

PRESS KIT

DONNA HUANCA

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Donna Huanca's immersive 'MAGMA SLIT' invites you to lose yourself at Henry Art Gallery

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1 of 8 | Donna Huanca, "SPRING," 2021. Oil, sand on digital print on canvas. (Courtesy of Peres Projects / Billie Clarken)

By

[Jerald Pierce](#)

Seattle Times arts and culture reporter

A&E Pick of the Week

Watching the installation of “Donna Huanca: MAGMA SLIT,” a commissioned exhibition from the Bolivian American artist [set to open at the Henry Art Gallery](#) April 2, what’s immediately evident is the magnitude. For Huanca’s exhibition, the floors of the gallery are as white as the walls and at the center is a large platform shaped like a cell just beginning to divide. On that platform, explained Shamim M. Momin, the Henry’s director of curatorial affairs, will be 15 tons of white sand.

“We’ve done very different things in this gallery over time, in this total immersive space,” said Momin, who organized the exhibit, working with the Germany-based Huanca. “It’s something very particular about what she’s interested in — that it encompasses all of how you move through it. [How] it engages the architecture, the multiple senses, all of that is uniquely immersive.”

The dimensions of the space seem to shift as you move through. The stark whiteness of everything in the room can give a feeling of the walls continuously expanding upward when you’re in the space and then making those in the space look surprisingly small if you stand at the top of the Henry’s cascading staircase.

“I wanted to respond to that scale by anchoring the room with a center stage that distracts you from the explosion of color and drama of the paintings behind you,” said Huanca.

Yet to be installed during a mid-March walk-through of the exhibition — the first commissioned exhibition at the Henry supported by the [Richard E. and Jane Lang Davis New Works Fund](#) — were a series of sculptures laser-cut from reflective stainless steel that will sit upon the central platform and four mural-sized paintings that will hang on each of the gallery’s walls. The surfaces of the sculptures will alternate reflective and matte so they flicker as you walk by. The paintings, named after the seasons, will be rotated periodically by the Henry staff, tracking the passage of time and standing in for the cycle of birth, death, decay and renewal. To similarly give a sense of the passage of time, the Henry will only periodically clean footprints off of the white floors, leaving the impressions from those who have come before.

The exhibition will also feature smaller, more organic sculptures and cast aluminum painted pieces, as well as some aural aspects. The overall effect of the exhibition is meant to be one of walking through a

kaleidoscopic tunnel, inviting attendees to lose themselves in both space and time.

The origins for this exhibition date back to 2019, with Huanca exploring themes around the natural cycles of death and life in the world. Huanca was originally scheduled to visit the Henry in March 2020, but Momin said they wound up canceling the day before. Even leading up to this April's exhibit, there was uncertainty around whether Huanca was going to be able to make it to the Henry for a site visit, an aspect of the creative process that is important for an artist like Huanca, whose works are created for, and integrated with, specific architectural spaces.

Luckily, Momin said, Huanca had an exhibition opening in June 2021 at Ballroom Marfa in Texas. Not only was Huanca able to work on similar concepts there that would appear in the upcoming Henry exhibition, like working with reflective metal surfaces, but she was also able to stop by Seattle after working on the Ballroom Marfa installation to see the Henry space. Then, a digital model of the space was precisely rendered so Huanca, as much as possible, was able to feel like she could experience the dimensions of the actual space while working from her home base of Berlin, Germany.

"When I did studio visits with her on the phone, that studio was just in chaos," Momin said. "It was glorious. It's a very physical process with that scale and with those sculptures, which — they're cast in aluminum eventually, but they're done by hand. You can see the imprint of the hand and how they're moved about."

Huanca and Momin worked on the concept for the exhibition for about six months after that visit. At one point, Momin recalled, they were considering a sort of labyrinth, drawing from those tilt maze games with a metal ball, potentially representing a journey of discovery. In the end, it felt like that could be too limiting in a COVID-19 environment since that might have necessitated sending participants through one at a time.

Eventually they landed on the interlocking ovoid forms that take center stage of Huanca's "MAGMA SLIT," a title that "refers to a hairline crack, a stretch mark, a glimpse inside the Earth's magmatic core," Huanca explained.

In addition to the installed exhibition, the Henry is working on organizing live performances of various genres to perform in dialogue with the exhibition's themes and add to the multidimensional experience

of Huanca's work. Momin said the first they are anticipating will be a performance from composer, performance artist and Huanca collaborator Lyra Pramuk. Huanca will also guide a live dancer in a nonpublic performance that will have the performer painted and performing against one of the gallery's walls, creating a wall rubbing that will leave a trace of a body in motion. Only one performance, that will likely take place this fall, is scheduled to take place on the landscaped sand itself.

"The purpose of my work is to facilitate a glitch in everyday life to allow the viewer to take a breath," said Huanca. "My hope is that the impact this has on an audience is something that on the one hand they hopefully won't forget and on the other stimulates their own memory."

THE INTRICATE COSMOLOGY OF DONNA HUANCA

WORDS BY FEDERICO SARGENTONE



Through large-format paintings, sculptures, installations, and performances, Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca has established a language that moves beyond the canonical “fine-art” system to bridge and incorporate a diverse range of creative practices, stretching the lineage between movement and tension. She engages with a multitude of performers in her work, who sometimes act more as muses, and she experiments with formats and media to create environments that approximate entire worlds. Traces of these characters can be found as breathing bodies in a gallery setting, impressed onto a canvas, or simply hanging around Huanca’s Berlin studio — “my own ritual place,” as she calls it — for a posing session.

In the site-specific installation *Obsidian Ladder*, conceived for the former Masonic temple of the Marciano Art Foundation in Los Angeles, for example, a massive eight-panel painting acts as the background for a set of performers covered in paint and styled in garments produced by the artist herself. In *Scar Cymbals* – her

DONNA HUANCA

TRAVESIA CUATRO

2015 breakthrough presentation at the Zabudowicz Collection in London - a site-responsive architectural and sculptural installation activates the former church, creating an ecosystem that challenges viewers by exposing the naked body and concealing it under layers of paint, cosmetics, and latex. Two upcoming solo exhibitions, at the Arnolfini Centre for Contemporary Arts in Bristol and the Henry Art Gallery in Seattle, will further elaborate on themes adjacent to her poetics through large-scale immersive installations combining movement, sound, paintings, and environments. "It's a bit of a crazy time," she tells me while Zooming from her studio.

Every aspect of Huanca's practice revolves around the celebration and contextualization of the human form, intended as the primary vehicle for her artistic practice. "Everything always goes back to the body," she says. "And that's such an important part for me to start, because I feel like everything I do is collage work. It's based on taking something and combining things that don't necessarily belong together. The paintings wouldn't exist without the live body."



This transition from the live element to the staged composition is particularly explicit in Huanca's work, as if her practice would allow certain mundane, living motifs to become art, and vice versa. An ensemble of performers - or "girls," as Donna likes to say - embody the physical manifestation of a piece that wouldn't exist without the presence of its cast in a specific space, and time. "It's always been really exciting to have my work come alive in front of me," she explains. "I just create the set and stage to let the performers do their own thing. And that's a really exciting dynamic that I have with them."

In a white-cube, institutional art space, these works cease to be art and become objects – as in, art-objects. This process of transformation is triggered by mediation: the institutional setting that constitutes the ultimate context for the artwork's fruition simultaneously influences the work itself. "People who are looking at art don't necessarily have that type of understanding," she comments. "They're just shocked to see a person standing there. And a lot of the times, in certain shows I've had, there are audience members that have never even been to a museum." By nature, Donna's work is far from being set into stone, her choreographed installations allow themselves to change over time. This fluidity is better exemplified when the work comes to its reception: the audience is present. And, in the moment the audience steps into the timeless dimension of the gallery space, they become part of the work, they share the space with the bodies, the paintings, the sculptures, and the installation that contains them.

Sometimes, the participatory nature of the performative work has put Donna into questioning the terms and conditions by which her work is assimilated and digested. Her work challenges traditional canons of beauty,

although it is often shown in public museums and institutions like the “tourist-packed Belvedere Museum in Vienna,” where she presented the exhibition *Piedra Quemada* in 2018. “In the most pop settings - like settings that aren’t very niche art spaces - you get the craziest reactions. People start to cry, or they’ll have this very uncomfortable attitude towards the models. They sort of don’t know how to behave, because they don’t expect to see a live person in the space. They don’t know how to relate with them, or to discuss the work in proximity.” There’s a boundary that is crossed.



In every iteration of Donna Huanca's work, her performers are subjected to the gaze of the viewer. No physical or dialogical interaction is ever created as the work maintains critical distance, but the potential objectification of the body is an inevitable part of what is presented on stage. Her models are prepared to face challenges and to be put front and center. "I'm really careful," she explains, "I talk to them about their comfort and I have security guards for each of them. I care about their safety on stage." Cast among artists, fashion creatives, performers, musicians, and friends of friends of the global creative scene, the performers slowly became the foundation of Huanca's work, which she nurtures and protects by all means. When speaking about her cast, the artist gets instinctively emotional and grateful for the work they put into making her art come alive. These people have worked with her for years, as she tends to build long-lasting relationships that continue after the performances cease to exist, and she is extremely caring of this universe she has created throughout the years.



"Can you handle this experience and are you going to be cool with everyone else? Do we all trust each other? Are we all willing to have each other's back?" Those are the preliminary questions the artist asks her models before committing to the almost-excruciating, unpredictable journey of performing every day for more than one month in a gallery setting in front of an audience. "I can't really describe how it will be for them," Huanca says. "And that's why I like working with people and having these exchanges with all the models that I work with: they're always coming from different worlds. They're artists themselves, and just different types of people who I cast based on how comfortable we are together."

"I'm glad you saw [my work] in person because I think a lot of people never did," jokes Huanca. Online, this practice can only be identified as the sum of its elements — sculptures, performance, paintings, sound, scent — while in person, it can be experienced in its intended totality. The formal aspect of the work leaves space for meditation, as the rhythm paces slowly while flourishing in a dramatic catharsis. "How can we find a moment of contemplation or solace?" Huanca questions of her work. "I think that has always been my intention, but I don't think it was ever really understood."

"I feel like the paintings can be very loud and give you something in contrast to what you're seeing in the rest of the work, which is silence or slowness," she continues. "I think that's how to make a painting. You're pressing pause on a video. It's something that's continuous, but you're just getting a tiny fragment of something much bigger."

Always moving across disciplines, Huanca works horizontally: stretching the possibilities of her medium to the fullest. Her work finds its rhythm when it's shared with her peers, her extended family of more-than-just-bodies. Her cosmology is being written at the same time it is performed, activated, gazed at, disseminated. Her universe is in constant flux and open to change, and so is her work.



A Post-Pandemic Statement: Donna Huanca's Espejo Quemada at Ballroom Marfa



By Anthony Dexter Giannelli

Ballroom Marfa sits in a contemporary art oasis in the middle of the West Texas Desert. A unique exhibition space, it has had the pleasure of ushering in rising and established artists as coveted pitstop on their rise to world-renowned careers. Solo showings are given to art world darlings who boast a long list of continued institutional exhibitions. Among these, have been installation favourites from a range of diverse voices including Elmgreen and Dragsted, Rashid Johnson, and now the Bolivian-American Donna Huanca. Huanca's current exhibition *Espejo Quemada* premieres as the first post-pandemic major exhibition work in Marfa, and her show is being closely watched to determine how the over year-long forced hiatus has shifted perceptions in the art world.

Opening this past June 26 and running to November 22, 2021, *Espejo Quemada* spans canvases and sculptures in controlled white cube(ish) gallery space to site-specific outdoor installation works which will morph with the changing climate of their environment. This is not the first major institutional show from Berlin-based Huanca in recent years: she has enjoyed solo exhibitions at unique spaces across Europe and North America, including a massive theatre space in a former Masonic temple in Los Angeles. Combining her expression across mediums, her immersive environments incorporate oil paint, acrylic resins, synthetic hair, sand, scents of indigenous Andean woods, soundscapes, and live performers to bring to life an ever-changing, breathing terrain. Blurring the geological with the corporeal, all is in signature bio-reminiscent hues of blue, green, sienna and white.

Glancing through Espejo Quemada

In *Espejo Quemada*, all the key pieces of Huanca's past immersive installations are present: the towering canvases, artificial yet biological sculpture work, sound, and scent. However, one expected staple in Huanca's work, the presence of breathing human bodies, is missing. Yet still, without the performers' physical presence, each element of the show – from the curves and texture of paintings and sculptures – bring us back to a more expansive and even introspective view of the body (human or other). In the artificially created and controlled environment of the gallery space, it's easy to relate the fabricated landscape around us to what we know; cues like the presence of synthetic hair will draw our thoughts to the feminine and the human form, and condition our understanding of the space. Moving outward, materials such as sand and metal prepare viewers for the presence of geological bodies in site-specific sculpture that communes with the changing and uncontrolled desert landscape, thus opening as a stage to the celestial bodies that first inspired her work.

Espejo Quemada translates from Spanish as 'burnt mirror,' but the adjective 'burnt' has been intentionally feminized. In a time when much of western culture is still suffering from a dogmatic and shame-controlled approach to the human body and femininity, from her burnt mirror, Huanca presents a growing narrative that embraces the nomadic and calls for change.

Building upon threads of cultural exchange and dialogue, Huanca incorporates her personal journey within the context of her surroundings. Along with the direct use of sounds and scents that hold personal meaning, Huanca often cites memories of the Bolivian festival of Urkupiña as an inspiration in her practice, the all-sensory experience creates deeply personal and unique sensations for each who witnesses it. As an artist, Huanca shares a story that only she can tell, her experiences and memories; but to viewers this story morphs based on individual understanding and the works' surroundings, growing from the west Texas landscape and building strength from each separate interpretation.



A Post-Pandemic Statement

Artists, galleries, and institutions – essential elements of an industry rooted in the physical – have been all, in some way, affected by the pandemic; delayed shows and contracts made way for a long period of adaptation and looking inward. For Huanca and Marfa this was certainly the case: the show was planned pre-pandemic and then subject to seemingly endless delays and promises hinged upon local, national, and international re-openings. Today, the show, its audience, and its interpretation are inherently different from what would have occurred pre-March 2020.

Furthermore, waves of social and political events in 2020 and early 2021 have changed the contextual landscape in the United States from that which we had have experienced Huanca's Espejo Quemada in its original form. We expect to see institutions held accountable and address an even greater pressure on decolonization, a critical view on the West's attitude towards culture and race, and vital environmental issues. Ballroom Marfa, besides the debut of Huanca's work, also presents an ongoing series of programming on indigenous voices, *Knowledge of Wounds 2021-22*, as well as environmentally focused works like Birdscapes Radio.

Now that we are entering the post-pandemic period, many are looking to the first wave of installation-based exhibitions as a check-up on the art world's vital signs. Are we picking up where we left off, or can we start to see some signs that things may have changed for good? Some are looking for a sign of how artists known for their use of performance-based works have adapted after the pandemic, and what it could mean for their future. Although performance and immersive-based works don't seem to be going anywhere, and their presence was deeply missed during the hiatus, this time away from the performance sphere did ultimately make many artists reconsider their work and take broader perspectives. Take for example Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen, an artist currently featured at Copenhagen Contemporary – a space formerly inhabited by one of Huanca's performance-based environments, Lengua Llorona. Rasmussen arranged smaller scale performative works throughout the pandemic in public space and now opened her first post-pandemic institutional show with an ambitious performance schedule, possibly even grander than her pre-pandemic work.

In this light, contextualizing Huanca as an exclusively performance-based practice would be belittling. In fact, her use of performance garnered attention for its innovative use, but even more outstanding is her creation of a living, breathing environment regardless of medium. Whether or not living body performers are present within these landscapes, the viewer's interpretation is what brings life to the space; and though the sounds of the forest may be coming from a speaker bouncing off white walls and artificial sand, the viewer is transported to a world that is just as alive as their own mind makes it.

Though the exhibition was initially planned for months before the pandemic, Huanca's process actually began 15 years prior with a visit to the site. These memories are honoured and live on through the exhibition. We are thus reminded of our experiences during the pandemic with a greater awareness of our surroundings, and Huanca's mirrors ultimately become a metaphorical means to reflect on our past and present.

Simon Lee Gallery, 12 Berkeley Street, London W1J 8DT

Donna Huanca: Wet Slit









Title : Donna Huanca: Wet Slit, Simon Lee Gallery London, installation view
Website : <https://www.simonleegallery.com/>

Donna Huanca: Wet Slit

Simon Lee Gallery

28 February - 18 April 2020 (temporarily closed)

Review by Tess Charnley

Donna Huanca's 'Wet Slit' at Simon Lee Gallery provides a bodily experience of her work. Like the ice sculpture encasing Klein blue hair, only present for the show's inaugural weekend as it shed water to nothing, we are encased by the exhibition in its evolving sounds and smells, moving beyond the visual. The sound of water dripping and splashing, a glass occasionally smashing, plays on loop. The gallery is divided into two spaces, an upstairs and a downstairs. The upstairs space smells medical almost, TCP or antibacterial hand gel - the now coveted scent of cleanliness. The walls are covered with plastic sheeting, creating a space of sterility or something more sinister. We feel that the room is prepared for the abject, for liquids pouring out of bodies. And then there are the bodies in Huanca's paintings, cloaked in paint, skin revealed only in fragments.

These paintings are resplendent. Layers of oil paint so thick you can still smell its nutty odour. They are wet but gritty (the oil paint is mixed with sand in some places), figurative yet abstract. They look the way sex feels; glimpses of bodies amid a slippery blur of movement. In 'Vesta' (2019/20), we see a woman's back, its cello curves reminiscent of a Man Ray photograph. Huanca paints on top of photographs of her performers and here we see the image emerge from beneath the oil; the creases of a foot's sole beneath the weight of a body.

The works seep together, the plastic on the walls a connective tissue between the paintings. Similarly, Huanca's sculptural pieces, totemic steel works covered in oil paint, sand and synthetic hair braided with cable ties, map out her two-dimensional works. The cut-outs in the sculptures, reminiscent of modesty screens with a peep-show twist, allow us to peer through at the paintings. They become fragmented in the space, several works merging to one. The paintings echo the sculptures, the colour palette repeated and the cable-tied braids transposed onto canvas. Each work is inseparable; our bodies inseparable from them in turn.

Entering the downstairs section of the show feels like entering an underworld, leaving the starkly lit, almost surgical space above and moving into a dark space, cocooned by black carpet and midnight blue walls. The works here, a sculpture and four paintings hung so closely that they could be one work, are lit by dramatic spotlights; we move among them primarily in darkness. It smells different down here, a note of Palo Santo, the South American holy wood, replaces the medicinal smell from upstairs. This space becomes the womb from which we are born, leaving the gallery and its healing space, through the glaring lights and sterilised. 'Wet Slit' both speaks to and negates our fears of leaking bodies and porosity, of what can pass between skin; all the more relevant in these times of Coronavirus-induced quarantine and isolation. We can leave this show but not without internalising it in some way, without it seeping into our skin.

ACTUALIDAD

Donna Huanca la artista de Bolivia imagina el futuro femenino

marzo 5, 2020

Donna Huanca la artista de Bolivia imagina el futuro femenino. La artista interdisciplinaria boliviana-estadounidense Donna Huanca habla sobre su nueva exposición WET SLIT, que transporta a los visitantes a un «espacio de capullo de muerte» único.



Donna Huanca artista

«La intuición es la única forma en que puedo ser auténtico en mi momento presente», dice la artista interdisciplinaria boliviano-estadounidense Donna Huanca. La sensibilidad de Huanca a su intuición, sus instintos más primarios, guía su exploración del cuerpo humano y su relación con el espacio y la identidad en obras que combinan pintura, escultura, performance, coreografía, video, sonido y aroma.

Inspirada en el Festival de Urkupiña de Bolivia, una fusión surrealista de culturas católicas y andinas tradicionales llenas de sonido, danza, disfraces y comida, la nueva exposición de Huanca, WET SLIT, transforma la Galería Simon Lee en Londres en dos espacios que exploran las polaridades de la luz y la luz. oscuridad, brillo y oscuridad, presencia y ausencia.

«El piso de entrada representa la superficie de la Tierra y entras en el sótano para descender al inframundo, el espacio de capullo de la muerte», explica.

La práctica de Huanca llama la atención sobre la piel como la interfaz por la cual experimentamos el mundo; sus pinturas de «piel» se refieren directamente al cuerpo. Trabajando exclusivamente con modelos y figuras femeninas, Huanca intenta imaginar un futuro feminizado y los valores de esa realidad, creando nuevos modos de existencia en el espacio, donde lo plano y lo tridimensional se mezclan y fusionan.

El cuerpo del artista en vivo está presente pero ausente en la instalación, se encuentra en los restos del cuerpo, sellado y protegido bajo plástico transparente, y en las huellas aún visibles en las pinturas.

Aquí, Huanca comparte sus ideas para crear una experiencia que evoca simultáneamente lo efímero y la permanencia del mundo en que vivimos.

Bolivian-American Artist Donna Huanca on Her Latest Exhibition

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY / INTERVIEW



Donna Huanca: WET SLIT Courtesy of Simon Lee Gallery

Bolivian-American Interdisciplinary artist Donna Huanca discusses her new exhibition WET SLIT, which transports visitors to a unique "death cocoon space"

MARCH 04, 2020

TEXT Miss Rosen

"Intuition is the only way I can be authentic to my present moment," Bolivian-American interdisciplinary artist **Donna Huanca** tells AnOther. Huanca's sensitivity to her intuition, her most primal instincts, guides her exploration of the human body and its relationship to space and identity in works that combine painting, sculpture, performance, choreography, video, sound, and scent.

Inspired by Bolivia's Festival de Urkupiña, a surreal fusion of traditional Catholic and Andean cultures full of sound, dance, costumes and food, Huanca's new exhibition, *WET SLIT*, transforms the Simon Lee Gallery in London into two spaces that explore the polarities of light and dark, brightness and dimness, presence and absence. "The entrance floor represents the Earth's surface and you enter the basement to descend into the underworld, the 'death cocoon' space," she explains.

Huanca's practice draws attention to skin as the interface by which we experience the world; her "skin" paintings referring directly to the body. Working exclusively with femme models and figures, Huanca is attempting to imagine a feminised future and the values of that reality, creating new modes of existing in space, where the flat and three-dimensional mingle and merge. The live performer's body is present yet absent in the installation, found in the body rubbings, sealed and protected under transparent plastic, and in the traces still visible in the paintings. Here, Huanca shares her insights into creating an experience that simultaneously evokes the ephemeral and permanence of the world in which we live.



GALLERY / 17 IMAGES

Donna Huanca: WET SLIT

Miss Rosen: What was the inspiration for *WET SLIT*?

Donna Huanca: For this exhibition, I wanted to respond to the specific time and sterile climate we are living in. We are currently afraid to exchange fluids – and touching can feel risky.

I wanted to engage with the gallery space and contrast it by including non-collectable [or] ephemeral works such as a body rubbing and the 'melting performer' – where I trapped my performer's hair into a monolith of ice that melted away on view over the course of the inaugural weekend. Each strand of our hair carries memory, chemical traces of our diet and the environment around us. Hair in this show is that container for history.

In all my installations, I always take into consideration the context of the space, its history and architecture in order to transform it. I wanted to acknowledge 'nature' in a new form, both toxic, artificial, yet protective. The layered scent of plastic and holy wood, mingled with the sanitary, antiseptic hand-sanitiser gel we are bathing in. Although the viewers are not allowed to touch the textures – they can be felt visually.

MR: How do you explore the paradox of the ephemeral and the permanent when conceptualising an immersive environment through painting, sculpture, sound, and scent?

DH: One of the main modalities of my practice is this action of layering, and the inverse – excavation. I am always building upon elements of works that have already happened; paintings that I made on the models, the sculptures and paintings that have been in installations, these are incorporated in all the new works. So in these new works you can also always excavate past temporalities.



Donna Huanca: *WET SLIT* Courtesy of Simon Lee Gallery

MR: How does the idea of skin as the interface between ourselves and our experience of the world, and the way that it becomes an ideal canvas, transform the way we think about the femme body?

DH: I am interested in the way we self-decorate and adorn as a mode for communicating and signalling to others in order to create community. At the same time, there are all these ways that we are socially constructed, that we are assigned various social identities. I feel that the layering of paint on the skin, and the meditation in the performances can facilitate a letting go of the ego – letting go of the way our bodies and appearances are constructed and seen within the limited gaze of patriarchal society. Of course, the experience for each model is different, the layers of paint applied to their skin can be a method of erasure, of the ego, of that constructed self that is imposed, or it can also be a form of armour, protecting from, and distorting the gaze.

MR: Can you explain the resonance created by simultaneously exposing and concealing nudity beneath layers of paint, cosmetics?

DH: I am always a bit wary of people talking about the nudity in my work, somehow usually they are talking about nakedness as some kind of social object ... nakedness has all these complicated cultural meanings. In my personal life I try to think about the issues facing us in the present, in the everyday; in my work I want to project us into a new space, into a future space which values care, trust, community, the natural world and our bodies in proximity to and as part of it. It is not so much about the nakedness as it is about embodiment.



Donna Huanca: WET SLIT Courtesy of Simon Lee Gallery

MR: How does the psychological space that the models occupy as live performers in the work and their presence create a powerful opportunity for viewers to examine their instinctive response to the femme body?

DH: Because there is no choreography, the performers choose when and how to make time work for them. I am interested in slowing down, and elongating time. I try to set up conditions where they feel safe to have an authentic experience over the duration of the work, which can take hours. I also ask the performers to write about their experience and will occasionally publish these texts with their permission.

MR: How do you transform the physical space – such as the cocooned space and the dark hermetic environment – as a means to physiologically communicate with viewers on pre-verbal, primordial terms?

DH: This non-verbal, primordial state that the dark environment creates, is the site of the joining of the cycle of birth and death. We are all sensitive to light, and our eyes trigger our memories. We were created in the darkness of a womb after all, and this was what I wanted to remind us of. We started in darkness and will end in darkness.

Donna Huanca: WET SLIT is at Simon Lee Gallery, London until April 18, 2020.

GARAGE MAGAZINE ISSUE 18 | By PAIGE KATHERINE BRADLEY | Mar 1 2020, 6:59am

Donna Huanca's Body Work

The artist makes Instagram-worthy installations. But you have to be there to see them. Photographed by Roman Goebel

The multidisciplinary artist Donna Huanca was born in Chicago, the daughter of Bolivian immigrants. She studied painting in school, but soon rejected its conventions in order to experiment with collaged textiles and more importantly, body painting. In her current practice, she brings together a variety of mediums—including dance, painting, performance, and video—all in service of her main medium, the female body. Her works often feature nude models streaked with paint, interacting within a spatial environment—fuse object and performative body into vivid tableaux.

In 2018, Huanca staged a show in the baroque chambers of the Belvedere, Vienna's 18th-century palace turned museum, in which live models—wearing long, coated hair extensions, with limbs spray-painted and wrapped in vinyl and molded plastic, their shoulders dusted with turmeric—walked around steel sculptures painted with colors and patterns that matched the ones on their bodies. Her installation at last year's Frieze London included white "sand dunes" on the floor, and the scent of palo santo wafting throughout. Working with bodies, means working with people—her collaborators are not "models" in their traditional sense, passively standing around, but active participants. In a way the transformation of the environment serves not for the spectator, but to create a heightened mood for her participants. They're the ones setting the energy for the space. After a work is finished, Huanca asks performers to meditate on their experience, and write down their feelings. A total experience.



DONNA HUANCA IS "INTERESTED IN THE WAYS WE TREAT OBJECTS AS THE VESSELS FOR OUR DESIRES—WE POUR EMOTION INTO THEM AND GIVE THEM POWER."

The way you engage with painting would, at first, seem to come out of a tradition of gestural abstraction, but there could be other historical and cultural references at play in your work. For example, you've talked about how you've been inspired by a traditional Bolivian carnival—*Alasitas*, no?—which you went to when you were a child. What particular aspects of that kind of ritual have informed your own process?

I'm actually talking about the Festival de Urkupiña—growing up, I spent summers with my family in Bolivia, and I consider this festival to be my first encounter with a total artwork, a surreal fusion of traditional Catholic and Andean cultures, full of sound, dance, couture that still inspires me today.

You've also spoken about your interest in the Ekeko figurines from the Andes. What about those figurines inspires you in your own process?

The Ekeko is an altar piece that grants wishes by decorating it with the objects you wish to acquire. I am interested in the ways we treat objects as the vessels for our desires—we pour emotion into them and give them power.

When you were developing as an artist, did you feel limited by the tradition in painting, perhaps fostered by Western art education, of seeking the single, perfect image? How did you find the confidence to move away from that pressure?

Growing up, I was not exposed to traditional forms of Eurocentric art, so in retrospect, this allowed me to see and create art as limitless. I've never felt connected to formal traditional painting and all the tropes that surround it, so for a long time I painted with nontraditional mediums such as makeup, food, fabric, sound, clay, etc.



THE DAUGHTER OF BOLIVIAN IMMIGRANTS, HUANCA OFTEN LOOKS FOR INSPIRATION WITHIN THE MIX OF ANDEAN AND CATHOLIC CULTURES. HUANCA WEARS DRESS BY VERSACE, BOOTS BY PUCCI.

So much artwork is circulated, and bought, via the internet, but given the importance of physical presence, including elements like scent, in what you do, do you think someone can understand what you're doing without seeing it in person?

Absolutely, my work is very layered and coded—and can definitely be experienced in different ways, both digitally and physically. The physical experience is special because unlike other ways of experiencing art, you are not seeing a finished product, but rather you are participating in the creation by how your own presence affects the performance. There is no distinction between the audience and the performer. You both share the awkwardness of proximity, particularly because you can't hide behind your phone.

In your performances and installations, you request that no photography be taken. Are you pushing back against the digital distribution of art, or is it more about creating a situation where people are discouraged from turning the female models into a thing a spectator then owns as digital files?

Both. It's important to me to create a total experience in the performances. I incorporate sound, scent, body movement, painting, and sculpture into my work, and the performances provide a meditative experience for the audience. However, at this point, it's almost second nature or instinctual for someone to want to photograph such a multisensorial experience, although the phone acts as a disrupter to this experience, not just for yourself, but also for the collective audience. I want to encourage the actual presence of the audience and not allow them to hide behind their phones.

My understanding is that when you were developing as an artist and didn't have a permanent residence, you would often use your own clothes as materials for art-making. What aspects of contemporary fashion or other practices of costume and ornament do you want to evoke in your work?

I'm interested in the idea of self-decoration and aesthetic as a primal urge that we all have for communicating, signaling, and community building. I am interested in adornment, as it is coded with meaning and history—or that are evocative of some kind of fantasy. I am a collector of objects and clothing that evoke a spiritual meaning for me. But the fashion world includes violences that I am repelled by: the fetishization of the body, the male gaze, the massive waste that comes with the incredibly fast, trend-based consumerism and the elitism. The fashion industry is also so essential to social media, which I feel my work provides an antidote for. I hope that people enter my exhibitions and feel a sense of presence and groundedness that is so often stolen away by our phones.

Sittings Editor BILLY LOBOS, Hair and Makeup JANINA ZAIS, Photographer's assistant ALEX MADE

In conversation: Donna Huanca and Lyra Pramuk

The duo let us wander their world of creative expression and emergence.



Initiating us into their dance of storytelling are Lyra Pramuk and Donna Huanca; two world-builders, cutting-edge multidisciplinary artists and regular collaborators, but most of all, kindred spirits. The tools of creation employed by each may differ—Pramuk is a vocalist and electronic musician, while Huanca works primarily with paint, sculpture, installation and performance—yet both sustain emotion, sensuality and devotion as the focal points of their artistry. In her practice, Huanca paints models in psychedelic hues and encourages them to engage in non-choreographed, almost meditative performances in site-specific rooms designed by the artist herself. At first glance, Pramuk works within a medium distanced from Huanca’s visually-soaked realm: on her much-anticipated debut album, ***Fountain***, Pramuk has fabricated a seven-track world entirely out of her own voice. In essence, however, the two artists both utilize the body as a boundless spring and urge us to unlock its potential by embracing processes of continual transformation. Glamcult meets the artists in Huanca’s studio in Berlin, but this time around, we retreat to a green corner of the room while the two enter their own magical dance of words and ideas.



Huanca: I’ve seen you blossom like a flower since we first met. In one of our early meetings, we were talking about the future and all the things you wanted to do. Today, you’ve made some hard decisions, you’ve taken action to put your record out, and that’s such a vulnerable thing to do; to not know how people are going to react, since this album doesn’t really have a beat, it’s not within the scene, it feels a-historic in a way. Similarly to my own work, in which I also don’t look at history. Things just happen.

Pramuk: Someone asked me the other day, “Where do you see yourself in history?” All I could think of as a reply was that I can just trace my influences. I’ve been sitting

on my computer making weird stuff for like six years, and I don't see myself as part of history. I do what I need to be doing. Just like life—it exists because it needs to. There's a certain autonomy to it; something with its own agency.

Huanca: And that's OK; it's enough. We're tricked into believing that we have to give it a categorization or a reference. But you have to also think about where those references are coming from. They're usually Euro-centric and come from a very specific place by people who won and wrote history, and thus destroyed other histories. Fuck all of that! I like making my own language.

