

ERIC HOLZMAN

Elm, 2015
Oil on Canvas, 43 x 35 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

JACQUELINE DOYLE

Saving Trees

A history of tree hugging

*When I am among the trees, / . . . they give
off such hints of gladness. / I would almost
say that they save me, and daily.*

—Mary Oliver,
“When I Am Among the Trees,” *Thirst*

1

My younger brother and I tuned out our parents’ continuous bickering every night at dinner and escaped the kitchen table as soon as we could. “May I be excused?” we asked, the minute we’d cleared our plates. Permission granted, we bolted out the back door, screen door banging, clattered down the rickety wooden stairs, ducked under the low-hanging branches of the trees by the back porch, and swung around the corner to race across the backyard to our tree house in the large apple tree.

2

I grew up in New Jersey, where Joyce Kilmer wrote his poem “Trees.” We had to memorize it in school. “I think that I shall never see / a poem as lovely as a tree.” That seemed pretty obvious to me in the third grade.

3

The tree house in our backyard was just a small platform nailed into the boughs of the apple tree and some scraps of wood nailed into the trunk that served as a makeshift ladder. My brother and I liked to sit there, cross-legged, hatching our plots for forays into the woods. In spring fragrant white blossoms surrounded us, like clumps of snow.

4

Kilmer wrote his poem in Mahwah, New Jersey, now designated an EPA Superfund site because of hazardous wastes dumped in the abandoned Ringwood Mines by the Ford Motor Company.

5

In the front yard, an oak tree surrounded by damp green moss towered over the road and rained acorns on the ground every fall. I could see it from my bedroom window, a stalwart sentinel. Lilac trees lined the yard, their blooms lavender, their trunks ancient and gnarled, propped up