

Synthetic Muses: From Skin to Wall was a fun yet thought-provoking pop-up exhibition featuring newly commissioned works from more than 20 Naarm based tattooists. Having inked a design of their choice onto a piece of synthetic skin, the content of this exhibition was centred on an inquiry into the meaning of tattoos when the body is abstracted as the receiver and replaced by an inanimate object.

The works did not aim to redefine tattooing as a linear practice, but instead recontextualise them to see if these skin adornments could still produce profound visual narratives when presented on plastic. By employing synthetic skin as their canvas, these artists explored what tattoos could signify - if anything at all - when they exist in isolation. Stripped of the body's impermanence, tattoos on synthetic skin take on new meanings, leading viewers on a journey through the intricate lines, vibrant colours, and evocative symbolism that characterise these works.

The importance of place was significant to this exhibition and our curatorial rationale. As such, the deliberate choice to collaborate with Naarm-based tattoo artists went beyond just a celebration and instead, served as a microcosm for the local tattoo landscape. As tattoos are markers of identity both individually and culturally, studying them naturally reveals information about the people who produce and sport them. So while this exhibition did this to an extent, we believe presenting them in a vacuum away from the body posed an alternative question of exploration surrounding a tattoos ability to generate meaning. If the relationship to the body is so integral, how do we interpret and feel about these tattoo works? And can the history and physical ritual of tattooing be honoured when this connection is compromised?

As people navigated through this exhibition, they encountered a rich tapestry of artistic styles and thematic interpretations. From abstract geometries that challenged our perception of form to intricate designs that echoed the voices of marginalised groups and cultures, each artwork offered a unique perspective on the intersection of body, art, and identity. Thus, we urged our audience to join us in this exploration of what tattoos signify in this ever-evolving landscape when they migrate from their corporeal sites to the most unlikely of places.

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