

## SARAH MCCOUBREY

*Fox II*, 2012  
oil on panel, 45 x 37 1/2 in.



COURTESY LOCKS GALLERY

## REBECCA CHEKOURAS

### Free to Good Home

**A**n April snow unusual even this far north laid a thin veneer of white over acres of pasture. The ground, no longer frozen, couldn't hold it. It would be gone in a day. The smell of mud and shit crowned the wind-battered air and water rippled where it collected in low spots. Jenny stopped at the milking parlor door to scrape her boot soles clean and then made her way past hired hands who readied the line. At her locker, she dipped her shoulder and her backpack slid to the shelf. Behind the concealing protection of the square metal door, she pushed two fingers into the canvas front pocket and tugged free a piece of paper no bigger than her mom's CD liners. It was real. That was her name under the tiny thing so much like a sea horse—a curl of spine and bulging eye spots suspended in dark fluid. She stuffed the image back and washed her hands. "Heads up, here they come," called Wayne. Wayne of jet-black hair and lake-blue eyes, his voice distant and small through the speaker buds in her ears. Her mother had warned her time and again the automated line was dangerous if she didn't remain alert, attuned to it, she'd said, but Jenny was sixteen and nothing could stop her doing what she wanted.

In the pale gray of late afternoon, a tide of black splotches on white hides, their hooves and shins tarred in the field, bawled and rolled their high-boned hips through the pasture gate and into the pen. Frank timed calving to the first grass and already many stomachs hung broad and low. The milkers were vectored off to a chute where Wayne rinsed their teats with iodine and glycerin and primed them with a few quick pulls. "Hey, Jenny," he called, laughing and wanting her to look at him. "Check it out. It's nipple play gets 'em going."

With any other boy she'd fire back at this kind of bullshit. But she'd been dating Wayne for six months. Long enough to know that a little nipple play really did bring the house down. She tied her long hair back and snapped a plastic cap over it, hauled on padded overalls, and settled the straps onto her boney shoulders. The flow and filter systems were in the chilling room where she monitored the pickup tank and scouted for abnormalities. She logged in, cleared the morning yield, and waited in the low-light coldness. In the parlor, the milk line hummed and jolted to a start. Her monitor blipped. The