

kitchen into the living room so he could rest his legs once in a while, he felt frustrated again. He'd used up all but two of his canvases, felt like maybe he was painting on the wrong surface. He thought of going back to sketch pads.

Until one afternoon he started painting on the wall, about shoulder high, and realized that he'd always wanted to do that.

*Developing rules for this game, breaking them as I go.*

1. *Never buy new what can be used.*
2. *House not home. Don't get comfortable.*
3. *Studio too big a word; call it space.*
4. *Walls and floors can get dirty. Dirty, dirty, dirty. Wish I knew this raising Helen. Could have had more fun, though Edie'd die if she saw. (Already did, dickhead.)*

The first wall painting had no edges, extended out in an awkward, uneven rectangle. A piece of driftwood Will set alongside three rocks stuck up with no background to hide his awkward rendering of its tangled surface. Then he painted four versions of the same grouping around the original, in counterclockwise order, still with no borders, no backgrounds, awkward proportions. By the fourth painting the driftwood piece had gone squat. Still no depth, he realized, consulting his how-to book until he learned that a white line along a cylinder on one side near the edge, and some darker paint along the other edge, can (with some practice, the book intoned) give the illusion of reflection and encourage the eye to turn the flat paint round. Or should be able to, he said to himself angrily as his paintings continued to defy grace.

*November 23.*

*Two days, then Thanksgiving. Driftwood my turkey leg. What next? Frescoes? Murals? Graffiti? No.*

5. *But yes to color on the walls.*
6. *Same arrangement of materials until at least two more paintings after first show I'm bored with the setup.*
7. *No new arrangement for two days after deconstruction.*

8. *Redo disassembled arrangement week or so after I disarrange it to see if it can be new again. Don't worry if it's not the same arrangement.*

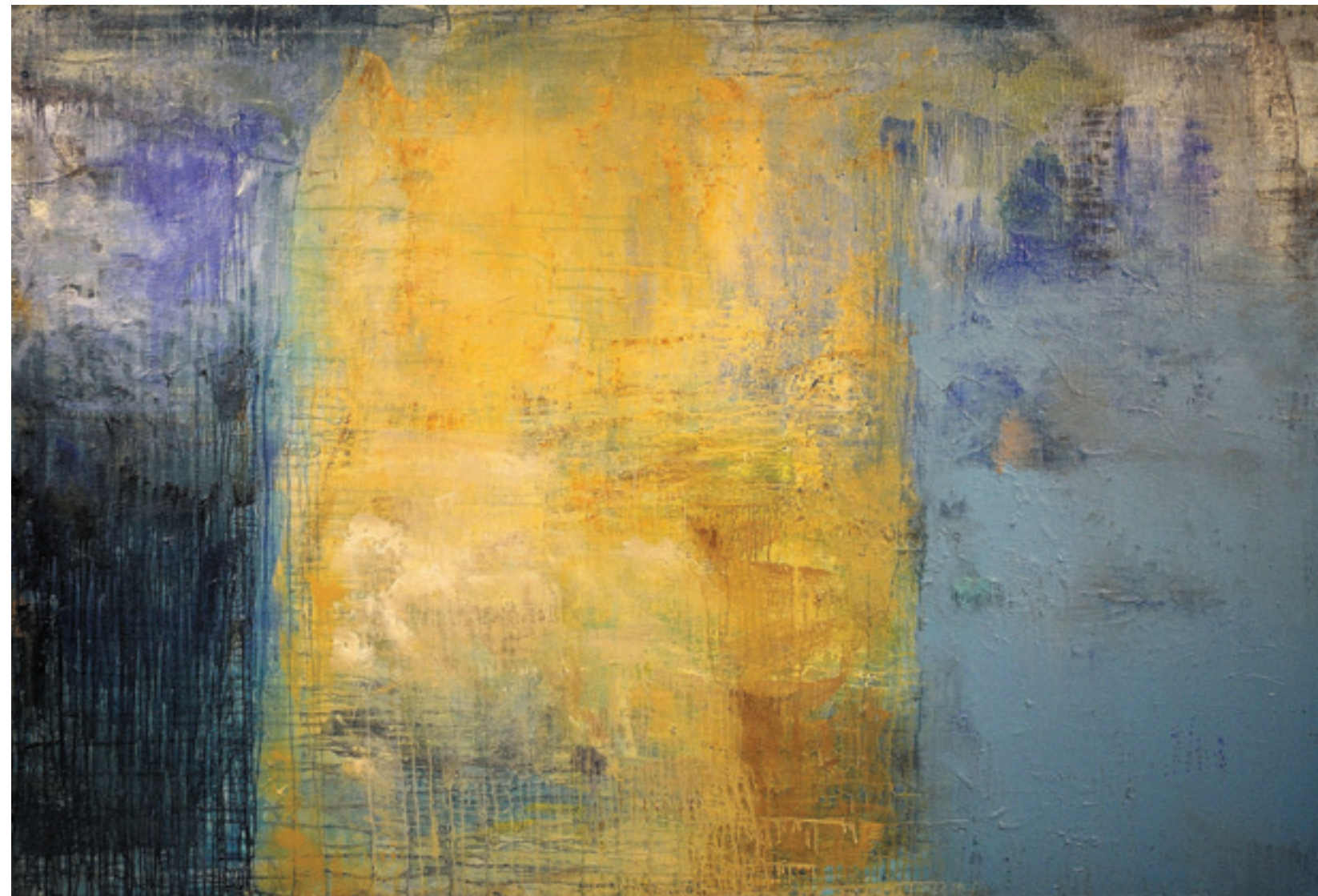
By early December, Will decided to paint over his wall scenes. "I don't paint to make a records for others. Not an historian: libraries overrated. U.S. needs national memory dump, deposit leftovers we can't contribute to charities. Or weekly pickups, like garbage, for recycling. Pack past in plastic bags, stuff in bins, leave curbside. Special dumps for art, toasters, talk shows."

Will bought himself some carpenter's white paint at the hardware store and covered over his five wall studies. He took a ruler and divided the wall itself into rectangles as high as he could comfortably reach and as low as he felt he could draw sitting on pillows. These lines would be his new canvases. He carried the easel into the storage shed, bought ear plugs ("Noise Reduction Rating 31 decibels if worn properly") that he curled into the sides of his head each morning. And began, with the new year, to paint his way across one side of the living room.

**Paul Skenazy** taught literature and writing at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His stories have appeared *Chicago Quarterly Review*, and *Red Wheelbarrow*. "Still Life" is the opening section of a novel in progress. His previous publications include a revision of a posthumous novel by Arturo Islas (*La Mollie and the King of Tears*); books and articles on James M. Cain, Dashiell Hammett, and other noir writers; a collection of essays on San Francisco fiction; and a selection of interviews with Maxine Hong Kingston as well as hundreds of book reviews.

## SAM NEJATI

*Apex*, 2013  
Acrylic on Canvas, 48 x 72 in



COURTESY WESTBROOK GALLERIES, MONTEREY