



“It’s pretty trippy being in an artwork for so long”

Berlin-based American installation artist **DONNA HUANCA** creates spiritual terrains with clothing, plastic, canvas, makeup... and women. *By PENNY RAFFERTY*

Huanca’s new show with Polish artist Przemek Pyszczyk, *Muscle Memory*, opens at Peres Projects on June 27. During the opening, you’ll have the opportunity to see her installations interlocked with female performers painted and directed by the artist: twisting, rolling, reclining, manipulating the pieces live before your eyes.

If you were a male artist, some might say you were objectifying women with these works. Yes, but I am not a man. The women I cast are strong, fierce antagonists in the works. I tend to work with the same girls time and time again. The work isn’t finished until they have left the piece. This can be hours, days, weeks – it’s about trust, freedom and development. When I started I only cast dancers, who can hold their bodies for hours, but then I saw how much baggage they had. I had to break free of that. The same goes for the women who were just in it for the money, I found myself pulling them out of it, sending them home. But now I have this team, we have a relationship. It’s usually other female artists and students – they bring their own identity to the works. It’s pretty trippy being in an artwork for so long. At times it’s also meditative and inspirational. In my eyes, the girls complete

the whole picture. As an artist you often decide when a work is finished; with my method it’s never that simple – I never know how they will feel that day, what they will do and what the end piece will be. I do get them all to write statements afterward to deconstruct their experiences though.

MUSCLE MEMORY

Jun 27-Aug 8 | Peres Projects, Karl-Marx-Allee 82, Friedrichshain, U-Bhf Strausberger Platz, Tue-Sat 11-18; opening Jun 27, 18-20

What has come out in these statements?

They often write poems. Many girls have a cold, calculated approach to the piece – they observe the frame and insert themselves inside it visually and logically – whilst others have a really emotional response, internal struggles, testing themselves. I always have a place they can hide built into the piece, or they can go off stage, but many choose to see it through.

This time around you have works on canvas too right?

Yes, typically I paint the girls three hours beforehand and at times change the installation intuitively to fit them; the body paintings are crucial to the dynamic of the works. It was only natural to take the physical action from the girls onto the canvas. So I started experimenting with different makeup on canvas with very simple gestures and it just looked perfect! I have no idea how long they will last or age as pieces, but I have used the strongest pigments to create these abstract paintings. ■