

## A Liberating Experience. On Becoming a Work of Art

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### ABSTRACT

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The art of bodypainting that is fairly unknown to a wider public turns the body into a canvas - it is a frequently used phrase in the field of bodypainting that illustrates the challenge it faces: it uses a three-dimensional surface and has to cope with its irregularities, but also with the model's abilities and characteristics. This paper looks at individuals who are turned into art by bodypainting. Although body painting can be very challenging for them - they have to expose their bodies and to stand still for a long time while getting transformed - models report that they enjoy both the process and the result, even if they are not confident about their own bodies. Among the reasons there are physical aspects like the sensual enjoyment, but also the feeling of being part of something artistic. This is enhanced and preserved through double staging - becoming a threedimensional work of art and then being staged for photography or film clips. This process gives the model the chance to experience their own body in a detached way. On the one hand, bodypainting closely relates to the body and on the other hand, it can help to overcome the body.

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### INTRODUCTION

Body art is an umbrella term for artistic concepts that developed from the events that took place in the 1960s and can be considered as an exploding trend since its "rediscovery" in the 1980s (see Schmidt 1999, p. 283). People have always been "expressing themselves in different ways through their dress and physical appearance" (Hill, 2013, p. 5), but body art usually goes one step further by turning bodies, and thus people, into objects and subjects of art. This becomes very obvious in bodypainting, yet, it is a form of expression, design, or art that is neglected in many respects: as it is difficult to exhibit, it does not easily

find its way into museums or galleries. Furthermore, artists do not have much time to complete their works and it is not possible to trade it. In the scientific field, it has not received much attention either. The term mostly appears in medical education, where it is used as a tool in clinical anatomy teaching (see e.g., Op den Akken et al., 2002, see McMenemy 2008, see Nanjundaiah & Chowdapurkar 2012). Apart from this, some works treat body painting along with make-up, tattoos, hairstyles, etc.

However, there is a very vivid international scene purely devoted to bodypainting, with regular events (such as the World Bodypainting Festival), websites, workshops, blogs, and Facebook groups. An estimation, based on the experience of former world champion Peter Tronser (Ingelheim, Germany), is that in Europe, far more than 100,000 people either practise it or have a strong interest to do so - worldwide, the number will be considerably higher. People take on different roles in the scene: painters, models, workshop leaders, event organizers, photographers, and filmmakers. As the role of the model who has to undergo a transition during the body painting process is particularly interesting, this paper will focus on them. Primarily, it will ask why models consider bodypainting and its combination with photography and/or film clips as a psychologically beneficial activity.

As mentioned, there is hardly any scientific literature devoted to bodypainting. Consequently, three different kind of sources will be considered: on the one hand, there are some popular sources on bodypainting, on the other hand there are scientific sources on various types of body art, mainly tattooing, and on corporeality and identity. In addition, there are sources dealing with body art in different, so-called "non-western" cultural contexts.

### **THE BODY AS A CANVAS**

Whenever people talk about bodypainting, the expression "the body as a canvas" seems to come up. With the term "canvas," a classical artistic touch is introduced. Obviously, the bodypainting scene is fighting for recognition as a "real" art form; it is evident in such expressions as "bodypainting is an art," which was chosen as a name of a Facebook group. However, the people involved in bodypainting apparently do not distinguish much between "art" and "kitsch." The expression "the body as a canvas" implies that something three-dimensional, dynamic, and lively - the body - is compared to two-dimensional, rigid material. This already points to one of the challenges that body painting poses. The association "blank paper" is close to the term "canvas": the body appears as blank paper, which must be designed by the painter. However, the painting also has to be adapted not only to the models' bodies and particularities, but also to the persons and their characters (e.g. how well they can endure the process). Creativity finds its limits with regard to reality - a fact that makes creativity actually relevant: the creative product has to be made, the idea has to be transformed into reality. This is called the problem solving ability of crea-

tivity compared to an unlimited creativity that cannot relate to everyday life (see Krause 1972, p. 42, for further reflections on body consciousness and similar uses of the metaphor of canvas as representation of the creative and agentive transformations/reshapings of the body in other fields; see e.g., Di Martino 2018, and Goldner 2011; these studies also suggest that body transformations/reshapings may affect social reality at large).