Pramuk: Your work has become much more visible, and you work with institutions so much more often now. How do you feel about your background in music and DIY punk culture? How do you carry that ethos?

Huanca: Well, I always think about the relationship with my models as a new form of band. I used to be in bands and I had such intimate relationships, where you had to really be on the same page to make a good composition or improvisation. All of those experiences have helped me be flexible to other people's sensitivities. I really want to hear other people out, I want to see what they're thinking, but also allow them to be free.

Pramuk: Your cast of collaborators, models and everyone you work with to bring the show to life, it does feel like a collective. I mean, we've been friends for a long time, but I remember when you first asked me to come into your work, the overriding sense was of joining a community.

Huanca: I don't take full responsibility for my shows, because it's not me doing it; it's everybody doing it. The audience and the performer are experiencing an alignment in real-time. So we're all contributing to this larger alignment at that moment. It's very brave, it requires a lot of sensitivity, and it's triggering, especially if you're performing. That's how I've gotten to know you, too. For each of my shows, we're so close as I paint your body. I don't really know what you will look like in the end, but I'm going by the conversations that we have and the energy that you bring. It's what tells me what colour to paint you and how to do your hair. Every little aspect is just energy exchange.



Pramuk: This ties in with the inherent trust-building of the work we do. I think this has definitely affected how I think of economies I'm a part of too. In that context, being part of your performance environment is such a spiritual thing that I always sort of trip out. Just thinking about looking out at the audience that's coming to consume an art product but discovers a disruption of that consumerism... The performance, it feels like, is transcending anything within capitalism. Do you get what I'm trying to say?

Huanca: Absolutely, because you're not for sale. You are autonomous, ephemeral and temporarily present. All of my work begins with the body and that intimate moment we have when I'm painting you. That trust you give me as a model gives me the courage to make marks. I also don't really like the word *performance*, but I guess that's what it's easily described as.

Pramuk: Yeah, words are clumsy.

Huanca: But it's important to distinguish that you can't intellectualize the moment a work is being performed. Art is elitist and people try to bring all these tropes to the

work. Yet you can't intellectualize something that's still going on, something that's being created in front of you. It all goes back to the idea of thinking about something versus actually doing it, and those are very different things.

Pramuk: You talk about being able to define something in intellectual terms, but also in market terms, which is something else I think about a lot. In the music industry, and when you're a singer, there are these expectations and codes of being a pop musician. I restarted my music project at the time I began transitioning, which was about the time when we met and started collaborating. Being a part of your work is an experience in itself, and you have to pay attention whilst that experience is happening. This led me to think about my live performances in terms of escaping intellectual or market value; my concerts as a spiritual or religious experience.

Huanca: Right! That's what I find so beautiful about your performances, and you can see it; especially knowing you, and knowing how smart you are and how much you devote to your work. But actually, when I experience your show, it's beyond what you know and what I know. It's tapping into something that's very subconscious, universal and human. I remember when you first let me listen to the record, I started crying and I'm not even that emo! But I felt the pain and the way that you've been working on it.

Pramuk: Yes, I played you one of the opening tracks in the car, and when the first vocal came up you saw this image of a girl sitting and combing her hair, sort of defeated. Or like, almost in the action of brushing her hair, so it feels like a defeat but she's still doing something, organizing something, trying to get herself together. A kind of impetus towards healing and always trying to make yourself better through working on yourself. One of the images from your work that hits me emotionally the most is a piece of clear vinyl that you'd scorched with fire so that there are burn marks. It was a body piece on one of the model's stomach. That hit me so much, it's such a visceral feeling of your gut burning. I think we're all sort of carrying wounds like that, but to display the wound in your own work, it felt very healing to me. Make the wound visible so you can start to heal.



Huanca: A lot of the mark-making I do with the body is not supposed to be beautiful, although it somehow is in the end. I think the totality of it is something I consider beautiful. There's a lot of pain in beauty, so when I hear your album, I just feel the pain and the struggle of there just being so many different voices emerging at the same time. Just like a mermaid, or this deep-seated creature that is alien but is trying to find her particle form. We capture this emergence of beauty and all the nasty things that come with it too.

Pramuk: And that's the most vulnerable and powerful thing. To just be real about that pain, to say it and not run away from it. It's so strengthening to name what has hurt us. I was trying to do that in some way when I was working on the music, but we started talking about the album artwork before most of the songs were even finished. At the time, I had been working on a sort of water journey through the pieces, writing down and drawing every form of water I could possibly find. Water is so transformational and connected to so many cultures and rituals: baptism, bathing, cleaning or purging. Graphic designer Gergö Kovács, who I also worked with on the artwork, they added a butterfly to the design. Did you know that when the caterpillar goes to make a cocoon, and once it's inside the cocoon, the first thing that happens before it turns into a butterfly is its whole body turns into liquid?

Huanca: Whaaaat?

Pramuk: The cells are called "imaginal cells".

Huanca: Imaginal?

Pramuk: Like imagination, the cells of the liquid.

Huanca: Wow.

Pramuk: Isn't that beautiful?

Huanca: Yes, because to transform we have to dissolve and it's ugly. Allowing yourself to dissolve, I think that's where people get stuck, because we're taught to identify as one thing or another. That's why I think it's important to create and let go, and also to be OK with making ugly things. I know that you were going through a lot when you were working with your voice, for example. I remember you expressing the uncomfortable aspects of using your lower voice versus your higher voice, and how you were training to navigate this. Using the things that you were not comfortable with for the purpose within a bigger scheme of things.

Pramuk: Oh my god, thank you for saying that! For three years, I was just hoping to find a way to make a whole record where my voice would sound feminine. It was a really big change and growth in myself to just say, "I have to accept my whole voice for what it is. I'm going to accept my whole voice for what it is. And I'm going to accept where my body has been and the journey I have been on." That's something you really embody. I think you renew yourself continuously.

Huanca: Yeah, and it's really hard, but it's also our duty. It's not like we'll reach the perfect form eventually. There's no such thing. Still, meditation has helped me to kind of stop and become cells; to listen to myself and let all the voices dissolve.

Pramuk: I just want to go back for a second and say something about singing in the low voice. When you're a transfeminine person, hormones never make your voice higher. Whereas for transmasculine people who take hormones, the voice does become lower. In my case as a transfeminine person, the voice never became higher, but I can change it since it's a muscle. This made me think, what is a *natural* voice for a transgender woman? What makes a voice natural? Is it something that exists or can be defined?

Huanca: Well, I think that's up to you, because you can train yourself to have the voice you want. Or you can work towards it. I don't even know what nature is at this point, but for me you embody so much more than a feminine voice or a masculine voice. You are all of that and then some more. I think that this record is so beautiful, because you embrace all of those sides and the spectrum of the voices that you have, seeing how important the low voice is to make certain dynamics in the songs.



Pramuk: Actually, one of my favourite quotes is by a Pakistani singer, Abida Parveen, who has a huge vocal range. In an interview, someone asked about her being a woman and being a singer, and she said, “I don’t think at all about gender when I’m on stage. I’m a vessel for energy and that’s it.” That’s so cool!

Huanca: Yeah! It’s important to make this work human, because we all have a body and we’re all dissolving and disintegrating. That’s the point.

Pramuk: And there are so many ways of being; it’s just not factual. We’ve talked about this before in another context, about nature. You said to me once, something about the green, earthy nature versus—

Huanca: —a completely plastic body.

Pramuk: Or a cybernetic body. What do you think of nature when you think about materials in your work, but also just in general?

Huanca: I think we can’t see nature just as the granola we eat or as biodegradable stuff. That’s not nature. For me, nature is nasty and plastic; all these UV colours and things that look beyond natural. When you think of the underwater world and the creatures that are yet to be discovered, it’s beyond our [stereotypical] image of nature. I’m more about embracing as natural the things that we’ve overproduced, such as plastic. Taking those materials and owning the fact that, yeah, it wasn’t made by nature, but what is nature? The number of products that we make today, and the amount of consumerism that’s out there, that’s natural at this point. We can’t be stuck to what happened before the Industrial Revolution. We have the power to create our own bodies, voices and identities. At this point, whatever we want to do is natural.

Pramuk: There are these two designers, Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, who compiled a book in which they talk about how technology and design originate from within ourselves. We developed technology and then it changed the environment and hence our bodies. One example they use is about the web of a spider, which exists in the body of the spider, which then builds the web outside of itself. Everything that we have made as humans is part of nature, because we are nature.

Huanca: We created it.

Pramuk: Yeah... Mm, do you wanna take a pee break for a sec?

Huanca: Sure, do you wanna pee first?



Pramuk: So, when I try to explain your work to other people, I tell them it's Andean-futuristic, as you once told me. It's also about decolonizing and picking up scraps of indigenous and Bolivian culture and practices, and sort of reimagining them into the future. What's so impressive about it is the constant resampling that happens through the multimedia world that you've built. I feel the same way when I make songs. I want them to feel like they're living and breathing, and that they're not set in stone and can change. In a way, it's a paradox.

Huanca: Yeah, but we're creative and we're always afraid of repeating ourselves. But if you really zoom in deep enough, you can find new content [within your own work]. There's micro-evolution in every piece I make, and it's important to honour that.

Pramuk: I think it's really beautiful to see that as some kind of floral blossoming. If one looks at your exhibitions over the years, a continuous, effectual evolution seeps through; it's really gorgeous. I think I connect with that a lot, because I sample myself a lot in my work too. When I'm putting a track together, often the samples I have access to are sample packs, or things that have been made by someone else, or samples sold by a company. That's how a lot of people make music, but because I work with my voice in such an intimate way, it feels weird to juxtapose that with material that came from a source I'm not familiar with. So that's the reason why I started to make things totally out of my own voice. It felt like it was entirely mine.

Huanca: I feel like also you're creating a self-sustaining world for yourself, because you rely on yourself to create new content versus looking to what's outside. We're also so bombarded with images, and for me it's important to just go into myself and go into the work I've made and sort of sample from that. That sampling process can go on for ever, but it's also interesting because it does trigger you to invent new things, and that's what some people don't see. When you look at what you've done, then you're sort of finding ways to evolve from there while still being authentic to yourself.

Pramuk: A lot of my reluctance to bring in material that may have been made somewhere else, or is for sale, is that I want to feel somehow authentically part of what I make. I know you're also really sensitive to the context of where your exhibitions take place; the architecture, the lighting of the space, all of these elements you think so carefully about. I think I relate to that too; every concert that I play I think so much about the audience, the size of the room and the stage, the height of the ceilings, the quality and strength of the sound system. I feel like each time I do a performance, it feels like a new thing. Every single time. Even if the set is exactly the same as last time, it feels totally new.

Huanca: Yes, that makes you human! I feel it's so important to know all of those aspects of the room. For me, one of the first conversations I have with galleries is about the location of the bathrooms in the space and their proximity to the stage. My models need to have somewhere to go! Museums and galleries are so confused. They think, "Oh, people are just going to show up and it's easy," and I'm like, "No, you have to feed them, you have to keep them warm, you have to bring security." Art spaces are not used to this. They're used to hanging something on the wall, lighting it and being done. In a way, with every performance, we realize how we are changing the system, one show at a time. We're sort of teaching people how to care for others, how to be sensitive, how to look for different social cues to tell someone to leave. It's very sensitive.



Pramuk: It's super similar in the electronic music scene too. A lot of what my friends and I do is based on the body, but a lot of these events are made for people who mostly use equipment or a laptop. It's a different kind of consideration that goes in when it's your body that's the vessel. You need time to meditate, enough water, a good meal and time to warm up and stretch before you start. A lot of the places I play are electronic music spaces and there's this kind of contradiction between awareness of working with bodies and people who are using their bodies.

Huanca: The commitment still needs to be there. The institutions or venues that you play at, they have to be aware of what you require. You're not just going to show up there with your laptop. I think that's what makes us all grow together: things can get better one performance at a time.

Pramuk: Yes! We're into that live experience. That's the heart and centre of everything that we do. It's having that one-to-one, giving people an experience where they're on their own terms and can have an experience with performative work; a living, breathing moment. That's so special, we need so much more of that in our world today.

Huanca: Yeah, that's why it's sort of slowly making its way to the art world. This urgency to feel something and be in a space where people are embodying themselves.

It's not about finishing work; it's a work in progress. This makes me think of the exchange of privilege to work with you on the album artwork! I mean, I had never really taken a photograph before.

Pramuk: But that was such a blessing. We were here, like, very caffeinated, sprawled out all on the floor of your apartment with my hair out in spirals on the floor. I mean, it was such a trip! Considering that you'd never taken photographs before, the images that we got are amazing.

Huanca: That's why I think it's such an exchange. If I wasn't comfortable with you, I wouldn't have been able to speak with you and direct you the way I did. If you weren't comfortable with me, you probably wouldn't have let someone talk to you like that.

Pramuk: I probably wouldn't have been topless on your apartment floor!

Huanca: For me, that's such a privilege; to be able to see you grow and go into your own. It's going to go on, this is just a pause. Whenever we talk, or whenever we're able to create something together, I learn so much. For me, this is how I communicate now, this is how I have friendships and growth, through collaborations. The image we made for your album cover makes so much sense now.

Pramuk: It does!

Huanca: It's like you're emerging...

Pramuk: *We* are emerging.



Photography by Joseph Kadow

Donna Huanca: Wet Slit review

Art  Recommended ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



'Egeria' (2010) © the artist. Image courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London

Time Out says ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Friendly warning! We're working hard to be accurate. But these are unusual times, so please check that events are still happening.

Donna Huanca's art drips, melts, trickles and slithers through the gallery. It coats and covers every inch of this brightly lit space. Plastic sheeting lines the walls like the space is being prepared for something very, very messy. An ice sculpture – big crystalline blocks filled with blue hair-like fibres – drips, drips, drips into a pool. Sculptural paintings dot the space, big canvases cover the walls. They're all thick with unctuous blue paint, ultramarines and cyans, delineating body curves and lines. They're beautiful paintings, like Yves Klein at a Berlin sex party.

Downstairs you lose the bright white glare in favour of deep, dark blue carpets and walls. Jungle sounds fill the air, a powerful scent of burning wood and body odour hits your nostrils. It's heady, overpowering stuff.

In case it wasn't obvious, this is all art about the body, about skin and curves and sweat and touching. The smells and the paint teleport you into Huanca's world, like you've stumbled into some magical, sexual ritual. It's so absorbing and immersive that you feel like Huanca isn't just exploring the bodies of her models – or even just some abstract concept of the body – but your body too. She's inviting you into her ritual, making you consider your own form and texture.

The only thing missing is Huanca's signature live models haunting the space in their body paint. But you can forgive the omission, because here you get the chance to just concentrate on her paintings, which usually get so overshadowed, and they're lovely things.

The whole exhibition is great. It's open, sexual, sensual, gooey, inebriating art for the eyes, brain and nose. No bit of you leaves unsatisfied.

BY: EDDY FRANKEL

POSTED: FRIDAY FEBRUARY 28 2020

Private view: must-see gallery shows opening this March

From Kevin Jerome Everson's videos of working-class displacement to Donna Huanca's wet slit—the best new commercial exhibitions this month

ANNA BRADY and MARGARET CARRIGAN

27th February 2020 15:40 GMT



Donna Huanca's *Mona de Diosa* (2019-20) Courtesy of the artist, Simon Lee Gallery and Peres Projects

Donna Huanca: Wet Slit

Simon Lee Gallery, London, until 18 April

This is the Bolivian American artist Donna Huanca's first solo show in London since *Scar Cymbals*, her 2016 site-specific commission at the Zabłudowicz Collection, and it is also her first at Simon Lee—although the gallery did devote its Frieze London booth to an installation by her last year. This show of her “skin” paintings is similarly immersive, with visitors “cocooned”, the gallery says, by swathes of polythene, while a scent derived from Palo Santo, an aromatic wood native to South America, is pumped out along with the sound of water and liquid—not one to attend on a full bladder.

WET SLIT IS A SOLO EXHIBITION OF NEW WORKS BY BOLIVIAN-AMERICAN ARTIST DONNA HUANCA.

By Mark Westall • 7 February 2020
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Donna Huanca *EUNOMIA*, 2019-2020 Oil, sand on digital print on canvas 275 x 180 cm (108 1/4 x 70 7/8 in.)

WET SLIT is a solo exhibition of new works by Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca. This is Huanca's debut exhibition with Simon Lee Gallery and her first solo show in London since SCAR CYMBALS. Incorporating painting, sculpture, sound and scent, Huanca's site-specific installation immerses viewers in a total environment which synthesises her unique aesthetic with a politics of the body as it relates to space and temporality.

Huanca's practice draws particular attention to the skin as the complex interface via which we experience the world around us. Her 'skin' paintings – layered on magnified cross-sections of her models' painted figures photographed during performance – refer directly to the body. During the artistic process, she layers colours and forms with paint on her models, resulting in an indexical practice that places emphasis on the interaction between the ephemerality of experiential art and the permanence of painting. This exploration of the transient pertains directly to the temporal experience of the body, invoking themes of mortality and calling to mind the fleeting connections, both corporeal and emotional, brought about by physicality and touch.

Entering the gallery, viewers find themselves in a cocooned space, the walls hung with swathes of diaphanous recycled polythene that engages with the tactility of the artist's work. These sheets will be reused in future pieces of the artist's sculptural practice, further engaging with her method of reusing and extending materials in multiple iterations and forms. As though islands, two sculptures form an archipelago in the space. Coated in layers of highly textured oil paint mixed in with sand, their totemic proportions act as surrogates for Huanca's models, who are both sheltered and observed through the negative space of their compositions during performance. By introducing her organic statements into the white light of the gallery, Huanca emphasises the primordial in her practice. All her materials refer directly to the human body and denote an engagement with the cultural traditions of her Bolivian ancestry.



Donna Huanca SEED CELL REDUX, 2019-2020 Oil, sand on digital print on canvas 220 x 180 cm (86 5/8 x 70 7/8 in.)

The exhibition continues into the basement where viewers are enveloped in a dark, hermetic environment that counteracts the sterile light of the ground floor. This inversion of the traditional gallery space positions institutional critique at the heart of Huanca's femme-centric practice, upending prevailing power relations and realising a sanctuary. In both spaces, she facilitates an amplified connection between the senses with the introduction of sound and scent, bringing sight, hearing and smell into congress. The galleries are suffused with a fragrance derived from Palo Santo, a holy wood native to South America used in ritual purification ceremonies in both folk and church traditions. The sound piece, which uses natural sounds of water and liquid, serves to further displace the viewer from their surroundings and into a transcendent state, while underlining the fluidity of the subconscious. Huanca's background in sound art generated a practice based around sensory experimentation, which brings bodies and architecture into direct contact. Fundamentally, Huanca's emotionally instinctive body of work challenges the viewer through an invocation of the mutable, interactive and non-conforming.

Donna Huanca WET SLIT 28th February – 18th April 2020 Art Opening Thursday, 27th February, 6 – 8 PM
Simon Lee Gallery . LONDON

About The Artist

Donna Huanca was born in Chicago, IL in 1980 and lives and works in Berlin, Germany. She studied at the Städelschule, Frankfurt, Germany as well as the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME and the University of Houston, Houston, TX. She has been the recipient of the DAAD Artist Frankfurt and a Fulbright research grant. In 2019 Huanca was the subject of two major large-scale exhibitions, *OBSIDIAN LADDER* at the Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA and *LENGUA LLORONA* at Copenhagen Contemporary, Copenhagen, Denmark. She has previously had solo exhibitions at the Belvedere Museum, Vienna, Austria (2018); Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China, (2018) and at the Zabłudowicz Collection, London, UK (2016).

Conoce a Donna Huanca, la artista que transforma la piel en lienzo para deconstruir clichés de género



"Obsidian Ladder". Fotografía: Joshua White/JWPictures.com

29 oct. 2019

Words mor.bo

Donna Huanca se llama a sí misma una disruptora de oficio: la artista boliviana-norteamericana, nacida en Chicago y radicada en Berlín, utiliza pigmentos saturados y materiales "similares a la piel" (por no mencionar cuerpos humanos vivos) para deconstruir nuestras ideas preconcebidas acerca del género y proporcionar una alternativa a la mirada masculina. Usa lienzos salpicados de pintura, ropa desgastada, objetos de acero ambiguos, cera, pelo e incluso granos de café en sus instalaciones caleidoscópicas.

Huanca creció en Chicago con padres inmigrantes bolivianos: su padre trabajaba como profesor de idiomas en Berlitz y su madre como agente de viajes. Pasó los veranos en Bolivia, hasta que la familia se mudó a Houston cuando tenía 15 años. "Mi hermano mayor estaba en una pandilla en Chicago y tuvimos que mudarnos para sacarlo", dice.

Antes de pintar la piel, le gustaba pintar ropa. En Texas descubrió tanto una escena musical underground, tocando la batería en varias bandas, como el arte contemporáneo. Estudió pintura en la Universidad de Houston, donde obtuvo su licenciatura en 2004, pero para consternación de sus maestros, no estaba interesada en lienzos porque eran demasiado caros. En su lugar, compró prendas de segunda mano para cortarlas y convertirlas en collages o frotarlas con pigmentos.

Más allá de los materiales, para ella, el proceso siempre comienza con la gente. "Cuando estaba en la escuela secundaria tomaba ácido con cualquier persona que quisiera conocer", dice Huanca, cuyas modelos cubiertas de pigmentos aparecen, como miembros del clero en un ritual psicodélico de sanación, en el centro de sus ambientes contruidos. "Quiero que la experiencia de mi trabajo cree un momento surrealista similar a una alucinación", dice. Para Huanca, la ropa sirve como un poderoso sustituto para el cuerpo humano, como ella misma lo describe: "Las prendas evocan cuerpos y llevan su forma y espíritu".

Desde 2012, también ha incorporado modelos en vivo a sus piezas, a quienes invita a improvisar e interactuar con las esculturas e instalaciones que la rodean. Estos incluyen ensamblajes abstractos compuestos de varios arreglos de ropa teñida y alterada; lienzos marcados con maquillaje; y objetos que recuerdan cajas de vidrio y espejos. Las referencias a los orígenes, la memoria, el tiempo y la identidad están presentes en toda la obra de Huanca, lo que evoca la complejidad de las influencias que conforman lo que somos.

Su trabajo más reciente se llama **OBSIDIAN LADDER**, y en él sus "pinturas de piel" (tanto en lienzo como en modelos) y sus esculturas de acero tallado crean "una nueva topografía de los sentidos activados, combinando sonido, aroma y actuación en vivo". Cuando no está trabajando en el campo visual, Huanca es una artista del noise que se hace llamar **Rua Minx**.

Esta artista tiene un sentido innato de cómo los cuerpos y la arquitectura reverberan unos contra otros para crear estática emocional. En persona, este sentimiento contradice las fotografías de la obra de Huanca, cuyos vibrantes colores las hacen increíblemente listas para Instagram. "Agradezco que las obras sean fotogénicas", dice Huanca, "pero quiero que, mientras caminas por el espacio, te sientas como si estuvieras en el centro de un universo, en el centro de un ser complejo, autogenerado y vivo".

A lo largo de la exposición, además de las modelos en vivo que forman parte de la obra, acoge a artistas, activistas y estudiosas para una serie de programas "relacionados con la interpretación del género y la sexualidad en la vida contemporánea". Y a sus críticos que dicen que usar modelos desnudas durante la obra es explotarlas, tiene una respuesta contundente.

“Esa es una reacción tan natural porque las mujeres han estado expuestas en el arte y han sido explotadas por los artistas durante tanto tiempo. Pero estos modelos tienen poder de decisión sobre sí mismas. Tienen derecho a tomar descansos o a irse cuando lo deseen. Les pago a todas por encima del salario promedio de un ‘modelo vivo’. Sus voces están incluidas en el catálogo que estamos haciendo. Sus nombres están en las paredes. Quiero que sean mis colaboradoras”.

Una de sus modelos, **Iiia Anxelin Eleuia Xochipilli**, que se identifica como una artista de ascendencia apache, dice que es genial la diversidad que se encuentra en este trabajo: “Creo que es increíble que esté trabajando con modelos de diferentes formas que son trans, cisgénero y no binarias. No se permiten hombres, ni siquiera entre los guardias de seguridad. Mantiene las cosas seguras para nosotras”.

“No me gusta seguir las reglas, así que me parece bien que se desvíen del curso”, dice Huanca, explicando la naturaleza suelta de la coreografía del espectáculo. “Realmente confío en las relaciones con mis modelos para crear este ambiente. Tenemos confianza mutua. Hay mucha conversación que se refiere a cosas como la seguridad y la creación de un espacio seguro y cómoda para los modelos. Estamos reconfigurando lo que es la norma de tener una exposición de arte. Cuando hay gente viva en tu espacio, tienes que cuidar de ellos y ser flexible a las diferentes condiciones que puedan surgir”.

Cubiertas de pintura corporal y equipadas con extensiones de pelo sintético exageradas y una “armadura” de vinilo transparente moldeada a medida, las modelos parecen elegantes aves exóticas que anidan en una isla tropical llena de arte. Al igual que los pájaros, hacen lo suyo. Huanca las describe como guerreros poderosos y pacíficos. No se ven afectados por las multitudes y los visitantes, están concentradas en la tarea que tienen entre manos, su atención es tranquila, directa e introspectiva.

Al igual que la observación de aves, la experiencia de ver estas modelos se siente un tanto voyeurista, como si estuvieras observando a una criatura de otro mundo realizando silenciosamente un ritual sagrado.

Obsidian Ladder estará disponible hasta el próximo 1° de diciembre en la **Marciano Art Foundation** de Los Ángeles.

Interview with Donna Huanca

October 15, 2019

Text by Lindsay Preston Zappas



Donna Huanca & Przemek
Pyszelek, *MUSCLE MEMORY*
(Installation view) (2018). Image
courtesy of the artists and Peres
Projects, Berlin. Photo: Trevor
Good.

Amidst an alien landscape of white sand and labdanum-scented air, clear plastic crinkles over braided hair caked with clay. Breasts are sheathed beneath armor-like chest molds, and feet track lines through the sand, dragging slowly with trance-like precision. The ambient soundtrack that emanates from behind large swaths of fabric heightens the drama, and locates the scene somewhere moodily futuristic.

On Saturdays at the Marciano Art Foundation, Berlin-based Donna Huanca's largescale installation, *OBSIDIAN LADDER*, is overtaken by her army of performers, each costumed and painted head-to-toe by the artist. Huanca costumes her performers with an uncanny mix of natural and synthetic materials—the gentle egg washes and clay pigments she cakes into her model's hair and uses to ornament their skin contrasts long synthetic braids antiseptically wrapped in clear plastic packaging—creating a fantastical vision. Her models walk amongst and position themselves within or against sculptural works that simultaneously mimic their bodily ornamentation and act as backdrops for their movements. Large paintings hanging on the back wall serve as abstract backdrops to the built environment. Huanca begins her works on canvas with the painted body: she photographs her festooned performers, and uses those images as underpaintings.

Though Huanca's process of styling her models may echo the fashion and beauty industries (still too often defined by damaging beauty standards and non-inclusive marketing campaigns), the artist insists that a progressive politic underlies the work. While utilizing living people as an art medium is perhaps not a new phenomenon (think *tableau vivant*), it's certainly one that introduces a host of logistical concerns—from compensation to bathroom breaks—as well as several conceptual ones. Huanca cultivates relationships with her models, attempting to build a safe autonomous space for their performances to occur. She also donates the proceeds from editioned art objects to local trans and LGBTQ community groups (organizations that she says serve the communities her models belong to).

Though Huanca contends that her work breaks from the tradition of using the female nude to elicit the male gaze, her audience may not always be up to the task. "There's always some idiot man in every city that asks: how much do they cost?" she told *The Guardian* in 2016.¹

I caught up with Huanca in between international flights and post-show travel, and asked her about her dedicated relationship with her performers, the ephemerality of the figure, and how she sees her work in relation to feminism's progression and the ever-present male gaze.

Lindsay Preston Zappas: Your work includes intricately painted and costumed figures, but the paintings on your figures ultimately get washed off in the shower.

Donna Huanca: I am interested in the practice of detachment and letting things go. Since absolutely everything is temporary, I find it freeing that the body paintings are ephemeral.

LPZ: Do you pre-plan your body painting in any way (e.g., sketches or drawings), or is applying the body paint an intuitive process?

DH: The process of creating the body paintings is very intuitive for me, responding to and working with the models. I draw much of my inspiration from the natural world, from geological formations and patterns. I find it much more freeing than standing in front of a canvas, which can feel static and permanent. The inherent ephemerality in working with the models and on bodies feels more true and instinctual to me, which is why in my paintings [on canvas] I do a mixture of both—printing images from the body paintings onto the canvas and then layering over top of that painting and scratching [paint] with my hands.

LPZ: In your body paint and costuming, do you have specific moves that you repeat that act as constants?

DH: I think of my work as self-referential—my process involves a lot of layering and experimentation. Because of this, there are definitely certain things that recur between pieces. For example, I use a lot of hair in my work—braided hair that hangs from the sculptures and is also attached to the models. We hold memory and trauma in every strand of our hair—I am interested in this metaphor.

LPZ: I read that you have your performers write about their experience after each performance. What have those texts revealed to you, and how do you take that on board as you are conceptualizing a new piece?

DH: I value my relationships with the models extremely highly, and want to honor the different forms of expression and temporality that communication can take. I think of the texts as an extension of the experience of the performances, which is itself very meditative and self-reflexive. A lot of the models I collaborate with are artists in their own right, and the responses are often moving and are very important to me. It gives me the opportunity to encounter my work through their experience of it.

LPZ: I attended one of your shows in the past, and I saw you whispering to a performer who you ultimately led out of the gallery (maybe she wasn't feeling well or had to use the restroom?), and I remember thinking about how humane that interaction felt.

DH: All my models have complete agency when performing—they are free to move when they choose and leave the stage as they feel. For my work, what is absolutely crucial is the creation of a space that is safe for the models to have a meditative, transcendent experience.



Donna Huanca, *Obsidian Ladder* (Installation view) (2019). Image courtesy of the artist, Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, and Peres Projects, Berlin. Photo: Joshua White.

LPZ: How does that safety translate to live performance, where the audience is involved in looking?

DH: I'm trying to distort and refract the gaze. Not just in the live performances, but for me what is crucial to this destabilization of the male gaze is in the relationship of care and trust that I cultivate with the models. I give them very little instruction, and they are completely agential in creating their own experiences.

LPZ: Are you imagining a futuristic landscape?

DH: [I think a lot] about art history, but I actually think that the future (and the near future) is the important horizon to keep in our vision. In my work, I try to project a future, to experiment with visions of what a feminized future would look like, what it would value. For me, that looks like care, trust, community, the natural world, and the interconnectedness and dependence of bodies with the natural world.

LPZ: In your vision of a feminized future, are men precluded? Or do you envision a shift in power dynamics towards women?

DH: I'm not interested in exclusion. What I'm more interested in is new constellations of being and of relating to each other that supplant our current understandings of the masculine and the feminine. The feminine is powerful. I am trying to demonstrate that power as it already exists.

LPZ: How do you see your work fitting within the lineage of feminist art?

DH: The canon of feminist work has often excluded certain identities and bodies. I see myself as elongating (and certainly being indebted to) but also breaking with that history.

LPZ: You mentioned the gaze earlier. There are aspects of your work that mimic artists that had questionable body politics (the body prints of Yves Klein, performances of Vanessa Beecroft).

DH: My work has nothing to do with these mentioned artists.

LPZ: Your work diverges conceptually, but for instance, your show involves body prints (which Klein did with nude female models) and uses a particular Yves Klein blue.

DH: You could make that aesthetic connection, but that would be up to you to do the intellectual work of connecting my performances with the work of Yves Klein and making some sort of explanation or meaning from that. You could also compare my work to Ana Mendieta's performances or to Carolee Schneemann's films, or GWAR, or any other artist who uses the color blue. But for me, all I can say is that I have never made work consciously thinking about or reacting to Yves Klein.

LPZ: Is fashion a source of inspiration for you, or something that you are pushing up against?

DH: Self-decoration and aesthetic is a primal urge that we all have for communicating and signaling and community building, and I am interested in that aspect of "fashion." But the fashion world includes violences that I am repelled by: the fetishization of the body, the massive waste that comes with the incredibly fast, trend-based consumerism.

LPZ: Can you discuss how your work avoids fetishization of the body?

DH: Sure. I think first of all, I want to make clear that fetishization is often conflated with nakedness, and this is reductive and not true. Fetishization in fashion advertisements and other such media is the cutting up of bodies and evacuation of subjectivity or agency from those bodies, which is necessary to feed the erotics of the male gaze. My work is in direct conflict with this; it is all about the agency of the models, and the whole performance is set up to accommodate not only their safety but also to facilitate a meditative experience for them. The fashion industry is also so [dependent on] social media which I feel my work provides an antidote for. I hope that people enter my exhibitions and feel a sense of presence and groundedness that is so often stolen away by our phones.

LPZ: What do you mean by that? How is your work providing an antidote to social media?

DH: By allowing the audience to have presence in the space and to enter a space where time is elongated.

LPZ: As tech becomes more integrated into our lives, do you think it is something we need to resist or rethink our relationship to?

