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I arrived at Montello a few days before the summer solstice. Patricia, the previous resident, had placed bouquets of wildflowers around the studio and kitchen, the arrangements gathering isolated notes of color into concentrated bursts — orange-red, yellow, blue — a companionable foreshadowing of the variety waiting to be found in the desert. The mid-summer days were long and my time was always filled. I woke at dawn to watch the first light, listening to the birds and coyotes at their most vocal. Each morning I studied the house's maps, choosing a direction to explore by bike or on foot. When the sun reached its peak intensity, starting around 10am, the birds quieted and the light flattened, and what felt like a second night settled in, leaving space to shelter inside, reading or working. Calm mornings often gave way to sharply increasing winds, which I monitored with interest on the kitchen's mini weather station, noting the sustained speeds of 20 or 30 miles per hour, with gusts sometimes reaching 40 and 50. I enjoyed the strange suspense of not having a weather forecast, and watching to see what new patterns might unfold. The library's collection of field guides became valuable friends, as I looked up the animal tracks I was seeing and the birds I'd glimpsed on walks. By the third day, I was becoming familiar with the bright yellow shape of the



Nevada Window, June, 2019, oil on panel, 7 in x 8 3/4 in

western meadowlark, audible every day at the house, often singing from the top of a juniper tree, or on the grass right by the porch. I thought of it in the deep quiet of night. The sagebrush was a luminous green that time of year, alternately silvery and warm as the sun shifted. Rain fell at the house once, and for ten days, no cars passed.

Time at Montello is luxurious and uncluttered, but not empty. I had space to give my attention to whatever called it, and to notice my own responses. Unexpected things become interesting and valuable in that remote context. Perhaps experiencing this attention in such a concentrated way can build a kind of muscle memory, helping to sustain something similar even in different circumstances. (Thoreau was only a mile from the nearest town at Walden Pond, reporting experiences familiar to many Montello residents: *It is surprising how contented one can be with nothing definite — only a sense of existence.*) I felt a different awareness of scale at Montello, my attention alternating between the particularity of individual birds and the abstract expanse of geologic time, visible in its own way in the Great Basin. The same snow-capped mountains that looked small and distant from the gravel road filled the window frame when seen from the bed at dusk.

In the months since my time at the house, I've made small paintings of the images that have held most clearly in my memory, particularly the view from the studio — the irregular line of the horizon, close sagebrush, sunlight on the wall. That expansive space remains so vivid to me, and I love to imagine it changing across the seasons with each new resident.

