

Iri Berkleid



Iri Berkleid started her career in 2017 with *Flesh and Stones*, during her residency in R.A.R.O Madrid. This multidisciplinary collaborative work bears the mark of her past, as she was working as a producer in contemporary opera in London. Merging video projections, experimental techniques of argentic photography, performance and scenography, Iri staged four performers in a work inspired by themes that would later drive her artistic exploration: the link between psyche and matter.

Trained in classic sculpture and drawing at *ESAG Pennighen Paris*, Iri started to work with organic matter during her MFA at the *School of Visual Arts* in New York between 2018 and 2020 at the school's biolab. She discovered bacterial cellulose produced by Symbiotic cultures of bacteria and yeast at the school biolab which biological processes became her main constraint for creations and a major source of inspiration.

Following Covid-19, Iri resettled in Paris and started building her own vats of cultures in her studio. She experimented with the matter until she figured a unique way of co-creating with the microorganisms, revisiting both sculpture and drawing techniques in the light of bio principles.

Before starting her artistic career, Iri graduated in law and studied diplomatic conflict resolution – she researched the impact of collective emotions in inter-ethnic conflicts on politics. She then trained as a mediator in international organizations.

This work experience made her aware of power relations, social structures, and conflict dynamics. Creating experiences of communion through the ritualistic and organic aspects of her work, Iri's creation might be viewed as an attempt to transcend these cultural, psychological and physical barriers.





Statement : I first took an interest in bacterial cellulose because I was preoccupied by the marks psychological experiences can leave on organic matter, what the biological and chemical materiality of our bodies tells us, and the political and social realities these bodies produce. I was fascinated by the new science of epigenetic and by militants who were remodeling the contours of contemporary politics by twisting identity politics into a revolutionary biopolitic of the body (ie. Paul B. Preciado).

While studying at the *School of Visual Arts* in New York, I was immersed in the influences of the feminist avant-garde of the 1970s and their subversive techniques to regain control of the body and its representations. The Korean artist's performance work *Cravings*, inspired by this movement that sought to portray the body from the inside to emphasize its monstrosity, is an epitome of this idea.

While exploring these questions through works such as the video *It Supposed To Be A Loop, 2020*, I spent countless hours in the school's biological laboratory exploring underwater creatures – I was interested in the idea of a new kind of interspecies alterity and was starting to put the element of water at the center of my practice. It is there that I discovered the liquid cultures of SCOBY that instantaneously seduced me.

My practice is based on three pillars. First is material research with bacterial cellulose and its biological processes of growth (technical). Second is formal expression stepping from the confrontation between my visions and formlessness and non-demarcation (representational). Third is a systemic proposition operating in evolving and immersive installations with growing matter activated by invited artists through ritualistic experiences (spiritual). These three aspects mutually feed on each other to form a mutative corporeality.

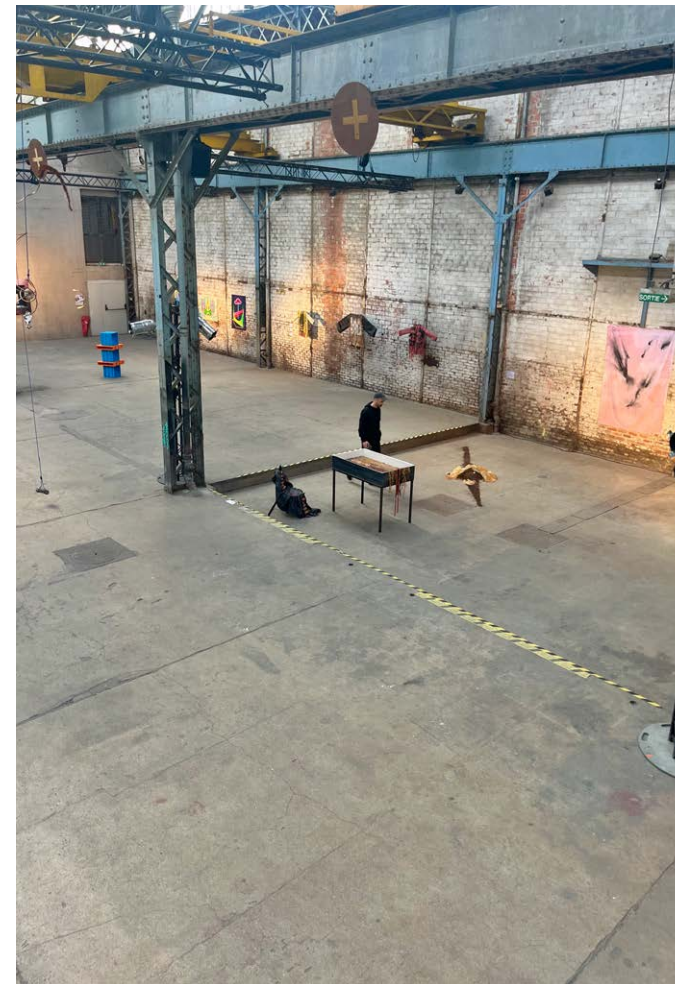
Through both “processual artworks” (in growth) and “stabilized-artworks”, I am attempting to displace our notion of abjection and awe by revisiting our relationship to our body and its environment.

I am working with the biological time – a scale measured on human life, in all its robustness, fragility and indomitability. This labor, sometimes challenging physically, affiliates me to this specific matter for years now, making our bodies inextricably linked. By building a space to enable a direct, unmediated, experience with this micro-organic nature and bypassing usual technological and scientific mediations, my practice paves the way for a new mysticism based on the communion between bodies on different scales (micro/macro) and in the immanent multiplicity of each individual.



