



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 analog photography, performance and scenography, Iri Berkleid stages 4 performers while being guided 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, she started to work with organic later as she was undertaking her MFA at the school of Visual Arts in New York between 2018 and 2020. At the school's biolab, she discovers bacterial cellulose produced by Symbiotic Cultures of Bacteria and Yeast that which biological processes became her main constraints for creations and a major source of inspiration.

Following the Covid-19 crisis, Iri Berkleid resettled in Paris and started building her own culture vats 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 through bio principles.

Before being fully dedicated to her art, Iri Berkleid 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.

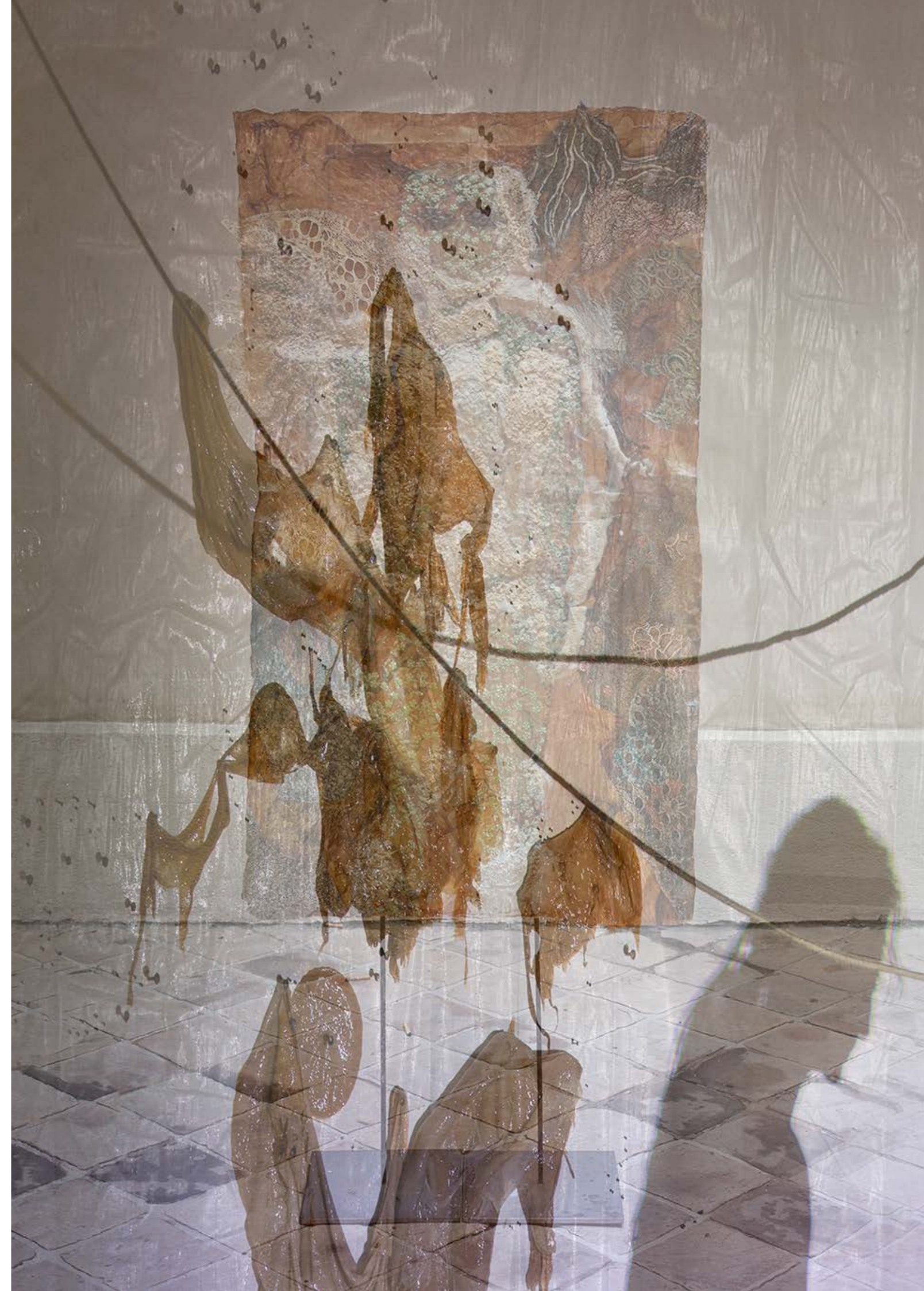
Statement : The Experimental Vitalism of Grown Art

My practice is based on three pillars : **material research** with an organic matter and its biological processes of growth ; **formal research** arising from the confrontation between a vision, formlessness and non-demarcation ; a systemic proposition produced by evolving and immersive installations in which living works of art grow and are activated during ritualistic performances (*Microperformances*).

These three aspects of my practice mutually feed into each other, forming a mutative corporeality that revisits our conception of "nature" by shifting our connection to abjection and awe, to our body and to our environment.

My body of works is built on the simultaneous exhibition of "**process-artworks**" (in growth) and "**finished-artworks**" (stabilized), the latter being inseparable from the "**sculpture-containers**" and infrastructures imagined to encourage their growth. Together, they translate my direct experience of this micro-organic nature – an imaginary vision that is usually inaccessible to the naked eye - presented here without scientific or technological mediation. This opens up a new mysticism, grounded in the communion between bodies at different scales (micro/macro) and in the immanent multiplicity within each individual.

