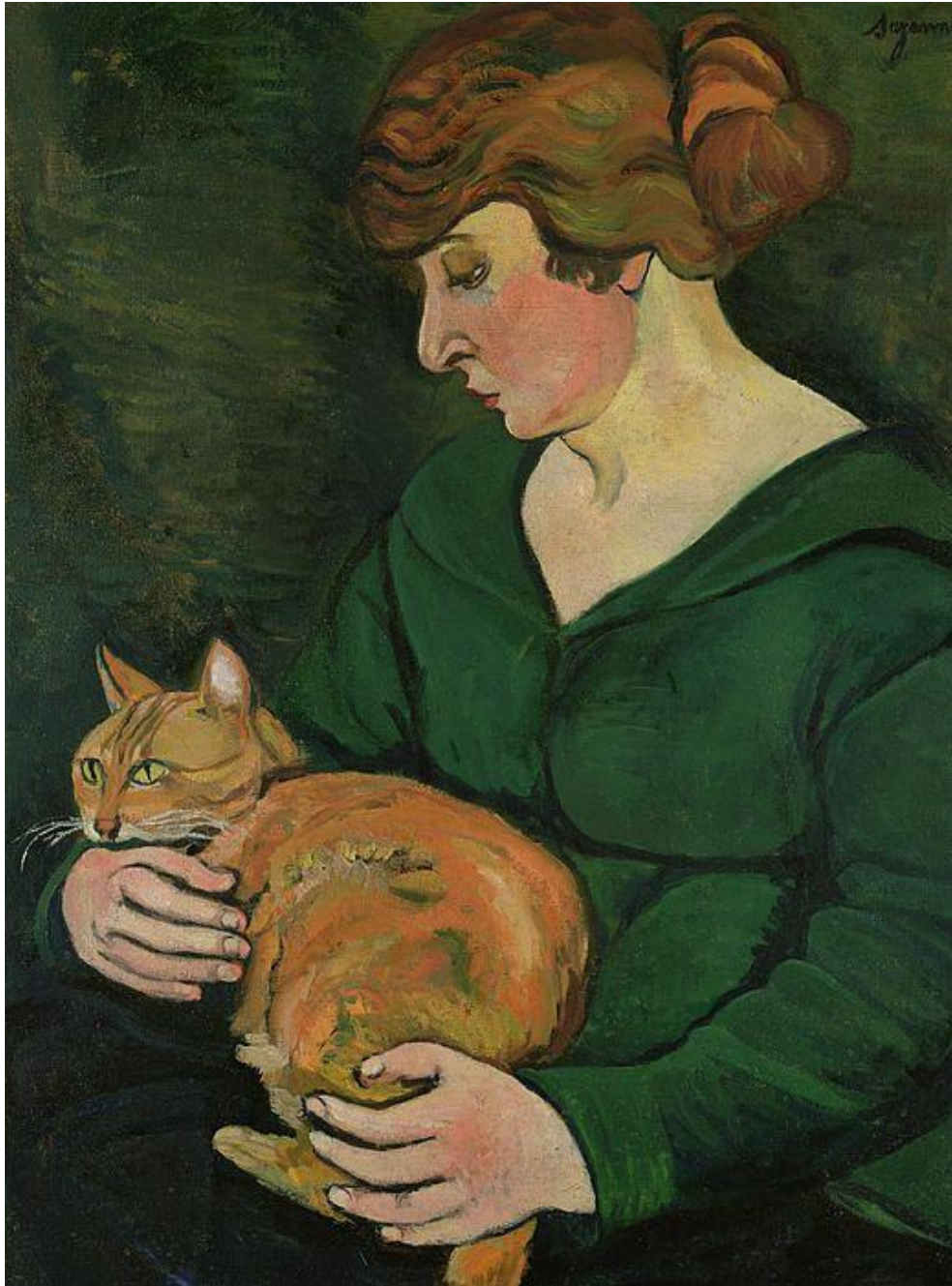


Suzanne Valadon, *Louison and Raminou*, 1920



**\*\*First Question First\*\***

What is *your* immediate reaction to this artwork?

Trust it. Write about it. Use the guide sheet for help.

Continue reading for another perspective and journal questions.

## **Suzanne Valadon, *Louison and Raminou*, 1920**

While I grapple with words to express the universe of animals in our lives, I look up to see a young fox trotting down our alleyway. A rare sighting. I am delighted at the synchronicity. And then three more follow. A family on their way to the creek down below. As I write, one of our cats sleeps unknowingly on my outstretched legs. Blue jays drink at our backyard water bowl. The blessings and beauty of non-human species. Fun, comfort, companionship. And wordless spirit, felt.

In this time of grief when words can fail us, living with animals and birds can feel like sanctuary. Our domestic family, always nearby, soothe and soften those rough times when all we can do is hold on. There is no holding back with them. They are our witnesses and confidantes to our worlds beyond words. Looking into their eyes is the language of spirit.

Our non-domestic friends come and go, with each visit experienced as a gift and perhaps the day's highlight. Their presence recalibrates our place – we humans – in the scheme of things. And, thus, our grief. No, it is not a lessening. But a widening of the aperture. We practice love beyond words with them. Just as we now must with the ones we grieve.

Q.) Write about your relationships with animals and birds during this time of grief. What is your common language?