

TRACES

By Sabīne Skarule with Sarah Blais and Monika Tatalovic
Installations by Haleimah Darwish

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SKARULE studio

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Kim? Contemporary Art Centre presents *Traces*, the first institutional exhibition by fashion designer Sabīne Skarule, with the photographer Sarah Blais and stylist Monika Tatalovic. Skarule's design practice – realised through the SKARULE label – is grounded in reflections on the (de)construction of belonging and the traces left by the interplay between individual experience and collective memory in the ever-changing landscape of contemporary visual culture.

Over the past decade, the course of inclusivity, openness and democratisation advocated by the fashion industry as well as the field of contemporary art has been ever more visibly replaced by a return to formerly established hierarchies. Powered by digital tools, the route from the "periphery" to the "centre" has seemingly become shorter, yet the quality of the road has not improved; the politics of representation, in making visible the diversity of bodies, identities and origins, is increasingly being positioned as an exceptional hyper-individualised quality; and the market-driven, ceaselessly growing cult of exhausting newness finds itself in a most peculiar lockstep with rising societal intolerance and geopolitical instability.

Against this background, *Traces* sets out a potential and deliberate course outside the trajectories predetermined by others. The exhibition is the result of several years of collaboration and sustained dialogue and provides an overview of the material and visual world of SKARULE, at the same time shedding light on a process that usually remains hidden – how the work is made, what voices are involved and what is the role of each individual woman. A rhythm synchronised through diversities, patience, sustained repetitions and a special attitude towards the flow of time demonstrates SKARULE's interest in ensuring that mastery and expertise in disappearing crafts continue. The experience acquired through exercises of seeing and sensitivity transforms into intuition, which in turn becomes an instrument for the creation of shapes and volumes.

The contours of the exhibition carry associations with mood-board collages, or with a kind of map of the inner world, which, having broken the boundaries of the sheet of paper and the screen, appear in the exhibition via spatial installations, photographs and fragments of items of clothing, as well as footage of performance. *Traces* as a method and metaphor is announced through the arrangement of layers of textile elements presented on the walls. Garment fragments, threads, lace, catkins and woven elements – pressed, sewn together, dyed, glued – are fastened within framings placed on the walls and a set of objects freely arranged spatially, and this museological presentation is employed to show care, consideration and celebration of Latvian craft traditions and materialities.

In the world of SKARULE, a woman's (manual) work as an act of healing and way of preserving mental balance is closely bound to the surrounding natural environment and its steadily changing seasons. The most recent series of photographs visualises this mentally sensed landscape and channels a special attitude: a woman (designer, stylist, and photographer) looking full of inspiration towards another woman (a talent), her clothed or uncovered body against a changing background – pastoral as well as urban – and, no less importantly, captures her gazing back and the silent yet confident power expressed through her posture and body language.

In *Traces*, threads of inspirations and community rituals that have settled into personal and collective memory weave together, associatively suggested by the concluding part of the exhibition: an improvised meeting place made up of chairs and a long table. This installation, created in collaboration with artist and set designer Haleimah Darwish, serves not only as a "stage" for craft techniques, but also a surface on which the imagination is laid out and the bustle released by mutual respect takes hold. Placed on the group of tables, unencumbered by decoration, these integral elements of SKARULE's language – clusters of thread-cord-crochets – further serve as props for the kitchen-semiotics-tinged performance by the artist and model Britt Liberg. Substituting spoken language for role play, the artist takes on a dinner setting to embody and shift in between the characters of butler, lady and child-woman. Recorded behind closed doors on the eve of the opening, video documentation of the event awaits the viewer at the start of the exhibition.

Similarly to the practice of SKARULE, *Traces* functions as a literal and figurative space for interpretation – the tying down of dreams and thoughts. Despite the fragile and insecure context in which independent labels have to exist, the exhibition simultaneously serves as a field of refuge and grounding – a place to return to when looking to (dis)entangle the original sensations, impulses and traces.

BIO *Sabīne Skarule* is a Latvian fashion designer who created her eponymous brand SKARULE in 2021. Skarule is inspired by processes of identity (de)construction and individual and collective memory dynamics across today's visual culture landscape. Knitting, crocheting, weaving and other traditional crafts are central to Skarule's design process. She graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium (BA and MA), and honed her professional skills at The Row fashion house in New York. In early 2020, Sabīne Skarule received the *H&M Design Award* 2020.

BIO *Sarah Blais* is a photographer whose work uses a sense of play to reconfigure familiar narratives, evoking both tension and intimacy – always underscored by a quiet joy. In 2019, Blais was awarded the *British Journal of Photography's* Female in Focus prize. Her ongoing project *Alma* was published by Libraryman in autumn 2025. Her portrait series *Miyuki* was exhibited at Atelier Néerlandais during Paris Fashion Week 2025. Sarah works across photography and moving image for leading fashion houses, publishers, and cultural institutions.

BIO *Monika Tatalovic* is a fashion stylist whose work explores the relationship between clothing, form, and character. Her practice explores the feminine space between structure and fluidity, strength and softness, guided by a focus on texture and an instinct for balance. Fabrics, shapes and proportions are at the forefront, expressed through muted tones, thoughtful layering, and unexpected details. Her recent photo book, entitled *Dressed* was exhibited in Paris at Sheriff's Gallery in collaboration with Claire De Rouen and the Alaïa bookstore.

BIO *Britt Liberg* is a Dutch performance artist and designer whose work focuses on the exploration and analysis of body movement. Trained as a professional ballet dancer, she uses her body as material, finding form in the movement of textiles and seeking fluidity between dressing and undressing, between sexual nudity and objective nudity. The concept of "being a muse" is a big part of her work – Brite feels the desire to explore ways to "free" the muse from the artist's clutches. The muse is the work of art itself, the pure form of the body, seen directly by the viewer rather than through the eyes of other artists. She has performed internationally – in Europe and beyond – in both fashion week and contemporary art contexts; she regularly gives lectures and performances at various educational institutions internationally.

BIO *Haleimah Darwish* is a London-based artist with a background in architecture from the Royal College of Art. She has cultivated a refined spatial sensibility and an acute awareness of surface, form and materiality. Darwish's practice spans scenography for editorial and moving image projects, as well as spatial design for installations.