

NEWSLETTER



MAY 2025 — CONTEMPORARY JEWELLERY

ISSUE NO. 7

Inside this issue:

IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE, UNLIKE PREVIOUS ONES, I AM FOCUSING ON THE WORK OF A SINGLE ARTIST: HELENA RENNER. HER WORK DELVES INTO EXCITING AND THOUGHT-PROVOKING THEMES THAT I BELIEVE ARE WELL WORTH EXPLORING FURTHER. ALONGSIDE A DESCRIPTION AND IMAGES OF HER PIECES, YOU CAN ALSO READ AN INTERVIEW I CONDUCTED WITH HELENA IN APRIL, OFFERING DEEPER INSIGHTS INTO HER CREATIVE PROCESS AND INSPIRATIONS.

Helena Renner

www.helenarenner.com

[@helena.renner.art](https://www.instagram.com/helena.renner.art)



Helena's work explores the external and internal perception of the body and its image, sparking a conversation about the ideal physical appearance and the tension between reality, individual desires and societal norms. With a hands-on approach, she transforms readymades like shapewear and underwear, breathing new life into these artifacts and infusing them with profound, layered meanings. Each creation is a visual commentary on the complexities of beauty standards, inviting us to question the constant pursuit of an ever-changing ideal.

Helena Renner studied 'Gemstones and Jewellery' at the University of Applied Sciences Trier in Idar-Oberstein, where she now works as an assistant. She is a trained goldsmith and a member of the Goldsmiths Examination Board of the IHK Koblenz. Before starting to explore jewellery as a profession, she graduated in german studies and sociology at the university of Trier.

In 2024 she was awarded the Grassipreis of the Sparkasse Leipzig and the Marzee Graduate Prize of Galerie Marzee in the Netherlands. Part of her thesis was nominated for the 32nd International Jewellery Competition EMPATHY 2024 where it is shown in the exhibition and the catalogue. One of her works is shown in the catalog "The Nature of Imperfection" at the Society of Arts + Crafts in Boston. In 2022, she was part of the 'Lithomania' exhibition and contributed texts to the publication. Also in 2022, she staged a performance, 'Encounter', with Miriam Strake for which they were nominated for the Sustainability Award of the school. The performance was transformed into an artist book in 2023. She took part in workshops by Sophie Boons, Julia-Maria Künnap and the Jakob-Bengel-Foundation.

Artist Statement

My work explores the external and internal perception of the body and its image, sparking a conversation about the ideal physical appearance and the tension between reality, individual desires and societal norms. With a hands-on approach, I transform readymades like shapewear and underwear, breathing new life into these artifacts and infusing them with profound, layered meanings. Each creation is a visual commentary on the complexities of beauty standards, inviting us to question the constant pursuit of an ever-changing ideal. Within my graduation work, I want to show the body related struggles that we as humans are confronted with every day. Most of us don't own a smooth and 'perfect' body like the ones presented in (social) media. On the contrary, our bodies show signs of our lived experiences, like weight gain and weight loss, pregnancies, scars from accidents and trauma. I want to invite the viewers to find what they can relate to within my work, to reflect about the relationship to their bodies and finally to develop compassion and acceptance towards their own bodies and the ones around them. This is my form of activism against the beauty norms of our society, which I practice at fairs, exhibitions and on social media to stimulate a broader discussion about body acceptance.



Interview

SCULPTING ACCEPTANCE: A NARRATIVE OF BODY IMAGE

When I first encountered her work, it felt like an instant connection—intuitive and deeply personal. After our interview, my admiration only deepened as I uncovered new layers in her art. Now, preparing for her first solo exhibition in Mannheim, Germany, Helena aims to create an immersive experience. I invite you to dive into the interview to learn more about her fascinating practice and to experience her work firsthand at her upcoming solo exhibition.

Vica Gábor: On your website, you write that your work initiates a dialogue about the tension between ideal physical appearance, reality, individual desires, and societal norms. What personal experience or observation led you to explore these themes in your art?

Helena Renner: I've never had the kind of body that matched those of my peers or the images I saw in magazines and advertisements. From a young age, I became aware of this difference—partly through internal comparisons, but also through external experiences like bullying and negative comments. I realised that I was treated differently by teachers, classmates and potential romantic interests. Instead of questioning society's expectations, I internalised the message that something was wrong with me. So, body image has been on my mind for as long as I can remember.