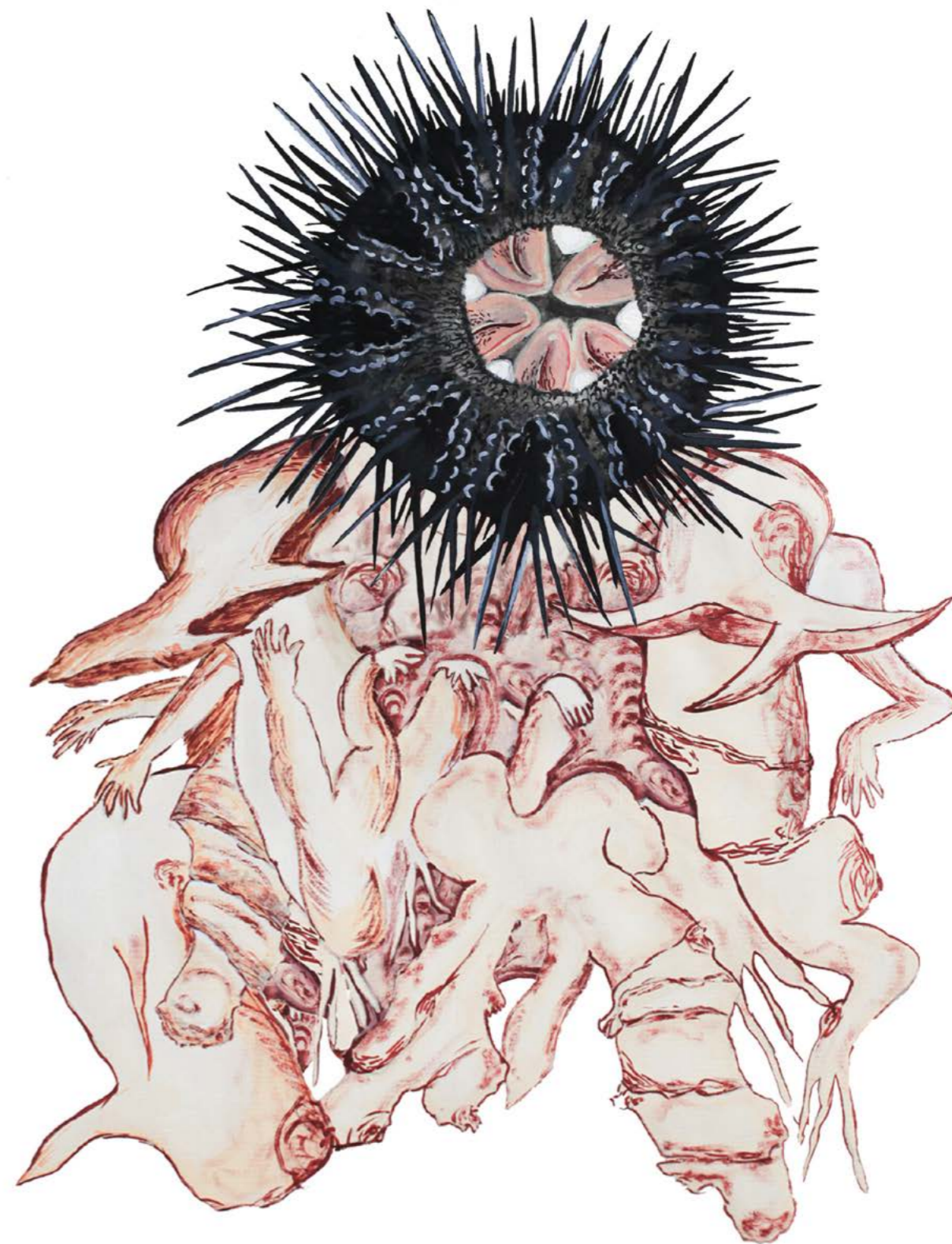
I am working with the biological time – a scale that corresponds with human life, with all its resilience, unruliness, and fragility. This physically challenging work forms a lasting connection between my body and this material, binding them inextricably together.



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 **epigenetics** and by militants who were remodeling the contours of contemporary politics by twisting identity politics into a revolutionary **biopolitics 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 agency over their body and its representations. The Korean artist Lee Bul'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 digging into these questions, 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 these liquid cultures : seeping, smelly, sensual, permeable and invasive, the **hyper-sensitivity of the matter** instantly instantaneously seduced me.



Mother, 2019
Watercolor painting
30 x 45 cm



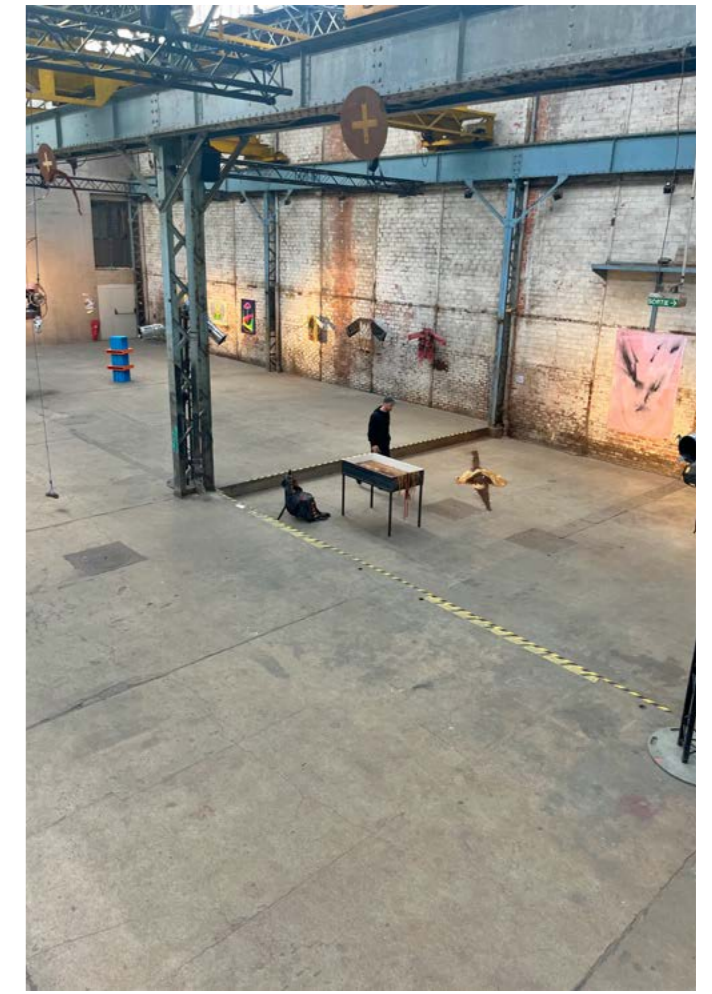
*In the Studio - two cultivation tables among
which is the incubating process-artwork
The Wake of Eros, 2024*

The Wake of Eros, 2024

The Wake of Eros is inspired by the theme of the death of the god Eros and explores the relationship between two materials : rubber and bacterial cellulose. Created for the exhibition *Cataoutchouc* at *Les Chaudronneries* in Montreuil in April 2024, this body of work comprises an evolving installation that includes a growing process-artwork housed in a metal sculpture-container, a stabilized finished-artwork (*La Veilleuse*), a microperformance by the soprano Fanny Perrier Rochas, and a finished-artwork that emerges from the growing process of the evolving installation.