### **CULTURAL CONTEXTS SURROUNDING BODYPAINTING**

Before looking more closely at the bodypainting scene, a brief examination of some historical aspects of bodypainting and its relevance in different cultures should give a foundation for further thoughts. Bodypainting looks back on a long history, having “been practiced around the world as evidence from Paleolithic burial sites has revealed” (DeMello, 2014, p. 63). Hence, it can be considered as one of the prime means of artistic expression (see Beckwith, 1990, p. 199). In addition, bodypainting appears in numerous different cultures, for instance among the indigenous people of Australia, Polynesia, Melanesia, among the Rapa Nui on Easter Island (see Fortin, 2009), and parts of Africa, and many Native American tribes once practiced it as well (see DeMello, 2014, p. 64). In India, it is typical for Sadhus to cover their bodies in ashes for certain events and rituals, but the body - respectively facepainting - is also in use for dance performances, such as the Kathakali dance theater from Kerala (see von Matuschka, 1999, p. 6f.), thus combined with another type of staging.

Today, bodypainting traditions are continued in some cultural contexts.

*It is a common form of self-expression in many indigenous cultures. Nuba men of Sudan paint their bodies white on one side and black on the other. In New Guinea, the women paint their faces red, blue and white, while young Trobrianders use black and white vegetable dyes to paint designs on their faces and rub charmed coconut oil into their skin to make it shine in an attempt to appear more attractive to the opposite sex (Fedorak, 2009, p. 73).*

The Surma, the Mun, better known as Mursi, and the Bumi, have a long tradition of bodypainting and regard their skin as a means to express personal meanings. There are patterns that use warrior figures in order to frighten enemies, but also mere decorations used to attract partners. To make paint, local plants and fruits are used (Fisher, 1990, p. 270). Mun clay bodypainting has been described as a “unique way of engaging with the environment, for the Mun have an earthcentered habitus” (Fayers-Kerr, 2012, p. 245). Matike et al. (2011) looked at the Xhosa bodypainting practice and found out that there are certain minerals in the clay that can be beneficial for the individual’s health.

Often, bodypaintings signify major events or stages in life (see Fedorak, 2009, p. 73), “commonly used in rites de passage, such as initiation rituals marking the passage

of boyhood to manhood” (DeMello, 2014, 63). Although it is not explicit in the bodypainting scene, several interview statements collected as part of the present study indicate that those concerned experience the act of receiving a bodypainting or the entry into the scene as a significant moment comparable to the rite de passage.

*For me, body painting initiated a process to accept my body. (Sarah)*

*[It feels] great! Quite liberating. (Hannah)*

In various cultural contexts, bodypaintings can communicate mythologies, values, and beliefs (see Fedorak, 2009, p. 73). This leads to the question of whether cultural appropriation comes into play (see Young, 2010): “There may be instances [...] where ritual face or body painting or tattoos are used out of context by outsiders in an offensive way” (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2018, p. 39). In general, cultural appropriation understood as an inspiration from other cultural contexts has always occurred in history, and consequently it is nothing specific or extraordinary in the context of bodypainting. In the process of inspiration and appropriation, new meanings often arise. However, a symbol having a strong meaning can seem to be devalued by people sharing it for a completely different purpose. The discussion gets more sensitive when styles or inspirations are taken from another cultural context that has been or continues to be oppressed. If one looks at the bodypaintings that are typical for the scene of bodypainting, in the vast majority of cases there are no clear similarities to traditional paintings of indigenous groups - yet, it cannot be ruled out that there are influences.

