

A close-up photograph of a human fingerprint, showing the intricate ridges and valleys. The image is centered and serves as the background for the text. The title 'SKIN TRADE' is written in a large, bold, dark red font with a white outline, positioned in the upper half of the image. The authors' names 'Larry List & Martha Wilson' are written in a smaller, bold, black font at the bottom of the image.

SKIN TRADE

Larry List & Martha Wilson

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Cover photo: Generic image of human fingerprint is a salute to Nissan's project
Premium-FEEL concept (PEEL), in which they are creating a synthetic upholstery material
with the softness, texture and warmth of human fingerprints, found to be the most satisfying surface by people.

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SKIN TRADE: A FOREWORD

In slang, the term “skin trade” refers to “any or all aspects of the burlesque, exotic dance, pornography or prostitution industries.” But, taken in parts, skin - trade, can imply many types of exchange - one made with another person, society at large, or even a private bargain made with oneself. There are many possibilities but they are almost always concerned with eros, beauty, identity, or mortality.

When one thinks of skin one can also think of flaying, scalping, scarification, tattooing, and taxidermy. Flaying, scalping, and scarification might best be left to historians documenting troubled eras and cultures of the past. Tattoos in Eastern and Western cultures constitute a major area of study, from gruesome early examples in the Wellcome Collection, London, to Belgian artist Wim Delvoye’s recent full body tattoos on sedated live pigs at his Art Farm in China. Examples of animal or bird taxidermy turn up in the work of artists such as Glenn Kaino, Petah Coyne and others and are a subject worthy of another show, entirely.

The importance of skin in our consciousness may be measured in part by how many figures of speech derive from it. Just to name a few: the Beat generation’s expression “give me some skin...” meant “greet me as an insider,” while more recent hedge funders’ demands to put some “skin in the game...” means to make a personal investment or commitment in a deal. A “skin tight” fit implies there’s nothing closer or tighter possible, while “by the skin of one’s teeth” indicates success by the thinnest margin. “Thin-skinned,” of course, means painfully sensitive while “comfortable in one’s own skin” conveys poise and a sense of ease. And, course, if one makes a bad bet, one risks “losing your skin.”

Moreover, the fact that there have been other exhibitions and publications devoted to skin is an indication of the depth and breadth of interest that the topic elicits among artists and authors, as well as the wider cultural and scientific communities. *SKIN, an artistic atlas*, was presented earlier this year at the Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, to introduce the Irish Skin Foundation and compliment a lecture series by medical doctors. The Walters Art Museum, in Baltimore offered *Touch and the Enjoyment of Sculpture*, curated by Dr. Steven Hsiao, a Johns Hopkins neuroscientist specializing in skin and the many facets of touch, and Joaneath Spicer, the Walters’ curator. *I AM ART: An expression of the Visual & Artistic Process of Plastic Surgery* was organized by Dr. Anthony Berlet, at Apex Art, to discuss and showcase Dr. Berlet’s reconstructive artistry and that of three fellow surgeons. *Borderline: Depictions of Skin*, featured the work of three painters here in New York, at Garis & Hahn Gallery. Another exhibition, *[SKIN]* was accompanied by a book of the same title, documenting seven different bodies of sculptural work, by seven different women artists all using pigskin. In actuality, the book and all of the groups of work were made by one artist, Heide Hatry, (whose family operated a pig farm), working under the guise of different creative personae.

While these other shows sprang from medical and scientific interests or inspired individual efforts, the title and direction this exhibition was sparked by the feedback loop of creative energy originating with certain artists in the 1970s liberating their imagery and themselves. Their work fueled subsequent generations of work in painting, photography, video, and performance dealing frankly with sex; beauty; age; gender; and the creation, or re-creation of identities. A current beneficiary generation of artists, steeped in a heritage of gender studies, multi-media, and performance art idioms, has created bold new work in all media, including new forms of burlesque, itself, for both straight and LGBT artists and audiences. This new/old idiom offers both a persona-driven performance model and a medium of critique of past gender dynamics - impetus for a new skin trade.

We would like to thank the many people and institutions that made this exhibition possible. First, Wendy Olsoff and Penny Pilkington for hosting the project. Annelis Beadnell, Tierney Drummond, Aaron Zimmerman, and Kelly Freeman, of PPOW, for their endless patience and tireless efforts. All of the artists who inspired the theme and shared their great work and ideas. Eugenie Tsai of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art of the Brooklyn Museum of Art; Joree Adilman of The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation; Thelma Golden of the Studio Museum of Harlem; Benneton; Paule Anglim of Gallery Paule Anglim; Brian Clamp and Julie Grahame of Clamp Art; Betty Cuningham of Betty Cuningham Gallery; Alexander Gray; Risa Needleman and Benjamin Tischer of Invisible-Exports; Sean Kelly; Elizabeth Misitano of Eli Klein Fine Art; Kimberly Davis of L.A. Louver; Mary Sabbatino of Galerie Lelong; Renee and David McKee of McKee Gallery; Alexandra Boiarsky and Fabienne Stephan of Salon 94; Stefan Stux and Andrea Schnabl of Stux Gallery; Xandra Ibarra and the Wild Theater Project; Jo Weldon and the New York School of Burlesque; Galerie Michel Rein; Georgia Scherman of Georgia Scherman Projects; and Studio Associates of New York. All images reproduced are courtesy of the artists and institutions as stated in their identifying captions, with copyright and all other rights reserved.

Martha Wilson
New York, 2013



Robert Mapplethorpe. *Man in Polyester Suit.* 1980. Gelatin silver print. 20 x 16 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of Robert Mapplethorpe and Sean Kelly Gallery. 1980 @ Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation. Used by permission.

SKIN TRADE: EROS, IDENTITY, BEAUTY, MORTALITY

LARRY LIST

EROS

Average adults have between 16 and 21 square feet of skin which may be “traded” by being displayed, offered, or denied in return for social acceptance, money, or love. Skin can be shown to indicate vulnerability, autonomy, allure, or defiance. As the bearer of nerve endings, scent glands, and sensors of touch and taste, it is the human body’s largest sex organ. Hence, it is no surprise that skin has been central whenever artists consider Eros their subject.

When he took up photography as a serious medium of expression in the early 1970’s, **Robert Mapplethorpe** began writing another chapter in the history of the nude as a formal subject, a chapter he supercharged with the erotic. “I’m looking for the unexpected...things I’ve never seen before ... I was in a position to take those pictures. I felt an obligation to do them.” He boldly shone a spotlight on aspects of gay identity and lifestyles at the same time that the AIDS crisis began to cast its shadow over the community. He crafted images that were formally elegant while simultaneously shocking, sensuous, and wickedly humorous. *Man in Polyester Suit* exemplifies these qualities.

Pictured is a black male but wearing the stereotypic “skin” of a white businessman – a polyester suit. Traditional nude torsos reveal the skin of the body and modestly shield the genitals. In this case, it is the body, instead, that is modestly clothed, while the length of the model’s ample, uncircumcised penis is gracefully exposed from the front of his trousers, revealing the model’s prominent foreskin. Mapplethorpe’s image seductively teases the viewer by literally presenting “a man in a polyester suit” (1970’s slang for a lover willing to wear a condom) with one who is not actually wearing a “skin,” slang for a condom.



Nancy Davidson blows up the zaftig female sculptural genre of Gaston Lachaise and Fernando Botero by making monumental sculpture out of air captured by a thin skin of rubber.

In her work *Blue Moon* she pours the “old wine” of the 20th century Fredrick’s of Hollywood sensuality into the “new skins” of millennially liberated feminism. Davidson’s sculpture is like Mapplethorpe’s headless torso - clothed, but with erogenous zones exposed. In this case, weather balloons, squeezed and contorted by a gigantic custom-tailored corset, suggest bulging buttocks and breasts. However, even though Davidson is “working blue” – offering sexually-freighted content in a humorous style - this is a work of a cyber-sexual era – overtly erotic but a virtual fabrication without a real human identity. Davidson makes her sculpture huge in scale not to make the viewer feel small, as past heroic sculpture did, but rather to make every view a close-up, an intimate encounter. Even though in a public space one has the

Nancy Davidson. *Blue Moon.* 1998. Latex, fabric and rope. 96 x 60 x 60 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Betty Cuningham Gallery.

same field-of-vision-filling sensory experience one would have if pressed closely against another person. Just as Davidson inflates her balloons to the point of bursting she swells the thin skin of erotic desire to the limits of absurdity.

Joan Semmel is one of the women artists who, in the early 1970s, when it was still quite taboo, set about picturing private physical pleasures on a larger than life-size, public scale. In reaction to shifting cultural and sexual mores Semmel developed a style and content that affirmed sensuality but offered a model different from either the neutered distance of traditional figure painting or the fetishized objectification of only the female body in the pin-ups, Pop art, and pornography of the day. In her ambitiously scaled 1974 oil on canvas *Intimacy-Autonomy* skin becomes landscape. Semmel boldly presents a post-coital moment of calm shared between lovers whose bodies are portrayed as monumental sensual forms stretching into a distance. They are pictured side by side unselfconsciously as equals and compliments to each other. The figures' location in a simple, ambiguous space (bed? beach? rooftop?) unmoors viewers' minds from the surrounding world just as the experience of intimacy does.