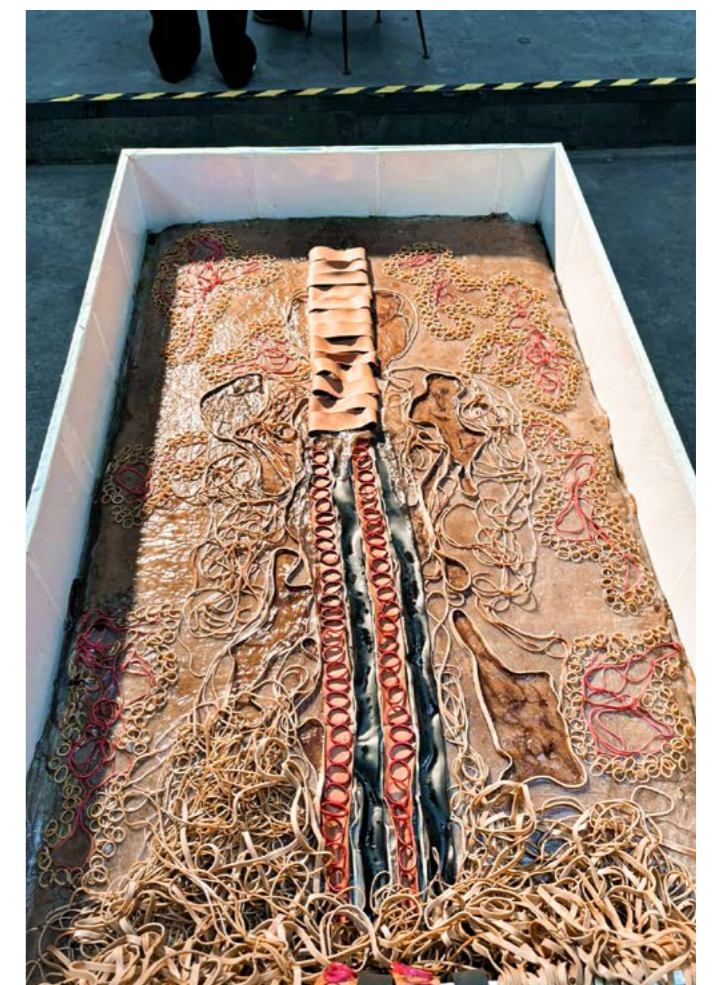
The Wake of Eros, 2024
Dried bacterial cellulose, rubber
Finished-artwork on metal legs, coming from the
evolving installation (left)
160 x 70 x 30 cm
Process-artwork on a chair (right)
90 x 70 x 60 cm





The Wake of Eros, 2024
 Exhibition view
 Cataoucthouc, Relations en Tension II, Jakmousse
 Les Chaudronneries, Montreuil, 2024

Evolving installation with cultivation table in metal and ceramic tiles (120 x 70 x 140 cm), growing cellulose (60kg), rubber, glass pane, dried cellulose piece embroidered with rubber on a chair



Singing microperformance
 with Fanny Perrier Rochas

Plasmatic Plastics, 2023

Plasmatic Plastics is a series of large-format organic tapestries grown from microbial cultures.

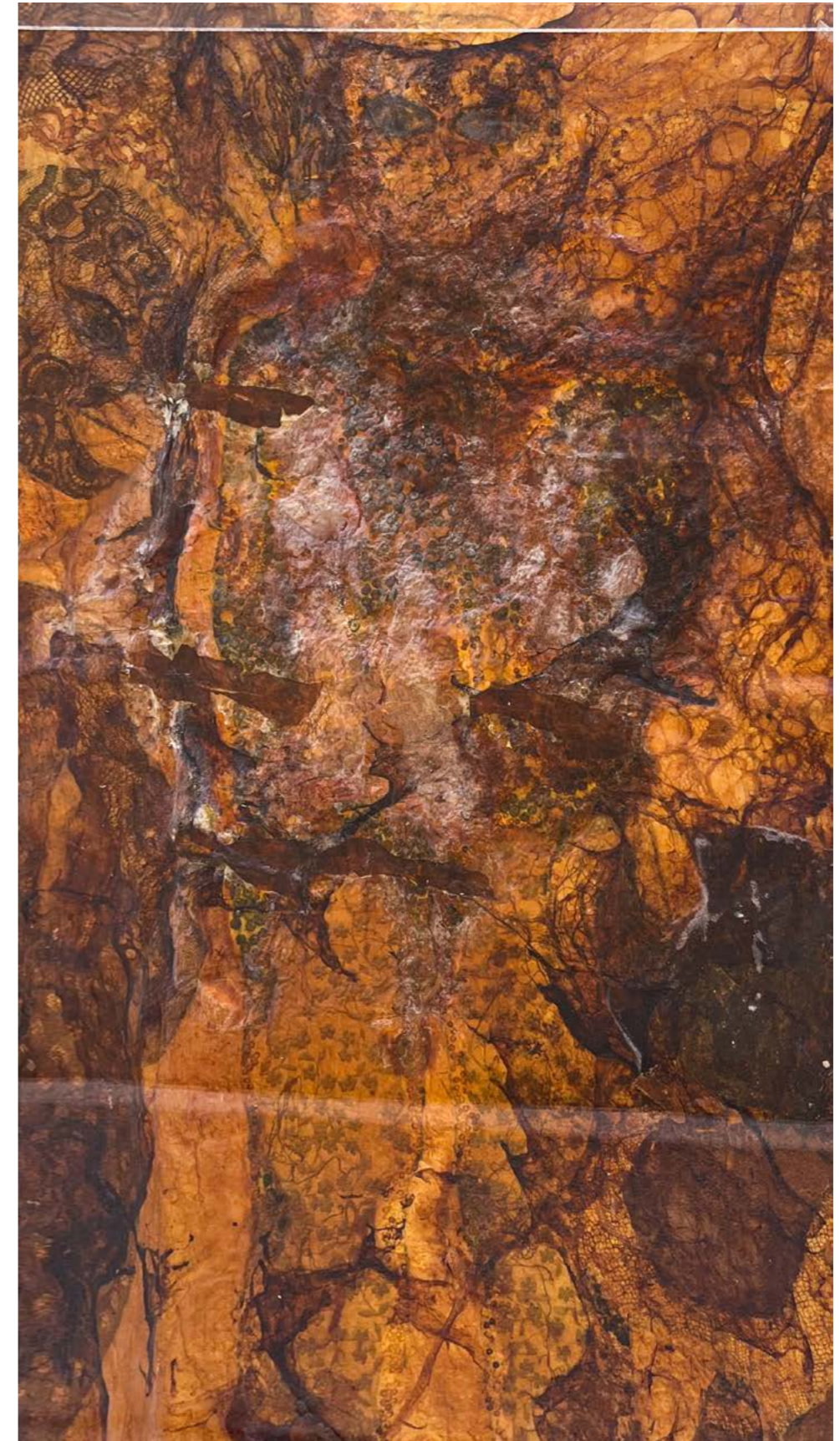
Mastering her innovative technique of cocreation with the microorganisms, Iri Berkleid approaches these fleshy, mattresses-like surfaces as **living canvases**, where the lumps and bumps produced by active bio-processes confront more or less abstract figures inspired by the artist's dreams and visions.

