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SPECIAL SECTION: ANTHRO-ARTISTS: ANTHROPOLOGISTS AS MAKERS AND CREATIVES

Body art

Living in and leaving the body behind

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Body painting uses a three-dimensional living canvas. While a widespread activity that can be characterized as a creative cultural scene, it has not yet merited anthropological attention. Even though body painting is closely related to the body, it is ultimately often about overcoming this very body. This process already takes place during the creation of the painting, when the model's body is transformed into someone or something else, but even more so when it comes to the resulting visual representations, the photographs, in which the person's body recedes into the background in favor of the overall picture, the artwork. The twofold staging—becoming a three-dimensional work of art and then being staged for a two-dimensional photograph—gradually distances the body from the model and gives them the chance to appreciate the photograph of their painted body in a different light. While physically and emotionally challenging for the model, body painting is also experienced as psychologically beneficial. Such research findings open up new possibilities for art therapy.

Keywords: body painting, participant observation, well-being, staging, embodiment

Body painting is an artistic process that tends to be overlooked in several respects: because of the socially controversial use of the naked body and because of its short life span, it is different from other art forms and difficult to exhibit. Artists also do not have much time to complete their works—often only a few hours, depending on the model's time—and they cannot trade it once they are finished. Those few scholarly articles available on the topic are usually posts in medicine, where it is used as a tool in clinical anatomy teaching (see, e.g., Op den Akken et al. 2002; see also McMenamin 2008; Finn 2010; Nanjundaiah and Chowdapurkar 2012), or, when considering the social sciences, works that examine body painting, along with makeup, tattoos, hairstyles, etc., but are not exclusively or primarily concerned with it (see Steiner 1990; Fedorak 2009; Martí 2010). Furthermore, they mostly refer to historical or body-painting practices in the global South (Fortin 2009; DeMello 2014; Sauvet et al. 2018), but not to the body-painting scene in the so-called West.

Yet, a very vivid scene purely devoted to body painting, with events such as the World Bodypainting Festival in Austria, has developed in the past decade, with guidebooks, workshops, blogs, and social media groups devoted to the topic. According to an estimate, based on the experience of former world champion Peter Tronser (winner of four world titles at the annual World Bodypainting Festival), in Europe alone more than 100,000 people have either practiced it already or have a strong interest to do so, as models, workshop leaders, media specialists, or event organizers.[1] Because of its ephemeral quality, body painting relies heavily on additional media for ensuring its longevity, where photography plays a particularly important role in transforming body painting into a durable, portable, and convenient form to disseminate.

In this article, I highlight the body-painting models' roles and experiences, which are especially interesting because their bodies undergo a transformation through both painting and photography. Here, overcoming the body plays a role in various ways: the models have to overcome themselves to undress and endure the procedure,

1. Personal correspondence (meeting: August 10, 2020).

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and, ultimately, it is about leaving their bodies behind in favor of art, as body painting gives the bodies a completely different look that may make them largely unrecognizable, even to the models themselves. Moreover, the staged photographs taken of the finished body paintings are characterized by ambiguity (see Pinney 2008: 145) and lead to a further detachment from the persons shown, so that they can be enjoyed by the models as artwork without necessarily relating to them as their own bodies. As I will demonstrate, this process of overcoming and detachment is related to the feeling of flow and creativity (see Fischer and Wiswede 2009: 100; Schuster 2015: 50) and recalls spiritual practices of "purification" (see Bogdanova 2019) that may be beneficial for the models' psychological well-being.

Methods

The research is based on long-term participant observation over the past ten years in both the body-painting scene and the photography scene (for a discussion of the term "scene" see Hitzler et al. 2005: 20). "Scene" is preferable to "subculture" because it is based on the notion of intensive hubs as part of wider networks for creative activities and interaction rather than the boundedness of designated (sub)cultures. Both body-painting scenes and photographic scenes share similar features and overlap in parts. While centered on actual places for body painting, they are to a certain extent delocalized, where the internet plays an integral role in connecting, discussing, and planning. Online forums like modelkartei.de (translated "model index") offer the possibility to include or exclude the category "body painting" as an option, and people can create a portfolio as a body painter. A mutual dependency can be observed, as body painters need media specialists to capture their art in an appropriate way and media specialists find an interesting subject to explore in body painting. The models, mostly amateurs who do the work alongside their other vocations, are often the same within both scenes. Most of the actors practice it as a hobby; however, a few body painters and several photographers have built up a second income, and models sometimes receive a (moderate) payment for their work.

Geographically, my activities took place in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and the island of Gran Canaria associated with Spain. The scene is particularly active in German-speaking countries—the reason why can only be speculated: perhaps because Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland are densely populated areas where the physical copresence of several interested parties is easier to achieve. The World Bodypainting Festival, well covered in German-speaking media, has made more people aware of the activity. Thus, there are more courses and competitions in German-speaking areas. A more relaxed relationship to the naked body could also play a role in the fact that body painting is more present in rather secular areas than in strictly religious regions.

