

ALAN FELTUS

No Words Could Explain, 2008-09
oil on canvas, 31 1/2 x 43 1/4 in.



COURTESY FORUM GALLERY, NEW YORK

KIMBERLY JEAN SMITH

As You Know, Bob

“As you know, Bob, you and I have been married for seventeen years,” says Mary to Bob, to whom she has been married for seventeen years.

According to Mary, theirs is not a happy union—something Bob seems unable or unwilling to comprehend. So for the second time that day, Mary states, “Ours is not a happy union,” adding, “I may be wrong in doing so, nevertheless, I blame you.” Perhaps it’s worth noting that Mary doesn’t really think it wrong to blame Bob. While she supposes it is theoretically possible for anyone (including herself) to be wrong, saying so would more accurately be described as a small defensive gesture, showcasing her own human frailty. Thus proceeds an escalating onslaught—the cataloguing of Bob’s marital crimes.¹ These include, but are not limited to, the following: he doesn’t listen, he doesn’t understand, he doesn’t recognize her as an essentially loving but complicated person, his love of Vivaldi is immature and annoying. (According to Mary, no one of any gravitas listens to Vivaldi.²) She pauses and repositions the silk cushion for better support. Outside, light breaks through gray skies and does a familiar shimmy on the surface of the pond—something Mary once attempted to capture in poetry and then photography (neither satisfying the initial expressive urge).

Might the problem be the pond itself? The landscape designer had placed it midway between the house and the marsh’s edge. Beautiful, yes, but neither she nor Bob feels quite sure it ended up at the point of greatest aesthetic perfection.

Bob follows Mary’s gaze out the window but can’t see the water from where he sits on the refurbished Eames. He sighs and instead rests his eyes on Mary. He sees a dark-haired woman of fifty-two with a wide mouth that when formed into a smile feels to him exactly like sunshine. Such

1. Since 2005, Mary has diligently attempted to aid Bob in recognizing these crimes. Such recognition, she hopes, may increase his suffering sufficiently that he will join her in concluding that the marriage has, in fact, failed.

2. She regrets introducing Bob to Vivaldi, something she’d done after they attended a symphony concert with the Westins and Bob admitted he’d understood little of what he heard. At the time, Mary thought Vivaldi would bridge a gap to composers of greater depth (i.e., Shostakovich and Mahler), not become a stopping point.