

BLAISE ROSENTHAL

Another Country, 2015
Charcoal and acrylic on canvas, 64 x 76 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST AND JOHANSSON PROJECTS

RCA O'NEAL

My American Thanksgiving

I have been trying for some time to figure out how to explain things. I did take notes, you see, and I had always thought that the notes would lead to something else, or would be *useful* in some way. Yet, perhaps the notes speak for themselves, perhaps even more faithfully than fickle memory? I do think that some explanation is required, but what I want you to understand is that the notes themselves are true, they are as close to truth as any of us can hope to get. Therefore, understand that it was American Thanksgiving, a holiday of Competitive Family Obligation. Families feel obligated to come together, to cook large meals, and to talk. As near as I can tell, they compete with their neighbors to fill their driveways and streets with parked cars, to fill their dinner tables with people and food, and to generally appear to be bountiful in the Thorstein Veblen sense. This, of course, is only my preliminary observation, as I have not actually lived in an American city since I was four and a half. In any case, my family is ill prepared to compete in such displays of bounty due to a family tradition of late breeding and accidental death.

Harold, my grandmother's brother, was one such accidental death.

"Harold was a homosexual, you know," she says as if we had never figured it out, although perhaps referring as an accident to a death by depressive drinking following that of his own lover's is too simple. The point is that my grandmother says this in a conspiratorial manner, and in fact there was a conspiracy, as my mother explains to me: At ninety-three, Harold's mother, my great grandmother, wished to visit him before he died. His sister, having obstructed things as much as possible, finally revealed what she believed to be her trump card. To their conservative Christian mother, she shouted, "You know that Harold is a homosexual, don't you?"

She had apparently forgotten all the Thanksgivings and Christmases when Harold had invited his "friend," whereas not all Christians had forgotten the Doctrine of Forgiveness. With this in mind, I thus present to you my notes from this last Thanksgiving, as I took them down.