GROWN ART





La Veillée d'Éros, 2024

Installation with growth table in steel, glass (120 x 70 x 120 cm)
 growing cellulose fused with rubber (approx. 60 kg piece)
 dried cellulose embroidered on a chair

Exhibition view (p. left, p. right)

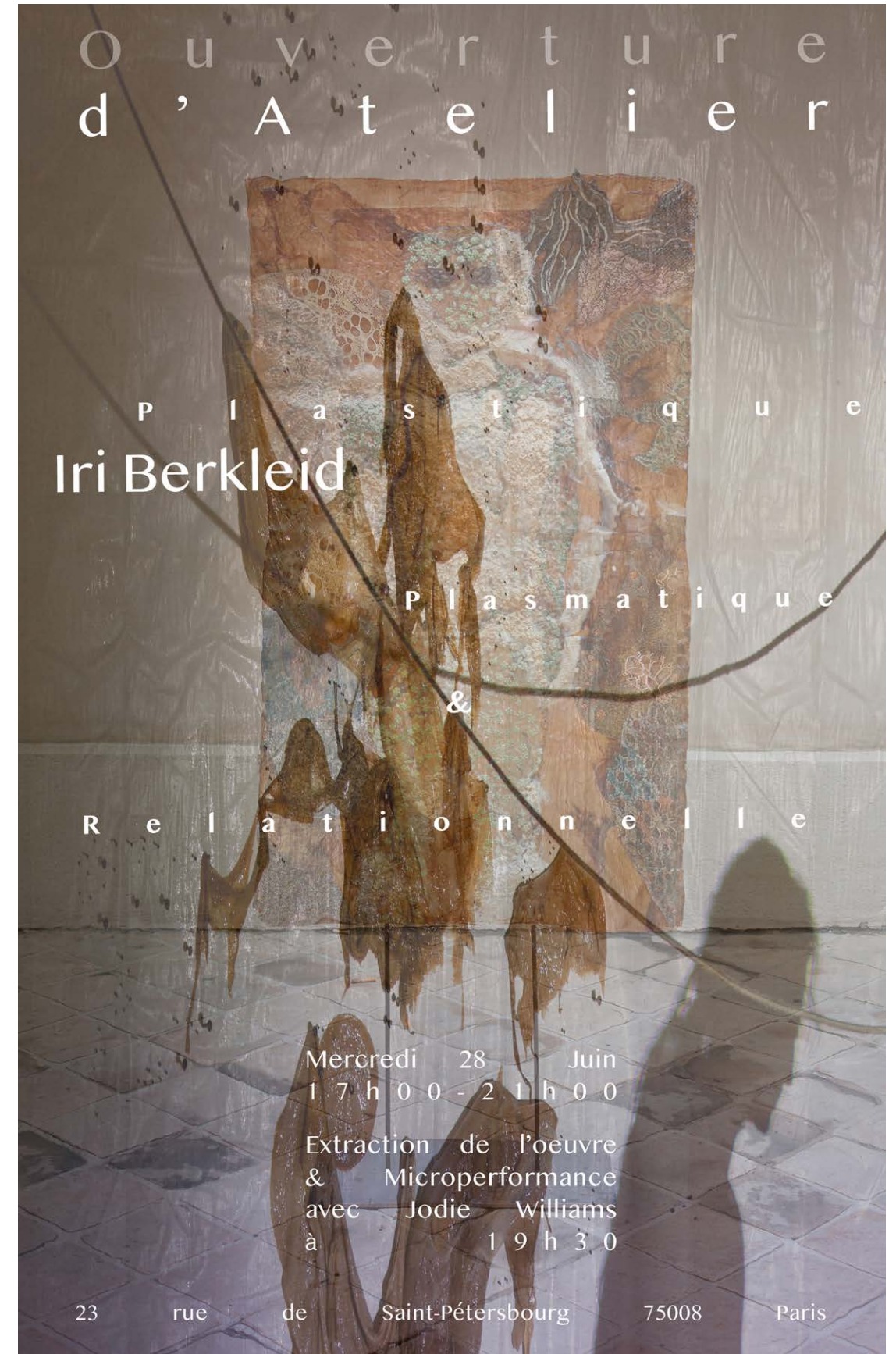
Cataoucthouc, Relations en Tension II, Jakmousse
 Les Chaudronneries, Montreuil, 2024

Lyric microperformance by Fanny Perrier Rochas (p. right bottom left, middle)
 Stabilized piece from the installation (following p.)