Looking at the “Western” context that is the focus of this study, bodypainting was utilized by the Hippies of the 1960s and 1970s, for example, in order to demonstrate their closeness to nature and their fascination for indigenous cultures, but eventually also to shock conservative people because of inherent nudity. For similar purposes, “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, p. 73). Goths, in particular, try to invert the typical ideal or the imperative of beauty (see Gunn, 2007, p. 52).

Consequently, there may be various influences that inspire the scene of bodypainting, which can be seen as a separate cultural context that overlaps with others (e.g., with the model photography scene); however, it centers on bodypainting, while in other cultural contexts it is only one of many options to design one’s life. In indigenous rituals or dance theatres like Kathakali, for example, bodypainting is an element but not the central part. The importance or centrality of bodypainting distinguishes the bodypainting scene from other contexts in which it occurs. The scene gathers in internet groups and meets for workshops or festivals. The first bodypainting festival was held in Austria in 1998, so we deal with a fairly recent trend. In Europe, the art enjoys more public appreciation than in

the United States (DeMello, 2014, p. 67). But there are now also major festivals in non-European countries; for example, one has been taking place in Daegu, South Korea, since 2009. Most of the performers in the bodypainting scene practice it as a hobby. Some artists have built up a second income and models sometimes receive a (moderate) payment.

### **BODYPAINTING - A DEFINITION WITH REGARD TO THE SCENE**

The bodypainting scene is a very specific social context and therefore, bodypainting should be defined with regard to this cultural background. The first thing to consider is the extent to which bodypainting is a fundamentally different quality than clothing. Clothing or dress has been linked to the self-concept (Solomon & Schopler 1982), to gender and identity (Roach-Higgins & Eicher 1992). "Dress is a basic fact of social life and this [...] is true of all human cultures that we know about: all cultures 'dress' the body in some way, be it through clothing, tattooing, cosmetics, or other forms of body painting" (Entwistle, 2000, p. 323). Joan Entwistle gives a plausible example of how differently dress is understood depending on the culture or on the situation: a bikini might be enough to ensure that a woman is decently dressed on a beach, but not in the boardroom. In the broad definition of "dress," body painting therefore certainly falls into this category. More narrowly defined, the paint applied to the body respectively bigger parts of the body is the most important criterion that distinguishes bodypainting from other forms of dress.

Consequently, it can be concluded that bodypainting is both the process of applying paint on the body and the result of a non-permanent painting that goes beyond typical make-up. "It is similar to tattooing in that it colours the wearer's skin, but it's very different [...] in that body painting is intended to temporarily transform the wearer [...]. Tattooing, on the other hand, is generally used to mark a permanent or semipermanent status or identity onto the body" (DeMello, 2014, p. 63). Different than make-up, bodypainting affects the entire body or larger parts of it. In addition, it is usually not used to move the body towards an ideal of beauty. Nevertheless, the term "bodypainting" can also be used to include make-up for special occasions. For instance, the art of mehndi or henna can also be understood as a kind of bodypainting, however, it lasts a bit longer - around two weeks - and is at its decorative peak of saturation on the day after its application (see Shukla, 2008, p. 363).

When taking a closer look at the canvas, it can be stated that in recent decades, the body has been exposed to increased social science interest. While it was ridiculed by philosophical, political, and cultural theory as something inferior, and at the same time desired as something forbidden or alienated, "the body 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, jog-

ging and walking, but also the spread of Asian relaxation and martial arts clearly speak for increased body awareness” (Scheiper, 2008, p. 119). The body is understood as malleable, and some scholars even claim that there is a social imperative to control and improve or change it (see Leimgruber 2005, p. 227).

As a foundation of this article, I distance myself from such dualistic categories as mind versus body or self versus body. “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, p. 100) - it is situated in structures of power. Some of them can be shaped, infiltrated, accepted or ignored by its owner. Just as Entwistle (2000) sees dress as both social and personal experience (p. 325), bodypainting may seem like something superficial at first glance, but for the model, it is ultimately an embodied experience.

