

INTUITION, IDEA, CONCEPT FOLLOWED THROUGH  
NO ARBITRARY CHOICES,  
NO TEST  
NEVER ARBITRARY, NEVER DECORATION

THE STRENGTH OF VISION AND SOUL IS THERE, IT MUST.  
WE ARE LEFT ULTIMATELY WITH A VISUAL PRESENCE.

WHY DENY THAT. CAN'T DENY THAT.  
IT'S WHAT WE  
ARE LEFT WITH. A VISUAL PRESENCE,  
DEPTH: THAT TOO WE MUST BE LEFT WITH.  
SOL, THERE IS DEPTH AND VISION, A PRESENCE ART.

— EVA HESSE IN AN UNTITLED STATEMENT TO SOL LEWITT, 1968

Murmurs is pleased to present *To Breathe, To Walk*, a group exhibition featuring the work of nine artists from around the world: Kim Farkas, Covey Gong, Shana Hoehn, Yeni Mao, Anna Ting Möller, Marsha Pels, Esteban Ramón Pérez, Rodrigo Ramírez Rodríguez, and Marley White. Operating beyond the limits of representation and abstraction, the works in this show probe the sensitive boundary between the known self and the world outside it. Our physical bodies, and the sensations that they transmit, are permeable entities through which information flows, and self identity takes shape. This legacy of artmaking that treats the body as an instrument of sensation, rather than a static ideal or concept was pioneered by feminists in the late 1960's who, feeling ostracized from the cold voids of masculine-dominated minimalism and abstraction, began to create art that evoked the experience of living in a body, a *real* body with its messiness and imperfections. Equally eschewing realistic representation which reinforced an objectified image of femaleness, their artwork forged a connection with the viewer based on transmitting sensation through form and formlessness, texture, gravity, movement and energy. Today, the present moment presents new challenges: in our image-saturated culture where photography is ubiquitous, even our understanding of ourselves is mediated by external visual standards. Representation stifles imagination as everything is visible, searchable, photographed, and tagged. Looking has supplanted feeling as the primary way of understanding the outside world. This show deliberately resists this image-worship— there are no recognizable images present, nor are there any figures— instead what is shown is matter that has been transformed with gestures of the body, and can therefore reveal truths previously unexpressed.

In the titular sculpture *To Breathe, To Walk* by Marsha Pels the figure has disappeared, leaving behind a pair of cast iron stiletto boots above which floats a giant set of lungs made from bronze and frameworke d glass. Pels made “To Breathe, To Walk” during a time in her life when she was recovering from a spinal surgery that left her debilitated and unable to do everyday functions such as breathing and walking– the sculpture is a self portrait daydream to escape her injured body. Pels’ speciality is the process of lost wax casting. This method allows a copy of an object to be made in bronze, while the original is incinerated, instantly destroyed by the molten metal. The exchange of heat energy is a sacrifice which both destroys and creates anew. *Woman with her Torso Cut* is a lost wax casting of Pels’ own undergarment which was shorn off her body by paramedics after an accident. The bronze cast emulates every minuscule detail of the fabric so flawlessly that the piece appears to have the softness and flexibility of fabric. We imagine the woman, either injured from the violence of the slash or liberated from the confines of the garment, which was shed like an old skin. In *Ecorche* Pels again uses clothing as a stand-in for the body. This piece, which was made shortly after the death of her mother, features a mink coat opened flat, with plaster casts of Pels’ hands wearing various pairs of her mother’s gloves arranged on it like ribs around a central spine. The artist’s hands fill the empty gloves, yearning for the touch of a person no longer alive. The piano bench and sheet music are reminders of Pels’ mother’s love of playing the instrument, relics from a life lived.

Similarly, in Yeni Mao’s *Chimera*, fragments of a monument made of stoneware with an iron patina lie scattered in a bed of salt, like bones in the desert. Several recognizable body parts, a hand, a horn, a tail conjure a vision of a great felled beast, perhaps part human part animal as the title suggests. Hand carved in wood, the monolithic mass of Shana Hoehn’s *A Tangle of Limbs and Long Hair* is also ambiguously non-human– although a slit-like opening on the back of the form reveals buttcheeks, suggesting that maybe a human being is trapped inside the husk. Emulating a similar cocoon shape, Kim Farkas’ *23-33* is made from many layers of tissue-like plastic hardened into a rigid exoskeleton or shell, protecting a living creature within. Covey Gong’s delicate sculpture *Harmony* of gauzy knit fibers attached to swaying wires is a reminder of the fragility of skin, that paper thin membrane that delineates the boundaries of our bodies. Marley White’s *A well made of skin, I am at the bottom consists of circular stacks of membranous “bricks” made from the animal pig intestines, stretched, molded and dried*. White has turned the body inside outside, that which was hidden inside becomes a type of skin. The viscera made visible is depicted in Rodrigo Ramírez Rodríguez’s flesh-toned paintings of writhing limbs and guts.

Anna Ting Möller also uses a living medium in her work. She has been making artwork from a SCOBY (Symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast) since it was gifted to her by an old woman during a trip to China where Möller was searching for her birth mother. Although she was not successful in locating her mother, Möller brought the SCOBY home and has maintained it, a metaphoric stand-in for her absent mother. In its normal state this organic medium has flesh-like properties, gelatinous and layered. Möller learned to stretch the SCOBY, dry it into different forms, and even suture it like skin. Looming large in the back of the gallery is another approximation of skin— Esteban Ramón Pérez's *I Came with the Flame*, made from scraps of leather sewn together in a giant hide-like shape. Perez uses techniques of scarification and layers of paint to treat the surface of the material. The spiky starburst left in bare leather references the signature aura surrounding La Virgen de Guadalupe. Like the instantaneous flash of a camera or bolt of lightning, the apparition of the virgin vanishes leaving an afterimage in a burned-out retina.

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