

expected, more people who seemed to enjoy disrobing while staring out at the almost empty streets. But Will found their bodies didn't interest him as much as the play of room light, the shifts of geometry that shadow created. "Nights: still, unknown. They are alive to me as days aren't. No one to see, or see me. All quiet except me, alley cat, night prowler. When do I start to howl at the moon?"

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By mid-November, Will's life as a painter was as regulated as when he worked. "Routine, consistency," he wrote to himself:

*Habit is palette of hours, how we compose days.
Perspective, boundary, impression of three dimensions.
Kept me eating, caring for Edie; now, walking beach,
carrying rocks, painting. We break routine, make
new habits. That gives us a split life, + awkward
transitions we call consciousness (or shock, love,
whatever) in between. Then what?*

There were hours when all Will did was rearrange his rock formations on the table, test angles, pick up one rock or another, put them back on his piles. "Waking among boulders," he wrote one morning. "If I could only get the salt air into the paint." He felt his way along, anxious to discover some right relation of elements, though he never worried that he couldn't define what "right" was. "Failures of structure before failures with paint," he wrote. "Does a *real* painter find or build a still life, see variations as he organizes or after in the paint? Old answer I'd count on was both/and, but maybe I can take sides on this before I die? (That word 'real'; am I an unreal painter? Probably.)"

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Staring at his rocks, Will continued to find himself distracted by memory. He lost days thinking about Edie up until three a.m. one night, working on the dining room table with walnut, sandpaper, and polish to repair a crevice a dinner guest left from rubbing his steak knife along the edge of the wood. The wood was raw, fresh, pale against the dark walnut—a gash that he knew, immediately, was there forever. But Edie tried to bring a bit of life and color back to the table. "Wood is like kids," Edie insisted, morn-

ing after morning repeating her mantra, "Life's in the grain and you never cut against it once you see it. You mend what you hurt, repair what you scar."

"Mend hurt; repair scar," he wrote one morning, hoping to purge his thoughts of the formula by writing it down. "Amends don't last long, scars show we've mended. Tough skin at lesion. What are we, if not our wounds? I love the lines in stones. Edie told me once how the Japanese fill cracks in bowls and vases with gold to accent the breaks. I've only got paint and ineptitude."

With the table covered, he thought he should be done with what the wood once looked like. But nothing seemed to disappear. Or everything, he corrected himself. Did but didn't, stayed but left, persevered and eroded. He retreated from this conundrum to his paint, shifting around the living room while he looked, as he wrote, for some "point of view that matters":

*As if one matters more than another. As if an ocean
has one. But people: forced into each other. Why—
how—choose one person, one rock? Why put it next
to another, stand to look at it or paint it, stare from
right or left? Don't know. Why this color or that on a
map to indicate countries? Who gets noticed that way,
forgotten? So blame mapmakers for wars? Who else?*

For two days after that comment he didn't paint at all, just kept moving his easel in an arc around the dining room table and adjusting the legs on it up and down, from knee height to full extension. "How can I figure out my position in the living room, let alone world?" he asked himself. Finally he decided he'd be systematic, and do a five-day circuit of the scene each week with two wild cards allowed when whim would reposition him. He got out a compass, drew a circle on the back of a drawing, ruled out hexagrams around the edges, labeled days, then repeated the exercise on the oak floor of the living room in carpenter's pencil. "The democracy of math," he concluded in his notebook: "Can't decide, so I pretend it doesn't matter. But I know it does, or pretend I know, even if not how or why. If mystery, write formula. Doesn't explain, does reassure."

But after three weeks working his way around his hexagons, standing before the easel, adjusting the angle this way and that, moving one of the battered stools from the

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Anonymity, 2014
Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 72 in



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