My own role in the scene includes various activities: over the past decade, I have often carried out body-painting shoots, have been an honorary jury member at festivals, have been painted myself, and have assisted body painters. These activities enabled me to be both a long-term participant and an observer in the scenes. Autoethnology is a useful method here because it involves a practice that must be experienced in one's own body if one is to claim an insider perspective (see Adams et al. 2017: 3). This approach also takes into consideration that social research is "not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions" (Smith 1999: 5). Nevertheless, I cannot deny that it took some effort to write about my experiences as a body-painting model. This may be surprising, since some of the resulting photographs are publicly visible on the internet or have been used as flyers, etc. In this observation, I already found a starting point for my research; apparently, I relate the photos less to my own physical body than to a body of work. I like to present this *Gesamtkunstwerk*, this overall work, but when I realize that through the reflection of "getting/being painted" my own body comes more into focus, it makes me a little uncomfortable.

Furthermore, in order to appreciate and understand the models' experiences, twenty-three semistructured interviews were conducted by myself and the Australian body painter and sociologist Wing Sum Diana Chan. The sample consists of women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-eight and two men, aged twenty-six and thirty-two, mostly from Europe and Australia. The number may not be high, but considering their similar responses to my inquiries, clear tendencies can be seen. Most of the interviewees also model in other genres such as fashion or fantasy—the latter referring to the staging of fairy tale–inspired themes that shows some overlapping with the genre of body painting. Five of the body-painting models are also body painters themselves.

Considering ethical dimensions, none of the participants attached importance to complete anonymity. However, models in general are usually not mentioned with their full names, but only with their first names or pseudonyms. The main reason is not because they are embarrassed about the (semi)nudity required as part of their involvement but because they are worried about reducing future job opportunities, as conservative bosses may not approve of such activities. In addition, some models have gained a certain popularity under their pseudonyms.

With the help of content analysis of the interview transcripts, "a method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a dataset" (Joffe 2011: 209), my interlocutors' responses were clustered. The use of similar words and expressions helped to find certain patterns of meaning-making. Of course, it cannot be denied that despite a general openness, my own presuppositions resulting from participant observation also play a role (see Altheide 1987: 211). Consequently, the method corresponds to David Altheide's "ethnographic content analysis" that "consists of reflexive movement between concept development, sampling, data collection . . . and interpretation. . . . Although categories and 'variables' initially guide the study, others are allowed and expected to emerge throughout the study" (Altheide 1987: 68).

Turning the body into a canvas

An expression that almost always pops up in the related scenes when it comes to body painting is "the body as a canvas." A classical artistic touch reminiscent of the old masters is introduced with the term "canvas." This fits with the observation that the body-painting scene is fighting for recognition as a "real" art form, which is also evident in expressions such as "body painting is an art," chosen as the name of a Facebook group and appearing in various book titles (see Düsterwald 2008; De ruiter 2012).

Furthermore, the expression "the body as a canvas" implies that something animate and three dimensional is linked to a two-dimensional, rigid material. One could find it degrading that a human body is compared to an object; furthermore, the concept of the "blank canvas" resonates, as if the painter could design the human body completely freely. De facto, however, the juxtaposition "body-canvas" also shows that the artistic concept must be adapted to the body—and not only to the body, to the model's shapes and forms, but also to the character of the model, for instance, to the perseverance and the posing abilities of the person. Creativity is limited by the materiality of the flesh—a fact that makes creativity actually *relevant* for everyday life, where creativity is always confronted with limits, where not everything imaginable can become a reality, that is to say that the creative idea has to be made manifest and, as it does, it must navigate the potentials and limits of the body. In this context, the characteristics of creativity as a problem solver become apparent (see Krause 1972: 42; Jerrentrup 2020: 156).

Body painting as (dis)embodied experience

Before we move any further, body painting should be defined for our specific context. We could say that the alteration of the human body comes close to being universal. As Terence Turner notes: "Decorating, covering, uncovering or otherwise altering the human form in accordance with social notions of everyday propriety or sacred dress, beauty or solemnity, status, or on occasion of the violation and inversion of such notions, seems to have been a concern of every human society of which we have knowledge" (Turner 2012: 486).

As there is a dearth of literature on body painting in the global North, we might refer to the large body of literature on dress (e.g., Barnes and Eicher 1992; El Guindi 1999; Eicher 2000). The question then arises as to whether body painting has a fundamentally different quality from clothing. Joan Entwistle develops an umbrella understanding of the term: "Dress is a basic fact of social life . . . all cultures 'dress' the body in some way, be it through clothing, tattooing, cosmetics or other forms of body painting" (Entwistle 2000: 323). She goes on to give examples of how differently dress is understood, depending on the cultural context or situation: a bikini might be enough to ensure that a woman is decently dressed on a beach but not in the boardroom. Following a broad definition of "dress," body painting falls into this umbrella category. More narrowly defined, the paints applied to the body are the most important criterion. Consequently, it can be concluded that body painting is both the process of applying paint on the body—linguistically, this is shown by the progressive form of the verb "to paint"—and the result of a nonpermanent painting that goes beyond typical makeup for everyday contexts.

In many ways, body painting both is distinct and shows overlaps with other practices. For instance, it resembles

makeup yet affects larger parts of the body. There are similarities to tattooing; however, body painting has to be finished in a much shorter amount of time and does not permanently transform the wearer. For tattoo models, respectively, tattooees, the term "canvas" is used as well, but in the related literature it is stated that it should not suggest passivity: getting tattooed can also imply "reclaiming the 'canvas'" for oneself (Santos 2009: 93). The art of mehendi or henna can be understood as similar to body painting, yet it lasts longer and reaches its decorative peak a day later (see Shukla 2008: 363). Consequently, body painting is both a unique and not-so distinctive art form. Therein lies its potential for both practice and theorization.

