

LOUISE LEBOURGEOIS

Whip Waves, 2018
Oil on panel, 36 x 36 in



BEN MASAOKA

Where Life Began

Ballona Creek overflowed its cement banks during the 1958 tropical storm that dumped a small ocean of water into the concrete Los Angeles basin. Imagine, all those square miles of streets and sidewalks and parking lots, from North Hollywood to Anaheim and suburbs beyond, the curb gutters whirling, flooding parts of town to wash away automobiles and storefronts and the occasional person who, with bitter luck, had been sleeping drunk behind trash cans in a low-lying alley. Whose disappearance in the flood had been prefigured years before by a disappearance from, perhaps, a more respectable life. These things are rare, but they happen.

Residents from housing projects to the east heaved all manner of broken things over the barbed wire fence into the culvert tributary of Ballona Creek. Televisions, dryers, shopping carts, bicycles, lawn mowers, mattresses, sofas with coiled springs hanging loose like broken clocks. The banks of Ballona Creek were so littered with junk that it almost seemed the purpose of that winter's deluge, to carry those artifacts of habitation, once-new products that temporarily brought joy, away. Away to the ocean, where the occasional piece of junk washed up on Toes Beach to be buried deep in the sand by pounding winter storms.

People gathered to stand on the banks of the creek to see what the flood carried; among the crowd was a small boy. A water heater tank turned and surfaced and submerged in the currents like a catatonic albino seal; a doghouse without, everyone hoped, the dog; a refrigerator with a closed door; a La-Z-Boy recliner that, seeing it awash in the flood, made elderly people sad. Now it was the third day of high water, although with the clearing weather it had abated a bit in volume, and people had lost interest. Only the boy returned, this time bringing a little girl. Michael was six years old and Miya, three. Their mother was napping. Squatting at the water's swift edge on the upstream side of Miya, Michael scanned for floating objects to point out to his baby sister. He saw an automobile tire tumbling toward them and he turned to alert her to the sight, but she was not there.

Michael stood and looked downriver, but there was nothing to be seen, only the tire that had swept by and was now far away bobbing and spinning like a life preserver in the dirty waves. Guessing that Miya had gone home when his back was turned, he dashed quickly up to the top of the