Through this **pictorial exercise**, Iri Berkleid captures the ongoing negotiation between two masterful forces : the creator and "nature". Acknowledging that the latter is infinitely more powerful, each "finished-artwork" for the artist is merely a relic of an initiatory journey - one that continuously moves from sketch to form to blur.

As much "Process-artworks" as they are "finishes-artworks", these creations are built from the same material, yet their varied manifestations reflect the **relational plasticity of our living world**. They bear the visual marks of all that escapes the naked eye: the very fabric of life that binds us together in the mystifying dance of microscopic, ever-changing cells.

*Beginning of the cocreating phase of the artwork
Beak Me Tender, 2023 (right)*





Beak Me Tender, 2023
Bacterial cellulose, textiles, minerals, graphite, copper powder, cotton wires, other materials, Gram+ bacteria
120 X 70 cm (w/ the Plexiglas box : 150 X 100 x 17 cm)
Stabilized

Stabilized - back view



Incubating - pre-extraction at d-40



In process of stabilizing - post-extraction

Video documenting the
«process-artwork» :

[link](#)



Research collaboration with the biolab Coniphy-Conidia,
Lyon, 2023





Love Me Tender, 2023
*Cellulose, textiles, minerals, pigments, sable, plastic,
graphite, cotton wires, dried Gram+ bacteria*
120 X 70 cm (w/ the Plexiglas box : 150 X 100 x 17 cm)

Stabilizing - post-extraction - details (left up)
Extraction (left bottom)

Eva Tender, 2023
Dried cellulose, textiles, minerals, pigments,
sand, graphite, cotton wire, various materials
120 X 70 cm



Microperformance *The Birth of Eva, 2023*

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 (*The Birth of Eva, 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 co-produced by bio-artists 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 *The Birth of 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 (...)



Microperformance *The Birth of Eva*
In the production space (studio of the artist), June 2023

Writing & direction by Iri Berkleid,
Body performance by Jodie Williams
Music and singing performance by Fanny Perrier Rochas
Theatrical performance by Martin Guillaud & Evangelia Pruvot



TEASER



*Growing - pre-extraction,
in its «sculpture-container»*

Eva Tender, 2023
Incubation, pre-extraction, preceding
the performance

TEXT OF THE PERFORMANCE (FR)

Interprété par Martin Guillaud

« 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 »

TEXT OF THE PERFORMANCE (EN)

performed by Martin Guillaud

You are about to witness the extraction of the artwork. This marks the precise moment when the cellulose skin is removed from its microbial cultivation bath after three months of incubation.

At this point, the connection to its culture will be irreversibly severed, the microbial structures in the vat will be disturbed, and the symbiotic process will be interrupted.

This moment, as fleeting as it is, has yet to occur and will soon be over. Meanwhile, the symbiotic ecosystem in the vat will continue its cycle, forming a new layer of cellulose. The extracted cellulose piece will then begin its drying process, losing 95% of its water weight over the course of two weeks at controlled humidity levels. During this time, it will shrink from 40 kilos to just 200 grams. Only the traces of its past vital activity will remain on the dehydrated cellulose.

During both the extraction and dehydration phases, the artwork is extremely vulnerable—susceptible to colonization by external microorganisms, disintegration, distortion, and division.

Since the beginning of this introduction, the artwork has already undergone several metamorphoses, guided by ongoing cellular duplications. If the response of the microorganisms to various interventions—with fabrics, natural pigments, and other manipulations—has been recorded only in approximate terms by the recreational human, the microorganisms' reaction to his ever-watchful eye is even more uncertain.

In report n°112, the recreational human notes: "As a matter of definition, all measurement entails an exchange of information."

They add: "Observing the artwork during its three months of growth has been like watching the movements of the sky, as if I could touch and smell this transience."

*Microperformance
Body Abstracts, 2022*

(...) 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 after a workshop at the Chaire Arts et Sciences at École Polytechnique



SYNOPSIS



Body Abstracts, The Performance, is an immersive performance by the artist Iri Berkleid that tells the story of a symbiosis and a separation in 5 "tableaux". At the intersection of music, theatre and visual arts shows, Iri stages the circus artist Jodie Williams, the poet and musician Santiago Aldunate and the music composer Tamas Juhasz. A first public version of 18 minutes took place at SOMA Marseille in October 2022 in front of an audience of sixty people.

The action takes place in an evolving installation in which a cellulose membrane, resembling human skin, grows during the month running up to the performance. Jodie's body is transformed by the fusion with the membrane and emerges in enigmatic forms in the bathtub before spilling out, body to body, into the performance space. The separation of the two bodies marks the second part of the performance, where Jodie becomes the conscious master of the material. She now handles the material practically, yet still sacredly, under the improvised sounds of Tamas who sets the tempo for her ascension to the final scene, her projection, the creation of a mural from the remaining pieces of material.

Her actions are abstractions of Iri Berkleid's real process and experience of working with this matter, highlighting the labour and physical effort, the intimacy and fusion, the constraints and conflicts of working with a new materiality. The audience is invited to a complete sensory experience, in proximity with odours, sounds and textures; a new environment, displacing them to reconsider their notion of abjection and awe.

In each performance Iri invites a different musician to frame the work, giving a sensitive impulse to start the action. Their voice leaves a gentle trace carried through the duration of the piece until the audience are reunited with the music in the form of a concert at the end. Jodie, exiting the performance space after the final act, leads a hypnotized audience into the concert of the guest musician, a familiarity that now relieves the trance of the performance environment.