Joan Semmel. *Intimacy-Autonomy.* 1974. oil on canvas. 50 x 98 inches. Courtesy of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art of the Brooklyn Museum of Art.

Betty Tompkins.

Sex Painting #3. 2013. Acrylic on canvas. 36 x 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Like Joan Semmel, **Betty Tompkins**, too, sought a new way for women to “own” and picture their personal passions. Best known for her large, forthright close-up paintings of erogenous zones during coitus, until recently Tompkins’ works could not even be transported across international borders without being regarded as obscene material. To cool down the heat and add distance, Tompkins has rendered her subjects with photographic accuracy but in impersonal, matter-of-fact black and white. She uses an airbrush, the commercial photo retouchers’ tool more often used for painting out erogenous zones than painting them in. The same tool that is now used for spraying on sun tans and make-up is used for literally spraying on skin.



Tompkins’ works suggest tightly cropped freeze-framed details from black and white stag films of a by-gone era at the same scale that they would have been seen when projected in a movie theater. They are images pulled from sources originally fashioned for men but then firmly re-fashioned by a woman and reclaimed for all. Indeed, in *Sex Painting #3*, the artist captures a woman(?), a man and woman(?), or two women(?) with graphic clarity yet seductive ambiguity. Fingers on a thigh and a bared breast invite a universe of intimately tactile associations, reminding us that our skin is our largest and richest sense organ.



Marilyn Minter. *Wangechi Gold #4.* 2009. C-print. 60 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Salon 94.

Energetically extending the work of Joan Semmel and Betty Tompkins, **Marilyn Minter**, too, believed that women should create sexual imagery of their own. A denizen of New York's overheated club scene and an advocate of personal liberation, Minter did not think, however, that people would necessarily have "politically correct" fantasies. Hence, in the late 1970s and early 1980s she began to experiment with imagery from the fashion, advertising, and porn industries to discover if its meaning could be changed if a woman, herself, controlled the images. The resultant works, such as *Wangechi Gold #4*, are fierce and fantastic. Skin is decorated for the tribal rites of a savagely sensuous urban culture that unabashedly celebrates women's bodies. They are highly saturated color treatments of skin explosively wet with water, sweat, or champagne. Glistening with lipstick, make-up, glitter or even gold leaf, her works embody physical desire in overdrive. She focuses on sensory transition points, like the nose, mouth and the tongue where skin actively brings the outside world inside the body to be smelled, felt, and tasted. Always offering the world in larger than life, closely cropped details, Minter makes every encounter at once both intimate and overwhelming.



Katy Martin. *After Bada Shanren #2.* 2008-13. Archival digital print on rag paper. 60 x 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Like Marilyn Minter, skin is the canvas upon which **Katy Martin** works. While Minter manifests the sensuous as spectacle, Martin manifests it as spiritual. Originally interested in painting with large, expressionistic full-body gestures, by degrees Martin arrived at by putting the gestures onto the body – her own. “The figure” became “the ground.”

Her interest in gesture led her to study Chinese calligraphy, wherein painting is regarded primarily as a performance, an act. The resultant brushstrokes represent a mapping of the past energy fields of both the positive and the negative space.

Works such as *After Bada Shanren #2*, captured as large format photo images output on paper and hung unmounted and unframed on the wall, allude to the scroll paintings of the 17th century Chinese painter, Bada Shanren, a Taoist and Buddhist priest. With the bounding contours of the body cropped out, ambiguity about what is surface, what is form, allows one to become the other and the implicit sense of the space and energy to expand infinitely.



Dolores Zorreguieta. *Joined by the Head* (from the series *Monsters*). 2004. Polymer, clay, acrylic and foam. 2 ½ x 8 1/2 x 2 3/4 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

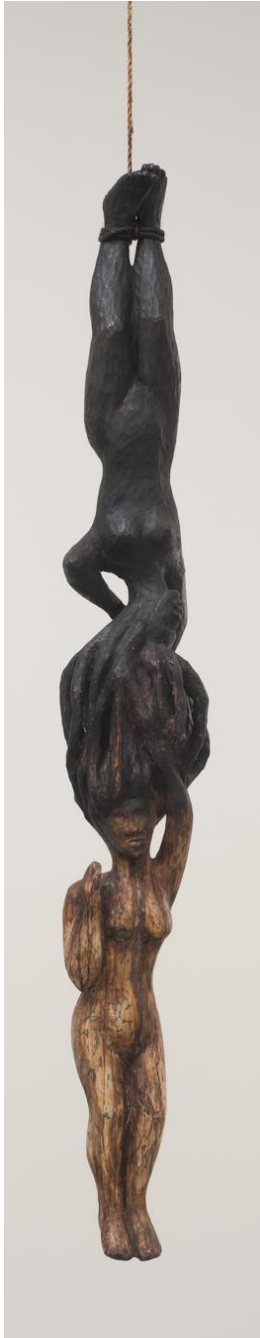
Plate 43 of Francisco Goya's famed etching series *Los Caprichos* declared that "The sleep of reason produces monsters." For Argentine artist **Dolores Zorreguieta** simulated skin that rolled, writhed, tumbled and folded in on itself produced her *Monster Series* of fleshy nightmarish works, of which *Joined at the Head* is an example. Like a teratoma, a tumor with tissue or organ components, it is skin seemingly caught up in the polymorphous perverse stage, angrily wrestling itself into existence, sprouting vestigial digits and baby-toothed vaginal mouths that threaten to devour themselves or each other. It is an accumulation of details and parts we know but that do not add up to any whole we can yet recognize. It is a fierce expression of human emotions without a recognizable human identity. Despite this, with skin so like our own, it is hard not to be drawn into this furious concentration of undirected violence, unresolved conflicts. In this work human desire gone wrong is condensed into a vulnerable child-scaled tantrum.

IDENTITY

There are many aspects to identity but none has the immediacy and impact of our skin. Some artists assert and celebrate their identity via their skin while others regard it as a territory of question, mystery, and doubt. One's skin can be the canvas upon which one's identity – either real or imagined – can be built. It can be the tell-tale surface one wants to deny, sacrifice, or camouflage.

SKIN COLOR & IDENTITY

From the “one drop” rule of hypodescent in the past to the racial profiling controversies of today no issue of identity and skin remains as contentious as color-as-identity and its use as a basis for discrimination and hierarchies of privilege. Between races, crude slang terms for Black, Asian, and Latin are used to set up false boundaries, while within a race terms like “high yellow,” “Louisiana creole,” “free person of color,” and “paper bag party,” at times further divide a people against themselves. Authors Edward Ball, Cynthia Carr, Henry Louis Gates, Bliss Broyard, and others have meditated on how willingness to exploit these intra-racial differences have enabled some people to “pass” as white and enjoy greater opportunities to travel, work, and live beyond the limitations imposed on Black society.



In works such as *High Yallah*, *Pallor Tricks*, and *Blonde Dreams* Los Angeles artist **Alison Saar** has made her subject the contra-dictions, secrets, scandals, and surprises that arise while in the world “incognegro.” Her work is based on observations made and knowledge gained from lived experience in the African American community. Saar’s mother, Betye Saar, is a prominent African American artist, however, Alison’s rough-hewn woodcarving technique and vernacular materials choices stem from her work with African tribal sculpture alongside her late father, a white conservator of art objects.

In *Dark Roots*, the thick black locks of an inverted Black nude female figure are tightly interwoven with that of a high yallah, or white female figure. Tar and plaster, polar opposites, color this work. Tar, which always softens when heat is applied, is known for its “pitch blackness,” its role in the “tar baby” children’s story, and the brutal practice of tarring and feathering in lieu of lynching. Plaster, known for its “whiteness,” and its ubiquity in covering things over, begins as powder but dries hard and brittle. Unable to bend, it can only break. Yet in this work neither figure is only one color or the other. They were originally carved from the same piece of wood and it is the artist who has applied different colors, just as society applies racial differences. In *Dark Roots*, where more than “one drop” of dark tar has hypo-descended down through the hair of the lighter figure, there are not different races, but rather, race as a continuum, with each becoming the other, with mysterious beginnings leading to ambiguous ends.

While Alison Saar’s work examines the idea of one skin color passing for another and *COLORS Magazine’s* *Racial Facials* propose people changing races, **Beverly McIver’s** *Praise the Lord* from her *Loving in Black/White* Series offers hypothetical situations where racial identities are dramatically reinforced and traditional hierarchies are undermined or reversed. In her 2003 oil and watercolor painting *Holding My Baby* McIver presents a black housekeeper wearing blackface, sitting regally with white gloves and a fan in a throne-like winged armchair, smiling, and staring heavenward as if rejoicing. A despondent young white woman, possibly her mistress/employer, who is wearing white-face, subserviently kneels, resting her head on her servant’s knee and humbly touching the hem of her garment while holding in her arms a black doll wearing a red checked dress identical to that of the housekeeper. Here, skin-based stereotypes crumble as each figure “holds her baby,” embracing her opposite, as dominant and subservient roles are reversed.

