

Janine Antoni

LUHRING AUGUSTINE

Janine Antoni's spring exhibition at Luhring Augustine featured a striking group of seven cast-resin sculptures: quasi-surrealist amalgams of bones, body parts, and everyday objects (a flowerpot, a stool, branches, and so on). Inspired by the tradition of *milagros*, the votive offerings that are hung in Latin American Catholic churches to invoke protection and healing, Antoni's new work continues her decades-long exploration of the body and its psychological and spiritual dimensions.

In *to channel*, 2015, one of the show's most visceral pieces, an overturned flowerpot acts as a pedestal for the chance encounter of a skeletal pelvis and a human head. The head is upside down, and the pelvis sits on top of it, creating a union of body parts that brings to mind the moment of birth (and, by extension, the many transitions of life). *To compose*, 2015, meanwhile, puts sex and death in unsettling proximity: A woman's leg is entwined with that of a skeleton. Likewise, *to twine*, 2015, consists of a resin-cast straw mat, with two spinal columns pressing amorously against each other, like snakes making love. The spines-*cum*-snakes are genderless—they could be either male or female—and indeed, the embrace itself seems less sexual than ecstatic. For each of these works, Antoni spent weeks sanding down the resin, giving it a glassy, ghostly quality, rendering each piece a beautifully alien index of a body in flux.

Alongside the sculptures, Antoni presented a video: The nearly fourteen-minute-long *Honey Baby*, 2013, created in collaboration with choreographer Stephen Petronio. The piece features a naked man moving about a round, honey-filled space that is meant to suggest a uterus. Gliding with viscous fluidity, the dancer is simultaneously adult and child, sublime and sexual, his gestures both primal and graceful; at times, his poses bring to mind the pristine classicism of Robert Mapplethorpe's photography. The audio of *Honey Baby* is a sonorous panorama made up of 272 individual sounds, such as cardiac rhythms, that recall the noises one might hear in a womb. The experience *Honey Baby* evokes—that of being in utero, a condition we have all known but of which we have no conscious recollections—gives it a palpable lure: The video attempts to reach to us on a cellular level, in a primal place that is outside time.

Antoni's work lies between the body and spirit, addressing processes of incarnation and integration: the way in which we come into the world, and the way we move through it. Her work explores the body's relationship to other bodies and to its environment, describing corporeality as a vessel for the storage of gestures, sounds, and sensations. In contrast with, say, that of Louise Bourgeois, who mediated her experience of the bodily uncanny by focusing on emotions such as anxiety and anger, Antoni's approach to issues such as maternity, intimacy, and vulnerability is characterized by mature awareness and profound grace.

—Ida Panicelli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

Janine Antoni,
to channel, 2015,
polyurethane resin,
27 × 15 × 15".

