

liverpool

Sk-interfaces

FACT

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The skin is a social, political, cultural, philosophical and moral object and also the biggest organ in the human body. Described as the place of inscription of the law in primitive societies by Pierre Clastres (1) and as one of the homes of the self by Didier Anzieu,(2) this skin, which today is cultivated, has again become one of the major symptoms of modern societies. Organized by Jens Hauser around a problematic, and not a particular technique, *Sk-interfaces* brings together seventeen artists who give form to these symptoms in works with very diverse forms, aesthetics and mediums.

If there is a skin that is freighted with moral significance, it is the hymen. In *hymNext Hymen* Julia Reodica cultivates the fragile membrane using cells from her own vagina on round metal forms on which are sculpted various symbols that leave their mark in the tissue. A symbol of infinite re-virginization, these artificial hymens are sealed in small transparent boxes and presented in highly worked chests. In a simple, acerbic gesture, Reodica evokes the subservience of women, and the current possibility of virginal reconstruction, and places the hymen among the precious objects of a bygone age, for a cabinet of curiosities.

It is the skin as symbol of a cultural identity and purity, and also of the species, that Orlan pulls apart with her *Manteau d'Arlequin* (Harlequin's Coat). This installation is made up of Plexiglas lozenges assembled in the form of a coat, with videos of cells and cultures combined with cells from the artist, taken from people of different ethnic origins and other species. The head of this Harlequin is a bioreactor in which the same mix of cells is busy growing away. Here Harlequin becomes a metaphor of permeability and multiculturalism.

To make the skin into a garment used to protect oneself means, in practice, removing that of another. *Roadkill Coat* by Art Orienté Objet, (3) a fur coat made of said roadkill, and *Victimless Leather* by TC&A,(4) miniature clothes made from tissue culture, question our contemporary ideas about this second skin that we have worn for so long.(5) *Victimless Leather* evokes the utopia of trying to make leather—and “usable” leather, too—without any animals being killed in the process. The striking thing about this work is that these “clothes” bring to mind dolls' clothes, taking us back to the world of childhood where everything is possible, including the dreams that, as adults, we know to be illusory.

The image, too, has become a skin, the skin of the world. *World Skin: Safari Photo au pays de la guerre*, an immersive and interactive installation by Maurice Benayoun and Jean-Baptiste Barrière, deploys a dialectic between the media that give us access to the world and filter it at the same time, between an image that is only an image and representation but that becomes a reality, between the beating of our hearts and the din of battle.

Several common themes run through these works that would ideally all merit description: the idea of a skin that is no longer the surface and limit between interior and exterior, self and others, visible and invisible, but a moving interface that is constantly being reconfigured, a constructed and constructible skin; that of a (re)materialization of art in a new, fluctuating materiality and, finally, new political and ethical questions. The skin is also touch and those tiny bits of ourselves that we inadvertently leave on the world (and that it leaves on us), like the traces of our hands on the thermo-chromic wall *Touch Me*, or on the cover of the exhibition catalogue designed by Zane Berzina.

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(1) By means of tattoo and scarification. Pierre Clastres, *La société contre l'Etat*, Paris: Ed. de Minuit, 1974.

(2) Didier Anzieu, *Le Moi-peau*, Paris: Dunod, 1995.

(3) Art Orienté Objet is a duo comprising Marion Laval-Jeantet and Benoît Mangin.

(4) TC&A (Tissue Culture and Art) comprises Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr.

(5) We still use it of course, if not as fur, then in the form of leather.