### **CATEGORIZATION OF BODYPAINTINGS**

Different techniques are used for bodypainting: except for action bodypainting, specific paint is mainly applied with a sponge, with a brush, or with an airbrush. In addition, there are often body extensions made of latex, which are glued on, wigs, headdresses made of different materials, and even pieces of clothing are sometimes integrated to form a new entity. Within the scene, different types of body painting are distinguished.

Imitation of actual clothing, such as corsets, lingerie, or tight trousers through bodypainting remains closest to the everyday perception of the body. If bodypainting is applied properly, 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. Pin-ups in the style of the 50s with painted hot-pants are a popular topic, but there are also boudoir scenarios in which underwear, stockings, gloves, and jewellery items are painted on.

Monochrome paintings, often in gold or silver, immerse the body in one color. Gold paintings are reminiscent of a famous scene from the James Bond movie “Goldfinger.” 007, played by Sean Connery, finds the secretary Jill Masterson (Shirley Eaton) dead on her bed. The villain has put gold colour over her body and her death is explained in a way that her skin could no longer breathe. Actually, it is not possible to die because of golden bodypainting, but still, this famous myth adds some tension to the picture. In addition, a monochrome bodypainting gives the model something sculptural and can thus be understood as an extension of the field of “classical nudes.”

Figurative paintings should transform the body into a different, non-human creature (e.g., into an elf, a lion, a dragon, or a tree). Thus, it can be a fantastic creature or a living being that actually exists. In another variation, one or several models, arranged in a special way, are supposed to form a single creature. The surprise effect lies in the process,

be it that the recipient sees the creature or the individual model(s) first and consequently, this kind of bodypainting is usually filmed rather than photographed.

Another type of bodypainting can be described as conceptual. Here, works are created that represent something rather abstract. To do so, the body is often divided into smaller canvases like the back, the chest, etc. While figurative paintings mostly shape the body and respectively accentuate its shape, this is not necessarily the case with conceptual paintings. Conceptual paintings sometimes only become understandable when the recipient learns the title or the subject of the painting or when the model performs certain movements that give hints for its understanding. Bodypainting competitions are often about implementing abstract themes in an original way.

Camouflage describes a fourth type: bodies are painted in a way that they become invisible in a certain setting. This can be thought of as an amusing effect, but sometimes a message of integration is intended: camouflage paintings in nature, for example, are often meant to communicate that humans are part of their natural environment (see Park 2015, figure 1).



*Figure 1.* In the camouflage bodypainting project called “Metamorphsen;“ the human body should be perceived as a harmonious addition to the landscape. Bodypainting: Léonie Gené. Foto: Uwe Schmida and Laila Pregizer



*Figure 2.* Result of action bodypainting. Paint was thrown onto the model from above to result in random patterns. Bodypainting & Photo: Ulrich Allgaier. Model: Tini

The term “action bodypainting” describes a technique rather than a result: the models, who are mostly naked or primed with a monochrome paint, are sprayed with paint (see figure 2). This often takes place as a performance and consequently, is usually filmed.

These categories show different relationships of the paintings to the body and to its staging. The painting in which clothes are painted on is still quite close to the body, while the other types change the appearance of the body considerably. In monochrome and camouflage paintings, the staging plays a more integral role than in conceptual paintings. Monochrome and camouflage paintings do not unfold their effects so much on their own, but require a certain pose or a corresponding location. Looking at their occurrence, figurative paintings are most common (see table 1).