Alison Saar. *Dark Roots.* 1999. Wood, plaster, tar, rope and paint. 72 x 9 x 10 inches. Courtesy of the artist and L.A. Louver.



Beverly McIver. *Praise the Lord.* 2003. Oil & watercolor on paper. 30 x 42 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Betty Cunningham Gallery.

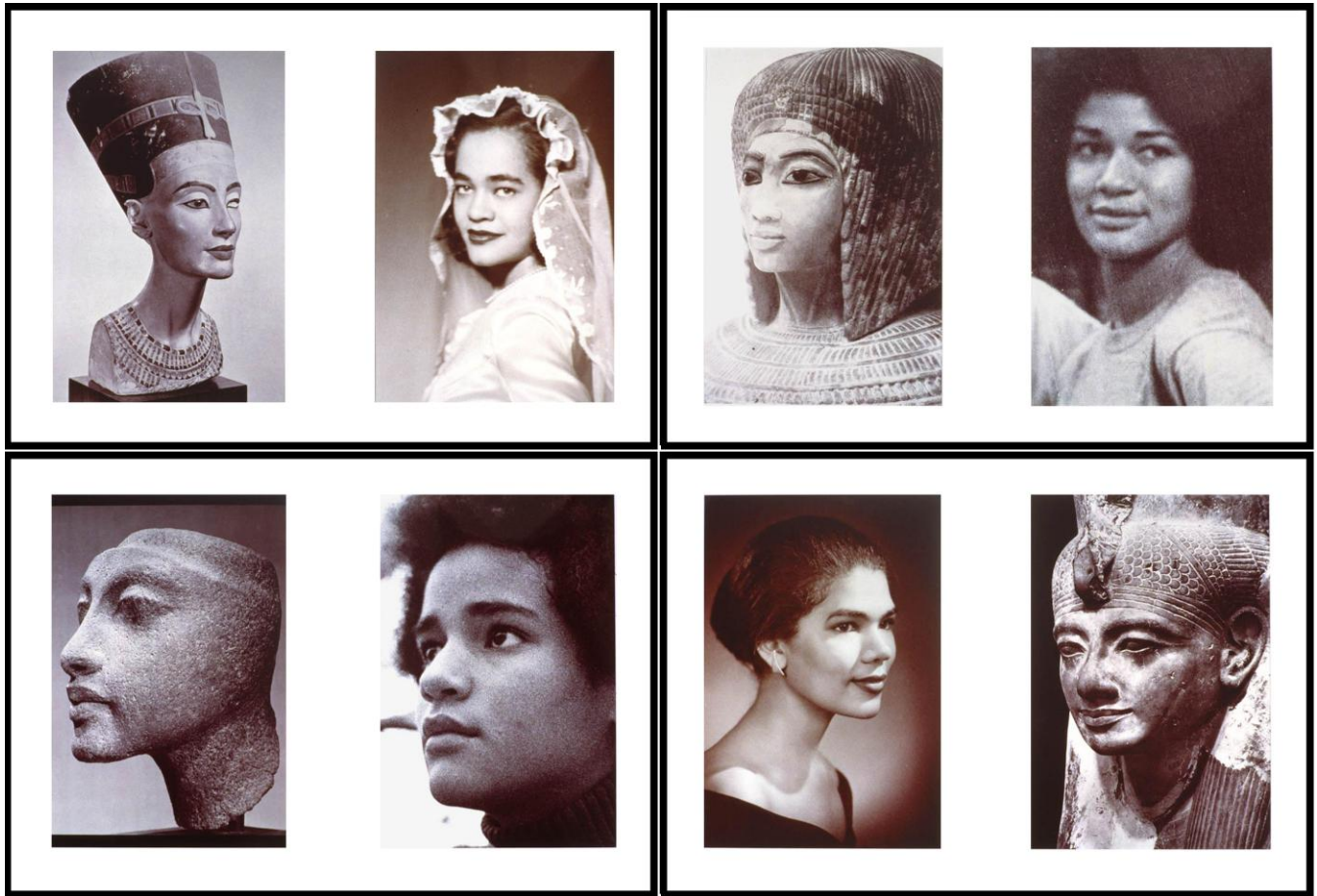
The idea of one race becoming another was also the subject of the late Hungarian-born graphic designer Tibor Kalman's of *Racial Facials*. Kalman commissioned this work from Site One New York, a pioneering computer-imaging studio in 1994 when he was Editor-in-Chief of *COLORS MAGAZINE*. Published by Benetton, the *COLORS* mandate was to be a magazine "about the rest of the world." Printed in multiple languages, it was distributed to youth worldwide to stimulate multiculturalism and social awareness. In the series officially titled "What If," uncannily manipulated color photos presented Queen Elizabeth as Polynesian; Arnold Schwarzenegger as Black; Spike Lee and Michael Jackson as Caucasian; and Pope John Paul II as Asian without changing their recognizable identities. Almost twenty years later, these chameleon-skinned images continue to circulate globally, challenging peoples' core beliefs and confounding their expectations about race.



Racial Facials. Arnold Schwarzenegger (l.) Spike Lee (r.). COLORS Magazine. United Colors of Benetton. 1994. Printed mass-circulation magazine pages. 11 3/4 x 10 3/4 inches each. Private Collection.

Skin color as an indication of racial status framed in the context of cultural heritage/lineage is also the interest of Boston-born, West Indian artist **Lorraine O'Grady**. An example of this is her work *Sisters*, a set of four paired images of the artist's deceased older sister Devonia and the empress Nefertiti exhibited as a quadriptych museum piece. The work itself has a complicated three generation reverse "family" genealogy, with these four pieces having descended from the 16 diptychs of a 1994 gallery photo-installation, *Miscegenated Family Album*, which, in turn, had been drawn from 65 pairs of projected images in the artist's 1980 *Nefertiti/Devonia Evangeline* performance.

With prior experience as an intelligence analyst, a literary translator, and music critic it is natural that the artist would not present images singly, but, in pairs as examples for comparison, or as one in relation to an earlier one, by generational descent. O'Grady makes her sister Devonia's story a translation of Neferiti's story with comparisons and parallels: both women got married when young, were admired and respected beauties, were subsequently attacked by younger sisters, died at the same age, and were posthumously exalted and mourned. O'Grady presents a narrative without words in which the personal is translated from the skin in the form of the political and historical.



Lorraine O'Grady. *Sisters* (from the *Misegenerated Family Album*). 1994. Paired C-prints. 20 x 16 inches, each. Courtesy of the Studio Museum of Harlem: Gift of Peg Alston Collection.

Rather than identifying the points of friction or conflict between skin colors and races, **Nancy Burson** has instead contributed calming, leveling effects by enabling people to see themselves in others. She has done so by way of the influential computer image-morphing systems which she has been devising ever since her earliest collaborations with M.I.T. computer scientists in the early 1980s. Her *Age Machine* program, which graphically



Nancy Burson. *Mankind*. 2003. Color coupler print. 14 x 11 inches.
Courtesy of the artist and ClampArt.

shows progressive aging in faces, has helped police and other agencies identify lost persons or criminals on the lam who have been missing for years.

Since 1999, Burson has toured college campuses with her feature-morphing computer program, *The Human Race Machine*, which allows people to see themselves transfigured into other ethnicities. In 2000 Burson specifically created *What Would You Look Like as Another Race?* for the Millenium Dome in London. In her 2003 version of the work *Mankind*, first conceived of in the 1980s, Burson creates an accurate unity of the races portrait by compositing Asian, Caucasian, and Black features, weighted according to world population statistics. Her work repeatedly reminds society that there is no gene for race, that it is a social construct, not a biological one.

Skin has been the ever-present medium with which to create and explore the limits and meanings of identities, both real and imagined, as in the work of Lynn Hershman Leeson, Martha Wilson, Heide Hatry, and ORLAN.



Lynn Hershman Leeson . *Roberta's Construction Chart #2*. 1975. Digital pigment print. 19 ¾ x 25 inches.
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Paule Anglim.

Roberta's Construction Chart #2, created by **Lynn Hershman Leeson** as part of a project running from 1974 to 1978, is a prime example of identity mapping using skin. It is a central planning document used by the artist to annotate every possible facial detail necessary to make a totally new identity, the fictional, now legendary, Roberta Breitmore.

Though the creation of false identities had been used widely by agents in World War II, F.B.I. COINTELPRO infiltrators and the Department of Justice Witness Protection Program, Hershman Leeson was among the first feminist artist practitioners of identity-creation. Like the Federal government, the artist started with the skin, building an alter ego with cosmetics, hair color, and clothes, then adding addresses, bank accounts, driver's licenses, credit cards, and a psychological profile.

