

CULTURED

SPOTLIGHT ON: DONNA HUANCA

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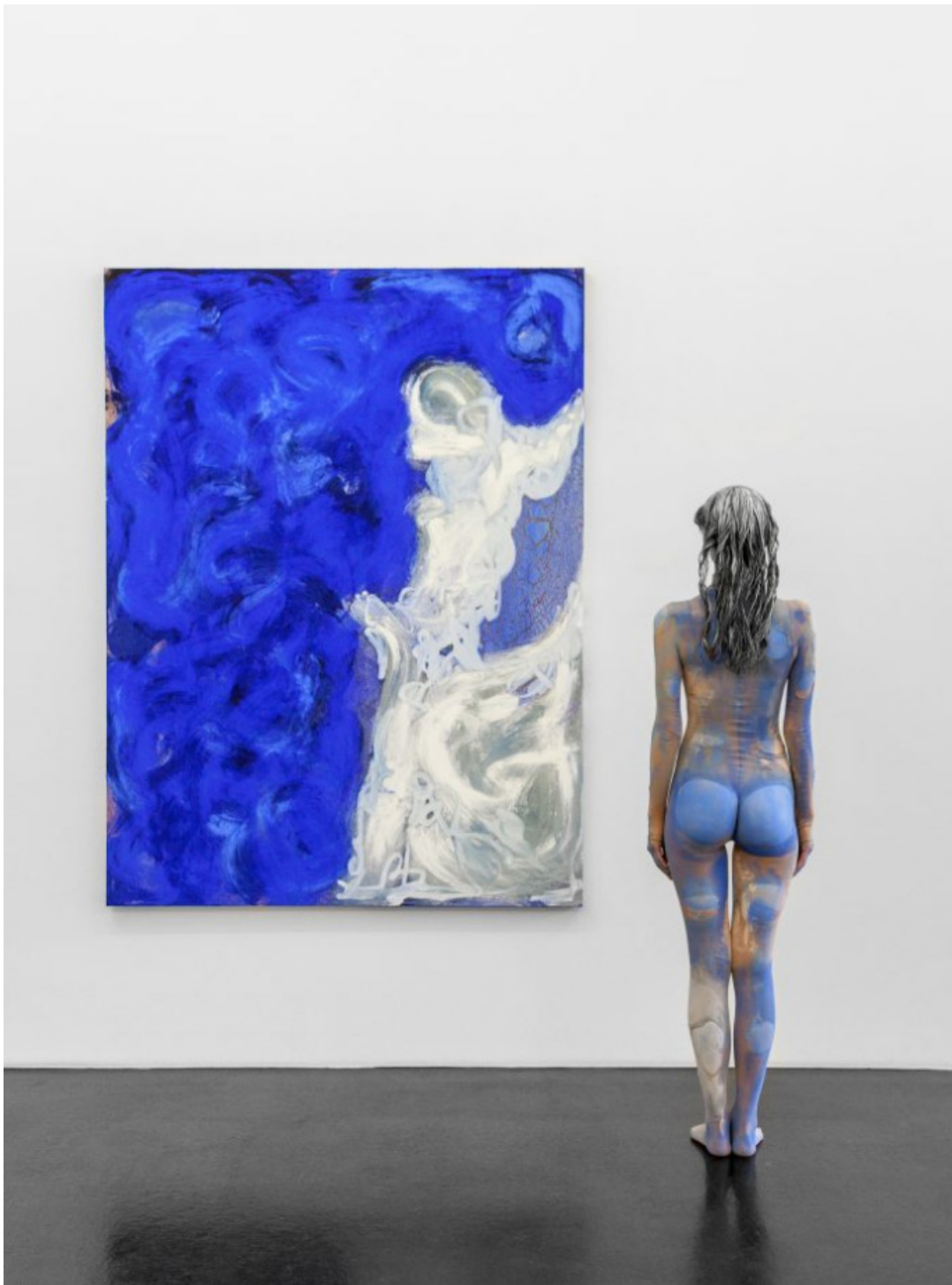


Performance view of "Donna Huanca: Surrogate Painteen," 2016. Photo courtesy of Peres Projects, Berlin.

Earlier this month, Donna Huanca's new show "Surrogate Painteen" opened at Peres Projects in Berlin. The gallery is populated by delicate sculptures, fields of gestural swaths of skin and paint, and nude performers coated from head to toe in rich color.

Contemporary art has a long history with identity politics. Huanca herself was born to Bolivian immigrants living in Chicago in the 1980s, but instead of giving us a biography that highlights her own experience, Huanca ventures in with a thorough exploration of what identity is. She plays with ideas about what comprises it, its translation and, transportation, and finally its fragmentation.

Complex sculptural compositions piece together personal minutiae like leather, cloth and synthetic hair to create totemic individuals of their own. These sculptures live beside human performers, dressed in a similar combination of materials with iridescent body paint thrown in the mix. Huanca's models wear her paintings like garments forcing the bodies to both perform and inhabit their identity. She uses skin as a surface and medium. Anything applied to this surface becomes armor, which either conceals or accentuates identity. Clothing is a central fixation beyond its connotation as a chief way to express our individuality, Huanca highlights the way we affect that clothing (or body paint) and how that tells a story about the body that lived within it.



Performance view of "Donna Huanca: Surrogate Painteen," 2016. Photo courtesy of Peres Projects, Berlin.

Similarly, her large scale abstractions made by the tranced performer's raw application of paint to enlarged photographic images of skin leave clues about the movements that transpired in its inception. Often the fleeting nature of performance as a medium hinders an artist's practice but, Huanca capitalizes on this. She leverages the disjunction between events and their aftermath in order to discuss a narrative about the fragmentation of identity in this age of globalization and exponential cultural syncretism. Her performers move glacially, like tectonic plates leaving marks as artifacts of their actions. On both a national and individual level, Huanca's environments tell complicated stories about the cultural transmissions that occur in the interactions between bodies and the surfaces they come into contact with.

On September 29, Huanca will continue this exploration in a large-scale solo exhibition at the Zabudowicz Collection in London.