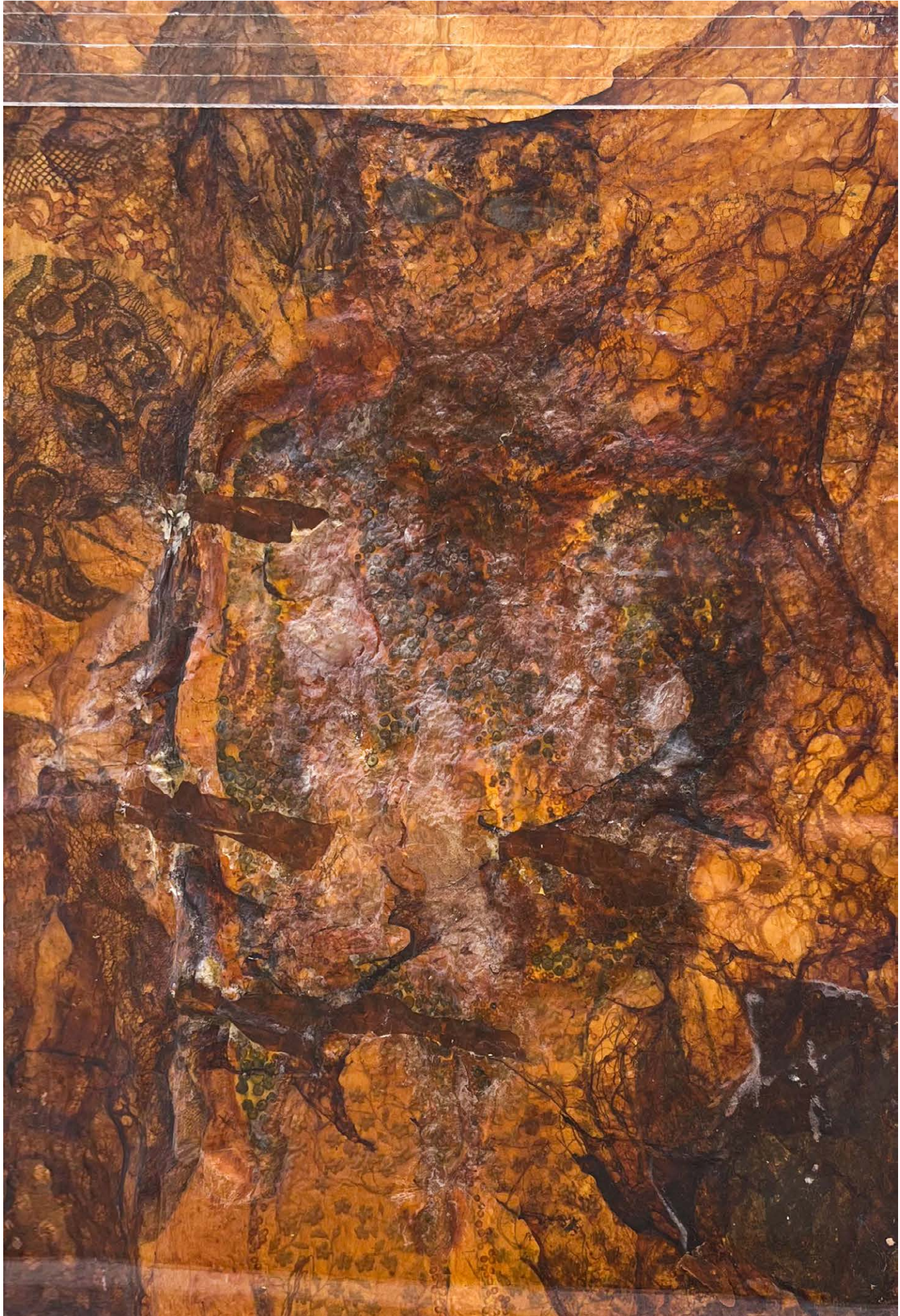




Plastique Plasmatique series, 2023









Beak Me Tender, 2023

Cellulose, textiles, mineral, graphit, copper powder, coton wires, dried Gram+ bacterias
120 X 70 cm

Stabilized, back in plexiglass box (previous p.-2)

Stabilized, back view (previous p.)

Pre-extraction growing (p. left p.right) :

Video documenting the «processual artwork» : [LINK](#)

Sketches (p. right bottom)

Stabilizing, details (p. -5, p. -7)

Invitation for the performance-exhibition (p.-3 right)





Love Me Tender, 2023
Cellulose, textiles, minerals, pigments, sand,
graphit, coton wires, dried Gram+ bacterias
120 X 70 cm





Eva Tender, 2023
Cellulose, textiles, minerals, pigments,
sand, graphit, coton wires
120 X 70 cm

Stabilized (p. left)

Open Studios (p. right)

Incubating (p. +2)

MICROPERFORMANCE

The microperformances are like mini operas in which the body performer, visual and circus artist Jodie Williams activates evolving installations in which the raw organic matter (Body Abstracts, The performance, 2022) or living artworks in their transitory state are growing (Eva's Birth, 2023). Jodie embodies a mediator between the micro and macro worlds, using an alternative, ritualistic body language enabling the present bodies to commune as they are inhabiting the same space (publics, microorganisms, performers, etc...). The appellation "microperformance" was invented by the curators and critics Jens Hauser and Lucie Stecker to speak about a new form of performance coproduced by bioartists and microorganisms.

The performances I create are to a great degree improvised, since we hardly ever practice with the material so as not to degrade it before the performer, Jodie Williams, interacts with it. This improvisation is part of a scenario crafted according to the material's state at the time of the interaction: its chemical characteristics (acidity levels), biological features (stage into the formation process), idiosyncratic consistency (thickness, resistance, vigor, color, texture); the infrastructures in which the material has grown (immersive installation, more or less temporary depending on the location—studio, place of residence, exhibition room etc.); its appearance after my various interventions during its growth.

In *La Naissance d'Eva*, for example, the image produced by incubation is a pictorial element embedded in the scenario (in this case, the portrait of a woman). For this performance, I wanted to create an artistic ritual around the moment of extraction; to mark the genesis of a work of art, its separation from its original culture of bacteria and yeast (...)

(...) Like in *Body Abstracts*, more focused on the relation between the body and matter. The idea is to reveal several scales of life at the same time and in the same space, to observe how they are related and to form a new spiritual language permeated with the awareness of microscopic life that, when staged, prompts us to reflect on our own composition, which, hardly noticeable, is the smallest common denominator of our societies and the human beings that compose it.

*Extract of a written exchange with the art critic Jens Hauser, 2023
following a workshop at l'École Polytechnique, Paris Saclay*





Text of the microperformance (fr) : *Vous allez dans quelques instants assister à l'extraction de l'œuvre. Il s'agit du moment précis où la peau de cellulose est extraite de son bain de bactéries et de levures après ses 3 mois d'incubation.*

Le lien avec sa culture sera irréversiblement rompu, les structures des microorganismes perturbés et le processus symbiotique interrompu.

Ce moment n'existe pas encore et il n'existera bientôt plus.

Dans le bac, l'écosystème symbiotique continuera son cours et formera une nouvelle peau de cellulose. Pendant ce temps-là, la peau de cellulose extraite commencera son processus de séchage et perdra 95% de son poids en eau pendant deux semaines à un taux d'humidité contrôlé. Elle passera donc d'environ 40 kilogrammes à 200 grammes en 15 jours. Ne subsisteront sur la cellulose dépourvue d'eau que les traces de cette activité vitale passée.

Lors de l'extraction et de l'assèchement, l'œuvre sera extrêmement vulnérable. Elle pourra être colonisée par des microorganismes extérieurs, se déliter, se déchirer, se décrocher, se déformer

Depuis le début de ce speech, l'œuvre s'est déjà métamorphosée plusieurs fois au gré des duplications cellulaires en cours. Si la réaction des microorganismes aux différentes interventions - avec des tissus, des pigments naturels et autres manipulations diverses, a pu faire l'objet de rapports très approximatif par l'humain récréatif, la réaction des microorganismes à son œil incessamment observateur est encore plus incertain.

