

SHELBY GRAHAM

Mother of Pearl, 2013
digital print (detail from scroll), 30 x 40 in



JONAH RASKIN

Here Comes the Rain Again

A Californian
reflects on
the Drought

Last December, somewhere in the middle of the long drought we're in, I gathered memories of rain, as though remembering might seed the clouds and make it rain again. Maybe I was thinking magically, maybe I was deluded. I know that I craved rain, and remembered a December when it rained every day for three weeks. In a cabin with a wood-burning stove and two small windows, my son and I watched it come down ferociously, and wondered when it might stop—if it might stop. Roads flooded, redwoods crashed down, and the earth shook. Power lines came down, too. That season it rained more than nine feet—still a local record. Despite the memories of that storm and the disruption that it caused, I longed for the kiss of the rain, as I had once longed for a lover who mailed postcards from Italy promising to come back, though she couldn't say when. We did live together again. We were happy for a time, and yet her return didn't mean as much to me as the return of the rain that made the earth green again and felt like a huge dose of a natural antidepressant.

"Yes, that's it exactly," a friend from South India, now living in the Central Valley, told me when I described the healing properties of rain. "Californians are such wimps when it comes to drought," she added. "In Coonoor, a village in the Blue Mountains, the red, pink earth would dry up and crack at the end of the rainy season. In Kerala, I experienced monsoons. The sky just opened and water poured onto the earth. There were no raindrops." She and I talked the international language of drought and rain that the Eurythmics sang about in "Here Comes the Rain Again," which became my own personal anthem that I played rainy days and sunny days, when I woke in the morning and went to sleep at night. There's nothing like a drought to make one appreciate rain, and nothing like rain to conjure fears of flooding. In a world going to extremes, drought and flood go together.

Recently, I found the Eurythmics album buried in a closet. I wiped away the dust, and played it at the end of January when Governor Jerry Brown declared a drought emergency and called for citizens to reduce their use of water. I wanted to be a good Californian. I took one-minute showers and flushed the toilet only when necessary. I cheered when nearby towns imposed mandatory limits and when restaurants only served water to customers who requested it. Reduction in use was an idea whose time had come a year