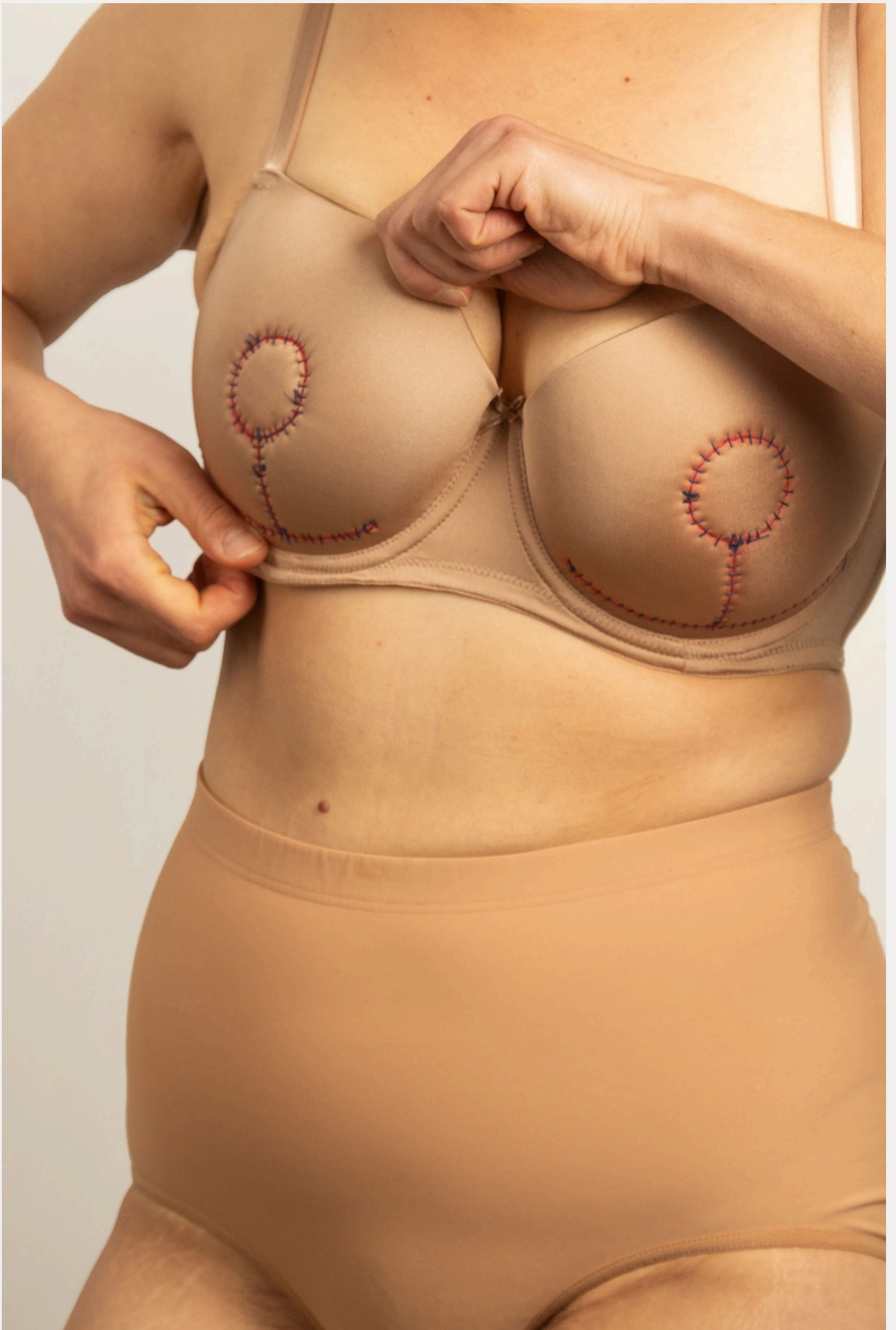


VG: Your work encourages the viewer to question our perceptions of the constantly changing beauty ideal. What kind of reactions do you expect and what feedback do you usually receive from the audience and other professionals during exhibitions?

HR: Many people who encounter my work for the first time, especially those unfamiliar with me or my artistic approach, are initially surprised or even slightly unsettled. They often don't understand what they're looking at or why I've chosen to portray the body in this way. But once I explain the personal background behind the work and share my relationship with my own body, something shifts. People begin to open up and often respond by sharing their own experiences. One comment I've heard several times is, 'Oh, the skin on my belly looks just like that after having children!' While I haven't experienced childbirth myself and it's not part of my own bodily history, I'm genuinely glad when others can relate to the work in their own way.

