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Illuminations

David J. Mann

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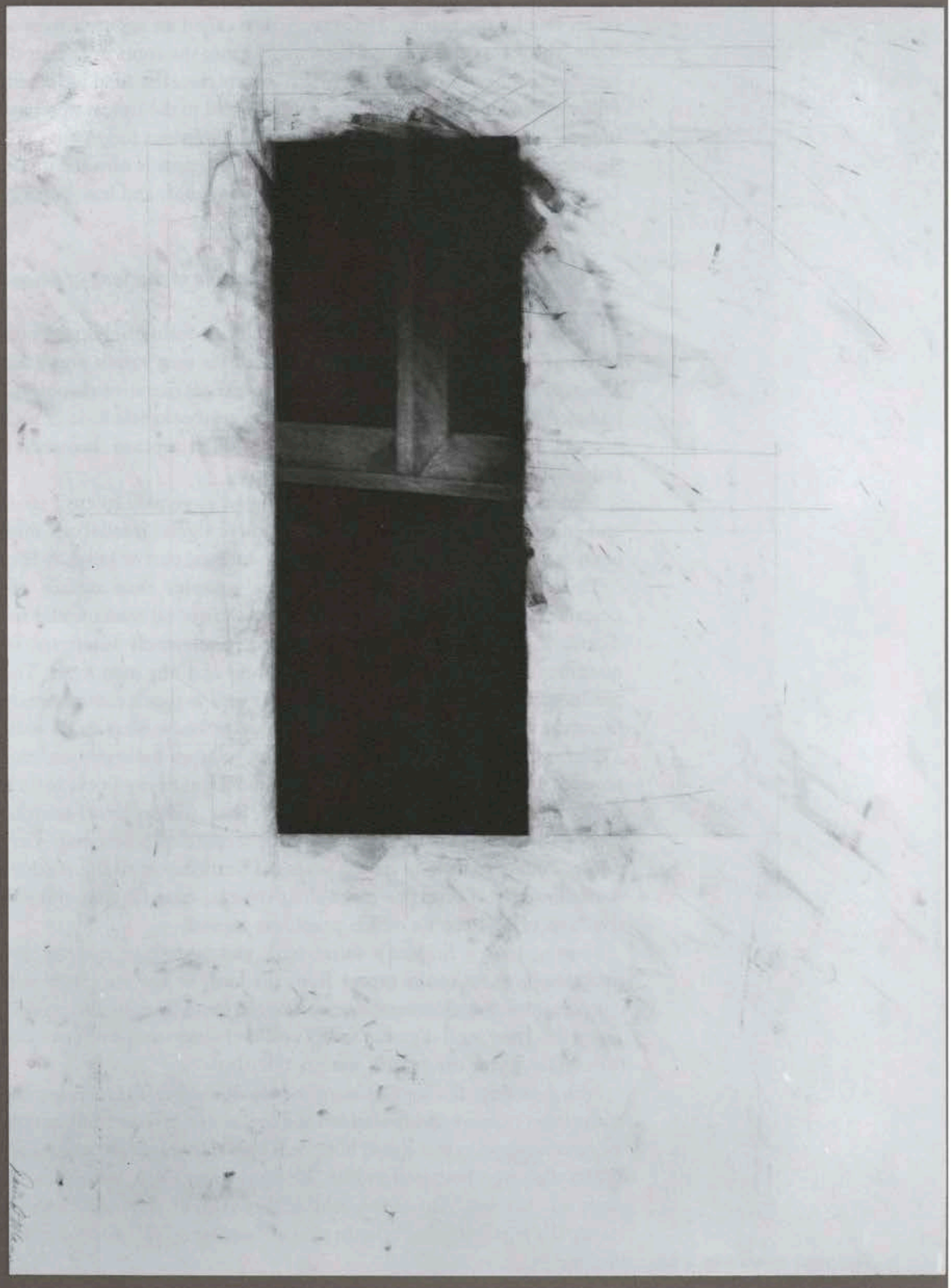
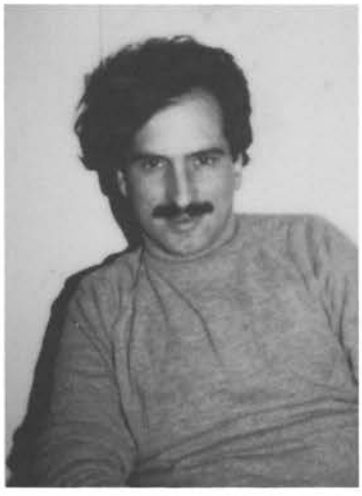


Illuminations

David J. Mann



David Mann was born in Buffalo, N.Y., in 1950. He earned his B.F.A. at Kent State University and his M.F.A. at the State University of New York at Buffalo. His work has been exhibited locally and nationally. Currently he is an Assistant Professor in the College of Visual and Performing Arts of Syracuse University, where he teaches drawing and painting.

