

On Rodney Cantrell's *It's a Bull-Market* Drawing

By Christopher Winn

January 30th, 2021



When titling an artwork, it is ideal to give it a name which could be inferred even in its title's absence, not unlike a person who is manifestly deserving of the name their parents chose. And this is precisely what Mr. Cantrell has done with *It's a Bull-Market*. The unsettlingly acerbic intent of the piece sears the beholder with immediate urgency. Reading the title is practically an afterthought, but one which cannot fail to provoke an utterance of "of course!" under one's breath.

The beastly eroticism of the piece—ample human breasts and petite human limbs juxtaposed with the bovine—strikes the male beholder with a twinge of accusation. One wonders if this is or was a woman, whose distortion is due to the beholder's commodification of her? Her gartered, four-legged position, coupled with her distinctly inhuman eyes and gaze, conjures prostitution—yet, as with that "oldest profession," one ultimately ponders what monster would accept this invitation, rather than dwelling on the monstres that offers.

Yet the Yeatsian slouch suggesting movement, the fact that the head is a bull's rather than a cow's, and the reptilian tongue which dangles from her mouth makes one hesitate to put too fine of a

feminist point on it. This critique employs something more than secular ugliness; its symbol is downright devilish. Goya's late "Black Paintings" are the first comparable which comes to mind, but de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal* illustrations are perhaps the closest relatives. One would not be surprised at all to find this creature is a study after some denizen of grimoire demonology.

From this one might infer that its use of livestock commodification and female objectification cannot be confined to a woman or women entire. What we are being confronted with is of a greater scope; it is the whoredom of *transaction* itself, not just a particular kind. Here, All has effectively been rendered a great auction wherein "everything must go"—even, or perhaps *especially*, human lives.

Like all good symbols, Mr. Cantrell has gilded his with misdirection—not unlike that great enemy of all things demonic who taught in parable so that only those "with ears" could hear. If the viewer finds only an erotic bad conscience herein, it is likely due to a narcissistic fixation, for there is far more to glean here than the affairs of one's own bedroom or wallet. Yet those are certainly involved, for each of us, Mr. Cantrell seems to submit, have contributed our petty lucre to this Bull Market which never closes or busts, wherein one is afforded a chance to gain the whole world, and the guarantee of losing one's soul.

The writer was given this drawing as a gift,
but offered to write this analysis of his own volition,
without being requested to do so.