There are also viewers, often women around my age, who immediately connect with the themes. It's usually clear from our conversations that they've faced similar struggles growing up. Negative feedback is rare, but when it does happen, I often sense that it comes from people who are dealing with their own body image issues. For some, it's difficult to understand why someone would choose to be so vulnerable and openly display what is typically considered an 'imperfect' body.

The only kind of reaction I really struggle with is when people, usually men, sexualise my work. Some assume that nudity automatically implies sexual intent. On Instagram, for example, certain images have been taken down because the platform's algorithm flagged them as 'sexual content.' But the presence of naked skin does not mean I'm trying to be provocative or seductive. While I might explore sexuality in future projects, this particular body of work is about acceptance, self-reflection and compassion towards ourselves and the bodies we inhabit and encounter.



VG: In 2022, you collaborated with Miriam Strake to create the performance titled Encounter. Could you tell us more about this collaboration? How did the idea come about, what was its goal and what did this creative process mean to you?

HR: The performance took place in a public space in Trier, where we were given the opportunity to transform a small kiosk over the course of four days. Our concept centred around reusing everyday household and construction materials, typically found inside buildings, and applying them to the kiosk's exterior. The goal was to spark a dialogue about sustainability and the role of art in public spaces. Importantly, the act of adding materials during the first half of the performance was just as significant as removing them in the second half, emphasising the impermanence and cyclical nature of transformation.

What stood out most to me were the spontaneous reactions from passersby. Since the kiosk was in a large, highly frequented public area, we encountered a wide range of people—tourists, locals and salespeople—who engaged with the work and often struck up conversations. These exchanges touched on everything from art and sustainability to everyday life. Even though the materials and theme weren't directly connected to the core subjects of my own art practice, it was my first time creating art in public and explaining my work to complete strangers. That experience really pushed me outside of my comfort zone and gave me a taste of how public engagement can shape an artwork.

We began with a loose concept of how we wanted to transform the kiosk, but without a fixed outcome. This required us to trust our instincts, something that challenged me, since I'm usually very clear about the final result I'm aiming for. Later on, we documented the process through transforming photographs and video stills, which we took during the performance and compiled them into an artist book. This part of the project deepened my understanding of design tools like Photoshop and InDesign, which have since become valuable skills in my practice. All in all, it was an incredibly rich learning experience on many levels.



VG: In the text related to your work, Worth it? you write that your artistic practice emphasises the importance of self-acceptance and encourages us to be kinder to our bodies. In what way does your work influence your own acceptance of your body? How do you interpret the process of self-acceptance and how does your creative process connect to your own journey of self-acceptance?

HR: Losing weight and moving closer to society's beauty standards brought me more positive feedback from those around me. While this validation felt good on the surface, it also made me more critical of myself. I became afraid of gaining the weight back and losing what I had 'achieved.' In some ways, this fear felt just as heavy as the experience of living in a larger body. I even began seriously considering plastic surgery to remove the loose skin and 'imperfections' I still saw. But then I realised, even if I changed my appearance, I would still carry scars as reminders of my body's past. There's simply no way to erase every trace of what your body has been through. So instead of resenting those marks, I started to wonder: what if I could learn to accept my body as it is? To treat it with more care and kindness? After all, it's the only one I have and it evolves along with everything I experience in life. There are more important things than appearances.

Most of my pieces begin with a specific physical feature I've struggled with or an emotional response to how I see myself. I then think about how to build the piece: what kind of clothing or form might relate to the theme, or whether I want to use readymades or create something completely new. After that, I choose materials like fabrics, beads and stones that help express my thoughts and feelings.

Since the body plays such a central role in my work, the process often includes trying the piece on myself while I make it. What looks one way on the table often changes dramatically when worn. That's why I place so much value not just on the finished object, but also on photographing it on the body. Seeing my pieces worn, especially on 'imperfect' bodies like my own, gives them their full meaning.

And in these photos, I see my body differently. I begin to accept my stretch marks, my belly fat, my scars, both internal and external. I'm learning that even the parts of me I find hard to love deserve to be adorned, not hidden. This realisation has been incredibly empowering.