DH: We have to surrender to it.

LPZ: Performers inhabit the space at the Marciano just once a week on Saturdays. If viewers see the work without the performers, are they having an incomplete experience?

DH: I'm interested in the practice of femme mark making, the echoes and traces of the bodies in the space when they aren't present, how the space holds and retains that energy. When the models are not present, you can still trace their bodies through their footprints left in the sand and the rubbings that they've left on the wall from their bodies. All the works in the exhibition are interconnected and rely on one another; the paintings would never exist without the performances, the sculptures emerge from the paintings, etcetera.

Lindsay Preston Zappas is the founder and editor-in-chief of Carla.

Donna Huanca, born in Chicago in 1980, studied painting at the St. dellschule in Frankfurt am Main, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, and the University of Houston in Texas. She has previously had museum exhibitions at the Zabłudowicz Collection in London (2016) and the Yuz Museum in Shanghai (2018). Huanca lives and works in Berlin.



Donna Huanca & Przemek Pyszcak, *MUSCLE MEMORY* (installation view) (2016). Image courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin. Photo: Trevor Good.



Donna Huanca, *OBSIDIAN LADDER* (installation view) (2019). Image courtesy of the artist, Marclano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, and Peres Projects, Berlin. Photo: Joshua White.



Donna Huanca, *OBSIDIAN LADDER* (installation view) (2019). Image courtesy of the artist, Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, and Peres Projects, Berlin. Photo: Joshua White.



Donna Huanca, *LENGUA LLORONA* (detail) (2019). Image courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin. Photo: Elsa Kostio.



Donna Huanca, *OBSIDIAN LADDER* (installation view) (2019). Image courtesy of the artist, Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, and Peres Projects, Berlin. Photo: Joshua White.

Arte

Una muestra vedada a los hombres sobre el cuerpo femenino

Para su primera gran exposición en un museo en los Estados Unidos, la artista boliviana Donna Huanca actualiza la tradición del arte corporal.



La única ropa que usan las modelos en "Obsidian Ladder" es vinilo transparente o plástico moldeado para el calor. (Tracy Nguyen para The New York Times)

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Por JORI FINKEL

LOS ÁNGELES — Por primera vez en su historia, la galería en la planta baja de la Marciano Art Foundation se parecía a las bambalinas de un desfile de modas. En un rack colgaban prendas extrañas y extensiones de cabello, y a una modelo sentada le retocaban el maquillaje.

Pero cuando estas ocho modelos —una mezcla de mujeres cisgénero y artistas escénicas trans de diferentes razas— caminaron a una isla de arena blanca para posar cerca de coloridas esculturas de acero, sus movimientos eran lentos, sin dejo alguno del pavoneo de pasarela. Y lucían pintura corporal en lugar de ropa: una forma azul parecida a un bikini por aquí, una forma verde similar a unas chaparreras (polainas con cinturón) por allá. Las únicas prendas tangibles eran piezas transparentes de vinilo y plástico moldeado usadas para dar calor.

Es un nuevo giro de la artista Donna Huanca, radicada en Berlín, a la obra de Yves Klein, que bañó a modelos desnudas en su pintura azul brillante a partir de fines de los 50. Y es un nuevo uso para un espacio que, pre-Marciano, fue un teatro de 2400 butacas para los miembros de sexo masculino del Templo Masónico Rito Escocés.



Huanca dice que quiere que sus modelos "sean colaboradoras" (Tracy Nguyen para The New York Times)

"El teatro Masónico sólo admitía a las mujeres en ciertas ocasiones", dijo Huanca, de 38 años, mientras instalaba su nueva exhibición, "Obsidian Ladder" (Escalera de Obsidiana).

"Así que se siente muy poderoso ocupar un espacio en esta arquitectura con marcas pintadas sobre cuerpos femeninos y con modelos que representan una gama de femineidad".

Ha instalado nueve de sus esculturas de acero y un lienzo grande, basado en fotos, en el espacio. El aire está lleno con una banda sonora de ruidos naturales como fuego y agua, y un aroma acre que huele a madera quemada.

Las modelos aparecerán, dos a la vez, en la exposición todos los sábados durante el tiempo que esté la muestra, hasta el 1 de diciembre.



La exposición "Escalera de Obsidiana" de Donna Huanca en la Marciano Art Foundation de Los Ángeles presenta ocho modelos que llevan pintura corporal.

Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, una curadora independiente, relaciona a Huanca con una generación anterior de artistas latinoamericanas interesadas en el cuerpo de la mujer, incluyendo a Cecilia Vicuña, Ana Mendieta y María Evelia Marmolejo.

"Ella pertenece a la tradición del arte corporal, mostrando cómo el cuerpo, tema de tanta violencia política, es un espacio creativo que puede ser reclamado por los artistas", afirmó.

Pero ¿no es, a cierto nivel, explotador pedir a mujeres que posen desnudas ante desconocidos?

"Ésa es una reacción tan natural porque las mujeres han sido expuestas en el arte y explotadas por los artistas, durante tanto tiempo", dijo Huanca.



Para las extensiones de cabello, el artista originalmente usaba crin de caballo pero ahora ha cambiado a sintéticos. (Tracy Nguyen para The New York Times)

"Pero estas modelos tienen el poder de decisión total. Tienen el derecho de tomarse descansos o irse cuando quieran. Le estoy pagando a todo el mundo arriba del salario de una 'modelo de desnudos' promedio". Añadió, "quiero que sean colaboradoras".

Una modelo, Iiia Anxelin Eleuia Xochipilli, una autodenominada artista de performance de ascendencia apache, señaló: "creo que es realmente cool que ella esté trabajando con modelos con diferentes formas corporales que son trans, cisgénero, no binarias. No se permiten hombres, incluso entre las guardias de seguridad".

Huanca creció en Chicago, hija de padres inmigrantes bolivianos. Pasó los veranos en Bolivia, hasta que la familia se mudó a Houston cuando tenía 15 años.

En el pasado, la artista ha pintado la piel a mano, despertándose a las 5 para crear un nuevo par de pinturas corporales todos los días. Para esta muestra, usa máquinas rociadoras. Pinta algunas de las modelos para hacer juego con las esculturas cerca de las que están paradas.

A Huanca le gusta incluir materiales naturales como la cúrcuma y los posos de café en sus obras. Esta vez, espolvoreó cúrcuma sobre los hombros de las modelos. Para las extensiones de pelo, inicialmente usó crin de caballo, pero cambió a productos sintéticos hace un par de años. "Recibí una extensión a la que aún le quedaban unos pedazos de piel, y dije: 'ya terminé con esto'. Me pareció cruel y abusivo", recordó.

No era el elemento visual correcto para el arte que celebra el cuerpo.

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Sustituye la piel desnuda a los lienzos

“ Huanca creció en Chicago, hija de padres inmigrantes bolivianos. Pasó los veranos en Bolivia, hasta que la familia se mudó a Houston cuando tenía 15 años.

✎ Jori Finkel



La artista Donna Huanca dice querer que sus modelos “sean colaboradoras”. (Tracy Nguyen para The New York Times)

📅 14 Agosto 2019 | ⌚ 12 a.m. | 📱

Por Jori Finkel

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No era un elemento visual correcto para el arte que celebra el cuerpo.

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Bare Skin Is the Canvas for Donna Huanca

For her first big museum show in the United States, Ms. Huanca updates the tradition of body art.



Donna Huanca's "Obsidian Ladder" exhibition at the Marciano Art Foundation in Los Angeles features eight models wearing body paint. Tracy Nguyen for The New York Times

By Jori Finkel

July 12, 2019

LOS ANGELES — For the first time in its history, the recessed, ground-floor gallery at the Marciano Art Foundation looked like the backstage of a women's fashion show. A clothing rack held odd garments and hair extensions, a model sat having her makeup touched up, and others shuffled around in white robes.

But when these eight models — a mix of cisgender women and trans performers of different races — walked out past a large scrim and drifted onto an island of white sand to pose near colorful steel sculptures, they moved extremely slowly, with no hint of a runway swagger. And they wore body paint in place of clothes: a blue bikini-like form here, a green chaps-like shape there. The only tangible garments were see-through vinyl and molded-plastic pieces worn for warmth.

It's a new twist by the Berlin-based artist Donna Huanca on the work of Yves Klein, who drenched nude models in his bright blue paint starting in the late 1950s. And it's a new use for a space that, pre-Marciano, was a 2,400-seat theater [where male members of the Scottish Rite Masonic Temple](#) staged their own plays to attain higher levels of initiation or "education."

"The Masonic theater only allowed women inside on certain occasions," Ms. Huanca, 38, said while installing her new show, "[Obsidian Ladder](#)," at the Marciano. "So it feels very powerful to take up space in this architecture with femme mark-making and with models who represent a range of femininity."



Ms. Huanca says she wants her models "to be collaborators." Tracy Nguyen for The New York Times

She has installed nine of her Cubist-looking steel sculptures and a large photo-based canvas in the cavernous space, making it seem less imposing with scrims and bright lighting. The air is filled with a soundtrack of natural noises like fire and water and a pungent scent that smells like burned wood. ("To me it smells like a witchcraft market I like in Mexico City — burnt feathers and bleach," she said.) The slow-moving models will appear, two at a time, in the exhibition every Saturday for the show's run, through Dec. 1.

"The previous shows here played with the darkness of the theater," said Ms. Huanca, wearing a paint-splattered black jumper and some fierce-looking talon-shaped red nails. "With the light, the models, the scent and sounds, you're entering a whole new landscape."

Cecilia Fajardo-Hill, an independent curator not connected to the show, calls it a "ritualistic landscape where she explores the fluidity and complexity of identity, femininity, nature, culture." She relates Ms. Huanca to a previous generation of Latin American artists interested in the female body, including Cecilia Vicuña, Ana Mendieta and María Evelia Marmolejo. "She belongs to the tradition of body art, showing how the body, the subject of so much political violence, is a creative space that can be reclaimed by artists," she said.

So this isn't the same as Klein's [directing women to smash their painted breasts](#) against large sheets of paper to make artworks. But isn't it still at some level exploitative to ask women to pose naked before strangers?

"That's such a natural reaction because women have been exposed in art, exploited by artists, for so long," Ms. Huanca said. "But these models have complete agency. They have the right to take breaks or leave whenever they want. I'm paying everyone above an average 'life model' wage. Their voices are included in the catalog we're making. Their names are on the walls. I want them to be collaborators."



For the hair extensions, the artist originally used horsehair but has now switched to synthetics. Tracy Nguyen for The New York Times



Ms. Huanca uses machine sprayers for the body paint in the show. She dusted turmeric on the models' shoulders. Tracy Nguyen for The New York Times

One model, Iiia Anxelin Eleuia Xochipilli, who identified herself as a performance artist of Apache descent, said: "I think it's really cool that she's working with models of different shapes who are trans, cisgender, nonbinary. There are no men allowed, even among the security guards. She keeps it really safe for us."

Ms. Huanca noted that no photography would be allowed at ground level and that security guards had been trained to follow each model. "These performances trigger reactions in people ranging from crying to masturbation, so we want security to understand what to look out for," she said.

Olivia Marciano, the institution's artistic director and daughter of the museum co-founder Maurice Marciano, added that she found Ms. Huanca's work "meditative," not sexual. After seeing a similar installation by Ms. Huanca at the Belvedere Museum in Vienna last year, she invited her to take over the Marciano project space for her first big museum show in the United States.

Ms. Huanca grew up in Chicago with Bolivian immigrant parents: her father worked as a Berlitz language teacher, her mother as a travel agent. She spent summers in Bolivia, until the family decamped to Houston when she was 15. “My older brother was in a gang in Chicago and we had to duck to get him out,” she said.

Before she painted skin, she liked to paint clothes. In Texas she discovered both an underground music scene, playing the drums in various bands, and contemporary art. She studied painting at the University of Houston, getting her B.F.A. in 2004, but wasn’t, to the dismay of her teachers, interested in canvases — “too expensive,” she said. Instead she bought thrift-store garments to cut up and turn into collages or rub with pigment.



The models often match the sculptures in the show The only clothes they wear are see-through vinyl or molded plastic for warmth. Tracy Nguyen for The New York Times

In 2006 she did the summer program at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, starting what she calls “my hobo life of residencies and finding ways to work with nothing” — moving between New York and Berlin with a stay in Mexico City as well. There, in 2012, she dipped garments like a velvet dress and leather shorts into paint and hung them on the wall for a show at the Preteen Gallery. A couple of years later, in Brooklyn, she began experimenting with painting directly on the skin of friends.

Her biggest attention-getter came in 2017 at Art Basel, when her gallery, Peres Projects, presented her work in the Unlimited section, devoted to venturesome artists. For an eight-day, eight-hours-a-day performance, she painted the skin of two nude models and set them adrift in her own sculptural installation. Sabine Schaschl, director at Museum Haus Konstruktiv in Zurich, was among many who shared images on Instagram, writing, "Lock eyes with a model and the lines between looking and being looked at begin to bend."

At the time the artist was painting skin by hand, waking up around 5 a.m. to create a new pair of body paintings every day. For the Marciano show she is using machine sprayers, giving each model a set pattern and palette to be replicated through the show. Some are painted to match the sculptures they stand near — more or less camouflaged.

Ms. Huanca likes to include natural materials like turmeric and coffee grounds in her canvases, body paintings and sculptures alike. This time, she dusted turmeric on the models' shoulders. For the hair extensions, she initially used horsehair but switched to synthetics a couple of years ago. "I got an extension where some pieces of skin were left on," she said, "and I said: 'I'm done with this.' It felt cruel and abusive."

It wasn't the right visual, to say the least, for art that celebrates the flesh.

ART

DONNA HUANCA BREATHES NEW LIFE INTO LOS ANGELES

THE ARTIST'S NEW EXHIBITION TAKES OVER THE MARCIANO ART FOUNDATION,
TRANSFORMING THE FORMER MASONIC TEMPLE INTO A MULTI-SENSORIAL EXPLORATION OF
GENDER, MEMORY, BIOLOGY AND TIME.

CALLAN MALONE

06.29.2019



DONNA HUANCA: OBSIDIAN LADDER, JUNE 28-DECEMBER 1, 2019, AT THE MARCIANO ART FOUNDATION, LOS ANGELES. COURTESY OF PERES PROJECTS, BERLIN. PHOTO BY JOSHUA WHITE/JWPICTURES.COM

We're in a moment of identifiers and categories being the compasses by which we navigate the world. We delineate personas based on aesthetics or superficiality. There are, however, people who are creating work in order to subvert these norms. Donna Huanca continues to break down barriers of conformity with her interdisciplinary work. The artist transcends genre and, instead, values mutability and interaction. Huanca celebrates her first major United States solo exhibition with "Obsidian Ladder" now at the Marciano Art Foundation. The site-specific work features the eponymously titled center piece: a massive painting in eight parts as well as sculptural work and a calendar of performances that will accompany the show. Running through November, choreographed performances and public programming talks will comprise a major part of "Obsidian Ladder." Huanca also includes sound and scent to create an all sensory triggering experience. *Cultured* caught up with Huanca before the show to get a taste of what's in store.

This show combines so many art forms and really seems to function at the intersection of identity and praxis. Was your approach different for this show than "Lengua Llorana"? How did the Marciano space lend itself to "Obsidian Ladder"?

Since my work is so heavily influenced by the self, the body, and the subconscious, the approach to each show lends itself to the ever-changing and fluid nature of these ideas. However, "Obsidian Ladder" specifically defies the space at Marciano which is the site of a former Masonic Temple. A longstanding symbol of male power and brotherhood is transformed to a realm of femme spirituality.

Is there generally an order you follow in creating the paintings, score, scents, and chores?

All elements in my work are created from and within one another and the process has always been a type of meditation itself. The idea of order isn't necessarily the driving force of productivity, but more so a flow and intuition of the mind and body.



DONNA HUANCA: OBSIDIAN LADDER,
JUNE 28-DECEMBER 1, 2019, AT THE
MARCIANO ART FOUNDATION, LOS
ANGELES. COURTESY OF PERES
PROJECTS, BERLIN. PHOTO BY JOSHUA
WHITE/JWPICTURES.COM

How did you cultivate the scents for the piece? Is there a different process depending on location, venue, etc?

The scent, particularly for "Obsidian Ladder," I wanted to recall memories of a particular market in Mexico City and create an essence of body odor, bleach and burning feathers.

Phones have become such an invasive, but accepted tool while watching or interacting with a performance piece. How do you navigate that space as someone who prefers that no one is on their device?

By using sound, scent, body movement, painting and sculpture, my performance work provides as a very meditative experience for the viewer. As someone who has been practicing meditation for several years, it's a necessary tool which heavily influences my work. However, at this point it's almost second nature for someone to want to photograph such a multi-sensorial experience, but in actuality the phone acts as a disruptor to this experience, not just for yourself, but also for the collective audience.



DONNA HUANCA: OBSIDIAN LADDER.
JUNE 28-DECEMBER 1, 2019, AT THE
MARCIANO ART FOUNDATION, LOS
ANGELES. COURTESY OF PERES
PROJECTS, BERLIN. PHOTO BY JOSHUA
WHITE/JWPICTURES.COM

I remember the first time I read the *Cyborg Manifesto* and my understanding of feminist theory shifting entirely, particularly in regard to the combination of natural roots and live matter with the post-human and machine life. Can you speak to the ways in which you incorporate cyber-feminism into works that are so rooted in your Bolivian background?

My work exists as a politically charged testament regarding intersectional feminism, and the femme body, in relation to a rapidly changing modern society controlled by a patriarchal dialogue. As an artist, I have to ask myself, especially in terms of both the genetic or physical, conscious or subconscious existence of myself, how can I create a completely new realm of communication, with other beings or forces beyond our current comprehension.

ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS

With semi-nude models, Donna Huanca brings femme power into a male art world



Artist Donna Huanca, photographed in her "Obsidian Ladder" installation, at the Marciano Art Foundation in L.A. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

By CATHERINE WOMACK

JUNE 28, 2019 | 12:48 PM

Donna Huanca says her deep and enduring artistic interest in the female body stems from a simple fact: She has one.

She also says she's tired of seeing female bodies brutalized, tired of viewing them via the male gaze.

"In art history, women have been depicted in such a vulnerable way. This is a new way of looking at the feminine form, and in that gesture I'm trying to distort the male gaze, to have it be so powerful that it reflects back in a different way."

Huanca is standing in a sea of her art, surrounded by deep ocean blues and pops of rusty orange and chartreuse oil paint against a stark white backdrop. She's inside the Marciano Art Foundation's 13,000-square-foot Theater Gallery a few days before the opening of her show "Obsidian Ladder," which runs from Friday to Dec. 1.

Huanca's parents are Bolivian; she was born in Chicago and raised in Houston. Today she lives in Berlin — a great place to "hide and make work and have a studio," she says. This is her first major museum show in the U.S.

With her long, flowing black hair, silk emerald-green blouse and jeans covered in graphic paint, Huanca almost looks like a piece of her own artwork, as if she were one of the colorfully painted live models who will populate the space each Saturday during the run of the show.



Live models will be part of Donna Huanca's "Obsidian Ladder," running through Dec. 1 at the Marciano Art Foundation in Los Angeles. (Joshua White, JWPictures.com / Marciano Art Foundation)

Huanca's stylized, semi-nude models are just one element in an immersive ecosystem that also includes layered, vibrant abstract paintings, colorful figurative steel sculptures, looping audio and a specially designed scent diffused throughout the room.

In Huanca's hands, the Marciano gallery has been dramatically transformed. A pungent smell (more on that later) and the occasional low rumble of a pussycat's amplified purr or the gentle indigenous-language chanting of the artist's grandmother fill the atmosphere. The installation's sloping white walls obscure the hall's towering concrete ones, creating a wide V shape that draws the eye toward a curvy island of white, crushed quartz and marble sand inhabited by sculptures and quietly meditating models.



Sloping walls have been constructed to form the V for Donna Huanca's "Obsidian Ladder." (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

With the goal of creating a highly femme space, the artist says she first had to grapple with the architecture of the room.

The Marciano Art Foundation is housed in a [former Scottish Rite Masonic Temple](#) on Wilshire Boulevard. Designed in 1961 by Millard Sheets, the imposing structure was created by men, for men. Even after its modern adaptation into a museum (also by a male [architect](#)), the building's Theater Gallery has — until now — served as a vessel only for installations by male artists ([Jim Shaw](#), [Olafur Eliasson](#) and [Ai Wei Wei](#)).

“This architecture wants to dominate you, and it feels very patriarchal,” Huanca says. “Working in this room, it felt like I was wrestling a giant. We’re surrounded by all these secret codes of power. I wanted to uproot that and reverse it, and that’s what I hope we did. This [artwork] has its own codes, its own language too.”

That language — Huanca’s language — is an intuitive, inwardly focused and inherently feminine one.

In her practice, for instance, the way models are treated, protected and cared for during the run of the show is as important as how they look and move in front of visitors.

“I don’t like to follow rules, so I’m OK with them veering off course,” Huanca says, explaining the loose nature of the show’s choreography. “I really rely on the relationships with my models to create this environment. We trust each other. There’s so much conversation that goes into things like security and creating a safe and comfortable space for the models. We are sort of reconfiguring what is the norm of having an art show. When there are live people in your space, you have to take care of them and be flexible to the different conditions that might arise.”



Donna Huanca's "Obsidian Ladder" at Marciano Art Foundation (Joshua White, JWPictures.com / Marciano Art Foundation)



The models in the exhibition are encouraged to journal at the end of each performance. (Joshua White, JWPictures.com / Marciano Art Foundation)

Nine models who identify as female will perform throughout the run of the show: two longtime Huanca collaborators and seven local to Los Angeles. To keep them warm, heaters have been placed beneath the white sandbar on which they walk and pose. In place of itchy makeup, organic materials such as clay and egg whites are used to sculpt their bodies and hair.

Stationery is provided backstage, and they are encouraged to journal after each performance. (Huanca keeps the journals for documentation and for potential future publication.) The vibe is spa-like, Huanca says, because although the models are being paid to do this work, the experience should feel less transactional and more healing, peaceful and meditative.

Covered in body paint and outfitted with exaggerated hair extensions and custom-molded, transparent vinyl “armor,” the models look like elegant exotic birds nesting on an art-filled tropical island. Much like birds, they do their own thing. Huanca describes them as powerful and peaceful warriors. Unaffected by crowds and visitors, they are intent on the task at hand, their focus calm, direct, inward.

Like bird-watching, the experience of viewing these models feels somewhat voyeuristic, as if you are observing an otherworldly creature quietly perform a sacred ritual.

Even in the models’ absence — they appear only one of the four days a week the museum is open — the impressions of their bodies remain. Their footprints are visible in the sand, and colorful debris from their “costumes” peppers the sculpture island. They’ve also rubbed their blue-painted bodies against the gallery’s back wall, leaving a soft, messy smudge that will forever be a part of the Marciano’s DNA. The blue eventually will be painted over but never washed off.



A closer view of the sculpture island where live models will position themselves every Saturday. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)



Detail of one of Huanca's sculptures. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

Subtle remnants of women's bodies are embedded in Huanca's paintings too. Her canvases feature enlarged, close-up photos of models' painted bodies, which she covers in oil paint mixed with tumeric, sand and coffee grounds. Peeking out from behind the paint are bits of knees and elbows, cobalt blue goose bumps, wavy strands of hair and a repetitive grid of magnified skin.

There's also body odor.

"Like dank, but friendly dank," the artist says of the earthy scent she designed with olfactory artist Klara Ravat at Smell Lab in Berlin. "It started with me just burning palo santo in spaces, and then later I started to develop something more rich, something that can't be described. I want it to be welcoming but also a little bit off-putting."

The scent can be purchased as part of a shrink-wrapped clay sculpture on sale for \$50 in the museum's bookstore. (A rolling applicator is embedded in the clay.) Huanca says 100% of the proceeds from the scent sculpture and other show-specific pieces go to the Trans Wellness Center in Koreatown, the East Los Angeles Women's Center and Reach L.A., which serves young LGBTQ people of color.

Huanca says if you purchase the object, you can keep it as a sculpture or remove the scent and use it. But, she warns with a smile, it packs a powerful punch.

After all, it is a scent designed for a big job: cleansing a 13,000-square-foot space dominated by men for decades so that femme art and bodies can thrive.

Donna Huanca's 'Obsidian Ladder'

Where: Marciano Art Foundation, 4357 Wilshire Blvd., L.A.

When: Thursdays-Sundays, through Dec. 1

Admission: Free; timed-entry reservations strongly recommended

Info: (424) 204-7555, marcianoartfoundation.org



One of Huanca's paintings in the show opening Friday at the Marciano Art Foundation. (Robert Gauthier / Los Angeles Times)

On View

Traveling This Summer? Here Are the Shows You Can't Miss in 5 Cities Across the United States

From New York to Los Angeles, here are the must-see museum shows to hit while you're on the road this summer.

Artnet News, June 24, 2019

"Donna Huanca: Obsidian Ladder" at the Marciano Art Foundation Through December 1, 2019



Installation view of "Donna Huanca: CELL ECHO", at Yuz Museum, Shanghai.
Courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin.

Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca is getting her first large-scale museum show in the US at LA's Marciano Art Foundation, where she will debut a new site-specific installation that features her skin paintings and a series of carved steel sculptures, for which she is best known. These static objects plus sensory-engaging performances will take on the "aura" of the Marciano's building, which was once a former Scottish Rite Masonic Temple.

On view at the Marciano Art Foundation, 4357 Wilshire Blvd, through December 1, 2019



Installation view of Donna Huanca: CELL ECHO at Yuz Museum, Shanghai

Courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin

ART MUSEUMS

Donna Huanca's Color-Saturated "Skin Paintings" Are Set to Disrupt the Marciano

The Bolivian American artist will be the first woman to have domain over the museum's massive Theater Gallery

By Gwynedd Stuart - April 2, 2019

Donna Huanca is a disruptor. The Chicago-born, Berlin-based, Bolivian American artist uses saturated pigments and "skin-like" materials (not to mention live human bodies) to deconstruct gender and provide an alternative to the male gaze, and for her first-ever large-scale U.S. solo show, she's "challenging" the nature of a historically male space. Granted, a lot of art institutions are steeped in masculine energy to some degree, but the Marciano Art Foundation's former Scottish Rite Masonic temple once kept women out, except on special occasions.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Bu-3xkCFfDf/>

Called *OBSIDIAN LADDER*, the exhibit represents the first time a woman artist has taken domain over the Marciano's 13,000-square-foot Theater Gallery since the Wilshire Boulevard museum opened in the spring of 2017. Huanca's "skin paintings"—both on canvas and on hired femme models—and carved steel sculptures will create "a new topography of triggered senses, combining sound, scent, and live performance." When she isn't working in the visual realm, Huanca is a noise artist who goes by Rua Minx.

Previously, the gallery has housed Jim Shaw's *Wig Museum*, a simultaneous send up and skewering of midcentury iconography; Olafur Eliasson's psychedelic light installation *Reality projector*; and, most recently, Ai Weiwei's *Life Cycle*, a conglomeration of fragile-seeming objects, including massive wood-frame and fabric sculptures and a carpet made of antique ceramic teapot spouts.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/BvRe7QKFBap/>

Huanca's work has been described as "incredibly Instagram-ready," but that discounts its visceral nature. Throughout the course of the exhibit, in addition to the live models who'll be part of the work, the Marciano will host female artists, activists, and scholars for a series of programs "related to the performance of gender and sexuality in contemporary life."

OBSIDIAN LADDER opens on June 28 and runs through December 1. Admission to the museum is always free with [an advance reservation](#).



<https://channel.louisiana.dk/video/donna-huanca-disrupting-the-male-gaze>

Donna Huanca

Disrupting the Male Gaze

"I want to create a new way of looking at the feminine gaze and disrupting the male gaze."

"The body is a universal tissue." Meet the cutting-edge Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca and experience her striking site-specific multimedia installation that brings together sculpture, scent, sound, performance and painting – on canvas as well as on the skin of the female models.

The models in Huanca's exhibition move slowly. The artist feels that there is so much drama in the paintings and the way that the models are painted, that she wants to present something quite still "so that the audience can really determine the different layers and see the bodypainting echoed in the painting behind them." Huanca feels that the body is always a good starting point, when "creating a bond with a stranger," as it is something, we all have, making us able to relate to each other regardless of race, class or gender. When she studied painting, Huanca felt that "staying within the boundaries" of the medium was confining, and she was hence attracted to the free and ephemeral qualities of bodypainting: "There are no mistakes, and there are no pressures of it being this heroic canvas."

For her exhibition, Huanca wanted to create an artificial landscape that mimics the two-dimensional screen-based world we live in: "We're obsessed with looking at a two-dimensional screen, so I wanted to use the opportunity to make an artificial landscape with this very cold artificial light that we're surrounded by." In continuation of this, she wanted to create a space that the models feel safe in and also to present women in a powerful way, where they have complete agency: "I want to create a new way of looking at the feminine gaze and disrupting the male gaze. Historically, women have been depicted as vulnerable in art, typically made by men and for men."

Donna Huanca (b. 1980) is an American artist born to Bolivian parents. Huanca is particularly known for her painterly installations mixing painting, sculpture, sound, and scent with live performance. Her practice is rooted in an aesthetic and philosophical examination of the biochemical heritage and cultural history of the body. Especially in her use of the skin as a canvas and performative tool, she deconstructs the gender and body policies dominating our time and introduces an alternative gaze on the body. Huanca has held solo exhibitions at Belvedere Museum in Vienna, Yuz Museum in Shanghai, Travesía Cuatro in Madrid and Zabłudowicz Collection in London among others.

Donna Huanca was interviewed by Roxanne Bagheshirin Lærkesen at Copenhagen Contemporary in Copenhagen, Denmark in April 2019 in connection with her solo exhibition 'Lengua Llorona'.

Camera: Rasmus Quistgaard and Roxanne Bagheshirin Lærkesen

Produced and edited by: Roxanne Bagheshirin Lærkesen

Cover photo: From 'Lengua Llorona' by Donna Huanca. Courtesy of Peres Projects and the artist

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Supported by Nordea-fonden

Body Language: Donna Huanca



March 29, 2019

I first met Berlin-based multidisciplinary artist Donna Huanca when she was participating in the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's residency program in New York City in 2007. Then, she was making large-scale murals in fabric that depicted imagery of the assassination of Che Guevara, and colorful paintings of shoes, all of which conflated concepts of revolution in fashion and politics.

Interview by Eric Shiner

Photography Michael Hemy

Styling by Julie Ragolia

Model Karolina Svard

Makeup by Patrick Glatthaar

Hair by Gregor Makris

I've always found the two topics to be inextricably linked, and it was great to find an artist who seemingly understood that the personal is always political, and that the trappings that we choose to wear position us in society as a rebel, an academic, a punk, a team player, and on and on. I've watched her career grow from those early days into what it is today, a fully-fledged practice with works branching from a pervading central subject—the body politic.



Dress by Dries Van Noten, boots by Balenciaga, earrings by Maison Margiela.

ERIC SHINER — Your work, for me, has always been incredibly loaded thanks to your multidisciplinary exploration of the body politic, art history, fashion and fascism, and paint and performance. Might you let our readers know what fuels your art making?

DONNA HUANCA — I see my art making process as a form of meditation that creates a new language. It's necessary for me to communicate in this way, using my intuition and subconscious to process the exterior world.

ES — Materiality is deeply important to your practice, and you have had success working across a variety of media in producing your work. At the core, with which medium do you feel the most at home?

DH — I would have to say sound is the medium that continues to seduce for me, perhaps because it is the most challenging, abstract, and requires the most silence.

ES — How has your time in Berlin influenced your practice? You decided to make it your home, and I'd love to know what about that city provokes and inspires you the most.

DH — I was nomadic for several years—the consequence of growing up in an immigrant family means you never feel at home anywhere. I grew up in South Side Chicago, spent summers in Bolivia, went to college in Houston, and continued in my studies in Frankfurt. As my practice took shape, I went on to work in Mexico City, New York City, Argentina, et cetera. When I first arrived in Berlin, I immediately felt at ease. I'm not sure how to explain it. Perhaps it's because Berlin is the most unpretentious city I've ever been in, where people are in a constant state of flux, discovery, and experimentation. Those were the initial hooks that allowed me to stay and continue experimenting.



Left - Jacket, dress and leggings by MSMG, shoes by Marques'Almeida.

Right - Dress by Sonia Rykiel.

ES — If given the opportunity, what is your dream project? Where might it be and what might you hope to achieve with it?

DH — I would like to create a completely new atmosphere in communication with other beings and forces that are beyond our comprehension.

ES — Do you consider yourself to be political?

DH — Absolutely. We are all bound to our bodies as human beings, which makes it the most fundamental political unit. The personal is political.

ES — In recent years, meditation has become an important part of your life. I did the same when living in Japan. Tell us more about your practice and why it's important to you.

DH—My performance work is essentially a live meditation, so it is essential that I seek inspiration from that same source. I have been practicing Vipassana (10-day silent meditations) for a few years now, and these experiences have changed my life. Meditation is part of a bigger constellation of research into my subconscious and genetic memory, where I source inspiration.