Hershman Leeson "became" Roberta Breitmore in 1974, just as political activist Abby Hoffman, convicted of a drug charge, skipped bail, had cosmetic surgery, and began living under an assumed identity as an environmental activist and travel writer (until 1980). Hoffman had a vast support system while Hershman Leeson worked as a courageous, quick-witted solo act, playing the mythical roles of both the sculptor-king Pygmalion/Lynn and the beloved statue-come-to-life, Galatea/Roberta. Unlike Hoffman, she escaped nothing but confronted everything as she singlehandedly explored the boundaries and implications of a self-created alter ego.

Like Lorraine O'Grady, **Martha Wilson** has been concerned with the historical interpreted through the personal. Her past work has involved "getting under the skin" of others via impersonation of historical figures Barbara Bush, Nancy Reagan, and Tipper Gore. Coupled with her critique of character(s), Wilson has conducted an ongoing investigation of "myths about beauty."

In her multi-panel photo/text work *America the Beautiful* Martha Wilson sardonically uses her talent to assume a surprising identity to explore yet another myth about beauty. She weds her own skin and physical identity to that of her beautiful country. The artist chose *America the Beautiful* because it has inherent ties to the female. The melody was originally entitled *Materna*, and it became the tune for *O Mother Dear, Jerusalem* which personified the female as a celebrated holy site.

Furthermore, the lyrics were written by Katharine Lee Bates, an English professor at Wellesley, a liberal college for women. Though fashioned by females in 1895, it was conservative male "patriots" who first popularized the song and conservatives, as recent as Mitt Romney, who continue to exalt it to this day.

These lyrics, so beloved by men, objectify America, feature by feature, just as males have long objectified women's bodies, feature by feature. As the lyrics dissect and praise the landscape, the artist personally analyzes and anatomizes the lyrics. Panel by colorful panel, lyric by romantic lyric, Wilson replaces the skin of the earth with the skin of the artist, challenging a country founded by witch-hunting Puritans to re-envision itself as at least 50 % female; honest flesh and blood.



Martha Wilson. *America the Beautiful.* 2013. C-prints. Eight images, each 24 x 15 3/4 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PPOW.

Rudimentary forms of reconstructive surgery and cosmetic, or plastic surgery, have been practiced as long ago as 800 BC, though modern reconstructive surgery, as the discipline we recognize today, had its origins during WW I. It offers significant benefit to individuals born with birth defects, those whom have suffered accidents, or have undergone major surgeries. Each decade more procedures have been perfected and have gained mainstream acceptance. In the United States in 2010, alone, there were over 9.3 million reconstructive and cosmetic procedures performed, of which 1.6 million were surgical.

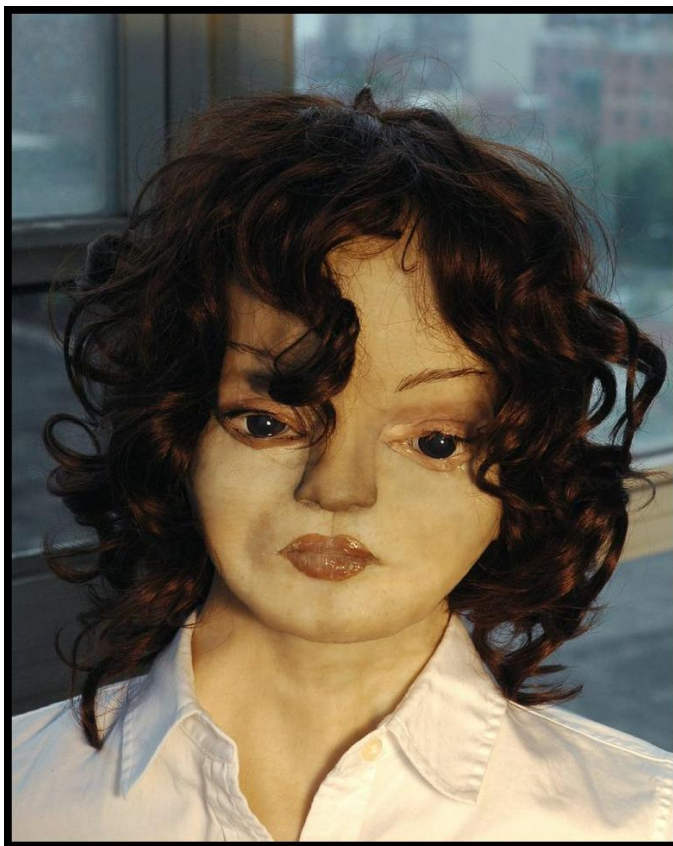
Medical engineering has found ways to sample the genetic material of burned or otherwise injured people and rapidly “grow” sheets of compatible replacement skin for them in the laboratory. Nissan Motors is designing a synthetic car upholstery with the look and feel of human skin. Combining bio-engineering and 3-D digital printing technologies med-tech pioneers are now able to use bio-media infused with individuals’ genetic material to digitally “build” body surfaces, features of cartilage and soft flesh based on MRIs of peoples’ bodies. Soon, “simulacrum” will not be a term of art theory but, rather, another category of consumer product.

Artists continue to innovatively use skin as a creative and expressive medium for the literal construction or reconstruction of identity. Some, like Heide Hatry, choose to work “hands-on” themselves, while others, like ORLAN, employ top experts and the newest technology to help them realize their goals.

The German-born artist **Heide Hatry** chooses to practice her personal artistry using pigskin and animal organs as her creative medium. In her *Heads and Tales Series*, she masterfully clad sculpted clay portrait busts of women with untreated pigskin, inset pigs’ eyes, and crafted lush pink lips of fresh red meat. Carefully clothed, with attractive wigs and make-up, and “brought to life” in photographs, these women were introduced to society by Hatry with the help of respected authors who then created an entire persona for each sculpture in a short story format displayed in tandem with the portrait photos.

Like the most famous use of skin in 20th century sculpture, Duchamp’s *Étant Donnés*, our view of these women is tightly controlled. However, while Duchamp offered an anonymous naked body with no head (but cast from a living person), Hatry offers clothed heads with no bodies, (from the imagination), but with elaborately fabricated identities.

Hatry’s women exist in what computer animators and robotics labs refer to as “the uncanny valley,” the nadir of humans’ comfort level with human replicas that look almost, but not perfectly real, and trigger intense alternating waves of attraction and repulsion. They raise concerns about the imperfections, dangers, frailties, and the ultimate transience of human life. With these eerie works Hatry challenges us to consider anew where the boundaries of art and humanity lie.



Mimi contemplates the word fame while pouring herself the second to last bit of precious fuel from her stash in the freezer. On the rocks, garnished with a twist, the premium-blend tastes dangerous and smooth. Mimi relishes each oily sip of her cocktail, fights the urge to guzzle it down. Cost of gas rising, prices highest they've ever been on the day the gorgeous young actor decides to kill himself, the same day Mimi filches the shipping box from Mrs. Schnabel's recycling bin and makes a bed for the dying animal. The dead actor is famous. The dying animal in Mimi's overheated apartment is not. There is no product to be found in all of Manhattan or Brooklyn, or any other borough, for that matter. One shimmering drop left in the humming fridge. Mimi licks her lips, fights the urge to swoon. She flips open her cell, rereads last week's text message from Bobby: Bitch b cool Cuzn of mines 2 fuckin bad. Bad bad not good bad. Fnd nu srs. Dnt panic. Then he sent one more, seconds later, before disappearing for good: I wl mis u. The days fly by. So much work and nothing to do. Mimi lights up one of those small Cuban girlie cigars, a cherished souvenir from Bobby's many clandestine trips to Bobby-wouldn't-say-where. Even after all these months, the cigar tastes fresh. She stares out the window at the shell of a high-rise luxury loft condo being built across the street. Each floor starting at six point six. Rooftop gym, spa, pool, garage, natch. Doorman, valet service, 24-hour concierge, no brainer. The architect's famous and Dutch. Mimi's view of the river's now blocked, but so what? Mimi's always avoided looking at that river; the river reminds her too much of the greasy oceans beyond. Mimi chides herself for getting morose. One shimmering drop left in the humming fridge; take it slow and easy, Mimi. And speaking of fame, just like that most famous of famous Lorca poems about death – Mimi glances at the clock and cheers up. Five in the afternoon. At five in the afternoon, exactly five in the afternoon... Lorca's hypnotic lament conjures the image of a young matador being gored by a Lydian bull. Five in the afternoon. Mimi takes another hit off the dainty cigar and wonders why she can't remember any other lines from the poem. Five in the afternoon. At exactly five in the afternoon! You're such a drama queen, Mimi. Mimi It's All About Me-Me! Why the tears? You don't know any matadors. You never knew that poor, dead actor. Cost of gas rising. And rising. The animal crawls out of the shipping box, huge glassy eyes fixed on Mimi. It howls. It stinks. It's time. It's really dying. I can't help you, Mimi says. She's the squeamish-type. Never mind the low-budget slasher films she concocts with such glee. You've seen the trailers. Supermodels trapped in desolate hostels in the Black Forest. Trembling jocks strapped down and eviscerated. Mimi's an auteur, so good at dreaming up genius scenarios. Next time you invite her to a dinner party? Watch the way she suddenly stops eating. Watch the way she flings her knife and fork, aiming straight for your face. The cutlery flung with such élan! But when it comes to a suffering animal, the chick's a wuss. Mimi stubs the cigar out in the sink. Restarts her computer. DISCUSS. SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS, urge the online bulletin boards. Sad. Tragic actor guy. So young! R.I.P. How could you? Oh, man. You were the source of our national pride. LIKELY A SUICIDE OR ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSE. The headlines confuse and contradict just minutes and seconds after the famous actor's corpse is discovered by his tantric masseuse. Mimi turns the flatscreen TV on, turns up the volume to drown out the sounds of the dying animal. Apparently, the actor's body has not been removed from the building. Apparently, the Tantric masseuse had a key. Apparently, the Tantric masseuse, the one carrying an umbrella and a set of keys, slips out the side exit while no one is looking and hails the first available taxi. Police barricades hold back the growing mob of grieving fans. Hundreds and thousands of them, patient and determined. I am here to bear witness, a woman announces for the cameras. A man dressed like an arctic explorer shakes his head and murmurs. Unreal. This is so unreal. At five in the afternoon. At exactly five in the afternoon. Mimi's gaze wanders past the dying animal, the ticking clock, over to the ancient, humming fridge. That last, odorless, shimmering teardrop, waiting. Mimi must decide. And soon.

