHT

*Independent Curator and Writer,
New York City*



River Flow

2003-04
Oil & collage on canvas
18 x 28 inches



Fog in Ipswich

2003-05
Oil & collage on canvas
24 x 30 inches





MARJORIE MORROW was born in Newark, Ohio and graduated from Miami University, Oxford, OH, where she majored in painting and printmaking. She attended the Blossom-Kent Art Program at Kent State University under the guidance of Richard Anuszkiewicz. The artist is the recipient of the Ohio Arts Council Award and a Purchase Award from The Museum of the Dayton Art Institute.

Her work has been presented in solo shows at Ceres Gallery, NYC, and included in exhibitions at the Bronx Museum, NY; the Cincinnati Art Museum; Kent State University, OH; Provincetown Art Museum, MA; P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center; Soho 20 Gallery, Ten Downtown, all in New York; and the London Institute of Contemporary Art among other venues. Morrow's most recent one-person presentation was held in 2005, at the TAI Gallery, in NYC.

She divides her time between New York City and the Catskills of Sullivan County in upstate New York.

Detail Left:

Radiating Field 2006

Acrylic on canvas

52 x 136 inches

Back Cover:

Late December Limbs 2004

Mixed media on flat canvas

15 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches

Art Photography:

Ed Watkins

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