

“Under the Skin”

**Sue de Beer, Clarity Haynes, Katherine Hubbard,
Alison Kudlow, Carly Ries, Eva Tellier**

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In Ursula K. Le Guin’s essay “Is Gender Necessary?,” she states: “One of the essential functions of science fiction, I think, is precisely this kind of question-asking: reversals of a habitual way of thinking, metaphors for what our language has no words for as yet, experiments in imagination.”* The works in the exhibition “Under the Skin” energize Le Guin’s words and break away from presumptions of how a woman’s body “should” perform and be categorized. They are in dialogue with the aesthetics associated with body horror in film, addressing the antagonistic nature of the monstrous feminine.

In body horror, emotions fluctuate between disgust, grief, insecurity, fascination, and repulsion when the viscosity of the body is foregrounded in the messy nature of women’s biology. Notable examples include: Andrzej Żuławski’s *Possession* (1981), David Cronenberg’s *The Brood* (1979), and more recently Jonathan Glazer’s *Under the Skin* (2013) and Coralie Fargeat’s *The Substance* (2024). These films, as well as many others, rely on our perception of femininity as reaffirming the vulnerability of the exposed female body. We see transgressions of bodily boundaries by devouring, penetrating, spilling contents, and destruction—transforming the female body into a grotesque spectacle.

“Under the Skin” is a celebration of the flesh: mutations, hybrids, and manipulated beings as expressions of how the body can be re-written as a mode of feminist empowerment. The show looks at how abjection is articulated and can be redefined, examining child-birth, care-taking, and body reconfiguration. The works seek to dissolve binary differences and disrupt the social order around female signifiers. The show flips our final understanding of the monstrous feminine into a source of power rather than punishment.

Sue de Beer references cinematic violence most directly in *Untitled* (1997-1999), as we see the artist split in half down the center standing in the corner of her room. The ambiguity in her facial expression between pain and relief suggests we are witnessing an anticipated death or a type of re-birth as she sheds her outer layer through a bloody severing.

Carly Ries’s works similarly depict a splitting as the artist’s body multiplies or transforms via metaphorical mitosis. Their doubling—visualized through the utilization of mylar as a liquid reflection—renders multiple selves through bodily reconfiguration.

Alison Kudlow explores the body as alien as it transforms through pregnancy, birth, lactation, and illness. Beaded glass seeps from orifices and drops through crevices in life-size anthropomorphic ceramic sculptures, supported by cast iron legs. Although fleshy and creature-like, these works fall into a slippery space of endless possibilities.

Eva Tellier’s sculptures combine skin-like materials, such as silicone, hair, and structures made from hollow clay tubes that evoke porous skin. The artist cuts and carves into the clay to offer speculation for bodies and identities beyond dominant narratives of femininity, invoking the monstrous feminine most literally.

Origin I is a large tondo painting of a crowning by **Clarity Haynes** who states: “I want to show something coming out, instead of coming in. I want to show blood and gore as part of the body, as part of the darkness of life’s entry, like its exit, from this earth.” In *Infinity Birth Altar*, a 36-fold repetition of pregnant bodies, we see extreme close ups of crotch shots resembling flowers that are hairy, leaky, and oozing with blood—fragmented yet ubiquitously crowning.

Katherine Hubbard’s unique experimental silver gelatin prints are made in collaboration with the artist’s mother. The contact prints are at a one-to-one scale with the body, working with vaseline and physical touch and pressure. These imprints of both Hubbard and her mother’s skin materialize intimacy through an embrace with the photographic paper. The resulting ghost-like black and white images index movement, texture, and the tactile quality of contact, as well as care and tenderness in the dark.



*Sue de Beer, Untitled, 1997-1999, C-print
49.88h x 36.38w in, Edition of 3 of 3*



*Katherine Hubbard, body print, fold hold,
2023, Unique silver gelatin photograph,
39h x 29w in*



*Alison Kudlow, Catch, 2026, Ceramic,
glass, cast iron, 42h x 12w x 22d in*

*Ursula K. Le Guin, “Is Gender Necessary?” (1976), Redux (1998), in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Writing, Science Fiction, and Fantasy* (Simon & Schuster, 2024), 165.