““Meditation is part of a bigger constellation of research into my subconscious and genetic memory, where I source inspiration.””



ES — How does ritual play a role in your practice? Your performance-based work at Art Basel Unlimited last year, for me, conflated dance, ceremony, and body art into a deeply moving action bordering on the religious. I'd love to know more about the background of that piece.

DH — **BLISS (REALITY CHECK)**, 2017 was a breakthrough moment for me, because of its duration—eight hours a day, seven days straight. It was a huge risk, as the models were the primary focus and, as always, I had given them very little instruction besides, "Stand still, and when you move, please move slowly." I never like to tell the models what to do as it is their own experience. I believe the element of chaos and improvisation is what makes the performances authentic. We had already been working together for years so there was an inherent trust and understanding between the models and myself. The work in itself is visually dramatic so I want the models' actions to be as non-dramatic as possible.

The space the audience encountered consisted of very few elements: a scent, a white sand-covered stage, a soundtrack (that was mostly bass sounds to give them a vibrational pulse that also moves the sand, that keeps time, and keeps time for them), two life-size sculptures that had hidden speakers—I did not know what they represented at the time, but later I realized the one represented my father (male/fragility) and one was representing my mother (bountiful giving) and finally the two painted models.

We created our own ecosystem within those walls, which included backstage where the models would be painted, take breaks, eat their meals, and go to the bathroom. The models and I would wake up at 6 am, and I would paint them for three hours to prepare them for an eight-hour shift. During the day I would be backstage cleaning up and preparing their meals. I would often watch the performance in the crowd amongst the general public. I did not realize how intense the performance happening within the crowd would be. So this also added to my learning experience. The body paintings were improvised, so progressively got crazier as the week went on given that I had to create fourteen new paintings in seven days. Afterwards we would have dinner together and talk about the day, sleep, and do it all over again. We learned so much about ourselves, and it was very emotional for everyone involved, not to mention the audience.



Earrings by Maison Margiela.

ES — Fashion has seemingly had a constant presence in your work, from early show paintings to costume and other bodily adornments in your performance-based work. Why is that important to you? Do you approach it from a position of critique or adulation?

DH — My relationship to fashion has always been conflicted. I am both inspired and repelled by it. I don't identify with the disposable and violently sped up aspect of trend-based fashion, but instead view it as a means to explore identity and self-expression that slowly evolves with time. Self-decoration has always been the primal form of communication and coding—this is the aspect I am interested in.

ES — What are your thoughts on Andy Warhol?

DH — When I think of Andy Warhol, I think of mortality. When that NYT article came out describing his autopsy, revealing his body was completely disintegrated from years of abuse, it confirmed that no one escapes mortality, not even the magician himself.

ES — Who are three young artists to whom we should be paying attention?

DH — The artists I'm most excited about are Vi Payaboon, Manuel Salano, Elysia Crampton, and Yves Tumor.



Left - Jacket by Tibi, jeans by Telfar.



Right - Jacket and shorts by Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello.

Art

8 Artists Using Silicone to Create Strange, Radical Artworks

Alina Cohen Mar 25, 2019 1:04 pm [f](#) [t](#) [e](#)



Ilona Szwarc

I am a woman and I cast no shadow, #17, 2016

AA|LA

Silicone has a meandering, illustrious history. British chemist Frederic Stanley Kipping pioneered some of the first major investigations into the compound (which is made up of silicon and oxygen atoms) in 1927. Since then, its shape-shifting potential has inspired everyone from astronauts to plastic surgeons: Neil Armstrong wore silicone-tipped gloves during the first-ever moonwalk; cosmetic surgery has long relied on the material for breast implants; and it's a favorite of both sex-toy and cookware companies.

Given its potency in popular culture, as well as its malleability, it's no wonder that silicone has inspired artists, too. In its solid, rubbery form, it easily conjures distinctions between the natural and the man-made. It evokes a consumer society obsessed with performance, innovation, and the pliability of self-presentation—metaphor is, indeed, embedded in its chemical make-up.

Many sculptors who work with the material are also intrigued by its connection to the uncanny and grotesque. “I like silicone because of its flesh-like consistency and the way it holds light,” artist Hannah Levy explained. “There’s a kind of luminosity to it if you add just the right amount of pigment that makes it look like it has some kind of life of its own.” She’s used the medium to construct works that approximate objects as varied as a pink swing, a massive asparagus stalk, and deck chairs. Below, we examine Levy’s work and that of seven other contemporary artists who use silicone to unique, radical ends.

Donna Huanca



When asked what she finds most interesting about silicone, artist Donna Huanca offered an equally intriguing answer: “the ephemerality of it, the smell.” The material does, indeed, produce a synthetic reek. Embedded in artwork, it produces olfactory sensations that can intensify a viewer’s visual experience.

Huanca (who shows with Berlin gallery Peres Projects) has long been known for her performances that situate paint-covered models in the gallery setting among her multimedia sculptures, and she’s recently added silicone to her repertoire to heighten the drama. She gives her performers glass vials filled with liquid silicone and their choreography invites them to paint it, intuitively, onto plexiglass. “These silicone paintings are temporary, as they peel the silicone once dried,” Huanca said. “I love the idea of creating ephemeral paintings.” The fleeting nature of the artworks encourages the audience to enjoy the moment.

Huanca said she’s particularly interested in Andean futurism and meditative practices. Her art often suggests an alternate realm, decades from now, where nude women aren’t watched for titillating purposes, but for their own creative potential.



Alina Cohen

Artist Donna Huanca's Transcendent Installations Value Real Life Over Likes

By [Caroline Busta](#)

Photographed by [Richie Shazam](#)

March 5, 2019



Paint-splattered canvases, tattered garments, ambiguous steel objects, wax, hair, and even coffee grounds – these are just a few of the many materials that Donna Huanca incorporates into her kaleidoscopic installations. And yet, says the American-born, Berlin-based artist, the process always begins with people. “When I was in high school I would take acid with anyone I wanted to get to know,” says Huanca, whose pigment-covered models appear, like members of the clergy in a psychedelic healing ritual, at the center of her built environments. This month, her “traveling gang” of mostly fellow artists and musicians will arrive in Denmark for Huanca’s ambitious exhibition at [Copenhagen Contemporary](#), a museum housed in a former ship hangar.

Although they owe a debt to the happenings of Carolee Schneemann and Robert Morris, Huanca’s works are born from the nightclubs of her adoptive home of Berlin. A decade-long veteran of the noise music scene, producing music under the moniker [Rua Minx](#), she has an innate sense of how bodies and architecture reverberate against one another to create emotional static. In person, this feeling belies the photographs of Huanca’s work, whose vibrant colors make them incredibly Instagram-ready. The striking presence of her performers acts as an anti-screen surface, one that pulls its audience into the lived reality of the room they inhabit. “I’m grateful that the works are photogenic,” says Huanca – and indeed they are – “but I want you, as you’re walking through the space, to feel like you’re at the center of a universe, at the center of a complex, self-generating, living thing.”

Sittings Editor: Briana Andalore.

DONNA
HUANCA

b. 1980, Chicago, IL, USA
 Lives and works in Berlin, Germany
 is a M.A. candidate at the University of Berlin

Donna Hudson is interested in skin—as a source of identity, the source of our earthly experience and the palette on which our experiences are recorded for our earthly lives. For this artist, the human body is a terrain for exploration, not only our material form, but also the surface through which we interact with our immediate surroundings and the wider world. Inspired by organic materials such as rocks and minerals, the evolution of forms, the natural colours of plants and flowers and psychedelic experiences, her work is a crystallization or visceral organization of humanity, whittled down to an arrangement of sculptural forms, processes, rituals and modes.

There is a Romantic, almost stenographic quality to Hunsot's presentations, for which the female form is the crux of inspiration and information. Working across installation, performance,

photography and sculpture, the Berlin-based artist uses female nudity as method by which to confront the viewer. Her take on nudity is neither sexualized nor glorified: the naked female body – either a live performer or cast parts of female anatomy – is often presented as part of an immersive tableau, which renders its elements both seductive and shocking. The feminine body in Huerto's practice, which includes women, trans women and men, is unapologetic, stark and empowered.

Hand's work is ephemeral, moving structures. Performers are adorned with skin and skin-like accoutrements that release grimoire, bondage, the possibilities of transformation and evolution inherent in living bodies. The performative aspect of her pieces provides another unadorned reminder of the power of the body and the mappings of the composed self.

[illegible]



ON OUR RADAR

DONNA HUANCA

Donna Huanca's multisensory art installations transport viewers to another world—one that is ruled by the feminine. For her first big U.S. museum show, at the Marciano Art Foundation in Los Angeles this year, Huanca transformed the former Mission Temple with a mass of white sand, totemlike steel sculptures, and monumental oil-on-canvas works. Nine painted nude models—a mix of cisgender and trans persons of different



Above: A 2019 work titled *Tegumentum Beta*, crafted with oil and sand on digital print on canvas. **Left:** Donna Huanca.

ethnicities—slowly moved about. A bespoke scent and a nature soundtrack rounded out the experience. "With every exhibition, I respond to the architecture and history of the location," says the Berlin-based artist. "The temple was created to enforce patriarchal power. To hold a female space was truly an epic feat."

Huanca, who grew up in Chicago with Bolivian parents, made a name in the underground music scene and studied painting at the University of Houston. "I never declared wanting to be an artist," she says. "I grew up in a working-class immigrant family where that was never an option. Becoming an artist was more of a process."

It was at 2017's Art Basel in Switzerland that she first caused a stir on the international art scene, presenting with her Berlin gallery, *Peris Projects*, a sculptural installation that featured two nude models in a durational eight-day performance. "I have found observing the textures, destruction, and cycles in nature to be very inspiring," she says.

Since then, Huanca has had solo shows at the Belvedere museum in Vienna, the Yuz Museum in Shanghai, and Copenhagen Contemporary. Next spring will be her first solo exhibition with Simon Lee Gallery in London. "Donna's unique visual language is based in collaboration and innovation," says Simon Lee Gallery director Katherine Schaefer.

"Being an artist today is challenging and exciting," says Huanca. "I see my job as an urgent one and use a sensual, visual language for this communication." www.donnhuanca.com —L.R.

DONNA HUANCA



Installation view of *EPITHEAL ECHO*, Juka Stoschek Collection, Berlin, 2017

Touch is the earliest sense to develop in the human embryo. Scientists say that as early as eight weeks, the unborn fetus begins to explore its self and surroundings through the network of sensory receptors on the surface of its still mushy skin. From this point on we are inexorably stimulated with neural signals, as our sense of touch cannot be shut off in the way our eyes can be closed or ears covered.

Our largest organ, skin forms the contours of our bodies. Lacan locates subjectivity in the moment of recognizing ourselves in a mirror, our fleshy exteriors clearly demarcated visually by a largely consistent expanse of matter that stands in contrast to the floral pattern sofa, wood floors, or whatever other objects exist in our imaginary nursery's reflection. Kristeva alternately understands subjectivity as forming through the slow infantile process of determining what is inside and outside the skin; we locate ourselves through coughing on our mother's milk or throwing it up, brought about by our parent's hand patting against our back. The notion of our skin itself as a fixed boundary is complicated when we recognize that it (ideally) has a lifetime much shorter than our own. Our epidermis is constituted through a continual process of programmed death; keratinocyte stem cells multiply through cell division and migrate superficially to the skin's surface, slowly cornifying to become corneocytes, aka "terminally differentiated" or biologically dead cells that then basically flake off and become food for mites.

It is on and from this surface that the artist Donna Huanca makes her work. In her large-scale performances, models wearing thin layers of nylon are covered in fertile botches of body paint, latex and other fragmentary garb, emphasizing and embellishing the outermost façades of their being. Moving at a measured, almost glacial pace, her performers are often described as doll-like, externalized to the point of becoming quasi-objects. Over-inscribed, the bodies end up in excess of themselves, however, and the exteriors slowly peel away, the paint rubbed off against panes of plexi through the familiar process of desquamation in which our skin itself is removed, accumulating over the duration of an exhibition as paintings composed through exfoliation. Huanca's alien creatures also molt, and the artist assembles their exuviae of rubber exoskeletons, leather hides, horsehair wigs, and clothing, still formed to the curvatures of an anterior body, in startling, almost-anthropomorphic totems that do not so much point towards death as to a kind of asexual propagation.

While the relationship Huanca establishes between the body and its object-artefacts clearly defies the clean notion of a unified and stable body-image, the externalized traces of the body are not exactly abject either. Rather than detrital throwaways, which in their alterity allow the performers to in turn constitute themselves, her static works are imbued with a vital materialism that holds a continued ability to reciprocally affect and be affected by their living counterparts; for example, *NERVE ENDINGS / ASTRAL LAYER (Blind Spot)* lined the contours of her recent Zabłudowicz exhibition "Scar Symbols" with 40 infrared sensors, triggered by the body heat and movement of both her models and the collection's visitors. Combining vibrotactile and auditory stimulation through a mix of sub bass frequencies and recorded bells, whistles, found audio, and recited texts, the piece is activated and felt contingently in relation to the amorphous constellation of bodies within the room. At its center is an armature draped in large sheets of latex and leather, which ripple and pulse when approached, a reminder that the body is not only form, but a material conduit of energy and sound.

The tensile system of relational vectors that Huanca sets up finds a description in Erin Manning's *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (2007). Understanding touch as a reciprocal exchange, she writes, "When I reach to touch you, I touch not the you who is fixed in space as pre-orchestrated matter/form. I touch the you that you will become in response to my reaching towards. Our bodies are at once indissociable and in excess of the regulatory norms that govern their materialization and the signification of these material effects"¹. Her project collapses the binary ontologies of self and other into an ontogenetic process of becoming, in which to touch is to always simultaneously be touched in return.

This unstable understanding of the subject, which is always in the process of in-forming, is less a Batailleian knocking of form off its pedestal as it is a theory of the subject as being continually constituted contingently by its environment and the multiple potentialities found within it. The subject thus becomes dispersed and sticky, its skin extended into the world. Rather than a straightforward fossilization of performer into sculptural artefact or painting, the various components of Huanca's installations communicate through feedback loops and symbiosis. In fact, components from a sculpture or painting are often cannibalized in later works or installations, always susceptible to further digestion or recombination. In this sense I think of her practice as akin to the process of anastomosis found in fungal mycelial networks, through which individual spores extend branching, thread-like hyphae to form a reticulating but singular clonal colony. Huanca's objects and performers are merely the visible, fruiting mushrooms atop a larger, interconnected and extracorporeal body.

BY KENTA MURAKAMI





Installation view of BLISS (REALITY CHECK), Peres Projects, Art Basel, 2017



Installation views of *POLYSTRENE BRACES*, Kim?, Riga, 2015-2016



DONNA HUANCA



TRAVESIA CUATRO

Donna Huanca's "Piedra Quemada"

by Rose-Anne Gush

September 28, 2018–January 6, 2019

Lower Belvedere, Vienna

December 18, 2018



Installation view of Donna Huanca's "Piedra Quemada" at Lower Belvedere, Vienna, 2018. All images © Belvedere, Vienna and courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects, Berlin. All photos by Elsa Kostic.

Flatness, surface, posture, and the notion of cycles animate Donna Huanca's "Piedra Quemada" [Scorched Stone]. The exhibition, displayed across Vienna's Lower Belvedere museum, is a Gesamtkunstwerk consisting of 33 works including paintings, mixed-media sculptures, and live models whose bodies, painted by the artist with bright colors, move slowly throughout the space. In the first room, blue, green, white, and pink oil and acrylic paints billow across ten canvases. The paintings' titles (all works 2018) point to forms of containment, growth, process, and sedimentation, as in *MOULD*, *CYANOBACTERIA* (bacteria which gain energy through photosynthesis), and *ACRITARCH* (an organic microfossil believed to be up to 1400 million years old).

In the center of the room is a platform covered in a layer of almost invisible white powder, which carries traces of foot and body prints made by Huanca's models. Displayed on the platform is the steel frame of *PARA ELYSIA (MARIPOSA)* [For Elysia (butterfly)], one of the five mixed media sculptures presented in the show. Stretched and pulled around the skeletal structure whose shape evokes a head and torso are scrunched plastics painted with opalescent oils and acrylics. A rope made from synthetic black hair further anthropomorphizes the work. In the multi-screen video works *ABUELITA VERDE* [Green Granny] and *SAPO SANGRE* [Blood Frog], hands feel through gray sludge or sensuously push paint and fabric across skin, the body's membrane treated as canvas.

Built during the early eighteenth century as the palace of Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736), in 1903 the Lower Belvedere was adapted from a place of aristocratic and imperial absolutism to a space for secularized art exhibitions. The sound installation *TECO Y ZENON (PARENTS SPEAKING)* plays in the Baroque Marble Gallery. Its ceiling features a fresco of Apollo riding a sun chariot and sculptures of Providentia. Personifications of Vienna's four main rivers fill the floor and statues of ankle-shackled prisoners adorn the walls. Intimate conversations between the artist's parents, during which her father and mother discuss Quechua, echo around this space of pre-conditioned ritual.

"Piedra Quemada" has an undulating narrative form. Viewers are guided from room to room as if from light to darkness, from rationality to magic. The fourth room contains five classical statues of women, dating from 200 BCE to the twentieth century. Facing each other, their backs turned to the viewers, they form the hermetic world-within-a-world of "Piedra Quemada." Their supports—which resemble the steel frames of Huanca's sculptures—hold them in upright or crouching postures. These marble and plaster figures point to a heritage of figuration, proportion, and gesture. In contrast, the edges of the room carry impressions from Huanca's live models. Like Yves Klein's "Anthropometry" series (1960), Huanca's models have pressed their bodies along the entirety of the wall, leaving faint colored imprints.

The final room, with its deep blue walls, draws viewers into another space of ritual. On each wall hang huge, swirling, Gustav Klimt-esque canvases—ten in total, mirroring the first room. Collectively titled "MAGMA," these paintings in oil, acrylic, and blue pigment evoke a kind of atavistic, disfigured time against the frozen time of the classical statues. The smell of myrrh drifts across the room. Here, art is wrenched into the space of myth, yet this move is countered by the large mixed-media sculptures displayed in front of the paintings, which absorb the new through their materials. In this warm, scented room is a model, guarded by white-clad invigilators, sitting still. They are painted blue and white, divided in sharp lines down the middle of the torso; they move sideways, becoming almost invisible as their blue blends with that of the wall.

As if drawing equivalences between Klein, Viennese Actionism, and Ana Mendieta, Huanca's painted humans are flattened and de-situated. The artist draws on the tradition of treating the human-as-artwork as an ideal form, which testifies to the institutionalization and integration of the "neo avant-garde." In a recent conversation with Isabelle Graw, Huanca claimed that her models let go of expected norms and behaviors to "detach from their ego," revealing a latent idealism.¹ Yet in these billowing paintings, which reflect on posture and fashion, there is an impulse toward placation. In appealing to a mix of geological time, the cyclical, distracting time of fashion, and the dead-labor time expended by Huanca's models, is this exhibition neutralized of its force in the present? It is unclear whether Huanca's creation of a para-world in "Piedra Quemada," within an old home whose echoes of absolutist rule are still visible, assaults a hostile, external world or merely decorates it.



CRITICS PICKS

VIENNA

Donna Huanca

LOWER BELVEDERE AND ORANGERY

Rennweg 6

September 28, 2018 - January 6, 2019

Spread over eight rooms in the Baroque former summer residence of Prince Eugene of Savoy (1663–1736), Donna Huanca's current exhibition has an opulence all its own. Bright and dim spaces alternate throughout the Lower Belvedere, evoking an initiatic journey into a brave new world. Nude models—sixteen at the opening and two for the duration of the exhibition—with bodies painted in canary-like greens, oranges, and blues starkly contrast with their life-size marble and plaster counterparts, culled from local sculpture collections and arranged in a circle in the penultimate gallery. Huanca calls her female and androgynous models “live paintings,” though they function as both canvases and brushes. Some wear elaborate headpieces of what looks like melted, amorphous plastic, or pose perfectly still on pedestals; others move slowly along the white walls, leaving behind traces of their passage. The resulting wall rubbings inevitably nod to Yves Klein, but they also recall the excesses of Viennese Actionism and hint at Ana Mendieta's earth-body works.

In the sound piece *Teco y Zenon*, 2018, the artist's father teaches her mother Quechua, harkening to Huanca's Bolivian roots. The same is true of the evocative Spanish titles, including that of the exhibition as a whole. “*Piedra quemada*” (Burnt Stone) culminates in the elemental soundscape of birdsong, crickets, crackling fire, and gushing water, heightened by the faint aroma of charred wood that permeates the final room. Animated by Huanca's models and the lustrous, metallic, and velvety materials, the wall paintings and richly textured sculptural assemblages come together in a setting designed to solicit all our senses.

— *Agnieszka Gratzka*

Donna Huanca: 5 answers in 1 minute from the spectacular young artist who paints on bodies and on canvas

There are **names** that **circulate in the contemporary art world** which resemble little **refrains** that get stuck in your head.

You hear them here and there at art fairs and museums on the other side of the world, you **spot them in sophisticated programmes**, yet you're so preoccupied by the **mass of information** that you can't even **attempt to identify their work**.

For a few years, this was the case for me with **Donna Huanca** (born in 1980), an **American artist of Bolivian origin** who lives in **Berlin**.

That is, until the day in 2017 when I saw an **extraordinary performance** of hers organized at **Art Basel** by the gallerist **Javier Peres** from Berlin. **The rituals she establishes are unique**.

She **doesn't participate** in them directly, but instead stages an **immersive aesthetic context** (complete with sound, smells, sculptures...) with **performers walking around** covered in **body paint**.

She considers these **body** paintings to be **works of art**. She considers **the performance itself to be a work of art**.

She also **prepares these performances** in her studio in the presence of models, which she **documents** with the aid of photography (**Javier Peres** insists that these photos are not works of art) and from this she **produces paintings on canvas**.

She starts by making **collages of printed images**, which she then **paints over using the same raw materials** she worked with on the bodies of the models, usually **with her hands**. This has been her work process for seven years and according to **Javier Peres** it's evolved a lot in recent years. "She's fascinating because **her work is a mixture of intuition and intelligence**. It all comes from her heart and her gut, but also from her **knowledge and her Aymara heritage**. The Aymara are a people who live in the **Lake Titicaca region**."

Donna Huanca willingly applied herself to the one-minute answers game. Her comments are well articulated. The comparison with **Yves Klein**, which people often make when discussing her work, is not seen to be flattering. Our meeting took place a few months ago while she was preparing for her large-scale retrospective currently showing until 6 January at the **Belvedere Museum in Vienna**. Javier Peres also promises there will soon be an exhibition at a museum on the **West Coast** of the United States.

Why and where did you become an artist?



<https://youtu.be/bojX1pBgX4A>

What do you think of Yves Klein?



<https://youtu.be/QmFyzKI5AWw>

Is performance the key to your work?



<https://youtu.be/cPMEF42GNso>

What is your next dream?



<https://youtu.be/27NQQ2hwUOI>

What would you like people to remember about you?



<https://youtu.be/QDQv9CUmAMo>

BODYPAINING

Belvedere: Donna Huanca stellt lebende Leinwände aus

Die Ausstellung "Piedra Quemada" der amerikanisch-bolivianischen Künstlerin changiert zwischen psychedelischer Malaktion und Cyberpunk-Modeschau

Roman Gerold 1. Oktober 2018, 19:19 7 Postings



Bemalen und bemalt werden: Die Haut als Malerleinwand, dieses Thema treibt die amerikanisch-bolivianische Künstlerin Donna Huanca um.

Foto: Johannes Stoll

Wien – In den Prunksälen des Unteren Belvedere rechnet man eher mit historischen Ausstellungsthemen. Einem Historienmaler des 19. Jahrhunderts oder Überblicksdarstellungen der klassischen Moderne boten die altehrwürdigen Räume in jüngerer Zeit eine Bühne. Umso stärker ist die Wirkung der Arbeiten von Donna Huanca, mit denen nun die Gegenwartskunst einkehrt.

Die amerikanisch-bolivianische Künstlerin hat in die barocke Atmosphäre eine futuristische Szenerie gepflanzt, die zwischen psychedelischer Malaktion und Cyberpunk-Modeschau flottiert. Paraventartige Objekte aus Stahl, opulent bestückt mit zerschnittenen Jeans, Latex oder Sexspielzeug, dienen als Bühnenbild. An den Wänden breiten sich abstrakte Farbstrudel und Abdrücke bemalter Körper aus.

Performer wie Skulpturen

Selbige sind auch leibhaftig anwesend. Performerinnen und Performer mit grellem Bodypainting und exzentrischen Kostümen bewegen sich lautlos durch die Ausstellungsräume. Zuweilen verschmelzen sie wie Chamäleons mit den bemalten Wänden und vermögen ähnlich überraschend wie jene aus dem Nichts aufzutauchen. Oder sie bieten, reglos dastehend, den örtlichen Skulpturen neonleuchtend Widerparts.

Die nachdrückliche Körperlichkeit der Schau könnte manchen Besucher, der auf gute alte Flachware gepolt war, irritieren. Immerhin blicken Huancas "lebendige Leinwände" – also die Performer – zurück, während man die feinen malerischen Texturen auf ihrer Haut betrachtet. Das Spiel mit der Grenze zwischen Körper und Malerei ist wesentlich in jenem Konzept, mit dem Huanca auf dem Kunstmarkt reüssiert.

Offensive Körperlichkeit

Die 1980 in Chicago geborene Künstlerin erprobt die nackte Haut als Leinwand und kokettiert mit den Geschichten, die diverse auf dem Flohmarkt erstandene Kleidungsstücke zu erzählen vermögen. Huanca zählt zu jenen Künstlerinnen, die durch unbedingte Sinnlichkeit die Verflüssigung der Identitäten anvisieren.

Den Willen zum Immersiven bekräftigt sie, indem sie Räume mit Sound-Atmosphäre ausstattet und einen Saal gar mit dem Geruch von Myrrhe füllt. Ja, ein wenig Kitschverträglichkeit wird man in die Ausstellung *Piedra Quemada* (dt. "Verbrannte Steine") schon mitbringen müssen.

Leibfreundlichkeit 2.0

Schade kann man finden, dass es Huancas Utopie von der Leibfreundlichkeit 2.0 leicht an Diversität mangelt. Der Kampf gegen das Schönheitsideal, den sich die Künstlerin auf die Fahnen schreibt, erscheint ein wenig halbherzig, denn: Viel Abwechslung und Normabweichung wird man unter ihren durchwegs androgynen Performern dann doch nicht finden. (Roman Gerold, 2.10.2018)

New Establishment: Donna Huanca

Donna Huanca creates live sculptural pieces—working primarily with the nude female body, painted and re-formed—that explore ideas of space and identity. Emily Steer spoke to the American artist as she prepared to undertake the Zabludowicz Collection's Annual Commission in autumn 2016.



Portrait by Paul Physioc. Courtesy the artist

Can you tell me a little about your upcoming Zabłudowicz Collection show?

All my works are very sensitive to their environment—perhaps it's an attempt to take possession of a space—and it is impossible to ignore the context that the works are born in. The Zabłudowicz space is unique and quite perfect, because it is both a former Methodist chapel and a former drama school. The sacred geometry lends itself to dissection; the exhibition is an exciting recalibration of this space. For this piece I am creating seven points of entry that will deepen as you infiltrate the space, as in the layers of the skin. There will be several performances throughout the exhibition where the works will evolve over time. I am creating a new sound installation that will act as a guide, including sound sculptures that will respond to the presence of the body.

Do you have quite a specific idea about what you'd like from your models and performers, or are each of them quite self-led?

It's a combination of both. I set up environments for the models to occupy, introduce them to the space, and encourage their feedback and movement. Although the performances are mildly choreographed, most of the actions are actually chosen by the models. I allow the works to unravel live and respond to the circumstance of the present moment that they are performed in. Essentially, I don't want to control anything, but of course a blueprint of control is necessary. I now have a core group of models that I have been working with for years, so we have developed a language of trust. The artworks I create are always in service of the models—to shelter or mirror, they are always created in relation to the body.



Culo (Pecosa), 2015. Photo by Trevor Good, courtesy the artist

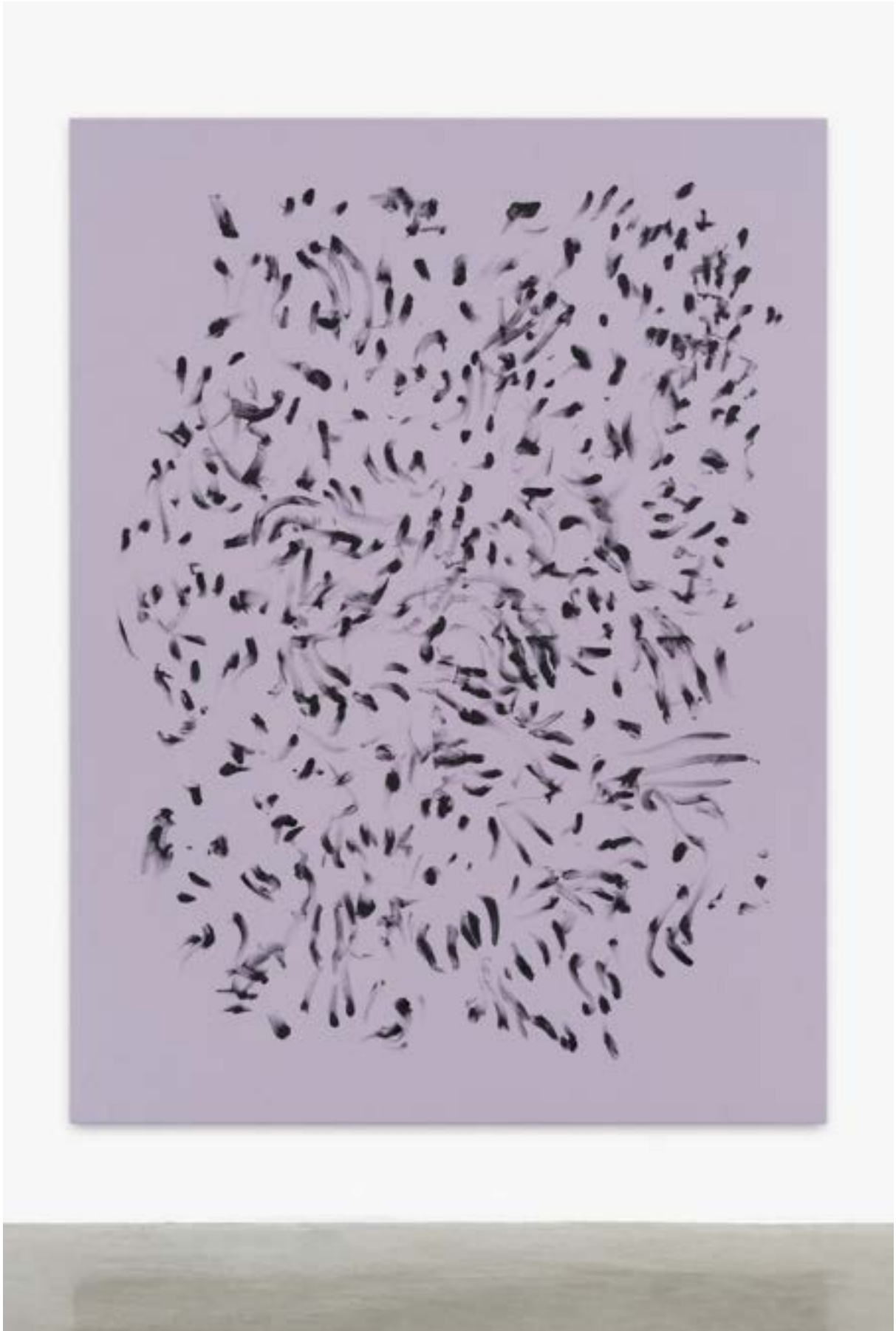
The nude female figure is an instantly noticeable part of the work, and yet it doesn't feel like an overtly sexualized display of nudity. When did you begin working with the female body, and what impact do you hope it will have on your audience?

Undeniably, I use the body and skin as a visual language. There is a strategy of resistance against the disappearance of the body that results in intangible fleeting moments. I have always used live models in my work, early on as performers in my sound project, Rua Minx, or recently to enliven or activate my static (dead) artworks. There is nothing more familiar, or abstract, to me than my own body. My works are an attempt to research this flesh casing while challenging its triggering effect on others, both politically and emotionally. The feminine form has been fetishized since the beginning of time; first worshipped, now brutalized. My work is an attempt at reclaiming the power of the female form by allowing the audience to witness a visceral experience.

You work with a very pleasing palette. Can you tell me a bit about the influence of colour on your practice?

I am greatly influenced by nature and its palette. The DNA of the earth, gems, minerals, meteorites, desert landscapes and hallucinatory states have all taught me about colour and its effects on mood.

“My works are an attempt to research this flesh casing while challenging its triggering effect on others, both politically and emotionally”



Violet Froth, 2015. Courtesy the artist

Who, or what, have been the key influences as you've developed your practice?