Let us take a closer look at the "canvas": in recent decades, the body has been exposed to increased social science interest (e.g., Lock 1993; Counihan 1999). While in critical theory the body was rather seen as something inferior and at the same time desired as something forbidden or alienated (see Horkheimer and Adorno 1969), as Scheiper notes, it "seems to be increasingly staged and presented in the transition from modernity to reflective modernity. Phenomena such as body building, body shaping, body painting, body piercing, wellness and beauty, jogging and walking, but also the spread of Asian relaxation and martial arts clearly speak for increased body awareness" (Scheiper 2008: 119–20). The body is seen as malleable, and there is an imperative to control and change it according to cultural and gendered perceptions of beauty (see Leimgruber 2005: 227). Consequently, the "beauty imperative," the surrender to dominant cultural norms, maintains the status quo (see Bordo 2004; Goldman and Waymer 2014: 3), accompanied by an increased focus on physical activities to enhance the body (see Rittner 1986: 142). Thus, it can be stated that the body is still a field of conflict in today's Western culture, caught between pervasive religious and puritanical views (see Sorabella 2008) and capitalistic and narcissistic views (Thurner 1992: 29), as well as creative and practical potentials and limitations.

Of course, I distance myself from strictly dualistic categories such as mind versus body or self versus body. In most of today's psychological and anthropological perspectives, "the body is not viewed as an object, entity, or vessel for the self, but as an active and mutating form that permits and restricts particular modes of being-in-the-world" (Gillies et al. 2004: 100; see also Csordas 1990). The body is inflected by structures of power, and some of them can be shaped, infiltrated, accepted, or ignored by their owner. Just as Entwistle (2000: 325) sees dress as both a social experience and a personal experience, body painting may seem like something superficial at first glance, but for the model, it is ultimately a deeply embodied and conflicted experience that navigates both personal and social realms. Another significant omission in the relevant literature is that it does not sufficiently explore how one might both be within and depart from the body, as part of a series of nonreligious creative processes.

A brief look at body painting in context

An examination of body painting would not be appropriate if one did not at least briefly consider some historical aspects of body painting and its relevance in different cultures,[2] as body painting can be considered "the oldest and, paradoxically, one of the most contemporary art forms" (Magalhães 2018). Looking back on a long history, it "has been practiced around the world as evidence from Paleolithic burial sites has revealed" (DeMello 2014: 63; see also Langley and O'Connor 2019) and can be considered one of people's prime means of artistic expression (see Beckwith 1990: 199), having appeared in different cultures, for example, among indigenous people of various areas (see Fortin 2009; DeMello 2014: 64). Some were made known worldwide in the 1960s by the photographer Leni Riefenstahl, who especially photographed body-painted Nuba people from Sudan (see Bailey and Peoples 2011: 232). Besides denoting the individuals' social status, body paintings also serve(d) their wearers' physical well-being (see Matike et al. 2011; Horváth et al. 2019).

Unlike reports of body painting in the global South (see Fedorak 2009: 73; De Mello 2014: 63), the body-painting scene in Europe and Australia is less about life stages and more personalized to meaningful moments in the models' lives, as stated by one of the interviewees: "For me, body painting initiated a process to accept my body" (Sarah). Yet, in the Western context, body painting has been linked to various scenes: the hippies of the 1960s and 1970s, for example, painted their bodies to demonstrate their closeness to nature, as well as their

2. Even though this article is not about the problem of cultural appropriation (see Daynes 2008; Urban 2015), it should be briefly noted here that the paintings of the scene usually bear little resemblance to traditional body paintings.

Figure 1: Backstage during a body painting. Body painters: Peter and Petra Tronser. Model: Jennifer.

imagined or desired proximity to tribal cultures; as Fedorak observes, "New York's East Village punks paint their bodies in multicolours, and European Goths paint their bodies white and their lips and eyes black" (Fedorak 2009: 73; see also Ogilvie 2005: 22).

The art of contemporary body painting was brought to a wider public by Joanne Gair and Demi Moore: in 1992, a picture of Demi Moore photographed by Annie Leibovitz appeared on the cover of the magazine *Vanity Fair*, which, following Gene Newman, "introduced the world to the art of body painting" (Newman 2000). Newman also interviewed body-painting artist Filippo Ioco, who wanted to distinguish himself in the crowded '80s New York art scene when he started body-painting projects that would blend the model into a setting as performance art.