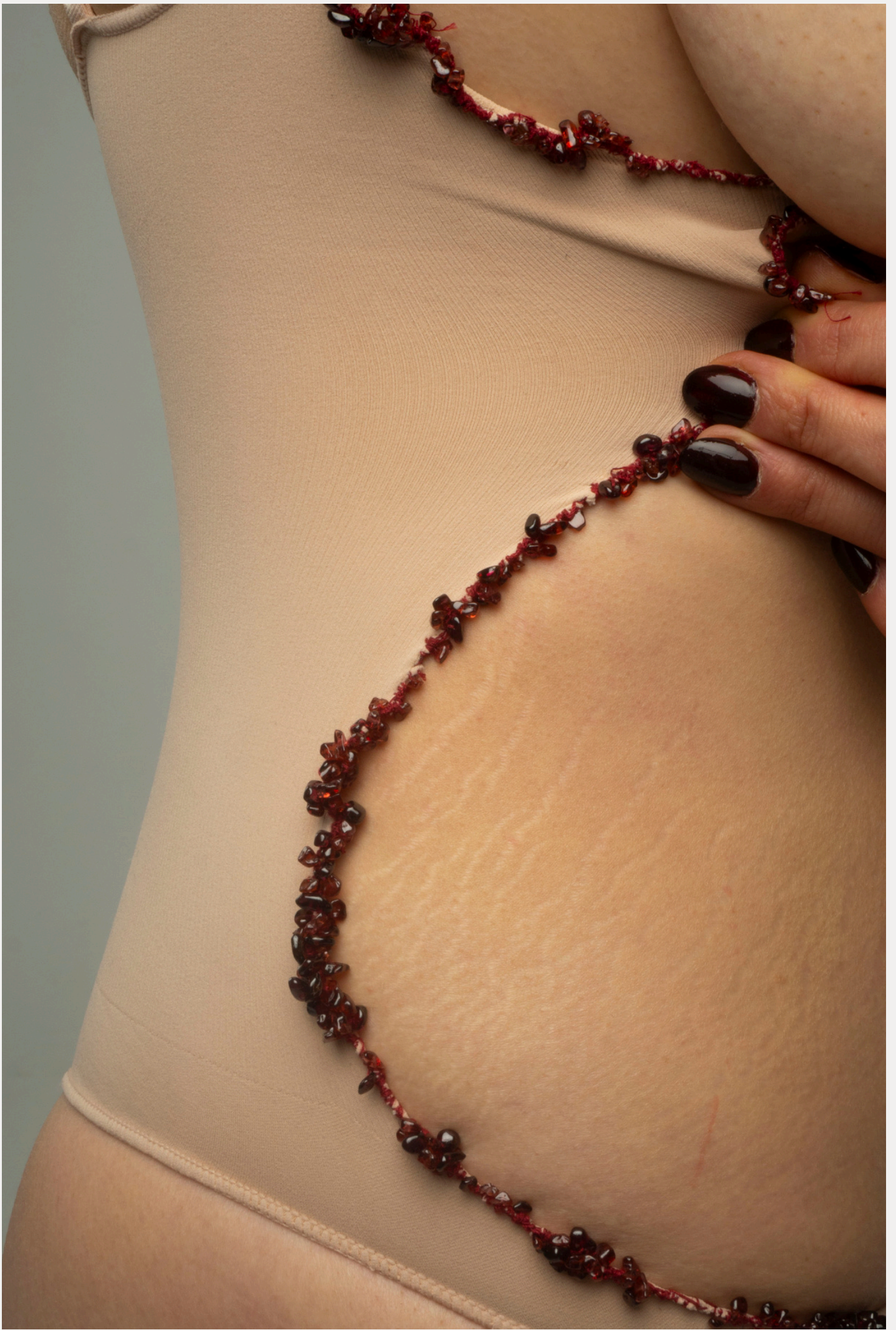


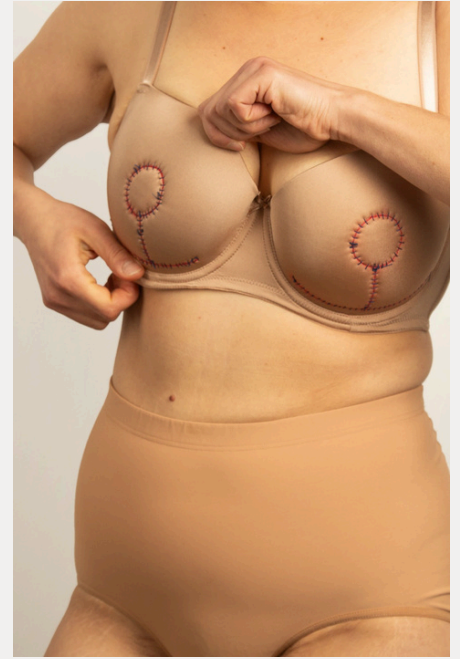
VG: Do you feel that your art resonates with women across all age groups, or does it primarily address the body image struggles of a particular generation?

