

# JOSEPH NORMAN



The densely layered image of *Slum Gardens No. 3* signals claustrophobia. A large tree with a thick, spiked vine winding its way up the trunk defines the right side of the work. Weeds and flowers blanket the bottom half of the image, almost obscuring the wooden shack (left) and the staircase. Plants invade a picket fence and piece of railing in the lower foreground. We sense that the vegetation will soon overtake the entire area, turning the "garden" into a neighborhood menace. The muscularity of the work, emboldened by thick, heavy lines of black charcoal, contributes to the intimidating quality of the plant life.

Joseph Norman frequently uses landscape imagery to convey meaning. For this work he drew on his experiences growing up in the ghettos of Chicago and on a trip in 1990 to Costa Rica, where he witnessed the effects of poverty on various neighborhoods. *Slum Gardens No. 3* is not a view of a specific place; rather, it visualizes the concept of "slums" from regions around the world. Here the overgrowing landscape serves as a metaphor for the lack of attention paid to impoverished neighborhoods. Not only are the physical environments of such areas neglected, but, as Norman's drawing suggests, its social and economic problems are ignored as well.

Norman was born in Chicago in 1957. He received a BS in art education from the University of Arkansas, Little Rock, in 1980 and an MFA six years later from the University of Cincinnati. After teaching drawing for nine years at the Rhode Island School of Design, Providence, he took a professorship at the Lamar Dodd School of Art at the University of Georgia, Athens, in 2001. He currently serves as the school's chairman of drawing and painting.