TEASER



Body Abstracts, La Performance
Soma Marseille, Octobre 2022
Writing & Direction Iri Berkleid
Body Performance par Jodie Williams
Singing & Music performance by Santiago Aldunate & Hanta Yo
Live Music creation by Tamas Juhasz







*Body Abstracts, Evolving Installation
Soma Marseille, October 2022*



*Exchange with the publics around the
process of creation
Soma Marseille, 2022*



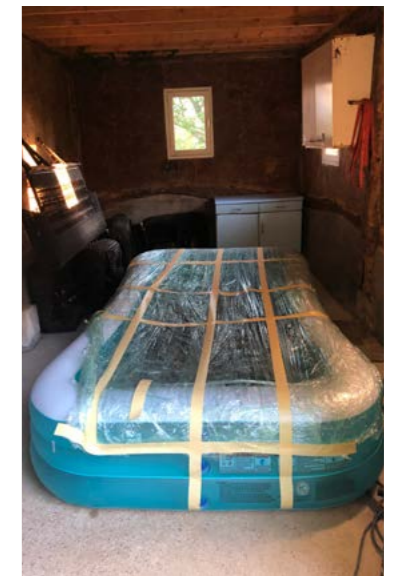
*Ready-made «sculpture-container»
- day of workshop with the students of
l'École de la Seconde Chance
Soma Marseille, 2022*



Microdosage Poétique, 2022
Cellulose, various materials
190 x120 cm



*A SOMA Marseille during the
microperformance
Body Abstracts , 2022*



*Ready-made «sculpture-
container», 2022*

At the moment of the extraction

Body Abstracts, 2022

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





Image of the incubation (left)
Stabilized (right)
Details (previous p.)



Bust 0, Body Abstracts series, 2022
Dried cellulose, nails, cotton wire
65 X 10 X 35 cm



Body Abstracts series, 2022
Exhibition view *Symbiocène, L'Été des Serpents, Arles, June 2022*



Busts of the series Body Abstracts, 2022
for the scenography of the eponymous *Microperformance*
SOMA Marseille 2022

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 the physiological and biological operating bio-processes, autobiographical elements and philosophical questions on themes like inter-species empathy, alterity, 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 evokes 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 our bodies' attachment to the “very fabric of life that binds us together in the mystifying dance of microscopic and everchanging cells”

Marie de Ganay
Exposition Symbiocène, Arles, 2022



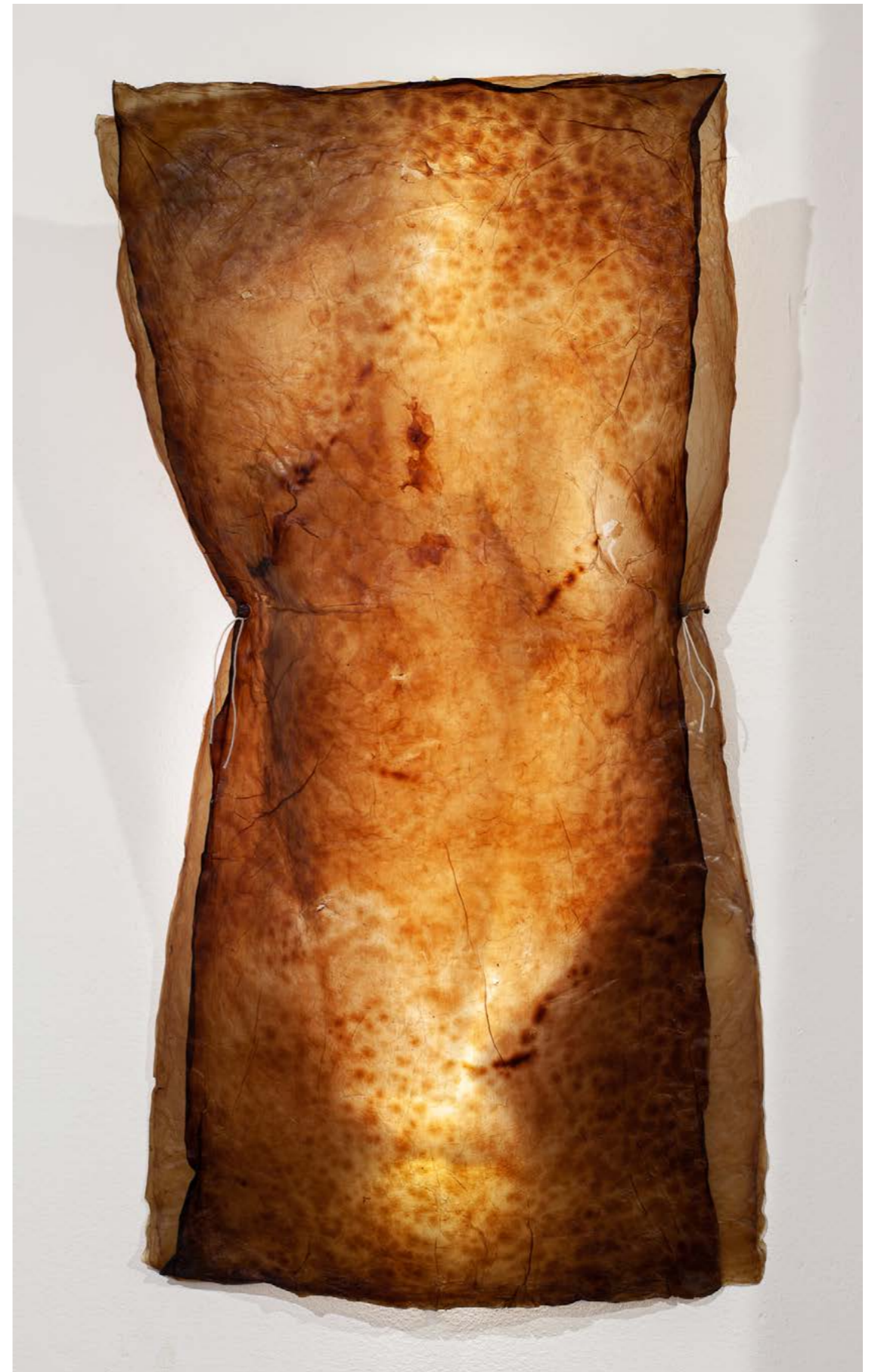
Bust 8, Body Abstracts series, 2022
Dried cellulose, sand, pigments, nails, cotton wires
65 X 10 X 35 cm

Details (right)
On metal leg, private collection (left)





Incubation (left)
Stabilized, w/ light installation (right)