I am naturally attracted to artists who display a defiant attitude. In all these artists' work nature plays a strong role, as does a form of resistance tinged with a brutal urgency that is based on the reflection of their lived experience. Teresa Margolles, who focuses on the disappearance of women and violence in her country, Mexico, continues to be greatly influential. Her works are silently aggressive and highlight the lure of a minimal aesthetic object, but they're also tinged with an inescapable morbidity. Ana Mendieta (of course). Valie Export. Leonora Carrington's paintings have sung me to sleep. I am very grateful for the metal floors and powerful bass speakers that make my organs move. I am a failed musician—drummer—so early on I devoured music. I moved to Houston from Chicago and quickly found Pauline Oliveros, who is one of the first female composers of electronic music who taught us to how to listen and to respect silence. Queens like Poly Styrene from X-Ray Spex, Lady Saw and Ari Up. DJ Screw. Currently I am very excited by Elysia Crampton as well as the work of young artist and trans activist Ser Serpas, whom I had the pleasure of collaborating with earlier this year.

Donna Huanca

28 Sep 2018 — 6 Jan 2019 at Lower Belvedere in Vienna,
Austria

12 JUNE 2018



Donna Huanca, BLISS (REALITY CHECK), 2017 © Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin Performance View at Art Basel Unlimited 2017

Fall 2018 will see the first solo presentation of the Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca, staged in the Lower Belvedere. Using sculpture, painting, sound, video, and live performance, she forges interplay between multisensory art, the Baroque architecture, and participants.

In the Baroque chambers of the Lower Belvedere, Donna Huanca creates an artistic parallel world using sculpture, large-format painting, video works, and soundscapes. Nude models, whose bodies are transformed with colours and

textiles, meditatively move about the space in deep concentration. They are dynamic components of a cosmos, in which visitors embark on a journey from artificial light to mythical darkness, much like superficial perception can lead to insight and recognition. Huanca's 'models' interact with their own environment and the room on their own accord. The artist makes reference not only to the architecture of the palace, but to the exhibition Egon Schiele. Pathways to a Collection, which will take place simultaneously. The gaze upon the naked body, questions of 'forbidden' curiosity and sensual pleasure, as well as the relationships between artist, model, and public become as relevant in the face of Egon Schiele's works as they are in the experience of Donna Huanca's stagings.

Continuous engagement with the human body, its presence in space as well as its use as material and medium of art, is a central aspect of Huanca's multidisciplinary work. Based on music, fashion, and painting, the artist has developed her own aesthetic language over the last ten years, with references to Viennese Actionism, Yves Klein, Cindy Sherman, and Ana Mendieta. Born in Chicago in 1980, Donna Huanca studied painting at the Städelschule in Frankfurt, the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, and the University of Houston in Texas. In 2016, she presented a solo show at the Zabudowicz Collection in London. The artist lives and works in Berlin and New York.

TOP TEN

LYRA PRAMUK



Lyra Pramuk is an American singer, composer-producer, and performance artist based in Berlin. She collaborates often with artists such as Holly Herndon, Colin Self, and Donna Huanca, and this fall will release her debut EP with Objects Ltd. She is committed to empathy and listening as the central pathways to self-actualization and affirmative collective action, using fictive play to summon a kinder future.

5

Donna Huanca

I'm a bit biased, as Donna is one of my good friends and I've performed with her many times, but I'm so excited by what she has done in recent years. Donna's installations are an interactive landscape of visual and sound works for her performing models. There's tantalizing interplay between synthetics and skin. Her art is a triumphant discovery of something alien yet also distinctly human and indigenous.



View of "Donna Huanca: Jaguars and Electric Eels," 2017, Julia Stoschek Collection, Berlin. Photo: Adrian Parvulescu.

DONNA HUANCA IN CONVERSATION WITH VENUS LAU



Donna Huanca's artistic practice samples our fear of skin. In her exhibitions, models wearing skin-colored body stockings stand, kneel, or sit in the exhibition space, sometimes on a pedestal or behind Plexiglas. Nudity is a tradition of contemporary art, and juxtaposing skin and painterly surface summons the spirits of Yves Klein and Kazuo Shiraga, whose masterpieces hosted the skin as poltergeist—a noise-making spirit, an invisible specter whose absent presence is defined by the traces of its own movement, and who is cloaked by the bodily movements (the corporeal freedom) it stages.

THE EXPOSED BODY IN HUANCA'S WORK IS A DENUATION NOT ONLY OF ATTIRE BUT ALSO OF MOVEMENTS AND EXPRESSIONS. BODIES ARE CLOTHED BY PATCHES AND LINES IN MILD-COLORED MATERIALS FROM CLAY TO SPICES TO PIGMENTS: MINTY GREEN, BLUE, LEAD WHITE, PINK, BRIGHT YELLOW, BLACK—A PALETTE BEARING A RESEMBLANCE TO COSMETIC PRODUCTS.

The lack of chromatic conflicts orchestrates a visual quietness along with the models' silence; the colors are like lone islands. The act of coverage is doubled and folded by the artist's painting on detailed photographic prints. She paints both surfaces—skin and its images—in the same way. The enveloping of skin with color is a slash-and-burn of existing skin-related identity narratives, rehearsing a pre-linguistic tabula rasa on the skin. The layers of drying pigment crackle as the tension between skin and this other element—its spirit—intensifies.

Venus Lau
Donna Huanca

Your works involve a specific color scheme (I actually listed minty green, Dodger blue, lead white, pink, bright yellow and black in another text about your artistic practice), especially blue—different types of blue, including Klein blue, which is an institutional blue now. Apart from the sake of aesthetics, what are the main factors behind your choices of shades?

I am inspired by geology and birds of paradise, natural formations of color that are unexpected and rare.

Do you occasionally paint with cosmetics? What kind of materials do you use?

Yes, I use thick pigmented shadows and foundations, healing clays as well as charcoal and tumeric.

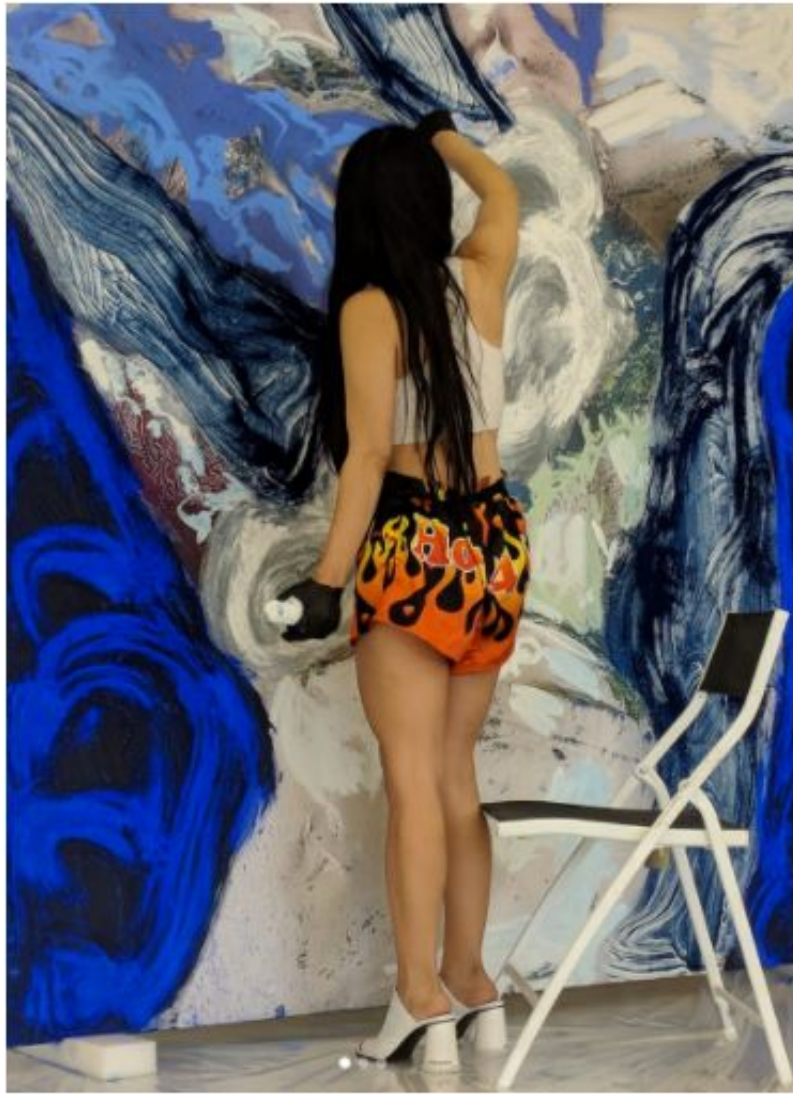
Human bodies are crucial sculptural elements in your practice. When did you start working with performers?

My work is an evolution of music practice which began in 2002, so collaboration is always a part of my work. I am interested in creating live, visceral experiences that are more like encounters rather than observing finished artworks usually found in an art context.









On the one hand your performers/human sculptures are getting more and more static/immobile in your works, making themselves into a sculpture in a more conventional contemporary art way, in which the positive and negative spaces are very clearly demarcated; and on the other hand, your sculptures are undergoing a process of resembling the appearance of human bodies. What do you think about these two ways of presenting human bodies and how do you see the difference and sameness between them?

I always wanted to display the live body as immobile as possible, in order to see the movement and life in the materials it is surrounded by... Essentially collapsing the materiality of both.

What are you going to do for your project in Shanghai? How do you imagine your show in that context, where the idea of nudity and exposure of skin is totally different from the West?

For the exhibition in Shanghai, I plan to create an evolving stage performance which is deconstructed for its duration. Even though some viewers can't see past some aspects of nudity in my performance work, I hope it eventually transcends this question. Of course there are different views towards the body and nudity in cultures around the world, but I try not to factor this into my conception of the performance. I believe and hope that it is understood that the work is coming from a genuine place and therefore is received with an open mind.

PANIC FEAR CRYING FITS is one of the rare works of yours without the presence of human bodies, but it shows the traces of human bodies/activities. What are the reasons behind making something present versus absent (or present absence) in your work?

I am interested in the nature of temporality in all things. We travel constantly in our virtual experiences while seeing the world from a screen. I am interested in the potential of scarring the brain with human smell/scents and the approximation of physicality, which is rare. The audience can see themselves through the models, feeling empathy for the human body.

PANIC FEAR CRYING FITS was a homage to materials that had continuously reappeared for years in my work. Leather pants, velvet shirts, etc.; I wanted to mortalize these materials, these gestures, and present them as the characters in my morphed language. They had a long life, first as my clothing, then they have been reassembled into many artworks. I wanted to reduce them to observe their potential and beauty.

Skin is a connecting surface in your practice, from your act of painting the performers to the prints of the painted bodies to your painting on pictures of the performers' skin (that is cloaked under the flaky dry paint). Skin creates the inner walls of your immersive practice. Why do you choose skin as a medium for your practice?

Skin is a universal tissue that connects all humans.

There are a lot of bodies in your works, and also a lot of double of human bodies—clothes and mannequins (like the one in *Mariposa Amor*). How do they converse with the sculptural bodies of the performers?

I see the sculptures as surrogates of the performers, posing them as the performers themselves once the space is without the live body.

According to your observation, how does the audience usually interact with the performers? Can you recall one particular instance of this?

The audience is observing what essentially is a meditation that is hardly theatrical. The works are allowed to be entered and exited without a timeline. The performers are living in their own universe and the audience has the privilege to be in the same space.

The spatial experiences constructed by your artworks are usually of domestic scale, probably because there are a lot of elements in human sizes: human bodies, clothes, shoes, etc. You conceived a project for the Zabłudowicz Collection space, which was formerly a chapel, a huge religious architecture with divine spatiality. What is the intriguing part of working in a space like this?

Every installation I create takes into account the history of the space and its original intention/use. Zabłudowicz Collection's venue was a former Methodist chapel, while its back space was a former dance school. For my upcoming show at the Belvedere Museum in Vienna, for example, I am thinking about its original intended use as an entertaining space. The choreography of the performance will take this into account and challenge the original intention.

One of your projects is entitled *Muscle Memory*, and in an interview in *Studio International* you mentioned that memory is "the most permanent architecture," with a practice involving time-based sculptures. How do you describe your relationship with memories?

Our reality is a consequence of our memories. Our memories create a version of our reality that serves whatever narrative we need to survive. I am fascinated by the potential of this to create or destroy reality.

There is a totemic structure in your sculptures. Can you talk about this aspect of your work?

The materials in the sculptures are like diary entries for me, as they are made up of my clothing and searching. The totemic form refers to the idea of stacked and draped materials having a spirit and a certain history, which resonates with my work as the sculptures are made up of materials that are meaningful to me. Ultimately the form refers back to the scale and forms of the body.

Your recent works (especially the ones made in 2017) feature different types of languages in the titles, such as within *Hangisi*, *Awankitu* (*Abuelito Fuego*), *Mami Wata*... Is there any reason behind this?

There are clues to my personal interests in the titles of my works which help describe what it is that I am drawing from.

There is an increasingly repetitive presence of braids in your sculptures, why? Hair is sort of creepy, I don't know why, and I always see a kind of spectrality in your works...

I am interested in hair as a recording device as it can tell your history and carry so much information per strand that describes trauma and even drug use. Native people see hair as sacred and powerful, as antennas for psychic ability.

CREDITS:

All images courtesy the artist and Peres Projects Berlin

donna huanca in conversation

with executive director peter doroshenko



Donna Huanca, *PIEDRA QUEMADA*, Performance View. September 28, 2018 – January 6, 2019. Belvedere Museum, Vienna, AT. Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin

What is the passion that gets you to the studio to make your work?

I go to nature as much as possible to observe the peace and chaos and its constant change. Meditation tunes me into a sensitive focus and provides me with inspiration for innovation and evolution in my practice.

I strive to offer the audience a glitch in the world around them, a portal that can function as a reflection pool for anyone open to the experience.

How do you orchestrate the multi-layered and multi-disciplinary aspects in your installations?

I engage all of the senses as a guide to create imprints of memory: sound, smell, visuals, scale and haptic vibrations. I started working in sound before visual art and this gave me alternate perspective on working with space. When working with different spaces, the context of the space matters: the architecture, culture, history of that environment. I seek to create installations that can be universally understood through the experience of the work within these spaces.

Are some of your paintings time markers for past installations?

Yes- every painting carries stored information from the previous live performances and encounters- these ephemeral experiences guide future works.

How has your work evolved over the last few years?

My evolution can be traced to a focus on creating situations that serve the performers and audience simultaneously but in different ways. I have been working closely with the same performers over the years and have been in conversation of how to optimize the experience for everyone involved.



Donna Huanca, *SURROGATE PAINTEEN*, Installation View, September 2 – October 28, 2016. Peres Projects, Berlin. Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin



Donna Huanca, *BLISS*, Performance View, June 13 – June 18, 2017. Art Basel Unlimited, Basel, Switzerland. Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin



Donna Huanca, *ESPEJO ESPIRAL*, Performance View, October 1 – December 15, 2019. 180 Strand, London, United Kingdom. Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin



Donna Huanca, *LENGUA LLORONA*, Performance View, March 22 – September 1, 2019. Copenhagen Contemporary, Copenhagen, Denmark. Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin



Donna Huanca, *OBSIDIAN LADDER*, Performance View, June 28 – December 1, 2019. Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, United States. Courtesy Peres Projects, Berlin

about donna huanca

Born in 1980, in Chicago, Illinois, Donna Huanca's interdisciplinary practice evolves across painting, sculpture, performance, choreography, video and sound, crafting a unique visual language based in collaboration and innovation. At the very heart of her oeuvre is an exploration of the human body and its relationship to space and identity. Huanca live sculptural pieces, or in the artist's words, 'original paintings', work primarily with the nude female body, drawing particular attention to the skin as a complex surface via which we experience the world around us. Largely collaborative, the partnership between artist and model is imperative to Huanca's practice. By exposing the naked body, while at the same time concealing it beneath layers of paint, cosmetics and latex, Huanca and her performers urge the viewer to confront their own instinctive response to the human form, which, in the artist's hands, is both familiar and distorted, decorative and abstract.

In 2019, Huanca had major exhibitions at the Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, California, and the Copenhagen Contemporary, Denmark. In 2018, she had exhibitions at both the Belvedere Museum, Vienna, Austria, and Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China.

Donna Huanca lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Open Studio. Donna Huanca

Foto di Tobias Willmann



"VOGLIO CHE IL MIO LAVORO GENERI NELL'OSSERVATORE UN'ESPERIENZA SURREALE, SIMILE A UN'ALLUCINAZIONE", HA DICHIARATO DONNA HUANCA A PROPOSITO DEI SUOI DIPINTI, SCULTURE E PERFORMANCE. NELLE SUE OPERE, L'ARTISTA AMERICANA DI ORIGINI BOLIVIANE (CHICAGO, 1980) IMMAGINA UN FUTURO PROSSIMO DALLE CONNOTAZIONI MINACCIOSE, IN CUI IL CORPO - O MEGLIO, LA PELLE - SONO SOTTOPOSTI A UN GRADUALE PROCESSO DI METAMORFOSI. A PARTIRE DAL 2012, HUANCA HA INCORPORATO ALL'INTERNO DELLE SUE INSTALLAZIONI MODELLI VIVENTI, I CUI CORPI NUDI - PERLUSTRANDO IN *SLOW MOTION* LO SPAZIO ESPOSITIVO - SONO CELATI SOTTO STRATI DI PITTURA, COSMETICI E LATEX. ISPIRATO AD ALCUNE SUE PERFORMANCE RECENTI - MEMORABILI QUELLE PRESSO LA SEZIONE *UNLIMITED* DI ART BASEL 2017

E, UN ANNO PRIMA, ALLA ZABLUDOWICZ COLLECTION DI LONDRA - È UN NUOVO CICLO DI DIPINTI: GLI *SKIN PAINTINGS*, GRANDI TELE A METÀ TRA ASTRAZIONE E FIGURAZIONE SU CUI HUANCA APPLICA PITTURA, ARGILLA E PIGMENTI VARI.

L'ARTISTA HA APERTO AI LETTORI DE *L'OFFICIEL ART ITALIA* LE PORTE DEL SUO STUDIO DI KREUZBERG - IL QUARTIERE PIÙ HIP DI BERLINO -, A DUE PASSI DA GÖRLITZER PARK. L'OBIETTIVO DI TOBIAS WILLMANN HA IMMORTALATO HUANCA AL LAVORO E, IN ANTEPRIMA ASSOLUTA, LE VIBRANTI SFUMATURE DEGLI *SKIN PAINTINGS*, LA SUA SERIE ANCORA *IN ITINERE*.



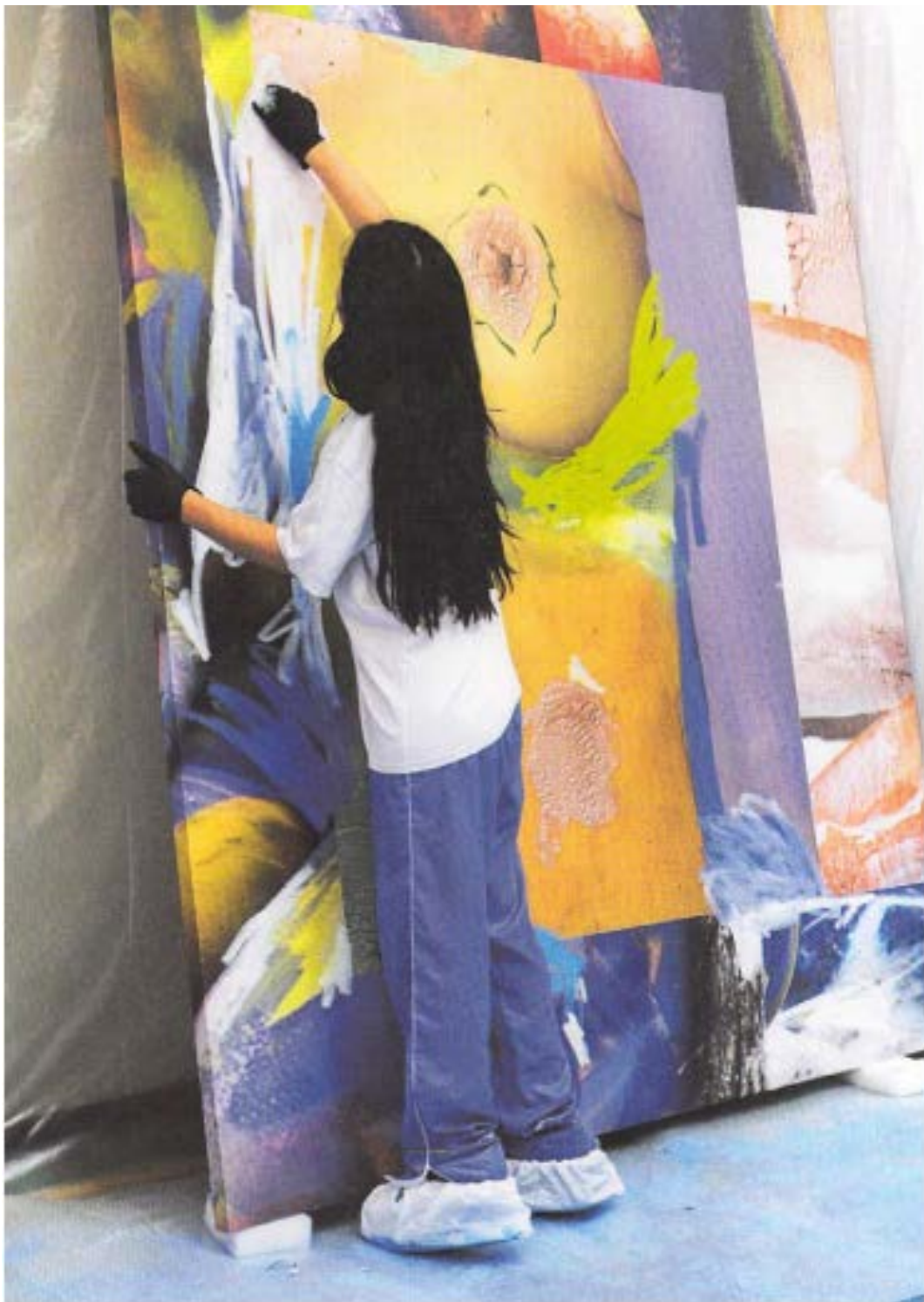






Donna Huanca ha in programma due mostre personali allo Yuz Museum di Shanghai e alla galleria Peres Projects di Berlino, rispettivamente a marzo e maggio 2018.

Tobias Willmaann è un fotografo tedesco di stanza a Berlino.



DONNA HUANCA

Interview by SVEN SCHUMANN

portrait by MAXIME BALLESTEROS

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Donna Huanca

O

Interview
by
Lucas Leclerc,
portrait
Tobias Willmann
photography
Thierry Bal

k, you've got a book?

Yes! It's my first book. The skin-like porous paper has my SCRAWLS as the cover heat raised so they can be felt as Braille. The Zabłudowicz Collection published four years of works in a chronological order. Since then, I have made a mini-version at the Julia Stochek Collection, where we are doing another performance for Gallery Weekend. This piece is mainly a stage that acts as a vibrational sound massage that the models are live on, embedded with subwoofers that can go no higher than 25 decibels, so all it creates are deep bossy sounds. The track is 32 minutes, and is a collage of various sources, including binary beats that are helpful for

transcending the body, my voice, and even a Why Be song. I wanted it to feel like a message for the models.

— *It's odd to think that low bass was also an instrument of torture during wartime.*

I know the military uses it as proximity sensors to scare people off, but I didn't know they used it for torture too.

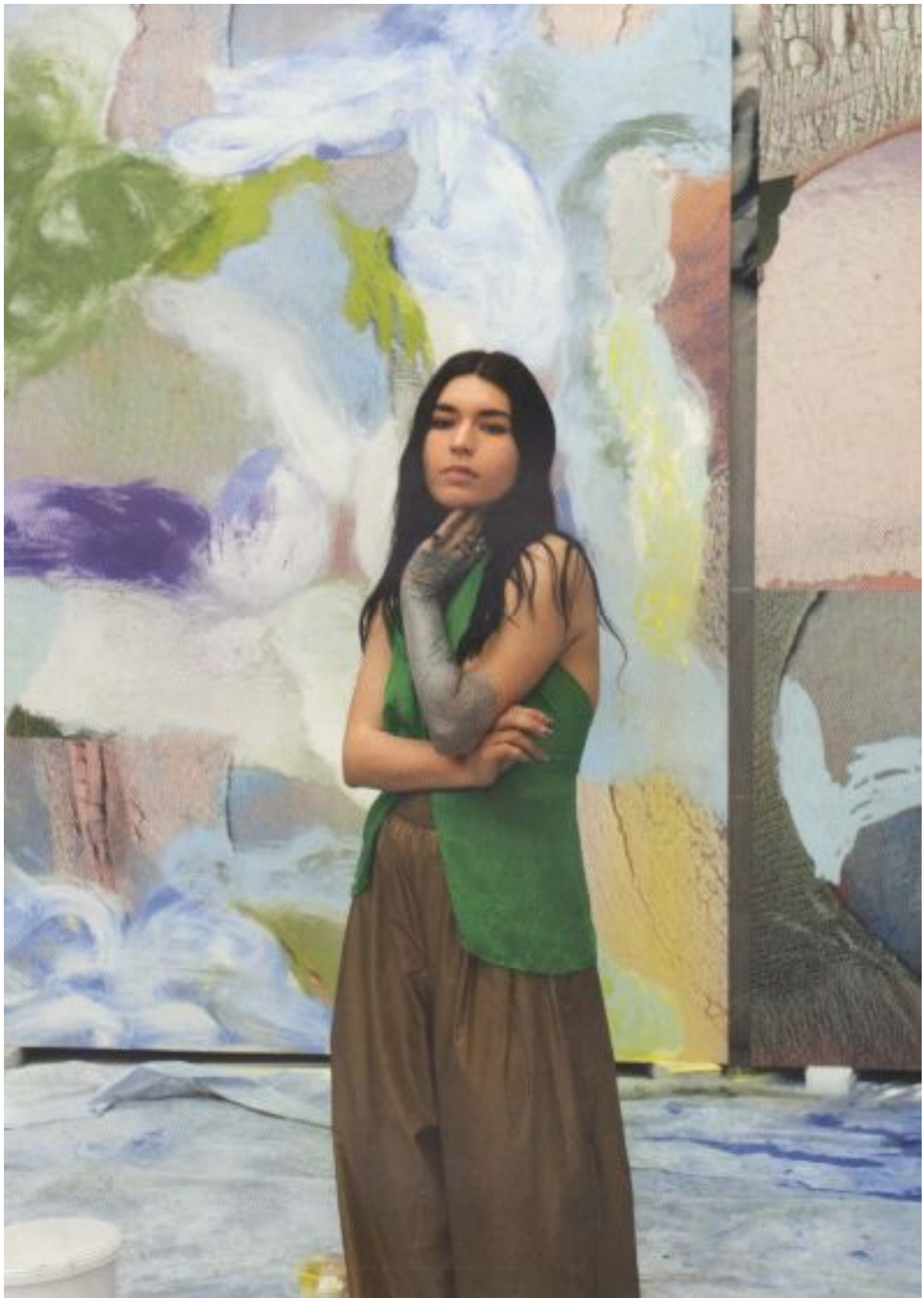
— *They do, because deep bass can really fuck you up when used really low and receptively.*

Oh god, I thought of it like a healing process for the models. I guess after eight hours, it's a bit tough, though it goes by waves,

oscillating between tensed and more relaxed moments. Actually, before I made art, I used to play drums, so sound is still a part of the bigger body of work. I'd love to play drums again, but I don't have a drum kit. Sound is a tremendously important element of my work and performances. My installation at Unlimited during Art Basel will have a heavy sound component and live performance. This is a continuation of the recent London show, *Scar Cymbals*, which was heavily layered. In the back room, the visitors' body heat would activate 40 infra-red sensors in the ceiling, linked to a sculpture made of speakers and latex, which I called *The Mother* the closer you would get to her, the louder she would get. The audience would create their own sound as they walked around. This created a personal experience and individual performance for the audience.

It was important to have an active piece in the back, as the front space was always occupied by two performers. For three months, two performers were present every day to activate the piece, but during special events, such as the opening and closing, and *Frieze*, we had ten models. In the front space, the performers were creating their own sounds by manipulating two KAOS pads. These pads are from the early 2000s, and they use touch screen technology, so they're easy to use without any previous knowledge, easily manipulating the original soundtrack as they performed. The space was a former Methodist chapel, with 40-foot high ceilings, which amplified the sound, heightening the echo. The smell of Palo Santo incense was constantly burning in the old church to scar your memory even more...

— *So the piece behind was a recording?*





Now I made peace with not knowing where I belong, although it sounds so fucking dramatic.

Yes. It had forty different tracks, with recordings of random samples, poems, analog sounds, voices and lots of bass!

— *Poems you wrote?*

I like to collage text, but I don't call it poetry.

— *You DJ words.*

Exactly. Especially words that are esthetically pleasing. I use this as the titles of my shows. For example, *Scar Cymbals* took me a long time to get, because I really was craving a juxtaposition of the evocation of sound and skin. But it's not my best title. My favorite so far is *Echo Implant*, because I'm implanting something, and echo has an endless repetition to it. *Sarrigate Painteen* was more based on the word «pain», for example, and drew inspiration from a punk band in Houston from the 1980s that was called The Painteens. Although I was born in Chicago, I spent my formative years in Houston, where I finished high school and went on to study geology, then quit and ended up in a public art school. I have a soft spot for Houston, because a lot of good sound comes from there. I'm really inspired by the music that comes from the weird swamp that this city is to me. I guess the oil money and its preppy side triggered a counterproductive, dark underground scene. Both DJ Screw and Beyoncé came from there, and I appreciate weirdos from there, though I wouldn't call it my hometown.

— *Do you feel it is important to have a hometown at all?*

Not anymore. I used to really obsess with it, with tracing my background. Now I've made peace with not knowing where I belong, although it sounds so fucking dramatic.

— *Like the first lyrics of a song full of tears, "I don't know where I belong..."*

Haha! Exactly! I fell in love with Berlin, for example, because I still feel danger in the club is real here, and its rawness is

invigorating. I did go out with friends to all the clubs last summer, and was recording information whilst they were doing their usual sexual tourism. But I don't necessarily like trashy places. I love the party Makumba, for example, because people here are not so self-aware. It's accepted to contemplate and take time to think. It's more relaxed here. I had come before because I had worked on a big performance with AIDS 3D at the old Program. It was during the Myspace boom, so people who were linked by aesthetics would meet, and that's how I met those kids who are now adults. It was my first introduction to Berlin: a two-hour-long sound performance in a courtyard. As for New York, it's clearly not my jam any more. It became corny and corporate. A lot of the people who survive there do so because they secured a flat and a situation in the 1990s, which is not my case, because I lacked the resources to do so when I moved there in 2007. My flat was 30 square meters for \$2000 a month, two hours away from my studio. Going out at night is a mission, where you would have to pass 40 security guards to find yourself in a room full of upright yuppies. I feel that anywhere in the US, institutions pump an art that's about making money, which is regretful, because a lot of artists end up making really shitty work just to make a living.

— *However, you have still managed to make your voice through this path, haven't you?*

I have, and it's been useful, because instead of going into academia, I went to school in Frankfurt and did some residencies. In the U.S., grad school is such a huge deal, because they try to keep you within the system, because without a graduate degree, you're not allowed to teach or become a teacher. I never wanted to be a teacher. I was craving something else. The Stadelshule, Skowhegan, LMCC—I even did a Fulbright and lived in Mexico City in 2012. I was always interested in the community. We had that at the Stadelshule in Frankfurt. One needs a space for mistakes and trials, and at the Stadelshule, for example, we were free to show things in progress, and that was significantly nurturing for me. I feel that my part is half of the work, for example, and the models activate the other half. The piece itself

depends on the trust we have for one another. I always think about my performance crew as a traveling band. We work together, and some people drop off, others continue to hit the road.

— *Why do you seek the community more?*

Because most of the people I know and care about are people I've met through my work. I used to do psychedelics with people when I really wanted to get to know them, and now that's evolved into asking them to participate in my work.

— *You said Scar Cymbals lasted three months in London. How did you manage to paint the models every day, because you couldn't stay the whole duration of the show?*

Well, it is something extremely intimate. It was actually very hard and challenging for me to let go of this process. That show forced me to break open a lot of things that I had been used to. But I made sketches for different archetypes of body paint, and in the end, they would paint themselves in order to paint this big altar, so they were changing constantly.

— *Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't see you working with assistants, for example, because your work feels very hands on.*

I have one assistant and could use more, but it has proven hard to find a good match. In London, I was working with my good friend Richie Shazam, who was amazing, but she is busy being a superstar. My perfect assistant would be able to read my mind. To be fair, they just have to be chilled and go with the flow. My work is a symptom of life, so there are many layers. Ultimately, it's all dependent on a subliminal communication.

— *Can you tell me about what you're preparing for Unlimited?*

It will be a durational performance piece for seven days, the entirety of the fair. It will include a new sound work, including sculptures as well. The piece will include smell too, and will be a full world you walk into. I want to create a very intimate setting.

— *Do you feel a pressure to justify what you're doing with a narrative from critics or spectators?*

At this point, no.

