

body mould

Curation and words by Maddalena Iodice

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“ I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs.” – Hélène Cixous

We are containers to be contained, hormones to be regulated, saved from the dysfunctionality of our ambiguous bodies. We are subject to the emotional, the sensuous, the erotic, the manifestation of invisible energies, and hence hysterical, monstrous bodies. How, then, to rule the uncanny? How to keep it concealed? Our monotheist, phallogocentric Western cultural system did so by imposing a binary language and exclusive system of representation for us to define ourselves with.

*Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.*¹

Fragmented and stigmatised, we then might ask ourselves *to what degree is disgust towards our bodies innate or learned?*² We are mould to be bleached when we don't fit, when we bleed, when we are not “natural”, when we lack, when we overflow. If we are unknowable, we are unthinkable, then uncontrollable. Yet mould is a fungi, its murky organic matter inherently alive and capable of infinite generative power. It has a language of its own that allows its mycelium and its spores to communicate, sustain each other, and exist.

We shall learn from the earthly organic matter that surrounds us. We shall reclaim our mould, our unruly flesh, our monstrosity, our unsettling erotic power. We shall overflow and propagate endlessly. *Body Mould* is an invitation to tear apart, reveal our innermost depths and in doing so reclaim our uncanny bodies, our language, creating words of our own *to speak our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.*³

Hailing from different countries, paths, and artistic journeys, the emerging and early-career artists presented in the exhibition confront stigmas through their own situated perspective. Their urge to constitute a visual language that expresses the truths and fluctuations of their own bodily experience, situates them in a lineage of artists whose pioneering practices paved the way for subaltern voices to exist in our culture and in the history of art.

¹ Cixous, Hélène, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875–93.

² Elkin, Lauren, “Art Monsters: Unruly bodies in feminist art”, Vintage, 2024

³ Lorde, Audre, “Sister Outsider”, Penguin Classics, 2019

From Georgia O'Keeffe who used voluptuous painterly gestures as words to her relationship to the earthly landscape she was surrounded by, to Ana Mendieta who laid down on the earth, floated in water, evoking through her bodily traces the universal energy that runs through insects, humans and plants alike. I think of Loie Fuller and Rebecca Horn, whose performative interventions saw their limbs lengthened, extended as if in the attempt of taking up space. Maria Lassing articulated the experience of inhabiting a body through a series of self-portraits rooted in what she called "body awareness", while Claudette Johnson's images of Black women like "*And I Have My Own Business in This Skin*" (1982) affirmed the Black subject outside of a colonialist perception of Blackness. Helen Chadwick's research on gender led her to question Western dual oppositional structures creating representations that leave space for ambiguity and a disquieting sexuality. Almost ten years after her "*Enfleshings*" series (1989), which to Chadwick embodied selfhood as conscious meat, Sarah Lucas was using humour to unearth obscene paradoxes created by patriarchal constructions, while Marlene Dumas was portraying the human figure in exploration of themes of race and gender, sensuality and violence, personal and public identities. And yet, the urgency of finding materials to transcribe the body and foster its own language is still here.

Fast forward, the list goes on:

Isabella Benshimol Toro's "*Painting about old me*" (2024), suggests an entrance point, and a potential trajectory to experience the show. Here, a discarded window from a British council house is the frame for a composition of resin-coated used clothing. Losing their original purpose, jumpers, pants and shirts become painterly gestures, visceral fluctuations that seem to expose the chaos of human existence. In Melania Toma's research, organs, bones, flowers, spores, and bacteria move to the rhythm of a synchronous dance. "*Door I*" from the "*Doors of the Kagneji*" series (2024) and "*Small Decomposer*" (2024), articulate the interconnectedness of organic matter and play as a reminder that human and other-than-human animacies are one. We are one with our mould. One with the earth.

"*Loins*" (2024), by Kesewa Aboah, poses a visual synecdoche, where the loins echo the body as a whole. The body itself becomes a mark, a physical gesture on canvas, the pressure of flesh and bones registered in dry pigments and walnut oil. The imprints, traces of the artist's body or the presence of friends and loved ones, part of Aboah's community, constitute a threshold between personal and universal corporeality. Blurring the lines between painting and ready-made sculpture, "*Unhook me*" (2024), by Paula Parole, is wrapped in fishnet tights, which, leaving an aperture on the canvas surface, show the back of a figure wearing a black lace bra. Parole cleverly plays with constructed notions of seduction and gender roles offering a witty take on the codes of constriction the female body has been subject to. Poetically contrasting such a state, Paula Zvane lets a hair-like sculpture creep through the

space in the form of what resembles a lace tapestry. *“Hair lace”* (2024), made of hardened organic linen fibres is to the artist a bodily extension, an act of self-affirmation thinking anew the way we make space and propagate our presence and our erotic energy.

*The erotic is not a question of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing.*⁴ The research of Giuditta Vettese responds to the urge of listening to our innermost pulsations. The series *“Interno Astratto”* (2024), (*Abstract Insides*, 2024) represents an instinctual vocabulary to articulate the process of becoming attuned to our primordial, ecstatic energy; and the bronze sculpture *“La Fiamma che non Brucia”* (2024), (*The Flame that does not Burn*, 2024) a pagan altar for these mystical forces to be evoked, to manifest.

To express the body is to be able to confront ourselves, to be vulnerable, to be naked, to be flesh. Just like in Inès Michelotto's self-portrait *“The way I feel at times”* (2024), which closing the show powerfully evokes the words of French writer and critic Helene Cixous: *“You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing”*.

⁴ Lorde, Audre, *“Sister Outsider”*, Penguin Classics, 2019