

BLOUINmodernpainters

ART / ARCHITECTURE / DESIGN / PERFORMANCE / FILM

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2016

**PIPILOTTI
RIST**

AN EXCLUSIVE
PROJECT

**DONNA
HUANCA** >

SKIN IN
THE GAME

**MARNIE
WEBER**

CASTS
A SPELL



**JIMMY ROBERT
MARC CAMILLE CHAIMOWICZ
SAM MCKINNISS**

DARREN
BADER'S
WEIRD MARKET





A model performing during "Muscle Memory" at Peres Projects in Berlin, 2015.

Donna

Huanca's

LESS REST- BODIES

ephemeral

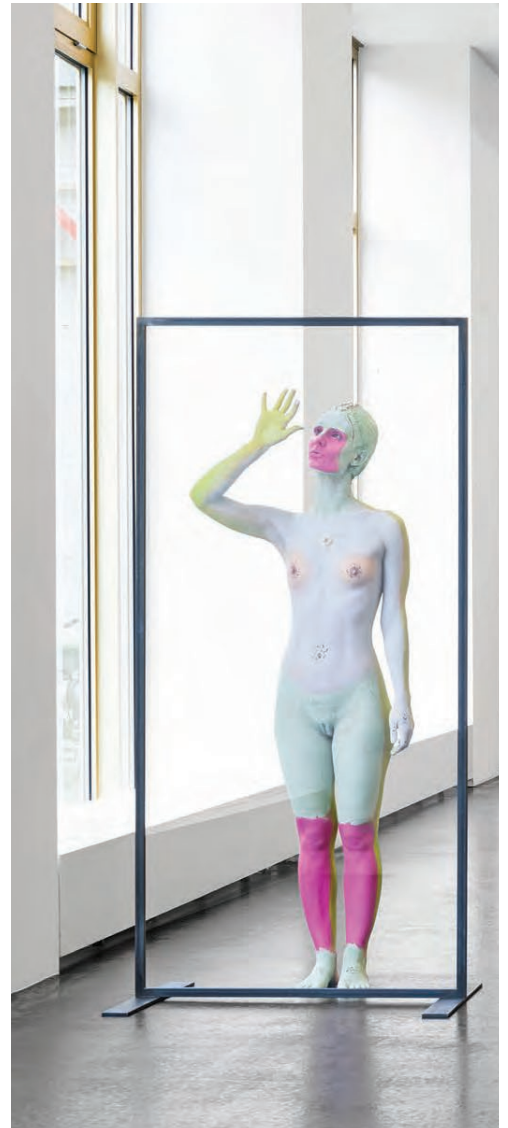
installations

BY TAYLOR DAFOE

HANS GEORG GAUL AND PERES PROJECTS, BERLIN

DONNA HUANCA'S site-responsive interventions often include live performers whose bodies are painted to resemble abstract canvases, used clothes & repurposed fabric, pieces of mirror or glass, and canvases printed with close-up photos of the performers. Her models move through and activate these installations, attaining an almost sculptural quality; meanwhile, the discrete objects positioned in the space accrue dirt and paint from their engagement with the performers.

The artist's latest commission—a three-month-long event with daily performances—is on view at the Zabludowicz Collection in London through December 18. Huanca envisions a work with multiple points of entry, a sound piece, & fragmented paintings. She spoke with Taylor Dafoe just ahead of the opening to discuss the project & her larger practice.



Installation view of "Muscle Memory" at Peres Projects, with live performers.



How and where do you source the clothing and fabric that you use? They have an energy to them.

I was nomadic for about six years, living out of my suitcase and working from all different cities. The first thing I would do to get to know a city would be to look for thrift stores and flea markets, getting to know the place through the clothes. Much of my practice isn't in the studio. It's about finding the pieces that lead to the works. I would wear a piece of clothing for a while and then I would make something with it. They're often pieces that mimic colors and textures that I couldn't paint, that I couldn't achieve on my own. A lot of my early works used clothing as a color source and a texture. On top of that, they bring all that history. Clothing has a life of its own. The owner infuses his or her DNA into it. There was also a practical reason—it was something that I could just pack in a suitcase and take with me. Then I started introducing live performances in order to activate the static artworks, and it slowly became about disrobing—making the sculptures more active than the models themselves.



FROM TOP:
catalyst (WET), 2016.
Oil, acrylic, and
pigment on digital
print on canvas,
74¾ x 56 in.

Serpierite, 2016.
Oil, acrylic, and
pigment on digital
print on canvas,
74¾ x 56 in.

Lorikeet Shadow,
2016. Oil, acrylic,
and pigment
on digital print
on canvas,
74¾ x 56 in.

Is this idea of bringing a history to the work similar to the way you choose your models? Do you work with people you have a history with?

I go through my community and ask personally, or ask people to refer others, so there's already a sense of who the performers are. But sometimes I'm in a city where I don't know anyone. For a show in Riga, Latvia, I didn't know anyone there and we were scouting at the dance school, and also at the art schools. There were a lot of dancers coming in pairs that wanted to do the piece together, but I chose two people who didn't know each other to introduce a new dynamic. There's a sense of sisterhood. While it's happening I'm holding my breath, aware of the performance, but also in a really protective state. What keeps me excited is knowing that I *don't* know what will happen; I don't know what they are actually going to do.

I always feel like the pieces are a collaboration. There's a lot of trust. After we do the performances I have the models write a statement, just to get to know the work better and to hear what they were thinking when the performances were happening. I've been a performer in other peoples' work too, and I understand that there's a sense of being out of your body when you're looked at for that long.

Do you consider the objects in the installations—the paintings and the fabric—works in their own right? Or do all the elements need to be combined to be complete?

I do think that they live on their own. The models engaging with the space is an extra interaction. I like that when the performances are happening the works sort of become peripheral, because you're focusing so much on the live element. It creates a tension. And then you can come through and look at the works without the models. Sometimes people tell me they're actually forced to look at the works harder because they don't want to be a voyeur looking at the models.

I'm interested in the role of skin in your work. What is your relationship to using it as a material?

We are all bound by this flesh casing, and we use clothing to conceal ourselves and as a signifier to communicate with others. Painting on canvas has never been interesting to me. Painting on a body creates a different type of tension and negotiation—there is a history that is inescapable on that end. I find it freeing to know my body paintings are ephemeral, that they will absolutely disappear, washed off at the end of the night, forcing a detachment and freedom. I paint on bodies using healing materials such as turmeric, clay, eggs, coffee, and sugar, as well as cosmetics and paint made specifically for altering skin. The difference between this and painting on a blank canvas is the connection I have with the people I am painting since I am letting them lead me—that tension leads the intuitive painting process.

Glass is also a recurring material for you.

I use glass because it is a "metastable" material, which mirrors the ephemeral quality of all my work. I want the glass to function as an attempt at containment—like a petri dish—an entombment or collection of energies and the past.

You reuse a lot of the materials from previous works, and after a work is done you often scrap it all or deconstruct it—not treating anything as precious. What is your thinking behind that?

I always found it troubling to be attached to any artwork that I make. It comes from an impulse of wanting to reinvent what I'm seeing all the time, and trying constantly to challenge myself. That's why a lot of the works are meant to be ephemeral, and not really contained. It's more about the experience of being there and having that time with the models, with the work—it's something that you have to experience live. MP

“We are all bound by this flesh casing;
we use clothing to conceal ourselves &
as a signifier to communicate with others.”



HANS-GEORG GAUL AND PERES PROJECTS

Still from a performance during "Muscle Memory" at Peres Projects.