These aspects may well have influenced the body-painting scene in various ways. However, the scenes that I focus on have body painting at the heart of activities, whereas with other earlier examples, body painting is only one of many design options. The same framework applies to indigenous rituals that continue, such as dance theaters like the south Indian form of Kathakali. Here, body painting is an element but not the central part of the activity. The contemporary body-painting scene gathers in internet groups and meets for workshops or festivals that are organized for body-painting enthusiasts, such as the World Bodypainting Festival (Klagenfurth, Austria; see Fig. 1), the Heringsdorfer Bodypainting Festival (Heringsdorf, Germany), the Euorpean Bodypainting Festival (Amsterdam, the Netherlands), or the World Art Connects (Gran Canaria, Spain), and usually combine workshops, competitions, and shows. The first body-painting festival was held in Austria in 1998, so we are looking at a fairly recent trend. In Europe, the artistic practice enjoyed more public appreciation than in other geographical regions (see DeMello 2014: 67). But there are now also increasingly larger festivals outside Europe; for example, a festival has been taking place in Daegu in Korea since 2009, and there is the Australian Body Art Festival that was introduced in 2017. Other cultural or music festivals sometimes include body painting as a side act. Furthermore, body painting is occasionally shown in TV programs, for instance, in the context of bets or challenges in game shows.[3]

Styles of body paintings

To apply the color to the body, different techniques are used in the scene of body painting. Action body painting

3. See, e.g., "Wetten dass?" ZDF, November 2009; "Abenteuer Auto," Kabel Eins, July 2013; "Frühstücksfernsehen," September 2015; "Taff," ProSieben, August 2017.

involves throwing paint onto the nude or primed body, but in most cases, the paint is applied with a sponge or a brush. Airbrushes are popular, especially among advanced users. In addition, artists use body extensions made of materials such as latex or cardboard, which are glued on; wigs, headdresses made of different materials, and even pieces of clothing can be integrated to form a new entity.

Partly independently of their creation, there are different types of body painting that show different relationships of the painting to the body, to its staging, and to the recipients. Models have to hold special poses in some painting styles, whereas in others this plays a subordinate role. Sometimes the primary goal of the paintings is to surprise the viewers; in other cases the recipients need more information to fully understand the painting.

In the following, the most recurrent types of painting will be introduced, wherever possible, using the emic terms.

First, there is body painting that imitates actual clothing, such as corsets, gloves, shirts, or trousers; these remain closest to the everyday perception of the body. Often, it only becomes apparent to the recipient at second glance that the model is not wearing real clothes, so that there is a surprise effect. In the pinup style, the models are usually meant to look provocative and perky, but futuristic costumes are also painted on the bodies—sometimes even mainly because such things cannot be acquired easily. Body painter Dorothée Hartmann explained that "with body painting, I can create absolutely original lingerie that fits the model 100%."

Monochrome painting is another conspicuous style that immerses the body in one color. The particularly popular gold paintings recall the famous scene from the James Bond movie *Goldfinger*: 007, played by Sean Connery, finds the secretary Jill Masterson (Shirley Eaton) dead on her bed, covered with golden paint, which supposedly caused her death, as the skin could no longer breathe. In truth, one cannot die as a result of golden body painting, but still, this persistent myth adds some tension to such paintings. Furthermore, a monochrome body painting gives the model something sculptural and can thus be understood as an extension of the field of classical nudes: "The statuesque look makes you perceive yourself even more as a work of art," said model Katharina describing her experience with this style.

Transforming the body into different creatures is the aim of figurative paintings. These creatures can be animals or plants (for animal paintings in Siberian tribes, see Jettmar 1994) or dragons, elves, or fairies, etc.; consequently, they can be either fantastic creatures or actual living beings. In a specific variation, one or several models, arranged in a special way, are supposed to form a creature. The effect for the recipients often lies in the process, whether they see the creature or the individual model(s) first.

Camouflage body painting (see Fig. 2) is another key style. The term "camouflage" can be traced back to the Italian word *camuffare*, meaning "to disguise": bodies are painted so that they become invisible at first sight in a specific setting, be it for the sake of amusement or to convey a more serious message of cultural or ecological assimilation or integration. Camouflage paintings in nature, for example, are often meant to communicate

Figure 2: This camouflage body painting integrates the model into another painting. Model: Yaiza. Backdrop and body painting: Wing Sum Diana Chan. Photo by author.

that humans are an inherent part of their natural environment (see Park 2015). The challenge for models in this genre, as Yaiza asserts, "is patience—to hold the exact pose without moving too much" in the attempt to merge the human body with the environment.

With conceptual body paintings (see Fig. 3), works are created that represent something relatively more abstract. To do so, the body is often divided into smaller canvases like the back, the chest, etc. Whereas figurative paintings mostly shape the body to accentuate its shape, conceptual paintings may even overcome or exceed the shape of the physical body. Sometimes, they only become understandable when the recipient learns the title or the subject of the painting or specific poses are shown that guide the interpretation. Body-painting competitions are often about implementing abstract themes such as "traffic" or "friendship" in an original way. "This style is about showing creativity," emphasised the body-painting professional Peter Tronser.

Unlike the other types, "action body painting" (see Fig. 4) refers more to a technique than to a result: paint is thrown on the models, who are either naked or primed in one color, canvassing a monochrome body painting. Uncontrolled-looking color splashes are quite intentional, as they add to the dynamic appearance. Often, action body painting takes place in the context of a performance such as during the Bodypainting Festival Bingen 2010. Here, action body painting also bridged the time until the models were painted for the competition. Even though this type of body painting, unlike the others, does not usually require standing still for a long time, it is still a challenge to have cold paint thrown at the body, as the interviewees, too, confirmed with me.

