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## There is No Looking Glass Here

### The current exhibition at the Wall Gallery of Deutsche Bank



Andrea Chung, *Residue*, 2010.  
Courtesy of the artist



Bayeté Ross Smith, *Antoinette Cosway*. Courtesy of the artist

Bertha/Antoinette Mason is the so-called madwoman in the attic, a minor but enigmatic figure who plays a background role in [Charlotte Brontë's](#) 1847 novel, *Jane Eyre*. The character, referred to in the story as Mr. Rochester's "creole" wife, inspired [Jean Rhys](#) to write her book, *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Published in 1966, *Wide Sargasso Sea* tells the story of Antoinette's early life from a post-colonial Emancipation perspective: the drama of a white Creole who becomes broken by the anger and coldness of social repression from both black and white cultures. Rhys's many-layered short novel also provided the inspiration for the current exhibition at Deutsche Bank's 60 Wall Gallery in New York. Guest curator [Kimberli Gant](#), former Director of Exhibitions at the [Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts](#) in Brooklyn, invited 11 artists to explore the book and its themes, which include uprootedness, truth and perception, identity politics and racism. Titled *There is No Looking Glass Here*, the show presents a variety of works in different mediums, some of which were made especially for the exhibition.

[Andrea Chung's](#) work *Residue* is a dyed silk dress conceived as a metaphor for class difference and interracial mixing in Caribbean society. The heroine in the novel, Antoinette, comes from an impoverished family of former slaveholders and for this reason is shunned both by the wealthy white and the black population alike. Chung gradually stained a white dress with brown sugar—as a reference to the "caste system" contingent on skin color, which bears a heavy colonialist legacy, as well as the use of a product of the predominant slave industry of the Caribbean, sugar cane. [Derrick Adams's](#) sculpture *Hidden Entrance* addresses Antoinette's imprisonment on the property of her British husband, while the art photographer [Bayeté Ross Smith](#) created fictional travel documents for six of the novel's characters that imagine questions of ethnic and social identity.

With a conceptual twist, [Kenya Robinson](#) references the origin of the two main characters, Antoinette and Rochester, by overlaying paper cut outs of their two islands, Jamaica and England, in a kind of Rorschach symmetry that reflects the psychological underpinnings of the story. For his sculpture, *Anaruka*, [Charles Landvreugd](#) re-proportioned a classical portrait bust in shiny black enamel paint and adorned it with feathers and crystals—"creolizing it," so to speak. In Swahili, "Anaruka" means "to fly," and hence the work alludes to the traditional religious beliefs in Landvreugd's native country of Surinam: an "air spirit" transports the souls of the deceased to their maker. In both novels, Antoinette sets fire to the country residence in which she's held captive as a "madwoman" and jumps from the roof of the burning building. Landvreugd's work interprets her tragic suicide as an act of liberation. The title of the exhibition, *There is no Looking Glass Here* is a quote from Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, who feels caught in a world without perception and understanding, one which traffics in isolation and fear and resonates universally as the ultimate obstacle to freedom.



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## PRESS

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Charl Landvreugd, Anaruka 1, 2009. Courtesy of the artist



Derrick Adams, The Hidden Entrance, 2009-2010. Courtesy of the artist



Justin Randolph Thompson, Hoodoo Wackin', 2010. Courtesy of the artist



Elizabeth Colomba, Seated, 2007. Courtesy of the artist



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