

# Sant'Andrea de Scaphis

**PRECIOUS OKOYOMON**

*the sun eats her children*

**OPENING: JUNE 19, 2023**

*The World Is Breaking in Flowers the Breath of Things*

Our love is a blue instant and forward-looking sky  
Every dream is a moment of freedom

Bliss hovering above the void

Resonate darkness can't be bound  
It's always being born

Ash in hand

Myths arise where it sets  
Knowing there is fire  
Knowing there is war

Cities rising and falling

A small black river flowing  
The speed of darkness  
Everything burns repeatedly

Return back to the umbilical tongue  
To vesicles of present breath

Swallow bits of tenderness  
Bring yourself back to the earth

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Within the walls of the deconsecrated church, bird song, the drone of insects, and the silent noise of soil underfoot, become one sound, thick and mysterious. Jimson weed, Lantana, Bitter nightshade and Stinging nettle are wrested from the earth by the umbilical tug of the sun's trembling light. Each species selected and cultivated by Okoyomon is united by a single natural property: the ability to produce poison. As Georges Bataille explained in his 1927 essay *The Language of Flowers*, "even more than by the filth of its organs, the flower is betrayed by the fragility of its corolla: thus, far from answering the demands of human ideas, it is the sign of their failure." Okoyomon too is interested in the antagonism these plants assert to the increasingly epistemic, and in Okoyomon's vision dangerously misguided, idea of nature as passive and vulnerable. Here, the flower, an image freighted with associations of purity, beauty, fertility and innocence is relieved of its symbolic burden, becoming only itself: tenacious, virulent, and formidable.

*Beloved*, a stuffed animatronic bear, is positioned gently lying on its side. It flutters in and out of sleep, and when it awakes it releases a terrifying scream. Its wooly pelt and howling call invoke the sacrificial. Joining the voices and breath of Sadiya Hartman, Okwui Okpokwasili, and Okoyomon in a single screech, the creature's vocalizations stand in stark contrast to the symphonic score composed for the installation by Kelsey Lu. The plush beast stares up at the sky as viewers look on to the figure's form from above, its prone pose suggesting submission. Clothed in lace underwear, the bear's unexpected perversity invokes the forbidden and deviant sexuality that suffuses our early experiences of childhood.

The most dazzling detail of the sun eats her children is the inclusion of a number of different species of butterflies with black morphology that will live, reproduce, and die inside of the church over the course of the show's duration. Titled *The Sky Is Always Black, Fort Mose* (2022), it references an 18th-century settlement of formerly enslaved Black people who escaped the American South to live in the then-Spanish colony Fort Mose in present-day Florida. In this work, the artist imagines the constant flight of the black butterflies as a metaphor for the fugitive life of enslaved and formerly enslaved people.

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Precious Okoyomon (B. 1993) is a Nigerian-American poet and artist living and working in Brooklyn, NY. Their work considers the natural world, histories of migration and racialization, and the pure pleasures of everyday life. In their practice, organic materials serve a dual purpose: they remind us of our violent histories but also celebrate nature's ability to adapt and flourish in the face of man-made crises. If their work continually asks us to listen to the natural world, it also contains warnings of what might happen should we fail to act.

They have had institutional solo exhibitions at the LUMA Westbau in Zurich (2018), the Museum Für Moderne Kunst in Frankfurt (2020), Performance Space New York (2021), and the Aspen Art Museum (2021-2022). They were included in the 59th Venice Biennale (2022), the Okayama Art Summit (2022), the 58th Belgrade Biennial (2021) as well as group exhibitions at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2021), and Luma Arles, France (2021). Major performances have been commissioned by the Serpentine Galleries, London (2019) and the Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2019). Their second book *But Did U Die?* will be co-published by the Serpentine and Wonder Press in 2023.