

## JOÃO DE BRITO

*New Life*, 2018  
Oil on canvas, 72 x 69 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

## EVAN WHITE

# Happy Times with Horses

I am waiting in a café, one of those new age places with live plants hanging from the walls and nothing with gluten. They've got a moss-and-driftwood piece above the register with air plants. You bought me something like this when I went on that plant kick and filled the house with bird's-nest ferns and succulents that I hung from the ceiling in glass orbs. "They purify the air," I said when you asked if I'd rather just live outside, maybe in a jungle.

I look at my watch.

A few minutes pass, and then he arrives.

Dan is bald. It suits him in the way that being bald either entirely suits someone or seems like a defeat. His cane has a knob handle. I've not noticed canes before, not really, and his strikes me as tasteful, though I've no idea what the alternative might be. Clinical? Pimp? He orders a skinny latte and I get a black coffee, and when our names are called I say, "I'll get them," not wanting Dan to have to stand up again, and realizing at the same time that I am being unnecessarily sensitive.

I get the cups. I grab napkins. I return to the table. I put his cup in front of him, and a napkin.

I sit.

I thought we'd have a connection, a sort of immediate bond, and that this would lend itself to an ease of conversation, but it's like meeting anyone else for the first time. We ask each other what we do for a living and where we are from: we talk about the things you talk about when what you really want to discuss is something you don't know how to bring up. And then Dan says, "You were with him for a long time."

And I say, "Yes."

And he says, "Can I ask . . ."

I thought it would be easier to talk about with Dan, and, in a sense, it is. I'm grateful that he's the one who brought it up, I mean. I haven't told anyone else the whole story.

This one.

I'd had to get a locksmith to open the file cabinet. It was old and rusted and I was determined to clean out the garden shed. "Have you thought about waiting until fall?" you had said, which really meant something more like, "Have you thought about waiting until the next century? Or the one after that?" But it was one of my organizing episodes, like when I purged the kitchen cabinets and replaced all of the mismatching dishes with stoneware. "You spent