



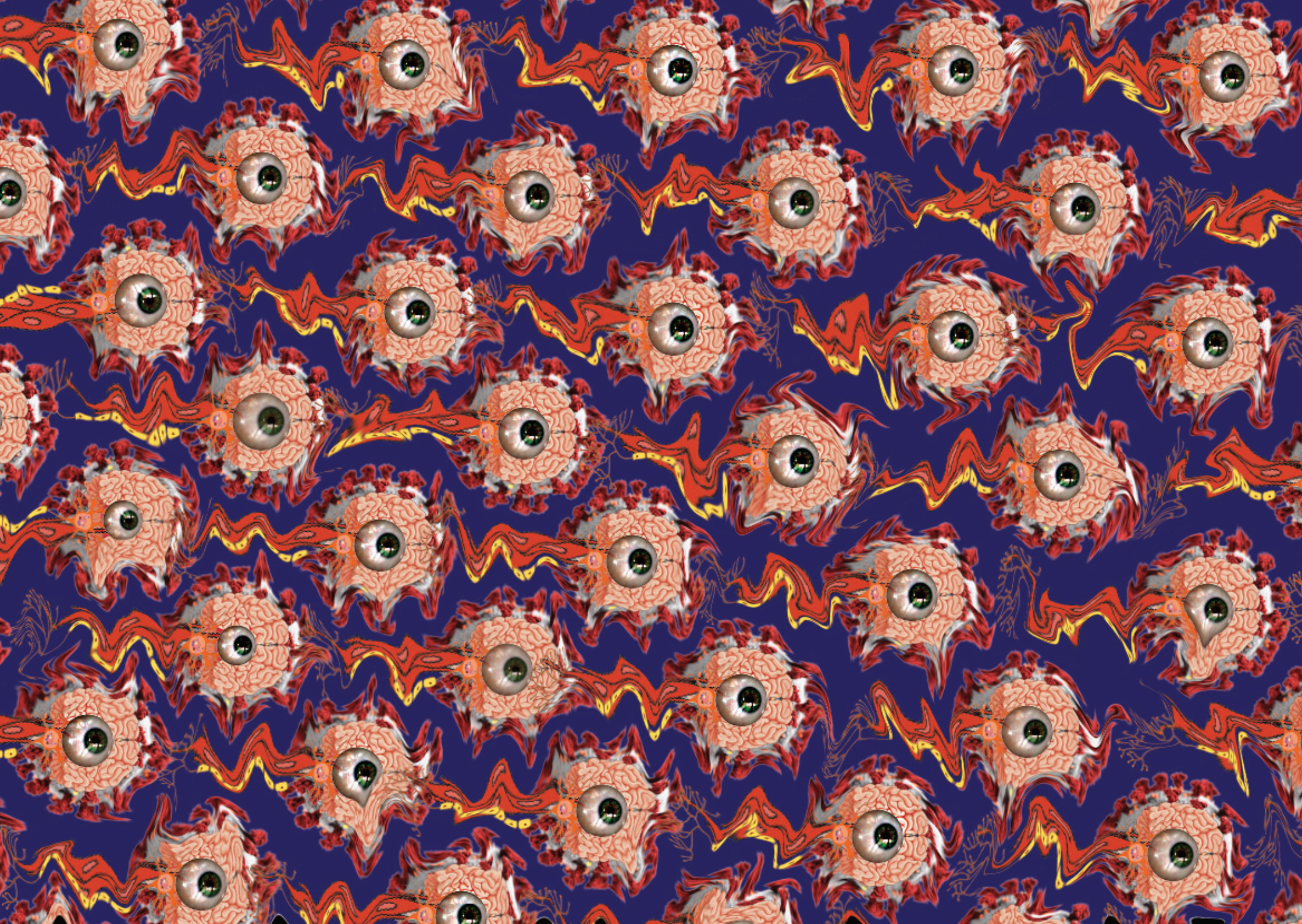
SURFACE TENSION

PERMEABILITY,
THE BODY, AND
INSTALLATION

University of Cape Town

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Declaration:

This is a minor dissertation submitted to the Michaelis School of Fine Arts, University of Cape Town in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Masters in Fine Arts. No section of this text has been previously submitted for examination in full or in part. All work not my own has been indicated as such and duly referenced using the UCT Author-Date format. This publication is intended exclusively for non-profit, academic purposes. This was completed with the assistance and formation of the institution.

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Supervisors: Jane Alexander and Kurt Campbell

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Content warning:

Readers are advised that there is sensitive content which may offend some, including: nudity with visible genitalia, sexual explicitness (including minor mentions of rape in classical myths), and graphic imagery (e.g. blood, surgery, pimple extraction, infected wounds). Topics covered include addressing racist and sexist tropes.

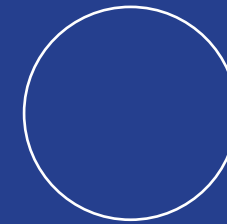
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*For my mom, the biologist
and my dad, the theologian*

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Premise I: There are bodies



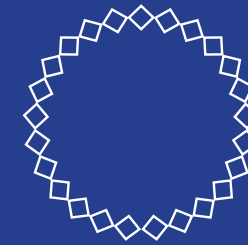
Premise 2: There are bodies within these bodies



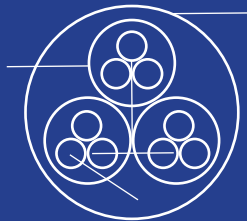
Proposition 1: Bodies are operational, not absolute



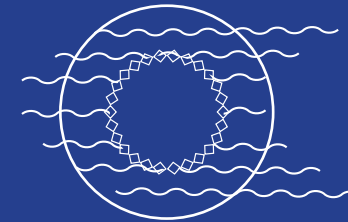
Premise 3: This is recurring



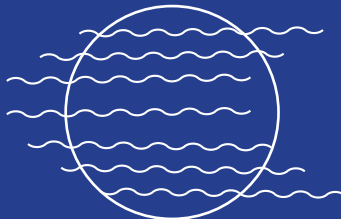
Contradiction 1: Bodies defend their absoluteness



Observation 1: These bodies communicate



Contradiction 2: Flux is selectively admitted



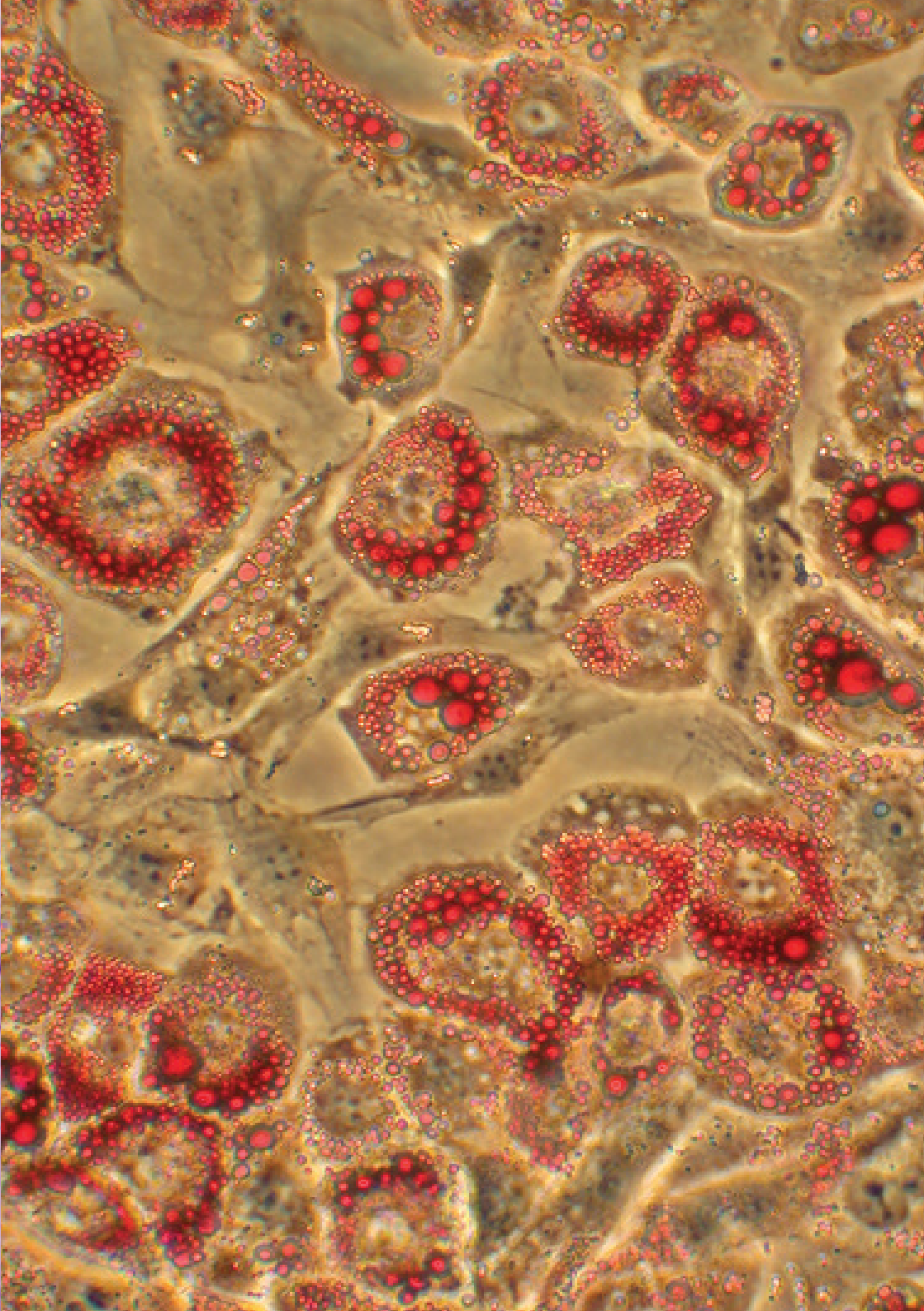
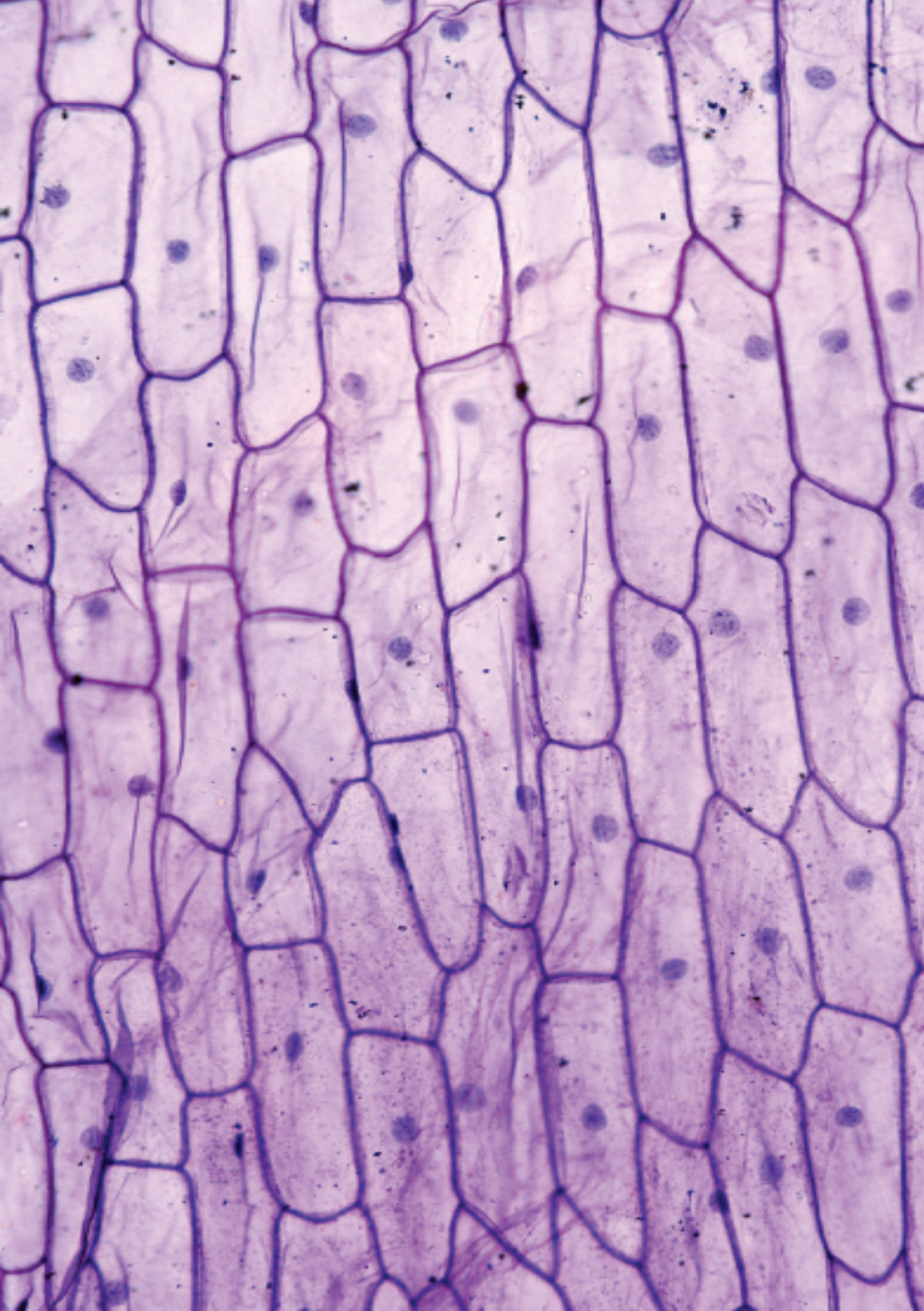
Observation 2: This communication is in constant flux

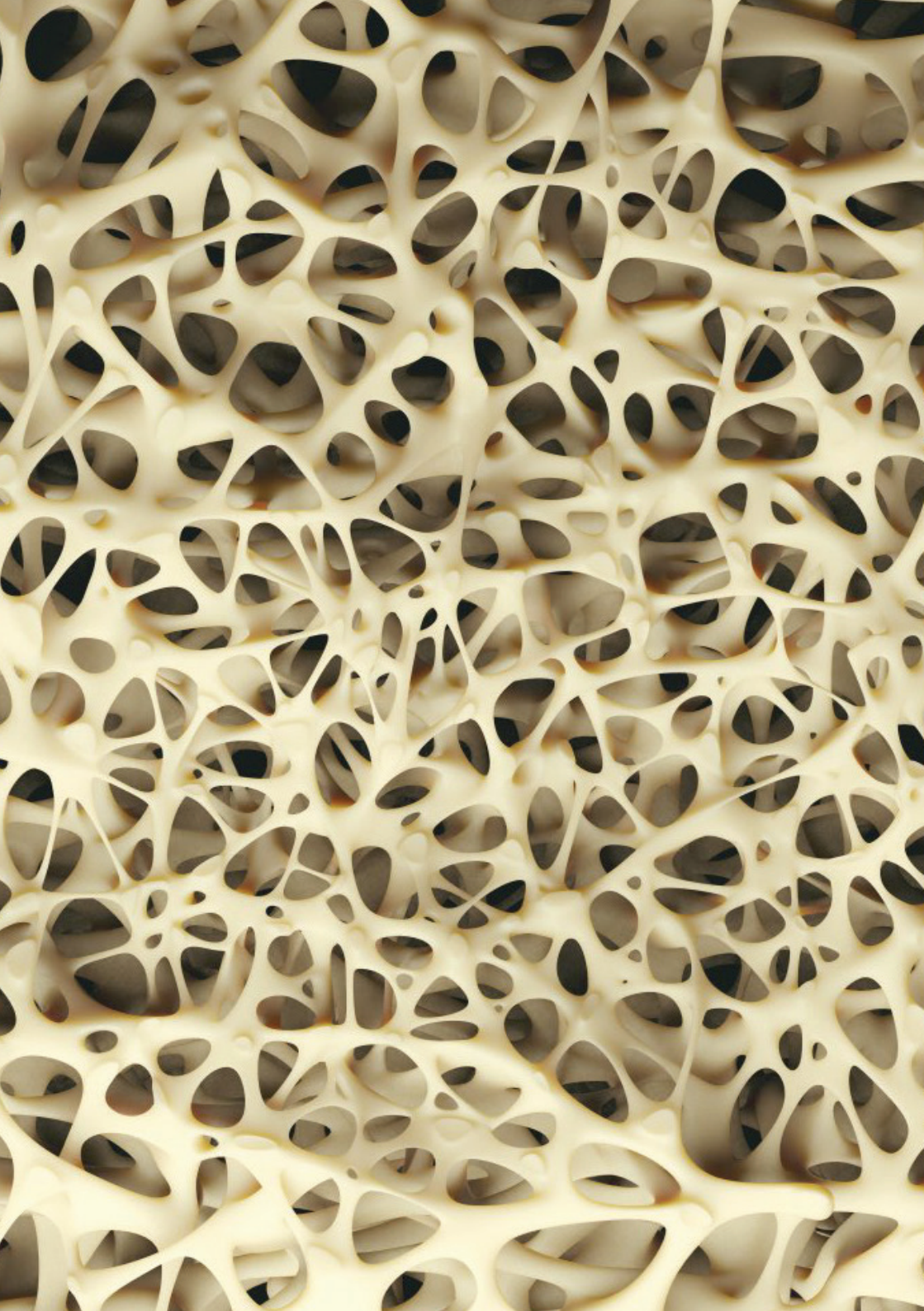
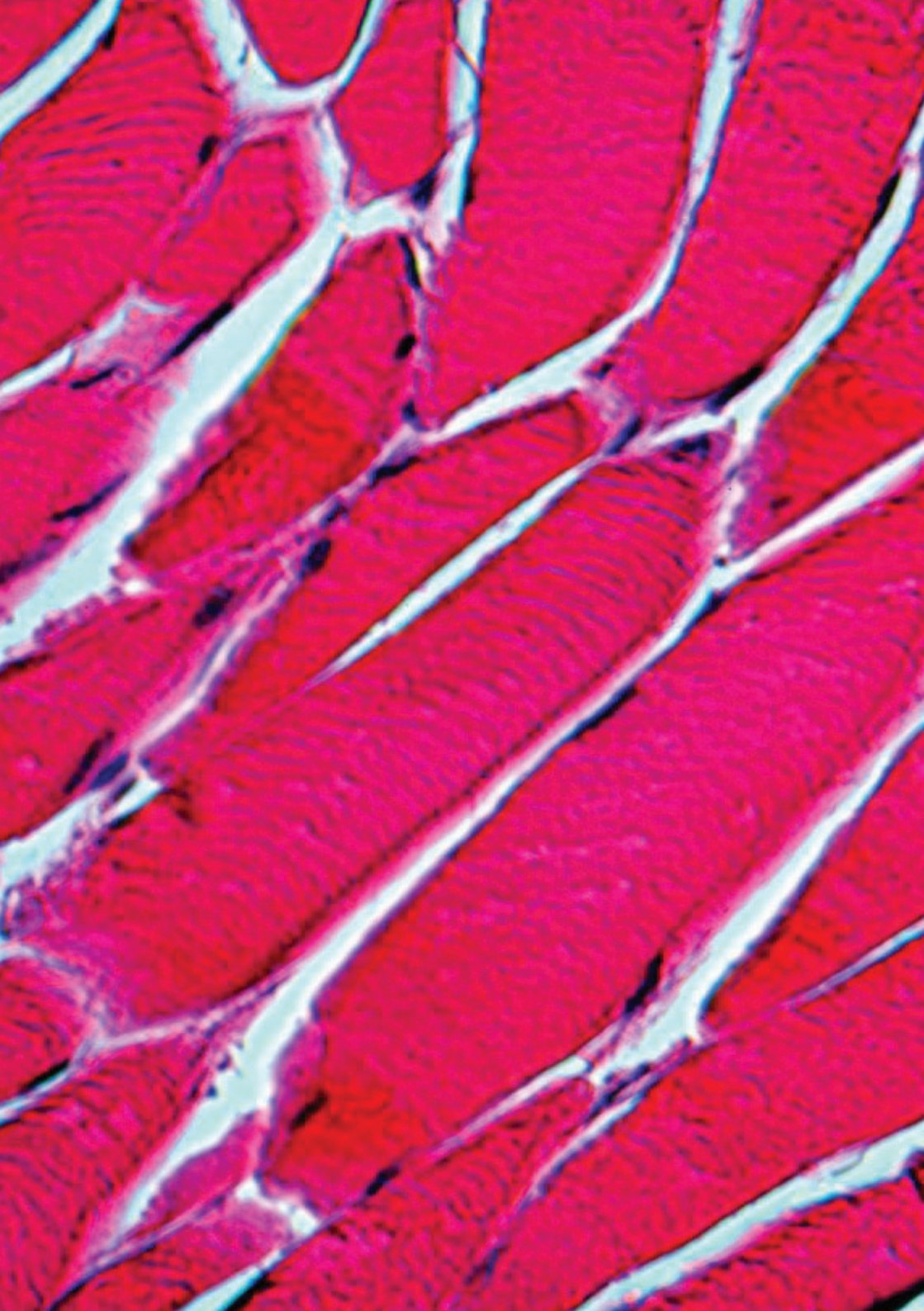


Question 1: How hospitable are you?