The body painting setting

As body painting starts with the (semi)naked body, models either must be somewhat exhibitionistic or have to build up a special relationship of trust with their painters. In this way, body painting is similar to photography: when (amateur) models take off their everyday clothing, often a process begins in which they also undress emotionally, which facilitates very personal communication with the painter (see Jerrentrup 2018: 53). Here, interpersonal intimacy is enhanced by two factors: painters and models have to be physically closer than photographers and models, and body painting is a slow activity that can take a long time, during which conversation takes place. The situation promotes ongoing communication and feedback. If one is already naked, one can also take off the "social mask." As Daria put it humorously: "My body painter knows my darkest secrets." The painter, being aware of invading the model's privacy, responds in an emotional, trusting way reminiscent of "talk therapy," a term that Tronser himself uses in a colloquial way. This special way of communication has also been noted for anatomical body painting (see Nanjundaiah and Chowdapurkar 2012: 1408). Sexual innuendos are very rare, if only because this would be considered very unprofessional and likely to disturb the basis of interpersonal trust.

Yet, being naked in front of strangers may be emotionally challenging, as it violates social norms: "When we dress we do so to make our bodies acceptable to a social situation" (Entwistle 2000: 326; for its rootedness in the global North, see Berner et al. 2019). There are certain social situations where nudity becomes the norm for those in the situation—in the sauna, on the nudist beach or colony—but being the only person who is undressed is indeed unique, only manifesting itself in artistic, photographic, or filmic contexts. Surprisingly, a great many interviewees stressed that they did not feel naked when being painted or at least once the painting was in process, which I can also confirm from my own experience. Analia reiterated the point of the experience of nonnudity even if she was not wearing any clothes at the time: "I actually never feel I'm naked." Daniela confirmed that "once a bit paint is put on, it does not feel like being naked." A layer of paint that actually does not hide the shape of the body still helps the model to no longer feel undressed. This corresponds to the remarkable fact that there are numerous (amateur) models who are happily available for body painting but would not pose nude in "fine art" genre. This conundrum can be explained by the fact that the models feel less nude but also less recognizable and less "themselves": "Body painting is okay for me because unlike nude, it's like a second skin," said Lou.

Already during the process itself, body painting helps to develop a different relationship to one's own body. Even models who are not satisfied with their bodies make themselves available for body painting and experience the transformation as beneficial: the body and its specific characteristics become, as model Lou put it, "raw material for an artistic expression." In my experience, viewing the body as raw material also leads to some (of course, not strict) separation of body and mind, with

Figure 3: A conceptual body painting inspired by *Alice in Wonderland*. Model: Siw. Body painters: Peter and Petra Tronser. Photo by author.

the mind being prioritized: the mind remains; the body is malleable.

During the process, a mutual adjustment of painters and models is necessary. The idea for the style of painting is usually already coordinated with the models beforehand, possibly also developed by both in dialogue with each other. This preparation is mostly discussed via email. When painting, the idea must be adapted to