Dans son rapport n°112, l'humain récréatif note : « toute mesure implique un échange d'information, par définition. »

Puis ajoute : « Observer l'œuvre durant ses 3 mois de pousse a été comme observer les mouvances du ciel, comme si je pouvais palper, humer cette fugacité »



Microperformance La Naissance d'Eva

On the spot of production (studio), June 2023

- writing and direction by Iri Berkleid,

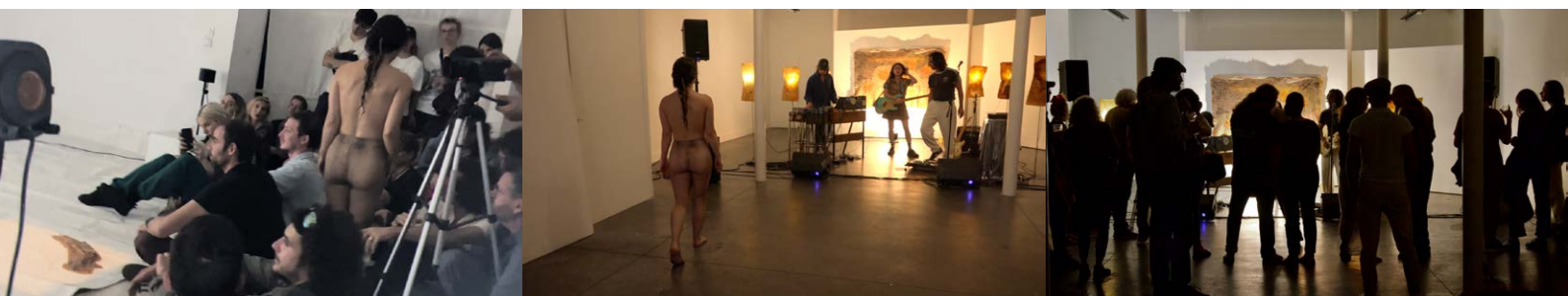
- performance by Jodie Williams,

- musical performance by Fanny Perrier Rochas,

- theatrical performance by Martin Guillaud & Evangelia Pruvot

TEASER





Body Abstracts, La Performance
Soma Marseille, October 2022
writing and direction by Iri Berkleid, performance by Jodie Williams, musical performance by Santiago Aldunate & Hanta Yo, sound and live music composition by Tamas Juhasz

TEASER

IRI BERKLEID

LIEU D'ART
H Y B R I D E
55 COURS JULIEN,
13006 MARSEILLE.

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RESTITUTION 29 OCT 19H30

ESPACE DE RECHERCHE
B A R

19H30: PERFORMANCE BODY
ABSTRACTS II AVEC JODIE WILLIAMS
ET SANTIAGO ALDUNATE

MICRODOSAGE POETIQUE



LIVES:
20H30: SANTIAGO ALDUNATE
LIANTA VO

Evolving Installation with the matter growing,
to be activated by Jodie Williams during the Microperformance
Body Abstracts, SOMA Marseille, 2022

Concert-performance in a scenography combining *Body Abstracts* busts
and *Microdosage Poétique* (left)

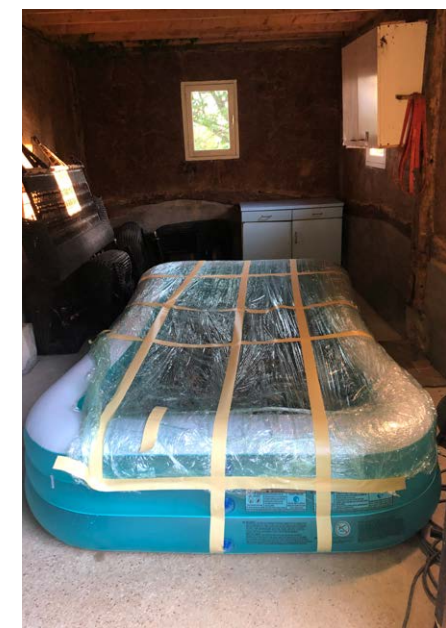




Microdosage Poétique, 2022
Cellulose, various textiles
190 x120 cm

Exhibition view, SOMA Marseille
(p. right up)

Documentation of the artwork growing
(p. left, p. right down)



Body Abstracts series, 2022-24





Body Abstracts is a series of twelve busts created by Iri Berkleid. Sculpted out of bacterial cellulose, the sensory sculptures are the result of research and experimentations around bodies: the organic cellular body and its matter - the political and social body inscribed into a conceptual feminist approach. Body Abstracts questions the representation of these bodies in a post-Anthropocene era. How to represent and project our bodies in symbiosis with the rest of the living world?

The busts are made of organic matter: bacterial cellulose. This matter is the sediment of bacteria whose function is to ferment and reproduce the SCOBY – Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast. The artist cultivates this bacteria cluster, grows it for 2 to 3 months depending on the biological time of growth. A labour of care is performed daily as the living matter thickens, mutates and transforms.

Iri Berkleid enters in conversation and collaborates with the matter. She accepts guidance from it as she intervenes in the growing process, gradually inlaying alien elements such as textiles, pearls, yarns, lace... The organic matter becomes a canvas revealing abstract or more figurative patterns, inspired by biological and physiological processes, autobiographical elements and subjects like inter-species empathy, otherness, exile, resilience or freedom. Berkleid explains that her intervention is “an epiphenomenon” in the creation of each bust that absorbs, conforms, or rejects her proposition. They become unique in their consistency, asperities and shapes.

The title Body Abstracts pays homage to Meat Abstracts, Helen Chadwick’s photographic series of raw meat steaks and light balls as signifiers of human bodies. Iri Berkleid stands in the aftermath of the second-wave feminist avant-garde of the 1970s. Not completely feminine nor completely masculine, the androgenous busts leave room for the viewer’s interpretation.

This series is anchored in the artist’s inquiry about cellular memory and epigenetics. Just as the Bust 12, Berkleid chases the psychic imprints on matter. The fusion of lace and microcellular landscapes created by the cellulose evoke the marks left by some materials on bodies throughout time. Light installations suggest a presence, the light of the soul. They bring a spiritual dimension to the artist’s work.

The busts converse when exhibited together, filling the empty space of the room with their animated auras. The space between our skins and the busts shrinks irremediably, reminding us the “very fabric of life that binds us together in the mystifying dance of microscopic and everchanging cells”.