*Following pages: Figures 1 - 5, the layers of the human body
Skin, epithelial cells, fat, smooth muscle tissue, and bone tissue*

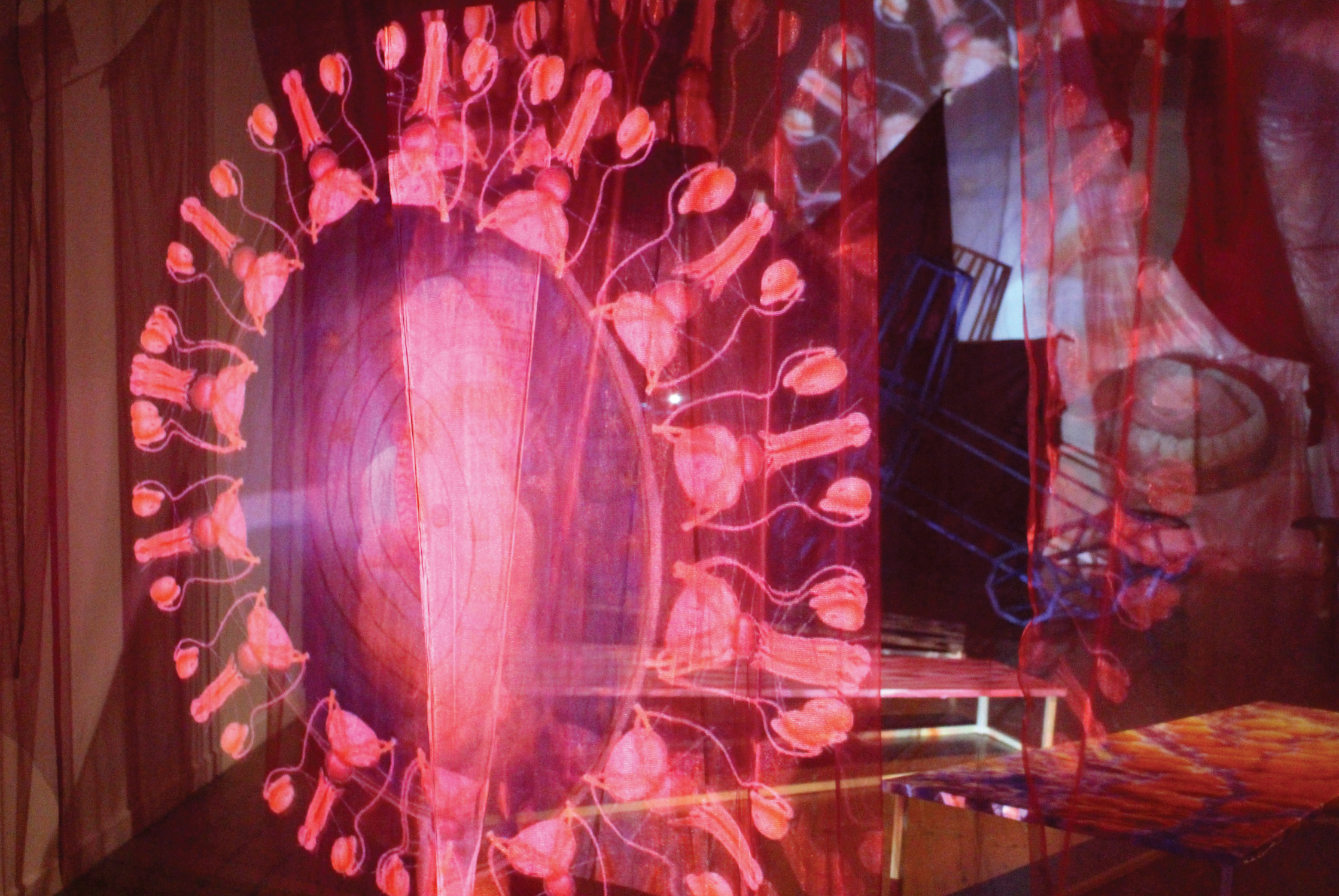






Pages 15 - 25: Figures 6 - 11
Veils and projections at the entrance to 'Surface Tension'













INTRODUCTION

Opp.
Figure 12

Surface Tension, a multi-media installation with accompanying text, takes as its point of departure the relationship between conceptions of the body as variously understood by specialized bodies of knowledge and the medium of installation as deployed in contemporary fine art practice. Installation is a medium primarily concerned with space in relation to the viewer's body. They inhabit and navigate the body of the installation, which in turn affects their own, manipulating movement and proprioception via immersion; viewers become agents and contributors to the work, their presence and reaction changing its composition. I suggest considering this as an exercise in permeability: an installation is permeable to its viewer, and the viewer is likewise permeable to the effects of installation. This exchange suggests a sympathy between the body and its modes of representation, whereby they inform and affect each other (Fig. 13).

Therefore, although particular to the nature of installation, I suggest considering other modes of representing the body through this lens of permeability. The installation subsequently incorporates highly varied visual languages – including medical, microscopic, art-historical, religious, and open-source stock-photography – to explore at times conflicting approaches to representing bodily permeability. In doing so, I present two main, contrasting conceptions of bodily porosity, with parallel modes of representation.



The first is demonstrated in the contextual genesis of this project. Within the ongoing pandemic¹, my understanding of my own body has been reoriented from viewing it as a discrete organism, to one that is in continuous exchange with what I previously classed as exterior to myself - other's bodies, or systems of trade and travel as passing examples. Although personal in observation, this illustrates a prevailing paradigm of bodily conception, one within which the body is viewed as a discrete organism with an impermeable skin boundary. This conception is the Cartesian Body. The Cartesian bodily paradigm is suggested as parallel to the rise of ocularcentrism (furthering the mind-body split via a mind-eye conflation) and representational modes that privilege the eye. Within my work, I explore the effects of ocularcentrism on the body using the metaphors of the bruise and the wound, which are both presented as counterarguments to the primacy of the skin-barrier as suggested by ocularcentrism.

The Cartesian body has been unsettled by the pandemic's reminder of a second, contrasting one: that bodies and the systems they operate in are highly penetrable. Drawing on the bodily and permeable nature of installation, my project attempts to unsettle the Cartesian bodily paradigm by highlighting the body as porous via references to wounds, infection, and penetration. The structure of the installation as a series of veils requires the viewer to walk between them, physically imitating a process of penetration. The viewer's own body is integral to this experience: images are projected onto the sheer fabric, and the viewer's movement results in shadows, interruptions in the projection, or projection onto their own bodies. The projections include animations of viruses, presenting processes of infection at a scale that aims to expose their usually invisibly invasive nature. Other references to infection include plague saints, or compilations of orifice-specific afflictions. Some sculptures reference nautical themes via dolosse and masts, suggesting reading the body as a form of ship and the resultant liminal metaphors that arise from this comparison. Other sculptures reference the fragmentation of the body within medical imaging, such as cardboard cut-outs of isolated organs, or exploded views of the layers of the skin. The relationship between the experience and the subject matter of the installation is suggested as symbiotic, whereby the bodily experience of installation, combined with the various references to the body itself, has the potential to feed into the viewer's understanding of their own.

1 In 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified a new strand of the SARS-CoV-2, named Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which affected the respiratory system with cold- to pneumonia-like symptoms, spread via liquid particles issuing from the nose or mouth. In March 2020 they declared it a pandemic; this status has not been lifted at the time of submission. This caused many countries to go into national lockdowns, limiting movement of persons both internally and internationally to prevent spreading the disease. Within South Africa this was enforced with varying restrictions from March 2020 until April 2022, which also lifted the National State of Disaster that had been declared. Governmentally mandated quarantining, home isolation, and wearing of masks in public were widespread approaches to prevention. The advent of vaccines initiated discussions of bodily autonomy vs group responsibility, as well as highlighting unequal health structures in their global distribution. To date, over 500, 000, 000 positive cases have been reported to the WHO. (WHO, 2022: 1)

Limitations

Although eclectic in scope, I do not attempt an exhaustive exploration of the body's many semiotics - particularly race, gender, sexuality, or class - except where it might be pertinent to deconstructing the Cartesian paradigm. I do however track the most widely accepted notions in the traditional canon of the Western Humanities as a point of departure, replete as it is with many critical blind spots as seen from the vantage point of the postcolonial turn. As such, most images of the body as presented are white, male, able, and Christian in origin. This is partially due to my own positionality within those same paradigms, and a desire to speak from within this embodiment to avoid perpetuating co-option of other's experiences. It is also an illustration of the pervasiveness of this body: my process of using open-source media often rendered these images the most readily available, as many mainstream representations assume the neutrality of this particular body, most evident in the field of medical illustration. As such, I hope to draw attention to this discrepancy and critique it from within, rather than presume to suggest alternatives.

Structure of this Document

In order to clarify my own position on the myriad interpretations of the body as a source of study, the first section of this accompanying text lays out a case for the body as a source of metaphor via the lens of anthropomorphism. This aims to set up a platform for understanding how changing conceptions of the body affect modes of representation and vice versa. This is followed by a consideration of representations of the body at varying levels of porosity. I begin by tracking the rise of the Cartesian body and its focus on an impermeable skin, supported by selective visual instances as case studies. This is followed by an exploration of installation as an Anti-Cartesian modality, illustrated by examples of contemporary works that could be read as operating within this paradigm. I conclude with a consideration of my own work as Anti-Cartesian through Xenia Kokoula's trifecta configuration of uncontainability, grotesqueness, and stickiness. Throughout, I link explication of specific aspects of the installation to relevant passages of text, done with the understanding that the more abstract concerns of permeability, the body, and its representation are equally relevant as foundational context to the exhibition despite less explicit correlations.

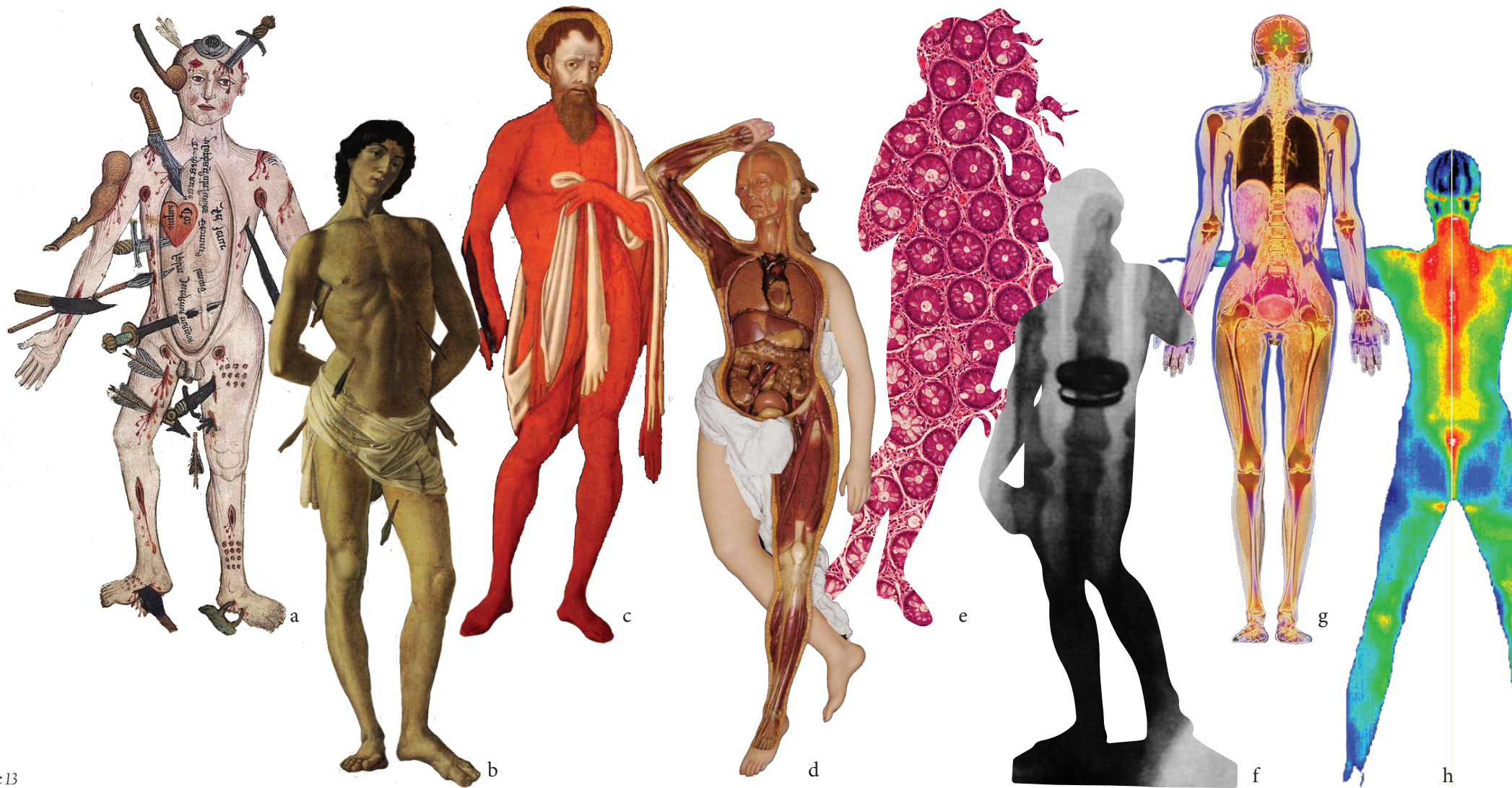


Figure 13
Western understanding of bodily permeability through visual technologies

A. Medieval medical almanacs made use of this illustration, commonly referred to as “Wounded Man” to allow doctors to diagnose and treat wounds. Note the focus on the piercing of the skin, and the rudimentary understanding of organs. B. St Sebastian was sentenced to death by arrows; even though he survived, he is generally portrayed in this event as an opportunity to depict the ideal male body. During the bubonic plague he was made a patron against disease, possibly in connection to it striking isolated areas of the body as did his arrows. C. St Bartholomew was martyred by having his skin flayed. Here he is depicted holding it, in an early form of a muscular cadaver. D. Human dissection was constantly in dialogue with morality. Later anatomists found an elaborate loop-hole by creating life-like anatom-

ical models in wax. An added benefit was making them beautiful; the cadavers were often crafted to look like sleeping maidens. E. The development of the microscope led to the discovery of life beyond the naked eye, including realising the body as a collection of ‘cells’ (named for those of the monks). F The development of X-rays allows the first non-invasive view of the human interior. This is one of the first X-rays, showing the inventor’s wife’s ring. G. MRI, CAT and ultrasound scan technologies greatly increase our capacity for non-invasive imaging of the body, with 3D and non-static visualisations becoming increasingly common. This is particularly applicable for neurology, oncology and gynecology, previously mysterious processes. H. Heat imaging allows to see even the invisible attributes of the human body.



SKELETON

Anthropomorphic Thinking: The Body as Metaphor

Opp.
Figure 14

The body can be a nebulous and entangled subject and is widely discussed in many fields. Whilst there is an essential organic component by means of cells, organs and systems that make up the organism known as 'the body', much theory written around it is not necessarily concerned with it at this level. Margo DeMello suggests grouping body studies into two main paradigms. Constructionist theory prioritises analysing the body as means of social signification and control¹; in contrast to this, embodiment theory explores the body as a lived reality in that we not only have bodies which are socially realised but are bodies² (2014: 5). My work borrows from both these paradigms. On the one hand I at times refer to the body within religion, which might follow a constructionist logic; at other times I incorporate cellular imagery, suggesting a more material view. However, within this project I am primarily interested in the relationship between the two, as both are relevant when considering the body as a semiotic treasury. In the words of anthropologist Mary Douglas:

The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system... The body is a complex structure. The functions of its different parts and their relation afford a source of symbols for other complex structures...The mistake is to treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins. (1966: 116, 122)

Here Douglas suggests that we view the body as a social signifier, but specifically one in conversation with systems outside of itself, which can be read onto it and vice versa. These systems are understood through and with the body. Changes in either affect each other. Thus, bodily metaphors become a representational tool.

1 Some key theorists could include Michel Foucault's considerations of biopower and sexuality, Franz Fanon's considerations of race, Judith Butler's revision of gender, or Pierre Bourdieu's configurations of class.

2 Consider for example the work of phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, or Julia Kristeva's work on abjection

Essentially, this is a form of anthropomorphism. Weemans and Prévost define anthropomorphism as “presum[ing], almost methodically, to start from our very experience of the world in order to think it: The question obviously is not to extend man to the world, but to place man in the world” (2015: 6). Anthropomorphism assumes a sympathy between the human form and the world around it. The strength of this lens is that it narrows the gap between the human self as subject and the world as object. Rather than the self being a separate entity, the self is seen as part of and in relation to its surrounds by virtue of the humanised space or object standing in as a relational semi-subject (Airenti, 2018: 1). However, this is arguably not the predominant form of body-world conception. Weemans and Prévost suggest that this is largely due to the 17th century Enlightenment process that emphasised distinct subject-object relations:

From Galileo and Newton (mathematization of nature, abstraction of space by a geometric idealism, homogenizing of all spaces, objectification of matter as *res extensa*, divisible into parts, etc.) to Descartes and Kant (foundation of the subject, distinguished from object, logical rule of mechanism and cause-effect relationship, status of representation, etc.), that new cosmology has striven for ever clearer, more emphatic distinctions among things, ideas, etc.—in short, between subject (observer) and object (world). (2015: 5)

Anthropomorphism’s agenda is to return the self into the world, and the world into the self. However, whilst the methodology is bodily, the nature of that body is not necessarily defined by the anthropomorphic lens itself. Medieval European medicine, for example, understood the body through humours³, mists and vapours, mysterious processes that had as much to do with the individuals constitution as they did their geographical situation, resulting in an understanding of the body in conversation to its climate (Hulskamp, 2012: 149). However, as the knowledge of the interior body increased, there was a concurrent rise in emphasis on the limits of the body, and the focus on the skin-as-border was concurrent to the rise of the bordered nation state and the globe being divided into a grid. Now, the digital age allows for a borderless world and high levels of globalisation; likewise, we understand the body at the microscopic level, and discussions on pandemics and viruses highlight a highly porous conception of the body.

