

The background of the entire page is an abstract artwork. It features a dense, chaotic network of thin, dark brown lines that resemble tangled hair or roots. These lines are set against a warm, yellowish-tan background that has a slightly textured, aged appearance. The lines are most concentrated in the upper left and right corners, with some smaller clusters scattered throughout the center.

Body Abstracts

Iri Berkleid
2022

Forewords





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

Presentation

The series of sculptures *Body Abstracts* are the result of two converging dimensions that define my art. Over the years, I've experimented with an unlikely partner: bacterial cellulose. I discovered this organic material at the *School of Visual Arts* biolab in New York in 2018 and developed new ways of interacting with bacteria since then. Bacteria, as they multiply in trays filled with liquid, form a membrane at the surface which becomes my (living) canvas. As the membrane grows and thickens, I inlay alien bodies into the membrane, which absorbs them over the course of its growth. Unlike expressionist artists like Anselm Kiefer or Aki Kuroda who make cosmic time their hallmark, I work with biological time - my art encapsulates it and makes it palpable as it renders its vulnerability, delicacy, and inevitability.

The second dimension is a conceptual one. It originates in an inquiry into the human body – biological, social, political – and its representations as we grapple with an environmental and identity crisis.

The title *Body Abstracts* pays homage to the British artist Helen Chadwick and her series *Meat Abstracts*. First woman to have been nominated for the Turner prize, Chadwick is also the first artist to have merged biology and art.

The busts are about 65cm long, 27cm large and 17cm thick. Originally meant to be pinned on the wall by two nails at each extremity, they have, at times, been presented on pedestals and other metallic frames for diverse installations.



















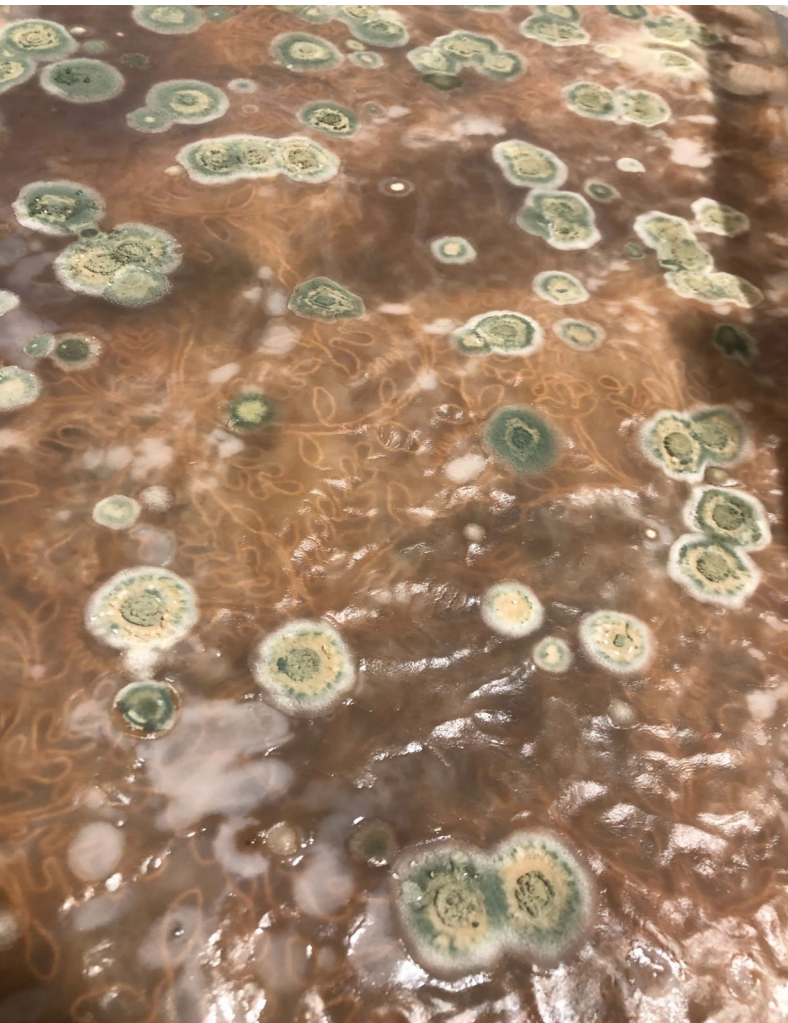
Experimentation

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 subjects like inter-species empathy, love, exile and awe. 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.