Heide Hatry. *Heads and Tales Series: Mimi.* (with story by Jessica Hagendorn). 2008 – 2009. Silver Halide prints of image and short story texts. 31 1/2 x 43 inches framed together. Courtesy of the artist and Stux Gallery.



ORLAN. *Omnipresence: Seventh Surgery Performance in The Reincarnation of Saint-ORLAN or Images New Image(s)Series. Omnipresence I.* New York, November 21, 1993. Produced and directed by ORLAN. 37 min. AND *Omnipresence II.* Paris Centre Pompidou. November 21, 1993. Produced by ORLAN. Co-Directed by ORLAN & Christian Vanderborgh. 44 minutes. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Michel Rein.

The French artist **ORLAN** is not interested in beauty but in the mutability of identity. Her work has been an intense, on-going exploration of the status of the (female) body using every available art medium and advance in technology. Her view of the body as “a ‘modified ready-made,’ no longer seen as the ideal” led her to pioneer the use of plastic surgery on her own skin as an art medium from 1990 to the present.

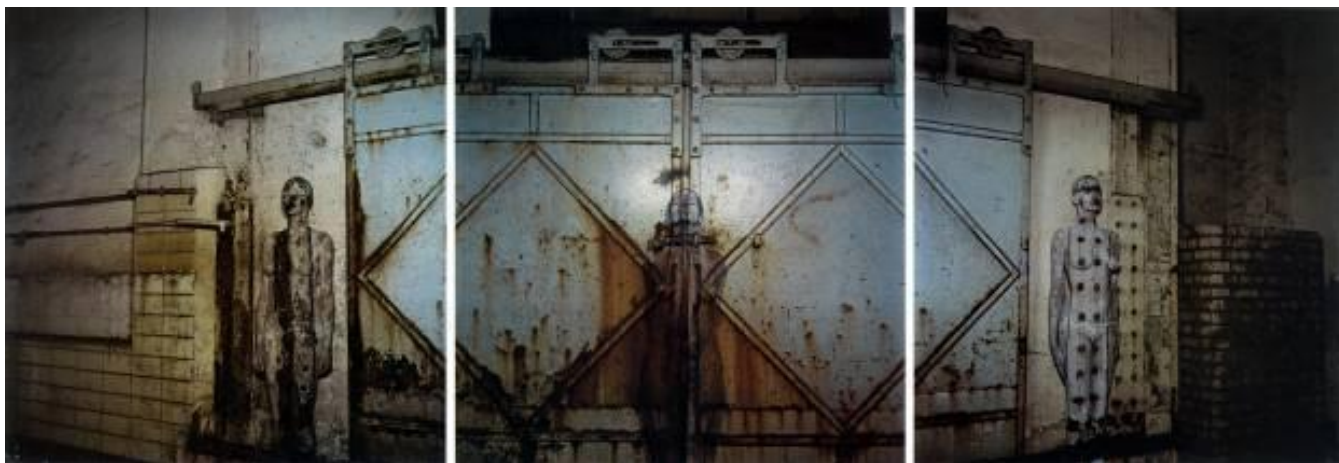
The Reincarnation of Saint-Orlan project has been a boundary-breaking series of major surgeries by which ORLAN acquired the ideal facial features as had been painted by past male artists: the lips of François Boucher’s Europa; the chin of Botticelli’s Venus; the eyes of French Fontainebleau depictions of Diana; the nose of Jean-Leon Gerome’s Psyche; the forehead of Leonardo’s Mona Lisa. During these and subsequent operations, each of which was structured around a specific philosophical text, the artist has remained conscious and in dialogue with discussants in the operating room and at distant global sites who were linked by real-time video feeds of

the operations. With primary emphasis not on the result, but rather the surgical process, and her documentation of it, ORLAN has initiated discussion of the modifiable body as a site of mutating identity, notions of self-sacrifice and reincarnation, the differing male and female definitions of beauty, attitudes toward aesthetic (plastic) surgery and a myriad of other attendant ethical questions.

While artists such as Hatry and ORLAN may use skin as a medium for the creation, or the on-going mutation of totally new identities, techniques of alteration are used by other artists either to eradicate identity or to integrate themselves more seamlessly into the fabric of society.

In the 1960's the German **Vera Lehndorff**, known as Veruschka, was the world's most famous model, shown in every magazine, shot by every photographer and screened in films by Warhol, Dali, and Antonioni. Shuttled from city to city, surrounded constantly by a crush of people, Veruschka became exhausted with her own image and identity.

In 1970 Lehndorff began a series of radical performance collaborations with German painter and photographer **Holger Trülzsch**. Like those of Ana Mendieta, they were executed in private, documented in photos, and involved her naked figure alone, embedded into environments to the point of disappearing. The sites were remote or abandoned. The most dramatic of these works, *THE Oxydationen* series, were executed in 1978 in the labyrinthine fish market in Hamburg. There Lehndorff stood, like the martyr Saint Sebastian, stalk-still against crumbling walls for hours as Trülzsch painted her skin to seamlessly match her surroundings, then photo-documented her in situ.



Veruschka Lehndorff & Holger Trülzsch *Triptych. Bricked-in Iron Beam. Left side of door; Barred Sliding Door to the Old Fish Market; Bricked-in Iron Beam. Right side of door.* 1978. Catalog reproductions of 16 x 15 ¾ inch original dye transfer prints. *Oxydationen.* 1985. 3 page fold-out in 8 ½ x 8 ½ inch photo catalog. 20 pages with essay by Robert Hughes. Pub. By Bette Stoler Gallery. 1985. Private Collection.

This particular triptych composition suggests a crucifixion, with Lehndorff as both flanking thieves and central savior. Each appears bolted to the wall and soon to disintegrate, as the surroundings have. The fish market site suggests the sacrificial Galilean fisherman, but also bears an important similarity to the fashion industry of Lehndorff's past. Both were involved with the quick sale of fresh goods whose beauty and value were fleeting and subject to rapid decay. Through their shared willingness to sacrifice more superficial "skin-deep" forms of beauty, Trulezsch and Lehndorff succeeded in creating images that were profound gestures of self-abnegation and self-effacement. As the model elegantly vanished into her surroundings deeper beauties emerged.



Liu Bolin. *Hiding in New York No. 7 - Made in China*. 2012. Color photograph. 44 1/4 x 59 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Eli Klein Fine Art.

Some 40 years later, the same “rendering into environment” technique employed by Trulezsch and Lehndorff is being used to different ends by the Chinese artist **Liu Bolin** in his ambitious *Hidden in the City* series of color photos taken in China, New York and a growing number of other locations.

While Trulezsch and Lehndorff worked against being known to millions, Bolin strives to become better known, exhausted by the anonymity that he and the contemporary arts community experience relative to the burgeoning Chinese society at large. While Trulezsch and Lehndorff labored together alone, with every detail of the scene painstakingly rendered onto Lehndorff’s naked skin as she stood in place for hours, Bolin employs a Warholian “factory” approach with studio assistants pre-painting outfits to match chosen scenes to slip into right before the photo is taken. While Veruschka submerged herself in sites of emptiness, Bolin interjects himself with Zelig-like energy into the most famous, or generic public sites. Choosing high-visibility locales in which to be barely visible, he pictures himself, shedding one chameleon-like skin after another, in crowded urban environments or in the deluge of consumer goods that his country produces and our country so readily consumes.



