

SKIN DEEP

**EROS DIBRA
ANNA ORBACZEWSKA
VIKTOR PETROV
MILICA ZHIVKOVIC**

Curated by **IZABELA GOLA**

Oct 18 - 27

Opening Oct 19

On view Fridays - Sundays, 11am - 5pm

**RU House, #404B
Colonels Row, Governors Island**

RU
RESIDENCY UNLIMITED

Skin Deep

In an era marked by fractured identities and polarized discourse, particularly in the wake of global humanitarian crises, this exhibition underscores the urgency of resistance that preserves the authenticity of one's voice amidst the socio-political forces seeking to dismantle it. *Skin Deep*, curated by RU Guest Curator, **Izabela Gola**, the final RU exhibition of the year on Governors Island—a space itself emblematic of transience, hosting artists from across the globe—brings together four European artists whose practices examine the body as a lyrical conduit for reflecting on the construct of selfhood.

Skin Deep reimagines the *body* as a vessel, constantly evolving yet deeply rooted in the complexities of trauma, memory, and identity. Through their works, **Eros Dibra** (Albania), **Anna Orbaczewska** (Poland), **Viktor Petrov** (Bulgaria, based in Berlin) and **Milica Zhivkovic** (Montenegro), navigate the *body* as a site of resistance, through strong visual expressions that bridge personal and collective histories.

Each of these artists grounds their individual voice in the visceral and physicality of the body or larger social body. The *body* functions as both the anchor of personal transformation and a reflection of larger socio-political processes.

Eros Dibra's emotionally charged works explore memory and identity through repetitive, abstract forms that evoke subconscious and Balkan folklore. **Anna Orbaczewska** focuses on bodily identity and psychological depths, subverting the male gaze through expressive, powerful figurations. **Viktor Petrov** addresses the intersection of domestic space and societal oppression, using mass-produced objects in large-scale installations, while **Milica Zhivkovic** engages with displacement and trauma through cultural lens of Turbo Folk fabrics and her own symbolics.

Through these various practices, the body is not merely a form but a dynamic vessel for the complexities of identity and memory. The works presented invite the viewer to witness the body as a morphing entity that resists categorization, while simultaneously embracing the poetics of defiance.

The reflected idea of the self is fluid, constantly reshaped by memory, proximity to trauma, and external socio-political pressures. The self is never static; it is in a perpetual state of becoming—reshaped by experience, history, and resistance.



Skin Deep continued

Eros Dibra hailing from Shkodër—a city nestled between mountains and lakes permeated with Balkan myths—presents works that evoke emotion through dreamlike, stream-of-consciousness narratives arrived with a delicate interplay of marks and erasures. Primarily a painter and multimedia artist, Dibra constructs an index of forms deeply rooted in memories, past events, dreams, and the everyday. His oil paintings, such as *Figures* (2021) and *Missing Memories* (2022), along with his drawings, fluctuate between abstraction and figuration, achieved through sensitive, almost tactile brushstrokes and softly saturated color fields.

These emotionally charged, ambiguous shapes, often painted in obsessive, repetitive series, evoke the darker hues of Albanian folk tales and the rhythmic cadences of Rumi's poetry, weaving a personal and intimate mythology.

Dibra's work transcends traditional media, as seen in his video installation *Alone with the Alone* (2014), which delves into themes of alienation, isolation, and displacement within the frameworks of contemporary society and its hierarchical structures. "My creativity," Dibra explains, "seeks to transform the decomposition of contemporary feelings into interconnected images, words, and gestures, as though governed by an alchemical formula." [Click here](#) for artist's bio.

Anna Orbaczewska creates figurative paintings, ink drawings, and ceramics—including ceramic tiles and plates—that center on the visceral nature of the body and its psychological depths. Orbaczewska's work evokes powerful imagery revolving around bodily identity, human psychology, and the complexities of emotional experience.

The visual narrations process personal inhibitions and anxieties tied to memory and human relationships, as observed in *You Have to Adapt* (2024) and *Look What Happened to Me* (2023). Through her exploration of trauma and the unconscious, the artist seeks to translate a barrage of emotions into near-pictogram form, capturing the psychological intensity of human experience.