HR: At a recent event mostly attended by older women, many shared with me that they've faced similar struggles with body image throughout their lives. But unlike younger generations, they were never given the space or permission to speak about it openly. Shame was something they learnt to carry silently. Some of them told me they've grown more accepting of their bodies with age, while others said the pressure has only increased. I've come to realise that this contrast shows just how deeply beauty standards are internalised and how differently they affect women depending on their age, experiences and environment.

What we're also talking about here is ageism, another layer of oppression within the system of beauty standards, which disproportionately targets women. We're expected not just to be thin, but also wrinkle-free, firm and youthful at all times. Signs of life like stretch marks, scars, grey hair and loose skin are treated as flaws to be corrected, rather than as evidence of lived experience. This expectation to erase ourselves as we age is profoundly dehumanising. It reduces us to objects meant to please, not to live fully and visibly.

My current work is rooted in my own personal experience, so naturally it reflects the perspective of someone in her thirties. I think this is why, as I mentioned earlier, many women in my age group seem to instantly understand my point and my perspective. Most of us, as we grow up, learn that we should look a certain way and we're chasing these ideals throughout our lives. But ageing is inevitable, and I can imagine that the way our bodies evolve over time is going to play a role in my work going forward. I don't want to just passively observe this shift, I want to challenge the narratives that tell us that we lose value as we age. There's a radical power in making this visible through art, and I see it as part of a broader feminist practice: reclaiming our bodies, our stories, and our right to take up space at every age.





Worth It?

Worth it? is a reference to the wounds we inflict on ourselves when trying to achieve the 'perfect body'. It prompts reflection on societal beauty norms, questioning the sacrifices we make to conform to the perfect body image that is promoted on (social) media. My work seeks to challenge pretty and thin privilege as well as today's perception of beauty. It should be understood as a critical statement and an impulse to be kind to our bodies, to embrace our scars and to cultivate self-acceptance.

Worth It? 2023, Ready-made
bra, pigment, thread,
300x330mm. Photo credit:
Helena Renner, Marlene
Tullius, Miriam Strake



Skinny Fat

People who are intentionally losing weight often expect their bodies to become 'perfect' at the end of their journey. In reality, previously stretched skin can oftentimes look deflated and saggy after weight loss (or pregnancy), leaving the individual feeling disappointed. 'Skinny Fat' challenges common perceptions of beauty and body weight. It prompts reflection on societal expectations versus reality, questioning the structures of pretty privilege and thin privilege. It invites us to find softness and kindness towards ourselves in a world obsessed with perfection, encouraging self-acceptance and maybe even self-love.



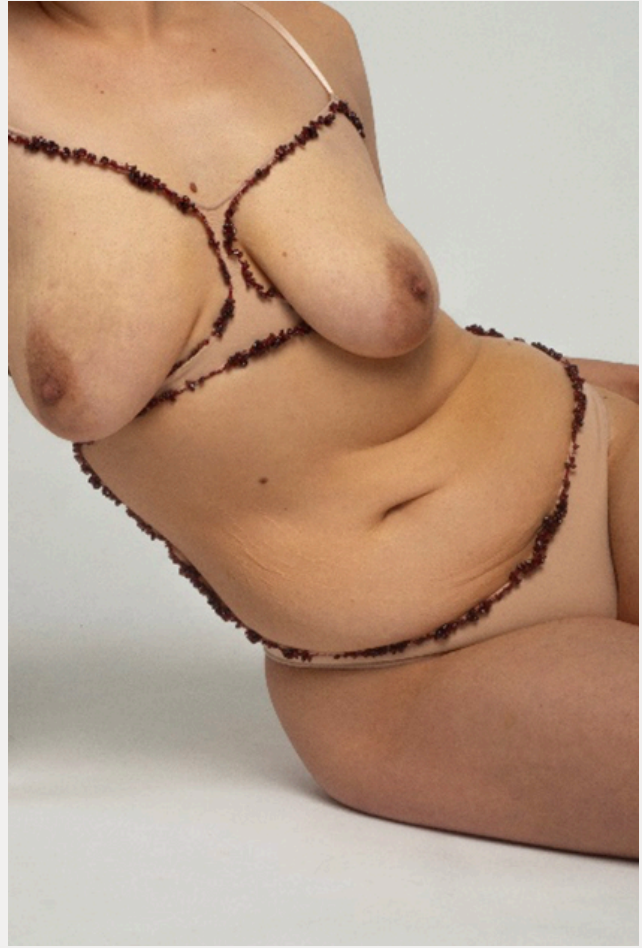
Skinny Fat 2023, Ready-made panty, silk, nylon , 320x390mm. Photo credit: HelenMarlene Tullius, Miriam Strake, Helena Renner