— *When did the paintings start?*

They started as zoomed-in photographs of the body painting. I would scan them to find a perfect collage of colors. I blew them up and started painting on them. It is important for me that the materials I use have a history—not so much to trace it back, but because I use the emotion as a trigger. It's quite a violent process though, to paint these. The sculptures are different, because they are more alluring and sexy to me. I feel like I'm dressing a person when I do it, and it feels almost like a styling job, if that is what styling is. I'm always using materials that are a part of my life, as well as using leather and silicone.

— *How did you collaborate with Women's History Museum?*

I met Mattie when we worked together at a thrift store in Manhattan. She would come in every day, and I admired how she treated her body like a sculpture. She told me how she was starting a label with her friend Amanda: Women's History

Museum. I offered them a space in the storefront of the Joe Sheftel Gallery in Chinatown, where I had a solo show. We had four weekly presentations during the show, with two of their models and two of mine. That's the only thing I was ever involved in, fashion-wise, but this is actually anti-fashion. They gave me some garments that currently oscillate between performance garments, sculpture materials, and things I wear. The other day, I just ripped one of their pieces out of a frame and wore it.

— *Your work has such strong aesthetics that are linked to the body: have you ever worked in fashion?*

Not really. When I lived in Frankfurt, I interned with a shoemaker in an attempt to make shoes. This had been a secret dream of mine. I failed miserably at making shoes, but since then have designed one-off shoes for myself, though I would love to collaborate with a mega-brand or a no-name brand, designing shoes for example. I've already done this with Women's History Museum, gluing lychees to fur and covering them in silicone, etc. I've been approached by some brands, but none of them felt right for some reason. I make wearable pieces for my shows. I like the idea of wearable objects, but I don't need to convolute two things unless I have the freedom: then I would most certainly go for it. Good fashion can be inspiring when it's like a timeless collage.

— *Are there any galleries or museum you like here?*

The Natural History Museum and the Anthropological Museum are my two favorites. The latter is closed, but I love to look at things that are not supposed to be art unless it's extremely ancient.

— *Do you find it more freeing?*

I do, because the context is different. It's supposed to be about education, and it has an innocence to it. Factual things, such as geology, speak to me more somehow. I honestly don't like contemporary art. I will support people I like, but I'm not seeking it out. I guess I'm lucky that my gallery represents artists I admire and not just random people. I haven't seen anything here that blew my mind. I don't know where I should go—what do you think? Take me! I guess I have little patience, when it comes to it.

Scar Cymbals, shoot 28 September 2016.



10 Must-See Works at Art Basel Unlimited

ARTSY EDITORIAL
BY MOLLY GOTTSCHALK
JUN 12TH, 2017 11:15 PM

Art Basel's Unlimited sector opened to VIPs this afternoon, filling 1.5 miles of wallspace with institutional-scaled works that each year make a proportionately outsized impact on collectors and curators. Curated for the sixth year by the Hirshhorn Museum's Gianni Jetzer, this edition sees 76 projects sprawled across the hangar-like hall, from emerging artist Donna Huanca's body-painted performance to a historic installation by Enrico Castellani. Indeed, there's something here for everyone—particularly if you're looking to fill a 20-meter hole in your collection.

There's a significant amount of ground to cover, so we've helped whittle things down. Here, we bring you the 10 presentations you shouldn't miss at Unlimited.

Donna Huanca, *Bliss (Reality Check)*, 2017



Installation view of Donna Huanca, *Bliss (Reality Check)*, 2017, presented by Peres Projects at Art Basel Unlimited, 2017. Photo by Benjamin Westoby for Artsy.



Installation view of Donna Huanca, *Bliss (Reality Check)*, 2017, presented by Peres Projects at Art Basel Unlimited, 2017. Photo by Benjamin Westoby for Artsy.

Huanca's body-stockings-clad models have been making the international art-world rounds in performances of increasing complexity—most notably, in 2016, when her Zabłudowicz Collection takeover saw a clan of painted performers ascend a three-story glass tower. At Unlimited, she debuts a new work in which lithe models, painted with splotches of natural pigments, respond to scent, sound, and sculpture. It's nearly impossible to look away, and that's the point: Lock eyes with a model and the lines between looking, and being looked at, begin to bend.

Art Basel Announces 76 Projects for Unlimited 2017

BY NICHOLAS FORREST | APRIL 27, 2017



Donna Huanca *Jaguars and Electric Eels*, 2017 Installation View
COURTESY OF PERES PROJECTS AND JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION

Art Basel has announced a lineup of 76 large-scale projects for this year's edition of Unlimited in Basel – Art Basel's platform for projects that transcend the classical art-show stand such as massive sculpture and paintings, video projections, large-scale installations, and live performances. Unlimited is curated for the sixth year by Gianni Jetzer, curator-at-large at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington D.C.

This year's edition of Unlimited will include works by leading emerging and established artists including the likes of Doug Aitken, Carl Andre, John Baldessari, Andrea Bowers, Chris Burden, Julian Charrière and Julius von Bismarck, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Carlos Garaicoa, Subodh Gupta, Jenny Holzer, Donna Huanca, Arthur Jafa, Barbara Kruger, Cildo Meireles, Bruce Nauman, Park Chan-kyong, Marwan Rechmaoui, Mickalene Thomas, and Anicka Yi.

Highlights will include Subodh Gupta's "Cooking the World I" (2017) cooking and eating performance in a shelter made of aluminium utensils, Lebanese artist Marwan Rechmaoui's politically and socially charged fabric installation "Blazon" (2015), Doug Aitken's "Underwater Pavilions" (2017) video installation, Sue Williamson's fishing net installation "Messages from the Atlantic Passage," and Hélio Oiticica's interactive installation "Pentrável Macaléia" (1978), to name a few.

Donna Huanca's "LENGUA DE BARTOLINA SISA"

by Juan Canela

February 24–April 29, 2017

Travesía Cuatro, Madrid

April 26, 2017



View of Donna Huanca's "LENGUA DE BARTOLINA SISA," Travesía Cuatro, Madrid, 2016. All images courtesy of the artist and Travesía Cuatro, Madrid.

September 5, 1782. Bartolina Sisa, Aymara leader of the indigenous uprising against the Spanish in Bolivia, is brutally tortured, publicly humiliated, and killed by hanging. Her body is dismembered and, to prevent further rebellion, her head and extremities are exhibited at several locations known for their resilience. Bartolina Sisa has subsequently become a symbol for the struggle of indigenous populations throughout Latin America, and, since 1983, September 5 has been celebrated as International Day of Indigenous Women.

The title of the first exhibition by Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca at Travesía Cuatro in Madrid refers to these facts, setting up a very precise symbolic framework. In recent years, Huanca's work has stood out for its understanding of the body, and of the skin in particular, as a territory where surface and matter converse with architecture, space, and the world. Through paintings, sculptures, and performances, the artist creates disturbing futuristic-prehistoric scenarios where identity shatters into a sort of schizodynamic production of knowledge. In these performances, a set of actions is carried out by regular collaborators, producing slow-paced choreographies that conjure private rituals and meditations in the gallery space, confronting the viewer with a scenario equal parts uncomfortable and suggestive.

Last autumn, Huanca developed a performance-based commission at the Zabłudowicz Collection in London that pushed these issues to the limit, developing performances that took place on a daily basis. The exhibition at Travesía Cuatro delves into this line of work on a smaller scale, generating a space where bodies, materials, and forms gather to establish an architecture of presence. The titles of the paintings, through which matter emerges as something between the natural and the artificial, and in which blue predominates over skin tones and earthy colors, allude to different types of rocks, minerals, and natural processes, such as *Vaporize Rock* (2016). The totemic sculptures, on the other hand, combine a variety of materials that relate to the body and which stand out for their tactile qualities, such as clothes, skin, silicone body imprints, natural and synthetic textiles, or re-contextualized cultural artifacts. Collaborators' bodies are painted from head to toe, resembling figures halfway between a shaman and a futuristic raver. As they move through the space in a trance, following an icy choreography, they switch positions, climb up and down stairs and props that are scattered throughout the gallery, and engage with paintings and sculptures in a wordless dialogue. A poem, written by the artist and presented in the press release, once again alludes to the story of Bartolina Sisa—her dismembered body, her blood spilled over the earth, and the survival of her spirit and vitality. This is embodied, in the exhibition, by the constellation of warriors and goddesses, represented textures, scarred and burned skin, or ripped hair.

The desert, the animist, and the virus—the scenario Huanca created could very well give shelter to these three figures, which Elizabeth Povinelli uses to explain *geontopower*, a mode of power that operates through the regulation of the distinction between life and non-life.¹ The desert, the animist, and the virus are a collection of ruling ghosts that exist between two worlds: a world where oppositions dependent on life (*bios*) and death (*thanatos*), and life (*bios*) and non-life (*geos*, *meteors*) are both sensitive and dramatic; and a world where these enclosures are no longer, or have never been, relevant, sensitive, or practical.

Huanca's practice explores a position bound by these two worlds. It questions systems of knowledge such as biology, ecology, geology, or anthropology, disclosing the ontological altercation Povinelli describes. Surrounded by the silent matter of the paintings and sculptures, one can almost feel the constant danger of life in relation to nonlife. The indigenous imaginary and the uncanny but vital collaborators' movements actualize the animist insistence on the fact that all forms of existence have within them a vital affecting force. All the elements in the exhibition—both bodies and objects—are impregnated with cosmetic pigments, unifying and stabilizing the animate with the inanimate, the human with the mineral, the organic with the synthetic. The bodies' coloration—like a virus—confuses and levels the difference between life and nonlife, and operates as an instrument of transformation, setting up a model for the fragmentation of cultural, gender, and national identities and the dissolution of the false dichotomy of nature and culture. After all, the death of Bartolina Sisa is not only a symbol of the defeat of a people against their conqueror; it also marks the affirmation of a progressive disappearance of diversity in lifestyles and ontologies in favor of the global uniformity of colonial violence.

Donna Huanca: arte e identidad al desnudo



Suplemento BRÚJULA

<http://www.eldeber.com.bo/brujula/Donna-Huanca-arte-e-identidad-al-desnudo-20170309-0061.html>

Donna Huanca: arte e identidad al desnudo

Adhemar Manjón

Donna Huanca nació en Chicago, de padres bolivianos y posee una obra que ya ha llamado la atención de revistas y galerías. Tiene una línea sólida que se introduce en la identidad, el cuerpo y la memoria

Donna Huanca ha sabido ganarse un espacio en el mundo del arte contemporáneo. Con 36 años, medios especializados la han mencionado como una de las artistas jóvenes a tomar en cuenta, o algunas de sus exposiciones, como la que presentó el año pasado en Londres, Scar Cymbals, fueron destacadas en importantes revistas.

Huanca nació en Chicago, sus padres son bolivianos. En sus puestas multisensoriales, que incluyen esculturas, pinturas y performances con cuerpos desnudos y pintados, indaga en temas como la identidad o la importancia misma de esos cuerpos.

Scar Cymbals se presentó en la galería Zabłudowicz Collection de Londres, el trance sicodélico generado por alucinógenos como la ayahuasca (que tuvo una importancia en el camino que tomó la carrera de Huanca) fue un disparador para sus performances. “Todo lo que yo hago es un intento de centrarte en el presente, lo que los alucinógenos usualmente hacen”, dice.

Identidad

Actualmente, Huanca tiene una expo en la galería Travesía Cuatro, de Madrid (España), titulada Lengua de Bartolina Sisa. La ‘lengua’ mencionada en el título se refiere al mismo tiempo a la pérdida del lenguaje y al poderoso arquetipo guerrero de Bartolina Sisa, quien en 1781 lideró el levantamiento indígena en La Paz contra la conquista española. Sisa fue capturada y su cuerpo desmembrado en cuatro partes y enviado a diferentes pueblos indígenas.



Huanca pinta cuerpos desnudos durante sus performances, los fotografía e imprime esa foto en un lienzo de gran formato para intervenirla con pintura. El lienzo encierra así todo el proceso de pintura del cuerpo, performance, registro fotográfico y pintura.

“En esta muestra plasmo su vitalidad encarnada en una constelación de luchadoras y ánimas representadas, tales como una piel quemada y cicatrizada o pelo arrancado. Sentí la necesidad de presentarme de esta manera en este contexto del eje colonial (del arte) latinoamericano en un intento de curación”.

En La lengua de Bartolina Sisa, como en sus anteriores exposiciones, el tema de la fragmentación de la identidad es recurrente. “En Estados Unidos las políticas de identidad son muy relevantes porque la mayoría de la gente viene de familias que emigraron, y sus hijos, al igual que yo, están constantemente batallando con el pasado y el presente. este hecho no es necesariamente un fenómeno global”, explica.

Huanca, a pesar de haber nacido en Chicago pasó la mayoría de sus veranos en Bolivia (principalmente en Cochabamba y Potosí). “Mis padres nunca quisieron aceptar el hecho de hacerse estadounidenses y siempre amenazaban con regresar a Bolivia, así que definitivamente había una sensación de que estaría en ese país solo durante mi infancia. Yo estaba prohibida de hablar inglés en mi casa, siempre suponíamos que regresaríamos a Bolivia. Era ahí que yo veía a mis padres “vivir” plenamente y no solo trabajando como en Estados Unidos, desconectándose de su comunidad mientras luchaban contra el racismo en el lado sur de Chicago”, indica.



De las visitas a Bolivia, a Huanca le impactó en especial la Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña cochabambina, que de alguna manera influenció en su trabajo. Todo ese caos de sonidos, danzas y colores están insertados en su obra.

Búsquedas

Huanca reside entre Nueva York y Berlin, estudió en la escuela de arte Städelshule, de Frankfurt (Alemania), y es representada por la galería germana Peres Project. Ha obtenido importantes becas para el desarrollo de su arte. Con una de ellas realizó el proyecto Unearthing, que tenía a Bolivia como sede, pero no pudo venir por diferentes motivos, así que la llevó a cabo en Perú. La obra fue una serie de fotografías en las que fusionó su cuerpo con lugares cuyos nombres se relacionan con su apellido (Huancavelica, Huancayo, etc.).

Unearthing buscaba la inserción de Huanca en un paisaje desconocido, en el de su pasado genético, persiguiendo la etimología de su apellido.

En este viaje, a Huanca le resultó difícil comunicarse con otros artistas. “Noté que muchos artistas de Latinoamérica solo se sienten validados una vez entran en la “exposición europea”, lo que es para mí una extensión de la colonización”.

La última vez que Donna visitó Bolivia fue en 2004. También ha tenido dificultades para contactarse con artistas de este país. “Sé que mi visión de lo que sucede en Bolivia es sesgada”, dice Huanca, que, en todo caso, ha encontrado artistas bolivianos por todas partes, como Elysia Crampton, Agatha Wara y Joakim Bornan. “En una manera es grandioso, ya que todos los que vienen de allá están haciendo trabajos muy interesantes”.

La música juega un papel importante en la estética de Donna, ella empezó muy temprano tocando la batería y después fue improvisando con el noise. “Estas experiencias continúan en mi trabajo. Veo a mis modelos como una banda que cambian constantemente”.

Los modelos que menciona Huanca son mujeres y hombres, usualmente desnudos, que participan en sus exposiciones y performances. “Vivir vestido o desnudo es lo mismo para mí”, afirma Huanca. “Estoy interesada en usar materiales que se relacionan con el cuerpo, ya sea insertados o hechos de pieles, como los cueros”, explica Huanca.

Para Huanca, la memoria es una arquitectura que permanece, porque estamos creando nuestro mundo exterior cada día. “No estoy interesada o atada a las cosas materiales. Esto es lo que estoy intentando crear en mi trabajo, una experiencia esencial que estará cicatrizada por siempre en tu mente”



Publicado 16th March 2017 por arte contemporáneo boliviano

Donna Huanca reinterpreta la cultura en Madrid

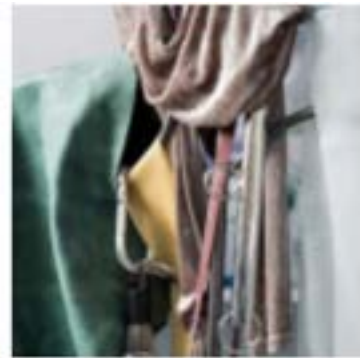
por [Benito Guerrero](#) 14/03/2017 en [Actualidad](#)

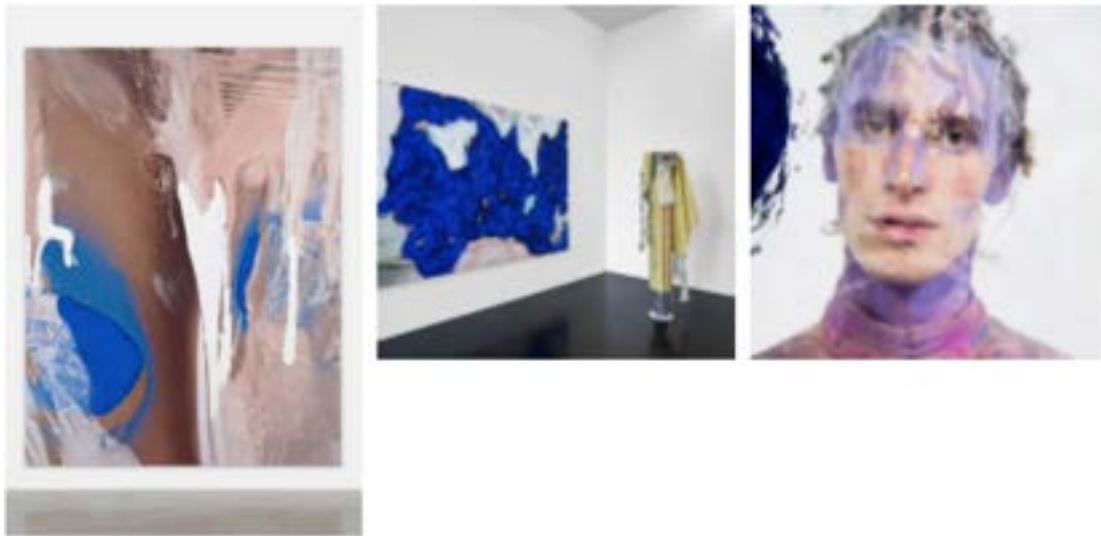


Por **Benito Guerrero**

14/03/2017

La madrileña galería Travesía Cuatro presenta «**Lengua de Bartolina Sisa**», primera exposición de la artista Donna Huanca en España. En esta ocasión, explora **el territorio del cuerpo en su doble condición de superficie y materia**, elementos complementarios de los que se sirve para construir una arquitectura de movimiento y presencia. Podrá visitarse hasta el 29 de abril.





La obra de Donna Huanca utiliza una cosmética que **tiene mucho de pintura gestual y funciona como instrumento para la transformación**. En sus performances, intérpretes pintados de la cabeza a los pies se desplazan inmersos en un estado de trance siguiendo una coreografía glacial.

Huanca recurre a formas estéticas como el camuflaje, la simulación y la fusión en una poética que vincula pintura, escultura y performance; **una puesta en escena para representar un ensayo sobre la fragmentación de la identidad**.

Sus esculturas totémicas combinan materiales que destacan por sus cualidades táctiles, tejidos de fibra natural y sintética, así como **artefactos culturales que pierden su función original** y son recolocados para crear una nueva composición descontextualizada.

Partiendo del cuerpo y su armadura como materiales abstractos, Huanca revela **la naturaleza atávica del traje en su relación con el cuerpo** como forma inmanente de transmisión cultural.

Donna Huanca: arte e identidad al desnudo

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11/3/2017 04:00

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En este viaje, a Huanca le resultó difícil comunicarse con otros artistas. “Noté que muchos artistas de Latinoamérica solo se sienten validados una vez entran en la “exposición europea”, lo que es para mí una extensión de la colonización”.

La última vez que Donna visitó Bolivia fue en 2004. También ha tenido dificultades para contactarse con artistas de este país. “Sé que mi visión de lo que sucede en Bolivia es sesgada”, dice Huanca, que, en todo caso, ha encontrado artistas bolivianos por todas partes, como Elysia Crampton, Agatha Wara y Joakim Bornan. “En una manera es grandioso, ya que todos los que vienen de allá están haciendo trabajos muy interesantes”.

La música juega un papel importante en la estética de Donna, ella empezó muy temprano tocando la batería y después fue improvisando con el noise. “Estas experiencias continúan en mi trabajo. Veo a mis modelos como una banda que cambian constantemente”.

Los modelos que menciona Huanca son mujeres y hombres, usualmente desnudos, que participan en sus exposiciones y performances. “Vivir vestido o desnudo es lo mismo para mí”, afirma Huanca. “Estoy interesada en usar materiales que se relacionan con el cuerpo, ya sea insertados o hechos de pieles, como los cueros”, explica Huanca.

Para Huanca, la memoria es una arquitectura que permanece, porque estamos creando nuestro mundo exterior cada día. “No estoy interesada o atada a las cosas materiales. Esto es lo que estoy intentando crear en mi trabajo, una experiencia esencial que estará cicatrizada por siempre en tu mente”.



Ana M. Serrano
1 de marzo, 2017

En la piel de Donna Huanca.

Primera exposición España.

TRAVESÍA CUATRO PRESENTA, BAJO EL TÍTULO 'LENGUA DE BARTOLINA SISA', LA PRIMERA EXPOSICIÓN DE LA ARTISTA DONNA HUANCA EN ESPAÑA.

Donna Huanca es una artista joven. De origen boliviano, aunque nacida en Chicago, estudió en el Städelschule de Frankfurt y en la Escuela de Pintura y Escultura de Skowhegan (Estados Unidos). Criada entre las tradiciones andinas y el ritmo frenético de la sociedad norteamericana, su vida ha estado impregnada de un sinfín de disyuntivas culturales que acaba reflejando en una obra dual alrededor de la identidad, el entorno y el cuerpo. Su estética tiene mucho de pintura gestual y funciona como instrumento para la *transformación*. En sus *performances*, intérpretes desnudos pintados de la cabeza a los pies se desplazan en estado de trance al ritmo de una coreografía glacial. Después los fotografía, para finalmente intervenir la imagen con pintura. Concluyendo así todo un proceso en forma de bucle multisensorial que engloba las principales disciplinas desarrolladas por la artista.

*me atas a la cola de tu caballo blanco
rompes mi cuerpo
con tu corona de plumas
soy amayra pero pintada blanca con
ojos verdes
me pinto la piel
para olvidar como me violaste
me separas de mis manos, mis ojos, mis
pies
mi lengua
pero todavía me mantengo humilde
porque la sangre nunca olvida. Donna
Huanca.*

La galería madrileña **Travesía Cuatro** presenta la primera exposición en España de **Donna Huanca**. Bajo el título *Lengua de Bartolina Sisa*, la artista explora de nuevo el territorio del cuerpo, el feminismo y la dualidad arquitectura-escultura. Recreando una alegoría de la brutal tortura y posterior ajusticiamiento de Bartolina Sisa, la artista no sólo rinde homenaje a la heroína aymara y la lucha contra la discriminación de la mujer indígena. Se vale del suplicio sufrido —fue descuartizada atada a la cola de un caballo blanco que la arrastró hasta la muerte— para crear una alegoría demoledora sobre la fragmentación de la identidad, como el cuerpo destrozado de Bartolina.

Huanca recurre al camuflaje, la simulación y la fusión en una poética que vincula pintura, escultura y *performance* para representar un ensayo sobre la identidad humana. Siguiendo la línea más característica de la artista durante los últimos años, *Lengua de Bartolina Sisa* parte del cuerpo y su armadura como materiales abstractos. A través de la descontextualización de los mismos revela la naturaleza atávica del vestido, al tiempo que los utiliza para construir una arquitectura de movimiento y presencia.

Lengua de Bartolina Sisa. Donna Huanca

Exposición: del **24 de febrero** al **29 de abril** de 2017

Lugar: **Galería Travesía Cuatro** – Calle San Mateo 16, 28004 Madrid.

Critic's Guide: Madrid

A round-up of the best shows in the Spanish capital ahead of this year's edition of ARCO, which opens tomorrow

BY JULIA MORANDEIRA ARRIZABALAGA IN CRITIC'S GUIDES | 20 FEB 17





Donna Huanca, *Siltstone (Azul)*, 2016, oil, acrylic and pigment on digital print on canvas 1.9 x 2.9 m. Courtesy: Travesía Cuatro, Madrid

Donna Huanca, 'Lengua de Bartolina Sisa'

Travesía Cuatro

24 February - 29 April The Bolivian-American artist's first solo exhibition in Spain is without doubt one of the exhibition highlights during this year's ARCO, after her impressive performance and show at the Zabłudowicz Collection during Frieze London last autumn. Huanca's work draws attention to the body but specifically to the skin: as a porous contact and exchange surface with the world. Naked bodies concealed under layers of paint, latex and cosmetics activate her installations, unpacking codified cultural gestures through a visceral entanglement of prostheses.

The title of her exhibition in Travesía Cuatro references the Aymara fighter Bartolina Sisa, who led the successful indigenous uprising against the Spanish in Bolivia in 1781. Captured a year later, she was publicly humiliated and executed in Madrid's Colonial Square (today's Plaza Murillo, at the south end of the Prado Museum), her body cut into pieces and sent to different villages as a warning. Not to be missed are Huanca's performances on the nights of the 23rd and 24th to understand what this new chapter will bring forth.

Body Painting

Donna Huanca's work usually gets categorized like this: 'lots of naked women, running around, then posing... In paint!' A fair description on the surface of it, but Huanca manipulates the public's knee-jerk reaction to female nakedness and the problematic relationship to the unsexualized female form. She casts naked female bodies in plastic, bits of mesh and paint, and uses these materials to make them look both attractive and odd. Her 2016 performance at London's Zabłudowicz Collection featured Huanca's trademark female figures and was her biggest performance to date.

What part did female bodies play in your 2016 performance at the Zabłudowicz Collection Scar Cymbals?

For this exhibition, I have created a site-responsive piece that has seven points of entry, deepening as you infiltrate the space, as in the layers of the skin. There will be daily performances where the works will evolve over time. The models I work with are familiar, and represent an authentic self, positioning themselves as powerful and unapologetic gazes.

All the models in my work display an authentic power that I associate with my own femininity: it's fluid, and not bound to gender. Women, trans women, and men all appear in my work as unapologetic, fierce symbols of power that are an inspiration.

How did bodies partly covered by make-up, latex and paint develop in your work?

Painting on canvas has never been interesting to me. Painting on the body creates a familiar territory. I paint using healing textures such as turmeric, clay, eggs, coffee, etc., 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 and that tension leads the intuitive painting.

Painting on a body creates a different type of tension and negotiation: there is a history that is inescapable on that end. I find the process freeing – to know my body paintings are ephemeral and will absolutely disappear, washed off at the end of the night, forcing a detachment and freedom.

Did you ever consider featuring the women completely naked?

In a 2013 performance titled *Mamads Cymbals*, I used a completely naked woman where I wanted to animate the sculptures against her still body.

Polystyrene's Braces seems so contingent on women's bodies and this covered/concealed aspects of the body.

My work is open to interpretation. The models I work with set an example of strength, and generously radiate power

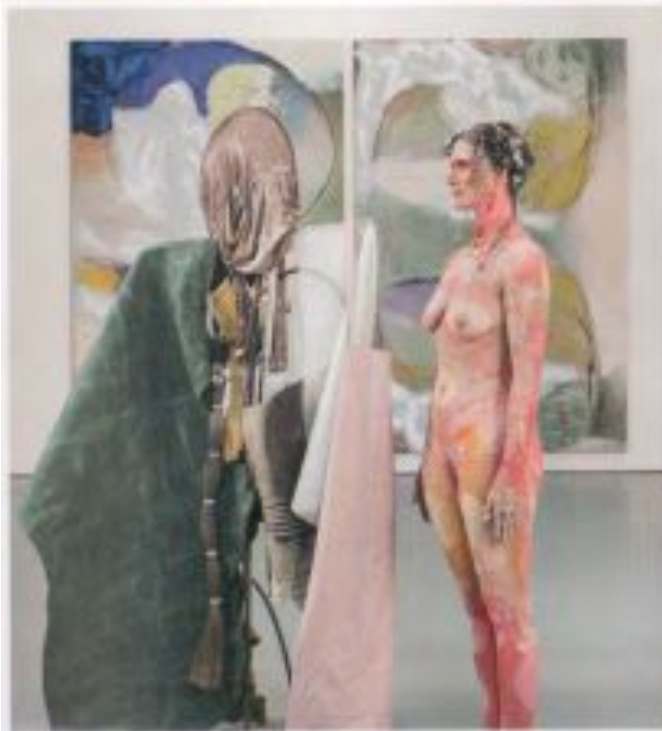
by naturally demanding respect within my work. I create safe spaces where the audience is privileged to experience our air and walk among us. There is no need for validation or drama. It is not theatre. The depths of our interior emotional history is boiling so heavy that the power created during the performances is undeniable. Whether it is understood or not is not my problem.

How does this performance fit into the wider context of your work, particularly the Rua Minx website (2002-present)?

Rua Minx began as an experimental website in 2002 (still running as my image archive), then was the alias for my sound work. Collaboration has always been critical to the development of my work. Before I studied art I was making music, as I was a drummer in several bands. When I began art school, I craved the collaborative side of music. In many ways, working with the models continued that sense of community that keeps the work exciting.







opposite
Polyester's Dream,
2011

above and right
Scar Cynical,
2014

previous page
Muscle Memory,
2015



Donna Huanca: Scar Cymbals. Zabłudowicz Collection London

Scar Cymbals is Huanca's world developed by means of a fluid dialogue between setting and architecture, sculpture and performance.

By Álvaro de Benito Fernández



With its combination of open and diaphanous spaces and different structural levels, the nineteenth-century Methodist chapel that houses the British seat of the Zabłudowicz Collection is a fascinating environment. It is perfectly suited to any action that requires movements or combinations of architectural elements and installations. For those reasons, it is not only an apt venue for *Scar Cymbals*, the first exhibition in the United Kingdom of work by Donna Huanca (Chicago, USA, 1980), but also a necessary one insofar as it enables the artist, who is of Bolivian descent, to formulate the synchronization and aesthetic dialogue that her work entails.

Three lines inherent to Huanca's background come together in her work. Though perhaps never formulated as such, the conflict between those lines has yielded

distinctive and groundbreaking work. If put in legal terms, the phrases would be *jus soli* and *jus sanguini*, two divergent areas of influence in which Huanca has always existed, the contrasts between her daily life in Chicago and her family trips to her parent's native Bolivia, where she came into contact with different sorts of folklore, such as the celebrations surrounding the Virgin of Urkupiña. The impact of the radically different led to a certain sense of fantasy or of unreality that makes itself felt in her art. The third line would be the artist's studies in Germany, which is key to understanding a certain expressive and chromatic bend.

All of that is at play in *Scar Cymbals*. It is Huanca's world developed by means of a fluid dialogue between setting and architecture, sculpture and performance. The power of the gesture, of the human body, of identity, and of how we relate to one another are the structuring links in a conversation channeled through nude performers who are covered in paint and makeup, skin rendered sensorial instrument. The performers interact with structures placed in the main gallery, some of which— *Melanocytes/Etheric Template*, for instance—are architectonic in nature. That transparent composition that presides over the front becomes opaque after each performance due to the chromatic marks left by the bodies. In other cases, the structures are installations; the morphology of the sand spiral in *Sensory Neuron/Celestial Layer*, for instance, determines the performers' rituals.

Almost by inertia, a hallway leads to a space in which sound becomes central. The sensorial and powerful whole resulting from the enveloping sound and the body serves to reaffirm the identity of Huanca's art. In this environment, the viewer receives impacts constantly, whether due to the nature of the sound used in a fantasy-like setting or to the colors and forms produced by materials that prove to be the source of the pigmentations that the performers use. Those sculptural installations, their double idiosyncrasy as process and as result, as well as the importance of sound art—with which Huanca has been working for years—in them bring to a close a journey from which escape is not all that easy. The show is a tireless exploration for the senses. It is somewhat chimerical and yet as real as the bodies and surfaces that make it up and as true as Donna Huanca's different realities.



The Top Emerging Artists of 2016

Artsy Editors

déc. 13, 2016 8:03pm

Among the more pervasive art-world narratives of 2016 was the downturn in the market for works by emerging artists. Market contractions may have limited the sheer number of new names bubbling up to surface this year in comparison to the last few. But this tempered pace also allowed for greater attention to be placed on the emerging artists of true quality and depth who gained traction in 2016—and it allowed a number of artists who have been working actively and slowly gaining recognition over several years to step up and strongly stake their claim as among those defining contemporary art today. Surveying this landscape, Artsy's editors consulted a number of data sources, including UBS's art news app Planet Art, and the insight of influential individuals to see who among these new and newly essential names proved a cut above the rest. Here, in no particular order, are the top emerging artists of this year.

Donna Huanca

B. 1980, Chicago • Lives and works in Berlin and New York



Portrait of Donna Huanca in her Berlin studio by Jonas Lindström for Artsy

Thirty-six-year-old artist Huanca has long taken skin and the human body as her medium—from imprints of paint-daubed performers à la Yves Klein, to performances featuring trancelike nude models clad head-to-toe with pigment, clay, and bodystockings. But this year saw her practice reach new heights. In addition to a September solo at Peres Projects, a performance at Manifesta 11, and a handful of group exhibitions, Huanca tied up the year with her first U.K. solo at the Zabłudowicz Collection—notably, the space’s first performance-focused commission.