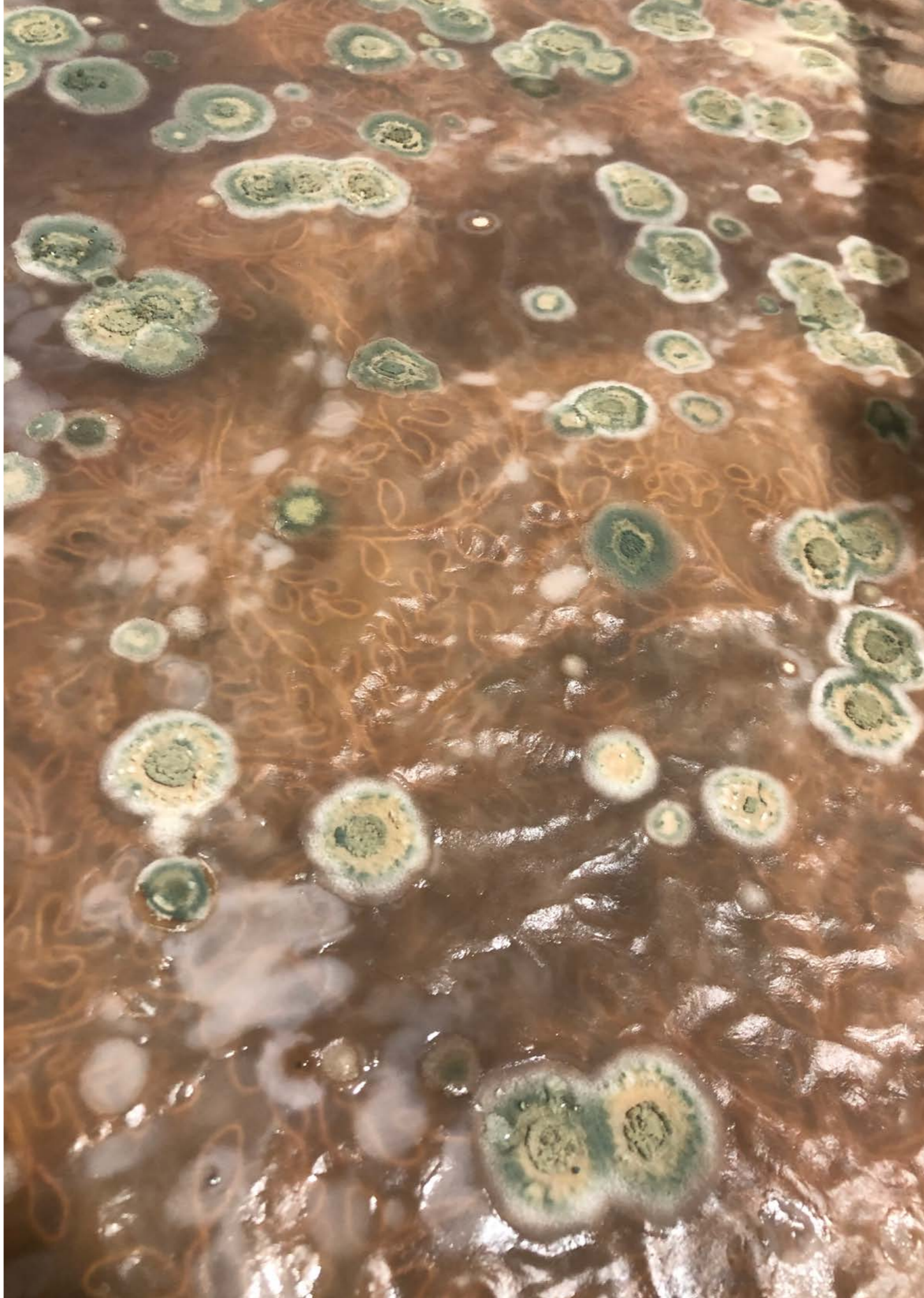
Bust from the Body Abstracts series (extended), 2022
Dried cellulose, natural pigments, nails, cotton wire
65 X 10 X 35 cm



Bust 12, Body Abstracts series, 2022
Dried cellulose, lace, nails, cotton wire, hydrogen dioxide
65 X 10 X 35 cm

Stabilizing on metal leg (right)
Details (left)





Bust 10, Body Abstracts series, 2022
Dried cellulose, lace, pearls, nails, cotton wire,
hydrogen dioxide
150 X 10 X 35 cm

Stabilized w/ light installation (right)
Incubating, colonized by a culture of molds (left)

*The Diner Party Revisited,
2024*

This series is produced for an order by a hotel which rooms pay tribute to renowned women in history. To this date, Iri Berkleid produced two busts, one in homage to the comedian Sarah Bernhardt and the other to the singer Maria Callas.

Bust Sarah Bernhardt , The Diner Party Revisited, 2023
Dried cellulose, lace, various materials, nails, cotton wire
66 X 35 X 35cm

Stabilized details (following p. left)
Incubating (following p. right)



Bust Sarah Bernhardt on metal leg in the room of the hotel, with a printed picture of the comedian on the right 2024





Bust Maria Callas, The Diner Party Revisited 2023
Dried cellulose, lace, various materials, nails, cotton wire
66 X 35 X 15 cm

Stabilized & details
Incubating & details (following p.)



Guts Help Us !, 2024

Guts Help Us ! is an installation still in progress. This body of work centers on a triptych of busts hanging on metal structures affixed to the wall.

Merging the political with the intimate, each bust is inscribed with a slogan in bold black capital letters, drawing from the visual language of political activism while employing microbiological and psychological rhetoric.

Created during the tense political climate of recent months in France, this work is the artist's visceral response to the rise of fascist parties and the increasing violence in our societies. The organic busts serve as protective shields, symbolizing the artist's psychic and physical integrity.



