

Text by Michelle Staten after Kiki Smith's "Standing"

standing

maybe you are standing there, naked
on that tree, as some form of retribution.

perhaps it is for the sanctity of your body
and choosing individuality over safety

i've heard what they do to women
who are aging and shameless.

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I stand there, perplexed as I try to analyze how connected humanity is to nature. She cast the tree in concrete and she cast the woman in concrete, both transcribing the mystery of life. She cast two beings at the end of their lives, commemorating their existence.

I've been thinking so much about death lately. What it might feel like and what it would feel like to not remember. I wonder how the woman featured in the statue felt, knowing her figure would outlast her.

I've also thought about how much emphasis society has placed on people who aren't male to conform to some strange notion that our evolving appearances are wrong or unworthy of acceptance and love.

I am renewed by the evidence that a woman can exist outside of the gaze that haunts us and be seen as a full human being when so many have been shamed for embracing their authentic selves.

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if they cannot sustain their objectification of you
they will inflict their judgement as they cast stones
which surround you as a reminder that
accepting your natural being is a form of resistance.

maybe that is why you are prodded on the wrists
a Holy Lance
on either side, so that there will be no resurrection
for the feminine—

because vulnerability is subjugation.

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The first time I learned about Christ on the cross I was a child in Sunday school.

They surely talked about it while I was in preschool, but I probably didn't comprehend what that all meant. I'm sure I knew I was supposed to sit there and listen.

Your presence takes me back to that story, the way your arms are spread out beside you. And I pictured Roman men, stabbing at your wrists to see if you are still alive after what you have been through. I don't consider myself religious, perhaps it's the way vulnerability shines through you that reminds me of Christ.

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a cleansing of your autonomy
your oppressors do not realize the magnitude of will and
forget their origin.

they forget the water, womb, the blood—
the cosmic body

the drum of the heart and
the vibrato of voice
the folds of skin that proudly display your history.

they forget
the muscle may atrophy
and your face maps crucifixion
but still you bear the weight into your heels,
grounding yourself to what seems like
a stake of eternity.

they forget that the cosmic body is everlasting
that the meek shall inherit the earth,

that is why they invaded your skin
with stars of their own.

Inspired by Stuart Collection: Standing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4YCVoaH2S4&t=4>

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