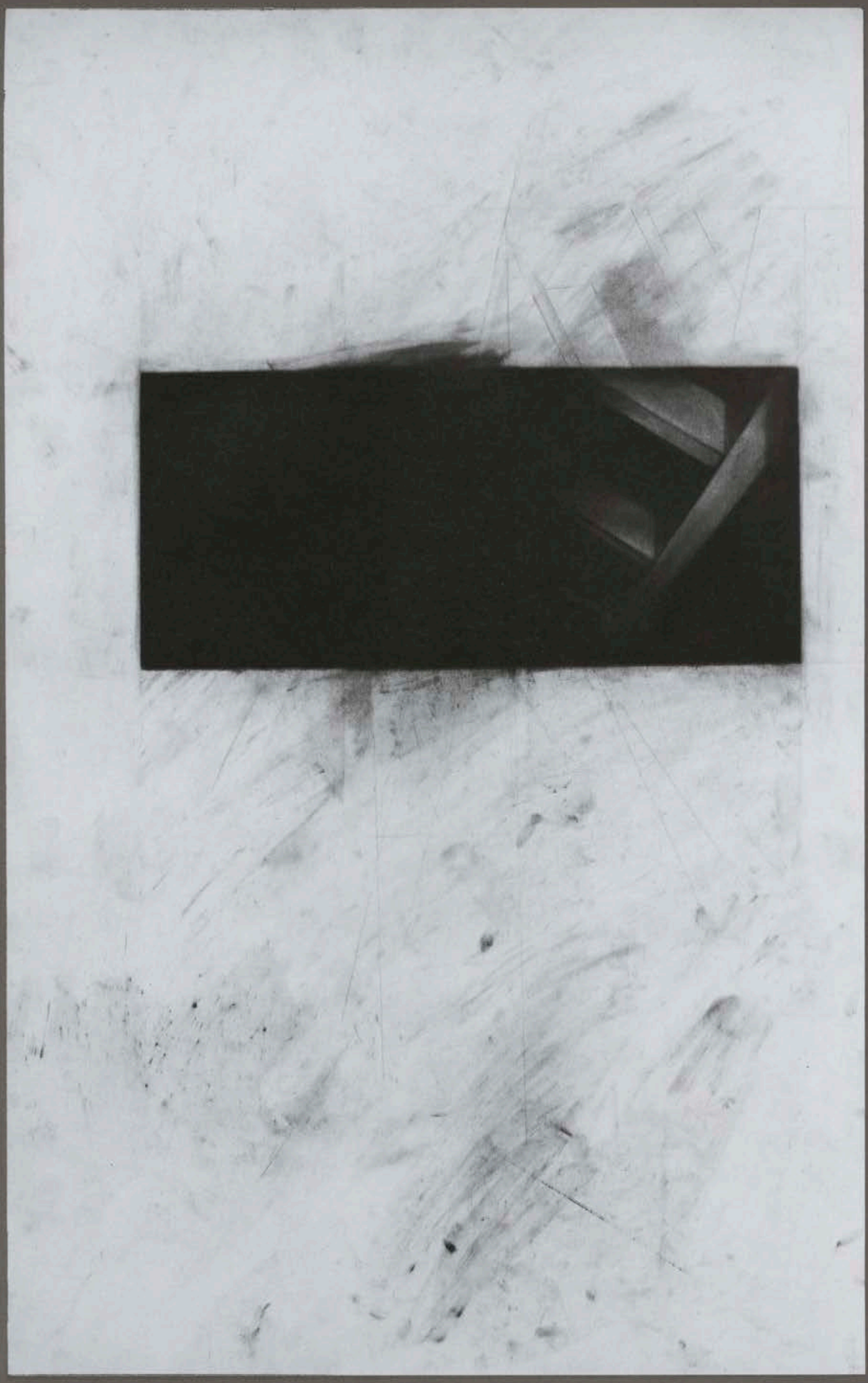
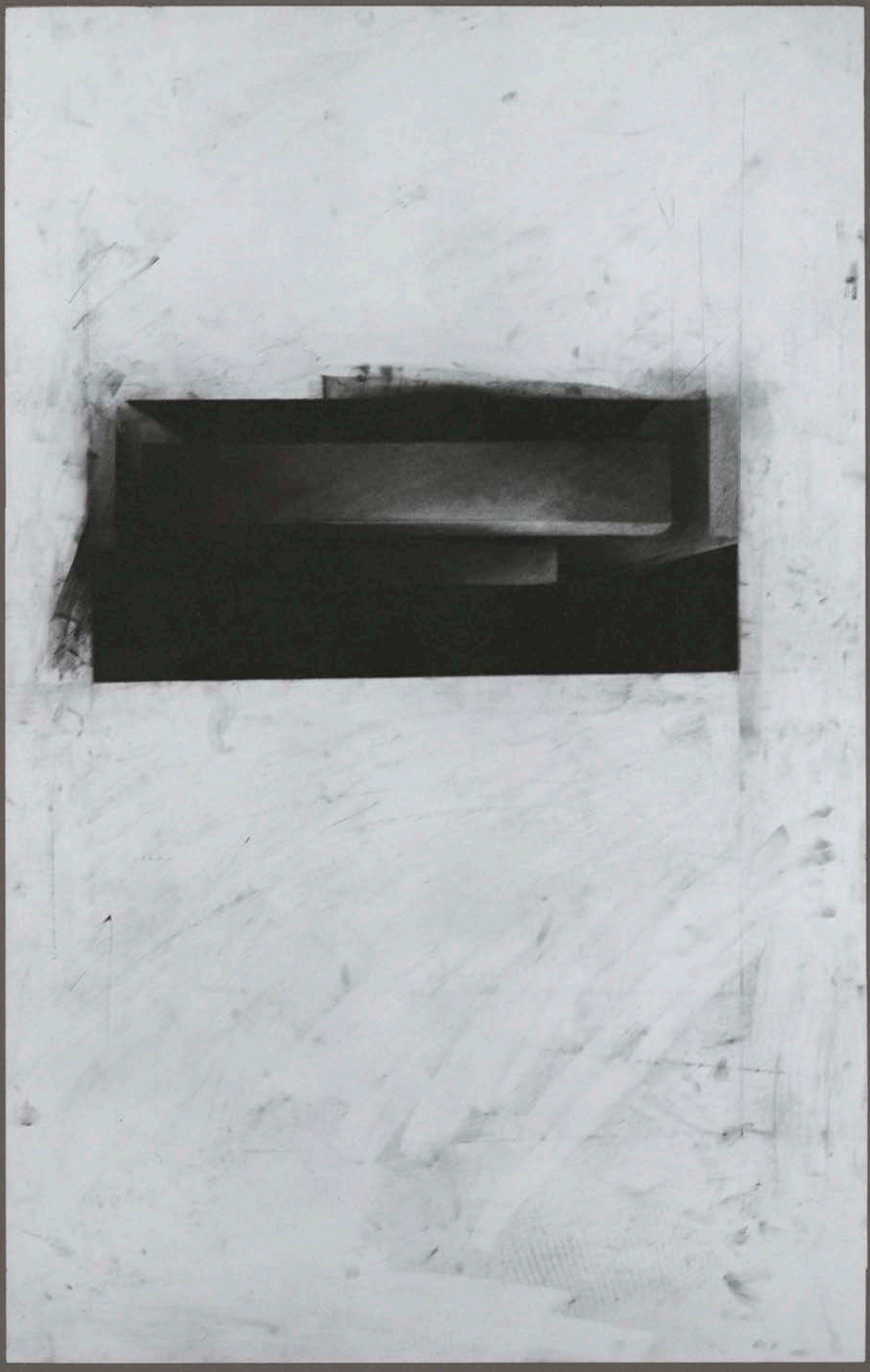
I began drawing out of a dissatisfaction with my painting and a growing desire to use some kind of recognizable imagery in my work. At that time, the issue of recognition involved the possibility of an image that referred directly to recognizable objects. I was brought up and educated in an abstract tradition with a seemingly strict taboo against representational subject matter. I knew that I wanted to use representation, but not in the traditional way. In other words, I wasn't interested in drawing objects that I saw for their inherent objective value.

