

SAM NEJATI

Off the Sea into the Sky, 2014
Acrylic on Canvas, 78 x 68 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

PAUL SKENAZY

Still Life

*If a thing is worth doing once, it is
worth doing over and over again.*

—Mark Rothko

Will Moran closed his front door and began to paint pictures of rocks. Rocks and bottles, driftwood, and the occasional bunched-up rag. Drawings first: in pencil and charcoal. Then in temperas, oils. On paper, cardboard, canvas. Day after day, for months, he devoted himself to painting, rocks, and his walks.

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After his wife Edie died in early June, Will was restless. What little peace he found was late at night when he left the house and wandered down to the beach. He saw people huddled near fires: noisy groups throwing Frisbees into the dark; couples hugging against the cold; someone walking a dog or folded into a sleeping bag. He would watch from the shadows, quietly trace the edge of the shore, then trudge back home, empty the sand, and head for bed.

At home, Will discovered that the only place he felt safe was on the roof. “Used to be afraid of heights, wonder why I’m not anymore,” he asked himself in one of his first entries in the notebook he started, hoping to learn something from the wild and fitful thoughts that consumed him. “World is different up there. So am I.” He sat for hours on the rough asphalt shingles, looking off across block on block of TV antennas and through the telephone lines to the horizon, where ocean, air, and fog met. He took solace in the silence, the clouds, the pale greens, browns and reds of the rooftops. “No more calls on me,” he wrote to himself. “No one to care for, answer to, worry about. Nothing to do but what I want. And what is that, old fart?”

Will had never been very talkative; now he was quieter still. He kept the lights off and the blinds drawn, living in a perpetual twilight breakfast to bedtime. What he needed, he thought, was to be alone. What he needed, he soon discovered, was to collect rocks.

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Long before he married Edie, Will loved the feel of sand. He’d walk the beaches, his pants rolled up to his knees, his feet bare. He admired waves—the turn and loop of them; the way they dropped rocks, shells, and wood, took whatever was in their way to scatter somewhere else along the coast. He’d stalk the tide, picking up and discarding small stones with a random, unthinking impulse. He’d stick them in