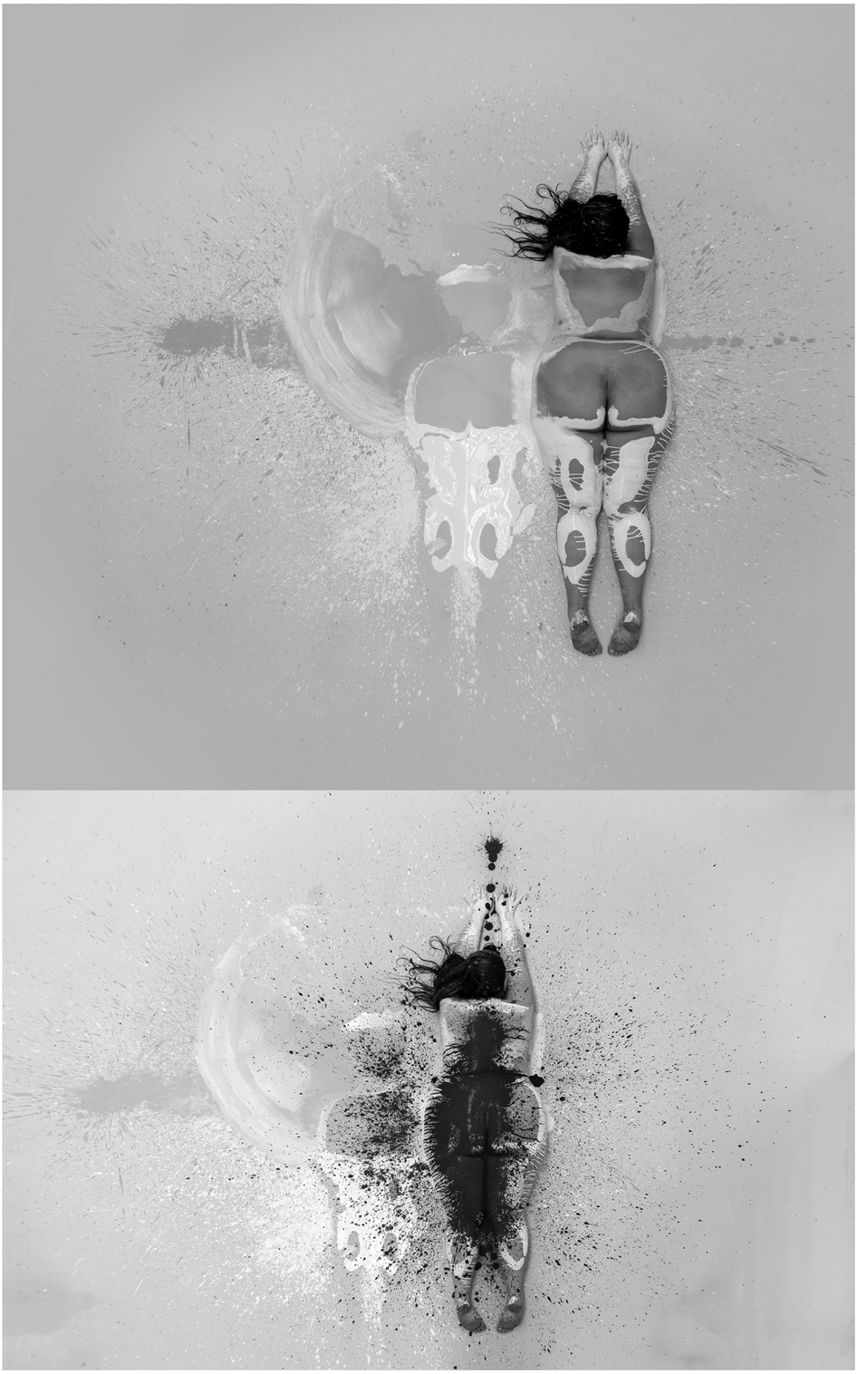

Figure 4: Two steps of an action body painting. Model: Yukia. Painting and photo: Ulrich Allgaier.

the models' bodies, their unique forms, contours, and sizes. The models' posing or acting skills may also play a role, as might their persistence and patience. As Katic observes with regard to camouflage paintings, painted images are "copies of natural forms that have been reinterpreted in new 'living' forms, as they are painted onto and in relation to a living body" (Katic 2009: 77).

Getting painted was sometimes described as a kind of sensual relationship and thus somewhat resembles descriptions of hairdressing (see Hershman 1974: 274). Lucy affirmed: "I love the feeling of the brushes on my skin." However, such observations, and the fact that "getting painted" uses a grammatical passive, should not obscure the ordeal of standing still for a long time and that the wet color on the skin often feels very cold—in short, that getting painted can be quite exhausting. Glued-on body extensions, for example, made of latex or cardboard, require even more discipline. I remember several situations as a model where I was limited in my movement for hours. I experienced this as very challenging but was also proud to have finally made it for some kind of higher purpose: art.

For both the models and the painters, the body painting also requires a great deal of flexibility due to uncontrollable factors—not only because the painters may not know the bodies of their models or the models themselves cannot assess how persistent they are but also because of the time pressure: with body painting one cannot—quite literally—postpone the work until tomorrow. There is an extra time sensitivity at festivals, and the clock also ticks for paintings that are only used for photo shoots: "A full body piece can take up to 14 hours to complete, time that the model must spend completely still and, usually, completely nude" (DeMello 2014: 67). For the models, this can lead to an ambivalent situation: they may enjoy the tactile dimension but also feel emotional and physical strain.

Looking at the painting itself, a loss of control can be observed: even if the motif is agreed upon, the models still cannot anticipate how it will turn out and must trust the painters. After successful collaboration, Annie spoke here of a "surprise effect," which I can confirm from my own experience: constant checking in the mirror would distract the painter, so one often does not have a clear idea of the painting during the process.

Yet, the constellation "painters–painted models" seems to imply a hierarchy. When considering photography, Beloff (1983: 171) sees the models in the inferior position. But is this comparable to the situation with body painting? At this point, gendered considerations need come into play, because so far, most photographers and painters are male and most models female. Yet, based on my experiences as well as interview data, I would not support the assumption of a clear hierarchy. First, the situation is changing as more women get into photography and become body painters, whereas more men go in front of the camera—which for many paintings makes sense, as the male physique offers a larger flat surface in the chest area. Further, depending on the team composition and the topic of the painting, very different power structures can arise that do not automatically demonstrate the higher status of (male) painters and photographers (see Schmerl 1992: 157) but depend on the person's popularity on social media or within the scene, for instance. In most cases, concepts are developed as a team, and in any case, it is important that the model agrees to the painting and is ready to endure the process—especially because models are almost never paid, and even when they are, it does not reflect the time they dedicate to the practice. Overwhelmingly, they are driven by an intrinsic motivation to be a part of the scene. Here, the question of identity comes into focus: why don't the models just want to visually enjoy the paintings, but rather experience them on their own bodies, in a way where they become the art?

