

## WILLIAM STANISICH

*Land's End #13, 2014*  
Oil on canvas, 40 x 25 in



COURTESY ANDRA NORRIS GALLERY

## RICHARD CHIAPPONE

### Help

**T**he first week of school that September, Dianne came out of the building at the end of a day and found one of her new freshmen students, Chao Saechao, standing in the emptying parking lot clutching an armload of books, watching the last bus disappear up the road, and looking exactly as new to Anchorage, as new to America, as he was.

Earlier that day, in her classroom, she'd seen enthusiasm and intelligence in his eyes and found herself drawn to him, ready to help him if she could. She knows that her now suddenly ex-husband would accuse her of "making a project of him." Before he left her for a woman he'd met on a bicycling chat room, he'd once said, "They're your students, Dianne, not your pets." But he was now halfway around the world, cycling with the new woman. So, fuck him.

Dianne offered the boy a ride home.

It was unusually warm for September, and she and Chao rode in the thin Anchorage traffic with the windows rolled down, the boy silent and locked away behind his wraparound shades, Dianne fixing and refixing her own glasses on her nose, unable to think of something to talk about. When Chao pointed and said, "Here," she slowed to a stop at a corner in a dreary neighborhood called Mountain View—although there was no view of the great mountain, Denali. There were only numerous more or less identical fourplexes and sixplexes, a Quick Stop, an abandoned gas station encased in sagging chain-link fencing. A defunct Mexican restaurant squatted on one corner, weathered plywood covering the windows, the door alcove drifted with soft drink cups and newspapers.

Chao opened the car door and slid out, closed it behind him.

"I'll see you in class Wednesday," she said out the open window.

He looked in and nodded.

"Do you understand the assignment, Chao?" She made an effort not to talk overloudly or too slowly.

He nodded again, and she looked away and adjusted the rearview mirror as if it needed it, then moved it back. "Well . . ." she said. When she turned back, Chao was gone. Just like her husband.

Halfway home she found herself on an unfamiliar street as her route detoured around a construction project where a new senior housing center was being built in an