

## ***Under My Skin***

Martín Soto Climént, Una Szeemann & Hannah Villiger

Opening: 21.05.22 from 16:00

21.05.22 – 16.07.22

### **Text by Leila Peacock**

#### *SKIN IN THE GAME*

There is a phrase that emerged between bankers in the 1980s, they spoke of having 'skin in the game'. The origin of this phrase is unclear but it has come to mean that one has risked something in an endeavour to gain something, that one has invested personally in a transaction, for what could be more personal than to wager your own skin? Though your skin is only the outer layer of a slimy medley of parts that make digesting, breathing, defecating, reproducing, moving, thinking and living possible, it is the skin we think of as *us*, and what's under it is just the mechanics, whirling away in a blood-dark gloom. The body's largest organ doesn't feel like an organ in the way that the others do, it's the only one we wear. It is ever-present in our perception of ourselves, several meters of finely tailored leather of the softest kind, waterproof, insulating, it stops us from evaporating like vampires in the mid-day heat

It's self-lubricating. It secretes a complex cocktail of sweat laced with pheromones that causes us to find each other unspeakably delicious. Every square centimetre indulges the tremors of a thousand nerve-endings, where pleasure and pain dance hand in hand. Embodied and embounded, both border and battlement. It is a place to be explored, a landscape to be traversed, a feast to be savoured. Protective and requiring of protection, it sheds itself like a snake, regenerating over and over. Your face is a replacement of a previous version of you.

The skin, its supple allure, its erotic folds and its sub-cutaneous thrills is the context for this exhibition. There are three positions on the skin presented in this show, sliced, segmented and sensual. But talk about skin in any art context and you will have to confront the 'nude'. That idealised evocation of skin, all surface and no sweat, all dimples and no dirt, no hair, no cracks, looked at but never licked. More often than not it is the female body that is treated in this way, left to soak up the one-way longing of the spectator's desire.

Hannah Villiger photographed the varied planes of her own flesh, producing images that have something of aura-photography about them. Using a Polaroid - that alche-

mist of cameras - these works are both metaphysical emanations and physical studies of her form, photographing herself, in an endless tango between the 'I' and the 'eye'. There is an unfocused immediacy to these images, enlarged over aluminium squares and nailed to the wall in perfect alignment creating modular totems of tantalisingly indistinct flesh. And yet despite this ordered display, we are privy to a bodily proximity reserved for lovers, you can feel her damp breath, feel her foot in your face, almost smell the odour exuded from these shadowy folds. Folds which both hold untold erotic promise and, in these works towards the end of her life, also document her own un-sparing exploration of her ailing body.

The skin is a record of its environment, a testament to the experiences of its wearer, though we have an unhealthy societal obsession with its tautness, managing and plucking at our faces, chasing a departing tension, like trying to re-stretch an old drum. Martín Soto Climent's works direct us from unfiltered nakedness back to the gazed-at nude, fetishistic aesthetics are sumptuously staged for the viewer's pleasure. A hairless, porny, framed section of a flayed sex doll displayed as a minimalist altarpiece, recalling those digital filters used for an unreal contemporary perfection. Flesh-coloured stockings seamlessly stretched over frames in an artful and intimate vortex that draw us longingly into their gyre. Despite their distorted form they are uncut, their simultaneous fragility and strength echoing that supple grace of the skin.

The third player in this ensemble takes us under the skin, giving subtle form to the subcutaneous. Und Szeemann's bed-shaped, life-sized sheets of copper, bend in supplication to their ghostly weight. All aura, the skin has metamorphosed, these shrouded forms are but traces of a writhing figure, snail-trails of sensation, shining haptic phantoms.

Amongst the legends of the Scottish isles there is a folktale about a woman whose husband died young, distraught she returned to his grave to steal his skin which she stuffed with magical herbs. Under the full moon she would sing to it and the skin would reanimate and dance with her until the song finished. These brief minutes of touch were enough to assuage her grief. Underneath it all we are all playing puppet master to the skins we inhabit, we are engaged in an enchanted animation of ourselves. And from all the many cultures who have practiced ritual mummification, we can say that in our imaginations it is the skin that dies last.

Leila Peacock (b.UK) is an artist and writer based in Zürich

With kind thanks to THE ESTATE OF HANNAH VILLIGER

Else v. Sick  
Stiftung



Kanton Zürich  
Fachstelle Kultur



Stadt Zürich  
Kultur

Fondation Nestlé  
pour l'Art  
partenariat

prohelvetia

Cassinelli-Vogel  
Stiftung