The exhibition kicked off during Frieze Week in London, filling the collection’s 19th-century chapel with stunning sculptural installations swarmed by a gang of glacially moving, painted performers (she calls them collaborators). Amidst the scent of Palo Santo—a wood tied to sacred and shamanic rituals—they moved through the space, lulling runaway fairgoers into a brilliantly meditative state. The show’s curator, Maitreyi Maheshwari, says Huanca’s work “provokes a mixture of devotion from her collaborators and a visceral discomfort from her audience as we are asked to confront our attitudes to the body and all the power dynamics attendant to it.” These include, among others, looking and being looked at, gender, race, sexuality, and objectification. “She has a very clear vision of what she wants her work to do, and is very open to working with others in order to make that vision a reality,” says collector, philanthropist, and Zabłudowicz Collection co-founder Anita Zabłudowicz.

SCAR CYMBALS: CORPI NUDI COME TELE DA DIPINGERE

A Londra, l'esposizione della statunitense Donna Huanca diventa un modo interattivo per indagare su come comunichiamo attraverso la nostra pelle

DI CHIARA MOLINAROLI
28 NOVEMBRE 2016



Cicatrici, segni indelebili del tempo, make up e convenzioni: può **la pelle**, un involucro esterno che ricopre il corpo, comunicare l'intera identità della vita che racchiude? In un secolo, come il nostro, iniziato all'insegna dell'estetica, della superficie e dell'apparenza condivisa con un clic, il quesito è più che mai attuale. Su questo interrogativo si basa l'esposizione **Scar Cymbals di Donna Huanca**, classe 1980, giovane artista originaria di Chicago, in mostra nella **Collezione Zabłudowicz** di Londra.

In questa suggestiva **ex cappella metodista** del 19esimo secolo, che ospita la galleria dal 2007 ed è situata a due passi dalla vibrante **Camden Town**, lo spettatore è invitato a **mescolarsi con le performance** di modelli e modelle che,

nudi, si muovono nello spazio e interagiscono con le installazioni scultoree, sonore e visive posizionate nelle diverse stanze del percorso.

Esponendo il corpo nudo, nascosto solo sotto strati di **vernice, prodotti cosmetici e lattice**, l'artista vuole mettere alla prova le convenzioni del comportamento umano, nell'interazione che questo ha con lo spazio circostante, lasciando ai singoli gesti il compito di **esprimere ognuno la propria storia**.

Tra i materiali prediletti da Donna Huanca c'è il **vetro**, che diventa sempre più opaco durante lo show a causa del contatto che la superficie ha con quella umana. I modelli si muovono con gesti che diventano rituali e con la loro presenza scandiscono lo spazio, arrivando inevitabilmente a determinare anche il vuoto, dato dalla loro assenza.

Huanca invita gli spettatori a **immergersi sempre più nella mostra**, attraverso **tableaux vivants** e **opere interattive**, installazioni ricoperte di modelli di minerali naturali e formazioni rocciose, che ricordano i pigmenti dell'epidermide umana. All'interno di questi totem, sono incorporate altre opere, questa volta sonore, che rispondono al controllo dei modelli così come al movimento e alla vicinanza dei corpi visitatori, che interagendo con lo spazio diventano parte dell'opera stessa. Anche le musiche sono create da **Donna Huanca** con lo pseudonimo di **Rua Minx**.

Come reagireste in una stanza, circondata da corpi nudi che si muovono attorno a voi? Per scoprirlo, non perdetevi questa mostra, curata da **Maitreyi Maheshwari**, direttore del programma della **Zabludowicz Collection**.

INFO MOSTRA

Donna huanca: Scar Cymbals
fino al 18 dicembre

Zabludowicz Collection
176 Prince of Wales Road,
London NW5 3PT
zabludowiczcollection.com
info@zabludowiczcollection.com
+44 (0)207 428 8940

Body Painting and Performance Art Collide in 'SCAR CYMBALS'

Donna Huanca slathers naked bodies with paint, latex, and cosmetics to confront our reactions to flesh.



By [DJ Pangburn](#)

November 20, 2016, 1:45pm



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This article contains adult content.

In Donna Huanca's imagination, the naked body is a number of things. A fleshy sculpture, a canvas meant for paint, an anatomical performance prop, a model, and so much more. In her first UK solo exhibition, SCAR CYMBALS, the New York-based artist takes over the Zabludowicz Collection, installing painted models in various poses and positions throughout the space. The resulting performance piece includes sculptural elements, draped fabrics and latex, canvas paintings, sound, and works on plastic sheets descending from the gallery ceiling.

SCAR CYMBALS, which opened September 29 and runs until December 18, is an ever-evolving installation. Its daily metamorphosis unfolds with Huanca painting the models anew, then moving them into different

spaces or onto platforms. The movements, slow and deliberate, are meant to conjure private rituals and meditations within the space. The effect is a bit like Matthew Barney doing a live, theatrical production—making artists' models the actual focal points of the work.



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Huanca also designed a three-story glass structure that interacts with the height and neo-classical stucco work of the 19th century, former Methodist chapel. Since the models are covered in paint, the glass structure becomes more and more opaque as their bodies make contact with the glass. Other sculptural elements are inspired by the shapes and patterns created by minerals and rock formations. The body paint covering the models is inspired by minerals' natural pigments.



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Huanca has also worked as a musician and sound artist, under the name Rua Minx, and the installation's sonic elements go beyond atmosphere. Huanca embedded sound works inside the sculptures and created a “standalone totem-like sculpture,” all of which respond to the movements and proximity of the models and visitors by emitting varying bass tones that affect the body.

As Zabłudowicz Collection notes, Huanca is interested in how human bodies occupy and move through space and how a life's worth of gestures creates “invisible histories.” Huanca hopes that in exposing the naked body, then concealing much of it with layers of paint, latex, and cosmetics, she can get viewers to confront intrinsic reactions to flesh—to see it as something familiar but also abstract and inaccessible.



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SCAR CYMBALS runs through December 18 at Zabłudowicz Collection in London. To see more of Donna Huanca's work, visit, [here](#).



Six degrees of separation: From Victor Pasmore to Donna Huanca

By Sam Phillips

Published 15 November 2016

How do Pasmore's mid-century stylistic transformations link to Huanca's paint-smeared performers? Sam Phillips joins the dots, by taking in six winter shows.

6. Donna Huanca

“With regard to Klein, I don’t relate to a man wearing a tuxedo pointing a wand, directing the naked female body”, says the Chicago-born performance artist Donna Huanca. In her show at London’s [Zabludowicz Collection](#), her models covered in paint, latex and cosmetics are in her words “symbols of power”.

until 18 December 2017



Donna Huanca: 'Memory is perhaps the most permanent architecture'

The Chicago-born artist discusses shedding skin, the idea of permanence, and being involved in Manifesta 11



by ALEXANDER GLOVER

Not only is Scar Cymbals the first UK solo exhibition by New York-based artist Donna Huanca (b1980, Chicago), but it is also the Zabłudowicz Collection's first performance-led commission. Each day during the exhibition, there will be scheduled performances by painted models interacting with site-specific sculptural installations. These works act as Huanca's response to the exhibition space, a former Methodist chapel. Rather than battle with the surroundings, Huanca has acknowledged the site's previous incarnation by building a huge, three-storey, translucent glass structure in the main hall. As the painted models perform within it, enacting private rituals and meditations with slow and emphatic gestures, the glass will gradually become more opaque.

The line between engagement and withdrawal is consistently blurred through these daily performances. As well as interaction, human or otherwise, the materials have a great importance to the overall experience of the exhibition. Totem-like structures are dotted throughout the space, presenting an

assemblage of various materials. Although many of these structures possess an eerie human-like presence, the interaction of the models provides new narratives for the viewer in real time. The sculptural installations draw influence from natural minerals and rock formations, reflecting the pigments used to paint the live models.

Sound is another key component to the exhibition. Huanca, who has previously made sound projects under the name Rua Minx, built on what she learned through that earlier work for this installation, which includes sound works that variously respond to the control of the models and the movement of visitors' bodies.

As the show unfolds, the models slowly peel off the layers of latex covering their bodies. Viewers are encouraged to experience the show as it unfolds: restrained and intensely focused at the beginning, while becoming more engaging with the interactive works by the end.

Alexander Glover: The nude bodies of the models in the exhibition are first covered in latex and then you have painted them. Do you see them more as mobile paintings, living sculptures or painted performers?

Donna Huanca: I see them as living artworks.

AG: Scar Cymbals is very much a site-specific exhibition in which you react to the space directly and its past as a Methodist chapel. Why did you want to react to this history?

DH: Because the architecture is so intense, so overpowering, I did not want to compete with it.

AG: It's the first time the Zabłudowicz Collection has hosted a performance led-commission. How has this project been logistically?

DH: Very exciting. This exhibition allowed me to take my work to a new level. By using all the senses, I wanted to create an immersive experience for both the

audience and the performer. The exhibition changes daily as the interaction with the models and artworks is shifting. The sound works in Scar Cymbals allow the models to create their own customised vibrational sound. There is also a piece that is activated by the presence of the body: Nerve Endings/Astral Layer (Mother) is activated by 40 infrared sensors set in the ceiling, which are triggered by body heat and respond to the body's proximity to the sculpture, making the sound louder the closer you get.

AG: Snakes shed their skin to allow for further growth as well as to rid themselves of any parasites on their old skin. What did you have in mind theoretically for when the models slowly cast off their prosthetic layers?

DH: I wanted to have skin layers in the show. Over time, this work is becoming pooled with skin cells and the DNA of the performers.

AG: Could you discuss the choices you made, in terms of material, for your sculptural installations?

DH: All the materials are related to the body, such as clothing, skins, textures created with my body in silicone moulds, and bondage equipment.

AG: When the models interact with the sculptural works, are they imbuing the still work with a heightened sense of humanity?

DH: Yes.

AG: Does your work allude to, or draw references from, a particular strand of spirituality?

DH: No.

AG: Is the pursuit of permanence overrated?

DH: Absolutely. Memory is perhaps the most permanent architecture.

AG: I have spoken to many artists who were formerly – if that can be ever true – musicians. Some neglect that past, but some

incorporate what they learned in to their practice. Sound is very important to the multisensory experience of the show. Was there anything you learned from your time as Rua Minx that you used directly for this show?

DH: Yes, my introduction to visual art was through music. Using sound has taught me about collaboration and improvisation – which have proved to be critical processes in my work.

AG: You recently took part in Manifesta 11. What was the experience like?

DH: For Manifesta 11, I was asked to do a three-hour performance at Cabaret Voltaire. I asked models I have been working with for years to improvise with me, contributing with their own art practices. Together, we created live sound and movement. It was a great to be on the stage with my models and deepen our relationship during this performance.

• *Donna Huanca: Scar Cymbals is at the Zabłudowicz Collection, London, until 18 December 2016.*

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Donna

Huanca's

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ephemeral

installations

HAND-DESIGNED GRASS AND PAPER PROJECTS, BRUNNEN

BY TAYLOR DAFOE

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A model
performing
during "Muscle
Memory" at
Reiss-Weinstein
Berlin, 2015.

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 Zabłudowicz 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
"Musical Memory"
offshoot 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 work 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.

HAIR: GEORGE DALL; MAKEUP: PIERRE MICHELLE



resonance
catalytic (n°1), 2016.
Oil, acrylic, and
pigment on digital
print on canvas,
74% x 56 in.

Serpente, 2016.
Oil, acrylic, and
pigment on digital
print on canvas,
74% x 56 in.

lonelier shadow,
2016. Oil, acrylic,
and pigment
on digital print
on canvas,
74% 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—sorts 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. *sm*

ALL IMAGES: PIERRE PELICCIOLI

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



RAMON GARCIA BARRAL AND PIERRE PRODUCTIONS

Still from a performance during 'Muscle Memory' at PeersProject.

Donna Huanca's Nude, Statuesque Models Make a Colorful Splash at Frieze Week in London



by [Skye Sherwin](#)

October 10, 2016 4:41 pm

Thierry Bal

With plenty of nudity and rumors about hallucinogens, Donna Huanca's solo exhibition "Scar Cymbals," at the [Zabludowicz Collection](#), was always going to be one of the most talked about offerings of [Frieze Week](#) in London. Yet though Huanca delivered a rainbow-colored visual spectacle for her performance on Friday night within the exhibition, the overall vibe is more meditative than sensationalist.

In the main gallery, her installations have a minimalist aesthetic that would suit a New Age temple or high-concept spa. There's a sand maze carved from low ridges, a two-story glass house, and, for Friday's special performance, a monolith of ice in which rambutans, an Indonesian fruit, had been frozen.

Against this stripped-down backdrop, Huanca's performers looked a motley tribe, dressed in nothing more than body stockings and lashed with pigments — hues of bright yellow, lapis lazuli blue, pale jade — in turmeric, coffee and clay. With a focus on the skins society inhabits, the back gallery is similarly populated by a crew of models, or "sculptures," wearing hides, clothes and clear plastic sheets. They took deliberate, slow steps while a spacey soundtrack resounded.

Like the festivals mashing up Catholic and local folk traditions, which she witnessed visiting her parents' home as a child, the Bolivian-American artist's work draws on diverse cultures. The smell of Palo Santo, a wood that's mixed with peyote and ritually ingested in psychedelic rites across the Americas, is pumped throughout the art space. Yet while the show courts out-of-body experiences, the performers remain bound to earth through traces of their existence.

Their interactions with the clear clean forms in the gallery left gentle marks of color, a record of bodies moving in space and time that will continue to accrue day by day, with performers in situ during the show's run. In one room body stockings are heaped like lizard skins, but identity, Huanca suggests, cannot be so easily shed.

See Donna Huanca's Spectacular Body Art at the
Zabludowicz Collection in London







DONNA HUANCA

TRAVESIA CUATRO



Donna Huanca, "MELANOCYTES/ETHERIC TEMPLATE," 2016, performance view. Commissioned by Zabludowicz Collection. Courtesy the artist and Peres Projects.

Donna Huanca: Sensory Exploration



The Zabłudowicz Collection, London, hosts the first UK solo exhibition by performance-based artist, Donna Huanca. A series of sculptural installations and live performances commissioned by Maitreyi Maheshwari take place in the 19th century Methodist chapel: a collective presentation of the American artist's career and an expression of identity and the body.

Huanca's work focuses on the human form, drawing attention specifically to the skin as the surface through which we experience the world, through sensory exploration. It is also the material that holds our individual visual identity. *Scar Cymbals* examines the interaction between our bodies and the space surrounding us – presenting the naked form as an abstract decorative object. This becomes the canvas for Huanca's collection, featuring performances by nude models concealed under layers of paint and latex.

As part of the installation, a three-storey glass structure, features in the Main Hall of the venue. Throughout the duration of the exhibition the translucent structure becomes increasingly opaque as models perform inside it, shedding their prosthetic layers and spreading smudges and splashes of colour from their painted bodies. Making deliberate and dramatic movements, the performers mark the space with their presence and identity, leaving behind a sense of visceral absence.

A collection of the artist's early sound art projects is embedded throughout the show. These audio pieces are responsive to the movement and proximity of visitors' bodies – giving viewers the control over this interactive feature. This event is a representation of skin and its many layers, as it presents a variation of different interactive elements for visitors to immerse themselves in. Using a combination of installation, sculpture, performance art and sound, viewers are invited to become increasingly involved; seeing beyond the surface and searching for a deeper analysis.

Donna Huanca: Scar Cymbals runs from 29 September – 18 December, Zabludowicz Collection, London.

Find out more: **www.zabludowiczcollection.com**

Kaleidoscope: Donna Huanca in conversation at Frieze, London.

On the occasion of her concurring performance-led exhibition at Zabludowicz, and a profile that appears in the current issue of Kaleidoscope, Huanca will discuss her concern with the nude female body with Kaleidoscope's editor-at-large Francesca Gavin, a writer and curator based between London and Berlin.

Find out more about the event: www.frieze.com

Credits:

1. Donna Huanca, *Muscle Memory*. Performance view, June 27–August 8, 2015. Peres Projects, Berlin. Courtesy of the artist and Zabludowicz Collection.

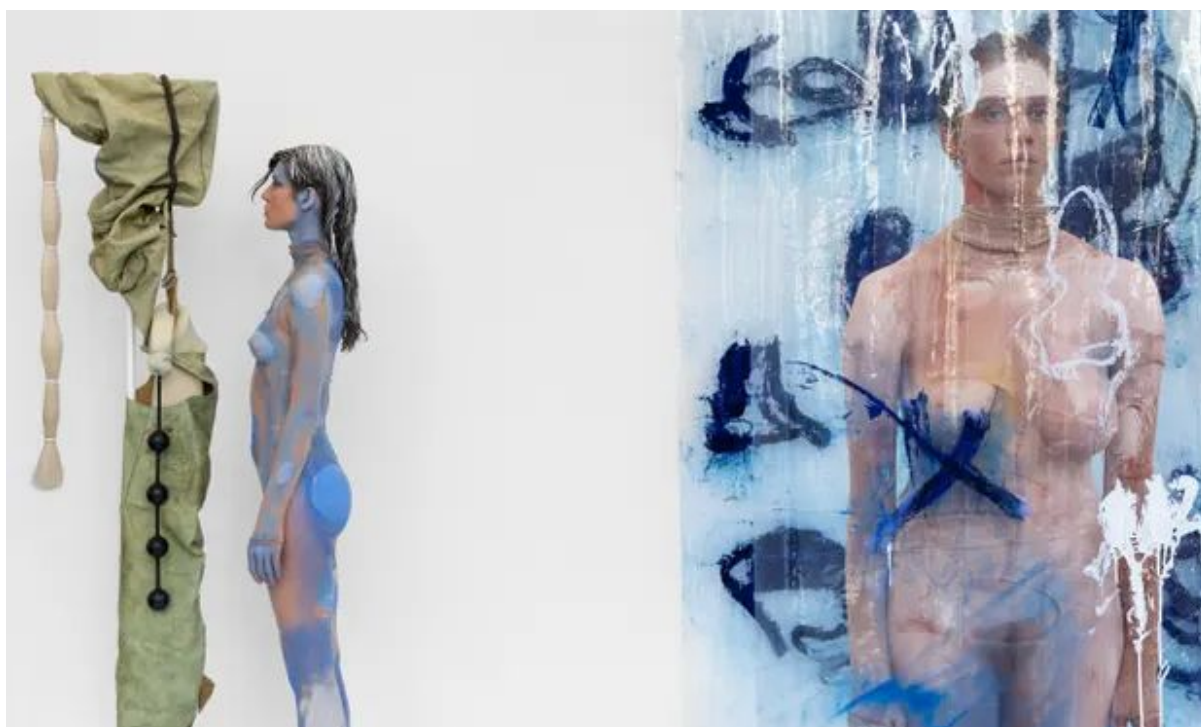
Posted on 5 October 2016

Interview

Ayahuasca and anal beads: the hallucinogenic art of Donna Huanca

Hettie Judah

Nomadic Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca arrives in London with a troupe of models, ready to cover themselves in paint and turmeric. She explains what it's like to be watched, and why trans women will destroy the patriarchy



▲ Donna Huanca's show *Surrogate Painteen*, now on show at Peres Projects in Berlin. Photograph: Adrian Parvulesco/groupshow.eu

Models in bodypaint, anal beads, and smells associated with ritual hallucination: these are just some of the parts of a multisensory artwork by American artist Donna Huanca, arriving in London later this month.

Huanca will unveil *Scar Cymbals*, an ambitious project stretching across the former chapel building at Zabłudowicz Collection. There's a vibrating pedestal, a low labyrinth for walking-based meditation, and a multi-storey acrylic structure built into the apse. Body-stocking-clad performers patterned with paint, turmeric and clay will interact with the various structures during the three-month show: two of them each day, and 10 for special events.



▲ A model poses in Donna Huanca's
Surrogate Painteen. Photograph: Adrian
Parvulesco/groupshow.eu

Born to Bolivian parents but raised in Chicago, Huanca's early life was full of the disjunction and ritual that she has later drawn on in her work. "My parents were immigrants, they were always telling us that we'd move back, and we weren't allowed to speak English at home," she recalls. In summers the family would return to Bolivia and attend the Urkupiña festival, which fused Catholic and Andean traditions in music, dance and richly coloured costume. "It was complete chaos," she enthuses. "None of it really made sense, but I enjoyed it, I was into the fantasy." For Huanca, Urkupiña's flurry of sounds, colours and performance came to represent a kind of ultimate artwork.

Moving between the two cultures became a wrench: "It was like I had two brains – I'd go through the festival and then return to a 'normal' life in Chicago." Now 35 and living between Berlin and New York, Huanca still feels nomadic. "I've been thinking about mental spaces and where you feel comfortable: these are the places I try to make in my work."

Huanca uses the term "models" as one might in a life-drawing class: "It's not like a **Vanessa Beecroft** work where they're off duty fashion models." Instead she recruits collaborators among her friends and peers. The bond they feel as a group is something she cherishes, and she asks the models to write about their

experience after each performance. “They have to go into a trancelike state. It’s difficult to be in any other state when you’re being gazed at that long. And you want to talk about it afterwards – it’s like going on a trip with someone.”

Subtle references to this state come from the aromas permeating the space, derived from Texas cedar and Palo Santo (a tree that grows in the Mexican desert), which are traditionally mixed with hallucinogenic ayahuasca and peyote, and burned as ceremonial incense. Desert rocks, meanwhile, inspire the tones and textures of the materials that Huanca uses to decorate her models’ bodies: close-up photos she’s made of them during performances resemble topographic studies.



▲ More works from Donna Huanca's show *Surrogate Painteen*. Photograph: Adrian Parvulesco/groupshow.eu

These photos will surround a motion-sensitive sound installation that will be activated by visitors as they thread their way between sheets of painted acrylic and sculptural forms dressed with leather and debris. Among these are used bodystockings, which look like reptile skin casts, and a string of black spheres the size of ping-pong balls. “Those are giant anal beads,” says Huanca, awestruck. “I feel like I learned so much going to fetish stores in Berlin. Those beads are huge – it’s like a form of torture.”

That counterpoint between pleasure and pain recalls her first-person experience of going through a long-duration performance, where “a torture element is transcended and rewarded in the end”. In 2013 Huanca engaged in *Raw Material*, a six-week long residency inside a studio walled with two-way mirrors in Malmö’s Konsthalle. Under the gaze of visitors she couldn’t see, she

went about her day-to-day life – art-making and all other activities – in full view during museum hours. Members of the public were invited in to collaborate with her, but only if they committed to stay for longer than 10 minutes. “It was about not knowing when someone is looking at you or what is expected of you,” she says. “Could I stand to be watched? What does it do to you?”



▲ 'A torture element is transcended and rewarded'... two models alongside a Huanca painting. Photograph: Adrian Parvulesco/groupshow.eu

When she first started recruiting other performers, Huanca was drawn to more direct “avatars”: young women of around her height with long dark hair. But she doesn’t specify age or body type. Trans models will appear in her newest work in London, as well as a male model. “The trans woman’s movement has becoming a subject on everyone’s mind – I’m so interested in their vulnerabilities,” she explains. “They’re allies in helping us break down the patriarchal system because they know what it’s like on both sides.”

Withstanding the gaze of onlookers is by no means easy: in the past Huanca has had to remove a performer from a work when she realised that they weren’t coping. And the balance of power between models and onlookers shifts subtly country to country. The one constant? “There’s always some idiot man in every city that asks: how much do they cost?”

Scar Cymbals is at Zabłudowicz Collection, London, 29 September – 18 December. *Surrogate Painteen* is at Peres Projects, Berlin, to 28 October.

ART

SPOTLIGHT ON PAINTER DONNA HUANCA

QUINN HARRELSON

09.26.2016



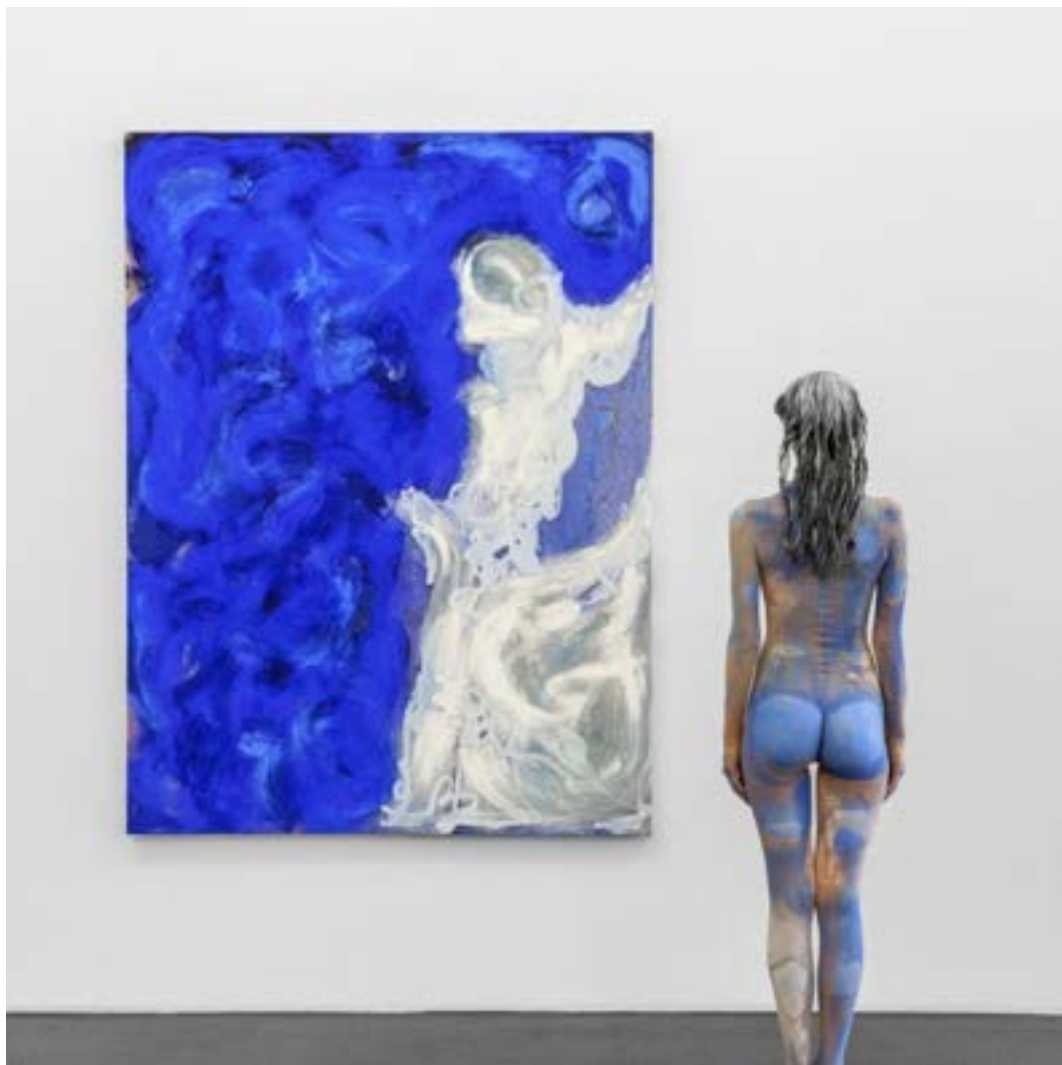
PERFORMANCE VIEW OF "DONNA HUANCA:
SURROGATE PAINTEEN," 2016. PHOTO
COURTESY OF PERES PROJECTS, BERLIN.

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.



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.

The Beauty of Donna Huanca's Body Art Is More Than Skin Deep

Charlotte Jansen

sept. 16, 2016 2:56pm



Donna Huanca, *SCAR CYMBALS*, 2016, performance view. Commissioned by Zabłudowicz Collection. Courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects. Photo by Thierry Bal.

Amid the cosmopolitan chaos of London this fall, the New York artist Donna Huanca is creating space for meditative contemplation. As Frieze Week sets in, the Zabłudowicz Collection in London will be taken over by Huanca's army of nearly-nude, pastel-painted models, who will be enshrined in a three-floor Perspex structure the artist has built. As they press and rub their bodies against the transparent walls, they'll create a painting, which will evolve over the course of the exhibition with the gradual build up of their imprints.

They'll move "glacially," Huanca tells me, as they move through the structure and drape articles of clothing on sculptures that resemble rocks and minerals. For those who witness Huanca's hypnotic, hybrid works, you can expect to experience something between the aftermath of an acid rave and the spiritual ceremony of an ancient ritual. "I am creating seven points of entry that will deepen as you infiltrate the space—as in the layers of the skin," the artist tells me. As they pass through the exhibition, visitors will be guided by a sound installation that responds to the presence of bodies.



Donna Huanca, *SCAR CYMBALS*, 2016, performance view. Commissioned by Zabłudowicz Collection. Courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects. Photo by Thierry Bal.

Huanca has been holed up in a studio in Berlin all summer, working on this major new project, as well as a September solo show at Peres Projects in Berlin. The London show will be Huanca's first solo show in the U.K., and the first performance-led work the Zabłudowicz Collection has ever commissioned. Whereas in previous productions—like her 2015 “Polystrene Braces” at Riga's kim? Contemporary Art Centre, or “Echo Implant” at the now-defunct Joe Sheftel Gallery in New York—she incorporated live models into the creation of her static paintings and sculptures, in a manner that recalls the “Anthropometries” of Yves Klein, these new exhibitions represent fresh terrain for the American artist, both in terms of duration and execution. For the Zabłudowicz show, for example, she's worked closely with the performers who will enliven the exhibition and bring her new “Skin Paintings” to life. She's taught them to paint themselves for the duration of the the exhibition, and although their movements have been choreographed, they have a certain autonomy that represents an evolution in the artist's work.

In her solo show that opened at Peres Projects earlier this month, titled “Surrogate Painteen,” Huanca's models, somewhat cyborg-like with their impassive gazes, confront large-scale paintings and sculptures more directly, sitting and lying on top of them, facing them and touching them—activating them. And although the body is supremely central to both shows, Huanca is less concerned with body politics than with the idea of the body as another surface or material. In the same way she reworks textiles and fabrics that make up her sculptures, or layers of printmaking and acrylics in her paintings, Huanca deconstructs and fragments the body, to

dismantle and recycle it into a genderfluid, post-human device that is no longer limited by interpretations of identity.



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

This approach may also explain the artist’s ongoing interest in the synthetic substances she employs in her paintings and sculptures—highly textural and symbolically rich substances like pantyhose, velvet, metal, silicon, and leather. In a number of her exhibitions, Huanca has referenced the lyrics of a song by British punk band X-Ray Spex, *The Day The World Turned Day-Glo*, which alludes to many of the materials Huanca favors—latex, rubber, rayon, nylon, and Perspex, also among them. And yet, color is equally central to Huanca’s experiential exhibitions. “The DNA of the earth; gems, minerals, meteorites, desert landscapes; and hallucinatory states have all taught me about color and its effects on mood,” Huanca explains. These intense studies have led her to employ a psychotropic palette of purple, blue, pink, and green hues, which she applies across her new paintings, sculptures, and the bodies of performers.

Huanca’s works prompt us to reflect on the relationship between visual aesthetics and identity. It’s one of the oldest conundrums of the history of art, but it’s as relevant as ever nowadays, when identity is duplicitous. Huanca asks the viewer to challenge what Amelia Jones refers to as the “politics of visibility” in her seminal book *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (1998).



Left: Donna Huanca, *MELANOCYTES/ETHERIC LAYER*, 2016, performance view. Commissioned by Zabłudowicz Collection. Courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects. Photo by Thierry Bal; Right: Donna Huanca, *SCAR CYMBALS*, 2016, performance view. Commissioned by Zabłudowicz Collection. Courtesy of the artist and Peres Projects. Photo by Thierry Bal.

Throughout her shows, skin has been an overarching motif for Huanca. The body's largest organ, skin contains a whole biological and cultural history within its layers—in a way, similar to the pigments of paint in an artwork, fibers in clothes, or the architectural makeup of a building. It's apt that the Zabłudowicz space inhabits a historic 19th-century building that previously housed a Methodist Church and a drama school. Site is another key element that remains consistent for Huanca. "All my works are sensitive to their environment—perhaps an attempt to take possession of a space. It is impossible for me to ignore the context the works are born in," Huanca explains. While the effect of the work has so much to do with the impact of the physical experience—the sounds, smells, motion, and color she orchestrates—I wonder how Huanca feels about audiences viewing her exhibitions online? "Documentation is the way most people experience art nowadays, flattened and immediate," she concedes. "I am aware of this and consider the documentation an important part, giving the virtual audience a separate layer of experiencing the work." However, while Huanca offers us the notion of a realm beyond the body, her living, breathing, moving artwork depends on exchange, a communal coming together of physical bodies, objects, and materials. In the words of X-ray Specs, "I live off you/ And you live off me/ And the whole world/Lives off of everybody."

