

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DONNA HUANCA: WET SLIT



28 FEBRUARY – 18 APRIL 2020
PRIVATE VIEW: THURSDAY, 27 FEBRUARY, 6 – 8 PM
SIMON LEE GALLERY, LONDON

Simon Lee Gallery is proud to announce *WET SLIT*, a solo exhibition of new works by Bolivian-American artist Donna Huanca. This is Huanca's debut exhibition with the gallery and her first solo show in London since *SCAR CYMBALS*, her 2016 commission at the Zabłudowicz Collection. Incorporating painting, sculpture, sound and scent, Huanca's site-specific installation immerses viewers in a total environment which synthesises her unique aesthetic with a politics of the body as it relates to space and temporality.

Huanca's practice draws particular attention to the skin as the complex interface via which we experience the world around us. Her 'skin' paintings – layered on magnified cross-sections of her models' painted figures photographed during performance – refer directly to the body. During the artistic process, she layers colours and forms with paint on her models, resulting in an indexical practice that places emphasis on the interaction between the ephemerality of experiential art and the permanence of painting. This exploration of the transient pertains directly to the temporal experience of the body, invoking themes of mortality and calling to mind the fleeting connections, both corporeal and emotional, brought about by physicality and touch.

Entering the gallery, viewers find themselves in a cocooned space, the walls hung with swathes of diaphanous polythene that engages with the tactility of the artist's work. These sheets will be recycled in future pieces of the artist's sculptural practice, further engaging with her method of reusing and extending materials in multiple iterations and forms. As though islands, two sculptures form an archipelago in the space. Coated in layers of highly textured oil paint mixed in with sand, their totemic proportions act as surrogates for Huanca's models, who are both sheltered and observed through the negative space of their compositions during performance. By introducing her organic statements into the white light of the gallery, Huanca emphasises the primordial in her practice. All her materials refer directly to the human body and denote an engagement with the cultural traditions of her Bolivian ancestry.

The exhibition continues into the basement where viewers are enveloped in a dark, hermetic environment that counteracts the sterile light of the ground floor. This inversion of the traditional gallery space positions institutional critique at the heart of Huanca's femme-centric practice, upending prevailing power relations and realising a

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sanctuary. In both spaces, she facilitates an amplified connection between the senses with the introduction of sound and scent, bringing sight, hearing and smell into congress. The galleries are suffused with a fragrance derived from Palo Santo, a holy wood native to South America used in ritual purification ceremonies in both folk and church traditions. The sound piece, which uses natural sounds of water and liquid, serves to further displace the viewer from their surroundings and into a transcendent state, while underlining the fluidity of the subconscious. Huanca's background in sound art generated a practice based around sensory experimentation, which brings bodies and architecture into direct contact. Fundamentally, Huanca's emotionally instinctive body of work challenges the viewer through an invocation of the mutable, interactive and non-conforming.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Donna Huanca

Donna Huanca was born in Chicago, IL in 1980 and lives and works in Berlin, Germany. She studied at the Städelschule, Frankfurt, Germany as well as the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME and the University of Houston, Houston, TX. She has been the recipient of the DAAD Artist Frankfurt and a Fulbright research grant. In 2019 Huanca was the subject of two major large-scale exhibitions, *OBSIDIAN LADDER* at the Marciano Art Foundation, Los Angeles, CA and *LENGUA LLORONA* at Copenhagen Contemporary, Copenhagen, Denmark. She has previously had solo exhibitions at the Belvedere Museum, Vienna, Austria (2018); Yuz Museum, Shanghai, China, (2018) and at the Zabludowicz Collection, London, UK (2016).

About Simon Lee Gallery

Founded in London in 2002, Simon Lee Gallery represents artists of diverse generations whose practices explore a wide range of media, from sculpture and painting to video and photography, and who share a broad interest in an exploration of the conceptual. Aiming to provide a significant international audience for its artists, the gallery also regularly punctuates its programme with historical exhibitions and curated group shows, which present shifts in contemporary art practice and thought, whilst broadening the dialogue with artists outside of the gallery's core programme. In addition to its UK activity, in 2012 the gallery opened a space in Hong Kong, which introduced its artists to a wider public in Asia, with a fully independent programme. In 2014, Simon Lee Gallery opened an office and private viewing space in New York. In 2017, this space was re-launched with a year-round programme of exhibitions and events, showcasing the work of emerging and established artists in dynamic group and solo exhibitions.

Facebook, Instagram, Twitter: @SimonLeeGallery
www.simonleegallery.com

Image: Donna Huanca, *SEED CELL REDUX*, 2019-2020, Oil, sand on digital print on canvas, 220 x 180 cm (86 5/8 x 70 7/8 in.) Courtesy the artist, Simon Lee Gallery and Peres Projects, Berlin.

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