*Marie de Ganay
Exhibition Symbiocène, Arles, 2022*



Série Body Abstracts, 2022

Bust 0 & bust 1 of the Body Abstracts series, 2022

Vues d'exposition Symbiocène, L'Été des Serpents, Arles, Juin 2022

Busts

Dried cellulose, nails, coton wires, various materials

70 X 35 X 15cm

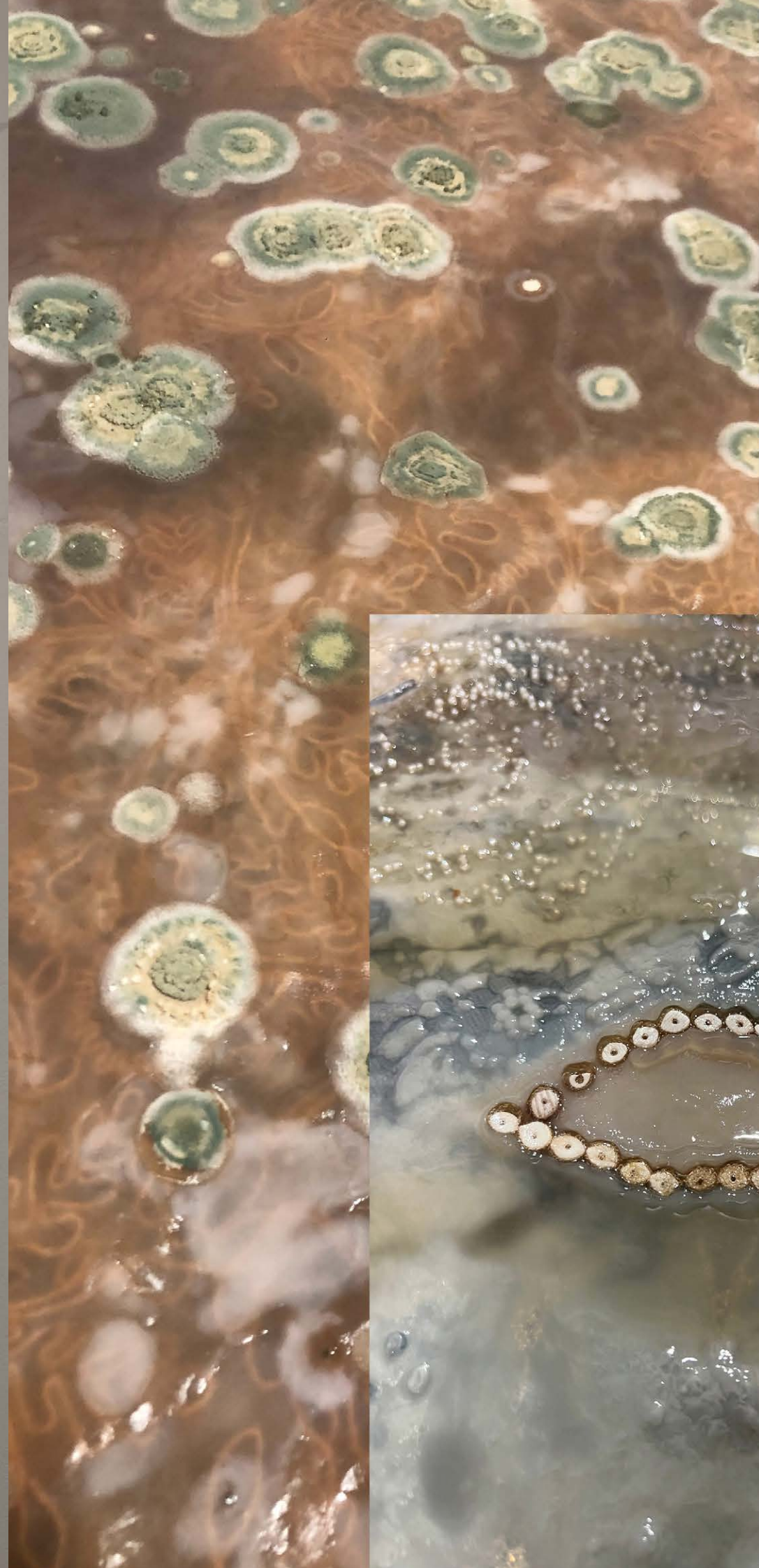
Iri Berkleid's exhibit, hybrid and subtle, is the culmination of years of experimental research across the fields of bioengineering and sculpture. On the cusp of the feminism born out of American pioneers from the 70s and modern-day examinations of the intersectionality of struggles, desires, and gender-related trauma, Iri Berkleid crystallizes the sublime contradictions and struggles of her generation.

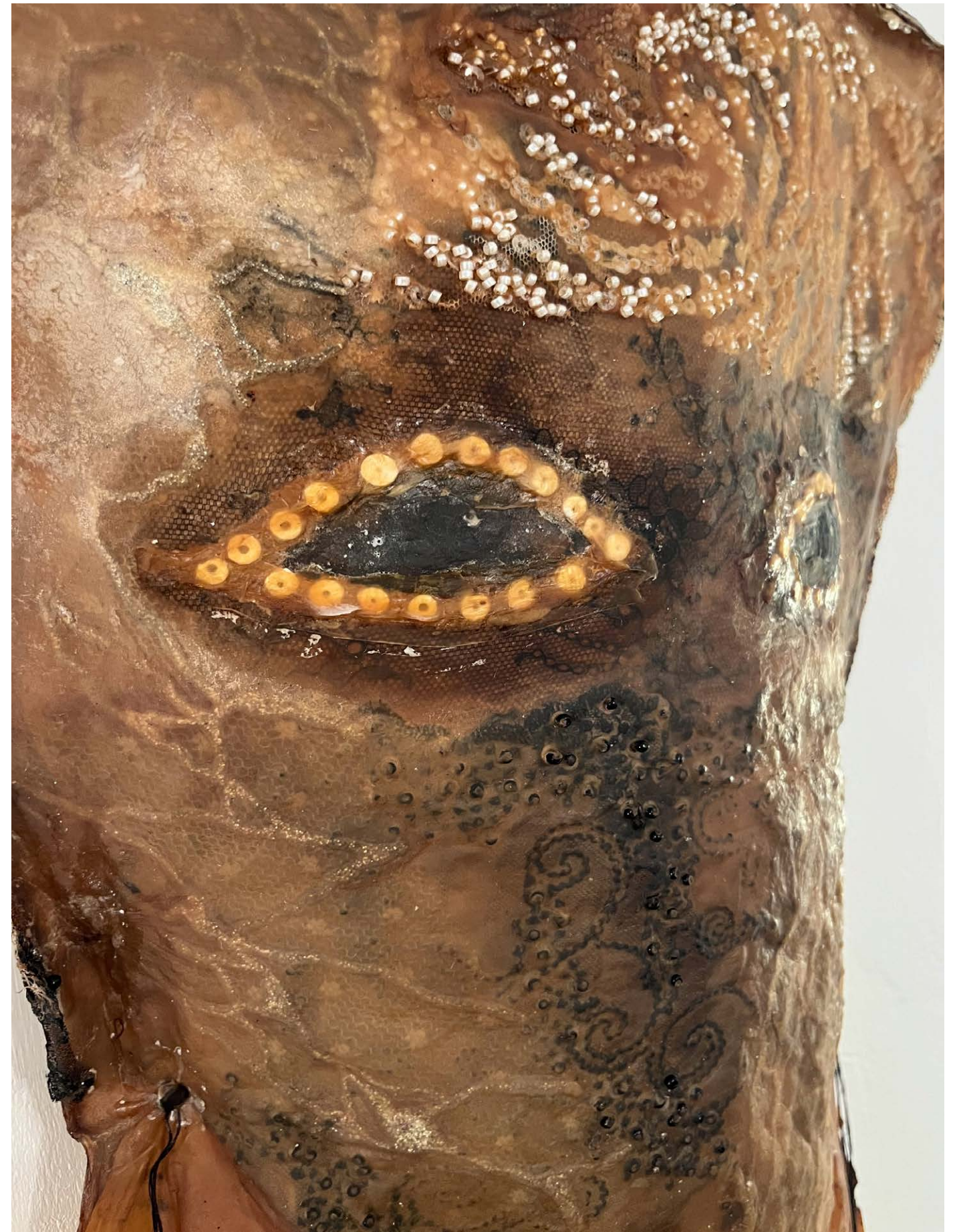
Through their fascinating medium, the SCOBY, the works of art herein displayed, enriched by years of reflection, creation, and research, evoke in a regular procession, sensual marvelling and perverse revulsion.

