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Ones to Watch: Brenna Youngblood By Lanka Tattersall Summer 2015

Inspired by history and memory, Brenna Youngblood makes art from scraps of the past.

Brenna Youngblood mines personal, collective and art histories to make paintings, sculptures, photographs and collages that are richly tactile and politically resonant. In Youngblood's paintings, which frequently reach six feet in height, abstract fields of colour are repeatedly built up and stripped away so that the surfaces often appear worn and used, as if bleached by the sun or aged over a long period of time. Fragments of found materials are sometimes incorporated into her works, such as printed wallpapers, crumpled shopping bags, cigarette butts, or, in one work, a ragged tree-shaped car air freshener printed with the pattern of the American Flag. "I'm thinking about how icons are very important in our culture," Youngblood says of her use of symbols such as the flag or the faces of George Washington from the dollar bill, as in 2013's "3 dollar bill (dirty money)", a painting recently acquired by MOCA. In it, three copies of Washington's face, signed and licked by flames, float against a background loosely painted the colour of a dollar bill that has gone through the washing machine. Youngblood frequently describes her work in relation to the body. "I want to put my hand in everything," she remarks of her accumulative process. The lightly wrinkled paper she frequently adheres to the surface of her paintings "feels like human skin of an older person," she says with pleasure. Youngblood's affinity with historical elders is clear in her work, which expands on the collage and assemblage practices of older generations of artists ranging from Hannah Höch and Kurt Schwitters to David Hammons and Robert Rauschenberg. The art historical resonances of her gestures tether them to the past in a way that allows the forcefulness of their presence to be all the more electric.

