

CORDA EBY

*Metal Pot with Yellow
and Red Flowers, 2006*

Oil on panel, 18 x 24 in



COURTESY WINFIELD GALLERY

CHRISTIE COCHRELL

Vagaries

Dinah was on a dogged hunt for Aunt Jane's recipe for purée Léontine. The day was sodden gray, as the past several weeks had been, and she had her heart set on the green soup—the concoction (wonderful word!) of springlike things that always raised her spirits. Green peas and lettuce; spinach, leeks, parsley, and mint. She'd exhausted the cookbook shelves, checking inside each book in turn and there finding old tickets for Midsummer Mozart and a flyer for an exhibition of Leonardo da Vinci drawings at the Legion of Honor in 2008, as well as a pressed petunia that had lost its deep indigo color and half its petals. Then she remembered she'd stuck some handwritten recipes into her battered copy of *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management* in the alcove between the kitchen and bathroom.

On her way to find it she stopped dead in her tracks—transfixed by the red Christmas cactus, in wholehearted, gladsome bloom. *Transfixed* was not a word Dinah used lightly (or actually at all), but it was a word Sally Larkin, her seventh-grade art teacher, had used one snow-muted morning about a painting she showed them of a rhapsodic Saint Sebastian, nude, against a marble pillar, in one of the big glossy art books she propped upright on the old wooden drafting cabinet between a coffee can of paintbrushes and an Archaic terra-cotta goddess with her features blurred in a way Dinah so identified with, even all these years later, seeing herself as oddly blurred as well.

The fact that the cactus was blooming at the end of February, not at Christmas, did nothing to diminish her delight at its beauty, at the joyful fulfillment—and much more!—of its plantly mission. Its sense of time had always been a little off, since it was no more than a baby shoot. She remembered the chilly Christmas Eve she'd carried it home in a jam jar swaddled in her gray-striped scarf and gently tucked into her deep winter coat pocket. Unmarried then, she'd eaten good New Mexican posole spiced with chile pods and cumin and oregano with Edna Avery, who once taught Dinah piano. The persistent tardiness of the cactus had endeared it to her, a fellow tardy soul, besides its being Edna who had given the cutting to her. Grown-up Dinah marveled that her teachers, wise and adult, should want to be friends with her, once they were no longer obliged to ask her to *try those triads one more time, dear*, or not to use so many exclamation marks in her