

## ROBERT BILENSKY

*Golgotha, 2017*  
Oil on Wood Panel, 60 x 48 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## KAREN ACKLAND

### Old Haunt

**W**hen I was younger, I wanted a house. I wanted a house the way some women want a husband or a baby. I hadn't ruled those things out, but I didn't want either of them as much as I wanted a house. If asked about my plans, I would have said they included becoming a marketing director or living abroad. Those were the kinds of goals I felt a single career woman should have, goals that showed ambition, independence, and self-confidence. But what I wanted was a house.

I was thirty years old, living in LA, and getting a late start on a career. It didn't seem like a house was within my reach. But five years later, following a move to Northern California, I finally scheduled an appointment with a realtor and bought the second house I looked at. Mine is a two-story house with a reverse floor plan, newer and smaller than its Victorian neighbors. The living area upstairs—my favorite room—has a high ceiling with clerestory windows and redwood paneled walls. Buying a house disproved the adage that you can't buy happiness. I loved my house and I was happy, or as happy as a woman can be whose best friend once made her a T-shirt with "cheerful malcontent" printed across the front in purple flocking.

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I was upstairs reading when David brought up a box from the garage. When we married, he moved into my house. For years we talked about buying a place together, and from time to time we flipped through magazines, noting floor plans we both liked, but this house suited us and we've been happy here. Over the years, we've extended the back deck, remodeled the kitchen, and replaced the outdoor siding, which had become spongy with termites. But since we both retired, this house, which I'd loved faithfully for over thirty years, felt cramped.

"Should I toss this?" he asked. He sat the box on the dining room table. He'd been cleaning out the garage, trying to create space for a workshop. "It looks like it hasn't been opened in years."

"Let me take a look first."

Inside I found keepsakes from when I lived in LA: playbills and trail maps, self-help articles and travel brochures. I remembered during those years feeling lonely and out of step. But sifting through the box, I found tickets from a diving competition for the 1984 Olympics, maps from