

HOMEWARD: A Fictional Response to Forebears by Mark Raymer

The following is a fictional response to Mark Raymer's work "Forebears," from the show Pinch/Punch at Beco Flowers in February 2017.



The rain is finally starting to let up. My hair is slicked fearfully against my cheeks as I make my first sinking steps at the base of the mountain. At first, the gentle floral prints are inviting and kind to my bare feet. But I can see, even from here, in the pieces stitched together forming the quilt of mountain peaks above, there are coarser fibers ahead. I touch the ground, I feel how it is woven together, the threads pulsing and weaving all the way to the top. I am here, almost. I press on.

I wade the river of thread, traverse canyons where paisley meets plaid. I flatten my body, hide from the moon's looks. I bury myself here, in the ridges.

The moon can't be trusted, really. It turns on me, showing me its darkness. I make measured confessions in the bed of cotton. The moon is looking the other way; for a moment, I am safe. I whisper into the fibers. I speak what I need. There is a lot to be thankful for here, on the quilted mountain, but there is anxiety bound up in every seam.

When I left, she said, "You cannot decide where home is."

I replied, "Today, there are new colors."

By night, I sleep wrapped in soft stitches. By day, frayed edges fumble my footing.

I could pinpoint the day the cicadas stopped. It is harder to sleep, now, when I can hear all the small sounds their collective buzz had cloaked.

My hair is growing long, my feet tough. I come across new fears every morning.

I find a skull. What if a skull symbolized immortality instead of death? I think about dying here, decaying here, and I selfishly pray it won't happen, because I don't want to fertilize fabric flowers.

As I dig my fingers into the green cliff, I look up: red giants blooming in the sky, a satellite blinking messages from home. I close my eyes and hum. And climb. And I climb higher than the moon. It smirks and glances. "And what will happen when you reach the peak?"

I say, "Then I'll be there."

The moon is steady, "Mmmhmm. And then?"

I scuttle sideways on the cliff, and don't look back again at the moon. What was it that Brecht said? Never mind all that, just keep humming, climbing.

The turtle stuck its neck out as I passed, croaking, "The colors have always been this way." What do monks know, in their tombs lined with books?

I stand up in a clearing, suddenly finding myself surrounded by weeds. I had been so sure about the colors. But, somehow, they're just the same. The same familiar greens and browns. My hands are the same. My skin is the same. My eyes are the same. My hair is the same, but longer now.

I squint off into the distance, but there's nothing. No swooning opening of land against sky to inspire, no beams of sunlight to instruct, no savior, no solution.

The cactus speaks: "What now, what next, traveler?"

I look to the armadillo but it only looks back in silence, awaiting my answer.

"Away from the needles, into the thread."

The cactus looks disappointed. "That's fine enough for now."

What next? Mouthburn, unspent gratitude, a long drive, overworn patience, time-lapse flowers blooming, forsythia, gardenia, hyacinth, iris, jasmine, kalmia, lisanthus.