I really love to draw and it seems that I'm just as interested in the process of drawing as in the final product. Each drawing is a kind of discovery or realization for me. I like the drawings to include the course that led to the discovery. That's why a lot of the smudges, marks, lines, and erasures are often left in the drawing. For me, it seems they are as much a part of the picture as the representation I use. They are the residue (results) of the process of making an image and are as important as, and integral to, the image itself. In these drawings the process is also a visual element in the product, and ultimately I think that the process and the product are one and the same.

I put on layer upon layer of carbon. Often the images get destroyed in the process and later are reasserted. For me, each object is a glowing illumination within a deep, rich darkness. They are reciprocal in effect: The light and dark exist because of each other, and each makes the other felt. I work the drawing until I get a kind of resonance in the image. I try to push it beyond my rational understanding, until it reaches a certain emotional depth, where it seems still, quiet, and self-sufficient.

I think it's amazing how a visually simple phenomenon can evoke a variety of possibilities, not just on one, but on many levels of seeing, thinking, and feeling. The most basic possibility that attracts

me is the emotional experience. My work is concerned ultimately with evoking emotion, rather than describing or illustrating it. The power to stimulate, to generate experience, is a vital potential of drawing. I'm interested in the way something can generate feeling without using a stereotyped signifier of expression.

Specifically, I'm trying to use inexpressive objects, for example, a ladder or a chair, and make them expressive through their incorporation in the drawing. But the drawings are only vehicles. They are not about the subjects they depict. They really are about the contemplative experiences they evoke in me, ranging from isolation to communication, tension to ease, warmth to coldness, apprehension to relief, and above all, a sense of mystery.

It is important for me to use recognizable subject matter in my drawings because ultimately it is impossible for us to avoid recognition. The question is, How can recognition be used? I want us to look at something and on the most obvious level be able to know what the subject is. But then, I hope, the more subtle and important information in the work will reveal itself.