In The Flesh

Lesley Dill • Carol Hepper • Prudencio Irazabal • Dennis Hardon
Byron Kim • Simon Leung • Glen Ligon • Harry Philbrick
Hiki Smith • Jack Whitten • Jelma Zunz

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Freedman Gallery Center for the Arts Albright College
In The Flesh

In the Flesh explores a contemporary aesthetics of the flesh firmly located within the tactile surface of the work of art. Through the experimental treatment of materials, Lesley Dill, Carol Hepper, Prudencio Irazabal, Dennis Kardon, Byron Kim, Simon Leung, Glen Ligon, Harry Philbrick, Kiki Smith, Jack Whitten, and Telma Zunz explore the skinlike translucency, texture, and malleability of a variety of two-dimensional mediums and supports, including paper, canvas, latex, stretched hide, tape, resin, and wax. Analogies to flesh provide an array of metaphoric and poetic associations. Themes of containment and protection, exposure and disguise, pain and pleasure all allude to the role of skin in the evolution of human consciousness.

Artist Prudencio Irazabal notes that the verb paint derives from the Latin pingere, which also means to embroider and tattoo. This broadened definition links the origin of painting with acts of piercing, incising, branding, or other forms of surface abrasion. A brief journey into the roots of the verb pingere traces back to an ancient point in history where the act of marking did not entail coloring surfaces or representing objects or people as he has stated: “We are reminded of certain anthropological speculations which correlate the birth of painting to marks made on the human body - first as wounds, then as tattoos. Hence the notion that all painting, as well as all other artistic forms, are a projection and a reflection of the body.”

In their forthright exploration of the visceral through the formal properties of their artwork, the artists in this exhibition summon numerous art historical references. In the post-war period, the painter Willem deKooning explored a frank erotics of surface, stating that “oil paint was invented in order to paint flesh.” The encrusted surfaces of the post-war European matter painters, such as Jean Dubuffet and Alberto Burri, also signify the vestiges of human presence. Tattoo, Jim Dine’s 1961 fleshy pink oil painting with the word tattoo scrawled into its painterly field augurs in a more explicit connection between surface and skin. Like their historical antecedents, these eleven artists convert the tactility of the artwork into a direct correspondence with skin. Where their work differs is in the societal implications currently linked to the body and its flesh.

In the past decade, the human body has emerged as the central motif in Western art. Exhibitions such as Corporal Politics at MIT’s List Visual Arts Center (1991) and Skin Deep at The New Museum of Contemporary Art (1993), as well as the influence of such preeminent artists as Louise Bourgeois and Bruce Nauman provide visual counterpart to the discourse of leading cultural thinkers. As French feminist Luce Irigaray has observed, “In our culture, the predominance of the look over smell, taste, touch, hearing, has brought about an impoverishment of bodily relations...The moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality.”

Jill Snyder
Director, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art
Simon Leung, *Pearl*, 1987-92, mirror, scotch tape, skin under and around artist’s left eye, 10 x 14 inches

Glen Ligon, *Untitled (#1 of suite of 4 prints)*, 1992, etching, 25 x 17 1/4 inches

I FEEL MOST COLORED WHEN I AM THROWN AGAINST A SHARP WHITE BACKGROUND. I FEEL MOST COLORED WHEN I AM THROWN AGAINST A SHARP WHITE BACKGROUND. I FEEL MOST COLORED WHEN I AM THROWN AGAINST A SHARP WHITE BACKGROUND. I FEEL MOST COLORED WHEN I AM THROWN AGAINST A SHARP WHITE BACKGROUND.

Dennis Kardon, *Two Headed Hixon*, 1992, oil, 66 x 72 inches

Prudenzio Irazabal, *Untitled #7*, 1992, acrylic and urethane on lutradur, 18 x 18 inches
Lesley Dill, *Big Hair Suit*, 1994, horsehair, tea on rice paper, 56 x 33 inches

Carol Hepper, *Skins (Lemon)*, 1995, hide, lemon peel and wood, 18 x 14 x 2 inches

Harry Philbrick, *Diptych*, 1993, Pine needles in canvas with wax and pigment, 7 1/3 x 9 x 5 inches each panel

Telma Zunz, *Untitled*, 1994, coffee and stitching on paper, 10 x 8 inches
Byron Kim & Glenn Ligon, *Black and White (version #1)*, 1993, oil and wax on 32 wood panels, 10 x 8 inches each

Jack Whitten, *Mask: Reclamation*, 1995, black walnut, acrylic on unstretched canvas, 8 x 8 feet approximately

Kiki Smith, *Flesh*, 1994, collaged lithograph on Nepal paper, 39 1/2 x 20 inches
Acknowledgements

In The Flesh was curated by Jill Snyder, Director of The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art in Ridgefield, Connecticut. The exhibition will be seen in an expanded version at The Aldrich Museum from January 21 to May 5, 1996. Ms. Snyder was my immediate predecessor as director of the Freedman Gallery. I am grateful to her for organizing this project, for her generous assistance in the presentation at our gallery, and for her concise and insightful essay in this brochure.

I would like to thank the members of the Freedman Gallery staff. Ted Mason and Nancy Sarangoulis, Preparators, Kelly McDonough, Curator of Educational Programs, Martha Barnes, Events Coordinator, and Lisa Korecky, Center for the Arts Secretary, represent a creative team. Like a coherent group exhibition, they work well together.

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Naturally, any exhibition of contemporary art is virtually impossible without the collaboration of artists and generous loans of their artworks. In this respect, I appreciate the contributions of all of the artists as well as the PaceWildenstein Gallery for lending material by Kiki Smith, the George Adams Gallery for Lesley Dill’s work, the Horodner Romley Gallery for Jack Whitten’s work, and the Max Protech Gallery for making available works by Byron Kim and Glen Ligon. I also appreciate the loan of Carol Heppeler’s True West from the collection of Hanny Frick. Ultimately, I am most grateful to the artists for sharing their acute perceptions. Together, their varying vocabularies form a cohesive anthology of the present dialogue addressing the motif of the body in contemporary art.

Christopher Youngs
Director

Albright College

Ellen S. Hurwitz, President
James P. Pitts, Vice President and Academic Dean

Freedman Gallery

Christopher Youngs, Director
Kelly McDonough, Curator of Educational Programs
Martha Barnes, Events Coordinator
M. Theodore Mason, Preparator
Nancy Sarangoulis, Preparator
Lisa Korecky, Secretary

Gallery Hours

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, 12-6pm
Thursday, 12-8pm
Saturday, Sunday, 12-4pm

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