Moulds on Scoby with lace



Sand drawing on Scoby



Coton wire drawing on Scoby



Scoby encrusted with pearls

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 the "very fabric of life that binds us together in the mystifying dance of microscopic and everchanging cells".

Marie de Ganay



They, who sees through, 2021
Suspended light Sculpture
Dried Soby, metal structure
85 x 40 x 40 cm

Documentation & experimentation
in a giant Soby culture



SOBY
(Symbiotic Culture of Bacteria and Yeast)
producing bacterial cellulose and subjected
to different processes of drying and
sculpting





Microdosage Poétique, 2022
Scoby encrusted with fabric

In the making - 150 liters of prepared liquid
in a pool of 120 x 190 cm

See a documentary video
about the process [here](#)



Bio

Iri Berkleid started her career in 2017 with *Flesh and Stones*, during her residency in Madrid. This immersive, collaborative and multidisciplinary artwork bears the mark of her past, as a producer in contemporary opera in London. With dancers and performers, she created a scenography on the themes that would later drive her artistic exploration: the link between psyche and matter.

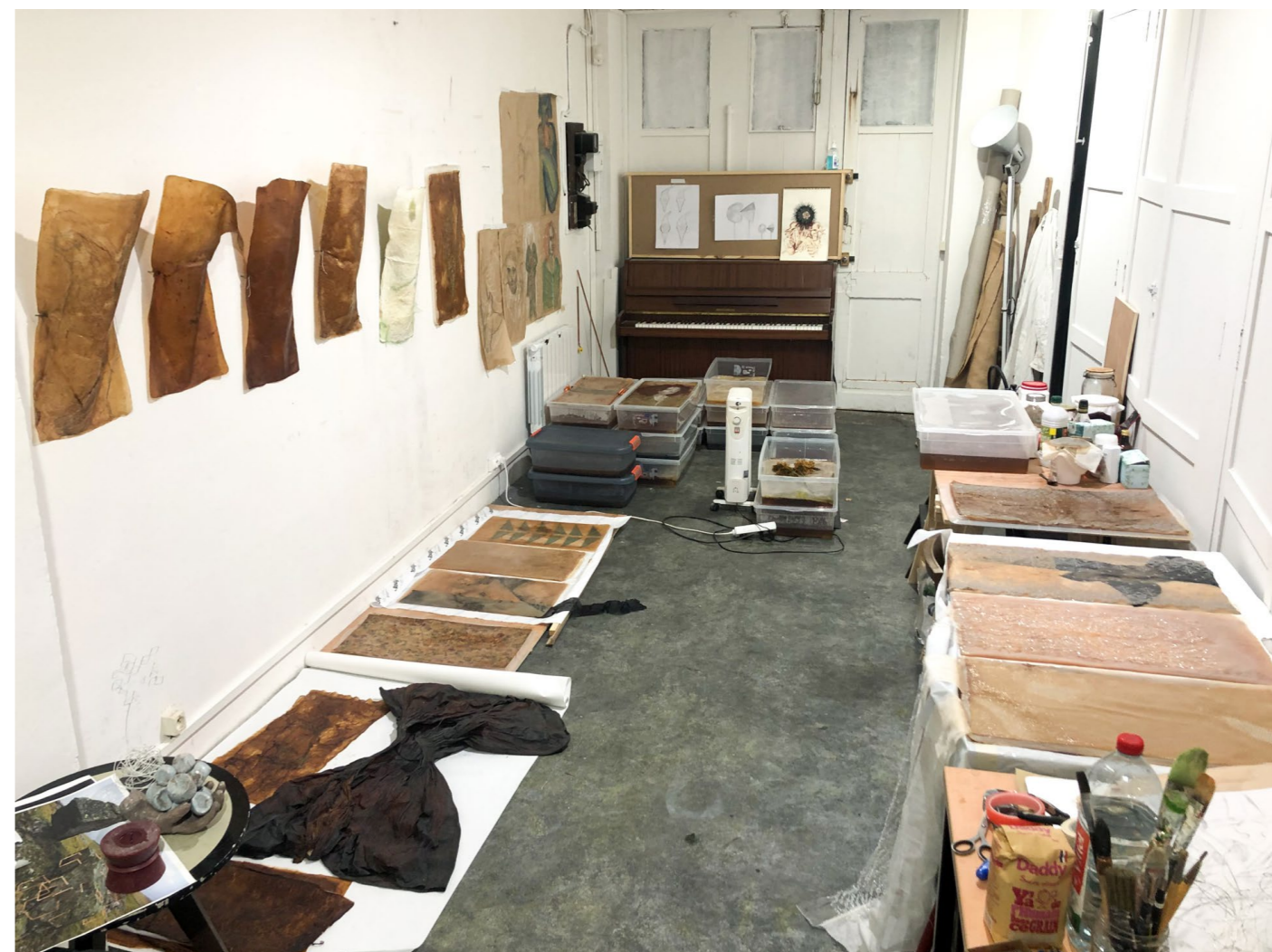
Iri then trained in different practices, among which sculpture, video & installation. It was during her MFA at the School of Visual Arts in New York in 2018 that she met with organic materials in the school's biolab.

