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PREMIERE INK

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LECXI DOUMER, JOHANN MUN, SAB DRESCHER, RYLEE SKY, OZ BARDOS, JAYNA WON,
AZIZE NGO

With limited career options, trans people turn to tattooing as a means of survival—and despite a rise in popularity, this practice often still exists on the fringes of normative culture. Only recently has ink gained acceptance in the workplace or “professional” sphere of most industries. The stigma of the body as a modular site for individuation is the crux of the likeness between the body-marking practices of tattooers and the body-modifying practices of trans people. They both aim to, or assist in the aim of others, to differentiate and particularize into their truer selves despite social stigmatization. Out of this shared taboo, “outsider” tattoo studios were formed by queer and marginalized communities who had been rejected or barred from “traditional” apprenticeships. *PREMIERE INK* brings together artists Lecxi Doomer, Sandy Kupfer, Sab Drescher, Rylee Sky, Oz Bardos, Jayna Won, Johanna Mun, and Azize Ngo, with practices in parallel, conflict with, or derivation of their tattoo work, into an exhibition. The show will be accompanied by a series of “flash days,” where pre-made designs from the artists are available to be tattooed in the gallery space, every Sunday of the exhibition run. This will be the inaugural show of Ceradon, the first trans-owned and operated gallery in LA.

Tattoo operates on and through the skin as a means for individuals to express their interior states, attitudes, or aesthetics more precisely. The artist’s making of the human figure into a symbol brings about an awareness of the viewer’s own expressive surface. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it in *Merleau-Ponty and Irigay in the Flesh*, “What ‘flesh’ articulates is an inherent structural reversibility: the seer’s visibility conditions vision itself... To see is also the possibility of being seen.” This switch of observer and observed manifests in *PREMIERE INK* by artists whose work thematically toils with the skin as a site for symbology and inversion of the viewer and viewed.

Lecxi Doumer’s *Lust Circus* breaks up the traditional frame into a series of steel surgical hooks and wall-mounted hinges typically used by body-mod communities seeking piercing which stretches the skin much like the hooks in the work stretch silicon surfaces. Lecxi creates compositions that transcend temporal and material boundaries by occupying a space that is glamorous yet critical of stardom. The central synthetic sheets are tattooed with faces and a cross lifted from vintage tattoo magazines. This use of skin to represent a symbol of the human body is a departure from the traditional use of the human body as a canvas for the symbol.

Rylee Sky’s ceremonial *Intuitive choices Intentional decisions* asks the viewer to participate in a water ritual, continually replenishing the wall-mounted sculpture as it slowly drips its contents into a dish below. Through engaging in this act of nourishment and care for the work, the viewer is given a responsibility to maintain the balance of the work, becoming a caretaker not a passive witness. The pillowed surface upon which the caretaker is meant to sit is mounted with a painting, in turn, having an element of the artwork to offer comfort and support to those who help maintain its water cycle.

Oz Bardos’ practice reflects the artist’s talismanic approach to working with a variety of materials. Whether it is semi-precious metals such as copper or acrylic remnants from their process, each material is given equal importance and value within a larger system. Via an alchemical process,

these materials are combined to transform their hidden properties into visible aspects of a body on canvas.

Sab Drescher focuses on the abundance of flesh, borrowing from the Baroque in their painting. Drescher captures and transforms the ambiguous folds and creases of the skin, rendering the body into an amorphous landscape out of its stratified parts. Using a custom-made device that combines a black marker and compressed air, Drescher flattens these dimensions of flesh with a surface layer of curled ink and calligraphy, thus merging the expression of language with that of flesh. The use of canvas board as a substrate only further flattens the image itself.

Sandy Kupfer's *Madonna and Child (Self Portrait)*, 2023, depicts the Virgin Mary using broad, impressionistic brushstrokes and layered acrylics, oils, and airbrushing techniques to form a humble and watchful mother altar. The artwork invites viewers to contemplate the universal importance of maternal acceptance, especially for the trans and queer community who face rejection from their biological families and are bereft of an older generation of queer figures.

Azize Ngo adapts the cyanotype process, in which sunlight is selectively exposed to a photo-sensitive chemical to render imagery, to combine motifs of their Turkish culture with biomorphic symbols of the body. Revisiting Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil's cyanotype series, Ngo's work extends the body beyond depictions of its parts, into propositions of new features, extensions, and augmentations.

Johann Mun expands upon his practice of incorporating found materials with ceramics as if to allude to surpassing disasters, items with unknown histories, and the organic likeness between bone, leather, and earthen clay. Departing from the ABEx imagery and Baroque patterning of his painting practice, Mun introduces a new, a-digital, and analog semiotics where material is left low-tech and unadorned. These relatively bare materials need no help or remanufacturing to occlude their hidden histories.

Clothing becomes an alterable medium for **Jayna Won**, using bleach to selectively disintegrate denim to flesh out a self-portrait of the artist. Facing away from the viewer and toward the interior of a dress, the figure of the artist is not confronting the viewer but begging them to peer into a space now absent of a wearer, of a body. Playing with histories of the female subject's gaze within European & American painting, Won uses absence as a means of self-preservation.

PREMIERE INK challenges the traditional roles of both the artist and the viewer, as well as the relationship between body and symbol. It highlights the problems that arise when one's body is reduced to a fixed symbol instead of being seen as a living entity. The exhibit draws attention to the dichotomy between the media spectacle or political tool trans people are made to be and their lived experiences as human beings with basic needs. The artists have shifted away from their tattoo practices to create independent works of art that exist beyond the living body. Similarly, viewers are encouraged to shift their political and symbolic conceptions of the trans body into a deeper empathetic understanding of the lived human experience.

About Ceradon

Ceradon is Los Angeles' first trans-owned and operated gallery. We specialize in cultivating the work of nexus artists, including but not limited to the craft of DJs, economists, sculptors, writers, architects, designers, and painters. We are keenly interested in developing the practices of artists working across mediums, economies, and worlds.

In noticing a lack of trans-owned industry in the arts world, Andra Nadirshah & Stevie Soares founded Ceradon in 2023. Ceradon believes that artists who are alienated from dominant narratives of equity, money, success, love, power, fantasy, play, death, marketplace, and sex offer particularly honest and compelling work. We seek radical honesty in art that dispels and tests previously assumed contrivances.

Ceradon aspires to be a point between creatives of numerous disciplines, providing opportunities for cross-contamination and engagement. By treating all media, fine art or not, as having the potential to speak radical truth, we plan to pair sociologists with DJs, tattooers with painters, and mystics with exhibition designers.

We do not exclusively seek trans artists but are inclusive of artists from all backgrounds.

As trans people are made to seek radical honesty with their own identities, we believe we are uniquely able to recognize, as curators, radical honesty in the work of artists and creators.