**Table 1**

**Occurrence of bodypainting styles - numbers based on estimations of the bodypainters, Peter Tronser, Petra Tronser, and Wing Sum Diana Chan**

Imitation of clothing	Ca. 5 %
monochrome	Ca. 25 %
figurative	Ca. 35 % (overlappings to conceptual)
conceptual	Ca. 25 % (overlappings to conceptual)
camouflage	Ca. 10 %
action	Ca. 5%

**METHOD**

The research underlying this paper is based on method triangulation. The foundation is provided by a long-term participant observation both in the bodypainting and the photography scene (for the term “scene,” see Hitzler et al., 2005, p. 20). Both scenes are to a certain extent delocalized and the internet, namely social media like Facebook and Instagram, play an integral role in connecting, planning, sharing pictures and videos, and discussing them. Body painters need photographers and filmmakers to capture their art, and photographers and filmmakers find a manifold and interesting subject in bodypainting. Moreover, the models, mostly amateurs, are often the same within both scenes.

Repeatedly, I have carried out bodypainting shoots, was a jury member at festivals, got painted myself, and assisted bodypainters, which enables me to access an emic perspective (Pike, 2015 [1954]). Based on this perspective, 28 semi-structured interviews were conducted by the Australian bodypainter and sociologist Wing Sum Diana Chan and by myself in order to give the engaged models a voice. The sample consists of 23 women

between 18 and 38 years, and five men, aged between 26 and 39, mostly from Europe (23) and Australia (5). That this study represents “normative” gender identities does not imply that other persons would not be part of the scene or that the scene would not welcome any gender identity, but is due to the comparably smaller number of other gender identities in society, which is reflected in the bodypainting scene as well. However, it would be a very interesting study to find out whether transpersons or queer people for instance, feel more drawn to the art of bodypainting. The interviewees from Australia were Wing Sum Diana Chan’s acquaintances and have been modelling in Europe as well. Diana, who has experience in both regions, decided to include Australian interviewees as well, as the scene is very similar to the European one. About two thirds of the interviewees also model in other genres, such as fashion or fantasy. Five of the bodypainting models are also bodypainters themselves, two more about to learn it.

The interviews were mostly conducted during the bodypainting process while taking a break. We tried to create private situations for this to avoid both rush and social desirability. Due to Covid-19, nine interviews had to take place via the internet by means of a video call. During the interviews, notes were taken, and wherever necessary, clarifications were made.

The answers given were clustered with the help of content analysis, which helps “identifying and analysing patterns of meaning in a dataset” (Joffe, 2011, p. 209) and suits the topic as it is not tied to a particular theory and, at the same time, serves as a useful tool to highlight the process of social construction (see Joffe, 2011, p. 211). Various patterns of meanings could be identified by the use of similar words and expressions but also by certain emotions, for example enthusiasm or excitement. When drawing such categories it is undeniable that - being also a participant observer - there were some pre-conceived assumptions on my part accompanied by a general openness to new information. Thus, the method can be specified as Altheide’s “ethnographic content analysis,” which “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, p. 68). The focus was placed on the qualitative side rather than on the quantity of the gathered data, as the research question is of a qualitative nature - it is about the reasons why models consider bodypainting activities as beneficial. With regard to ethical aspects, I got the clear impression that the interviewees themselves are interested in research.

*I hope my interview helps other people to discover body painting as a source of inspiration to experience bodypainting themselves. (Katharina)*

*I hope more people will experience the art by themselves.“ (Giu)*

Nobody attached importance to anonymity. As common in the scene of photography and with the interviewees' consent, I use their artistic or first names.

### RECEIVING A BODYPAINTING

Before considering the afterlife of the bodypainting, we take a look at the bodypainting situation - the time during which the painting is planned and executed. Of course, it has to be taken into account that the different types of bodypainting differ gradually in terms of the time required and, if larger headdresses, coloured contact lenses, or similar are used, also in terms of physical effort for the model

### NUDITY AND EMOTIONAL UNDRESSING

Bodypainting necessarily begins with getting naked in front of the painter, thus, with an unusual situation: "When we dress we do so to make our bodies acceptable to a social situation" (Entwistle, 2000, p. 326). Of course, there are certain social situations where nudity becomes the norm - in the sauna, on the nudist beach - but being the only person to be undressed among people who keep their clothing on is for many an unusual and awkward situation. An interesting aspect is that a great many of the interviewees who acted as respondents in our study emphasized that they did not feel naked when being painted or at least once the painting was progressing. As it seems, a layer of paint helps to no longer feel undressed even though it does not disguise the body shape. On websites like modelkartei.de it can be seen that there are numerous (hobby) models happily available for bodypainting, but exclude the photo genre "fine art nude" that refers to the artistic and usually not sexually loaded presentation of the human body. This may be surprising at first glance. Perhaps one reason is that the models feel less recognizable and at the same time less "themselves" once they are bodypainted.

