

## ANN LOFQUIST

*Alamo Creek Lower Grove:  
North View III, 2012*  
Oil on Canvas, 7 1/2 x 16 in.



courtesy: Winfield gallery

## TRANE DEVORE

# In the Depths of Groves

### 1 Froudland

**W**hen I was a child, I spent much of my time trespassing. I grew up in the countryside, in a cow town surrounded by chicken ranches and dairy farms. That was Sonoma County, in Northern California, north of the San Francisco Bay Area, before the grapes became ubiquitous and before the tech boom gave much of the county the dull contour of an upscale bedroom community.

Most of the cattle in the area where I grew up were free range, which meant that the hills and fields surrounding my house were easily walkable. There were still plenty of woods amid the open fields. Oak, bay, and buckeye trees grew thick around the creeks at the feet of the hills, while monumental eucalyptus windbreaks dominated the horizon. Small reservoirs—good for bass fishing—dotted the hills. Hilltops were defined by small outcroppings of igneous rocks, like remnants of some prehistoric barrow, with signs of hawk habitation scattered about—mouse skulls, hawk shit, and the winged remnants of other birds. Hills not covered with rocks would often be topped with small oak groves or, sometimes, dense oak forests that, from a distance, resembled nothing so much as bunched broccoli.

Up the road from my house—past the pine forest that was once a Christmas tree farm—was a small eucalyptus grove split down the middle by the shallow creek that ran through it. This grove became the headquarters for the wild explorations that my friends and I began organizing as soon as we realized how easy it was to cross fences and stay out of the sightlines of adults. We were children of the counterculture, and our parents' desire to break with the stultifications of American society and form new relations with the natural world is etched in our names—Crystal, Leaf, River. We were about nine, ten, and eleven then, and since our parents let us roam freely, we would spend days at a time in the groves, returning home at dinner and coming back the next day to continue inhabiting the strange world we had made for ourselves, our own secret forest culture.

At home my book world was twofold. On the one hand there were science-oriented books: Audubon field guides, books outlining the basics of doing scientific fieldwork in