Onus

Having breasts can oftentimes feel like a burden. There's the physical weight, that can make us crouch forward and strains our backs. There are also the looks from others, that can make us feel judged, whether we feel like our breasts are too much, too little or too visible. Depending on our bodily functions like hormonal cycles or being pregnant or breastfeeding, we might also feel pressure and pain in this area. Sometimes all of this feels like it's getting too much, we can't take it anymore and we just might burst.

Onus, 2024, Ready-made
bra, rhodochrosite, silk
thread, nylon, 310x380mm
Photo credit: Helena Renner,
Marlene Tullius



Wounded

Shapewear is made to smooth out our bodies under clothing. Most of the time it is focused on the belly and the breasts. It can be used as a more gentle alternative to getting plastic surgery, giving the temporary illusion of a thinner and flatter shape. In 'Wounded', the shaping elements of the bodysuit are cut out. The garnets, looking like drops of blood, represent the feeling of wanting to cut out these parts of ourselves. But they also frame these now uncovered parts of our body, that we try so hard to hide and squish into the perfect shape, giving them a touch of preciousness.

Wounded, 2024, Ready-made
bodysuit, garnets, thread,
260x570mm. Photo credit:
Marlene Tullius

Craving/Starving

Do you know the hollow feeling that you get while you're hungry? The way it spreads out inside like a black hole? Why would you want to endure this feeling that makes you weak and takes your energy away from you? Why would you want to make yourself feel bad? Because there's a promise. The promise to be rewarded for your efforts. To become thin and beautiful that you so strongly crave for. But your body and mind also crave food, nourishment. There's a constant fight between your cravings and urges, your actions and your avoidances. It's exhausting and it takes control over your mind..

Craving/Starving, 2024.
Ready-made bodysuit, pearls,
mesh, thread, 260x570mm.
Photo credit: Marlene
Tullius



Heavy Flow

Menstruation is a quiet rhythm, a cycle of expectation, relief, discomfort, and endurance. It marks time, brings reassurance, yet often arrives with pain, exhaustion, and the weight of emotions beyond control. Some seek to silence it with hormones, while for others, it carries the promise of life.

Blood has many faces - it is shame and secrecy, but also warmth and renewal. It stains, it seeps, it betrays, exposing what is taught to be hidden. A sudden bloom on denim, a familiar dread. A moment of humiliation in a world that deems the natural unclean.

This work reclaims the stain. Soft Velvet, silk and shimmering gemstones transform the unwanted into something precious. The deep reds and fluid textures embrace what is often concealed, turning discomfort into presence, shame into power. Menstruation is not an imperfection - it is a reality, raw and unfiltered.



Heavy Flow

2025 | objects

Cotton, mesh, velvet, garnets, pearls, thread, silk cocoon.

Photo credits: Helena Renner

Progress?

Tiny steps. Towards self-acceptance. Towards self-validation. Towards the appreciation of your body. Don't tie the knots too loose, you might lose your progress. It takes time. It takes habit. But in the end – maybe – you might come to a point where you can stop. Where you can be content. Where you find that you're worth it. Worth of being loved, by yourself and others. To recognize your beauty, inside and outside. I hope we all get to this point eventually.



*Title: Progress? 2024. Pearls, Silk, Elastic,
Tread, ready-made bra parts, 650x30mm.
Body Piece / Waist belt / Necklace. Photo
credit: Marlene Tullius*

I AM ALWAYS HAPPY TO HEAR YOUR
FEEDBACK! IF YOU HAVE IDEAS OR WOULD
LIKE TO HIGHLIGHT AN EVENT, BOOK, OR
ARTIST, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH AT
VICA.GABOR@GMAIL.COM.

I HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE 7TH ISSUE.
PLEASE HELP SPREAD THE WORD BY
RECOMMENDING THIS NEWSLETTER TO
ANYONE WHO MIGHT BE INTERESTED.
SUBSCRIBE AT WWW.VICAGABOR.COM.