Those familiar with Iri Berkleid's work know how much patience is needed to painstakingly grow bacteria from kombucha baths into a skin-like membrane.

As they grow, these living bodies are weaved and fused with sand, lace or pearls. This imbues these bodies with figurative and symbolic qualities that reflect Iri Berkleid's musings on epigenetics, physical and psychological violence, and the reclaiming of the body by women. Yet, the beholder will most certainly see in these busts their own reflection and walk away with much to be pondered.

Odyssée Bouvyer Marsan
2022





Bust Maria Callas
The Diner Party Revisited series 2023
66 X 15 X 35cm



Bust Sarah Bernhardt
The Diner Party Revisited series, 2023
On metal frame
66 X 35 X 35cm



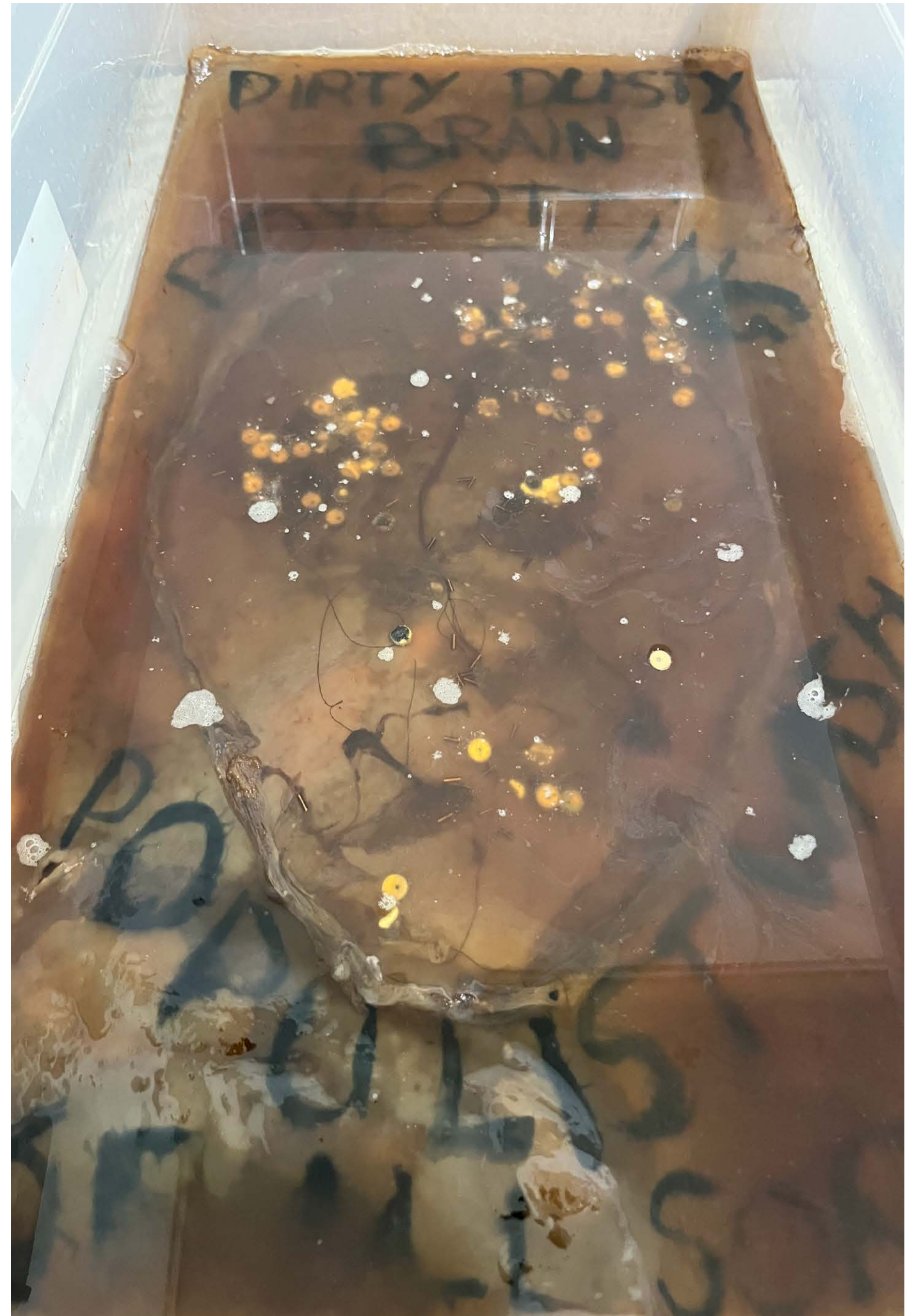


Guts Help Us !, 2024

Buste 1 : PILE OF WORRIED AGGREGATED CELLS RESISTING TROPISM, OF ALL SORTS

Buste 2 : TRAINED EMPATHETIC HUMAN AGAINST FASCISM, OF ALL SORTS

Buste 3: DIRTY DUSTY BRAIN BOYCOTTING POPULIST WASH, OF ALL SORTS





Guts Help Us!, 2024
Triptych of busts on metal frames
66 X 35 X 35cm
(approx. dimensions for each bust)

