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How Artist Donna Huanca Uses the Naked Body As a Canvas

– October 7, 2016 –

The Bolivian-American's extraordinary London debut, *Scar Cymbals*, invites viewers to immerse themselves in thoughts pertaining to flesh and skin through paint, discovers [Suze Olbrich](#)



Donna Huanca, *Scar Cymbals*, 2016 *Photography by Thierry Bal*

Text [Suze Olbrich](#)

Last week, on the cusp of Frieze, *Scar Cymbals*, the performance-led, multi-sensory London debut of Bolivian-American artist **Donna Huanca**, opened at the Zabludowicz Collection. The mesmeric, explicitly visceral show invites viewers to immerse themselves in thoughts pertaining to flesh and skin; bodies interacting within space; gestures and the behavioural conventions they arouse; memories, instincts and emotions engendered by the beholding of near-nude corporeal forms outside of standard surrounds – and infinite further such engrossing ideas.



The throb of bass, controlled by a model on a vibrating pedestal, ebbs through the door to the Main Hall as viewers cross the threshold into a post-human realm dominated by a site-specific, three storey glass structure that simultaneously recalls a stack of erotica-viewing booths, mannequin casings in shop fronts and a doll's house. The interplay between sexuality, violence and naïveté continues in the attire of the cast: bodystockings, cut severely, adorned with paint, latex, turmeric and clay. The encased models move laconically inside and between their cubic confines, one appearing to perform "artist model", reclining for an absent portraitist; another less animate, robotically poised, evades eye contact; yet another is more supplicant, forlorn. After a certain time, some of the structure's inhabitants begin to paint the clear material that separates them, and us, white. It's tempting to keep one's gaze drifting between these figures, but the eye is soon drawn to the centre of the room where a sole body, seemingly more constrained than those fully contained, is pacing slowly around a sand-filled meditation labyrinth whilst the model upon the vibrating pedestal covers their formerly nude nipples with paint.



Stepping into the second room, momentarily snapping out of the trance induced by that low throb, sound works triggered via infra-red are triggered by attendees moving between the paintings, installations and bodies within. The themes of blemished, coated and nude skin; of materials and the pain, comfort and arousal they can inspire are clearer here. Cloaked yet somehow barren sculptural installations bearing found fabrics, hides in natural, muted tones; show-ponytails, anal beads and debris beg viewers to stroke them. And two models dwell in this room too - static and almost totemic, by comparison with their Main Hall counterparts. A large-scale painting in vivid blue, perhaps calligraphy of an ancient, or future, language, demands less and is almost refreshing in its primary colour simplicity. Immersion complete. Depart.



Donna Huanca, Scar Cymbals, 2016 Photography by Thierry Bal

Donna Huanca: Scar Cymbals runs at the Zabłudowicz Collection until December 18, 2017.