

DAVID MOLESKY

Beach Break, 2006
Oil on canvas, 32 x 39 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

JOHANNA STOBEROCK

Fields of Vision

The View from Midlife

“**E**very silver lining has a cloud,” is what my son comes up with from the backseat of the car. We like to turn clichés inside out to pass the time. The best I’ve been able to do is this: “Sunscreen saved is sunburned,” but it’s not quite right—the rhythm is off. We’re on vacation on Kauai, it’s raining, we’re sitting in the car in traffic, and I wish I could turn the middle-aged cliché of my own life inside out. Joan Didion went to Hawaii “in lieu of filing for divorce.” Kauai for my husband and me is meant to function in a similar way: though we’re not here to salvage our marriage to each other, we’re here at least partly to salvage marriage to the rest of our lives.

It’s been a long year. A father’s illness. A father’s death. A sister’s sudden, partial blindness. A desire for faith in authority, and a lack of interest on authority’s part revealed. I know these things are really just expected parts of life (though I would say that the blindness came out of left field, *that* was unexpected—or should I say into right field; that’s exactly where the blindness entered). But even if expected, who is ever ready for a father’s death? And who really believes it possible that authority, once agreed upon, can check out? I’ve been an atheist since my teens, so why should I think there’s any hope of anything, even man-made, reaching down to offer aid? Isn’t that what God is about? Isn’t that what we give up when we rest in certainty that God does not exist?

We’ve been chasing sun this whole week on the island. We’re staying in the north, in a small house that has large rodents in the ceiling. We’re across the street from the most beautiful beach in the world. Sixty steps, and the water circles round our feet. But the north is where the rain is, and where the cliffs are, and where signs about dangerous currents and rogue waves abound, where guide books remind us that the island has on average ten drowning deaths each year, and warn us that the ocean that surrounds an island is a wilder ocean than that which breaks against a continental shore. So in the beginning we drive to the calm south daily, through traffic, until we reach the sun. And then we sit on another beautiful beach—I think every beach on this island is the most beautiful beach in the world—and swivel back and forth between our children.

We wish our responsibilities consisted entirely of watching them. We wish we could simply enjoy them from afar. Before we came, my husband and I promised