*Bodypainting is okay for me because it's like a different skin. But I don't like nudes. (Lou)*

Astonishingly, there are also many models who are not very confident about their own bodies, yet get naked to be painted and pose without clothes once the painting is done.

*I have never liked my body. However, both body painting and photography have given me a new outlook, to understand my body as raw material which can be designed. This is a freeing feeling. (Katharina)*

Yet, bodypainters will necessarily see and be in touch with their models' naked skin, which suggests that if the models are not somewhat exhibitionistic, they must establish a special relationship of trust with the painter, who is not only allowed to see them but also to touch and transform them. When the (hobby) models take off their everyday clothing, often a process begins in which they also undress emotionally and it quickly leads to very personal communication (see Jerrentrup, 2018, p. 53). In bodypainting, this may be

enhanced by two aspects: painters and their models are physically very close, and bodypainting can take a lot of time - time during which there are few instructions. The silence is usually filled with small talk and soon, very personal topics tend to emerge. Here, a kind of reflection is conceivable: if one is already naked, one is already exposed in front of the painter, one can also take off the social mask and undress emotionally. In return, the painter answers in an emotional and trusting way that reminds of talk therapy as described by Rogers (1951; for bodypainting as a form of therapy in other - non artistic - contexts, see for example, Riquelme et al., 2018). Even for anatomical bodypainting, Nanjundaiah and Chowdapurkar found out that it encourages communication, that “the students felt that the body painting method was fun and that lots of peer learning happened” (2012, p. 1408). The physical interaction seems to facilitate the verbal communication.

### MUTUAL ADJUSTMENTS

Models get painted - this grammatical passive suggests that somebody else is transforming them, a transformation that depends on somebody else's taste, ideas, and abilities; in short, that the models depend on their painters. However, in many ways, a mutual adjustment of painters and models is necessary before and during the painting process. The painting idea is usually already coordinated with the model beforehand, possibly also (further) developed by both, which is often done via the internet (i.e., without real-life meetings). When painting, the idea must be adapted to the model's body, its bumps, strengths, and weaknesses. Posing or acting skills on the models' part also play a role, as does their persistence and patience. Consequently, as described by Elvira Katic, (2009, p. 77) several aspects come together in bodypainting and thus lead to a new whole characterised by adaptation and inspiration.

*A painting grows. This means that you cannot push an idea through as if it was carved in stone. It is rather like an organic creature. (Giu)*

### ENJOYMENT AND EXHAUSTION

The painting process itself was described by some of our respondents or getting the nails done as a kind of sensual relationship and thus it resembles descriptions of hairdressing in their own words (see Hershman, 1974, p. 274, see Liebelt 2016).

*It is a sensual experience - to let go. (Mina)*

Such pleasant feelings should not hide the fact that standing still for a long time is tiring and that the wet color on the skin often feels very cold - in short, that being painted can be quite exhausting at the same time. As bodypainting contains uncontrollable factors - not only because the painters may not know the bodies of their models or the mod-

els themselves cannot assess how persistent they will be, but also due to the time pressure, everyone involved has to be flexible: with a bodypainting one cannot - quite literally - postpone the work until the next day.

*(It is both:) a pleasant feeling and quite some stress.. (Giu)*

At festivals, there is often a particularly big time pressure, but the clock also ticks for paintings whose sole purpose is photo or video shoots: in any case, “body painting demands [...] patience from the model. 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, p. 67). Consequently, for the model, being painted is in the area of tension between tactile enjoyment and emotional and physical exertion.