Suzy Lake. *Co-Ed Magazine #3*. 1973. Reprinted in 1998. Selenium-toned gelatin silver print. 14 x 11 inches. From the *Co-Ed Magazine Series* of five images: #1, #2, #3, #4, #5. Courtesy of the artist and Georgia Scherman Projects.

BEAUTY

In many societies, beauty leads to wider acceptance. It enhances earnings and status, grants privilege and, erroneously, even contributes to the estimate of one's intelligence and credibility. Our skin is the primary means of presenting our health and attractiveness visually, tactilely, and aromatically. Hence, our attentiveness to the maintenance and decoration of our skin and our awareness of the age and appearance of others' skin is a primal, often sub-conscious concern. In 2011, people in the United States, alone, spent almost fifty-four billion dollars on cosmetics and skin care products.

The skin of the human face is often regarded as the ground zero of human identity. Aesthetically, medically, forensically, and emotionally, it is the most studied part of the body. It is the prime terrain upon which people, and artists, most often project their fantasies and map their plans for self-improvement.

Known for such works as her 1974 ninety-frame color photo storyboard, *A Genuine Simulation*, picturing herself repeatedly applying make-up, Toronto artist **Suzy Lake** uses the portrait genre to explore and critique the subject of beauty and identity. In her *Co-Ed Magazine* series she satirically employs whiteface make-up as a conduit to beauty. Offering yearbook portrait style poses wearing stucco-thick whiteface the artist parodies two time periods at once: a specific era, the 1970s, and the formative years in young women's lives when they try on alternative identities, looking for a "fit" that society might approve of and that they can stand to inhabit. By re-photographing photomontages of herself, Lake performs a type of cosmetic plastic surgery, with camera and cosmetics. Mimicking the clipping and combining of childhood paper doll-play, she seamlessly fit hairstyles from 70s fashion magazines onto self-portrait photos, (and presaged by five years the controversial Rolling Stones' *Some Girls* album cover, that clumsily fit ladies' hairdos onto the rock stars' heads).

In Lake's images, the exuberance of youth is ratcheted up to manic intensity, held in check by the make-up, which functions as a theatrical "neutral mask." The fashion equation of "more make-up means more beauty" is pushed to the point of absurdity. Like a classic mime, in one image, Lake communicates thoughtful concern; in another she tentatively begins to form a heart with her hands; while in a third she purses lips to make cheeks bulge to the point of exploding in laughter, impatience, or rage. The caked-on whiteface creates tension between a feigned desire to offer oneself to the world looking one's best and the equally strong desire to protect ones' true self from embarrassment, safely concealed behind a thick, protective second skin.



Elana Katz. *Color Me Clear.* Video of 2011 Performance. 2011. Abramovic Studio at Location One, NYC. Performance duration: 6 hours. Video: 7:37 minutes. Cosmetics offset onto canvas. Set of 8 canvases from series of 144. 10 x 8 inches each. Courtesy of the artist.

In *Color Me Clear*, her six hour long performance, **Elana Katz** used the skin of her own face as her subject, her canvas, and her brush by repeatedly painting her face with make-up and transferring it, one canvas at a time, to a grid of 144 identical, face-scaled canvases on the gallery floor. Katz worked alone at first but then with an audience, occasionally breaking her pattern to offset her face onto that of a random onlooker – an intensely physical but not erotic experience with no eye contact.

Katz's process recalls early humans' urge to press soot-covered hands onto cave walls, Surrealists' decalcomania transfer of images from canvas to canvas, and Yves Klein's Anthropometric Paintings performances using naked women as "human paintbrushes." Closer, though, are the Study for Skin drawings Jasper Johns made by pressing his baby-oil-coated face and hands onto sheets of paper later dusted with graphite to reveal his image. Katz's imprints also suggest the smeared, expressionistic portraits of Chaim Soutine, and Francis Bacon's intimate self-portrait heads that merged movements. All capture evanescent emotional states, more than likenesses.

Does Katz consider a woman's face a "tabula rasa" that needs an identity literally "made up," ie. "created from the imagination?" Do the hours of performance reflect the hours in a woman's life devoted to her imagined social obligation to "put on her face" before appearing in public? Does the repetitive applying and blotting suggest the frustration and doubt that it can ever be perfect enough? The rage at having to try again and again?

As Katz re-addresses her skin/mirror/canvas, is she mythical Narcissis, fallen in love with his/her own image? Practicing transference by redirecting unconscious feelings toward a new object? Or enacting an elaborate Zen ritual of self-effacement – making oneself indistinct by wearing away the surface, making oneself modestly or shyly inconspicuous?

Human skin varies in thickness from four millimeters on the palms and soles of the feet to a mere one half millimeter around the eyes and face. This explains why wrinkles appear first on the face. As wrinkles appear on the skin, concern with beauty becomes entwined with concern with aging.

Western ideals of beauty originate from a Greek term, *hōra*, variously defined as “being of one’s hour,” being “youthful,” and “ripe old age,” together intimating that neither someone young trying to be older nor someone old trying to be younger would achieve beauty. The Greeks also stressed symmetry and “average-ness” of features and proportions as elements of ideal beauty. Smoothness and youthfulness round out the qualities passed down from antiquity in the West.

Looking to Eastern cultures, the art of origami and the concepts of *kintsugi* and *wabi-sabi* are also of interest in regard to age and beauty. In origami, a sheet of paper is regarded as blank until it has undergone meaningful creasing and folding that imbue it with distinctive character, identity, and form. *Kintsugi* is the Japanese method of repairing broken ceramics by gluing the seams back together with gold-infused lacquer. The more golden seams, the greater beauty and dignity. Highly sought for the tea ceremony, such pieces embody *wabi-sabi*, the beauty of imperfection which heightens awareness of life’s transience. *Sabi* is the specifically appreciated form of beauty achieved only over time and through evidence of wear.

In terms of skin and age, one lives on a continuum of trading – ever wanting to exchange what one has for what one wants, or wants to recover. The young yearn for maturity, the mature lament lost youth. Some long to make the evidence of years vanish while others link wrinkles to age and age to beauty.

The work of **Bonnie Rychlak** is informed by the Modernist furniture, swimming pools and the body-conscious beach culture of southern California, where she was born and raised and by her life-long study of Japanese art and culture.

Composed of a chrome lamp stand, a make-up mirror, a metal ring and a swimming pool drain, Rychlak’s sculpture *Vanity* is as cryptic an amalgam as a Zen koan. Each component is hard, precise, reflective, and recognizable in contrast to the fleshy amorphous beeswax form into which they are all embedded.

Supported by the lamp stand, this ambiguous collapsing skin-colored ball suggests a rubber bathing cap, a shrinking, wrinkling once-taut head or body part (A lung? A breast? A heart? A limb?), or a human brain losing crenellations. Any glimpse in the mirror draws the viewer into a riveting, *Dorian Gray*-like meditation on the transience of beauty and the certainty of its passing.



Bonnie Rychlak. *Vanity.* 2011. Beeswax, metal frame, drains, and mirror. 20 x 16 x 8 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Robin Williams. *The Artist as her Future Self.* 2012. Acrylic on canvas.
24 x 24 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PPOW.

Many artists wait until maturity to look back upon youth and beauty, but in her 2011 painting, *The Artist as her Future Self*, the then 27 year old artist **Robin Williams** attempted to “reconcile the inevitability of aging with the anxiety most women (myself included) have been taught to feel.” To picture herself older she composited images of herself, her mother, and grandmother Dexterous as a facial surgeon, Williams operated a fine-pointed dental grinder on the skin of a special canvas densely layered with colors, from lightest tints at the surface to the darkest shades deepest down. Lightest strokes exposed beige, then yellow. Deeper strokes cut through layers of orange, red, blue, violet and finally black.

Williams’ was a process of reverse facial dermabrasion. Though in dermabrasion the more marks one removes, the clearer the face becomes, in Williams’ case, the more marks she added, the clearer her face became. Far larger than life-size and tightly cropped from ear to ear and eyebrows to chin, the effect is con-frontational, with wrinkles and pores glowing like embers. On the floor below the finished work a pile of colorful shavings lay as evidence of the chromatic excavation Williams performed to unearth her own true future self.

The closer one gets to someone’s skin, the more intimate it becomes until one reaches cellular level, at which point such examination becomes clinical, then pathological, as in the case of **Jeanne Silverthorne’s** latex rubber relief sculptures. Silverthorne has been a sharp-eyed, sure-footed surveyor of skin as the slippery slope where youth begins its slide into decline.

She has studied *Normal Skin*, *Healthy Collagen*, *Sunburnt Collagen*, and *Highly Magnified Fingertip Skin*, among others, and reveals skin to the viewer not as the taut, sensuous, topographic membrane that contains us, but rather as the vast mesh of transition points between inside and out; the conduits of tears and sweat, the repositories of bacteria and bile.