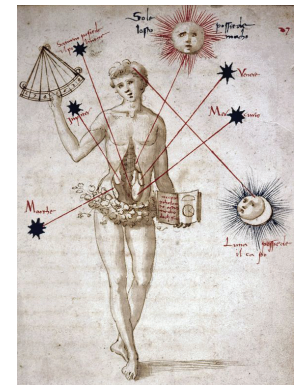
Within this thesis I propose that the common thread through this changing body-space conception is permeability. This follows architect Xenia Kokoula’s observation that there is a wide shift from a closed, passive, impermeable body of Cartesian origin towards “increasingly dissolving bodily barriers...open and unrestrained from its skin barrier” (2017: 12). In a similar vein, curator Jorge Hinder

3 Developed by the Greeks and formalised by Paracelsus, the four humours of blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile were believed to need balance. Individuals could have imbalances in these humours leading to certain personality or medical disorders. The four humours were directly linked to the four seasons, drawing a sympathy between the body and the environment. (Britannica, 2017)

Cruz notes that the body is de facto not as enclosed and discrete as perceived:

...for human life, the human body and circulation are inseparable: the “things” that circulate through it [water, air, products] are the body itself. It is not the skin, but various forms of circulation that compound existential elements and flows and integrate it as an extended body... (2018:1)

Having introduced the body as a metaphorical tool, particularly with regards to permeability, I expand on this by considering how changing notions of bodily permeability are realized representationally. This is presented as operating within two main modes, the Cartesian, and the Anti-Cartesian. The Cartesian body is the body founded in the Western Enlightenment: it focuses on closing or tightening borders and barriers of the body, namely the skin; it emphasizes the mind and thus cognition; it prioritizes sight as the primary mode of knowledge creation. In contrast, the Anti-Cartesian focuses on its lacunae, its thresholds of orificial transmission: bodily processes show a body in flux from constant exchange of the exterior; the mind is returned to all the senses; the subject is emphasized as relational. I begin with the Cartesian Body, highlighting its ocularcentric formulation of the body as an impermeable skin. I follow with a consideration of contemporary installation encouraging an Anti-Cartesian dialectic. This is supported with a personal selection of images that I have curated so as to bring my own interest to the fore while still presenting the ideation I have outlined above. There are many examples beyond the ones I have chosen, yet my very choice helps delineate the central visual languages that have both informed, limited and ultimately grown my praxis.



Above, TB: Figures 15 -17
Overleaf: Figure 18 - 19





SKIN

Membranic Visions: Sight and Surfaces

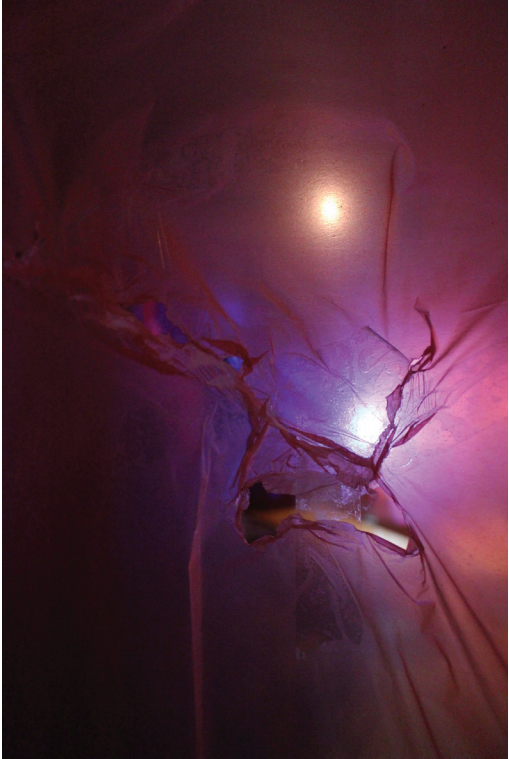
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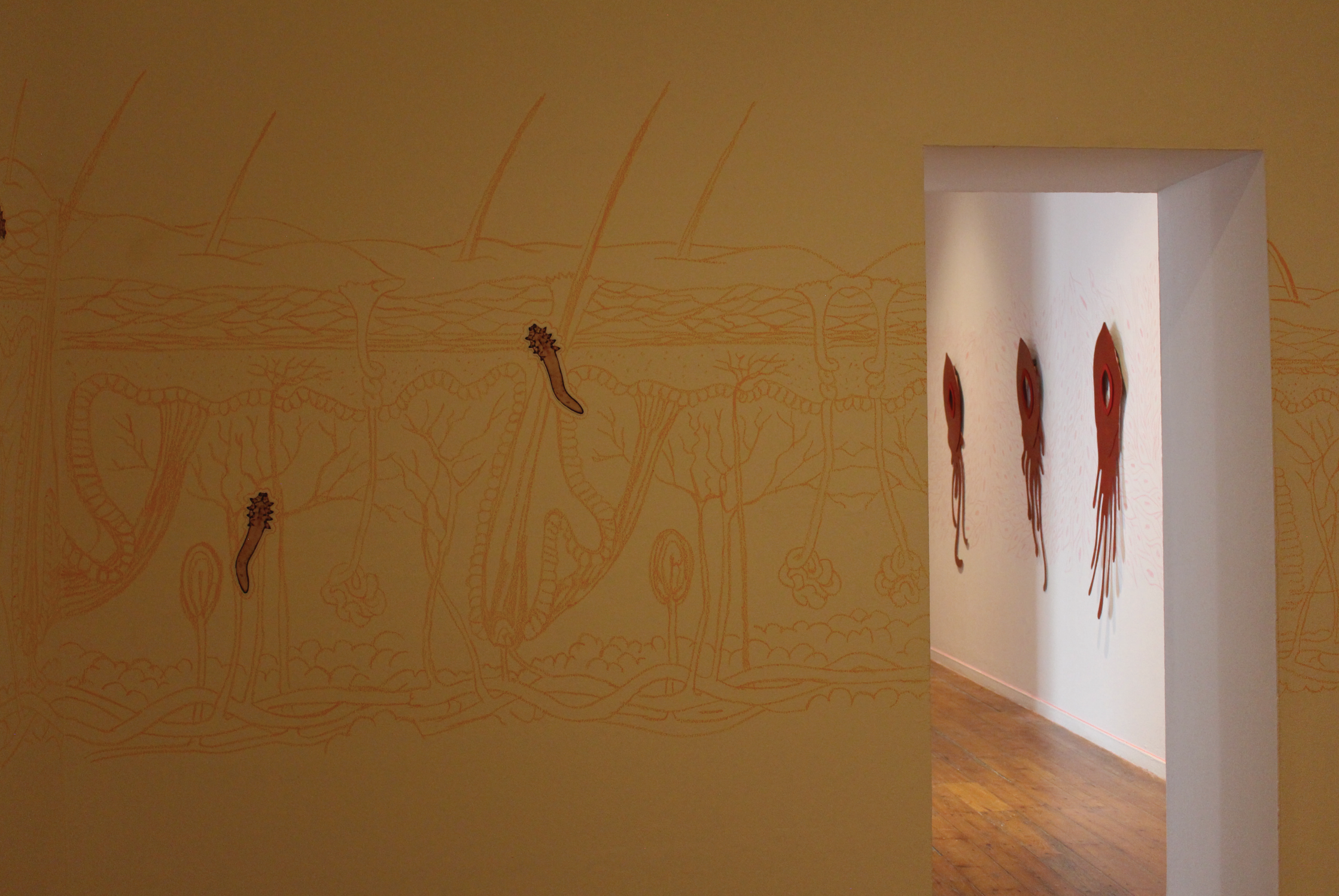
The skin is the most immediate, observable part of our bodies. It is largely opaque and, to both the inhabitant and the observer, is therefore indistinguishable on casual observation from what is layered beneath. If you were to touch any point on your body that is conceived of as skin, you would be able to trace in any direction and conceive of yourself as touching a singular entity. Indeed, the path your finger takes would only be interrupted when it met the orifices. Even your hair and nails are conceived of as growing out or through the skin. As such, the skin is supposedly cohesive, continuous, complete. More importantly, you would see yourself as being similarly cohesive, continuous, complete. For art historian James Elkins, it is this exact sensory immediacy that creates the dominant ‘envelope’ semiotic of the skin:

...in skin, [sensation] is immediate, bounded, instantaneous and sharp. Skin is like the thin plane of perfect focus in an optical system: things beyond it (outside the body, in the world) and things in front of it (in the body, in the more-or-less hidden insides) may be blurred... It may be therefore, that ‘skin’ is not a part of the body, but a condition of its intelligibility, a marker of the oppositional difference between inside and outside, body and world. (2021: 4 - 5)

Within this formulation, skin is both you in that it is all the intelligible markers of oneself, but it is also not you; it merely contains and separates what is you from what is not you. In the words of psychiatrist Didier Anzieu, it “is at once a system for protecting our individuality and a primary instrument and site of exchange with others” which is conventionally seen as “aim[ing] to constitute [its









Figures 26 - 27

Anthropologist Mary Douglas explicates the anxiety of the bodily margin thus:

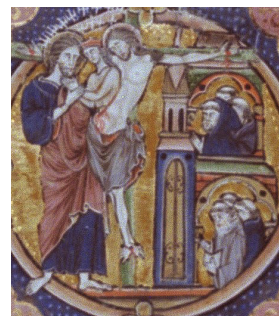
Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins. We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine (Fig. 27), faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary of the body. So also have bodily parings, skin, nail, hair clippings and sweat. (1966: 122)

Cultural theorist Julia Kristeva would continue this observation in her formalisation of 'abjection':

These body fluids, this defilement, this shit (Fig. 26) are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border... It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (1980: 3 - 4)

Douglas and Kristeva demonstrate that conceiving of the skin (and ergo the self) as discrete is continuously in conversation with its inverse, its transgression³. This is perhaps most evident in the Christian formulation of a body politic, formulated around the incarnation, or God becoming flesh. Jesus Christ is believed to be both fully human and fully God: his flesh is humanity in its perfection; His wholeness is the greater wholeness. Paradoxically, much attention is paid to the rupture of His skin in the passion of the crucifixion. Indeed, early devotional practices includ-

3 Psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu notes how scientists Seymour Fisher and Sidney Earl Cleveland encapsulated this dynamic when they grouped responses to the Rorschach test into two categories: Barrier and Penetration. Barriers classed any image that suggested the patient had a sense of self as secure, such as clothing and cliffs. Penetration was the inverse, and was broken into three categories: "a. the piercing, bursting or stripping back of a body surface (wound, fracture, abrasion, crushing, bleeding); b. routes or modes of penetrating into something or expelling something from inside (an open mouth, an orifice of the body or doorway of a house, a hole in the ground from which liquids gush out, X-rays or cross-sections of organs that allow a direct view of the inside); c. representations of the surface of an object that show it as permeable and fragile (things that are flabby or insubstantial, without clear boundaries, transparent or with a withered, faded, diseased or damaged surface)." (Anzieu, 2016: 33, 34)



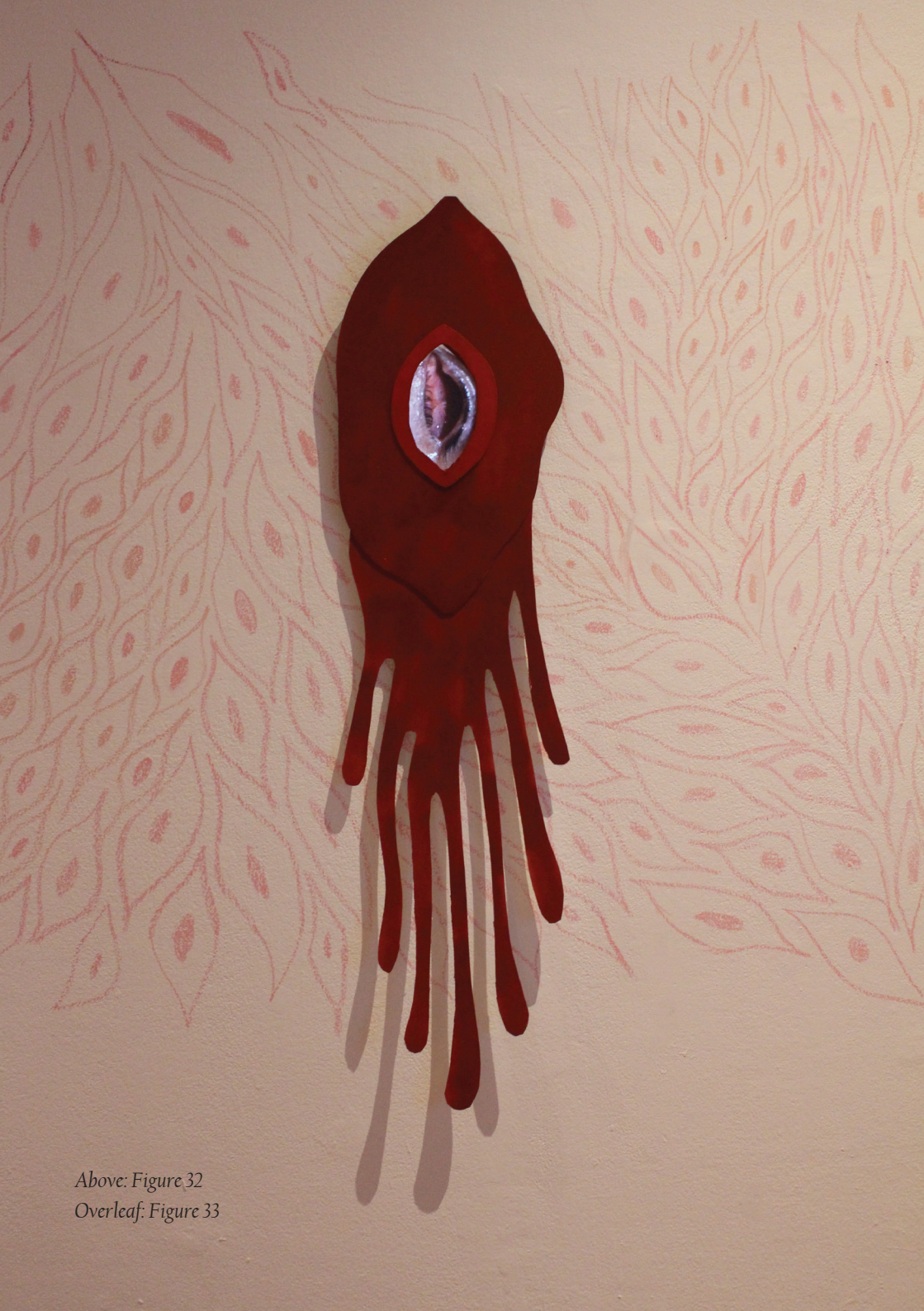
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Figures 28 - 30
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ed the Holy Wounds (Fig. 31), often depicted in isolation of the rest of the corpus or accompanied by the relevant tools of infliction. The spear-caused side-wound in isolation is strikingly vaginal, and in some instances, Christ is even portrayed birthing the Church through it (Figs. 28 & 29). Myriad Catholic practices reiterate this central system, such as the consumption of Christ's transubstantiated blood and flesh in Communion, or the keeping of relics. This language of wound, rather than suggesting a focus on exposure, instead points to the centrality of the closed-skin; Christ, as God – a being whose essence is unity - cannot ever be fully broken, even if pierced. In contrast, Mary's human wholeness could not be trespassed in the same way. As the bearer of God, she herself had to be without original sin, both spiritually and bodily. This state of grace was preserved through Christ's Virgin conception, but also through the virgin birth⁴ and the Assumption⁵, thus preventing the breach or collapse of bodily membranes. Artistically, this results in a focus on depicting skin as highly polished and smooth; it must be beautiful and impenetrable (Elkins, 2021: 8; Fend, 2017: 16)

My own work, *Wound* (Fig. 32) makes use of the metaphor of the wound to explore the anxiety around bodily orifices as gaps in the armour of a smooth skin. Five wounds, borrowed from an illumination of Christ's Holy Wounds, frame videos of various bodily orifices: the eyes, ear, nose, and mouth. They flash through images of the various diseases and ailments particular to each orifice (Fig. 65). The grotesqueness of the affliction is paralleled to the horror of the wound, conflating the dual narratives of invasion and alteration to a previously cohe-

4 The Catholic Church maintains neutrality on the exact nature of a virgin birth other than that her virginity remained 'intact'. Positions vary as to how the virginity was maintained: whether it would be necessary for Christ to simply appear outside her womb, pass through the vaginal canal without damaging tissue, or be birthed normally with rupture but no pain (pain being a side-effect of original sin, from which God prevented her being subject to in order to bear His Son), or a full, painful birth.

5 Whilst Mary is believed to have died in some sense, it is believed she was simultaneously assumed into heaven at that instant, bodily and spiritually, as the body that had touched God must already have been in a state of grace, and thus could be preserved in entirety rather than being resurrected in a glorious form at the second coming as all others who enter Heaven will be.



Above: Figure 32
Overleaf: Figure 33

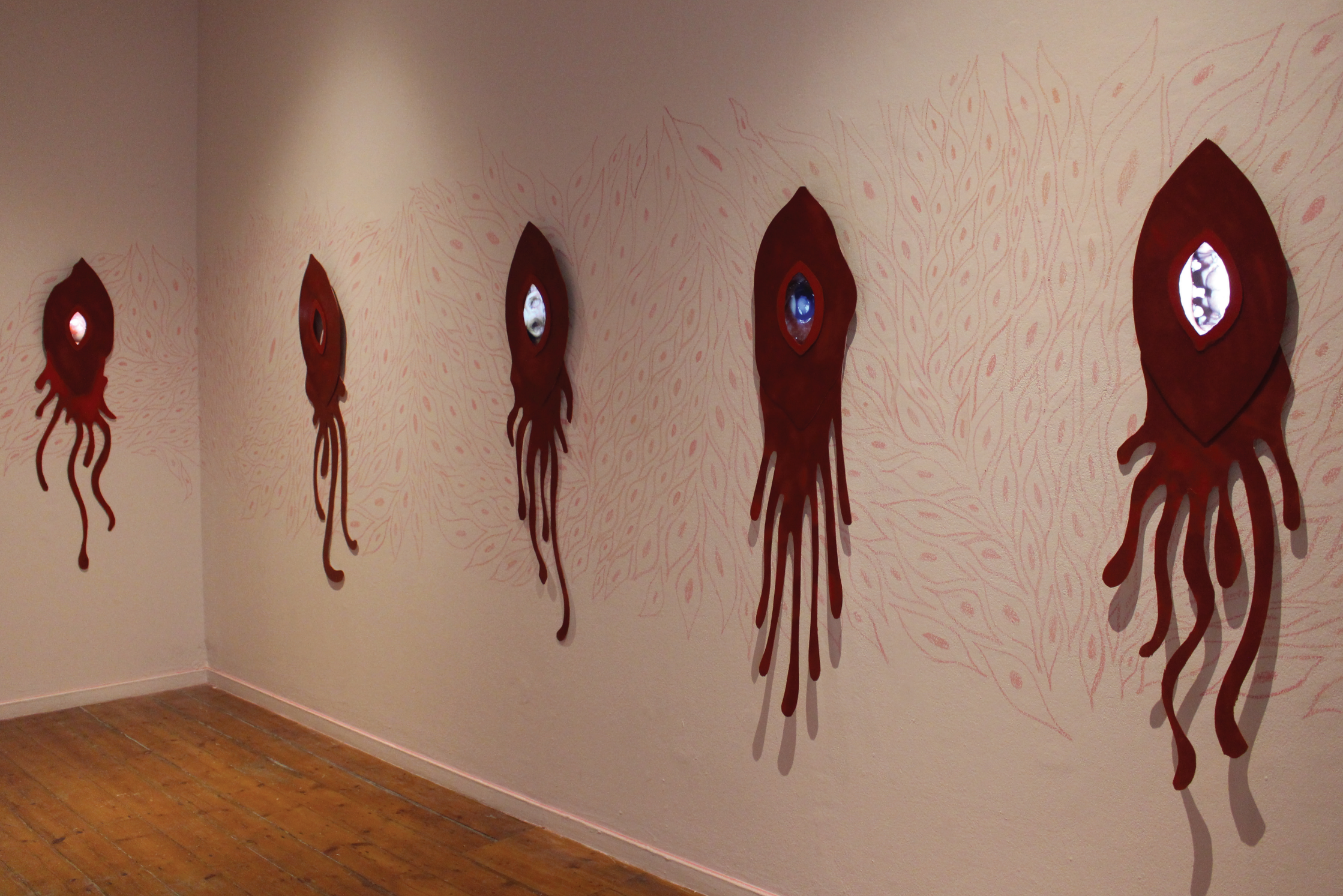
sive entity. The wound from which the frame shape is drawn is unsettlingly bacterial, sporous, or sperm-like, enhancing a tone of viral invasion.

