

ArtReview

Sarah Cain: *BOW DOWN*
By Andrew Berardini
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Is the ceremony about to begin or is it over? Sacred geometries angle and spiral across the surfaces of domestic effigies: a loveseat, striped, hearted and splotched; a wooden bureau patterned front and back holds a single vase of dead flowers; a vanity half in ghostly white and half blotched with color curves around a looking glass looking carefully prepared for divination. A single broomstick atop a latticed doorway bristles into a strange rainbow (*witchcraft*, all works 2015).



Beads and dollars dangle in offering. A naked palm dipped in white splays over the wall (*Palm Afterlife*). One profane portal, barred and feathered, has been contained with a hard mint cross (*mint green X*). The long back wall of the largest room in this bright temple stands painted and designed, an altar ready in its hues to take on the necessary ceremonies with a handful of pews facing it for pilgrims.

Everything stands prepared. Each of the shrines (paintings yes, but their dangles and cuts, inserts and protrusions, make them something more) bear the markings of colorful splatters, odd animals sacrificed or holy liquids spilt in offering. Split by a mustard strip that angles up onto the canvas stretched above, *loveseat's* polychrome heart, painted on the seatback, has a spray of blood-red dripping down into it, a human stain amongst all these hard edges. Spray-paint squiggles scar almost everything, but while illicit graffiti vandalizes with its rebellious spray, these profaning marks feel worked into the ritual. Franz Kafka's parable 'Leopards in the Temple' (pub. 1961) requires invocation here: 'Leopards break into the temple and drink the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes a part of the ceremony.'

A raw feminine energy makes these objects throb and glow. This is certainly a sanctum of priestesses and not priests, a monument to matriarchs. An exuberant femininity runs raw, almost too deep in its intimacy but protected by ancient forces, fearless of color. One stained cloth patterned in scrawled high-schooler's hearts looks like a post-coital love rag (and is indeed called *Love Rag*, 2015), but held aloft like a relic. Fucking here is sacred rather than a shadowy lust. The body here is the sacrament, not some crust of stale bread, but it is a woman's body, definitely alive and certainly spirited.

It isn't any of these things really except in metaphor. Literally it's an exhibition by Sarah Cain named *Bow Down* after a lyric (and pre-cursor track to) pop singer Beyoncé's raucous anthem *Flawless*, a tune that samples a speech by Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi

Adichie titled *We should all be feminists*. Beyoncé's feminism is hers. Her belief in equality doesn't limit how she can define herself or use her body. She can be as tough and dirty, as regal and forceful, as soft and sexy as she wants to be. The high priestess of religion she invented. And with polychrome witchery and corporeal force, Shaker psychedelia and leopard's carnal grace, so can Sarah Cain.