

Opening This Week: Marlene Steyn: Your Skin Is Not The Best Hiding Place

Text by Emily Steer

Violence somehow becomes playful in the hands of South African artist Marlene Steyn. A new exhibition at Cape Town's SMAC sees cartoonish features separated from their faces, and fleshy parts becoming permeable, invaded by picket fences and frying pans.

The body is vulnerable in Steyn's works, often nude, disfigured (albeit, very beautifully) and seemingly under attack from a variety of objects and beasts. Although, there is also much joy to be found also. One work, which draws numerous parallels with Bosch, shows a naked female figure surrounded by a strange woodland group; part-ninja, part frog. They elegantly twirl about the figure stroking her skin while she sips on a glass of wine through a long straw. As appealing as this scene may seem on a mid-Friday afternoon (who doesn't want to lie around in the nude while green catsuit-clad ladies massage your skin and feed you red wine? I know I do), there is the sense that all is not as it seems. The ominous, cultish title reinforces this. *We want you to be comfortable*. Comfortable, at what cost?

The body is malleable in the artist's sculptures, the prominent hand and finger marks an obvious sign of physical interventions into these figures' forms. In the sculptures in particular there is also a separation of body parts. *Ponytails Continued* sees a set of legs existing without a torso, and a head floating above shoulders without a neck in between. There's a big hole where most of the organs should be. In *My other half's other half* one big blue eye is skewered through a larger sculpture, peering up at the flesh-mounted eyebrow that sits above it. Below, a squashy nose sits just above a haughtily pursed pair of pink lips.



Marlene Steyn. My other half's other half, 2016. Oil on Ceramic Detail

'Your Skin Is Not The Best Hiding Place' shows at SMAC, Cape Town until 10 September



Marlene Steyn. We want you to be comfortable, 2016. Oil on Canvas and Ceramic. 144 x 127 cm



Marlene Steyn. Ponytails Continued 2015. Bronze 30.5 cm (h)



Marlene Steyn. Aura hour with cucumber, 2016. Oil on Linen, Silicone. 220 x 149 cm