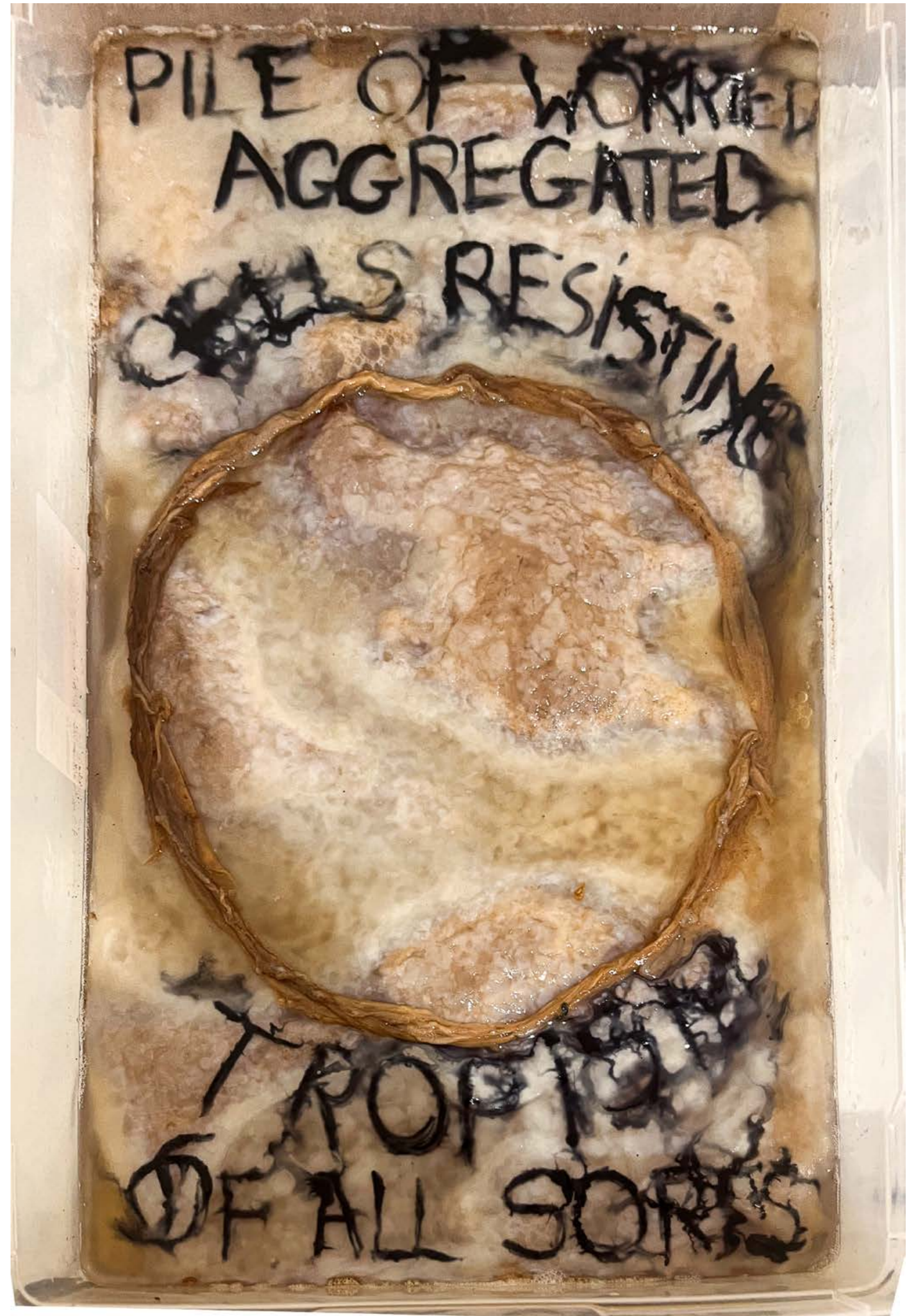
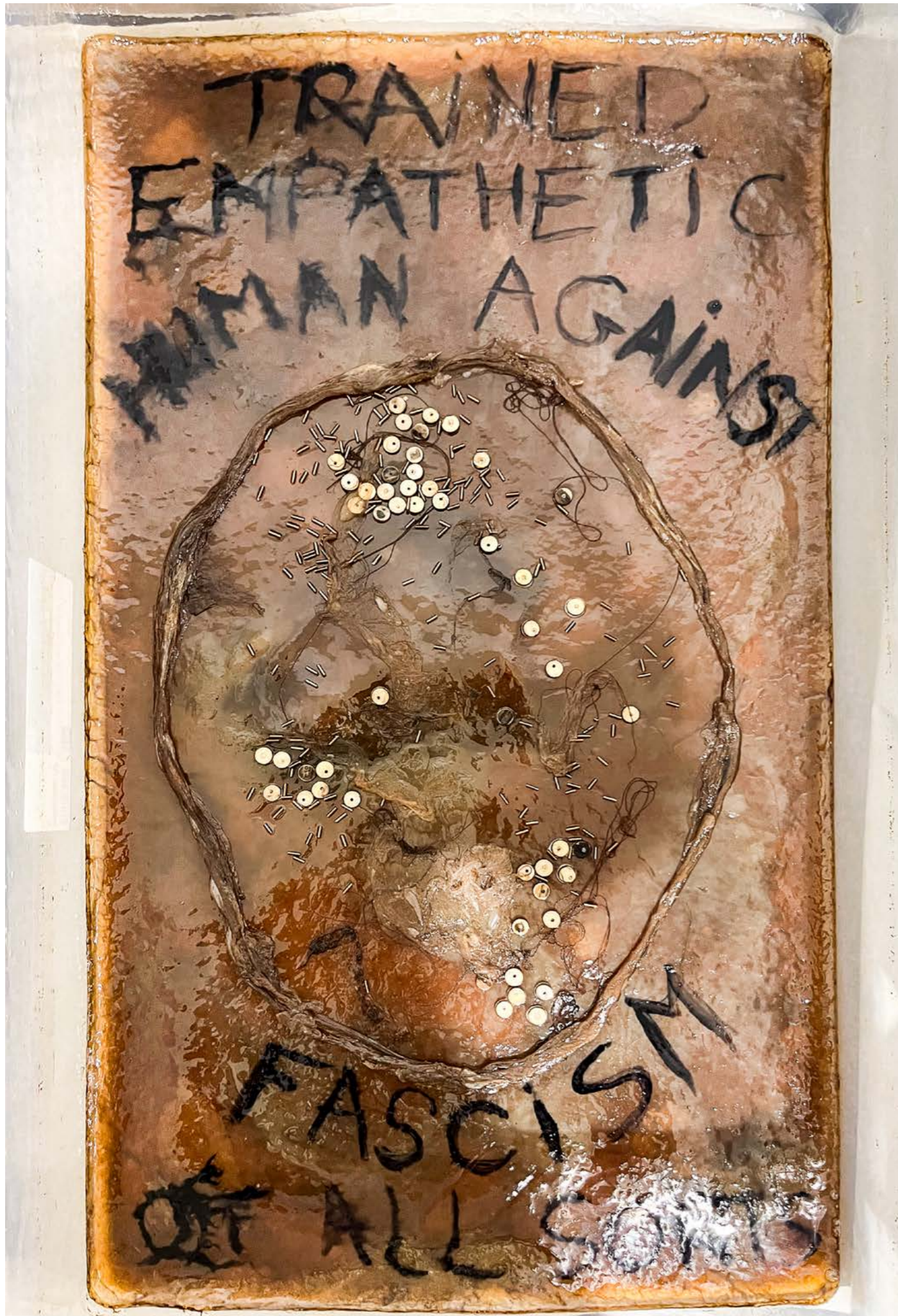
Guts Help Us!, 2024
Triptych of bust
66 X 35 X 35cm (each bust)