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 - in Israël and Palestine. She then trained as a mediator in international organizations. This work experience made her aware of power relations, social structures, and conflict dynamics. Her art depicts these themes by creating experiences of communion, which transcend cultural, psychological and physical barriers.

Iri Berkleid is interested in investigating disruptive psychological mechanisms on the individual and sociological levels.

Influenced by surrealists and akin to artists exploring our contemporaneity through the prism of biology and molecular activity, Iri uses materiality – the physical properties of materials – as a starting point of investigation.

For her sculptural installation and video works, she fashions a wide range of materials, from the synthetic to the mineral, the organic to the vegetal, and both dead and living bodies.



CV

Education

DIPLOMA

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
2007-2011	Law and Political Science (Bachelor's Degree), Université Paris Panthéon-Assas, Paris II

CERTIFICATES

2022	Scenography & Stage Design, Studio Té , Rennes
2016	Contemporary Art (short course), Sotheby's Institute of Art , London
2015	Advanced Photography class (short course), Central Saint Martins , London
2014	Social Anthropology (MOOC), Oxford University , London

Exhibitions & Residencies

SHOWS

2022	Microdosage Poétique, SOMA Marseille (solo) Eros Hypnotica, Artwork in Promess , Paris Symbiocène, L'Été des Serpents (OFF Les Rencontres d'Arles), Arles Body Abstracts, 23 rue de Saint Petersburg , Paris (solo)
2020	<i>Four Seasons and a Half</i> , Van der Plas Gallery , New York (solo) (cancelled for COVID)
2020	Queer Appropriation, Cité Internationale des Arts , Paris
2019	Non-location Specific, Flatiron Gallery , New York
2018	Te Llevo Para Que Me Llevés, Centro Munar , Buenos Aires
2017	Flesh & Stones – Renacimiento, Espacio Nigredo , Madrid (solo)

RESIDENCIES & ARTISTS COLLECTIVES

2022	Resident at SOMA , Marseille, FRANCE Member of the collective Le Cercle de l'Art , Paris, FRANCE
2021	Resident at AYATANA Research Program for Science & Art , Ontario, CANADA
2020	Member of the Queer Appropriation Workshop, Cité Internationale des Arts , Paris, FRANCE
2019	Temporary Member at the Houlloc , Aubervilliers, FRANCE
2017	Resident at R.A.R.O , Madrid, SPAIN Resident at ACART Intercambiador , Madrid, SPAIN

Prizes & Awards

2020	Los Angeles Cinematography Awards (LACA) Finalist in the category "Experimental short" for <i>It's Supposed To be A Loop</i>
2018-20	School of Visual Arts (SVA) Departmental Awards Excellence Award & scholarship for the years 2018, 2019 et 2020

Previously (Cultural Entrepreneurship & Diplomacy)

CULTURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

2016 -2017	Program Coordinator, .ART Domains (United Kingdom Creative Ideas -UKCI), London
2016	Short-term Project Coordinator for the art social media platform, The Artstack , London
2015-2016	Executive Producer for the Opera Puck, Synart & The Royal College of Music (RCM), London

