

M+B

JAMES MORSE  
*Prairie Cloth & Northern Pine*

January 24 - February 21, 2026

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MORSE  
2025



## JAMES MORSE

### Prairie Cloth & Northern Pine

**M+B** is pleased to present *Prairie Cloth & Northern Pine*, an exhibition of new works by James Morse. The exhibition will be on view from January 24 through February 21, 2026, with an opening reception on Saturday, January 24, from 6 to 8 pm.

In James Morse's recent paintings, the act of looking backward becomes a methodology for moving forward. Working from his studio in Northport, MI, the forty-three-year-old artist mines the accumulated sediment of a life lived between multiple practices—carpentry, furniture making, wilderness exploration—to produce work that collapses temporal and spatial hierarchies with surprising fluency. The seven large canvases and five smaller works on view pulse with what Morse calls "the thick matter of reality," a phrase that aptly describes both his heavily worked surfaces and his philosophical preoccupations.

*Prairie Boy* and *Prairie Math* locate childhood memory within geometric abstraction, the flat grasslands of western Illinois reconstructed through patterns learned from wooden blocks and Euclidean exercises. Morse paints his son reclining in tallgrass, but the image functions equally as self-portrait, the artist attempting to preserve something already obliterated by suburban sprawl. The prairie becomes both subject and method, woven, layered, and accumulated from smaller units into a larger whole. This interest in construction, in how things are assembled from constituent parts, extends across the exhibition, from the literal weaving practice of Morse's wife (whose looms share his studio) to the fundamental questions of ontology that animate his practice.

The spatial compressions of *The Harbor* demonstrate Morse's willingness to abandon photographic conventions in favor of what painting uniquely permits. Trained in large-format photography before dropping out of Columbia's MFA program, Morse treats perspective as "Silly Putty," stacking multiple viewing angles to "cram as much space as possible into a single picture plane." The result recalls the flattened depths of Bruegel's *Hunters in the Snow*, Ensor's *Christ's Entry into Brussels*, or Wayne Thiebaud's cityscapes combined with the paper-flatness and muted palette of Nordic modernists like Jockum Nordström. The rough brushwork of other northern-latitude wilderness painters ranging from Tom Thomson to David Milne maintains allegiance to the material density of Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff, two "heroes" cited by Morse.

*Northern Poetics*, the exhibition's largest work at 72 x 90 inches, features an interior filled with furniture Morse has designed and built, a cabin that exists simultaneously as memory, aspiration, and makeshift sanctuary. A moon appears in the window, placed there after days of deliberation and ultimately justified through children's literature: Harold drawing his way home with a purple crayon. This kind of reasoning, circular, associative, and unabashedly personal, permeates Morse's practice. He cites influences ranging from Miles Davis to the Wiener Werkstätte, from May Watts's prairie ecology to Egon Schiele's cityscapes, refusing the art world's demand for linear genealogies.

What emerges is less a coherent program than an accumulation of sustained attention. Morse works without irony, a risky position in contemporary painting, embracing beauty and wonder as legitimate artistic concerns. The moon recurs throughout these paintings, he recently realized, because his childhood favorites were *Goodnight Moon* and *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, books where the moon provides comfort in "the shelter of the safe and secure bedroom." That such autobiographical material enters the work unmediated, without critical distance or theoretical armature, distinguishes Morse from many of his peers. He paints, he writes, "out of necessity, a need and a desire to know myself."

The Greek maxim "Know thyself" anchors a practice that sprawls across subjects: villagescape, still life, geometric abstraction, and figurative work. Morse has visited Delphi twice, tutored his children in classical Greek philosophy while walking Athens' ancient agora, and designed and built his own house primarily influenced by the architectural legacy of the Shakers and American Greek Revival. This polymathic energy risks dilettantism but instead produces paintings of genuine authority, works that feel inevitable rather than illustrative. The influence of Bonnard and Vuillard manifests not as quotation but as temperament, a belief in painting's capacity to hold together the fragments of daily existence.

If there is an organizing principle, it is temporal. These are paintings that "can only be made during middle life." Morse hopes to continue working into his nineties, like Lois Dodd or Frank Auerbach, accumulating enough distance to finally see himself objectively, "to look back upon mother Earth while standing on the landscape of the Moon." Until then, the work continues, one painting at a time, each morning pursuing whatever interests him most. Bob Dylan called this "the truest form of freedom." Morse, characteristically, takes him at his word.



## JAMES MORSE

James Morse (b. 1982, Hinsdale, IL) lives and works in Northport, Michigan. Walking, sailing, ice skating, canoeing, and swimming within the coastal landscape of the rural peninsula where he lives is fundamental to his painting practice. It is a process that emphasizes being in, and interacting directly with, the rural landscape and small villages that surround the artist's studio. Morse's practice focuses on oil painting. Recent solo and group shows include exhibitions at Cob Gallery (London, UK); James Cohan Gallery (New York, NY); Alzueta Gallery (Barcelona, Spain); Philip Martin Gallery (Los Angeles, CA); Galleri Magnus Karlsson (Stockholm, Sweden); Galerie Elsa Meunier (Paris, France); Poker Flats (Williamstown, MA); Art at King's Oaks (Newtown, PA); Scroll Gallery (New York, NY); Hesse Flatow (New York, NY); and Wright Gallery (Northport, MI). Morse's work has been featured in Art Maze Magazine, Floorr Magazine, Artsy Editorial, New American Paintings Magazine, David Zwirner Platform, Venti Journal, and Booooooom.



