

JOAN WADLEIGH CURRAN

Reconstruction, 2015

Oil on panel, 30 x 30 in



PATTI JAZANOSKI

Too Late for Cows

Sandra stood in a Palo Alto art gallery on a Saturday night and clutched a hand-knit Peruvian cow, her long fingernails stroking its pudgy tummy. Though it was supposed to be white with black spots, the unbleached wool carried a beige cast and shed in her hand. Then there was its udder: oversized, protruding, and red, like a bovine fertility doll. Sandra told herself to just set it down, step away from the cow. At thirty-nine, she was too old to be buying herself stuffed animals, even if this store called it textile art. A salesclerk drifted up, fresh-faced with long wavy hair, and pointed to the tag. The alpaca wool had been raised in the Andes by women from an indigenous tribe. “That’s great,” Sandra said and turned away. She didn’t care about free-range alpaca sheep or whatever they were. She’d been politically correct when she was younger, but now she wanted to be happy.

Still, Sandra couldn’t walk away. This cow wouldn’t go with anything she owned, not her Italian leather sofa, her glass-top coffee table, and certainly not her antique Chinese armoire. Sandra, herself, clashed with the cow. She was tall, thin, angular. The cow was plump and squishy.

When her date, Jim, touched her arm, she startled. The last time she’d checked, he’d been studying a landscape painting far across the room. It had been safe to pick up the cow. She turned it to hide the udder. “Doing some early Christmas shopping?” he asked.

“For my niece, Amanda.” Sandra’s shoulders clenched. She’d sworn she wouldn’t lie tonight, but the words slipped out on their own.

“Let me get it.”

Really? “I couldn’t.” She hardly knew him. “Amanda wouldn’t understand.”

“What’s to understand? The cow’s cute. Family’s important.”

Sandra’s muscles relaxed, first her shoulders, then down her back, a rippling cascade of calm. Her family would love this guy. She could picture them all in her parents’ backyard under the sycamore trees: her two nephews playing bocce, Jim and her dad manning the grill, her mom carrying a giant bowl of potato salad, mouthing behind his back, “We like him.”

But was she ready for that? She hadn’t had a real boyfriend since she’d ended her engagement three years before. She really liked Jim, maybe too much.