DIPLOMACY & MEDIATION

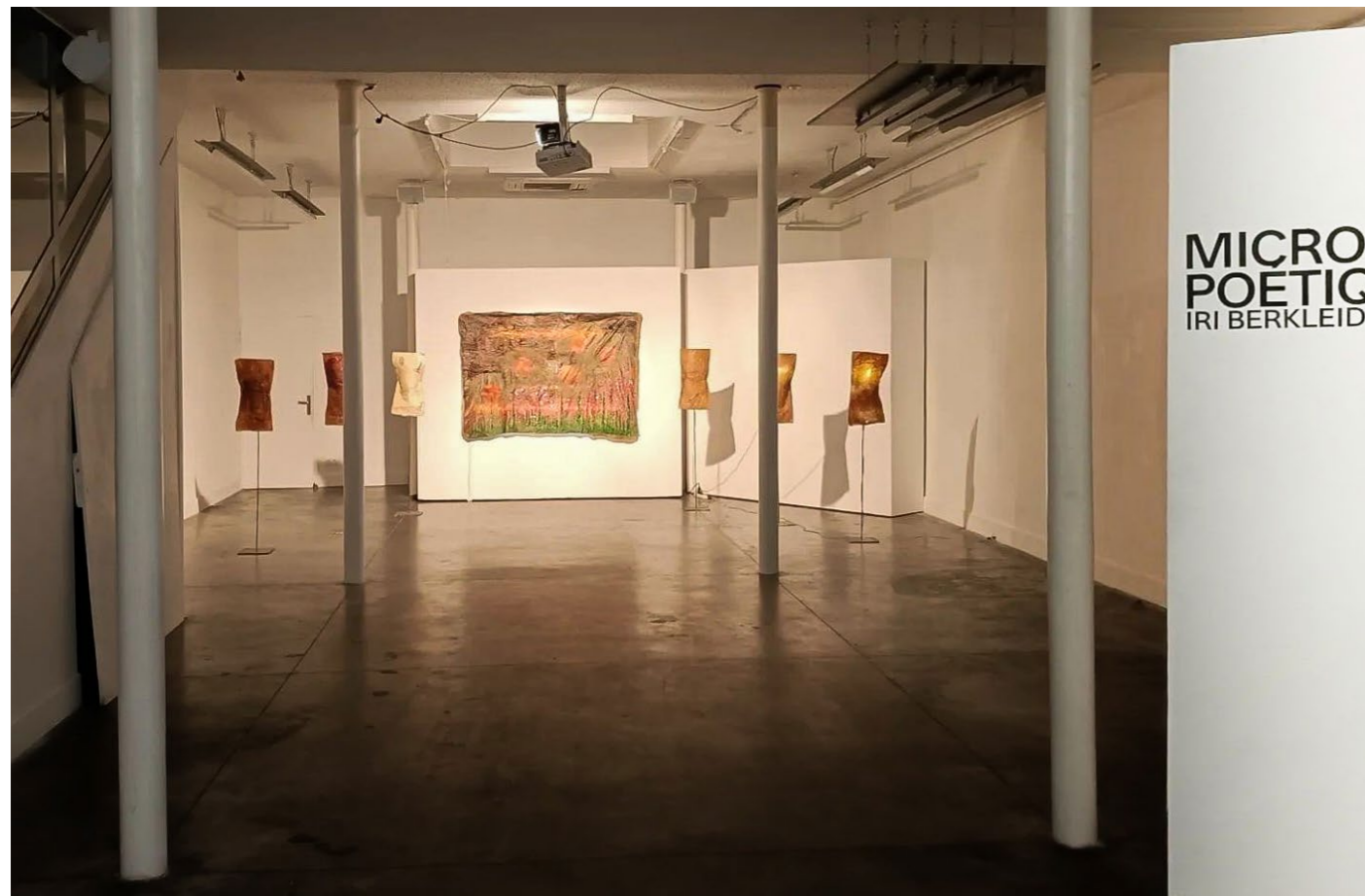
2014	Assistant to the director of Mediation, OMBUDSMAN OFFICE, United Nations , New York
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Exhibition Views





Microdosage Poétique
SOMA, Marseille, October 2022



www.iberkleid.com
www.instagram.com/iriberkleid/