

## RANDALL EXON

*Beach House, 2009*  
oil on canvas, 36 x 52 in.



## CLAUDIA STERNBACH

### Every Day, the Beach

The healing power  
of the ocean

In late August when I returned from my yearly summer in New York City carrying my luggage and the fresh knowledge of my thirty-year-old daughter's cancer, I began to walk along the curve of the Monterey Bay. It is five minutes from my house.

Park, walk south one mile then back and north one mile, then back. I become a regular passing an older man in a wheelchair who is never without fowl. One day a hen, another a rooster. Lap sitters. He nods. I nod. He motors past and I trudge on. Faces become familiar. In early fall there are whales spouting and breaching every day. The path becomes crowded with enthusiastic wildlife watchers. Even I am distracted by the ocean activity. There are dolphins. And an enormous number of pelicans drawn to the bay by the millions of anchovies arriving on the tides.

We are in a drought and every day is clear and sunny. The only dark cloud is my daughter's health. But it is fixable we've been told. It may come back, but for now, there is a way to deal with it.

She won't let me come for the surgery. Please, she begs. It will make me feel like "The Cancer Girl" if you come.

When you are handed your newborn in the delivery room it is difficult to imagine you will one day receive this call. That you will have to listen to this kind of request.

It will test your bravery. How much easier it would be to jump into the car and drive south. To elbow your way into her emergency. How much more difficult it is to honor her request. To say, I love you so much that I will *not* be there.

She won't be alone. Her boyfriend will be with her. The day of her surgery begins with a text and photo from him.

I've got this, he says. And he does. And she begins to heal.

Later, a second doctor will say that the small bits removed from her cervix were precancerous. Who is in charge, I wonder. Who knows the truth. Who can predict the future?

But it has been sliced away. It is gone.

I walk the beach in the unseasonable heat and think, all will be well.

And soon I will receive another call from her telling me she is pregnant. Because to her it felt as if the opportunity might be fleeting. She reached and grabbed the gold ring.

COURTESY THE ARTIST