Identity has long been discussed in a multitude of disciplines. For the topic considered here, it is important that identity concerns the "self-image as a coherent being with certain characteristics and a history" (Schönhuth 2005: 91). Identity can be seen as part of a self-understanding in relation to others, the understanding of who one is, what one's aspirations are, and so forth (see Henning 2012: 21). "One general line of consensus in . . . recent social theory is that—in conditions of intensive globalization—individuals are increasingly required, or called upon, to become the 'architects of their own lives,' to engage in continual do-it-yourself identity revisions" (Elliott 2016: 70). From this perspective, as Degele elaborates, "the body becomes a guarantee for unity and individuality, a bastion of autonomy and self-determination. This is also an inheritance of the Enlightenment: because the awareness of permanent change has become part of the modern attitude towards life and the construction of identity par excellence, the idea or hope remains of physical continuity (such as stopping aging processes) as one of the few stability refuges" (Degele 2004: 16). With bodypainting, it is as if models slip into new skins. Postures and movements are adapted to the

new painted being: "When I am fully painted, I am different; I behave differently. Funnily enough, that seems natural to me," states Jenny.

Yet, the models do become not only someone but even something completely different—a nonhuman creature or even just an abstract concept. Consequently, a particular tension arises: the models are not "costumed" but also not recognizable and not "themselves." They can discard their visual identity but, depending on the painting, still communicate something about what they believe to be their inner identity, which nevertheless might remain ambiguous. Petra, who modeled as a monstrous creature at a body-painting festival, stated: "Is it me? Completely, a little bit, or not at all—I won't tell."

At this point, the question may arise as to whether body painting demonstrates conventional sexualized body aesthetics. There are definitely paintings that do so; however, as explained above, it still has to be the model's wish to be presented in this way. Chan, who is active as both a painter and a model (see Fig. 5), explains this as an active engagement with the body and a way to examine its possibilities—"can my body be [part of] something sexy or cute, just as it may be [part of] something weird or frightening? And how do I feel about this?"—even though this is not important for every painting and probably more likely for newcomers. Certainly, there are also kitsch elements in some paintings. Even though kitsch has been described as "the enemy of art" (Retief 2003: 680), it can also be understood as a reconciliation with the world (see Gyr 2005: 362) and thus as a psychological relief and at the same time an ironic reflection of popular culture and of the model's own aspirations and desires (see Schiermer 2014: 173).

Photographing the painted body

As body painting is a time-bound art form, it presents the team members with the problem that their works cannot be stored, traded, or presented over a longer period of time but exist only in the context of the situation for which they have been created. Whether it is to somehow make the artwork permanent or the actual reason for painting, photography is almost always an integral part of body painting: "Once complete, the model poses for photos or, if he or she is acting in a film, will complete their scene" (DeMello 2014: 67). Commonly, extra sets and lamps are installed, so that the paintings can be photographed in the best possible way. Photo tickets at the World Bodypainting Festival therefore cost extra. Photographing the works also plays a central role outside of festivals and competitions: painters who practice

Figure 5: The models Wing Sum Diana Chan and Ana Diya should represent day and night. The painting, done by Chan, was inspired by ancient goddesses. Photo by author.

can record their progress and create a chronicle of their own paintings. Often, however, painting is done specifically for the camera, as it offers exciting and diverse motifs to people who are practicing staged photography.

The intention to photograph or to have the painting photographed usually orientates the creation of the body painting. When this is the case, the paintings are created differently from how they would be for private practice or public competitions. It is less about showing mastery over the body as canvas and thus optimally using flat surfaces such as the back but rather more about designing the body as suitable for the camera lens. Consequently, this can imply a more holistic perspective of the body—it is less divided into individual canvases and viewed more as an overall image—but at the same time, a less holistic approach can come into play as certain areas that are unimportant to the photograph are not elaborated. Posing options and light settings are also taken into account: if the model is to be photographed from the front, intricate back paintings make no sense; if the light is to be set from high up or to the side, shadow casts must be taken into account.

When body paintings are photographed, a staging takes place, just like in a typical fashion or portrait shoot. Photographic staging in the narrower sense sees the two-dimensional picture of a singular moment as the "defined objective" (Weiss 2010: 50). However, my experience (see Jerrentrup 2020) has shown that for most models, especially for those participating regularly in photo shoots, the image result is not the most or the only important goal of photography: mindfulness is a key factor when taking pictures (see Eberle 2017), as is the joyful feeling of being active and being truly involved in something that neither demands too much nor underchallenges. This has been characterized as "flow," a term coined by Mihály Csíkszentmiháyi referring to a specific type of intrinsic motivation (see Fischer and Wiswede 2009: 100). Furthermore, the chance to collect new experiences and insights plays a role, just as the expression of creativity, which is associated with empowerment and personal development (see Mundt 2009: 97), can lead to greater self-esteem and mental health (see Schuster 2015: 50).

Similar to the painting situation, the photography situation is characterized by ongoing interactions between the model and the photographer. Again, very personal information is often communicated here—not surprising, since portrait photography is considered to be closely interwoven with the persons portrayed, as it allows them to create a certain durable "image" of themselves (see Barthes 1989: 89). In many ways, this space of intimacy can be composed much more deliberately and perhaps more accurately than in most real-life situations: for example, if one wants to create the image of oneself as a successful businessperson, it may be quite easy to convey this with a deliberately composed photograph, while it is probably more difficult to create and maintain it in everyday life because of the greater control staged photography offers. As with body painting, photography has a close connection to personal identity. Now the person has become something else through body painting and poses as such in front of the camera.

