

JUDI MILLER

Moving Around Boundaries, 2002
oil on canvas, 36 x 70 in



courtesy the artist

K'DEE MILLER

River of Life Remembering the work of Judi Miller

It was exactly one year after the death of my mother, Judi Miller, and I was out for a run. Not an unusual act, by any means—in fact, since relocating to Berkeley two months prior, running had become my most recent addiction. I had run past the same designer shops, past the Occupy banners that clung to the pedestrian overpass, and onto the bike path that hugged West Frontage Road—but I could never outrun the sense that I was lost.

The bike path was the only place that felt familiar. On the west side of the path sat the bay, its mountain-fed waters lapping Berkeley's rocky marina before continuing west to glisten under San Francisco's cityscape. On the east side sat thousands of commuters as they inched their way through a threesome of highways known as The Maze. Over the past year, my life had adopted a similar bipolar nature. To my closest friends, I looked strong and steady like the bay's current; but in the quiet confines of my vehicle, I was stuck in The Maze, unclear of my destination, talking to myself. I tried to keep my tone calm but it would always become animated. Over the course of eight months, I had moved from Los Angeles to Nevada to New York to Los Angeles again. By month nine, my voice had gone from calming to outright concerning, so by the time I moved into my mom's art studio in Berkeley it seemed only natural to start talking to her paintings. Or rather, to the artist who now remained only in canvas form.

The paintings were large and hung elegantly in the studio. At night, the skylight exposed the acrylics and oils to the moon's beam, making the blues and greens dance and flow across the canvas like water. Inspired by months of standing in the middle of Northern California's tributaries after her twenty-five-year marriage had ended, she captured the state of the water as it rippled, bubbled, splashed, eventually creating a space for her before graciously flowing by. "The river was a place with no boundaries," she wrote in an essay that accompanied her thesis show, *River Stories*. "It's where past and future pool into the moment, showing me how two currents can flow side by side, reflecting and accepting one another."

"My currents aren't accepting one another," I'd confess to the canvas. The essay was one of my latest discoveries from her files, along with a photograph taken at the river's edge. Hair messily slung up in a side ponytail, flashing her gummy smile, she was wearing paint-stained waders with