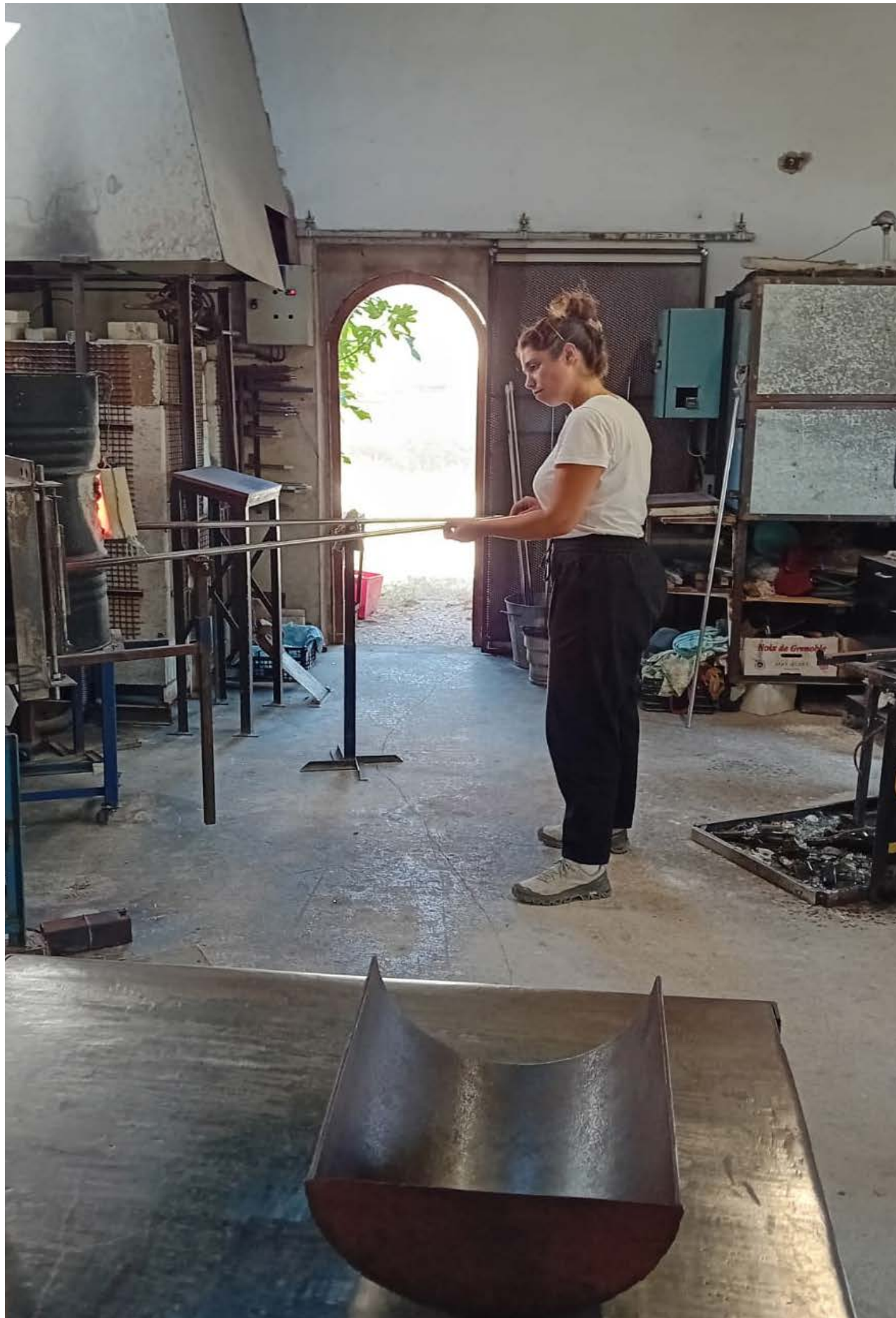
RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT





Project of sculpture with blown glass
and thermofusing
for the installation ***Guts Help Us !***





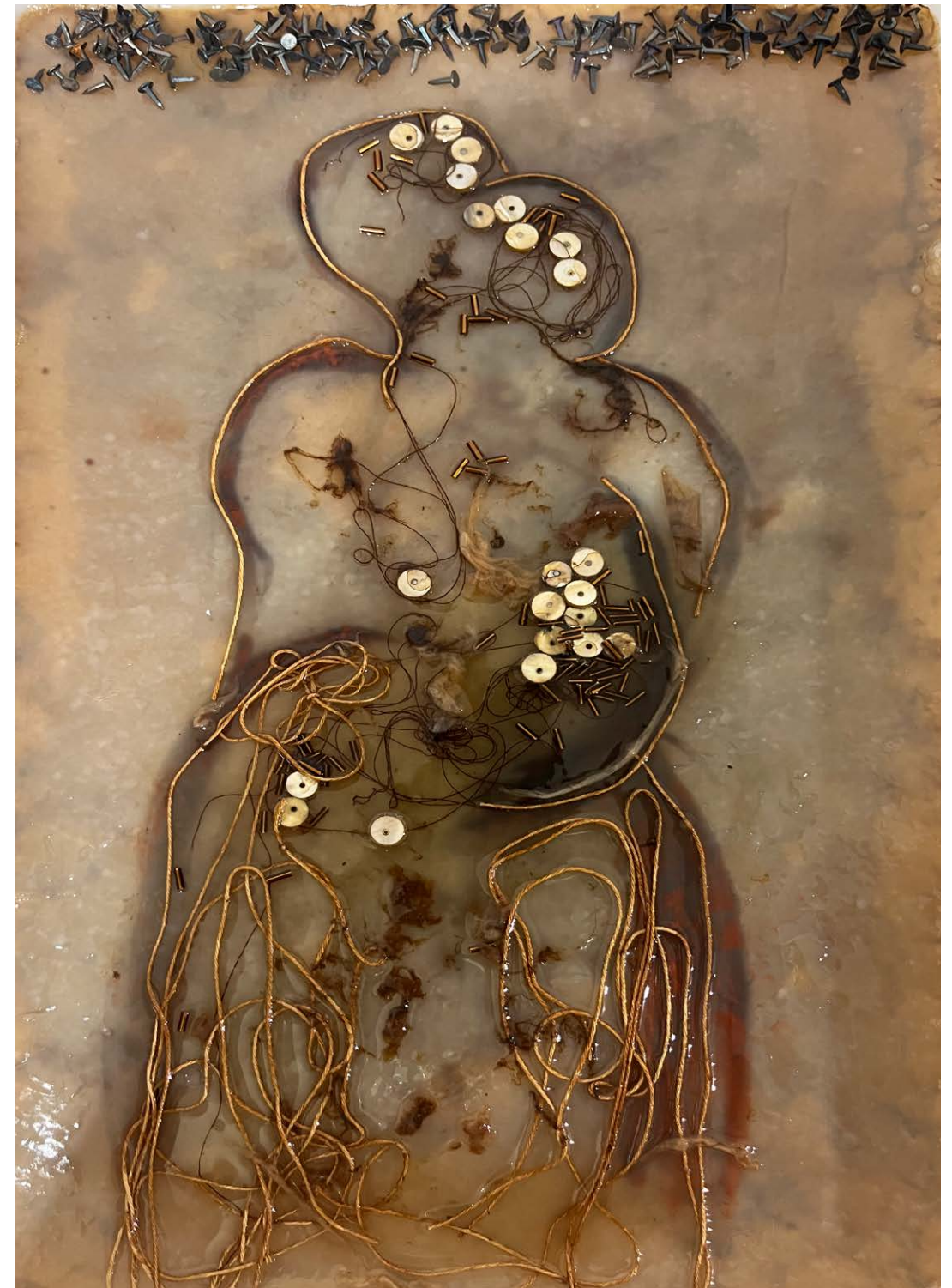
*Stoup prototype model in blown glass with
SCOBY liquid culture in it*



