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CERAMICS AS SKIN: "PEAUX D'AMES" AT NEXT LEVEL GALERIE
03.22.12 DESIGN | By GUY ANGLADE

"Peaux d'Ames," a group exhibition that opened last Friday at Paris's Next Level Galerie, uses ceramics as way to comment on everyday interactions around human skin. For the show, which translates as "Souls of Skins," gallery founder Isabelle Menil and curator and journalist Sandra de Vivies invited six artists and designers, including French industrial design duo Les Sismo; London-based sculptor Tamsin van Essen; and Chicago-based, French-born artist Farida Le Suavé. "The role of skin is an interface as well as the point of contact between human beings and society," says De Vivies. "Man is at the heart of this exhibition."



Tamsin Van Essen, "Psoriasis #1," ceramic apothecary jar (Medical Heirlooms Series), 2008. Image: Courtesy of the artist and Next Level Galerie.

As part of her Medical Heirlooms series, Tamsin Van Essen designed apothecary jars to mimic varying degrees of physical illness and skin conditions ranging from acne, syphilis, cancer and osteoporosis. For Psoriasis, the jar is mixed and sprayed with an oil glaze and then surrounded with clay pieces. She then added another layer to detail the skin's imperfection. "I started to think about my obsession with perfection and being beautiful and how you might inherit these common diseases the same way you might inherit your family heirlooms," says Van Essen.



Farida Le Suavé, "Sebastiano," 2007. Image: Courtesy of the artist and Next Level Galerie.

Farida Le Suavé, whose work intermingles historical references and cultural interplay, references Saint Sebastian in Sebastiano. She changed the famous saint's posture into an unrecognizable shape, offering different perspectives of the body while echoing the visual iconography of the popular painting. "A table, made out of beech wood, supports the installation and engages the viewer to walk around and interact with the sculpture, but at the same time keeps them at a distance," says Le Suavé. "Not being able to touch it creates a frustration in the viewer that amuses me."



Les Sismo, "Visage au grain de bœuf," Peau Semblable Series, 2012, created in collaboration with ceramicist Annie Laporte. Photo: Florian Kleinert, courtesy of Next Level Galerie.

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The founders of Les Sismo, Antoine Fenoglio and Frederic Lecourt, created their object, which translates as "Face with a beauty mark" out of three jars of varying skin tones and dimensions. Working with a taxidermist, the duo used python skin for the mouth, feathers as eyelashes, and horsehair as human hair.