

Postscript: Mona Hadler 2025

I had the pleasure of working with Lois Dodd for many years at Brooklyn College, going to galleries with her, participating in graduate crits together, having lunch in her Second street home studio. I interviewed her extensively in 1996 for the catalogue essay at the Farnsworth Museum which, at the suggestion of her gallerist, we have decided to reprint here. As I look at this text, written 30 years ago and in the wake of an excellent monograph by Faye Hirsch in 2017 and a major exhibition curated in 2025 by Louise Bjeldbak Henriksen at the Kunstmuseum Den Haag with its attendant catalogue, more thoughts come to mind. I still love Dodd's quiet and nuanced vision but now I ponder her late age style, her relationship to landscape and the built environment, and the intermingling of gravity and joy in her sensibility.

Recent work

Lois Dodd is now 98 years old and works in her home studios in New Jersey and Maine. Ever-present window views remain an enduring fascination as in *Converging Roofs with Attic Windows + Trees*, 2025, where the pitched roofs frame an array of interlacing branches that activate an expanse of blue sky with their boundless energy. Gone are the tunnels and dense foliage of the forest. Her physical state impacts her work, she does not go into the woods at this point, and cannot paint larger vistas. Objects brought to her are carefully observed and simplified. Convenience plays a role but often yields serendipitous results.

Decades ago, while painting her friend's garden in Maine, Dodd shed preconceived fears of being marginalized as a "woman flower painter." She came to enjoy the blooms' startling beauty as indeed her 17th century foremothers did when they looked closely, or as Georgia O'Keeffe did in more recent years. In the past twenty years Dodd has increasingly brought flowers up front, rendering them with an economy of means that produces a sparser

composition with its own distinct aesthetic. In *Amaryllis* 17, 2006, for example, the unapologetically beautiful wilting of a flower parries the lyrical grace of an adjacent green leaf that rises energetically upwards with remarkable simplicity and beauty. Although Dodd does not radically embark on a new production, she zeros in on the motif. Hirsch attributes an “otherworldly” feeling to such late immersive imagery.¹ In this regard, Dodd’s work needs to be contextualized to the growing literature on artists and age. As Robert Storr wrote about late de Kooning, “Age and sickness debilitate, but they are also catalysts....Thus, while the forfeiture of strengths is implicit in the human condition, so too is their constant metamorphosis.”²

Landscape versus the built environment

Dodd’s paintings exhibit many different attitudes to the land. She can record the nuances of the sunset or the flight of a firefly at night, look directly at a burning building or capture the beauty and geometry of the built environment. She owns homes with studios in three places: New York City, Blairstown, New Jersey, and Cushing, Maine. But as Hirsch gleans from conversations with the artists, Dodd has “essentially an urban mentality that structures her view of the pastoral.”³ Or Lucy Lippard’s words ring true: “Dodd is not a landscape painter, a term reserved for those who look in the distance. Her work is intimate, close-up, revealing the complexity of simplicity.”⁴ At times the ambiguities and oddities of vision intrigue her, as with a chair or sink in the woods or a painted landscape on the walls of a room.

While there are 20th century modernists who also turn a formal eye to nature (many of them are in Dodd’s extended family of artists), a comparison to 19th century French landscape is revealing. Historian John House, in his trenchant analysis of Impressionism, argues in a language reminiscent of Dodd’s work, that “the landscape ‘gaze’ itself claims not to be invasive, since it depends on a process of distancing and framing.”⁵ House further problematizes the

position of the Impressionist artists to the land they paint maintaining that they held a distinct place between tourists and those who worked the land. The painters are both outsiders and insiders engaged in a solitary conversation with nature.⁶ Dodd, in concert with most Impressionists featured neither worker, nor tourists, nor the picturesque. Her laundry is not evidence of household chores, but is hung as bright colors in the landscape. In Maine she avoids the coast which is an attraction that draws summer visitors. The locals and the work she depicts consist of her artist friends and their painting. Neither a tourist nor a traveler, she draws inspiration from the land that she owns, choosing not to show the life of the country or the city. When asked, Dodd corroborated this observation reaffirming her commitment to the formal.⁷ Indeed the idea of placing something from the indoors into the landscape, a ladder or chair, for example, moves landscape further into another level of formal intervention.

Dodd both “frames” the landscape and revels in its beauty. She jettisons the socio-economic history of the region in favor of a deep heartfelt “insider” experience of direct engagement with the motif and that experience is transferred to the viewer as calmness, radiance, and often inner peace. Her intense absorption is paralleled by the viewer’s similarly profound affective response rendering them in turn insiders and outsiders.

The gravity and joy of her sensibility

Many authors comment on the simplicity or deceptive simplicity of her vision. Unlike the Abstract Expressionists who served as foil to her early painting practice, she did not seek tragedy, ecstasy, and doom. She balanced instead the ephemeral against the timeless⁸ and rendered a sense of joy and contentment that prompt comparisons with Matisse.

I personally find riveting her observed but ordered geometry, indebted as she frequently claims to Mondrian, and I love it as a counterpoint to splashes of exuberant color. I find the

directness of her vision and the underlying structure meditative. It asks us to slow down and to open our eyes to the radiance of the world around us. In this regard I can only echo Anna Chave's praise for Agnes Martin whose work she claims offers an experience that is "at once somehow calming and stimulating: a profound sense of openness."⁹ So too with Lois Dodd's beautiful production.

¹ Faye Hirsch *Lois Dodd* (London: Lund Humphries, 2017), 124.

² Robert Storr, "At Last Light," in *Willem De Kooning: The Late Paintings, The 1980s* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Art and Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1995), 51. Dodd does not suffer from the memory problems that plagued de Kooning in his old age.

³ Hirsch, *Lois Dodd*, 23.

⁴ Lucy Lippard, "Closing in on Nature," in *Lois Dodd: Framing the Ephemeral* (Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Hannibal Books, 2025), 18-19.

⁵ John House, "Framing the Landscape," republished in Mary Tomkins Lewis ed, *Critical Readings in Impressionism and Post Impressionism, An Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 80.

⁶ House, "Framing the Landscape," 83-4.

⁷ Lois Dodd, interview with Mona Hadler and Seung Hee Kim, Blairstown New Jersey, November 13, 2025.

⁸ Hirsch, *Lois Dodd*, 84

⁹ Anna C. Chave, "Agnes Martin: Humility the Beautiful Daughter.... All Her Ways are Empty," in *Agnes Martin* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992), 151. Lois Dodd met Agnes Martin but never formed a bond or was involved with her art, interview with Mona Hadler and Seung Hee Kim, Nov 13, 2025.