In her work *Sweat Pore*, she engulfs the viewer with a roiling expressionistic Turner-esque tempest of cells. One is swept into a site where the body’s work is being done. Internal and surface temperatures are being stabilized as an individual’s aromatic signature is being exuded out into the world. Silverthorne shares the perverse beauty of the skin’s structure and function. In doing so, she makes the pathological intimate and enthralling in a unique way.



Jeanne Silverthorne. *Sweat Pore.* 1998. Latex rubber. 36 x 42 x 8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and McKee Gallery.



Kathy Grove. *Outtakes.* 2013. Archival digital print. 33 x 22 1/4 inches.
Courtesy of the artist.

New York artist **Kathy Grove** uses the skills she developed as a photo-retoucher in the fashion and beauty industries to create works that challenge norms of beauty and address issues of aging.

In her commercial work, Grove has retouched hundreds of models, celebrities, and world figures. She has “cleaned up” everyone from Nancy and Ronald Reagan to the rock group KISS and, in the process, has seen that no one is as perfect as the pictures printed of them. She has witnessed how the obsessiveness of make-up artists, stylists, and art directors has created the synthetic surreality of visual culture and has fueled consumers’ fears that they are never perfect enough, that they will always need one more product to perfect their look.

Over the years Grove has accumulated a digital cabinet of wonders and curiosities filled with copies of all of the pimples, wrinkles, frown-lines, beauty marks, and blemishes she had been asked to remove from fashion photographs. With them she has begun to assemble a panoramic environment composed of skin flaws called *The Outtakes*. This one panel is an example of the space crowded with disembodied flaws hanging like twinkling planets in an inky black universe or glowing petri dishes of tissue samples in the low light of a refrigerated laboratory. Arraying outcast creases like jewels against a velvety dark background, Grove practices her own forms of kintsugi and wabi-sabi by turning wrinkles to gold and venerating the worn and damaged cracks from the faces of the aging famous.

Like Kathy Grove, who isolated skin folds and re-cast them as elegant curios, between 1998 and 2008 the sculptor **Barbara Zucker** created her *Time Signatures* series of relief sculptures. Perhaps with kintsugi and wabi-sabi in mind, Zucker began studying the creases in the skin of her own face. Zucker found that one’s wrinkles are the record of one’s past emotions.

Every facial reaction became an elastic entry in the diary of one’s skin. The number, depth, and shapes of one’s wrinkles register one’s preference of laughing over frowning, or vice versa. They mark the patterns made repeatedly by favored facial expressions and hence, form a unique record of a personality. Over decades the facial muscles, guided by one’s reactions to life, sculpt one’s skin into a self-portrait bust.

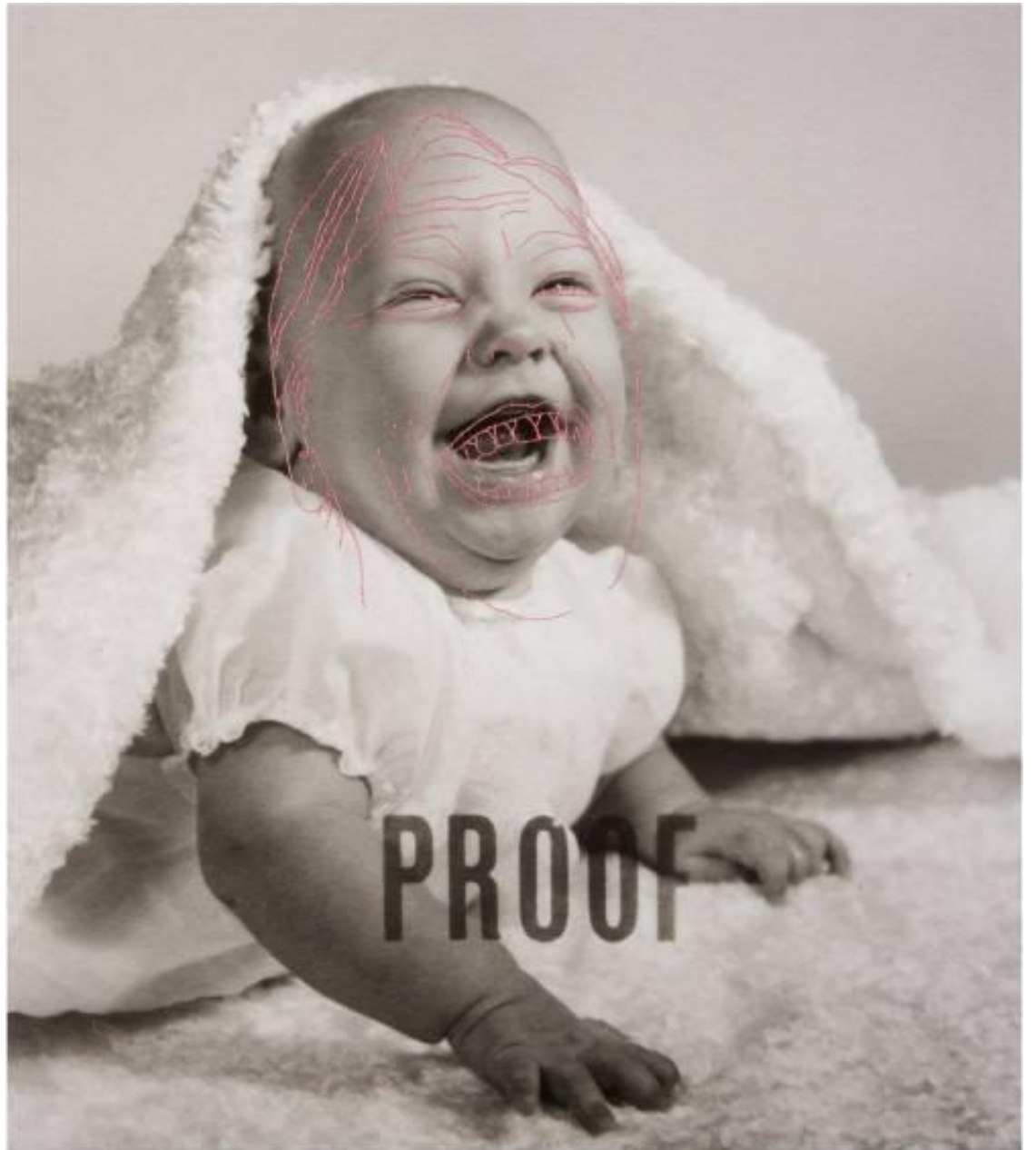
Just as in palmistry, where the future is supposedly divined from the study of lines created by past activity, and in origami where a final form is not appreciated for itself so much as for the fold lines that made it, in extrapolating the lines of each of her subjects’ faces, Zucker helps us to appreciate a unique form of beauty arrived at only over time.



Barbara Zucker. *Time Signature Series: Stella Painted Reflectively.* 2003. Steel and goinichromatic (color shifting) paint. 31 x 13 x 1 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Ken Burris.

Adele Crawford mines the ephemera of estate sales, swap meets and her own family attic in order to appropriate and alter the identities and histories of others, inhabiting their skins as if they were her own.

In her work, *PROOF: ProofGrey, ProofBlue, ProofRed, ProofPink*, the artist provides unique evidence of a sort, using her own baby portrait proof prints to tie her newborn self to her more mature self. Inspired by the age line tracteries in the sculptural work of Barbara Zucker, Crawford foretells the future by overlaying the lines of her own adult face onto the crisp, fresh faces of her infant self, stitching through the skin of their printed images with a perverse form of embroidery. She reworks the external elements of the past and present to create a more internally meaningful, coherent version of the future. A form of predictive plastic surgery that sutures adulthood inexorably to infancy, is this projection a wish to be young again or an indelible warning that one will grow old?



Adele Crawford. *PROOF: ProofGrey, ProofBlue, ProofRed, ProofPink.* (detail). 2008. Digital print and cotton thread. One of four 24 x 24 inch panels. Courtesy of the artist. Photo: Sheila Savage.



Margi Geerlinks. *Young Girl I & II.* 1999. Cibachrome, plexiglas. 67 x 50 inches each.
Courtesy of the artist and Stux Gallery.

Dutch artist **Margi Geerlinks** has produced works which with deceptive simplicity allude to the the impact that the rapid developments in computer science and bio-technologies may have on our evolving sense of physical self, identity, and the aging process. She acknowledges that when one is young, one longs to look older in order to be granted greater autonomy and respect, to be more attractive to others, and to indulge in the mature mysteries and pleasures of the body. Conversely, as one ages, one longs for the means to slow the process down or reverse it entirely.

Knitting, a traditional female craft form, has always been regarded as means of producing surrogate skins for humans to wear. Knitting and computer programming have been linked ever since Jacquard began using punch cards to guide mechanical looms to knit complex 2-D patterns. With the growing sophistication of computer-driven 3-D printing, the knitting of whatever custom skin surfaces and idealized features of the human body one wishes from one's own bio-matter is now becoming a definite possibility. Geerlinks deftly alludes to this prospect by picturing an innocent young girl, who aspiring to maturity, handcrafts her pre-computer printed token of exchange for adulthood – a breast knit to fit her young body – and ready to equip her for womanhood.



