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iona rozeal brown

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AUTHOR: REBECCA DIMLING COCHRAN

09.25.10-11.06.10 SALTWORKS

Having first garnered attention for her "a³" series, 2001–2006 (the three a's stand for "afro-asiatic allegories"), iona rozeal brown is well known for exploring the appropriation of hip-hop culture by Japanese youth. This early work was marked by a representational style with colorful yet flatly painted surfaces influenced by Japanese woodblock prints. While her more recent output retains much of that style, her subject matter has expanded to take a more global look at the negative influence of hip-hop culture on young women.

The artist conveys this concern through a complex mythological narrative woven throughout the paintings. She traces the journey of a few adolescent girls during the treacherous transition to womanhood, with hustlers and material culture constantly tempting girls to stray from what they know to be right. Her complex cast of characters includes these adolescents, whom brown refers to as "saplings," and those who revolve around them: older female "deities" who watch over them; female "warriors" who protect them; and both male and female "villains" who expose them to various vices.

In a *children's story*, 2009, the male demon "E.I.N." (everything I'm not), disguised as a seductress, and his accomplices the "hoochie putti," evil cherublike figures with engorged breasts and buttocks, try to coax the young sapling "anna mei" into life as sexual object. In another work, *the council of voices speaks* ("that's it, i got it, i'm gone"), 2010, the deities sense danger for one of the saplings and they dispatch the warrior "yoshi" to protect her. Hip and engaging, the paintings present visual parables about the temptations that face today's adolescent girls and the community that is needed to protect and guide them to adulthood.