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Robyn O'Neil, *A Song of So Many Beginnings*, 2009, Graphite on paper, 60 x 60 in. (152.4 x 152.4 cm), Courtesy: Susan Inglett Gallery, NYC.

ROBYN O'NEIL

ARTIST TO WATCH

For nearly a decade, Robyn O'Neil worked on a narrative series of large-scale graphite on paper drawings that followed the final days of the human race, through war and a losing battle against dominant natural forces. Like Hieronymus Bosch or Peter Brueghel, O'Neil explores humanity's foibles and complicated relationship with nature. Her meticulously rendered drawings depict remote winter forests under threatening skies, which are seemingly hospitable only to fir trees. Against this ominous backdrop, middle-aged men in black sweat-suits appear to go about their sheltered routines, despite the fact that they are completely unfit for the outdoors. Risking their lives by attempting their daily rituals, these characters underscore the bizarre nature of mundane living.

Throughout her narrative series, O'Neil is showing the viewer how strange it is to see a human in a natural environment. Our culture is on a course, as survival has become given, towards goals of comfort and convenience. It is through this evolutionary process that humans

have shed their ancient instincts and rituals, leaving them completely inept for survival. The final works in O'Neil's series include images of men holding onto cables above a violent sea. There is no indication of what the cord is attached to, if it is attached to anything at all. It appears that, for O'Neil at least, the cliffhanger is the ultimate moment before the last mortal dies, lost to the ocean. This tragic end to our human race may also act as a signal that O'Neil is now ready to move on to new material. She won the Hunting Art Prize (the largest monetary award in the U.S. for a single two-dimensional work of art) in 2009 for one of the images in the series. O'Neil's drawings were included in the 2004 Whitney Biennial and numerous other important exhibits around the globe. She is represented by Susan Inglett Gallery, who will offer a solo show of her work that continues through March 2011, and Tony Wight Gallery. -JM