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

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

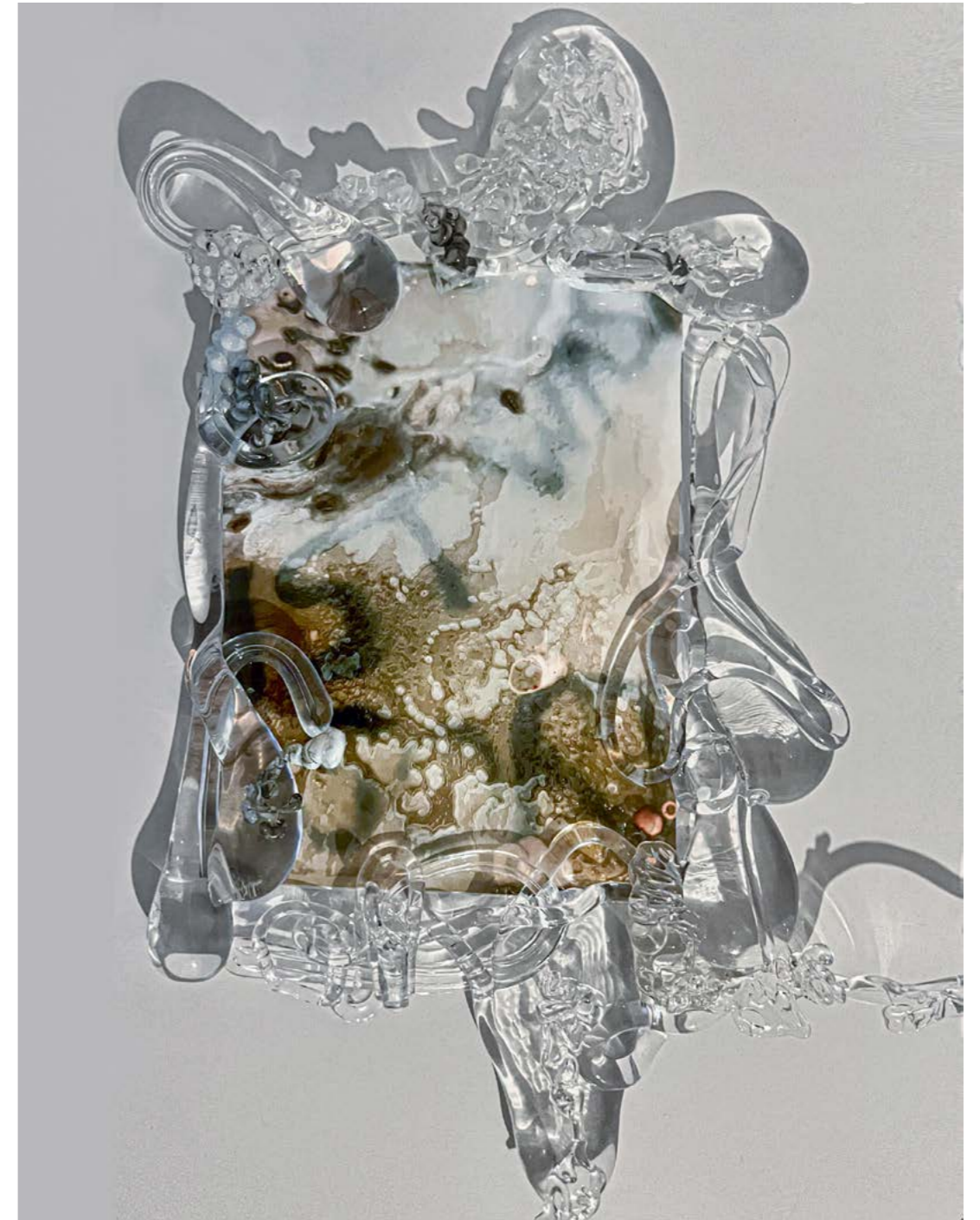
Buste 3 : DIRTY DUSTY BRAIN BOYCOTTING POPULIST WASH, OF ALL SORTS







Guts Help Us!, 2024
Images de la phase d'incubation



Guts Help Us!, 2024
Frame in glass
30 x 23 cm

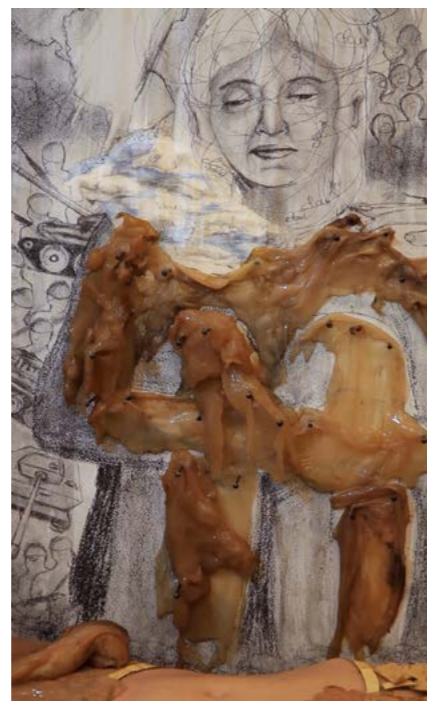
produced during the residency at
ARCAM Glass, Nantes
w./ a photography of one of the bust
incubating

Discernement Visceral

**- *Je Sais Que Je Suis Faite de Chair et du Sang qui Coule Dans mes Veines, et Toi, (devenu) Seule Idéologie, Tu es Perdu*
2023-2024**

Video project in the making taking as a starting point a sentence from the theatre play *Esthétique de la Résistance* (2023) by Sylvain Creuzevault, a play inspired by the eponymous book by Peter Weiss (1981).

"I know I am made of flesh and the blood running through my veins, and you, (who became) only ideology, you are lost"



***Discernement Visceral - Je Sais Que Je Suis Faite de Chair et du Sang qui Coule Dans mes Veines, et Toi, (devenu) Seule Idéologie, Tu es Perdu*
2023-2024**

Work in the making
Screenshots (middle, right)



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Visites d'atelier sur demande

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