

James G. Davis

Like so many artists before him, James G. Davis was keenly aware of the culture in which he lived. His love for opera, poetry and literature was surpassed only by his love of great art and the tradition behind it. Like the great artists of this century and those past, Davis used all of his cultural awareness combined with a highly personal view of the world to form unique visual statements. With artists eyes he saw the world from his internal perspective and created images that seem to pull at the attention of a viewer, like a homeless beggar catches the corner of our vision on a busy street; a constant reminder of reality as it really exists. It does not stop there either. Davis took us to the brink of fear and the dark passions of the unconscious and then to the other side of reality as seen through the looking glass of our minds eye. However, even amid the loneliness and separations of his figures, there is a glimmer of hope and beauty which he found and conveys so as to push us forward to the next step, the next day, the next level of awareness. It is this latter quality in his work that gives it a universal appeal; that amid the catharsis' and the enigmas of life, there is hope through perseverance. Davis used the artistic tradition to transcend the ordinary and broke from it to create informed autobiographies that may help us to understand the essence and complexities of the soul of man.

James came to Rancho Linda Vista in 1970 with his wife, Mary Ann. It was a wonderful place to work and raise his family. He taught at the University of Arizona for 20 years mentoring and inspiring many students, several of whom still visit the ranch.

James G. Davis passed away in September 2016. He leaves behind a legacy of picture making that continues to amaze and challenge new generations of viewers.

The Anteater
oil on masonite

White Boots
etching

White Boots: Ghost of the San Manuel Mine

Poem by William Pitt Root

As you know, Jim, I did work underground
in the same mine you've imagined
 in your studio: half a mile down, taking
wages enough to make it to California
and fool's gold enough to remind me
 I don't know much after all.

New guys like myself – still thrilled
by the dangers of fire or falling
 through the dark into a hole followed
by twenty tons of dusty rumbling ore-,
we all tried to stay alert
 each minute of the eight-hour shift.

And for a week or two, alert we were,
then habit made us careless as the rest
 so we'd pocket our safety glasses,
let dust masks dangle from our necks
and sometimes catch each other
 stepping out across open shafts

without first snapping our lanyards
to the rusty cables overhead.
 The buddy system wasn't much observed,
so like the rest come break time
I'd kick back alone against the stone wall
 and light up, flicking my headlamp off

so the dark expanded, flooding gently
through my eyes. In the distance,
 sometimes, a solitary hunched figure
projecting its small edge of light
would glide by my line's entrance
 tiny as a fly in a tear of amber
from where I watched, invisible
and isolate as a stone in outer space,
 or inner space. Just some guy.

Never saw old White Boots in those days
but often thought how all those men
 just lost in the Sunshine Mine
must have felt – poor bastards
who lived long enough to feel,
 long enough to lose everything
in their minds but hope
before their air was gone, long after
 their light. You'd have to kill your light

