

BRIAN ROUNDS

Russian Ridge, 2016
Oil on canvas, 11 x 14 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

ALEXANDER BARRY

Fence

The world has golden fur. They say the drought will end soon and the grass will grow green again, but they don't realize that the hillside is a hide, with beautiful gilded hay for hair and suntanned skin. That's just how the valley lives. Any trace of verdure is gangrene, cold and dark. I've always had an eye for warm colors. I could see the heat coming my way even years ago.

My commute took me north and out of the valley, so naturally I would pass the golden hills at dusk on my way back. The sun lit their wicks at that time of day, and the light would travel along the invisible strings, burning from the apex down, until it was right in my eyes. I like to imagine I glowed then. Another festering fantasy of mine was smooth talking my car off of the freeway three stops early, convincing it to wait on the shoulder of a shaded dirt highway, and exploring the radiant amber hills with my own two feet and my own gold eyes. Each to and fro along those roads was a back and forth between mundane responsibility and feral curiosity. The whole thing probably wasn't such a big deal after all, looking back.

Finally, decisively, and with great satisfaction, after a thousand consecutive concessions, I flicked my turn signal upwards, and the right light blinked. After some poorly paved blocks and a few hundred meters of dirt, really less than a mile out of my usual way, I left my car at the base of the closest hill and climbed. The whole of the hill was tough: sturdy grass, dry soil, gorgeous brambles. It was a magnificent experience and a magnifying one. That which was visible from the freeway simply grew in my eyes, but new nuances spiraled around me in the interlocking of the various slopes. There was a beautiful fluidity to the form, as exists between life and dreams. I sat down.

I fell asleep in the sunshine, although the surface was not comfortable.

I dreamed I was standing again and that the changing light stayed for too long. Over the crest of the hill approached a mountain lion, form barely discernible from the matching coat of the hillside, radiant marigold eyes trained on me. In its gaze I saw a calm peace. I misinterpreted its intentions, and it attacked me with its most ferocious force, a brutality I have yet to see in waking life. And so the lion and I fought, teeth and claws bared. We rolled and roiled up and down the hill, drawing blood and then drawing with that blood on the papyrus slope.