

Antonia Brown
b. 1989, ZA
Lives and works in Brussels

Turning over forward

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When did you learn that the image of Virginia Woolf was not in fact your mother? Her unattainability, despite a certain resemblance, was not lost on you, nor the immense audacity that afforded her this positioning, barred to most. The blossom closes up again: How am I to be loyal to a blossom's demise, when. Everything that makes me has you burdened with recollection.

Silk tainted with natural dyes stretches along wood and metal skeletons, following an inherent organisation, just as the flower-shaped vignettes of sheet metal and paper reveal their delicate assembly only at second sight. I try and remember where I had read about this mother, who, in some dark hour, returned to Maria Callas as Medea. Not for the act she performs, but for respite. I can't find it. Antonia Brown attests to me in conversation how certain figures continue to stay with her, providing recourse over many cycles of work.

The *tournure* was devised in the 19th century, to be worn around women's waists. Here, it finds itself without dress, giving clues to the trim and voluminosity of the other works, which together figure a relationship about discipline and control. *Tournure* can also describe a turning point, like in the expression *tournure de phrase*. If the collage's origins point – as do stigmata – to an outside source of transmission, the bud-like silk sculptures appear to have grown from within themselves and are still in the middle of unfolding. They attempt an articulation over and beyond the forces that bind one to the laws of derivation. Derivatives, in western art, are usually thought of as something owing to another origin, lacking originality in itself. Still, they could be the search for a land, or a language (Fraser), to light on.

'It always takes long to come to what you have to say, you have to sweep this stretch of land up around your feet and point to the signs, pleat whole histories with pins in your mouth and guess at the fall of words.'¹

In Dionne Brand's words there is a divinitive essence in derivation. In other words, the language one is searching for is already contained in the very make up of the (spiritual) environment. This is a central theme in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. She has dramatised the struggle to define a life of one's own in the figure of a modern-day Medea. Her novel is

¹ Dionne Brand, A land to light on

based on a newspaper clipping of a run-away slave who is faced with an impossible choice, when the militia is catching up with her. To have her children grow up in captivity, or, to end their lives. Sethe, Morrison's character, will do everything, including the unthinkable. She won't return to Sweet Home, under any price, but she never quite left it: the site of her enslavement continues to entrap her mind. And yet, she clings to freedom. Her claim to transfiguration, however unlikely it may be, dares to defy the logic of trauma.

The enjoyment of linear time manifests itself as technology of suppression. All one is left with is melting two images into one, obsessively, until a new reality emerges. Like a ribbon, holding together that which would grow apart. There are the gestures. The mending and stitching, the bending and the tying. To speak through the sprouting and blossoming of organic bodies inevitably throws up questions of inheritance, as well as coercion. Who authors the prerogatives one is indebted to? Whose history is being enacted? Antonia Brown's immersive material technique constantly reformulates and renegotiates the means of affective reproduction, while calling upon alternative praxes of ordainment and invocation. Her work is an attempt at formulating a kind of sculptural hermeneutics, of gathering vectorial desire into transcribed offerings which bear the cuts and seams of their re-collection. Behind their hermetic self-identity hovers a furious eloquence, if not despair: Over the lie that upholds the pastoral summoning and without which the tools of sexual control would crumble. Since ownership of our categories – female and male, wild and civilized – is what enables the derivation of power, the painstaking surgery of their divestment is prone to failure. But this doesn't mean it isn't worth trying.