The hardening of the skin surface is exacerbated by the advent of the dissection as the primary mode of understanding the body. Fend notes how, as the body was gradually understood by anatomists, artists, and medical practitioners through the visual language of dissection, it was increasingly understood through the skin, “as it hides immediate access to the interior while being the medium and instrument of its revelation” (2017:6). The act of cutting through the skin reinforced the idea that it was simply a form of garment, without density within itself. Although the skin was seen as a kind of veil⁶, the literal removal of which revealed knowledge (ibid), the counter-effect was a focus on its hardening. The nature of dissection as both invasive and revelatory induced an anxiety of autonomy (Langerman, 1995: 8) and thus only furthered a need to prioritise the skin as inviolable. This exact tension between being whole and pierced or, in scientific parlance, permeable and impermeable, is why Elkins suggests that “instead of the simple protoplasmic cell or the radically deterritorialised body, pictured bodies are frequently not bodies at all, but scenes where we are invited to witness dramas of failed or failing membranes” (2021: 19). Rather than thinking of the skin as skin, to conceive of it as a membrane embraces its nature as a layered organism of various permeabilities.

My own work makes use of this language of the skin-veil in various ways. The installation consists of multiple sheets of diaphanous fabric strung to create staggered screens, onto which video projections are cast (Figs. 6 - 12, 18 & 19). The transparency of the fabric reveals the layered construction whilst simultaneously acting as barrier, both mimicking the skin as a series of layers and undermining its usual opaqueness. Fabric itself could be thought of as skin-like in its intention to cover or clothe; this parallel is heightened by the red colour of the fabric, imitating the contrasting effect of a corpse *écorché*⁷ rather than a particular, racialised skin. The viewer being able to walk between these layers enhances a sense of penetration and revelation necessary to undermine the skin-as-surface paradigm, whereby they are both encapsulated by the ‘skin’ of the installation ‘body’ and asked to transgress it.

⁶ Interestingly, there is also a myriad of traditions related to the veil in Catholicism. One tradition is devotion to Veronica’s Veil, or the cloth used by the anonymous woman who wiped Jesus’ face on his route to crucifixion, with the resultant impression of blood and sweat leaving the one rendering of Jesus’ image. Naming her Veronica, or ‘true image’ (from the Latin, *veritas* – truth, and the Greek *eikon* - image) was a later tradition. Another tradition is devotion to the Shroud of Turin, a relic believed to be the shroud in which Jesus was buried, and on which is a miraculous imprint of his bodily form and face as a result of the mysterious process of resurrection. The Gospels also make specific note that on the hour of Jesus’ death, the veil in the Jewish temple at Jerusalem spontaneously ripped. Usually dividing the Holy of Holies - the inner sanctum of the temple which was only accessible to the High Priest on special feast days – from the public, its rupture symbolized Christianity allowing access for all peoples, even Gentiles. It is also representative of Christ himself, as he removed the usual barriers between God and humankind through his crucifixion.

⁷ A depiction of the body sans skin, as a study on musculature.



Similar in approach, *Exposed* (Fig. 36), displays images of skin, fat, muscle, and bone cells at a microscopic magnification, revealing their constituency as an accumulation of bodies themselves, rather than simply singular entities. The images are printed on stretched fabric, furthering a sense of their subject's membranous qualities. The prints are stretched on wooden frames in similar dimensions to doorways, deck-chairs, beds, massage tables or coffins, suggesting a transference of the bodily liminality that these objects occupy. They are designed at varying heights and displayed stacked in descending order of occurrence in the human body, to mimic the 'exploded view' or longitudinal cross-section that medical illustration often approaches.

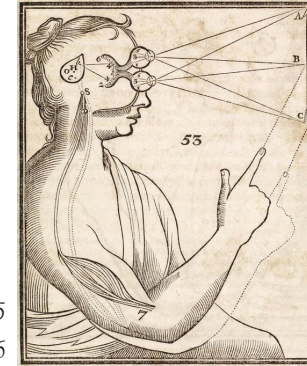
The Limits of the Eye: Ocularcentrism

Return now to my opening image of tracing a finger along the skin. If one were able to shrink their finger or enlarge the skin, not only would the finger be traversing a far less smooth terrain, but it would also probably emerge on the other side of the body. On the cellular level, the skin is porous and permeable, as is every organism, even if selectively so. Thus, a microscopic finger could trace its way around each membrane of each cell until it had tunnelled through to its antipode. This reveals to us that the skin-as-closed is in fact an illusion due to the deficit of the eye. This undermines the assumptions reliant on the understanding of the skin-as-closed, especially a conception of self that is singular and separated from the outside.

The architect Juhani Pallasmaa notes that historically, the eye was privileged as the site of experience, a tendency which perhaps runs true today (2012: 20). The Greek philosophers variously referred to "the mind's eye", or sight as most closely approximating intellect. Pallasmaa goes on to comment that "writings of all times have abounded with ocular metaphors to the point that knowledge has become analogous with clear vision and light is regarded as the metaphor for truth" (2012:18). This sentiment, for the philosopher Levin, is worryingly aggressive:

The will to power is very strong in vision. There is a very strong tendency in vision to grasp and fixate, to reify and totalize: a tendency to dominate, secure, and control, which eventually, because it was so extensively promoted, assumed a certain uncontested hegemony in...establishing an ocularcentric metaphysics of presence. (1993:205)

For theorist Jorge Hinderer Cruz, how the body was conceptualized under ocularcentrism was of paramount importance. Having continuously moved towards a disembodiment, the body merely becomes an object to be viewed, the eye understanding only that which is immediately viewable: the skin. Cruz explicates the conundrum thus:

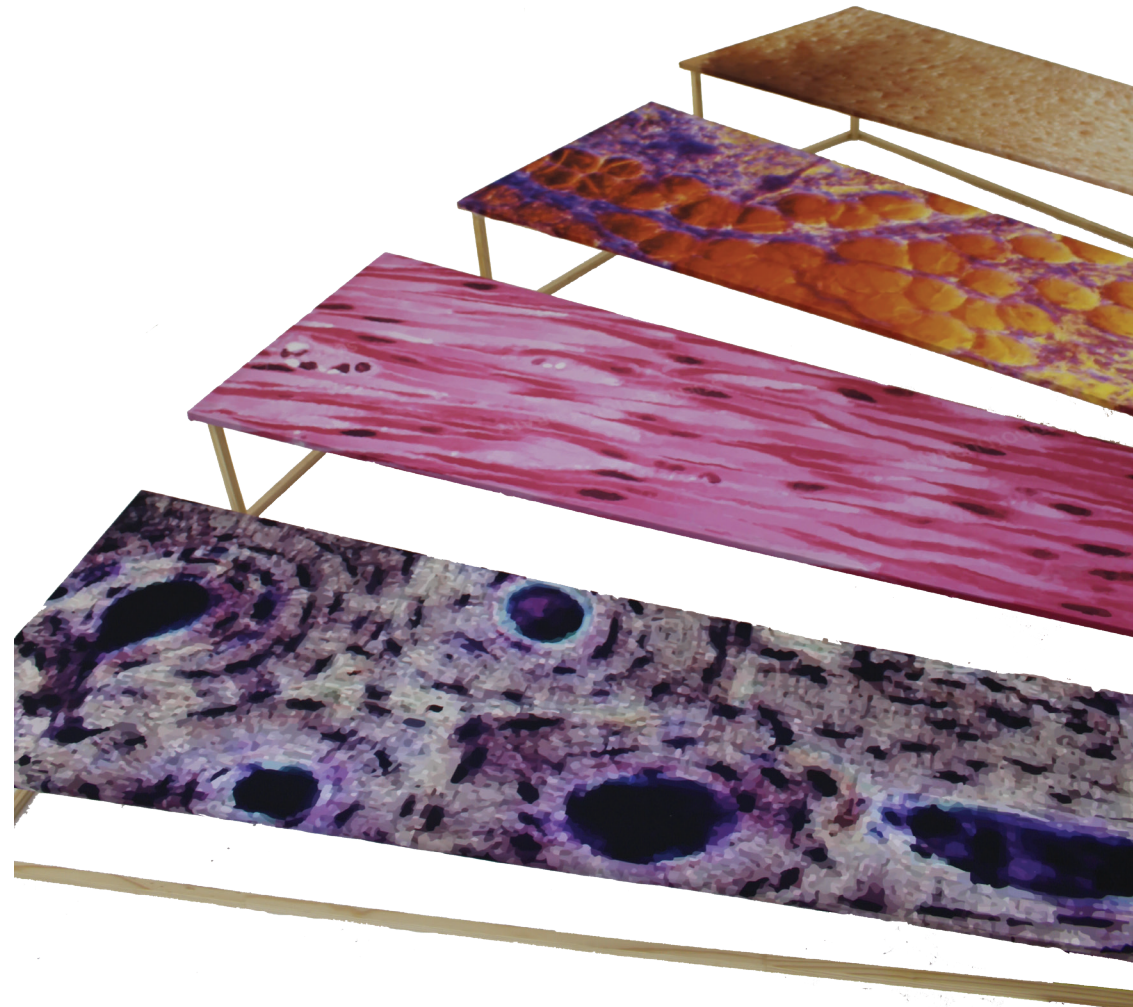
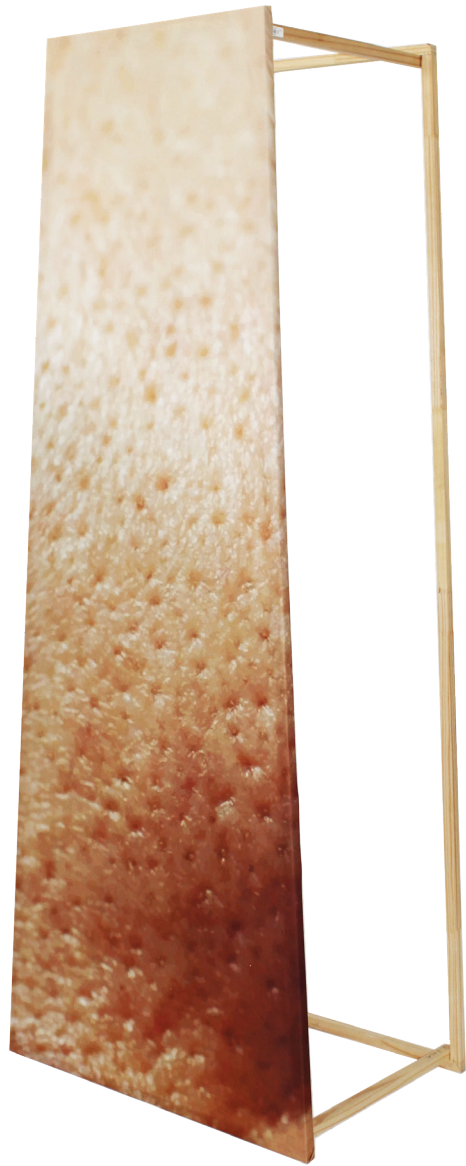


Figures 34-35
Overleaf: Figure 36

...the central historical principle for the regulation of populations is establishing the individual human skin as a frontier. In fact, establishing the "individual" human as defined by the outline of his or her skin, can be considered one of the most effective technologies of government to organize life in the capitalist world. Historically, particularly in so-called western societies, the skin gained fundamental importance in economic, juridical, and political terms. It was established as a double difference: a) the frontier between the "inside" and the "outside" of the body; and b) the difference between the "self" and the "other", including such notions as "me" and "you", and the "I" and "we". This double difference defines the "law of the individual" as governing principle, and the skin was culturally established as its representation par excellence... (2018:1)

One example of the negative impact of ocularcentrism when in conversation with the skin is the pervasiveness of racialisation. Within my own locality, this was formally realised within the policies of Apartheid⁸. Under this regime the totalising, homogenising effect of ocularcentrism is seen in full effect, whereby an entire governmental system revolves around viewing the body and the self at the visually evident level of the skin. Ocularcentrism was a paradigm in actionable practice. This body-as-skin was also translated into restriction of movement and access, again demonstrating the close relationship between conceptions of the body and permeability. It is interesting to note that whilst the skin-hierarchy assigned the same level of bodily permeability to its subjects (everyone was their impermeable, unchangeable skin), it assigned differing levels of spatial permeability.

⁸ Apartheid was a system of legislated racial segregation in South Africa between 1948 and 1994. Some of its series of many policies included: the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949 preventing interracial marriages, the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950 prohibiting personal and sexual relations between races, the Population Registration Act of 1950 which classified all citizens into four main racial categories, the Group Areas Act of 1950 which enforced racially-assigned living areas, and the Reservation of Public Amenities Act of 1953 which segregated public facilities such as benches, bathrooms, pools, beaches, transport etc. I have chosen these few examples to highlight the Apartheid system's regulation of bodily permeability (sex, skin, ablutions, amenities etc). The right to vote, employment, education, and mobility were all likewise affected. (South African History Online, 2022).

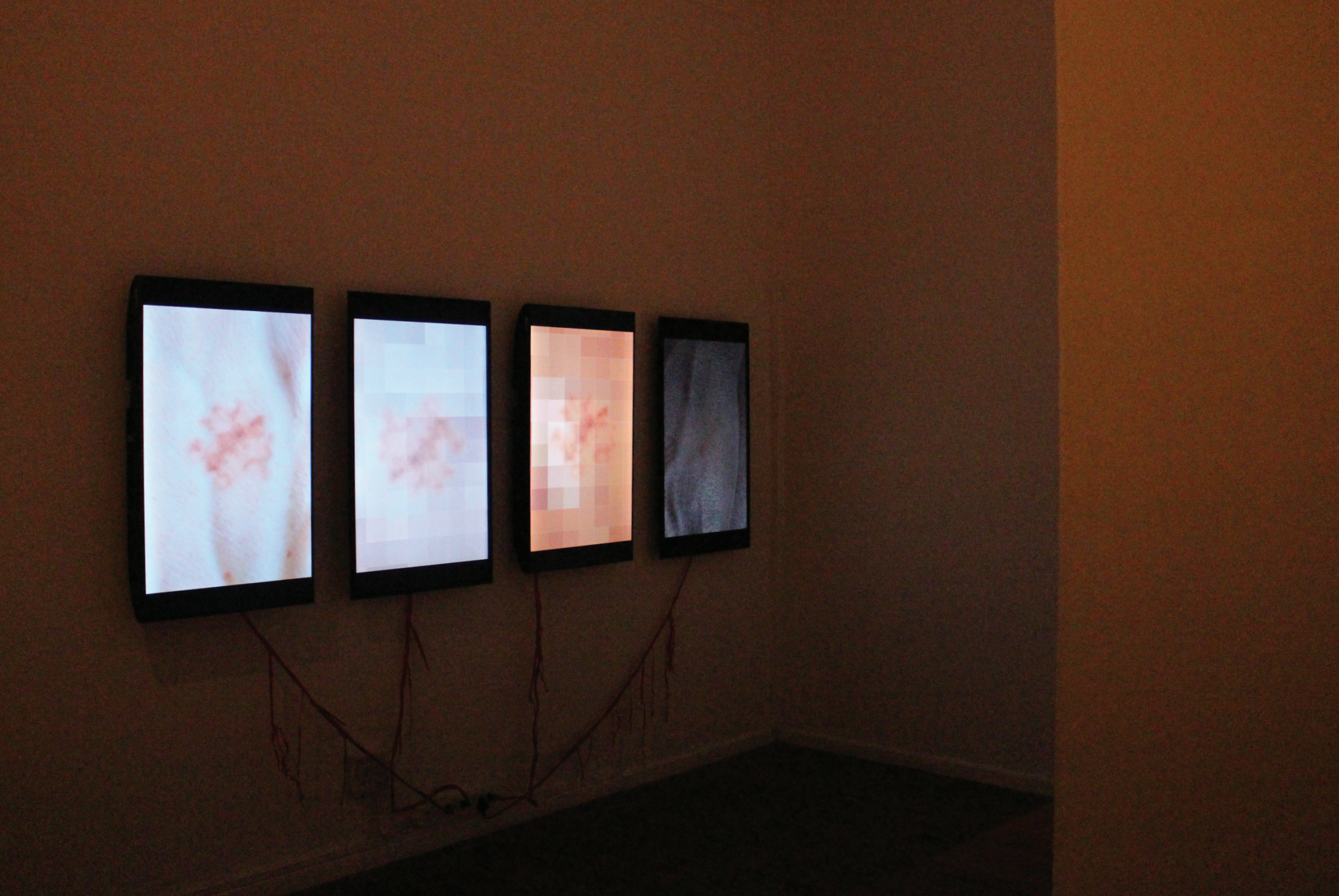


My video work *Bruise* (Figs. 37 & 38) addresses the complications of ocularcentric vision when the gaze is turned to the racial skin. It presents four varying skin types, each superimposed with the same pseudo-bruise graphic. Bruises are ruptured blood vessels beneath the skin due to blunt force, a unique affliction that is internal yet visible, and does not break the skin barrier as with other wounds. Since it is beneath the skin, the appearance of bruises are differentially visible due to the contrast of the surrounding colour field. On light skin they are very readily apparent, and exhibit varying colorations including blue, black, yellow, and purple⁹; in contrast, on the darkest skin they might appear as a discoloration. The video gradually zooms in on the photograph of the skin, slowly pixelating them further and further; the bruise remains at the same size. The visual syntax of pixelization as a distortion of clear vision is suggested as an intellectual process applicable to exposing racialization. As the pixels grow larger, they reveal colorations not necessarily evident to the naked eye: freckles become large dark patches, highlights become large grey ones, and colors not usually associated with skin, such as green or blue are scattered throughout. As the videos scroll through enlarged pixels, the bruise is backlit and is exposed as differentially visible dependant on the darkness or lightness of the colour field, highlighting the discrepancy in how much attention is paid to the visibility of pain.



9 This is often used to diagnose and treat the age and severity of the bruise

Figure 37
Overleaf Figure 38



Demodex folliculorum and *Demodex brevis*, commonly referred to as eyelash, skin, or face mites, are believed to be resident on anywhere from 30 to 50% of the human population. They reside in or near hair follicles, eating dead skin cells and oils that accumulate; they move and mate at night.

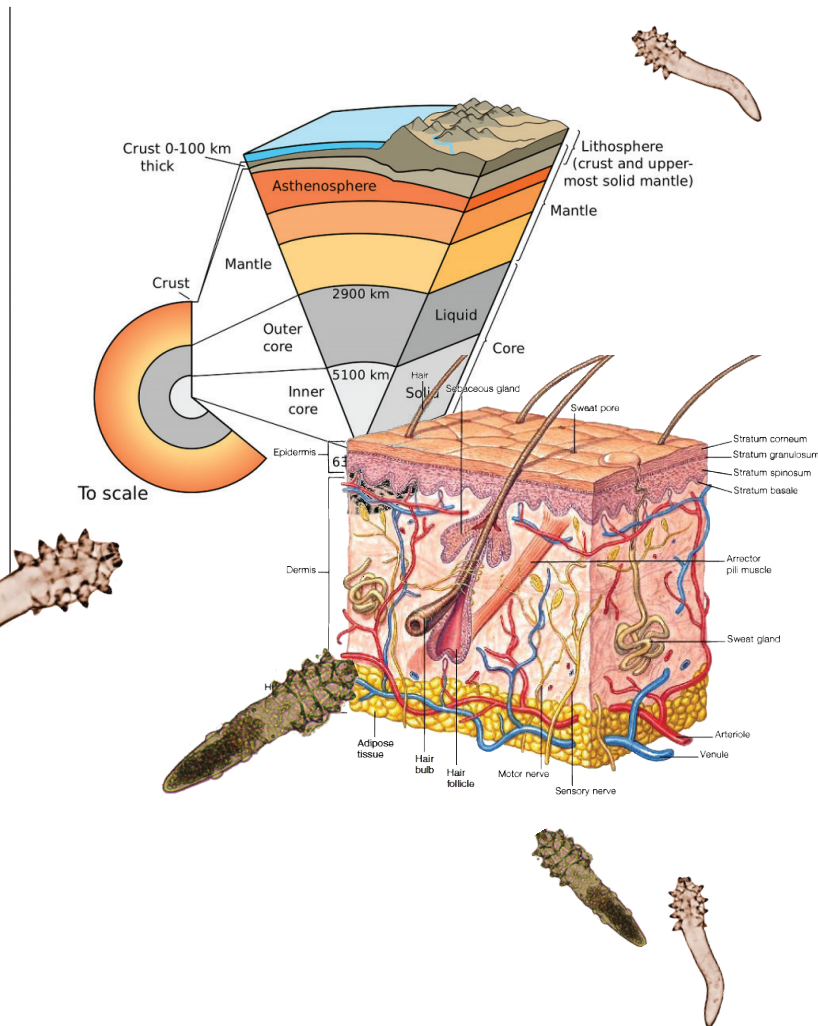


Figure 39

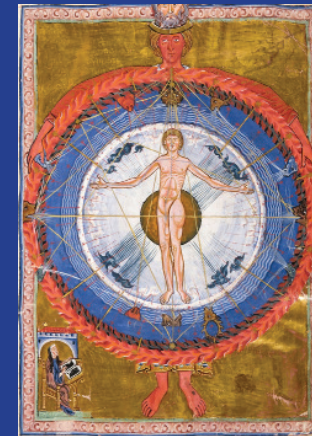
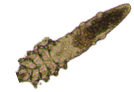
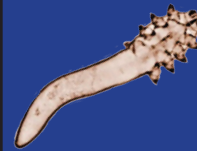


Figure 40



Figure 41

The ocularcentric conception of body-as-impermeable-skin results in a very particular type of body, with a consequent representation. I follow with some case-study examples of what architect Xenia Kokoula terms “The Cartesian Body”. The history of the Cartesian Body as presented here is peculiarly a Western formulation, concurrent to modernity, and culminating in the Enlightenment. Throughout, I seek to name and critique its harmful potential, namely anthropocentrism¹, and a racial and gender bias: the culmination of the body is proposed as the human, abled, white, male. This is achieved through visual criteria that quite literally centralize this body compositionally. In the following examples, I track how the Cartesian Body evolved from its medieval origins as a cosmographic tool, to the distinct mind-body separation of Descartes.

