

MELISSA GWYN

Your Virgin Renewal, 2001
Oil on Panel 48 x 48 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

ALIETE GUERRERO

Forest Blues

How Nature Saved Me
from Depression

I went down Switzer Falls Trail in the San Gabriel Mountains of Los Angeles shedding burdens, looking for serendipity while paying attention to things of irregular beauty. I was a bit weary of the tidiness of the city's gardens where I often went on walks to watch things blooming. That Earth Day 2015, I wanted a break from manicured grounds where gardeners had shaped nature too much.

Before I went down the trail, I stood in front of the pink silk floss tree. She was at least thirty feet tall. She had a thousand blossoms covering the canopy, but was bereft of leaves. Her thick green trunk was peppered with thorns where she stored water for dry times. Although a native of Brazil, she could handle the dry-bone desert of Los Angeles.

I crossed the narrow bridge and began my journey downward. The terrain was full of pitfalls but of such great beauty that I didn't mind the danger of tripping over exposed roots, shaky rocks dotting the creek, or the zigzagging that led to obscure passages. I crossed over a thick tree trunk on the stream to get to the other side. It felt as though I was walking on a balance beam, but I made it to safety.

I took a step ahead and continued down the slope passing a couple of canyon live oak. They were striking with their trunks tinged red, but didn't match the beauty of the pink silk floss. I jumped over the raised sprawling roots of a California buckeye crammed with yellow blossoms. I continued down the path further and further into the trail. It became dimmer as I passed a row of redwoods. They had been defaced by taggers and their jackknives. I ran my fingers over the deep cuts and scars on those staggering beauties. They felt like the ones that had once bloomed inside me. Some were still bruised and could reopen at the slightest touch. I crossed over the stream again, stepping on each stone carefully to keep my balance. Some weren't anchored properly and others were wet and slippery. Some had been polished by the water and glimmered in the sun coming through gaps between trees. I continued on to the lower falls, passing a couple of old grills. A family of four was preparing to have a picnic. I thought of my own family eating alfresco in that beautiful landscape. We had visited the falls uncountable times when Gabe, Willie, and Chris were growing up. The children loved to splash in the pool formed by the trickling of water coming down the lower falls.