

Donna Huanca brings art to life through body paint

Activated by naked bodies draped with latex, ripped body stockings, and slathers of paint, the American artist brings a metamorphosing exhibition to London



"SCAR CYMBALS", performance view, 2016
Courtesy of Donna Huanca and Peres Projects

Donna Huanca is an artist you may recognise for her use of painted naked bodies. Or perhaps from the cover of *Modern Painters magazine*. Represented by cult gallery Peres Projects in Berlin, Huanca's career has exploded in the past year. She is installing her largest show to date at the Zabudowicz collection. Standing on a raised platform, she directs her performers into different positions and shapes in a perspex glass box lit with bright white lights. Their naked bodies are draped with latex, ripped body stockings and slathers of paint. Their movements are somewhere between still relief and dancers, modelling and paintbrush. The NYC-based artist, who studied at Frankfurt's Städelschule, is entirely in charge of the show. The result is an exhibition activated by human bodies, resonating with some of the deepest bass you'll ever hear, and exuding swathes of muted abstract colour and figurative blur. She took a break to chat to Dazed about her site-specific show *SCAR CYMBALS*.

So much of what you do is figurative. What first drew you to the human body?

Donna Huanca: A lot of my works, in the beginning, were all related to clothing because I was nomadic. It was always about bundling up and carrying everything you own and have on your body. A lot of it was binding and hiding the body, and protection of the body. Slowly it started to disrobe and become about the skin. A blank canvas. When I'm painting on somebody, I'm having a conversation with them and then they lead the painting. Also, there's something about knowing that it's not permanent. Knowing that it's going to dissipate and change as a performance is starting that allows me to be free with the painting on the body. I want to give them whatever they need to achieve that focus because it's all about this really intense focus; it's shutting everybody else off.

Sound is a huge element in the show.

Donna Huanca: The first piece is a solo stage that is essentially a vibrational floor that I wanted it to be almost inaudible and it is really heavy bass. Because of the acoustics of the space, it's amplified. I design the sound to be very sub-lingual. There are these chaos pads which I used to use – I come from music, I was a drummer – you don't need to know anything to play them, it's all touch-based. The instrument in the back is triggered by your movement and infrared sensors. It was based on the idea of theremin and improvisation. I wanted to create the sound piece to be a very sensitive guide. The closer you get to it, the louder and the more bass-y it gets. If you walk around the perimeter you get a hint of sound. It's supposed to be a responsive piece for the audience but also there are the two performers who will be at the back.

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You've got latex, paint, skin, glass, a lot of translucence. What do you like about that materiality?

Donna Huanca: I feel like every time I make a new work, I collect; they're materials that I'm comfortable with and so they continue on to the next piece. Materials like skin, latex and things that goes into the body, like bondage stuff and anal stuff. A lot of the materials that are used on the body are meant to heal, so turmeric, clay, and coffee. The transparent materials are a false protection. They can go behind a lot of the latex and the materials are meant to house the body, sort of protect the body if they want to be hidden in a way.

Over time the show is very much activated – it's almost metamorphosing. What did you like about the durational thing?

Donna Huanca: I really think that art is dead. I'm really bored just seeing something that's the past. Very few things stay alive and in the end, it's paintings that I find can still really move me. Maybe I'm cynical or overwhelmed, can't sit still to pay attention or care about a lot of things – that's why I wanted to use live models because it's intriguing to me. There's a sense of freedom in letting go. There are materials that keep going and are morphed into new works but they also alternately are just discarded at some point. I'm not attached to the way that things are, it all comes together in this alignment and it just dissipates.



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Donna Huanca is showing at the Zabłudowicz Collection until December 18. A special performance at the space takes place during Frieze Week on October 7 from 6-11pm