Within by Janine Antoni

AN EXHIBITION INCLUDING A VIDEO COLLABORATION WITH STEPHEN PETRONIO
MATTRESS FACTORY, THROUGH MARCH 2014

On the first floor, two massive, displaced maple stumps—one on the ground, the other suspended from the ceiling. Enmeshed within the sprawling roots, a couple of spines intertwined on the floor in an embrace. One tree trunk penetrates the ceiling into the second-story floor and grafts onto the table leg above it. Repurposed trees made into elegant, austere tables. On top of the tables, hollowed-out body parts—shimmering white heart on bent arm, breast in mouth. The umbilical cord has been cut. Earth has been shaped into vessels and hardened with fire: Gertrude, Martha, and Mary. Small, medium, large—there is no porridge. The house is the body. The body is our home. We transform ourselves to create life. Things are altered and reshaped. The three floors are trimesters.

On the third floor the moving image of an adult body in a long industrial tube like the interior of an empty tar drum. At the end of the tube, a brilliant, warm yellow light illuminating a male figure's glistening silhouette, which floats slowly within the enclosure as if in a womb. Honey dripping. There is a constant whirl from inside the womb, interspersed with occasional segments of a heart beating. Brought closer, the image becomes more abstract and, along with the torso, an occasional hand or foot stirs like a fetus in a sonogram.

Large dark masses with a yellow-orange glow, shifting, just barely out of focus—the inside of a volcano or a furnace; molten lead or liquid gold radiating rhythmic warmth with each slow movement of the figure. Breathe in.

Then the outer light fades. Only the body is visible, as if at the earth’s core or in the bowels of a steel mill, the place of creation. Out of lush black coal, the body emerges as a luminous, golden solid.

In Janine Antoni’s Within, the interplay of the industrial with the organic acts as a metaphor for the building of a human: there is the sensual but there are also the mechanics of what goes into the production of life—the sexual act of making, the piston, the sound emulating not only the pleasant drone of amniotic fluid, but also the constant hissing of a machine. Waves lapping on a shoreline, the boring of an underground tunnel, the steady, rhythmic pulsing of the heart all blur into a state prior to language—where sensation is paramount and thinking isn’t required.

—SCOTT TURRI is based in Pittsburgh but spent his formative years in suburban Philadelphia. He has cultivated a range of artistic engagement: from punk rock to painting, from art rock to writing for Arthopper.org and Afterimage magazine, and work in experimental video.
above and opposite: Graft (details), 2013, maple tree, maple table, urethane resin. Images courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine Gallery.