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I took part in my first environmental action in September 1992 at seven years old. It was a six-mile-walk to protest overdevelopment around the Oradell Reservoir in Oradell, New Jersey. A defining childhood memory, the walk was organized by a local action network to bring awareness to the threatened, ecologically rich wetlands along the Upper Hackensack River near my home. The event would shape my entire worldview and my artistic preoccupation with the richness and fragility of the natural world. The Hackensack River watershed became the birthplace of inspiration and imagined worldmaking I came to practice in my studio.

In August of 2011, Hurricane Irene hit the area, flooding the Hackensack River and its overdeveloped banks, leaving a path of destruction and detritus. I reflected on the ruptured hierarchy of order, creating a series of disaster paintings that became abstract in response to the subject matter. A *Disasters of the Mind* series of drawings based in imagination followed. The works were miniature graphite drawings featuring flattened space, complex mark-making, and multiple images within a single scene. From the fragments of rubble that tumbled through these drawings, seeds of rebirth sprouted a series of graphite and colored pencil drawings, *After the Disaster*. Here, forms derived from piles of wreckage evolved into clouds and mounds of earth that began growing flowers, grasses, and trees.

After a trip to Rome and Florence last summer, I was inspired to develop an expanded language of forms. Captivated by the sight of cypress trees and umbrella pines under the cerulean blue sky above Palatine Hill and the Villa Borghese Gardens in Rome, I began incorporating the distinctive tree species into compositions. A sense of structured order entered the work along with an illusionistic space and atmospheric perspective, as distant hills and brush became cloaked in muted turquoise. Mark-making I developed in earlier work now dances through the paintings decorating foliage and sky.

Returning to oil paint for the first time in ten years, blue skies have rolled in, signifying clarity and optimism. Rounded forms of repeated hills reflect a dream-like, harmonious existence. As in my disaster drawings, pockets of imagery populate the spaces creating texture and complexity. These 'scenes within scenes' hint at the connection between the cosmic and microcosmic worlds that reside within us and around us. My paintings depict euphoric spaces filled with joyful color and clear light. Clouds, trees, and spheres fill the surfaces. Trees appear as solid forms on terrestrial mounds, as transparencies, and inside globes and clouds. Are they flying away? Are we dreaming them?

My drawing and paintings, imagined dreamscapes that hint at narrative, urge the viewer to navigate a web of surface, mark and form to derive meaning. In a world of technological complexity, notions of shared truths are murky. Concrete concepts of reality are constantly challenged, as artificial intelligence and competing narratives flash before our eyes on our devices, changing by the minute. My work reflects this present-

day paradox of living, achieving resolution while remaining open ended. Through coexisting and sharing, like networks of tree roots, we must connect with our collective conscious to find answers amongst the chaos and complexity of our contemporary world(s).

The tree, a symbol of life, of environmental movements, and victim of storm and ecocide, is threatened today as never before. Without it, none of us, great or small, can survive.