James Morse | *The Harbor*, 2025  
oil on cotton | 61 x 72 1/2 inches (154.9 x 184.2 cm)





James Morse | *Ochre Marsh, 2025*  
oil on linen | 48 x 60 inches (121.9 x 152.4 cm)



James Morse | *Northern Poetics*, 2025  
oil on cotton | 72 x 90 inches (182.9 x 228.6 cm)





James Morse | *Panes of Winter*, 2026  
oil on linen | 11 x 13 inches (27.9 x 33 cm)

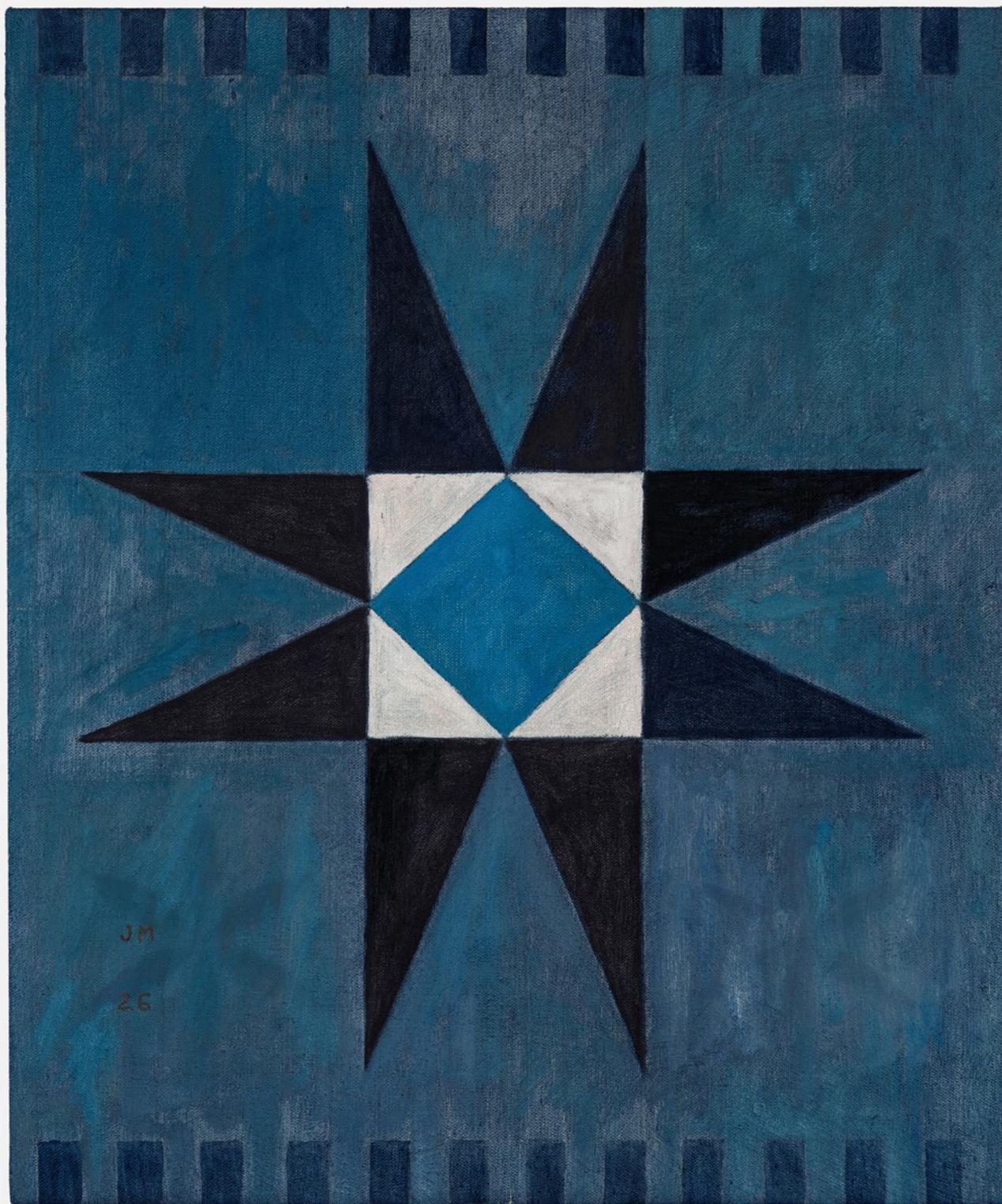


James Morse | *Hemlock Hill*, 2025  
oil on linen | 72 x 90 inches (182.9 x 228.6 cm)



James Morse | *Prairie Stars*, 2026  
oil on oak panel | 7 x 5 inches (17.8 x 12.7 cm)





James Morse | *A Flower for Mamma*, 2026  
oil on cotton | 24 x 20 inches (61 x 50.8 cm)



James Morse | *Miles & May Constellation*, 2026  
oil on wood | 17 x 21 inches (43.2 x 53.3 cm)



James Morse | *Prairie Boy*, 2025  
oil on linen | 60 x 71 1/2 inches (152.4 x 181.6 cm)





James Morse | *Prairie Math*, 2025  
oil on cotton | 48 x 64 inches (121.9 x 162.6 cm)



James Morse | *Maple Mirror*, 2025  
oil on cotton | 60 x 48 inches (152.4 x 121.9 cm)





James Morse | *Flowers for Egon*, 2026  
oil on cotton | 24 x 20 inches (61 x 50.8 cm)