Just as with the body-painting experience, photography also offers a new experience of oneself, which resembles the mirror experience: an individual experiences himself or herself in a detached way when looking at his or her reflection (see Broderson 2017: 145). Lucy reflected: "It gives me the opportunity to see myself from an outside perspective without judgment, which often appears whilst looking into the mirror." Alisa added, "I am in the photo, but somehow it is not myself." The second comment is of particular interest because people tend to say "This is me" when looking at photographs that show themselves and sometimes seem to take pride in a degree of recognizability while relating their photographs to their looks—to what is or has been possible with their appearance and to what they could possibly be or have been. In body-painting photos, however, the models are usually almost no longer recognizable, and just as the body paintings, the pictures may not have anything to do with their everyday lives. Nevertheless, the models derive a lot of pleasure from looking at the pictorial works.

Detachment: A canvas in a photograph

The process in which body painting and photography come together sounds rather peculiar when focusing on the result: an idea forms the basis for a two-dimensional sketch or mood board that later becomes something three dimensional on the body and then, through photography, again something two dimensional. In the process, the living canvases "change the contextual interpretations of the original painted images in integral ways" (Katic 2009: 77), they add to the original idea, and so does the photograph. A process of detachment takes place in which the effects of body painting and (staged) photography accumulate. Consequently, because of the lack of similarity, the models can appreciate the pictures

more easily as works of art without immediately bringing their own persons into play; they can look at the pictures detached from themselves in a contemplative attitude (see Bogdanova 2019: 5).

This detachment already starts within the process of painting and taking pictures. A dichotomy can be observed as, on the one hand, the body is in focus and, on the other, it is transcended in two different ways: in order to become a "living canvas," the model has to get naked and endure the long process of getting painted—this can be emotionally and physically challenging. Thus, embodiment means overcoming one's own limitations, one's own self-consciousness, shame, and perhaps fatigue due to the long process of painting the body. In addition, the model is transformed into something else; the painting "transforms the wearer into a (temporary) work of art" (DeMello 2014: 63). This becomes particularly clear when painted models represent something nonhuman or abstract. Looking at her body-painting photographs, Leonie stated, "It feels like I can be anything, literally anything." Similarly, Laura said, "When I look at the pictures, I can barely recognize my body, yet I feel a strong connection to the photograph, as important and vivid memories are connected to it."

With photography, the models undergo a double artistic transformation: their paintings are artworks already that are made into other artworks through the help of photography and digital retouching. Almost all models state that they experience it as a very positive and uplifting feeling to perceive themselves as art, both in the stages of embodying and later when looking at the resulting pictures—a feeling I can confirm from my experience as well. These pictures reflect a distance from the painting as well as from the photographic situation. This phenomenon results not only because there is a temporal distance from the body painting but also because they do not correspond to the memory of the situation either, which is already the case since one cannot perceive their everyday personas but is reinforced by the fact that the photographic result is based on staging and further processing.

The relationship between photography and memory has been analyzed frequently, mostly with reference to the indexical quality of photography (Ruchatz 2001: 179): a photograph is like a visual trace to the motif. Yet, there were also critical voices that photography was not able to do justice to actual memory, because it cannot capture the individual emotions connected to the picture (Kracauer 1977: 25). In the case of body painting, however, the photography situation usually has a fundamentally different quality than, for example, snapshots or documentary photographs because of the inherent staging: often, the photographs are taken in front of a background paper or in a thoughtfully selected or decorated set, often with enhanced lighting. Since the resulting pictures are usually not meant as backstage photographs to give an impression of the situation, but instead as works of art in their own right, the photographer selects only the section of the scene that suits any desired motivations to edit it even further.

This gradual distancing from personal experience enables the models to merge into the painting and the resulting photograph and leave their bodies behind—to identify with something that, at first glance, may have a lot to do with their bodies but that, at second glance,

Figure 6: A tribute to H.R. Giger, self-portrait of the author, having been painted by Peter and Petra Tronser, retouched by Thomas Hanel and Peter Brownz Braunschmid.

makes the actual bodies secondary: "I do not look at the photograph thinking about whether I look good, how I posed, what I should have done better," as Alisa put it, or in Petra's words, "It is all about the art, only about the art." The models can enjoy the pictures without necessarily relating them to their own bodies but understanding them as a teamwork between themselves—their physical and psychological qualities—the painters, and the photographers. Although I myself as a photographer perhaps still bring a different perspective and view to my own photos, including self-portraits, more critically, for me, too, the focus of body-painting photos, whether of other models or self-portraits, is not the body but the overall work as a creative expression of a team (see Fig. 6).

At the same time, the paintings and the photographs can tell us something about the interiority of the models, but this can remain in the dark and does not even have to be known by the team members and models themselves. In this way, the work distances itself even further from the model: the body becomes a canvas, the canvas becomes a photograph, and the photograph becomes a communicative and enduring signifier (or series of signifiers), which, however, remains ambiguous with regard to the model or in which the model perhaps does not play a major role. The process starts with the body being touched and transformed by paint and continues with the posing in front of the camera, ultimately leading to a sense of a connected yet detached relationship to the artwork. Connection is made possible through disconnection and vice versa. This can be understood as liberation (see Bogdanova 2019: 5) and opens up possibilities for art therapy: the detachment and the perception of the own body as part of creative processes may lead to a less judgmental view on the own body and a greater feeling of integration, especially as the artwork is achieved through a team.

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