Some of the earliest images from the West where we see instances of the human body as a scalar index are in medieval manuscripts. Consider for instance, St Hildegard of Bingen’s “Universal Man” (Fig. 40), an illustration of a vision she received. In it, St Hildegard observes a man the color of fire envelop a blue disc of concentric circles. From his head emerges God the Father. Caught in golden constellations is the naked body of a cruciform man, strangely sans genitalia, and rendered in a wiry understanding of muscular anatomy. His disproportionate scale and complete centrality in the humming disc of creation (essentially the womb of the larger fiery figure) sets him not merely as an inhabitant of the world, but as a marker by which the world is understood (Flanagan, 1998: 112). The constellations mirror and mark his proportions with mathematical precision: his arms measure their distance, and even the globe seems to revolve around his navel. The cosmos becomes a type of nesting doll, beginning with a man and ending in God, who looks like man. Thus, the human male body becomes the armature from which the universe is modeled and articulated.

Later, this same anthropocentrism would extend to a much closer alliance with spatial configuration in the field of map-making. Whittington (2014) notes how cartographers such as the monk Opicinus de Canistris variously began to represent both individual countries and whole continents as human figures. In de Canistris’ “A Cartographic Folio”, he genders Europe and Africa as either female or male, dependent on a political point. In one instance the Mediterranean is the Devil, ejaculating or urinating on the face of Europe, clearly delineating a moral superiority of geographic propor-

¹ “Anthropocentrism regards humans as separate from and superior to nature and holds that human life has intrinsic value while other entities (including animals, plants, mineral resources, and so on) are resources” (Boslaugh, 2016).

tion. In another, Europe is represented as not only masculine, but in the shape of a royally crowned Christ (Fig. 41). In a moment of medieval theology that is somewhat strange to us now, de Canistris has drawn himself as Christ's penis, his tonsure standing in for Christ's circumcision. In this instance, a complete inversion of the Devil-rapist Mediterranean, the masculine depiction is a declaration of Europe's Christendom, a virile, fertile power. Later, other cartographers depict Europe almost exclusively as female.

The power of these maps lies in what they can reveal to us about the application of bodily metaphors. The fact that the body is used to portray a country or continent is not merely a symbolic attribute, but one where a certain bodily politic is being transferred onto land. In these instances, the body is highlighted as a discrete, singular organism; the self ends at the skin, the country ends at the border. To transgress the skin is to transgress the self; likewise, to transgress the border is to puncture the body of the country. Conditions for transgressing that border-skin - war, expansion, migration, and trade - become matters not of mere population distribution or resource access, but of an abstract, coalesced body, where the country now stands in for the self. More presciently, the abstract, political body has started to override the personal.

Perhaps one of the most iconic depictions of this attempt at universalizing the white male body is Leonardo da Vinci's visualization of Vitruvius' suggested ideal man (Fig. 42). Almost kitsch in its ubiquity, perhaps it has actually achieved, in part, its original intention of universality. Explicitly stating that the Vitruvian man was a "cosmografia del minor mondo" or "cosmography of the microcosm [little earth]", da Vinci sought to formulate not only an ideal man, but the ideal man as the measure for an ideal world. What might we deduct of the world from such a man? Extrapolating from da Vinci's depiction, the world would appear to be a place of order, harmony, and balance; this is primarily because man is seen as ordered, harmonious and balanced, each limb length calculated from a portion of its constituents in relation to others. Significantly, the square and circle that contain him seem to become the outer limits of the world. His being able to span and fill them speaks to a complete mastery of these limits.

Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man later became the basis for an equally influential bodily system, Corbusier's "Modular Man" (Fig. 43). Invented as a way to reconcile the metric and imperial systems (which interestingly uses such measurements

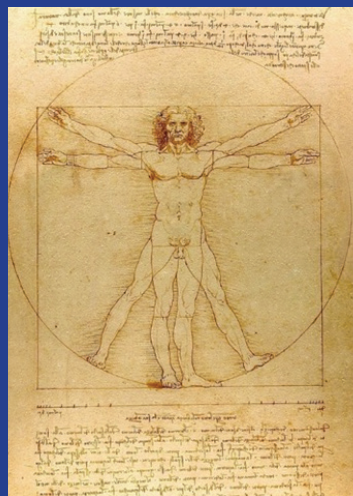


Figure 42

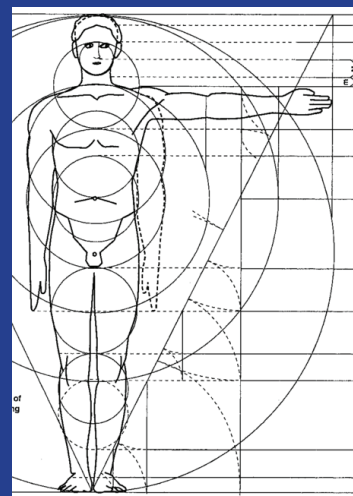


Figure 44

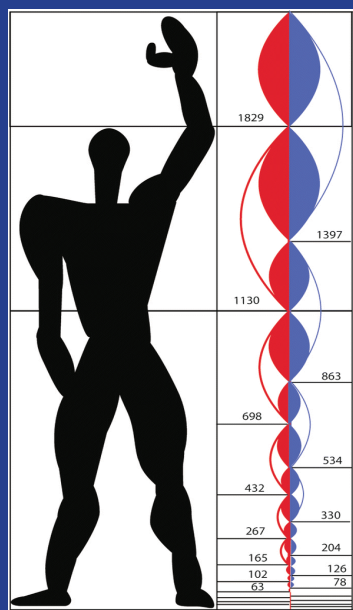


Figure 43



Figure 45

as 'feet'), it is a system of measurement based on Corbusier's idealized man standing with an arm erect above his head. This idea arose from an interest in early body-based measurements, such as the Egyptian forearm-based cubit, or finger-based digit. Corbusier developed architectural theories around this new measurement, using its dimensions to dictate stair height, door width and room size; specific buildings were even designed with direct reference to the figure itself in murals or paving. Noticeable quirks were inherent in this figure, one being that he increased the ideal height from 5'9" to 6' purely because it was widely seen as a more attractive height even if it deviated from the average (Le Corbusier, 2004: 56). The Modular would have its own progeny in the form of Ernst Neufert's "Universal Man" (Fig. 44) in his widely consumed architectural textbook, "Architects Data". The figure similarly detailed generic measurements for furniture and rooms; again, it used a tall, able-bodied male as the default.

The body in these cosmographies has been, to this point, largely quite obviously present and central. However, all of these in some way do not tend towards a specific, fleshy, personal body, but an idealized, abstract one. The man in Bingen's vision stands in for all mankind; de Canistris' maps coagulate entire nations into cohesive entities; Vitruvian man proposes both a default average and an ideal male body. Subsequent philosophies to da Vinci's took this idealized-body-world one step further by heightening its moral and hierarchical values.

In physician and occultist Robert Fludd's 1617 macranthropology² (Fig. 45), the human male is represented not merely as a measure for understanding the world but assigns an ascending hierarchy to bodily cosmography. The legs are the base soil of the Earth, the heart is the Sun and the solar system, and the head (the seat of rationality, logic and reason) is assigned the God-inhabited realms outside of material reality. The journey from the immediately observable to the abstract happens on three levels. The first is on the level of the body, where the movement is from foot to head. The second is in the world, from earth to heaven. The third is moral, from base/corporeal to transcendent/perfect. The three levels become intertwined, if not interchangeable. The body is used as a way to see the world and simultaneously discarded. The ultimate result is a definite shift towards a privileging of the mind

2 An anthropomorphic representation of the universe as a human figure, with organs corresponded to particular aspects of the cosmos (McEvilley, 2002).

and the body as an object separate to the self and its understanding. Historian Roy Porter, in his publication "Flesh in the Age of Reason" (2003) tracks this to the mind-body dualism of early Christianity inspired by Platonic philosophies. By entirely dividing and privileging the mind, the material nature of the body is given secondary status. Thus the white, human, male becomes not only the ideal *body* but the ideal *mind*.

Interestingly, the same process would happen centuries later with the dissemination of Rudolph Zallinger's 1965 illustration "The Road to Homo Sapiens" (Fig. 46), commonly referred to as "The March of Progress". However, there is an even further bias of race. By nature of the diagram's composition, it is commonly erroneously interpreted as depicting linear progress from an undeveloped, base species to an enlightened, upright, white man. The finer details, such as it does not portray direct descent, or that evolution is not merely a matter of improving on the previous model (Gould, 1990: 56), is lost in the visual construction and a popular sense of social Darwinism seems to be proved. Through this erroneous interpretation, the perception of the ideal body becomes particularly harmful – upright, male, able, refined, muscled, intelligent, and white is seen as the perfection of the human form; any deviance from this model is categorized as less evolved and thus less human. The ramifications of this on our interaction with the world is marked; humans in general are not a species amongst many, but the pinnacle of achievement, entitled and condoned by natural superiority; within this is our own further gendered (Fig. 48 & 49) and racial hierarchy.

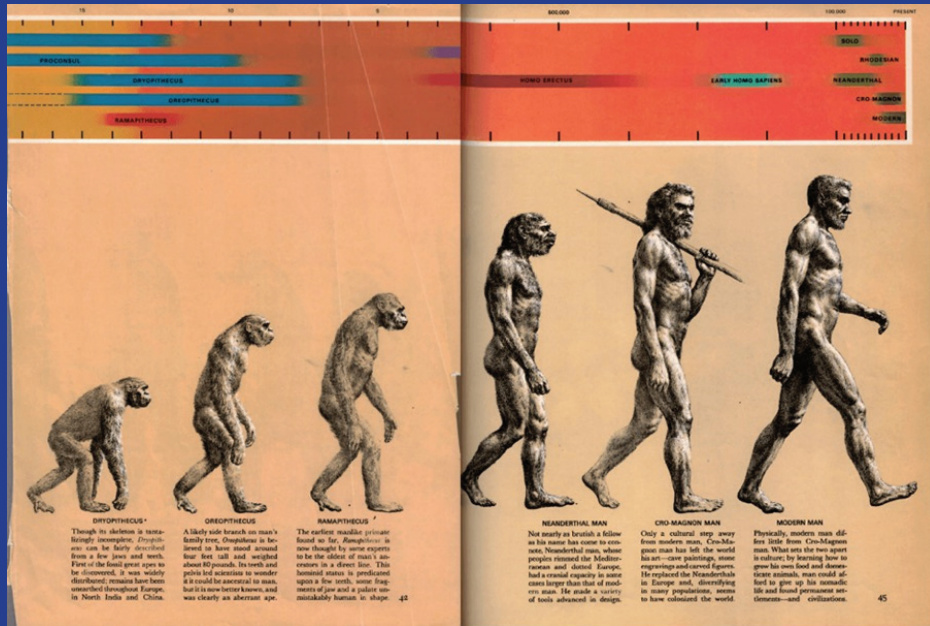
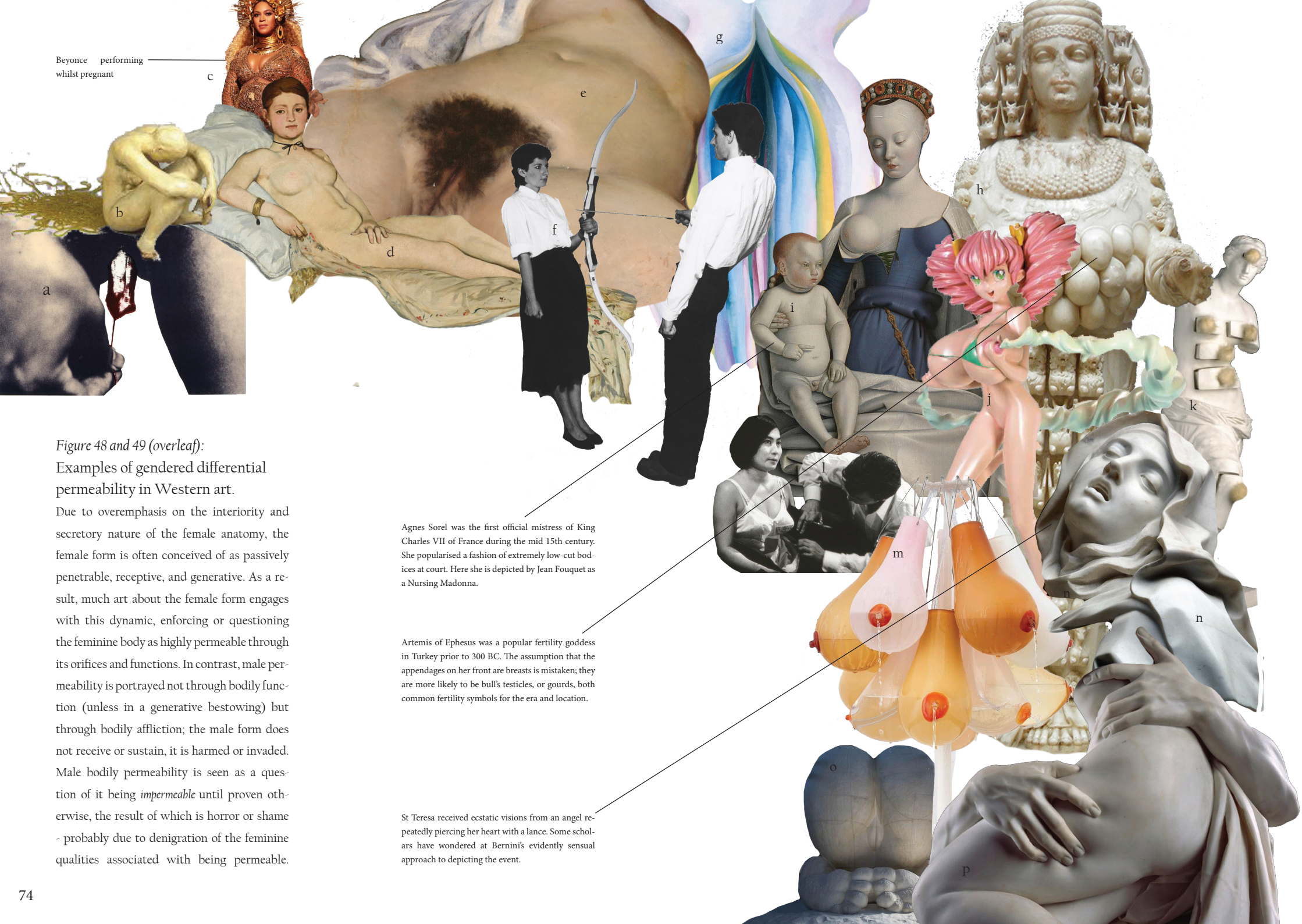


Figure 46



Figure 47



Beyonce performing whilst pregnant

Figure 48 and 49 (overleaf):

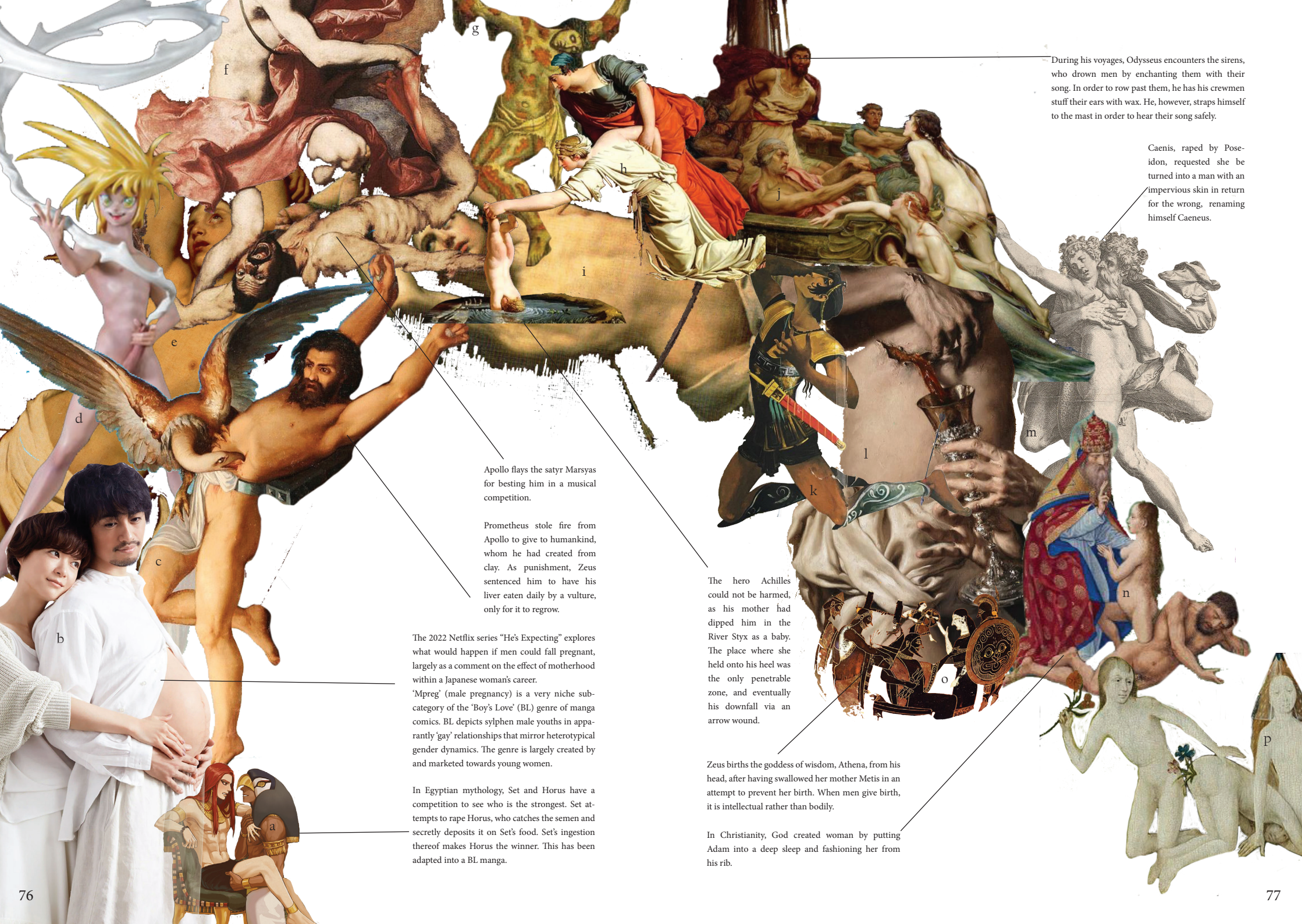
Examples of gendered differential permeability in Western art.

Due to overemphasis on the interiority and secretory nature of the female anatomy, the female form is often conceived of as passively penetrable, receptive, and generative. As a result, much art about the female form engages with this dynamic, enforcing or questioning the feminine body as highly permeable through its orifices and functions. In contrast, male permeability is portrayed not through bodily function (unless in a generative bestowing) but through bodily affliction; the male form does not receive or sustain, it is harmed or invaded. Male bodily permeability is seen as a question of it being *impermeable* until proven otherwise, the result of which is horror or shame - probably due to denigration of the feminine qualities associated with being permeable.

