

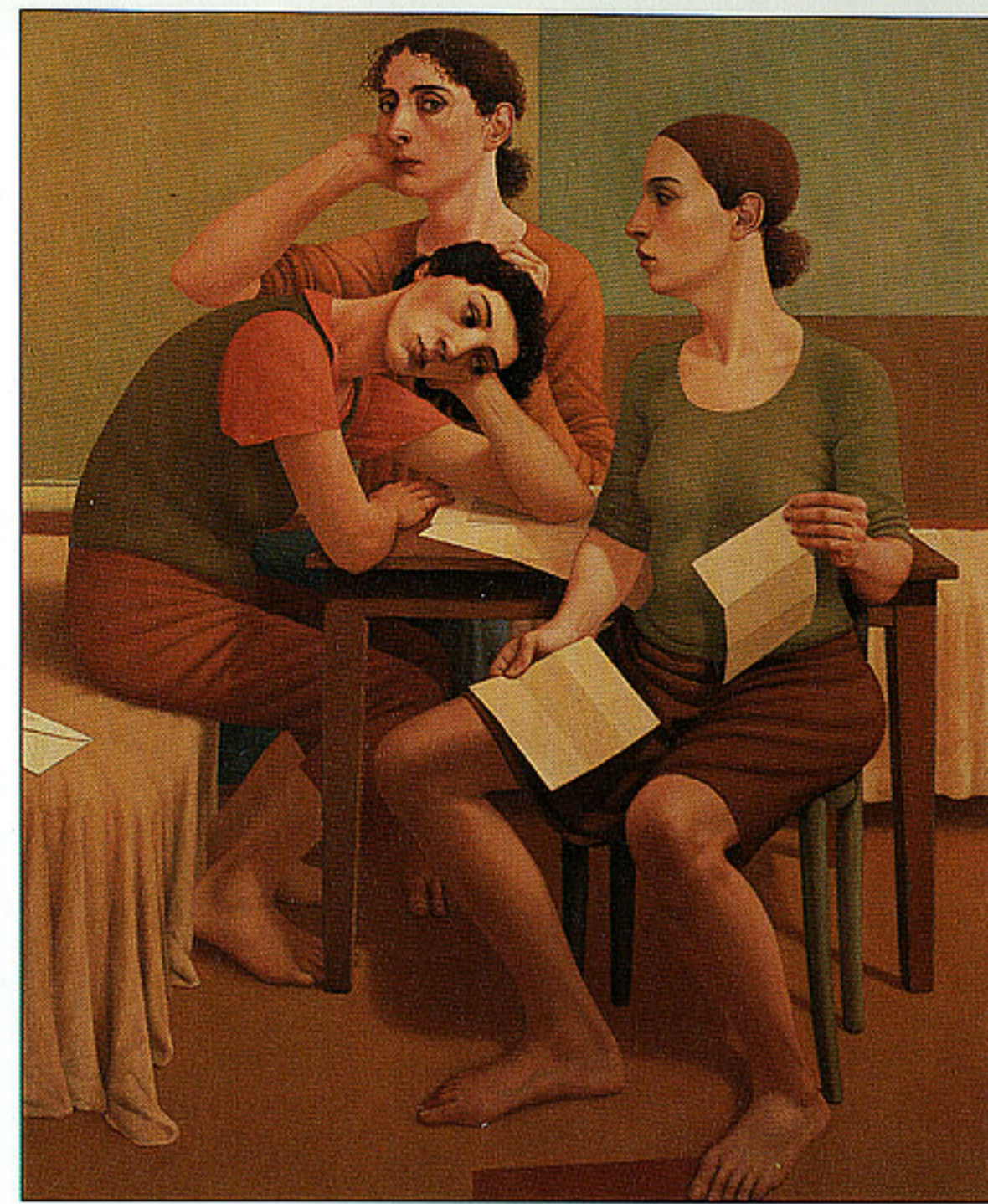
## Alan Feltus

Alan Feltus's contemporary classicism is rooted in his love of the Italian Renaissance, but his paintings are tinged with a melancholy that seems both modern and timeless. Born in Washington, D.C., in 1943, he has lived in Italy since 1987. His subjects are figures—most often but not always a pair—in simplified interiors, which are stripped down almost to the point of geometry yet retain a hold on the conventions of illusionistic space. Faces, male or female, have a stylized family resemblance, often with dark hair, downturned mouths and sideways glances; limbs are almost sculpturally smooth and characteristically bent into intriguing puzzlelike patterns. New oil-on-linen paintings exploring formal and psychological permutations of this milieu are on view at the FORUM GALLERY in New York City, October 21–December 3, 2005.

There are hints of myth and allegory in some of the work in the current exhibition. The trio of women in *Le Sorelle* (2005)—the title is taken from the Italian for sisters—could be muses or Norns or fates. They are more tightly



Alan Feltus  
*Morning Mail*, 2004  
COURTESY FORUM GALLERY,  
NEW YORK CITY



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grouped than usual in Feltus's work. The darkest haired of the three women, seated on a low couch, leans on a table with folded arms and tilted head, like a pensive Jane Morris in a Rossetti painting. But the composition's spatial ambiguity makes it look as if she were sitting in the lap of the woman behind her, a configuration familiar from Leonardo's *Madonna and St. Anne* (c. 1503–13). The third woman, sitting spread-legged on a chair beside them, holds a sheet of paper in each hand; she could be a kind of annunciatory angel. The duo in *Mute Sirens* (2004), sitting not quite side-by-side in rudimentary chairs, suggest two aspects of an enigmatic quality, like Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* (1514). Feltus is drawn to these enigmatic dyads, which suggest uncanny doppelgangers or relationships with complex backstories. Here, one woman is bare-legged and wears a simple white shift; the other—in a long-sleeved red dress, green stockings and brown shoes—holds a tightly folded piece of white paper.

In Feltus's paintings unspecified narratives hover in the air, and the inhabitants seem lost in their own separate worlds of memory. Elaborate iconographic schemes provided a context for Renaissance art work. Feltus's fictional spaces are closer to the domestic arrangements of the twentieth-century painter Balthus. The title *As Though by Themselves* (2003) exemplifies the intimate yet distanced relationships he likes to depict. One woman sits on a chair, a manuscript in her hand; the other crouches on the floor, her arms on a low