

ALAN FELTUS

What Thoughts Do They Hide, 2010-11
oil on linen, 39 ³/₈ x 47 ¹/₄ in.



COURTESY FORUM GALLERY, NEW YORK

DORIANNE LAUX

Heart of Thorns

The two young women in the house across the way are singing old world songs, ballads dredged up from our own muddy history, tragic myths of peril, Loss and betrayal, harmonies slipping across the paint-flaked sills of the open window like vapor, drifting up into the unfolding cones of the pines where the scarlet tanager, flame of spring, decked out in his blood-red body and jet-black wings, answers with his territorial *chick-burr, chick-burr*, as the girls trill through a series of Appalachian blue notes and sliding tones, one strumming an African banjo, the other plucking a blonde violin.

They seem unreal, though I can see the fact of them through the glass, their tumblers of iced tea, the heads-thrown-back of their sudden laughter. I like to think they have always been this happy, though I know they must have felt alone, the last of someone they love burning out like an ember, a distant star—*Barbara Allen, The Wayfaring Stranger*—but I also know they must have seen a miracle like the doctor removing the bandage from my husband's damaged eye, the new world rushing in.

Does the artist live to commemorate? Do the birds long to sing? And how far have we all traveled to get here where a summer breeze unleashes the scent of wild lavender and lily of the valley, where every unmarked grave is covered with a carpet of sweet alyssum, where the mother tanager sings her softer song from the crowns of hemlock, death plant made poisonous when the blood of Jesus seeped into its roots: woomlick, devil's flower, and gypsy flower, Break-your-mother's-heart.

Dorianne Laux's most recent collections are *The Book of Men* and *Facts about the Moon*. She is co-author of a handbook on writing, *The Poet's Companion*, all from W.W. Norton.