Agnes Sorel was the first official mistress of King Charles VII of France during the mid 15th century. She popularised a fashion of extremely low-cut bodices at court. Here she is depicted by Jean Fouquet as a Nursing Madonna.

Artemis of Ephesus was a popular fertility goddess in Turkey prior to 300 BC. The assumption that the appendages on her front are breasts is mistaken; they are more likely to be bull's testicles, or gourds, both common fertility symbols for the era and location.

St Teresa received ecstatic visions from an angel repeatedly piercing her heart with a lance. Some scholars have wondered at Bernini's evidently sensual approach to depicting the event.



During his voyages, Odysseus encounters the sirens, who drown men by enchanting them with their song. In order to row past them, he has his crewmen stuff their ears with wax. He, however, straps himself to the mast in order to hear their song safely.

Caenis, raped by Poseidon, requested she be turned into a man with an impervious skin in return for the wrong, renaming himself Caeneus.

Apollo plays the satyr Marsyas for besting him in a musical competition.

Prometheus stole fire from Apollo to give to humankind, whom he had created from clay. As punishment, Zeus sentenced him to have his liver eaten daily by a vulture, only for it to regrow.

The 2022 Netflix series "He's Expecting" explores what would happen if men could fall pregnant, largely as a comment on the effect of motherhood within a Japanese woman's career. 'Mpreg' (male pregnancy) is a very niche sub-category of the 'Boy's Love' (BL) genre of manga comics. BL depicts sylphen male youths in apparently 'gay' relationships that mirror heterotypical gender dynamics. The genre is largely created by and marketed towards young women.

In Egyptian mythology, Set and Horus have a competition to see who is the strongest. Set attempts to rape Horus, who catches the semen and secretly deposits it on Set's food. Set's ingestion thereof makes Horus the winner. This has been adapted into a BL manga.

The hero Achilles could not be harmed, as his mother had dipped him in the River Styx as a baby. The place where she held onto his heel was the only penetrable zone, and eventually his downfall via an arrow wound.

Zeus births the goddess of wisdom, Athena, from his head, after having swallowed her mother Metis in an attempt to prevent her birth. When men give birth, it is intellectual rather than bodily.

In Christianity, God created woman by putting Adam into a deep sleep and fashioning her from his rib.



FLESH

Beyond the Skin: Seeing With the Body

Opp.
Figure 50

What conception of the body, and subsequently what type of representational practice, would remedy an ocularcentric, skin-defined worldview? Understanding the Cartesian body as focusing on the impermeable skin, and the self as separate to the world, anti-Cartesian formulations highlight the participation of the body and self within the world. Architect Xenia Kokoula suggests we “...replace the whole and closed, Cartesian body with a more fluid and dynamic one...” (2017:1) (Fig. 51). The suggestion for an extended, fluid, dynamic body by Kokoula falls within a larger movement of bodily studies that proposes feminist, queer and classed readings of the body as an alternative to the harmful aspects of a closed body (De Mello, 2014: 15).

These practices seek to highlight the corporeal nature of the body as an answer to the emphasis on the mind of the Cartesian Body. Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau Ponty popularized this theory of embodiment, which takes as its premise the belief that:

In so far as we are one sensible item in a world of other such items, our most fundamental relation to this world is not that of an inner ‘thinking subject’ gazing out upon an ‘external’ world. Rather, we inhere in the sensible. Our engagement with Otherness is achieved through the body’s sensori-motor capacities operating as a unified field. (Crowther, 1993: 8)

Figure 51:
Examples of various conceptions of the body.

smooth, ideal, masculine, mechanised, homogenous,
logical, controllable

a. Michelangelo, *David*
b & c Ingres



composite, agential,

d. David Altmejd
e. Wangechi Mutu
f. Willie Bester,
Sarah Baartman,
*Baartman was a KhoiKhoi
woman in the 19th century
exhibited as a freak show
in Europe.*
g. Penny Siopis



productive, secretory, messy, emotional, sensory, chemical, abject, tactile

prosthetic, adaptable, limitless, mutable

h. Sophia the Robot. Her software includes AI to generate social skills and conversation. Marketed as a possible companion, she has been awarded Saudi Arabian citizenship and named an Innovation Champion by the UN. Her features were based on Queen Nefertiti, Audrey Hepburn, and the creator's wife.

i. Filip Cusic, *Pixel*

j. Hatsune Miku. She is a vocaloid software voicebank technology, based on the voice of actress Saki Fujita. Her company has hosted concerts for a holographic projection of her persona, and she is listed as a contributor on numerous international collaborations. In 2019, Akihiko Kondo announced himself as married to her in a personal ceremony.



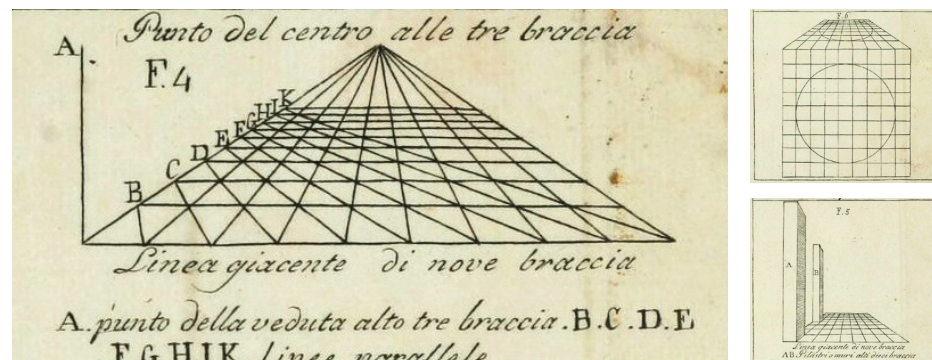
Embodiment thus attempts to reconsider the body not simply as a mechanism, but as textual, agential, and productive. This removes the hierarchical distinctions between mind and body, with a consequent reconsideration of self and other. A primary difference between the Cartesian Body and embodiment is understanding the world as subject in the same way as the self is subject. Notably, this is arguably a result of realizing the body as permeable and porous. Cruz notes that the body is de facto not as enclosed and discrete as perceived:

for human life, the human body and circulation are inseparable: the “things” that circulate through it [water, air, products] are the body itself. It is not the skin, but various forms of circulation that compound existential elements and flows and integrate it as an extended body (2018:1)

Remembering the body as permeable undermines the supposed skin barrier and demands a sympathy for the outside world as part of the self. This returns to an anthropomorphic rather than anthropocentric use of bodily metaphors. Theorist Julia Kristeva names this sympathetic dynamic “heterogeneous flow” (1980: 10); that which is not ‘the self’ creates the self; it is the relationship between the two and their boundaries that the self comes alive.

Amelia Jones notes how the introduction of the Cartesian grid to Renaissance painting through Leon Battista Alberti’s formulas resulted in a focus on the vanishing point (Fig. 52). Whilst offering an authoritative viewpoint of the visual plane, with adjacent claims to truth and power through clarity of representation, it also limits the viewer to a singular and static viewpoint, holding them in visual stasis (2006: 1). Thus, the eye becomes “the center point of the perceptual world as well as the concept of the self” (Pallasmaa, 2012: 18). Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues that it assisted in privileging an “ahistorical, disinterested, disembodied subject entirely outside of the world” (Jay, 1988:10). A possible ramification of this mode of viewing is a false conflation between seeing, ‘knowing’, and controlling.

Below, clockwise: Figure 52 a, b, c. Opposite: Figure 53.



This ocular reification has real world affect, exemplified in the colonial practice of mapping (Fig. 53). Within a map, the human eye purports to transcend bodily boundaries and hovers over the Earth, which becomes bounded by a projection of the Cartesian grid. Geographer Denis Cosgrove names this effect the “Apollonian eye”, which is “synoptic and omniscient, intellectually detached... [and] seems to induce a desire for ordering and controlling the object of vision” (2001: 3-5). This ultimately creates a stratification of visibility: by accepting viewing something from a singular commanding position, there is also the potential to be viewed likewise. Representation within this modality relies on engendering a dynamic of distance between object and observer. Baudrillard cautions against a seeing-knowing-controlling meld and suggests “[a shift to] also feeling what it is to be ‘my’ body as it is lived and perceived by me... [in ways that] exceed image-making” (1994:20).



Baudrillard's call to "feel what it is to be in my body" aligns closely with art historian Claire Bishop's formulation of installation art as a category: "Rather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision" (2005:1). Installation immerses its viewers, encouraging the primacy of affect. By default of entering an installation, the viewer becomes a participant. For Bishop, this "frees" them from the Cartesian grid's "objective positioning", creating an "activated, decentered subject" able to navigate the installation in a mirroring of real-world spatial dynamics. This is partially due to the fact that viewers will experience installation not as an isolated object that is immediately consumed by the eye, but as a collection of experiences that collage into a whole as they navigate the work. The physical activation of the body in engaging with the work encourages a more tactile, sensory relationship to the art object, aligning the medium with an Anti-Cartesian agenda. To illustrate further, I follow here with a consideration of installation as a critique of the Cartesian body.

Installation art as a recognizable category in Western Art history saw an insurgence in the conceptual art movement of the 70s. One particularly striking example in my research on this form of making was the feminist performance and installation "Womenhouse" (Fig. 54), organized by Judy Chicago

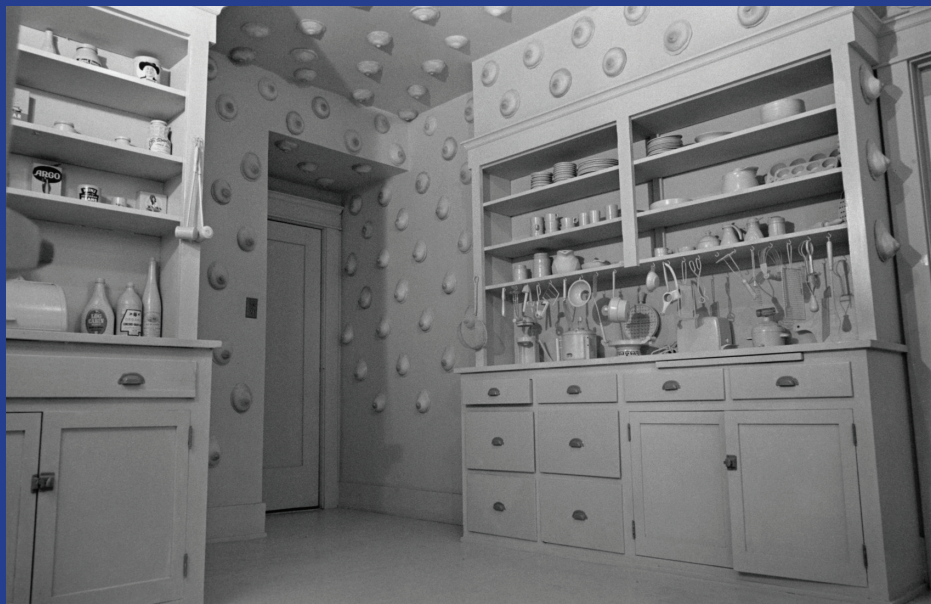


Figure 54

and Miriam Schapiro in 1972. The exhibition took over an entire house in West Hollywood, reimagining the domestic space traditionally attributed to women as an experimental and subversive exploration of femininity. Many references to the body itself were scattered throughout the house. The kitchen walls were transformed by a relief of sagging breasts; Faith Wilding painted one room black and strung it with crocheted doilies in a tent-like structure, referred to as the 'womb room'; Judy Chicago took over the bathroom, making it a pristine white except for a rubbish bin overflowing with menstrual hygiene products. The anti-Cartesian body is strongly at work within "Womanhouse". Firstly, as in all installations, the viewer must navigate the environment, never party to it as a cohesive, easily consumable whole, making them highly aware of their own body. Secondly, the various references to the body, especially in its sexual or abject form direct attention on bodies outside of the Cartesian ideal.



Figure 55

Installation does not necessarily have to reference the body as obviously as "Womanhouse" might in order to speak to it. Ilya Kabakov's "The Man Who Flew Into Space From His Apartment" (1980) (Fig. 55) does not contain a body at all; but that is the point. Viewers are confronted with an apartment room covered in posters, a sling of extremely make-shift appearance and a hole in the roof. The subsequent narrative – that a man has successfully managed to launch himself into space – speaks directly to the ultimate goal of ocularcentrism, which is transcendence of bodily and spatial limits. However, in this instance, we are asked to consider it from a completely bodily framework. The complete impossibility of the physics involved leave us only all the more aware of our own bodies, and how they are not, in fact, in outer space, but here in 'close space'.

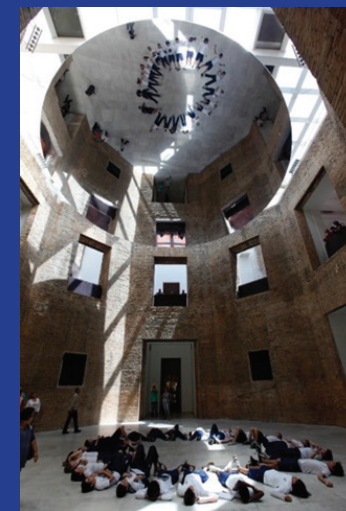


Figure 56

Olafur Eliasson's practice similarly works with recognizing the power of proprioception which installation has to offer. In his piece "Take Your Time" (2013) (Fig. 56), viewers are confronted with a large, rotating mirrored disc suspended from the ceiling. The experience is primarily an inversion of space, offering a unique and seldom-seen view for the human eye. Considering that the viewer is allowed to a) view themselves, but also b) see themselves

being viewed, the ocularcentric gaze and its focus on disembodiment is both fulfilled and refuted. They are allowed to participate in the part-voyeur, part-disembodiment that the Apollonian gaze strives for, but in doing so they are made wholly aware of that gaze as they ultimately gaze on their own bodies in the space.

Sarah Sze takes this inversion of the ocularcentrism and applies it using fluctuations in scale. On the one hand her practice produces large format exhibitions such as her solo at the American Pavilion for the 55th Venice Biennale, entitled “Triple Point” (Fig. 57), viewers were offered an amphitheater-like space made up of a diverse array of every-day objects, meticulously arranged and patterned to echo a globe, at the centre of which swings a pendulum, narrowly avoiding brushing the delicate arrangement. The gridded, bird’s-eye-view of world-maps is presented in equally seductive comprehensiveness; however, the life-size scale of this globe reminds us that we are not merely observers of the world, but its inhabitants. Whilst maintaining the ordering and categorical attributes of maps that are so attractive to our ocular selves, Sze requests that we step outside of the limiting aspects of this and learn to reinhabit our bodies.

Many installation artists also directly reference the body in their works, and it is in these instances that the circulatory, extended body can be seen in full effect. Pippilotti Rist is one artist who continuously references the human body in her video installations. One work in particular, “Homo Sapiens Sapiens” (2005) (Figure 58), illustrates some principles of the anti-Cartesian body. Consisting of large-scale projections on a cathedral ceiling, the work introduces an interesting correlation between medium and message. The projections filter through a close-up of an eye, Rist running over the camera as if flying, and hypnotic kaleidoscopes of body parts such as tongues or hands. The body, projected at this scale immerses the body of the viewer. As such, a sense of being in their own body within the body of the exhibition ultimately has the potential to create a sense of the porosity of the body on an experiential level.

Heather Phillipson likewise uses an inversion in scale to create an installation-body. In her work “EAT HERE” (2016) (Fig. 59), we are offered a diverse set of references to the human heart. At the centre are two screens, on which are projected medical dissections of a heart. Surrounding this are allusions to various pulse-raising activities, such as sperm for sex, or racquets for sport. The entire work is covered in red umbrellas, creating a luminescent skin. A foot poised to run rotates below the screens. A poem by the artist about breakups and love is read in the background. Again, Phillipson’s work operates on two levels; it is about the body, as well as being a body; the projection of the heart becomes the heart of the work. What type of body does it create? Rather than a cohesive, contained, Cartesian body, the work is scattered, fractured, referential. The body at hand is one of deconstruction and expansion.



Clockwise from Top Left: Figures 57 - 59

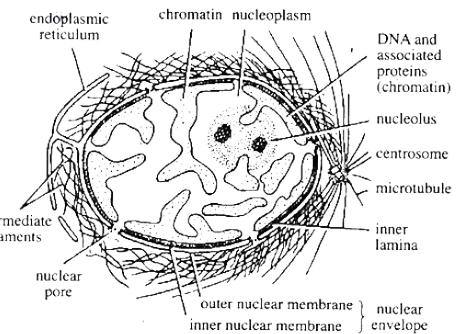


Diagram of a Nucleus



Greek map of their known world

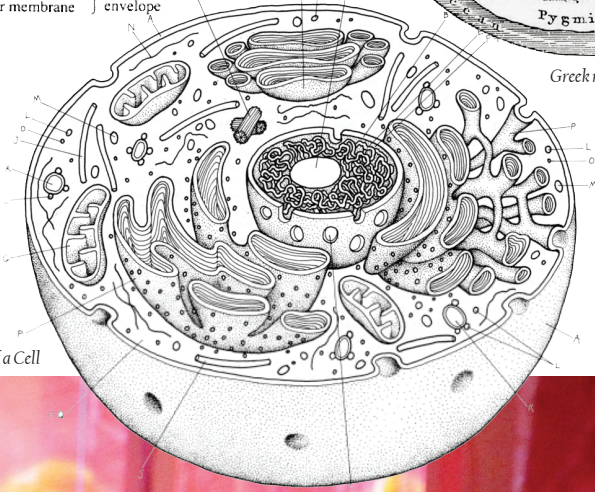
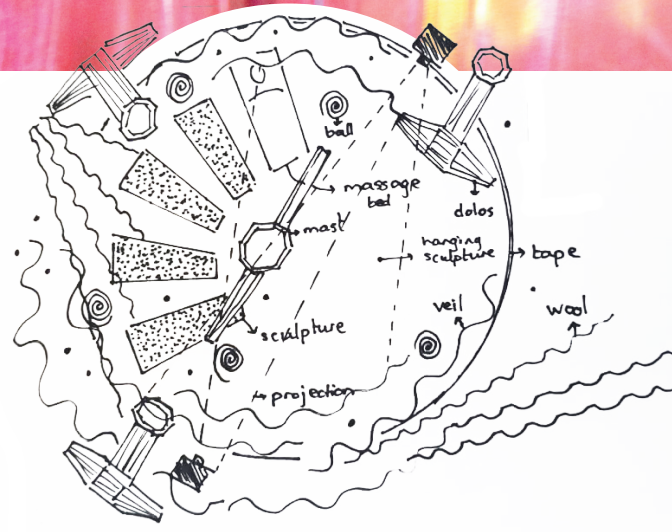


Diagram of a Cell



Medieval cosmograph



Planned layout of 'Surface Tension'

Figure 60

Opp. & Overleaf: Figure 61

Having presented installation as an Anti-Cartesian modality, I follow with an exploration of how I have attempted to work within this same vein, with the understanding that my previous statements on installation as a medium are likewise applicable here. To do so, I utilize architect Xenia Kokoula's three-fold suggestion of what might constitute an anti-Cartesian body politic, namely the body's uncontainability, its grotesqueness, and its stickiness. I apply these as lenses both to my chosen medium of multimedia installation, and to the subject matter itself. Contrary to the Cartesian body, architect Xenia Kokoula notes a move towards a philosophy of embodiment, with a renewed focus on the body's role in larger systems. In this intellectual approach, the body is not a vehicle for the mind, but a signifier. The abject, sexual, and material aspects of it are highlighted, calling into question the stark self-other binary perpetuated by the self-contained Cartesian body. Gradually, the body loses its borders all together. The role of our consumption in planetary ecosystems, the pervasiveness of digital dissemination, and the recent rates of large-scale cross-infection within the pandemic demonstrate that the body is not only not discrete but extends beyond itself.