Reserach residency at a glass blowing studio for a project of containers for the «process-artworks» and other works with glass, 2024



«stabilized-artwork»
Small format
30 x 40 x 10 cm



Photography of a
«process-artwork»
26 x 40 cm



Sculpting the formlessness
Ephemeral sculptures



Studio View 2024



Partnership with the microbiologists of the biolab Coniphy-Conidia
Lyon, 2023



Discernement Visceral - Je Sais Que Je Suis Faite de Chair et du Sang qui Coule Dans mes Veines, et Toi, Seule Idéologie, Tu es Perdu
2023-2024
Vidéo 5.14 min



Screenshots of the film (up, left)
Photo documenting Jodie William's performance for the film



Photo documenting an interview on the set of *Body Abstracts* following the performance, SOMA Marseille, 2022

Formations Académiques

DIPLOMES

- 2018-20 Master of Fine Arts (MFA) in Art Practice, *School of Visual Arts, New York*
2015-16 Master's Degree (MA) in Arts and Cultural Management, *King's College London*
2013-14 Master's Degree (MA) in diplomacy, Conflict Resolution & Mediation, *IDC, Herzliya*
2007-11 ESAG Penninghen, L1 / Licence de Droit et de Sciences Politiques, *Université Paris Panthéon-Assas, Paris II*

AUTRES FORMATIONS

- 2023 Microperformance Bioart (workshop), Jens Hauser & Chaire Arts-Sciences, *École Polytechnique*
2022 Pratique de la scénographie (formation certifiée), *Studio Té, Rennes*
2021. Infinitesimal, *AYATANA Research Program for Science and Art*, Ontario
2015 Advanced Photography class (short course), *Central Saint Martins, Londres*
2014 Social Anthropology (MOOC), *Oxford University, Londres*

Expositions & Résidences

EXPOSITIONS

- 2024 Jakmousse, *Les Chaudronneries de Montreuil* (collectif)
2023 Plastique Plasmatique, *23 rue de Saint Petersburg* (solo)
2022 Microdosage Poétique, *SOMA Marseille* (solo)
Eros Hypnotica, *Artwork in Promess*, Paris (collectif)
Symbiocène, *L'Été des Serpents*, Arles (collectif)
Body Abstracts, *23 rue de Saint Petersburg*, Paris (solo)
2020 Four Seasons and a Half, *Van der Plas Gallery*, New York (solo) (reporté COVID)
Queer Appropriation (Collective), *Cité Internationale des Arts*, Paris (collectif)
2019 Non-location Specific (collective), *Flatiron Gallery*, New York (collectif)
2018 Te Llevo Para Que Me Lleves, *Centro Munar*, Buenos Aires (collectif)
2017 Flesh & Stones – Renacimiento (solo), *Espacio Nigredo*, Madrid (solo)

RÉSIDENCES & COLLECTIFS

- 2022 Résidente à *SOMA*, Marseille, FRANCE
Membre de *Le Cercle de l'Art*, Paris, FRANCE
2021 Résidente à *AYATANA Research Program for Science & Art*, Ontario, CANADA
2020 Membre du Queer Appropriation Workshop, *Cité Internationale des Arts*, Paris, FRANCE
2019 Membre temporaire du *Houloc*, Aubervilliers, FRANCE
2017 Résidente à *R.A.R.O*, Madrid, ESPAGNE
Résidente à *ACART Intercambiador*, Madrid, ESPAGNE

PRIX & RECOMPENSES

- 2018-20 **School of Visual Arts (SVA) Departmental Awards**
Prix d'excellence & bourse d'étude pour les années 2018, 2019 et 2020

Autres Activités

ENSEIGNEMENT

- 2021-24 Le Vitalisme Expérimental : Une Histoire Alternative du Bioart (Art, Féminisme et Technoscience)
Le Cercle de l'Art

ENTREPRENARIAT CULTUREL & PRODUCTION (Londres)

- 2015 -17 Program Coordinator fort **.ART Domains name (UKCI) & The Artstack**, Londres
Executive Producer for the Opera *Puck*, *Synart & The Royal College of Music*

DIPLOMATIE & MEDIATION

- 2014 Assistante du directeur du département Médiation
United Nations (OMBUDSMAN Office), New York



Contact :

email : iriberkleid@gmail.com

IG : Iri Berkleid

Studio visits on demand

Place de Clichy

75017 Paris