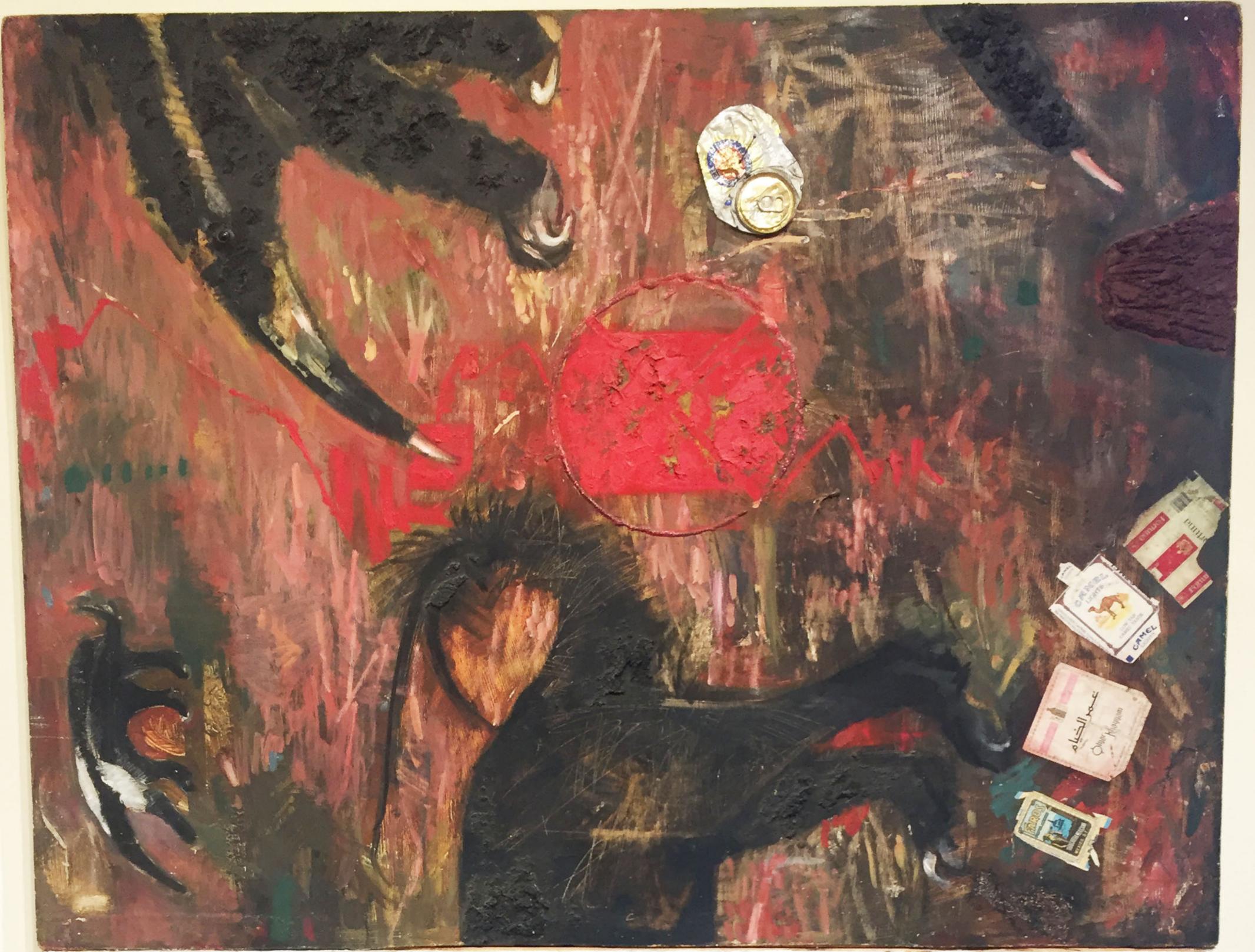
to keep from igniting whatever gasses
might be seeping from walls
 so dark is where you'd be,
whether by yourself or in the company of others.
In such a dark I had no need of White Boots, my friend
 but looking at his image, startling, almost comic,

you've drawn from the dark of blinding inks
and your own heart familiar with disaster
 I'm reminded now of how it is
the living keep hold of the things
that blind them to those gone –
 how gypsies, when a loved one's dying,

will help the one failing stay just a little longer
by turning a wooden chair upside down
 to hold between them. On one leg
a live hand, the dying on another,
until, ready, it falls free. But
 the thing is the clasp itself

across that final distance,
how it allows those last things
 that need saying to be said.
That's how it's always seemed
to me, with art I mean. Whether
 it's paint on canvas or ink on a page,

it's the chance for what knows it must die in us
to join what knows it will live forever.
 And knowledge from such a common depth
only survives in the light as shadow,
as White Boots, *imago*, as a way, meanwhile,
 to stay in touch while the sun burns on.





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White Beards The Sea West of Cape 1936