

DAVID HOCKNEY

Tree off the Track, 2006
Oil on 4 canvases (36 x 48 in each)
72 x 96 in overall



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CHRISTIAN KIEFER

Tree of Souls

He thought at first that the season had somehow skipped forward from late fall to deep winter and that he was, or must have been, asleep in the den, in the broad wide infinitude of his dreams, the forest of shadows in which he stood under a bright cold blaze of fall colors not the waking forest and so the scent of the boy not upon the waking air so that the whole of it—the woods, the scent of the boy, his own physical self—was therefore part of the sleeping months of his hibernation, the scent surprising only because he had never before felt it in the Big Woods but the scent itself familiar enough, easy enough to identify after ten years, that he had even given it a sort of identifier, almost a name. Indeed he had found himself in its presence so many times over so many winters that the scent had become part of him always, crossing from the hard sleeping freezes of his hibernation and on into the bright thick waking scent of spring and even into the heat of summer when he would move into the darkest reaches of the woods where hickories and maples and oaks grew in a thick tangle under which deer would lay down their bones in the damp verdant impenetrable shadows. There had been a time when his winter slumber might have pressed into those shadows, dreaming then of deer and the satisfaction of the hunt, but that time had long since passed for when he dreamed now it was only of the boy, a scent of sweetness and the faint pulse of young blood as if that of a fawn or a gosling or a kit fox. But he knew, too, that this was no fawn or gosling or kit but a boy, a human boy, a boy whose scent was familiar enough that he thought of him not as *a* boy but rather as *the* boy, as if there was or had only ever been one. That much was true. And then he knew that he was not dreaming at all, that the scent was part of the waking world for he could smell, too, the dogs and then the other men, surprised now only because he had not scented them earlier, knowing with sudden clarity that they were already at the building, the bunkhouse, in the center of the woods, that they had arrived and that, for the first time, the boy—the boy of his winter sleeping—was with them.

He could smell the man too now, the one whom the bear sometimes thought of as another bear or, if not a bear, then something just as essential, something of the woods, of the forest, part of a line that went back to the first people whose scent he had followed only in the dreamworld of