Ana Mendieta. *Sweating Blood.* 1973. Super-8 color, silent film transferred to DVD, 2:41 minutes. Courtesy of the Estate of Ana Mendieta and Galerie Lelong.

MORTALITY

While laugh lines, frown lines, and forehead wrinkles are not always the most welcome changes to our skins, they are at least understandable natural markings of time. The ravages of illness however, can violently lay waste to one's skin or a major stress in life can trigger the skin to react, announcing imminent mortality in inescapable and embarrassingly public ways.

As if to demonstrate the tenets of wabi-sabi that nothing is perfect and nothing is permanent, it is estimated that every cell of a human's skin is shed and replaced every thirty days. Skin is important, but not permanent. Other species periodically shed their skins in order to arrive at a more mature stage of development, associating a shed skin with evolution rather than death.

While Heide Hatry uses animals' skins as a source of material with which to work, the late Cuban artist **Ana Mendieta** employed cows' blood, and her own skin in the creation of her 1973 video *Sweating Blood*. Born in Cuba, in a Latin Roman Catholic culture interlaced with slave-originated Santeria, at age twelve Mendieta was sent by her parents, via the Catholic Charities, to live in camps and foster homes in Iowa. Just as Africans' violent abduction from their cultures into colonial Spain's slave-based island economy led them to create Santeria, mingling camouflaged elements of their original animistic religions with Catholicism, Mendieta eventually created an art of private symbols and rituals embodying her past to express feelings about the abrupt transition from her Latin roots to an Anglophile culture and her later alienation as a woman in a sexist art world dominated by white men.

Conjuring animist Santeria references to anointing the head of a priest(ess)/saint, the artist did not film herself being anointed with water which, through Catholic transubstantiation would symbolically become the "blood of the Lamb, the (male) Christ," but rather, with the blood of a cow, a humble, domesticated female animal instead. "Sweating blood" is the common expression for hematidrosis, the medical condition in which humans actually do sweat blood when under extreme, life-threatening stress. With blood slowly oozing from her scalp and down her face, the artist transmutes the role of beatific martyr from male to female, evoking the biblical descriptions of Christ's head bleeding as he prayed at Gethsemane or, later, when adorned with the crown of thorns. Mendieta poetically captured the moment when our skin signals that the stress of life has become the anticipation of death.



Reagan With Aids. COLORS MAGAZINE # 7. Pp. 120 – 121. June 1994. United Colors of Benetton. June 1994. Printed mass-circulation color poster. 41 x 27 7/8 inches. With framed text "Hero: An Editorial." 12 x 9 inches. Private Collection.

Distributed worldwide to ostensibly publicize an issue of COLORS magazine, the impact of this large Reagan with AIDS poster, cannot be underestimated. In a masterful act of damning with faint praise the

late Tibor Kalman, as Editor-in-Chief, included with the poster a fake obituary entitled "Hero," which backhandedly excoriated President Ronald Reagan for so irresponsibly failing to act at the moment that action could have saved the illness and death of millions.

HERO

"When the former U.S. President Ronald Reagan died of AIDS complications in February last year, the world lost a courageous leader. Reagan is best remembered for his quick and decisive response to the AIDS epidemic early in his presidency. In June 1981, against the counsel of his closest advisors, the President interrupted national TV programming to explain the findings of his emergency health task force and urge the use of condoms. The next week, by executive order, the President nationalized the condom industry; required all TV and radio stations, newspapers and magazines to devote portions of their advertising space to AIDS education; and called for free distribution of condoms in all public build-ings, including schools, post offices and prisons.

In July of 1981 the President held an emergency world summit to develop a global AIDS prevention strategy. The U.S. funded AIDS –awareness projects world-wide, sent hundreds of AIDS advisors over seas and coordinated international AIDS research effort. Health experts say that with these swift measures, President Reagan averted what could have been a global catastrophe costing millions of lives.

Tragically, the President himself was diagnosed with AIDS in 1986. Despite frequent hospitalizations, Reagan introduced national health- care legislation and diverted nearly half of the U.S. Defense budget to AIDS research and education. After his death, at the Ninth International AIDS Conference in Berlin, United Nations Secretary of AIDS Services, Margaret Thatcher observed "Ronald Reagan will be remembered for his courage, foresight, and above all, his boundless compassion."

While Robin Williams has abraded her canvas to reveal her future skin, with equal originality the late Kentucky artist Stephen Irwin abraded away ink-thin photos from vintage gay porn “skin” magazines to make the images of the free-wheeling erotic lifestyle of an earlier era fade from sight and memory. Gone is the lively action, color, and flesh.

Left for the viewer are only enigmatic shadows, quiet and stillness. For his 2009 exhibition, *Sometimes When We Touch*, Irwin used what are most often sensuous activities, touching and rubbing, to transform what was bold, graphic, and often prurient into ghostly, ephemeral, almost spiritual traces, leaving a legacy of beautiful, seductive memento mori.



Stephen Irwin. *Untitled.* 2010. Altered vintage pornography. 20 x 15 inches. Courtesy of the Estate of the Artist and Invisible- Exports.



Hunter Reynolds. *Butur Mummification Performance*. 2012. Video by George Lyter. *Mummification Performance Skin #1 (Participant)*. 2011. Plastic wrap and duct tape. 61 x 23 inches. Courtesy of the artist and PPOW.

Since 1998, the Minnesota-born artist, **Hunter Reynolds**, has periodically performed rituals involving the creation and shedding of a symbolic skin to commemorate the fragility of life and celebrate his continued survival and creative vitality as an HIV positive person. In his *Mummification Performance* Reynolds is wrapped, mummy-like, in saran-wrap and colorful tapes, with nose and mouth openings and one arm left free. He is then carried through the streets, periodically placed onto the street, dragged or rolled, then outlined with glitter. Returning to the ritual's starting point, the artist is stood up, the wrapping is sliced vertically up his back and the artist emerges from his shroud-like skin.

Reynolds' performances simultaneously offer two contrasting experiences. Onlookers are free to engage with, or not, a very audacious public display, while the artist has an intensely private experience, having sacrificed himself to deprivation of sight, hearing, smell, and freedom of movement. Like an art object, himself, he has entrusted his life, welfare, and appreciation to others.

Though there are associations with traditional forms of Egyptian mummification, done to assure the subject's future life beyond this world, or Christian beliefs in the Stations of the Cross, the Entombment and Resurrection promising an eternal afterlife in paradise, Reynolds' presentations are more tightly bound to a belief in himself and his community in this immediate world.

The sizzle of erotic frisson; racial, cultural and gender critiques; the creation, integration and dis-integration of identities; the celebration and satire of beauty; lamentation of lost youth and veneration of age; the signs of mortality and symbols of transcendence.

All have been offered by artists using skin as their subject. The tenets of wabi-sabi hold that nothing is complete, nor perfect, nor permanent, and so too, it is with this subject. The artists will continue to make work, will attempt to attain perfection, and hopefully, like their subject, skin itself, will continue to grow and change.

THE CURATORS

Martha Wilson is a performance artist, curator, and the founding director of Franklin Furnace Archive, a center for artists' books, installation art, video and performance art. She has exhibited, lectured, and performed extensively over the past 4 decades and has been a member of PPOW Gallery since 2011.

Larry List is an independent curator and writer who has done projects for the Noguchi Museum, the Menil Collection, DOX Center for Contemporary Art and other venues about Dada, Surrealism, 20th century Modernism, and contemporary artists' use of language, chance, and games.

THE GALLERY

P•P•O•W was founded by Wendy Olsoff and Penny Pilkington in 1983. P•P•O•W maintains a diverse roster of national and international artists. The gallery shows contemporary work in all media, with a focus on representational painting and sculpture and artists who create work with social and political content.

SKIN TRADE

Average adults have between 16 and 21 square feet of skin which may be traded, literally or figuratively. A “skin trade” can imply many types of exchange - one made with another person, society at large, or even a bargain made with oneself. There are many possibilities, but, like the ones addressed by these artists, they are almost always concerned with eros, identity, beauty or mortality.

ARTISTS: Liu Bolin Nancy Burson COLORS Adele Crawford Nancy Davidson Margi Geerlinks Kathy Grove Heide Hatry Stephen Irwin Elana Katz Vera Lehndorff & Holger Trulezsch Suzy Lake Lynn Hershman Leeson Robert Mapplethorpe Katy Martin Beverly McIver Ana Mendieta Marilyn Minter Lorraine O’Grady ORLAN Hunter Reynolds Bonnie Rychlak Alison Saar Joan Semmel Jeanne Silverthorne Betty Tompkins Robin Williams Martha Wilson Dolores Zorreguieta Barbara Zucker