Painted with a skill reminiscent of Baroque, Rococo, and Expressionist masters, her brushwork combines bold, saturated primary colors—such as reds and blues—with a humorous lightness and sensitivity that contrasts with the darker themes she explores. By referencing master painters such as Fragonard, Boucher, and Velázquez, Orbaczewska both acknowledges and subverts historical patriarchal value systems. Her reinterpretations through a feminist lens, redirect the traditional gaze cast upon the female body, focusing instead on the interiority of the human psyche. The strong, expressive figures that emerge from her canvases become illuminations of the deepest, often concealed, facets of the human condition. [Click here](#) for artist's bio.

Skin Deep continued

Viktor Petrov is a multidisciplinary installation artist whose work reflects the socio-political and domestic structures of the Balkans at times saturated with local folklore. His practice critiques systems of oppression, particularly the patriarchal and authoritarian frameworks that have shaped his region's history. Petrov frequently uses mass-produced objects—such as riot shields and domestic materials like dishwasher racks and kitchen stoves—to create large-scale installations that blur the boundaries between domesticity and state control.

In works like *Suspensorium* (2024), Petrov transforms police defense shields into architectural forms, highlighting the aesthetics of power and social control. His *Going Backwards in a Circle* (2022) subverts materials associated with domestic labor, repurposing them to critique traditional gender roles and societal expectations.

At the heart of Petrov's practice is the theme of social displacement. His work often employs a feminist perspective, challenging social stereotypes and creating a new visual language that suggests resistance and collective transformation. Bulgaria's communist history, intergenerational trauma, and the remnants of those systems continue to inform Petrov's examination of contemporary power dynamics and the possibilities for social change. [Click here](#) for artist's bio.

Milica Zhivkovic is a multidisciplinary artist whose work is shaped by her experiences growing up in the Balkans, particularly during the Belgrade bombing in 1999 and post-war aftermath. Her practice reflects on themes of loss, displacement, and memory, deeply informed by her family's post-war migration across former Yugoslav states. Zhivkovic has developed a symbolic, sensual visual language that engages with these difficult histories.

Working with fabrics traditionally used for Turbo Folk costumes—a genre emblematic of post-war Balkan popular culture—Zhivkovic paints large-format pieces that merge abstraction and figuration. Her eerie forms oscillate between organic shapes and weapon-like figures, creating an unsettling tension between beauty and violence, nature and conflict.

Her video piece, *Where Do Wild Roses Grow* (2023), addresses the struggles of women in the Balkans, emphasizing how traditional societal norms, reinforced by Turbo Folk culture, continue to shape female identity. Through her work, Zhivkovic examines how these cultural forces intersect with personal and collective trauma, creating a complex narrative of identity formation and resistance. [Click here](#) for artist's bio.

Through the presented visual expressions, the body becomes a chronicle of survival, a repository for memory, and a symbol of enduring self-realization—ultimately emerging as a site of profound resistance against erasure and fragmentation.

Ultimately, these artists use the body as a narrative vehicle for resistance, exploring trauma and healing while acknowledging the intricate relationships between cognition, memory, and the physical self. This exhibition offers a counter-narrative to the perpetuating toxic socio-political discourse that pervades grounding of selfhood and fractures human relations.