The Body is Not a Container

Curation

Kokoula's opening consideration of the body is that it "is not a container". For Kokoula, the skin is not an "absolute barrier... separating the human subject from its surrounding space...It rather becomes multi-layered, saturated, and heterogeneous. It expands to include other things or becomes penetrated by them, acquir[ing] depth and materiality" (2017: 16). I attempt to lead the viewer through an understanding of the skin as multi-layered using the layout of the gallery (Fig. 62). They first encounter *Bruise* (Fig. 23), the most surface level transgression of the skin; this is followed by *Wound* (Fig. 32), the intrusion of the skin barrier; they are then finally met with the main installation, which mimics the form of a cell or organelle (Fig. 60). This progression from surface to interior via a spatial mirroring from outside to inside the building introduces the body as layered in an experiential way.

Veils

Within the main installation, I continue this language of layering. The main display tactic is a configuration of veils onto which videos are projected (Figs. 6 - 11). Fabrics in varying layers of opacity mimic a cell wall or maze,





at various times overlapping, concealing, or revealing. More to the point, the configuration creates a barrier that must be penetrated by the viewer. As the body of the exhibition is penetrated by the body of the viewer, the principle of porosity outlined by Kokoula is enacted upon the work. The viewer can only observe the work a section at a time, unable to assess the entirety, and viewing is thus a fragmented collection of associations and occurrences as viewers move within it. They themselves become a projection surface, blocking light and creating shadows, editing the experience for other viewers (Figs. 18 & 19)

Sculptural works and videos

Kokoula goes on to quote Low as suggesting that “powerful counter-images [to the body-as-container] include [a] the fragmentation and rearrangement of bodily organs, [b] medical practices that prioritise the understanding of the body as an immune system, and [c] discussions on prosthetics and cyborg¹ paradigms” (2017: 12).

- a) My installation approaches this literally on one level, including images of isolated organs printed large and suspended at random around it (Fig. 61). Displayed so, and at this scale, they suggest the installation as being a body, the fragmentation and rearrangement of which aligns with this particular counter image to body-as-container. This is mirrored on a methodological level, whereby my process of sourcing stock footage (itself often of an isolated body part) and montaging it with others mimics a more literal bodily fragmentation.
- b) Many of the video works incorporate animations of viral infections (Figs. 63 & 64). The sensation of bodily invasion usually associated with being infected is replicated via the enlarged scale, as the infection is now visibly dominant and interactive with the viewers body (Fig. 19), stripped of its usual invisibility and anonymity. *Wound* (Fig. 65) also makes use of the language of infection, but allies it with orificial anxiety, presenting infections of the mouth, eyes, nose, and ears. Elsewhere, the inclusion of references to infection via other images - plague saints, or a Covid era presidential broadcast, for example (Fig. 63)- further align with a body-as-immune-system agenda.
- c) My video process of downloading stock footage, montaging, and projecting results in a highly digital engagement with the body. This in turn incorporates another, evolving type of body: one that is communal, highly disseminated, and incorporeal. This is particularly interesting giv-

¹ Feminist theorist Donna Haraway pioneered the concept of the cyborg as an answer to Western patriarchal dualism. She highlights specific problematic dualisms on the configuration of a self/other dynamic, pointing out that competition between them creates paradoxes in domination. Revolutions in technology blur the boundaries of organism and technology through their integration, suggesting a subsequent deconstruction of the self=other dynamic. (Haraway, 1991)

en the genesis of this project within a national lock-down in the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, which required me to work remotely and in isolation, only able to access this digital form rather than tangible ones.

Although much of the reference to porosity is held in bodily references, sculptural works also look at instances of literal barriers or borders, namely a series of wireframe dolos (Fig. 98) and a mast in wood. These nautical images are in reference to Foucault's image of a ship being "a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is self-enclosed and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea" (1967:1). Similarly, the dolos was designed as a semi-permeable oceanic erosion barrier. As such, both objects already speak to the liminality and porosity of constructed borders. However, contrary to the idea of being "self-enclosed" or a barrier, their wireframe construction renders them useless in their lightness and penetrability. This contrast is especially heightened by a life-size scale, their size balanced by their near transparency. This process, whereby the self-enclosed ship or reinforced shoreline is rendered open, can be read as synonymous at the bodily level, where 'enclosed' structures such as cells, organs, and skin are in fact permeable. A more literal reading could be given in context of the Covid-19 pandemic, whereby global borders and harbours were shut down in response to a virus' ability to transgress perceived bodily borders.

Grotesque Glitches

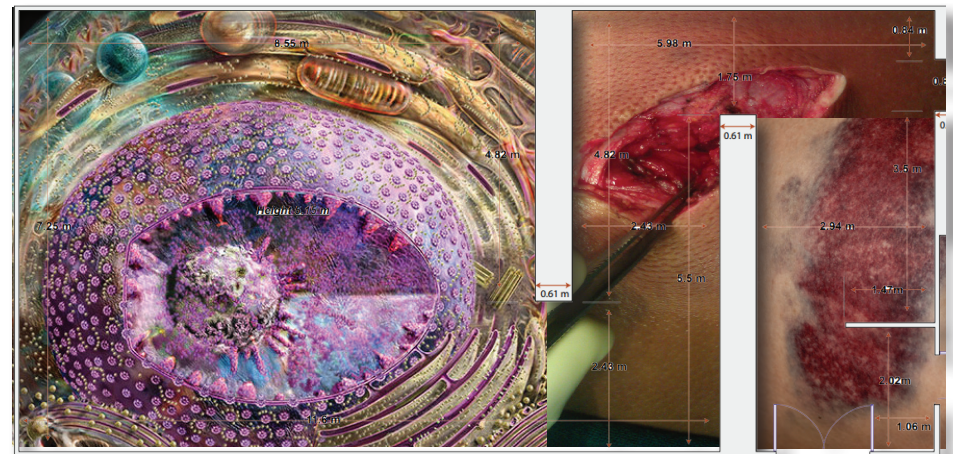
Based on the seminal work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Kokoula also proposes that an Anti-Cartesian body can be found in notions of the grotesque, in that "an aesthetics of exaggeration and excessiveness eventually culminat[es] in the transgression of the boundary that encloses and delimits the human body" (2017: 15). Instances in my work include sequences of meat being tenderised, a dissection of a foot, toenails being cut, art-historical images of the body fragmented, a floating bone foot and the like (Fig. 64). One particular work, *Wound* (Fig. 65), intentionally capitalises on grotesqueness by presenting oozing, infected, and maimed orifices. Such instances, in their grotesqueness, highlight the fragility of the body, heightening a sense of its vulnerability. However, there is also a juxtaposition of a contrary, beautified body. Drawing on art-historical religious imagery such as St Sebastian, St Lucy, the Divine Mercy, the Last Judgement and the like (Fig. 63), their portrayal differs to the otherwise medical or grotesque depictions. Although icons of pain, martyrdom or suffering, their bodily afflictions are beautified, rendered smooth and painless. The compilation of the beautiful surface quality of these bodies and the diseased, medical nature of the other footage within the same installation reinforce their relevant strengths via contrast.

Opp: Figure 62

The Stickiness of Sound

Kokoula also posits that Sarah Ahmed's concept of stickiness is another tool to disprove the body-as-container, as "it lies between fixity and rigidity on the one hand and the openness of an unrestrained fluidity on the other" (2017: 16). Stickiness demonstrates both an ability to penetrate, in that adhesion requires a form of adaption to the host surface, but also an ability to remain discrete; it affects and is simultaneously affected by. This idea can be applied to "material (bodies, objects, surfaces) but also immaterial (affects, signs) entities" (2017: 16). Stickiness for the viewer is "connection between each element with another, but also on the spatial patterns of moving, clinging and pulling away through a viscous space of uneven densities." (2017: 16). Whilst the hanging fabric in varying opacities directly mirrors "uneven viscosity", the more intangible aspects of the installation can be seen to engender aspects of stickiness. In particular, the sound piece (Fig. 67) permeates the exhibition, unavoidable. The act of listening becomes a sticky one, in that the viewer and their attention is attached without release to this input. The sound-piece itself makes specific reference to instances of bodily penetration, such as eating or breathing, that link back to previously discussed notions of the body as consumptive and secretory.

Hopefully, a viewer entering the installation will be experiencing a heightened awareness of their own bodies, both through an engagement of it by entering and navigating an immersive space, and by the multitude of references to it. My chosen visual language of infection, wounds, or medical illustrations aim to remind them of their bodies as porous, a principle illustrated both by the content of the installation, and its inherently anti-ocularcentric mode of representation. This renewed understanding of their own body will hopefully engage in a dialogue with deconstructing internalised notions of the Cartesian body, resulting in an awareness of their own participation in consequent economies of porosity.



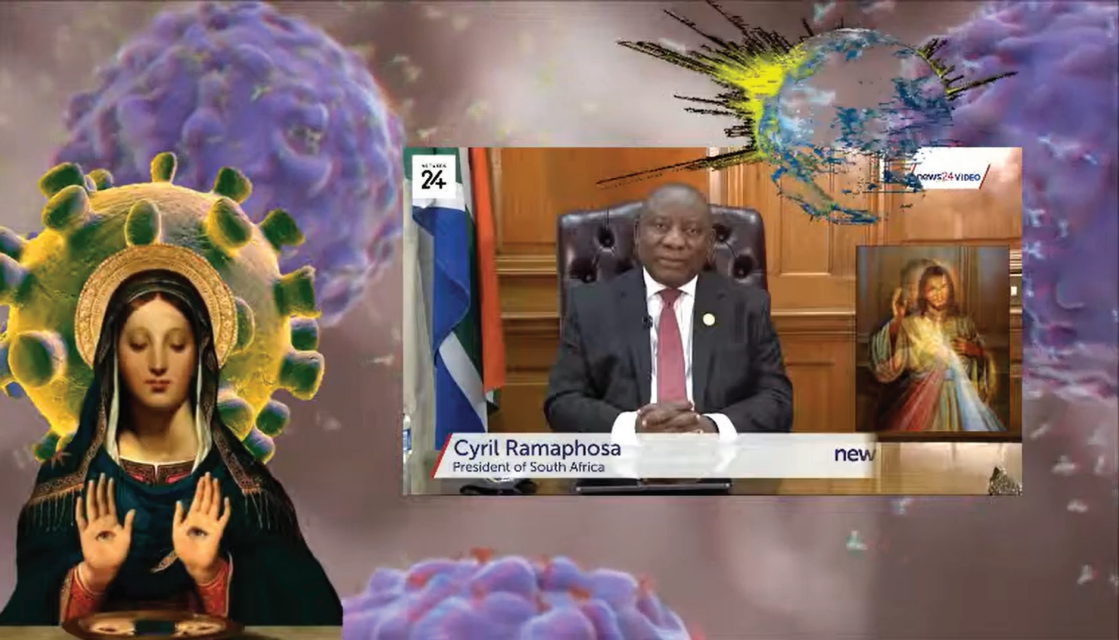


Figure 63

Figure 64

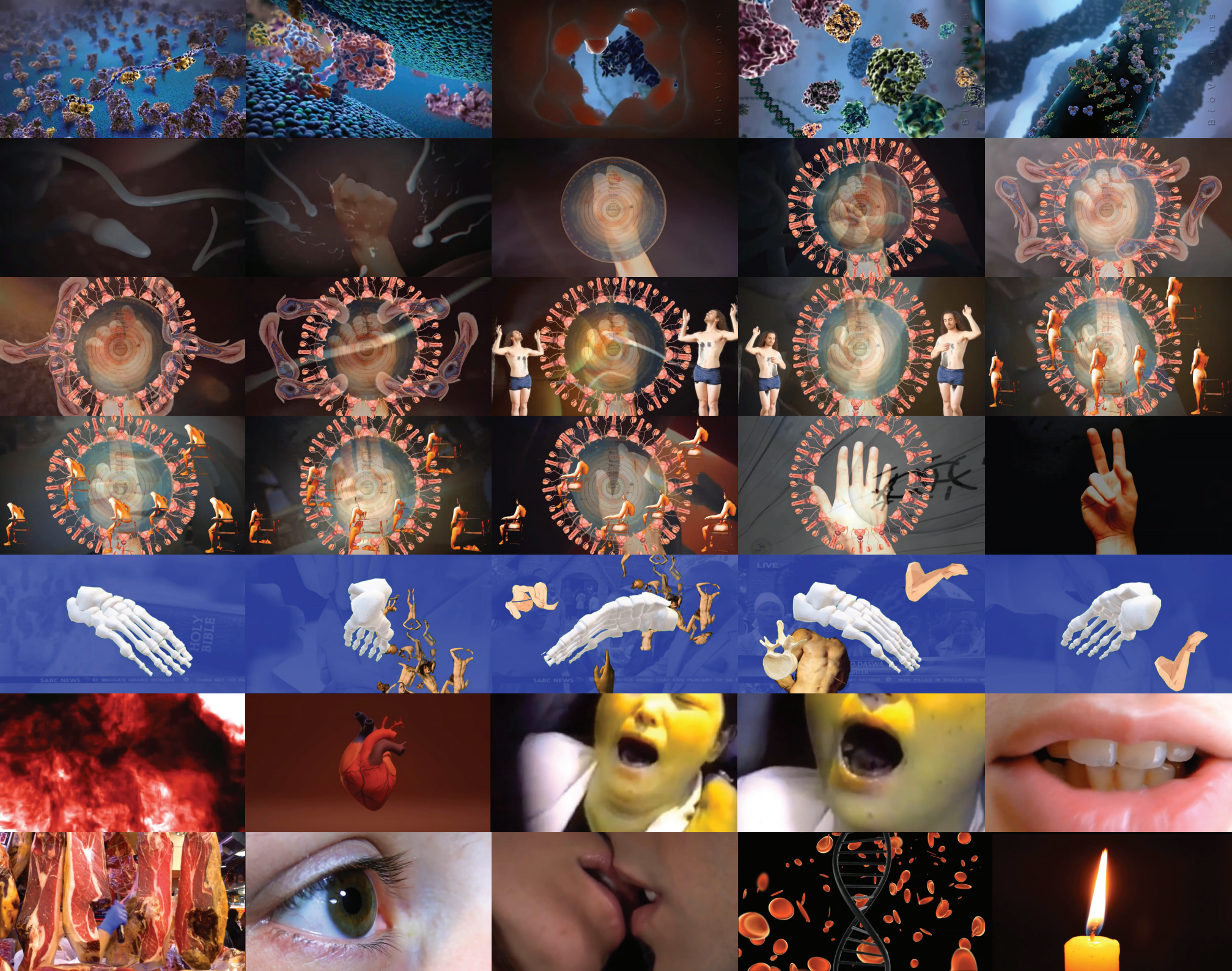
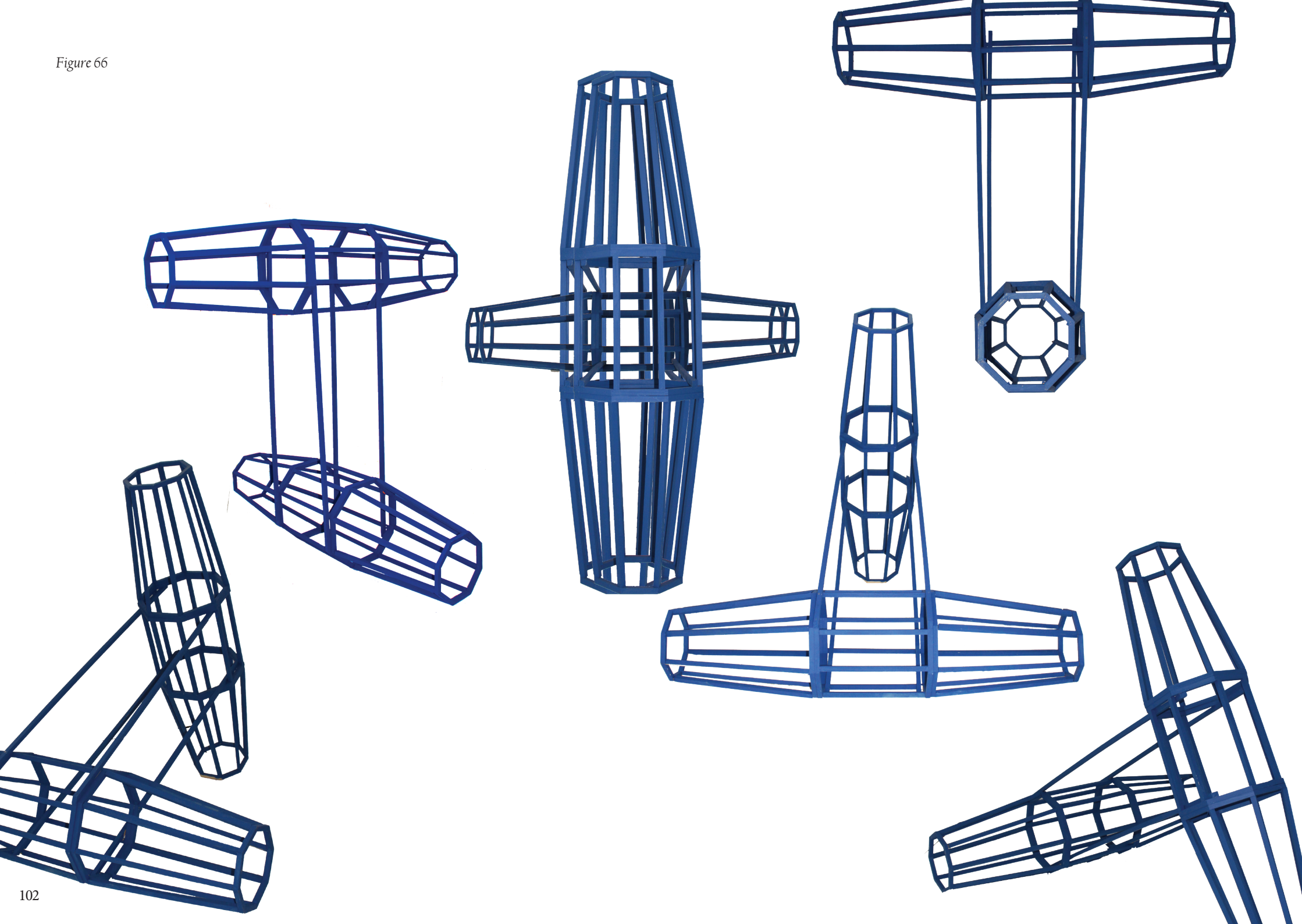




Figure 65

Figure 66



Think of your body. Where does it end?
Travel from the inside to the out.

Each cell has a membrane, next to another.
Between each is interstitial fluid, carrying chemicals like ships in a harbour.

Each cell builds up with the next
A congregation of similar bodies
Until it forms an organ, a system, a hand

Throughout, the blood
It is everywhere
Cut and you will see
Flowing through veins, through capillaries, into vessicles
Each branch further and further into the surrounding landscape of tissue
A highway

Breathe in
Oxygen pours in, flooding your lungs
Soon it will be everywhere

Think of your body. Where does it end?

Your pores, gaping holes in your skin.
Sweat evaporates, traces of you in the air
In someone's lungs

Each exhale, each touch, a compromise
Your cells rise to meet it from within
Flying buttresses in a cathedral

Little things slip through: pollen, or flu.
Some things cannot. The inside of your body is dark.

What it rejects you hide: pulled hair, burnt skin, cut nails

Imagine a bigger body, growing, encompassing everything.
Where does it end?
How do you exit?

