

Lois Dodd: Second Street Paintings: 2010  
Essay by John Goodrich

Under Lois Dodd's glance, ordinary things—a branch, a roof, a chimney—become extraordinary. In this selection of paintings of views from her lower Manhattan home, the artist uncovers the inner character of every element in its tell-tale geometry and hue. How do the broad planes of a sprawling brick building regard the day? As crisp, terracotta-colored facets, starkly absorbent under the midday sun, in one painting; in another, as rich, close-toned hues, thick with moisture after a snowfall; elsewhere, as a shadowy, distanced plane, on a day so foggy that only a foreground tree strikes a dark note. And accompanying each incarnation of this building—it happens to be a lowly men's shelter—is a new, curious assortment of details, each somehow necessary to its context; a lonely water tank holds against the sky, a pair of ventilators squat at a roof's edge.

The sense of heightened truthfulness in these paintings lies in a vigorous give-and-take with nature. While forms proceed from the artist's close observation, they clearly also guide her perceptions. A roof recedes ever more adamantly because of the strange, irregular, green shadows pacing its length. An arcing branch pauses in its passage before a ledge, then suddenly speeds again as it crosses into sky. The two most recent paintings are portraits of trees, conversing with their own shadows as they rise and branch before a sun-warmed wall. Without checking their labels, one would never know they were produced nearly four decades after the first paintings here. Their investigations are as lucid and fresh as ever: testimony to a keen eye, and the quiet authority with which the artist recounts the world from her windows.