Works on view by Eros Dibra



Erasures of Memory series
2024
Watercolor and pencil on canvas
10 x 12 in 2



Erasures of Memory series
2024
Watercolor and pencil on canvas
6 x 8 in 7



Erasures of Memory series
2024
Watercolor and pencil on canvas
8 x 10 in 7



Alone with The Alone
2014
Video installation
9m: 37sec

Works on view by Anna Orbaczewska



Nothing is as it seems
2024
Oil on canvas
60cm x 80cm



Look what happened to me
2023
Oil on canvas
30cm x 30cm



Pleasure Hand
2023
Oil on canvas
40cm x 30cm



Untitled
2024
Oil on canvas
110cm x 150cm



Untitled
2023
Oil on canvas
100cm x 100cm



After Boucher 23
2023
Oil on canvas
H: 60cm

Works on view by Viktor Petrov



Going Backwards in a Circle
2022

Glass-ceramic, tattooed
silicon hand, meat claw,
stove pipes,
30 x 30 x 7 cm



Suspensorium
2024
Riot

shield(polycarbonate),
stainless steel fittings,
webbing strap,
90 x 45 x 10 cm



Suspensorium
2024
Riot

shield(polycarbonate),
stainless steel fittings,
webbing strap,
90 x 45 x 10 cm



Chew & Screw
2024

Stainless steel, glass-
ceramic, silver
coating,
35 x 35 x 10 cm



Walled-up
2023

Steel, drain plugs,
metal chains,
DIMS vary, 3



Chew & Screw
2024

Stainless steel, glass-
ceramic, silver
coating,
35 x 35 x 10 cm

Works on view by Milica Zhivkovic



A life / A flash series
2021
Oil on fabric
120 x 155cm



A life / A flash series
2021
Oil on fabric
120 x 155cm



A life / A flash series
Oil on fabric
120 x 155cm



Where the wild roses grow
2023
Video based on AI, HD 1080x1920
4:00 min



A life / A Flash series
2024
Aluminum, oil on fabric
30 x 40cm

Installation



Opening Reception

Saturday, October 19, 2024

11am – 5pm

RU House, Governors Island

On View

Fridays – Sundays,

October 18 - 27

11am – 5pm



About the Artists



Eros Dibra is a YVAA artist and the recipient of the 2023 Ardhje Award for young contemporary artists in Albania. Dibra's works have been showcased in various exhibitions around the world, including in Paris, Washington DC, The Hague, and Strasbourg. Select solo exhibitions include: Escaping Space at Galeria Kalo (2022); The Plagues – Die Wunden at Atelier am Eck, Germany (2016); Burned sensations at FAB Gallery, Tirana (2013). In 2015, Dibra won first prize at the “Onufri 21st” edition with his video installation titled “XXI,” which was displayed at the National Gallery of Arts in Albania.

Full bio [here](#).



Anna Orbaczevska is a Polish artist who received the Cultural Scholarship of the City of Gdańsk many times and the Scholarship of the Marshal of the Pomeranian Voivodeship for Creators of Culture. She is a laureate of the program Kultura Polska na Świecie of the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, as well as the Bremenkunst scholarship. In 2019, Orbaczevska received 2nd prize in the Wrocław Weltchschmerz Drawing Triennale competition. Her works are in the NOMUS collection of the New Museum of Art in Gdańsk, the National Museum in Gdańsk, the National Gallery in Sopot, as well as in many private collections.

Full bio [here](#).



Viktor Petrov is a YVAA artist and the recipient of the 2023 BAZA Award for young contemporary artists in Bulgaria. Petrov is a Berlin-based Bulgarian artist whose oeuvre brings together the social, the architectural, and the political body in a dialogue about structural violence. Petrov's work has been awarded the UdK Art Prize, the Ursula Hanke Förster Prize, the Karl Hofer Scholarship, Deutsche Bank Atelier Scholarship and the NEUSTART+ scholarship. He has exhibited across Europe, a few recent shows including: Dog Days at Structura Gallery, Sofia (2024); 3% at Galerie NADAN, Berlin (2024) and Avec Plaisir at Kunstraum Porte, Leipzig (2024).

Full bio [here](#).



Milica Zhivkovic is a YVAA artist and the recipient of the 2024 Milčik Award for young contemporary artists in Montenegro. Zhivkovic has exhibited her works individually in Budapest, Prague, Belgrade, Bratislava, and Ljubljana, as well as collectively across Europe. She was a resident at Easttopics Budapest in 2019 and at Sandwich gallery in 2023 in Romania. Milica has participated in the Bienvenue Art Fair in Paris in 2021, and her works have been featured in several international art magazines, including ArtTribune, Kuba Paris, Easttopics, Nonfiction, AQNB, and others.

Full bio [here](#).

About the Curator

Izabela Gola is a New York-based curator, advisor, public speaker, and artist. Leading the Visual Arts and Design programs at the Polish Cultural Institute New York, her multidisciplinary practice engages contemporary visual arts and cultural diplomacy. Gola focuses on human rights and ecology, specifically human health and well-being—through an intersectional feminist lens, addressing today's urgent humanitarian and environmental crises and polarized public discourse. Gola has collaborated with notable US arts institutions, including MoMA, Brooklyn Museum, The New Museum, Residency Unlimited, A.I.R., Dallas Contemporary, Hauser & Wirth, The Kitchen, NYC Parks &, Antiquities, MIT List, Hudson Valley MOCA, Thomas Erben, Armory Show, and Frieze Art Fair.

Full bio [here](#).



This program is supported by the Trust for Mutual Understanding, Polish Cultural Institute New York, the Adam Mickiewicz Institute, the City of Gdansk, and the Government of the Pomeranian Voivodeship. RU is grateful for the partnership with Governors Island Arts.