Charlotte Jansen

A Studio Visit with Donna Huanca

6 September, 2016



Combining performance, painting and sculpture, Donna Huanca is bringing the dead back to life with the help of her audience. For SLEEK 51, we visited the artists' Kreuzberg studio as she prepares for the opening of "Surrogate Painteen", a solo exhibition currently on display at Berlin's Peres Projects gallery. Read below for an exclusive look into Huanca's workspace as the creative explains how the afterlife has inspired her latest works.



Images of the body are Donna Huanca's core motif. Sheaths of skin-like fabric – painted, torn, burned, creased, crumpled, layered and stretched – permeate every aspect of her output, and even her atelier. Today, her Kreuzberg workshop is a jumble of shiny, metallic, candy-coloured clothes, sheets of industrial plastic sheeting, and pastel toned paintings. Having moved her studio from New York to Berlin three-weeks ago, she's already unleashed her entire battery of resources, filling the converted garage from floor to ceiling with recently exhibited pieces and new works in progress. Few furnishings grace her studio apart from a small stage, placed in the centre of the room, the locus of her creative process. Currently preparing new work for a series of solo exhibitions opening across Europe this autumn, she seems unfazed by the change in scenery. Growing up in Chicago, she accompanied her Bolivian parents every summer to Fiesta de la Virgen de Urkupiña, a religious festival attracting up to a million visitors. "Being little and dancing all night, the festival chaos is still embedded in my brain," says Huanca. "The colours and sounds... It was ritual debauchery and surreal, totally exceptional to my otherwise normal, daily life. These surreal, psychedelic pockets of time, really fuel what I do now." In her early works, such as the 2009 video "Dressing the Queen

(Pachamama)", she began embedding found textiles into her work. "I started to cut up my clothing, gluing it on canvas," she says, "My intention was immediacy and painting with fabric was the fastest and most visceral way to achieve that."



Today, this approach has expanded into performance, encompassing models in various states of undress, channelling new age spirituality and psychedelic ritualism. In these shows, the body, and more specifically the nude female body, is put on display, reclaiming how women's forms are seen with a non-sexual agenda. Painted in various brightly coloured shades, they move slowly, conducting partially improvised movements, pausing in angular positions, interacting with surrounding installations. Remnants from each production roll over from one project to the next. For example, imprints of her models' painted forms like those on Plexiglas panels created in "Water Scars" at Valentin in Paris last year, become fodder for paintings such as "smokey eye (cry)", composed of fingerprints made with mascara and oil on wool. "Neither I nor the viewer can fully grasp or control the models," Huanca says. When shown side-by-side, her static installations and performances emphasise the role of the audience – who act as

intermediaries between the two mediums – becoming part of it in the process.

“I want to focus on giving audiences a meditative experience” – Donna Huanca

To Huanca, the models are projections of herself, and the Plexiglas panels and fabric sheaths function as shelters. “Being the subject of ‘the gaze’ is exhausting,” she states. “And the materials the models wear start to function similarly to the way we use clothing and make-up as armour in the real world.” Although she considers these static compositions to be ‘dead’ when compared to her ‘living’ works with models, by placing them in this context she reinvigorates them using the audience’s eye. “To me, this is like looking at the past, like relics at the natural history museum,” she says, grabbing one of her woven sculptures. “That’s why I want to infuse them during the performance with someone who is living, breathing and changing.”



Following her 2015 exhibition “Echo Implant” at Joe Sheftel Gallery in New York, Huanca began photographing the body paintings on her

models, making abstractions from details such as ears and crevices. “When the performances are happening, nobody gets close to the models. There were things I thought audiences weren’t seeing and at the end of the night, my paintings would wash off of the models. There was a sadness in losing those works that I wanted to capture.” She then recreated some of these techniques in the studio, printed the close-up images on canvas and over-painted in layers, using the same materials applied to the models like clown paint, clay and turmeric, incorporating oil stick and sand for added density. In addition to a solo show opening at Peres Projects in Berlin this September, Huanca will present her largest exhibition to date at the Zabłudowicz Collection in London as part of their annual commissions. The exhibition focuses on the seven layers of the epidermis, guiding audiences through a series of installations in different parts of the former 19th century Methodist Chapel. Featuring altars, totems, a vibrating stage and a three-storey structure made from glass scaffolding, it’s her most ambitious project to date, and one that she hopes visitors will appreciate as they become immersed within it. “I want to focus on giving audiences a meditative experience,” she says. “When you are there, you’re alive.” Donna Huanca's "Surrogate Painteen" is on display at Peres Projects until 28 October 2016

Photography by Kevin Mason

By Arielle Bier

Art

30 Emerging Artists to Watch This Summer

• Artsy Editors

juil. 14, 2015 12:02am



Summer is the season for emerging art. From group shows packed with up-and-coming names you've probably never heard of (but will know very soon) to trial balloon solos by artists freshly added to bigger galleries' rosters, it's high time for the art world to take in a fresh crop of talent. Here, we highlight 30 emerging artists hailing from around the globe—from Istanbul to Cape Town, São Paulo to New York—who mark the very best of the class of 2015, three of whom have been profiled in depth.

Przemek Pyszczek

B. 1985 IN BIALYSTOK, POLAND. LIVES AND WORKS IN BERLIN.

summer exhibitions: "RIO" AT OFFICE BAROQUE, BRUSSELS; "MUSCLE MEMORY: DONNA HUANCA & PRZEMEK PYSZCZEK" AT PERES PROJECTS, BERLIN.



Portrait of Przemek Pyszczek by Paul Green for Artsy.

Donna Huanca

B. 1980 in Chicago. Lives and works in New York.

Summer Exhibitions: "Muscle Memory: Donna Huanca & Przemek Pyszczyk" at Peres Projects, Berlin; "To Rectify a Situation" at Valentin, Paris.



With Chanel makeup smeared across the fabric of woolen suits and nude women painted head-to-toe, wandering through Peres Projects's Berlin space, Bolivian-American artist Huanca brilliantly jabs at ideals of female power and beauty, and cultural norms—particularly those of the corporate exec. Meanwhile in Paris, you can find Huanca's work in a group show at Galerie Valentin through the end of the July. (If you can't make either show, the [#DonnaHuanca](#) hashtag is worth a spin to catch snaps of the performances.)

Muscle Memory at Peres Projects



June 20, 2015

Lorenzo Pereira

Memory is a social construct – its content depends on individual or collective self-consciousness, as well as on social interactions with other individuals and groups. When someone makes a life-changing move (i.e. moving to another country), his or her remembrance is prone to so-called “memory rapture”. This rapture in memory enables more critical and objective examination of individual’s own memory on past events, as well as examination of groups’ collective remembrance, which is often a subject of art practices (you can check out the work by Andrea Geyer, for example). Peres Projects from Berlin organizes a two-person exhibition entitled *Muscle Memory*, with new works by Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca and Polish-Canadian artist Przemek Pyszcze. Both artists create work that draws from their experiences of social and cultural displacement as first generation North Americans.

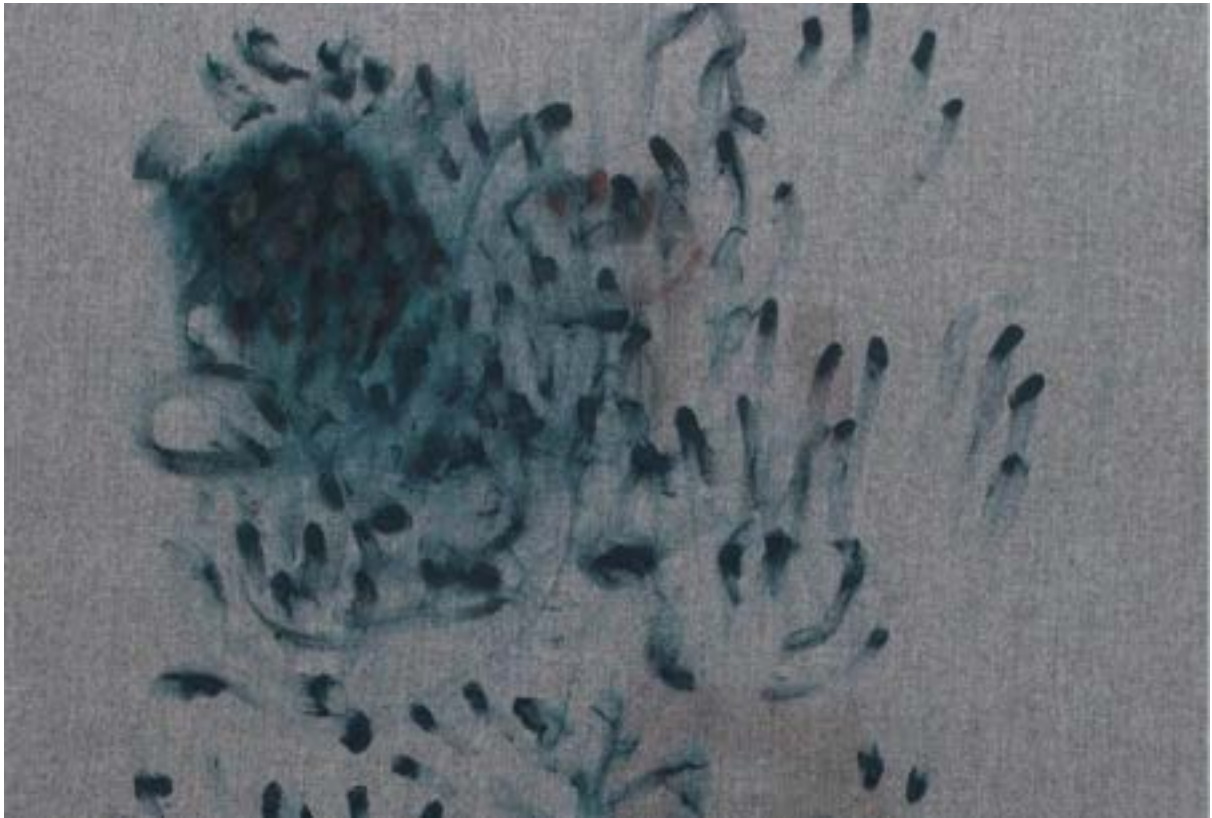


Left: Przemek Pyszcze - Playground Structure, 2015 / **Right:** Donna Huanca - Cavewoman, 2015

Body and Power in the Art of Donna Huanca

Donna Huanca is a Bolivian-American artist who uses painting, sculpture, sound and performance to create large-scale installations that often serve as platforms for social, interactive and collaborative happenings. In her latest works, Huanca explores the position of the female executive on the male-dominated battlefield of corporate life. This amazing artist’s aim is actually to communicate (through her work) the way power relations in our contemporary societies influence what is commonly called “the politics of body”. By examining female position in corporative structures, Donna Huanca investigates how the power suit and bold use of brand-name cosmetics have armored women in high positions. In *Cosmetic Paintings*, the routine female practice of applying makeup and dressing for success is transformed into a powerful, primal action, employing these normative symbols of feminine power by applying Chanel makeup onto woolen suit material. In the context of an exhibition, Huanca’s flat works act as backdrops to be experienced in

conversation with the body. They are activated through a performance of painted female bodies glacially engaging with the works and space.



Donna Huanca - Cavewoman, 2015 (detail)

Memory and Architecture in the Art of Przemek Pyszczyk

Przemek Pyszczyk is a Polish-Canadian artist whose work concentrates on interrelations between ideology, form, architecture and memory. As a Poland-born artist, he is familiar with Eastern European architecture built during the communist era, whose aim was to reduce the complexity of life into human scale units of shared wealth and community (in case you like street art, you might be interested to read our article about 10 Eastern European Urban Artists). At the center of this ideology was an architectural impetus that led to massive groups of housing blocks centered around parks filled with brightly colored and elaborately shaped metal jungle gym equipment. In the *Playground Structure* series, Przemek Pyszczyk destroys, rebuilds and abstracts these forms as a way of reconciling childhood memory with the realities of immigrant displacement.



Left: Donna Huanca - Pisces (Brows), 2015 / **Right:** Donna Huanca -Cosmetic Painting #10, 2015

Cultural Norms and Communal Memory: Muscle Memory at Peres Projects

Both Donna Huanca and Przemek Pyszczyk practices are a product of artists' interest in the ramifications of cultural norms and social planning on the body. While Huanca employs signifiers of female power to confront social constructs around gender, Pyszczyk draws on communal memory and the innocence of childhood to reconstruct a bygone ideology on contemporary terms. As a result of these interests, beautiful artworks were created that will be exhibited during the *Muscle Memory* two-person show at Peres Projects in Berlin, that will be on view from June 27th until August 8th, 2015.

If you want to be informed about the latest exhibitions, sign up for My Widewalls! It's free of charge.

Featured Image: Donna Huanca - Pisces (Brows) [detail], 2015

Image in Slider: Przemek Pyszczyk -Playground Structure (Calisthenics)[detailed],2015

All Images courtesy of Peres Projects.



IN CONVERSATION WITH DONNA HUANCA

OCT 22, 2014

by KATY DIAMOND HAMER



Donna Huanca, Detail, *Psychotria Elata* (2014), Installation and Performance, Brand New Gallery, abc (art berlin contemporary) Instagram photo by pishcheck, Screenshot by Katy Hamer

Travel comes in many forms and can be mental, literal or virtual. What I, like many people, do is a bit of all three. This year, abc (art berlin contemporary) was held September 18th through the 21st at [Station Berlin](#). Unable to attend, I watched excitedly as images appeared in my Instagram feed and when the photograph above was posted by pishcheck ([Przemek Pyszczyk](#)) I knew something special was occurring. The artist, whose work I discovered virtually by way of an image from an art fair in Berlin, is by [Donna Huanca](#) who also happens to be based in New York after having spent time in Mexico City and Berlin. In spring 2014, she participated in [MoMA PS1 Sunday Sessions](#) with [SADE ROOM \(famously reclusive\)](#), a mixed media installation at the Print Shop. The art world is small and instagram makes it smaller. Our dialogue is below.



Donna Huanca, *Psychotria Elata* (2014), Installation and Performance, abc (art berlin contemporary), Berlin, 2014, Brand New Gallery, Image courtesy of the artist

KATY DIAMOND HAMER: You recently participated in abc ([art berlin contemporary](#), 2014) with [Brand New Gallery](#). How long have you been working with them?

DONNA HUANCA: This was my first project with Brand New Gallery.

KDH: I was unable to attend abc this year, but the images of your work caught my eye. Can you talk about the installation?

DH: The piece is called *PSYCHOTRIA ELATA* (2014), after a species of plant that can make you hallucinate if consumed. I want the experience of my work to create a surreal moment similar to a hallucination. The installation was activated by live models, creating a shifting composition during ABC, a total of 29 hours.

KDH: When did you start to work with the human figure as a medium (not unlike a colored brushstroke of a painting) in your work?

DH: My first installation with the human figure displayed sculpturally among the static works was in 2012 for an installation called "SADE on DMT" at [The Kunsthalle Exnergasse \(KEX\)](#) in Vienna. Two models used the installation as a lounge during the opening of the exhibition. I have been working with clothes for a long time, however. Garments evoke bodies and carry their form and spirit.



Donna Huanca, *Psychotria Elata*, Installation and Performance, abc (art berlin contemporary), Berlin, 2014, Brand New Gallery, Image courtesy of the artist

KDH: The body in space, a three-dimensional form that functions as sculpture, yet within the context of your solid/immobile objects in the booth and two-dimensional hanging work, the installation as a whole felt very painterly. What is your relationship to painting?

DH: Although I studied painting, I never resonated with the medium or a two-dimensional format. My flat works act as backdrops that are meant to be experienced in conversation with the body.

KDH: Do you ever physically participate in the performative aspect of your work or do you leave that solely to models? Do you work with people you know or strangers and does this matter?

DH: Yes, I have performed in my work before. The models allow a necessary detachment. The models are cast in the different cities where I am working, so [they are] mostly strangers. I compose the installation and ask the models to respond with movements and shapes, creating several compositions. The choreography is open to improvisation, giving them freedom to find their own space during the activation. I ask each model to write about the experience of performing. These texts are part of my research.



Donna Huanca, *Psychotria Elata*, Installation and Performance, abc (art berlin contemporary), Berlin, 2014, Brand New Gallery, Image courtesy of the artist

KDH: The install at abc seemed to focus on blue. The color (almost a Klein blue) was so rich and contextually appeared to help hold the overall composition together. How did you arrive at this particular shade?

DH: I wanted the piece to have a muted, otherworldly palette, creating an image that departs from reality. Throughout the activation, the models created a painting with their bodies by rubbing on the wall.

KDH: What is next on your artistic agenda?

DH: Working on several projects, please be sure to check [my website](#) for updates.

Stay tuned for more exciting projects by this artist and follow her (@ruaminx) and myself (@katyhamer) on Instagram!

More soon,

xo

Divining the Future of the Past

by Alicia Eler

October 14, 2013



Documentation of Donna Huanca's "Scrying Threats" performance/installation at Queer Thoughts Gallery, Chicago (image courtesy of the artist and Queer Thoughts)

CHICAGO — Donna Huanca is from the South Side of Chicago, and she hasn't been back here since she was 15, an adolescent girl. The postcard for her solo exhibition *Scrying Threats* at Queer Thoughts Gallery is an image of Huanca and 14 other girls, all about the same age, adorned in gold chains and sweatshirts, wearing a similar shade of maroon-colored lipstick and posing, not smiling, fierce and proud and sad and beautiful. Huanca ditched class to hang out with these friends, and during that time they took this photograph — a bit out of focus, appearing as a fuzzy memory of adolescence, it serves as a disembodied psychic connection between the past, present, and future of the artist herself, who appears at the opening both in human and ghosted form.

The exhibition consists of a photograph of Huanca and friends, and a compact, fluorescently lit room in the gallery space where a white female performer, nearly nude, alternates from kneeling in front of a mirror to slathering the

walls with glow-in-the-dark goo. Fashionably disembodied fabrications of body parts and matching clothing articles — a cast white sneaker with a cylinder of wood shoved in, covered by a red-and-blue mesh sheet of fabric — are situated next to a shoe growing yellow and blue foam. A white pole rests inside that shoe, and on top of it hangs a sliced-open green goblin mask, its white mouth and red-spray-painted teeth gutted. Velour fabric rests in another corner, as if tossed there; elsewhere a pair of boxing shorts are positioned waist to the ground, and an army coat covered in splotches of white, neon blue, yellow, and red camouflage against the earth tone camouflage print hanging on the wall. The performer wanders around this space, her body covered in henna; she receives subtle instructions from Donna, but mostly just moves around the space in an intuitive manner, wandering, and painting.



Donna Huanca, "Pisces" (2013). Stretched crushed velvet, 10 inches x 8 inches.

Time and transformation are recurring themes in Huanca's work, and are seen through the body, reassembled clothing-turned-sculptural objects, and a photograph of her adolescent girl gang. For this exhibition, which she put

together over the course of one-week before the opening while in residency at the space, she used clothing and objects that she found locally. Taking inspiration from the occult practice of scrying, which suggests that the psychic, or perhaps the artist in this case, can see things — spiritual visions or fortunes connected to the future — Huanca presents her work as less of a *thought* and more of a *threat*, but to what is unclear. Were these adolescent girls in the photograph threatening for their ability to ditch class and band together in a serious crew? Or is the messiness of Huanca's work in what is normally a clean-cut art space the threatening act toward the viewer and the art establishment? Or could it just be that the woman recasting the adolescent girl in this context is in and of itself a threatening act?

To not understand the threat inherent in this work, however, is what makes this site-specific installation more intriguing. Huanca's aesthetic divination process unfurled through the arrangement of a hired performer, fashion as disembodied sculptural object, and a photo from adolescence, creating an open-ended narrative that stretched the limits of a chronological and restrictive temporality. As Huanca's friends from the photograph — now all grown-up — streamed in through the front door, a clock did not strike, divining the future and the past into the present. In Huanca's work, space and time are ever-evolving constructs, leaving behind residue in the form of objects without clear use or structure. It is a vision of a post-apocalyptic future, remnants of an adolescent past, and a temporal space that straddles both.



Photograph of Huanca and her crew. Image courtesy of the artist and Queer Thoughts Gallery.



Photograph by the author for Hyperallergic.



Photograph by the author for Hyperallergic.



Photograph by the author for Hyperallergic.



Photograph by the author for Hyperallergic.



Photograph by the author for Hyperallergic.



Image courtesy of the artist and Queer Thoughts Gallery



Image courtesy of the artist and Queer Thoughts Gallery

*Scrying Threats at Queer Thoughts Gallery (1640 W 18th Street #3, Chicago)
runs through October 27.*



Donna Huanca: Panic Fear Crying Fits

ARTS+CULTUREINCOMING

Deconstructed garments are re-positioned and given a new life in the American artist's Mexico City expo

29th June 2012

Text Leah Cross

Donna Huanca: Panic Fear Crying Fits

8 IMAGES



Donna Huanca's latest body of work, 'PANIC FEAR CRYING FITS', is inspired by and created using deconstructed garments. Like much of her previous work which pays homage to rituals, symbols and hieroglyphs, the sculptures not only resemble Huanca's own personal experiences in relation to her nomadic way of working, but also seek to highlight the relevance of clothing as a form of communication as well as an artistic medium. Dazed catches up with the American-born artist following the recent opening of her exhibition at the PRETEEN Gallery in Mexico City.

Clothing not only carries our DNA rubbings, but as a second skin, we are communicating with each other visually without saying anything. The choice and way clothing is worn morphs into signs, asking others to stay away or come closer

Dazed Digital: What was the inspiration for 'PANIC FEAR CRYING FITS'?

Donna Huanca: In 'PANIC FEAR CRYING FITS' I am presenting four new sculptures. They are from a series of symbols, signs and my own hieroglyphics using deconstructed garments, arranged sculpturally to create new characters. Although static, they suggest movement and are read differently online than they do in real life.

DD: Can you explain the link between clothing and communication?

Donna Huanca: Clothing not only carries our DNA rubbings, but as a second skin, we are communicating with each other visually without saying anything. The choice and way clothing is worn morphs into signs, asking others to stay away or come closer.

DD: Clothing, or the aspect of wearability, features throughout your work, what is it about wearable items that interests you?

Donna Huanca: I am drawn to textiles that have sculptural potentials, texture, and ones that mimic the paintings I wish I could make. I collect clothing as well as find my inspiration in it. This is partially how I get to know a place, through its discarded clothing. When I find a good piece, I either wear it or use it in my work. I keep searching and bits and pieces are found, like clues. They are what inspire the next piece.

PANIC FEAR CRYING FITS will run from 28 June to 25 July at [PRETEEN Gallery](#) in Mexico City

In search of unknown memories: an interview with artist Donna Huanca

Posted on September 7, 2011 by interventionsjournal in Interviews, Vol. 1, Issue 1: En Route.

by Daisy Nam*

August 2011

When I learned that artist and friend, Donna Huanca, was awarded a Fulbright and was leaving for her research trip to Mexico City in a few months, I thought it was the perfect opportunity to ask her some questions. Through our conversations, I've learned about her artistic process and personal memories.

An artist's process constitutes a murky and tenuous state of anticipation, anxiety, alienation and excitement. Navigation, being en route, through an unknown space requires experimentation and faith in the artist's intuition.

Daisy Nam, New York: *At the moment, we're both in a state of flux in our living situation. Your apartment and studio in Berlin is being torn apart and reassembled for renovations, and I'm moving apartments in New York. The other day, I was despondent as I hadn't found a place to live. I was reassured when I read this Adorno quote: "for a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live." [1] For Adorno, writing could be an invented space when he had no claims to a state. For you is it about your art-making?*

Donna Huanca, Berlin: I love that Adorno quote, I completely agree. That's one of the beautiful things about using clothing in my work; they excite me because I love hunting for them wherever I am....

DN: *Is that what draws you to using textiles as material in your work – the universality of them? Everyone needs clothes and so you can find them anywhere. What is your relationship with textiles?*

DH: Most of my work begins with traveling, in search of materials and experiences to inspire new work. I like to get to know a place through its discarded clothing and objects. I have many times posed the challenge not to take anything with me on my journeys, forcing myself to search for new clothes, random objects, or trash to make my work with. The DNA of the place is then present in my work.

As a kid, my mom and aunt would take me thrift store shopping every weekend in downtown Chicago, places mostly run by nuns. These were some of my favorite object and clothing collecting moments; I could be anyone and have anything that I found. We would spend hours sifting through piles. And when we got home, we would sit in a circle, carefully taking out the tags of our newfound wardrobe and then show each other and share how we were planning to use it. We would consult each other about outfits and even trade items.

These moments developed my love for the hunt of energy through clothing, as I really believe this exists. I developed my work surrounding the re-creation of these ideas.

DN: That such a great story. You speak of objects and their energy. I recently went to this show at Murray Guy, *A form is simply something which allows something else to be transported from one site to another* and Gregg Bordowitz gave this amazing performative lecture. He stated that objects have emotions. Do objects have agency for you?



Video from "Testing Some Beliefs", Performance by Gregg Bordowitz at Murray Guy, July 7, 2011

DH: Absolutely. Throughout time, cultures have created adorning objects that are labored upon to communicate an emotion that can transcend time, a container of sorts. We have all been at a museum only to be haunted by an object staring back at you.

DN: *Yes, definitely. Even though these objects are taken out of their functional contexts, they can still speak to you in the present. Regarding time, do you have feel that you're trying to grasp something that's fleeting as you're mining for memories of the past through textiles? Fashion, after all, is temporary.*

DH: Significant events mark time. I pay attention to things that are urgent to me and let them lead me. That's the best way I have found to navigate my time.

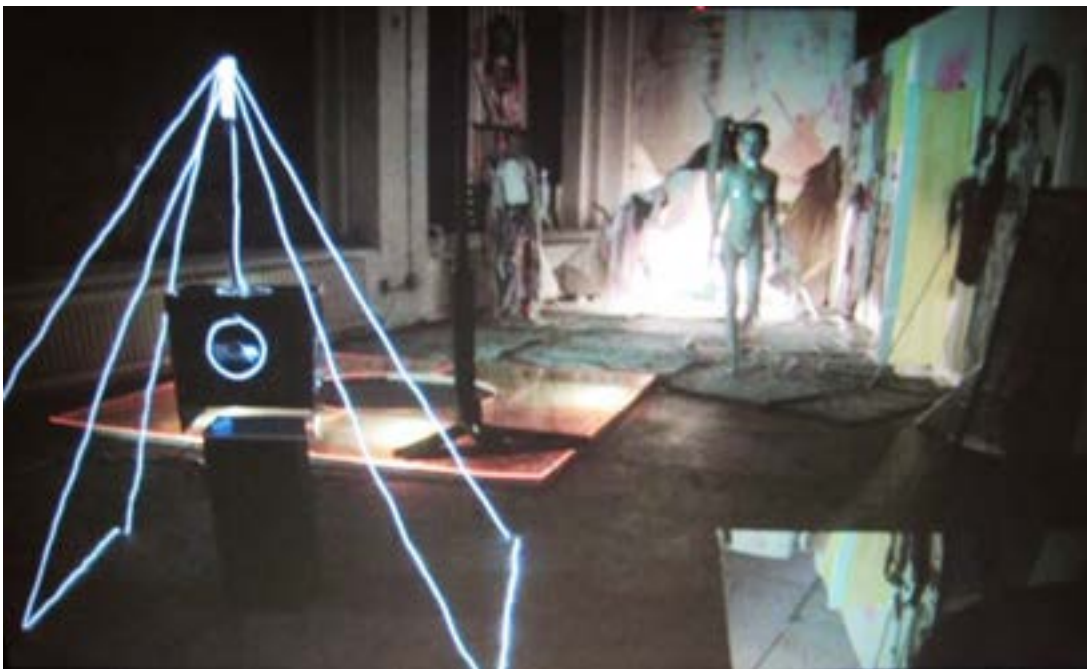
DN: *I know you have an interest in the Mayan Calendar, which basically has a concept of no-time. There's just an ongoing cycle really. I mean the world is supposed to end in December 2012, but they viewed this as another end with another beginning.*

DH: Yes, I collaborated with AIDS -3D on a few performative works in 2007 and 2008 about apocalyptic anxiety. The protagonist was a girl who survives and becomes a hologram and is transported to the future. Here's a one of the projects in August 2007 at Program, Berlin.



Still from "Jerusalem 2012", Performance Donna Huanca, AIDS 3D (Daniel Keller and Nik Kosmas)

And here's another at Exit Art in July 2008, where I created the stage for a piece called *Network of Love*.



Donna Huanca, ETAPA DE FUNCIONAMIENTO (SEGUNDO), 2008, for Network of Love Performance in collaboration with AIDS 3D

They were hopeful works.

DN: *I do find your work hopeful. Your installations, sculptures and fabric collages are incredibly dynamic and tactile. How do you arrive at an idea or project? Do you distinguish from the beginning that certain works will be wearable and functional and others are just objects?*

DH: I let the material lead me. My process begins with the initial hunt for materials that connects me to different geographies and economies where I select the most vibrant, alive fabrics I can find. Since I work with mostly used clothing, I feel some that are more energetic than others. Sometimes pieces want to hide behind layers of paint and I leave them alone, while other times they are desperately begging for attention.

All the materials are then fair game back in the studio, whether it's for collages or clothing. Sometimes it's necessary to deconstruct the garment and recreate it (like the shorts I made for you) and for others, I either collage the piece with other complementary pieces to forget the shape completely. They definitely intersect in the final work. Here are examples as to how these silk pieces were transformed into an both installation and wearable:



shorts created by Donna Huanca for Daisy Nam, 2009



Donna Huanca, I was you and Never knew it (after Rumi), Installation for Puno Moca, Puno, Peru, 2011



Donna Huanca, Collaged Silks, with custom made boots (source of materials: Cuzco and Puno, Peru), 2011

This dress is made of a silk scarf and silk jogging pants from Poland:



Donna Huanca, dress, 2011.

DN: *Do places ever find you during your art-making process, your hunt? I know one of your previous project, you visited Potosi, Bolivia. Historically this is a place with a rich Incan history which then became a prosperous mining town in the Colonial era. But it is also where your father is from.*

DH: One of the reasons I decided to have my “alternative” art-grad-school experience in Germany at Städelshule, an academy that claims to reinvent the art-school model, was because I knew that would make my dad proud, he might “get” why I make art and of course it would force him to visit me. When I first realized I would be moving to Germany, I immediately thought about my dad’s stories about his crush on German girls in grade school while growing up in Bolivia. Since his mom owned a business in town, he was one of the only indigenous faces to attend his school.

DN: *So there is a personal relationship to place. Bolivia and Germany are linked through the stories of your father. Could you tell me of your experience while in Bolivia? Is this where your performance took place?*



Donna Huanca, Nomadic Performance (tracing the Etymology of Huanca): Replicating Golden Phallus in Dream, Peru, 2011

This series, *Unearthing*, was made with Roy Minten and was funded by Art Matters (thank you!). We actually traveled throughout Peru, not Bolivia, as the original plan, due to heavy protests and transportation strikes in Bolivia.

In this series I was attempting to forge myself back into the landscape where I am genetically, historically tied. I visited several sites tracing the etymology of my last name, Huanca. What I discovered while on the trip is that I definitely do not belong there. I felt so much more of a tourist than in previous trips to Latin America. I felt like an outsider...I was not wanted. The people who I came across were a bit embarrassed for me. Perhaps my romanticism with “my” past was actually not mine at all.

DN: *How did that effect your present?*

DH: This experience forced me to take responsibility for the present moment and context that is unique to me. It was a bit painful but definitely pushed me into the present tense, which I am immensely grateful for.

For years, I have been returning to the idea of genetic memory as a source of inspiration for my work. I was trying to decipher the deep wells of the past through stories from my father. I guess this stems from a sense of dislocation of culture. As a kid of immigrants, my parents were always trying to preserve their culture through me. I've realized while living and traveling outside the US that wherever I go in the world, others see me as undeniably American. Although I see myself a hybrid of many cultures.

DN: *This goes back to Adorno who said, "the concepts of native land [Heimat], a country, are all shattered. Only one native land remains from which no one is excluded: mankind." [2] Is there a place you can call home? Is there a physical place you are drawn to? For me I feel like I have many homes, but inexplicably I do love the desert, is there a place like that for you?*



Desert, Palm Springs, CA.

DH: I feel at home in Berlin, so much that I decided to throw an anchor down after many years of being nomadic. Because of its heavy history, the city is still under construction making it experimental and financially forgiving. Berlin has a certain confidence about it where time is not so much of an issue as it is in other cultural capitals. It's the perfect base to develop and contemplate new work.



Park, Berlin, Germany.

I also feel at home in Mexico City. I've spent time over the past 10 years visiting there as a tourist. I am so excited to finally have the opportunity to decipher that labyrinth of Mexico City especially in 2012. I have had some of the scariest experiences in my life there as well as the happiest. As I mentioned, I have done a few performances about apocalyptic anxiety. What a better way to put myself in the "eye of the storm" than live in this insane city? I am too excited.



Street, Mexico City, Mexico.

DN: *Anxiety is a part of your process; it fuels you and creates excitement. That's an inspirational way to begin and end a journey.*

[1] Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (Frankfurt: Verso 1974), 87.

[2] Detlev Claussen, *Theodor Adorno One Last Genius*. Trans. Rodney Livingstone. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2008), 25.

***Daisy Nam is first year student in the MA in Modern Art: Critical and Curatorial Studies program at Columbia University.**