

EDWIGE FOUVRY

Le Soir à L'Orée du Bois, 2015
Oil on Canvas, 59 x 59 in



COURTESY DOUBLY CHADWICK GALLERY

DALE PENDELL

Holes in the Ground

A catalogue of creatures living in the soil

I live off a dirt road, so the road to my house is also dirt. The only paving on the property is the concrete slab under the house and a couple of the outbuildings. Otherwise, it's all dirt: the paths and trails, and the ground along them, whether covered by meadow, brush, or forest. Everywhere I go, the dirt has holes in it. And for years now I've been trying to find out who is responsible.

Easing into recovery from a recent surgery, I've been going for daily walks. Or, let's say, I've been sauntering, or ambling. And the slower I go, the more holes I see—even in these summer months when the meadow is all dry straw and the ground is brick hard.

These Sierra foothill soils have to be some of the worst in the world, with every nutrient but iron leached out. A pick won't dig a hole when the dirt is as dry as now, yet new holes still appear. There are pencil-sized holes, dime-sized holes, quarter-sized holes. The more I look the more I find. This isn't even counting the larger and more obvious holes—mole and gopher holes, or ground squirrel holes or owl burrows—I know who makes those. But who is making all these small holes?

A List in Progress:

First off, the Mammalia, our own dear class of milk drinkers, are responsible for the largest holes, that's clear. We dig holes ourselves: postholes, outhouse holes, and trenches for pipes—but they are usually filled in. Soldiers, of course, dig holes, or used to, and call them foxholes. And foxes do dig holes, though our foxes seem to prefer an abandoned tree house.

Rabbits dig warrens, which are holes in the ground, though they must dig them in the densest and most inaccessible brush thickets, because I never find them. Many rabbit warrens, it is said, are connected underground. We have skunks, and skunks have long claws and dig dens. I *think* I found one of those once. Opossums will nest in holes if they can find one, but I've read that they don't dig their own. Sometimes they live in trees.

And the coyotes dig holes and live in them. I found one once, with pups in it, dug into the side of an embankment.

Actually, my little dog found the hole before I did. He was just a little scamp Peckapoo with long curly hair and big eyes that said "I love you, just stroke behind my ears,"