

התאחדות

# THE SKIN TEAM: Rhiannon Dionysius and Peter Kozak

14 - 22 October 2016

## Teeming Flesh

The Skin Team is a collaboration of two artists, Rhiannon Dionysius, an interdisciplinary artist who works primarily in sculpture, and Peter Kozak whose current practice focuses on video art and installation. Founded through similar interests (the body, vulnerability, and the tactility of experience) their collaboration explores the relation between flesh, vision and thought. The works presented here are not representations of the world. Rather, their purpose is to engulf the audience in sensations that are symptomatic of being-in-the-world. The images and sculptures in this exhibition give expression to and speculate upon abject sensation ordinarily inhibited from our perception. The Skin Team lures the audience into experiencing carnal relations between self and other(s), and self and the world.

Through understandings of the body and material specificity, Dionysius' work opens up the possibility of moving beyond dichotomised thought (a fixed form of logics) and biological determinism. Her venus sculptures invite the assumption of familiarity, appearing fragmented in the name of beauty. Abstaining from naturalist figuration, Dionysius' sculptures are grounded in a speculative reality rendered through abstraction whilst drawing on the familiar. The use of plinths in her work allows for breathing room between the objects - yet the height of and manner of arrangement suggest they are displayed for examination. Fleishy textures force its way into the gaze of the viewer with curves, crevices and cracks in the clay that have an affective quality. The surfaces of her sculptures allow one to sense what it might feel like to touch the sculptures.

Some of Dionysius' work has the quality and bulbous appearance of a neolithic 'venus' sculpture, representing human forms without excessive decoration. The Greek word scopophilia (meaning 'to derive pleasure from thinking') can here be applied to Dionysius' work. Dionysius evokes disembodied, abstracted and contorted figures: her work has an unsettling and abject aura about them. Berlinde de Bruyckere who uses flesh as a method of interrogation, regarding sensuality and vitality in her work states that, "life is beautiful even if we have to deal with pain."<sup>1</sup> This collaboration extends upon a complex historical obsession that artists have with the organ that covers the body, indicative of a pleasure derived from thinking about flesh differently.

Peter Kozak's video works point candidly to objects that represent the abjection of trauma and the fragility of existence. Through foreign objects and in depicting bodily experience his work forces the audience to watch slowly over the subject of each video and engage in a directed gaze. His studies in drawing have influenced his practice and this can be seen in his stylistic mannerisms. Kozak's super close-ups shots of animals and unassuming objects provide an angle unusual to the human eye. His use of line and spatiality allow the audience to engage in a deep focus. Through use of this filming style and perspectival arrangement of geometries Kozak creates a tension between not only the videos surface, but between the filmed subject and the audience.

In all of Kozak's work there is an acute attention to slow looking and fine detail revealed over time. This kind of video examines the visible and invisible within different subjects, just as Merleau-Ponty states "the bond between flesh and the idea, and internal armature that it manifests and which it conceals"<sup>2</sup> Kozak's representation of tension is always a reflection on the self, and of perception itself; the abject gives us a sense of temporality and fragility that allows a moment for slow reflection on our own existence. Kozak's work observes the material and banal existence of objects falling into decay - akin to that which is hidden yet familiar. Flesh is both soft and vulnerable - in this room Kozak's objects play with abstraction, inviting chaos and control - covering our conception of the flesh's subjective specificity.

Kozak's films of the abject, the unwanted and the ignored (a notion pursued by Julia Kristeva), threatens to break down the meaning and distinction of the flesh which both serves, yet departs from, the notion of flesh found in Dionysius' work. Together, without their difference, the contrasting works shape an alternative notion of the flesh and consider privileged forms and their significance. What arises is a process of evolution, which continually puts subjectivity into doubt. The works presented in The Skin Team remind us that the body is always touching new ground and presenting itself as an indefinite form in fluxus.

Ashleigh Ralph, Jacob Warren & Graeme Auchterlonie - 2016

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Berlinde De Bruyckere, 17.10.2011, conducted and edited by Kathleen Bühler. Kunst Museum Bern. Bern, Switzerland

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Edited by Claude Lefort. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968. Originally published as *Le Visible et l'Invisible* Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

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