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ALEX CARVER
Expanded Skin
Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin
23.04.2024–22.06.2024

‘In my work I have continued to fixate on the conflation of the physical body and the medium of painting as its prosthetic extension, both as a living skin and a conceptual membrane. For me, painting is a literal skin which unspools across culture and history at a civilizational scale, and like our own skin, is a true sensory and metabolic organ. Painting is sensory because it can record its own production so intricately in the form of mark making and is metabolic because it consumes whatever representations we make with it, and then in turn is perceptually consumed in itself by us as viewers.

Over the years this contradictory impulse to experience painting as a skin while also thinking of it as a holographic membrane of information has driven me to produce paintings inspired by equally contradictory source materials. On the one hand the brutality and literalism of body horror in the form of medieval torture, and on the other the sophistication and tool driven progress of the biomedical sphere in the form of diagrammatic fragments of patents for surgical robotics, decellularized tissues used in transplant procedures and most recently in the form of the skin graft meshing device’.

-Alex Carver

Expanded Skin marks Alex Carver’s third solo exhibition at the gallery.

Embracing a regressive arc in his paintings, Carver draws inspiration from contemporary biomedical imagery and diagrams as well as medieval miniaturist imagery of the *Divine Comedy*. His new body of work transitions from dense machine-produced geometries to hand-made paper models. The models are cut in an intricate pattern that imitates a process utilized in skin grafting¹ known as meshing and are then taken as raw material to be pulled apart and stitched back together within the holographic space of painting.

Carver’s multilayered works convey varying degrees of illusionism, most primarily in the form of cuts, wounds and shadows, which threaten to consume the images and impressions contained within the frame of the canvas, only then to be gently pinned down with the trompe l’oeil acid green tabs of tape at their edges. A prominent contradiction lies within the very structure of the series: works that are ‘versos’ of each other, compositionally mirrored and rendered in highly saturated inverted color palettes. These versos purge the paintings of their deliberately overly burdened contents, privileging the emergence of the diagram from beneath as an equally erotic subject. With each reference to its own artificiality, the violence of the subject matter becomes diluted by pastiche. Carver makes no distinction between mythical and real testaments of torture and ecstasy, as he surges together bodies, narratives and painterly techniques. The tension between illusion and sensation within the paintings themselves results in a polychromatic psychedelia.

In the gallery’s second exhibition room, three paintings are not bound to the gallery’s architecture but to their own hardware, transformed into three-dimensional objects that allow the viewer to move around them and inspect their backsides. This positioning exposes the rear of the canvas like the patient draped in nearby work.

1 *Expanded Skin* makes reference to the process of split-thickness skin grafting, whereby the harvested donor skin is placed through a primitive device known as a mesher. The mesher is not a particularly advanced tool compared to the other instruments of the modern surgeon, but it does something important, which is to incise the skin with a series of precisely scaled and offset cuts.

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Through the appropriation of medieval paintings, Carver's source imagery is highly structured and diagrammatic. Botticelli's illustrations of the *Divine Comedy* serve as cartographic depictions of *Dante's Inferno*, which Carver decontextualizes and then reanimates within his own illegible architectures. Understanding the surface of painting as a freely unfolding, unlimited continuum, the painting is paradoxically collapsed by the self-referentiality of the medium, and infinite in its layers which seep from the canvas into the physical exhibition space. Celestial beings, man and beast all cohabitate through interwoven pictorial landscapes. Sprites rendered in thick monochromatic linework intermingle with human bodies caught between the intersections of Carver's capricious treatment of paint, skin melting into the motion blurred frottaged diagrams, soft brushstrokes, and raised patterns, sometimes amputated by the negative space of bare canvas. The paintings vibrate with coinciding narratives, generating an uncanny atmosphere: the palpable preoccupation with pain is compelling, suspending the viewer in desire to make contact with the violence it promises but ultimately withholds.

ALEX CARVER (b. 1984) lives and works in Boise. Carver is a graduate of Cooper Union, New York and received his Masters of Fine Arts from Columbia University, New York. Alex Carver's work has been exhibited and screened in international venues and in festivals including Nahmad Contemporary, New York (2023); Lyles & King, New York (2023); Art Basel Parcours (2023); Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin (2023); Stavanger Art Museum (2023); Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2022); the Art Encounters Biennial, Romania (2021); Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin (2021); Helena Anrather, New York (2021); Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2019); Tate Modern, London (2018); Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler, Berlin (2018); Lincoln Center, New York (2016); Berlinale, Berlin (2015); Biennale of Moving Image, Geneva (2014); Melbourne International Film Festival (2014); BAM, New York (2014); Locarno International Film Festival, Locarno (2013); Vancouver International Film Festival, Vancouver (2013).

Alex Carver's work is in the collections of:

Pinault Collection, Paris
Stavanger Art Museum
Ringier Collection, Zurich
Kistefos Museum, Norway
Langen Foundation, Neuss
GOME Art Foundation, Hong Kong