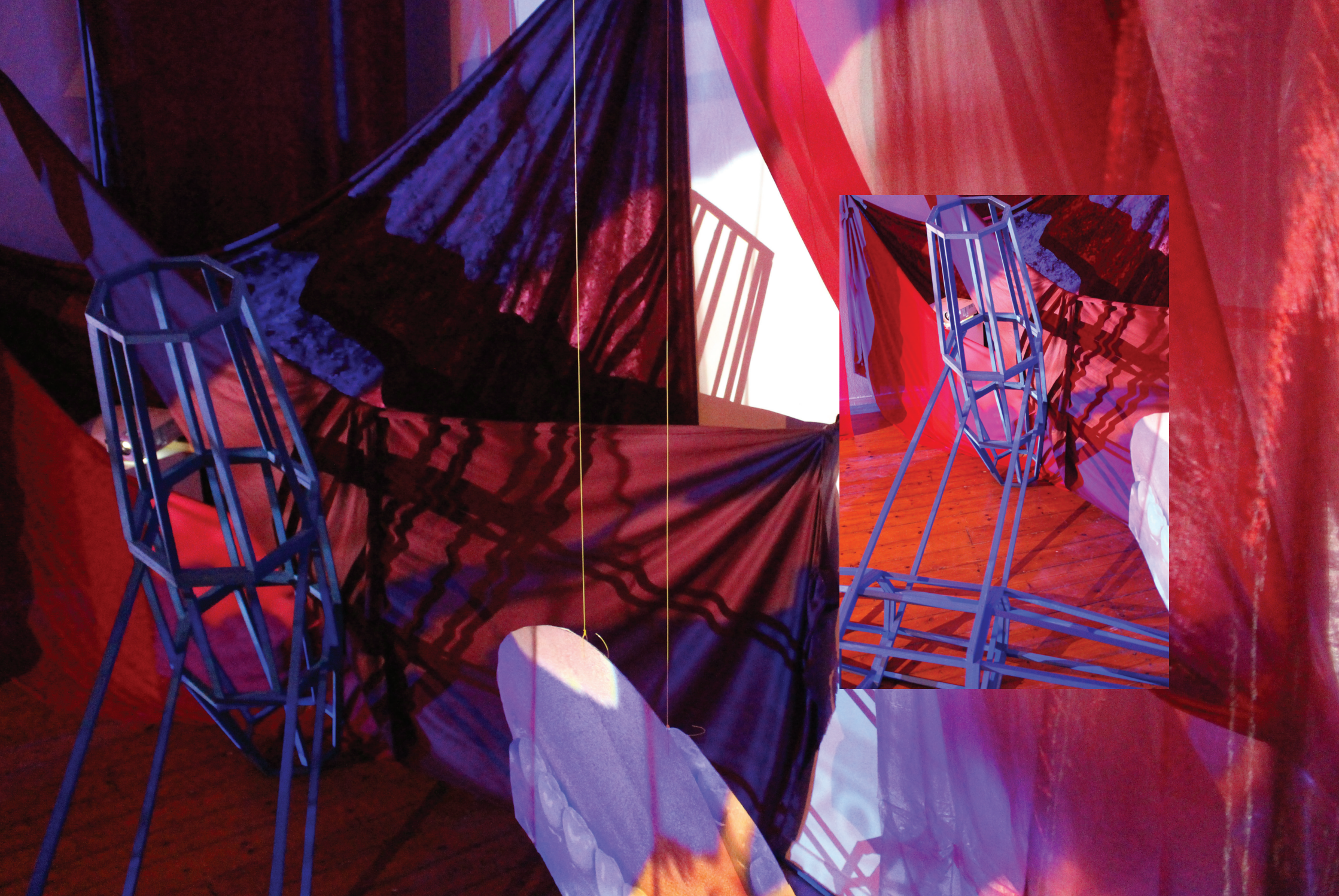
Imagine the perfect body
It is whole. It is complete.
No part of it disagrees with another.
No part is rejected.

Where is it?

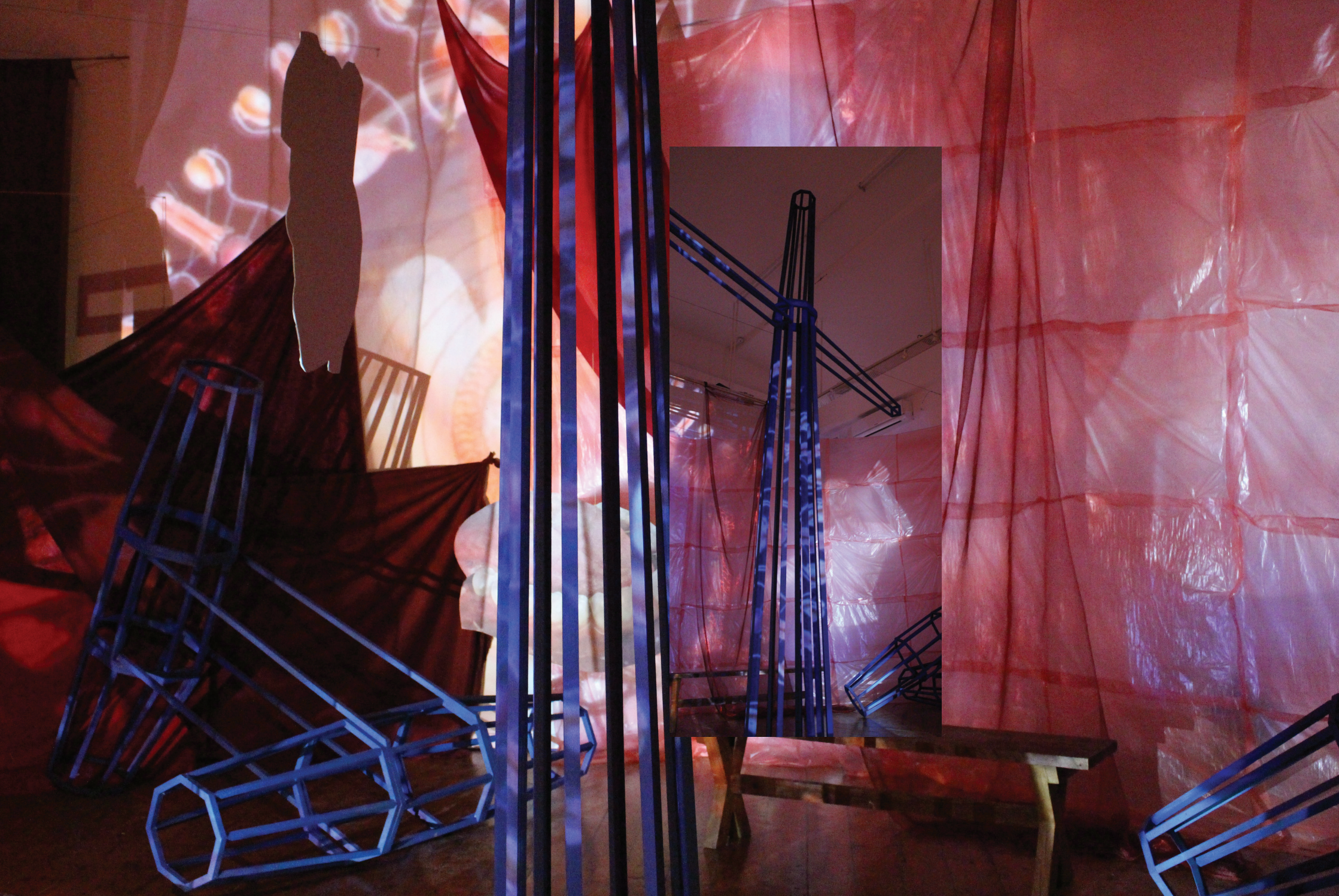
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Figure 68: Installation views of Surface Tension







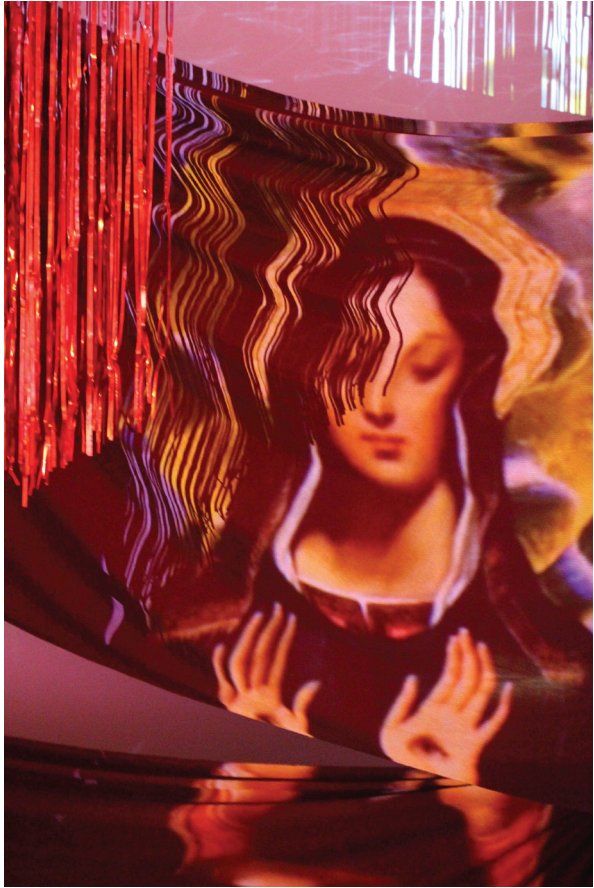










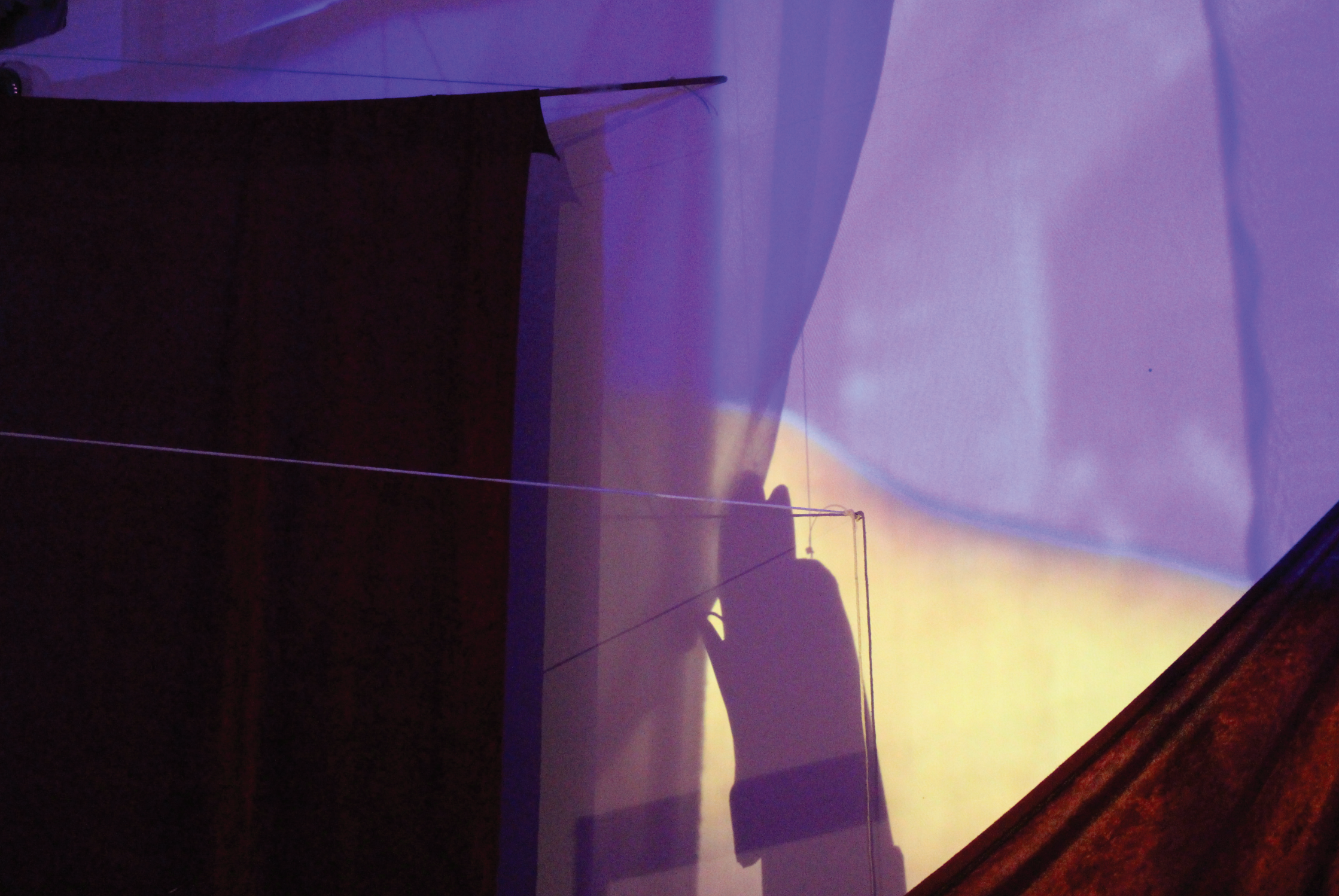




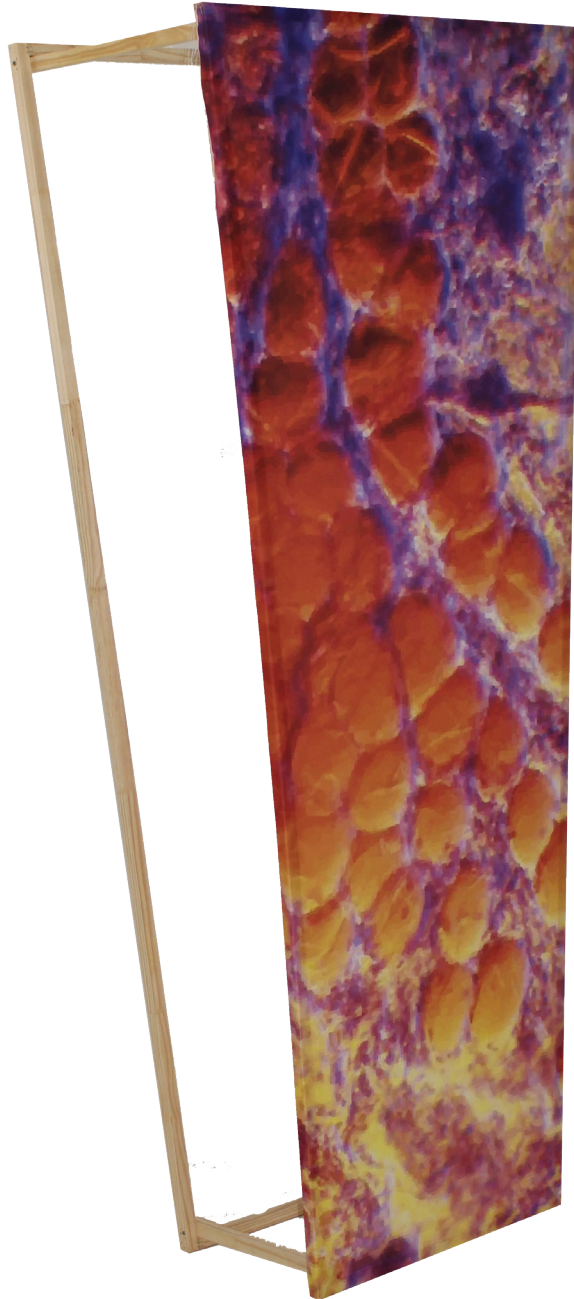








CONCLUSION



Above: Figure 69

Within this project I have tried to achieve a two-fold purpose: to illustrate the tension between the Cartesian body and its opponents in terms of a dialectic of permeability, and the relative parallels in visual representation. Cartesian bodily paradigms simultaneously prioritised the skin as the boundary of the body whilst emphasising its supposed impermeability. Representationally, this is seen in a focus on the language of wound and piercing, revealing an anxiety about the skin's rupture. Conversely, I have presented embodiment as a response to the Cartesian body. Embodiment avoids the problematic mind-body split and thus allows for more sympathetic subject-object relations. Representationally, I have explored installation as operating within a dialectic of permeability, playing host to the viewer and encouraging a holistic, embodied experience. My own work has been considered as using the bodily and permeable nature of installation as a medium to complicate the prevailing conception of the Cartesian body, primarily through the metaphor of penetration and infection.

I would like to emphasise that rather than there being a progression or evolution from a Cartesian bodily paradigm to its opposite, many aspects of both are in operation today in various ways. Consider how the advent of CoVID-19 created a hardening of national borders, disparity in healthcare, and flares in racial violence – this is the Cartesian body in full defence operation when confronted with an occurrence that completely transgresses the purportedly impermeable barriers that constitute its existence. Similarly, the digital language that predominates today draws on the borderless, heterogenous ideals of the Anti-Cartesian body-space, whilst simultaneously fulfilling Cartesianism's worrying discarding of the body by negating its necessity in the virtual realm. Consequently, conversations around permeability and porosity, not only as representational practices, but as social practices, are therefore of urgent relevance in a world determined to be defined not by hospitality, alliance, or assemblage, but by difference, exclusion, and otherness.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Close-up photo of the pores of the skin. Available: <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/gallery/how-to-mini-mise-pores> [Accessed: Aug 2022]

Figure 2: Epidermal cells under a microscope. Available: <https://lesliebaumannmd.com/the-5-layers-of-your-skin/> [Accessed: Aug 2022]

Figure 3: Fat cells under a microscope. Available: <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2012/10/104374/researchers-identify-lymph-pin-activating-brown-fat-cells> [Accessed: Aug 2022]

Figure 4: Skeletal muscle tissue under a microscope. Available: <https://createdigital.org.au/healing-muscle-tissue-cell-scaffold/> [Accessed: Aug 2022]

Figure 5: Bone tissue under a microscope. Available: <https://www.chemistryworld.com/features/building-better-bones/1010212.article> [Accessed: Aug 2022]

Figure 6 - 11: Ducray, L. 2022. *Surface Tension*. Installation views showing projections onto mesh fabric. Dimensions variable.

Figure 12: Ducray, L. 2022. *Surface Tension*. Installation views. Dimensions variable.

Figure 13: Ducray, L. 2022. *Understanding bodily permeability through visual technologies*. Digital Collage.

Figure 14: Merian, M. 1618. *Emblema II. Nutrix Ejus Terra Est*. in Maier, M. 1618 "Atalanta Fugiens" Engraving, 20cm x 20cm. As reproduced in Roos, A. 2007. *Alchemie & Mystik*. Taschen: Köln. Available: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Atalanta_Fugiens_-_Emblem_2d.jpg [Accessed: Aug 2022][Edited]

Figure 15: Toviya Kats. 1707. *Illustration of the parts of a human body compared to the sections of a house* in Hele.k ri'shon mispar ha-'olamot o ma'a' seh. toviyah, As reproduced in: Baker, Njidem & van t'Land (eds). 2012. *Medicine and Space: Body, Surroundings and Borders in the Middle Ages*. Brill: Boston.

Figure 16: Grillandi, P. ca. 1500. *Grilandas inventum libri VI*. Available: <https://pin.it/24A5iBB> [Accessed: Aug 2022]

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Figure 20: Caravaggio, M. ca. 1601. *The Incredulity of St Thomas*. Oil on canvas. 107 cm x 146 cm. Sanssouci Picture Gallery, Potsdam. Available: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas-Caravaggio_\(1601-2\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas-Caravaggio_(1601-2).jpg) [Accessed: Aug 2022][Edited]

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Figure 26: Manzoni, P. 1961. *Artist's Shit*. 90 tin cans reportedly filled with human faeces. Each 4.8 x 6.5 cm. Available: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artist%27s_Shit#/media/File:Piero_Manzoni_-_Merda_D'artista_\(1961\)_-_panoramio.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Artist%27s_Shit#/media/File:Piero_Manzoni_-_Merda_D'artista_(1961)_-_panoramio.jpg)

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Figure 30: Fontana, L. 1960. *Spatial Concept: Waiting*. Canvas. 73cm x 93cm. Tate Collection, London. Available: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/fontana-spatial-concept-waiting-t00694> [Accessed Aug 2022]

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Figure 55: Kabakov, I. 1980. *The Man Who Flew into Space from His Apartment*. Installation. Dimensions variable. Available: <https://www.wikiart.org/en/ilya-kabakov/the-man-who-flew-into-space-from-his-apartment-1984>. [Accessed: Aug 2022]

Figure 56: Eliasson, O. 2008. *Take Your Time* at Pinacoteca do Estado, São Paulo in 2011. Installation. Dimensions variable. Available: <https://olafureliasson.net/archive/artwork/WEK100351/take-your-time> [Accessed: Aug 2022]

Figure 57: Sze, S. 2013. *Triple Point (Pendulum)*. Installation. Dimensions variable. Museum of Modern Art, New York. Available: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/177636> [Accessed: Aug 2022]

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Figure 70: Ducray, L. 2022. Detail of *Exposed*. Fabric print on wooden frame. 210 x 50 cm.

Links for video works can be accessed via Instagram @studi0luke, or by contacting the artist studi00luke@gmail.com

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Figure 70