### PLAYING WITH IDENTITY

For the artists, the models’ bodies are used as canvases and inspirations (Katic, 2009, p. 77), but it is also very important that the models agree to the painting, especially so, because they are hardly ever paid (well), so they must be driven by an intrinsic motivation. At this point, the question of identity gets in focus: How does the painting relate to the model?

*It is great to witness the transformation of the own body. (Elli)*

Identity, deriving from the Latin term “idem = the same,” has been discussed for a long time in a multitude of disciplines. For our context, it is important that identity concerns the “self-image as a coherent being with certain characteristics and a history” (Schönhuth, 2005, p. 91). Identity can be defined as self understanding, the understanding of who you are, what your plans are, etc. (see Henning, 2012, p. 21). Especially nowadays, identity is not simply given, but “individuals are increasingly required, or called upon, to become the ‘architects of their own lives’, to engage in continual do-it-yourself identity revisions and to plot and re-plot individualized solutions to wider systemic social problems” (Elliott, 2016, p. 70). Remaining in control of the body transformations occurring during bodypainting as part and parcel of the work of art ensures coherence in the form of self-understanding: “the body becomes a guarantee for unity and individuality, a bastion of autonomy and self-determination” (Degele, 2004, p. 16).

*I am slipping into another body and identity.” (Sam)*

*It’s amazing to be a living painting myself.” (Analía)*

With the help of the painting, models can slip into a new skin, so to speak, but one in which they are still in control and can become not just someone, but even something completely different - a non-human creature or just a concept. Consequently, a particular tension arises: models are not “costumed,” but also not recognizable and potentially not “themselves,” as in the example of figure 2: the model is hardly recognizable. The con-

cept is something she can relate to, but as stressed by herself, it should rather stand for a universal human experience than for herself.

### **THE AFTERLIFE OF THE BODYPAINTING**

Obviously, bodypainting is a non-permanent art form, the paintings only exist in the context of the situation for which they were created. Yet, the fact that art cannot have its effect without a certain context is easy to overlook: it would be a mistake to think “that the only way art can be appreciated is on the basis of form alone untrammelled by art history or free from the knowledge and expertise of the creator” (Morphy, 2011, p. 17).

No matter for which purpose it is painted, taking pictures or videos is almost always an integral part of the painting just as filmmakers and photographers are integral parts of the cultural scene (see DeMello, 2014, p. 67). At festivals, extra sets and lamps are installed, so that the paintings can be photographed or filmed in the best possible way. It had been stated that the photographer’s or filmmaker’s status has inherently an edge over that of the subject (see Beloff, 1983, p. 171); however, based on my participant observation, I would largely deny this assumption: media products are usually developed as a team and legal rights are shared.

At this point, various media products have to be distinguished: snapshots and short film clips - usually taken in front of simple or monochrome backdrops with rather flat light setting - should help the painters to record their own progress, but also enthuse beginner filmmakers and photographers. Specific sets or locations are used to create more artistic pictures, or photos, or film montages. Some bodypaintings, such as camouflage paintings require specific locations in order to have an impact. Of course, there are significant differences between photography and (short) films: photography isolates a certain moment and condenses it to a flat and static picture, whereas film clips include a temporal dimension. Therefore, both genres face different challenges (e.g. selecting the right posings or movements). Yet, some recently popular techniques like one-second-clips or boomerangs seem to be almost between the two genres. Both film clips and photographs often engage in story telling: although there are some pictures that should have an effect only through their aesthetics, it often plays a role to trigger a story in the mind of the viewer (see Baetens & Bleyen, 2010, p. 165).

The intention to photograph or film a bodypainting already influences its creation. For shoots, paintings are often created differently than for competitions. It is less about showing mastery and thus optimally using flat surfaces such as the back, but rather about designing the body as suitable as possible for the camera and the intended effect of the resulting clips or photographs. Consequently, posing options, possible movements, and light settings are also taken into account.

When bodypaintings are recorded, stagings take place. Staging in the narrower sense sees the resulting moving or still picture as the “defined objective” (Weiss, 2010, p. 50). However, my experience and other studies (see e.g. Jerrentrup, 2020) have shown that for many people, the picture result is not the most or the only important goal: mindfulness plays a role when taking pictures (see Eberle, 2017), as does the joyful feeling of being active and being truly involved in something, which has been characterized as “flow” (see e.g., Fischer & Wiswede, 2009, p. 100). The opportunity to collect new experiences matters as well, and so does the expression of creativity, which is associated with empowerment and personal development (see Mundt, 2009, p. 97) and can lead to pride, self-esteem, and mental health (see Schuster, 2015, p. 50).

*When I am fully painted, I am different, I behave differently. Funnily enough, that seems natural to me. (Jenny)*

Just as the painting situation, the media situation is characterized by communication: the photographer or filmmaker and the model, as well as any other parties involved, must articulate their ideas and implement them as a team. Again, very personal information is often communicated during the process - not surprising, since portrait shots are considered to be closely interwoven with the person portrayed (see Barthes, 1989, p. 89). As with bodypainting, there is also a close connection to personal identity. Through bodypainting, the person has become something else and poses as such in front of the camera. The posings and movements are adapted to this new being. A further step of alienation occurs when models later on view their photos or video clips from a temporal distance.

*My clips are a great treasure for me - even though I do not necessarily see myself when I am watching them. (Jean)*

As shown, bodypainting and media enter into symbiosis and resemble each other in some aspects with regard to the model. So the assumption is that effects can be intensified through the usage of film clips and/or photographs.

## **DISCUSSION**

When focussing on the result, the process in which bodypainting, film, and photography come together sounds rather peculiar: a two-dimensional sketch or moodboard becomes something three-dimensional on the body and then, through media, again something two-dimensional and eventually moving. In the process, the living canvases “change the contextual interpretations of the original painted images in integral ways” (Katic, 2009, p. 77) and so do media. In addition to bodypainting, media also offer a new experience of oneself, comparable to the mirror experience.

*It gives me the opportunity to see myself from an outside perspective without judgement, which often appears whilst looking into the mirror. (Lucy)*

*It feels like I can be anything, literally anything. (Leonie).*

*When I look at the pictures, I can barely recognize my body, yet I feel a strong connection. (Laura)*

Due to the lack of similarity, it is easier to appreciate the pictures as works without immediately bringing one's own person into play, to understand them as detached from oneself. On the one hand, art can be understood as the pinnacle of individuality, all the more body-related art - but on the other hand, it is ultimately not about the individuals involved in the art, but about the work itself.

How can the relationship between models and their bodypainting videos or photographs be described? Bodypainting has become a second-level work of art through media: the painting is an artwork already and together with the recording process, it becomes yet another kind of art in addition. Almost all models confirm that they experience it as an uplifting feeling to perceive themselves as art. Media manage to detach the painting from its context and thus make it durable. Furthermore, the resulting pictures and videos hide a lot: they may have been taken in front of a background paper or in a set, maybe even lights are mounted - in most cases, however, the result shows something that does not fully correspond to the memory of the shoot. This is already the case because one cannot perceive oneself "in real life" from the outside, but it is reinforced by the fact that the result is based on a staging and is probably edited for example cut and filtered with video editing software and set to music, which adds to the effect.

*I am freed from myself. (Jean)*

This way, bodypainting models can experience the artwork without necessarily linking it to their own physical existence. Instead, it is perceived as a result of a teamwork and as something that is more relevant than the individual egos, which transcends these egos. As stated by several interviewees, this can be a liberating experience that deserves more scientific attention from various perspectives such as anthropology and psychology, but also may be interesting for psychotherapy and social work.

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