

Passepartout, No. 46: Skin

Passepartout. Skrifter for Kunsthistorie, Aarhus

Deadline: Jun 1, 2024

www.passepartout.co

Edward Payne

Passepartout - Skrifter for Kunsthistorie is a peer reviewed research journal of Art history, theory and artistic practice. It is hosted by Aarhus University, section for Art History.

Passepartout #46: Skin.

Edited by Edward Alan Payne, Laura Katrine Skinnebach, and Gry Lind Merrild Hansen.

Skin is contradictory. It is the site of creation and destruction, transformation and regeneration. On the one hand, the skin is the largest organ and outermost covering of the human body, protecting the internal organs from external assaults. It forms a shield against harmful microorganisms and chemicals, and it regulates the body temperature while simultaneously containing the body's vital fluids. The skin is a resistant membrane which can heal and renew itself by replacing old cells with new ones. On the other hand, skin is vulnerable. It is porous and can be attacked or decomposed by illness, microbes, and bacteria. It is soft and thin, and can easily be penetrated, lacerated, broken, flayed, burned, and scarred. Skin can also harden, crack, peel, flake, stretch, wrinkle, blush, blemish, and blister.

Skin is a contentious cultural artefact. It constitutes the body's encounter with the world and may be read like a map of our lives and identities. But the different signs inscribed on our skin – its pigments, decorations, holes, scars, and hair (or lack thereof) – embody cultural meanings that through history have led to discrimination and repression, or privilege and power. Skin is a field of cultural debate and calls for further critical study. From a new-materialist perspective, we might trouble the tendency to treat the skin in anthropocentric terms, for does the tree not have skin? And what of the sculpture, the robot, the animal, or the face of the earth – skin surfaces that meet and negotiate with their surroundings?

Skin is pervasive. It envelops bodies – our own and those of others – and constitutes the inescapable interaction between all entities. The skin senses and it is sensed. Skin also permeates our speech, as revealed by numerous figurative expressions: "beauty is only skin deep," "by the skin of one's teeth," "no skin off one's nose," "to be comfortable in one's own skin," "to be skin and bone," "to be thick- or thin-skinned," "to get under one's skin," "to have skin in the game," "to jump out of one's skin," "to make one's skin crawl." These phrases concern the resilience of skin, as well as its penetrability. Most importantly, they demonstrate that skin receives and produces metaphorical meanings. Skin is necessarily related to the visual by virtue of its visibility. Indeed, since antiquity, skin has occupied a prominent position in the visual arts. Tattooing, scarification, and body paint,

for example, make the surface of the human skin a canvas, and likewise, the bodily surface lends itself as a metaphor for a pictorial surface or support used in artistic representation.

Skin – human or other-than-human – is a frontier between outside and inside, surface and depth, visibility and invisibility. As matter and metaphor, skin offers an opportunity to investigate negotiations between the visual and the sensory from various historical and cross-cultural perspectives. In this theme issue of *Passepartout*, we will explore the problem of skin and its intersections with art and visual culture. How are the material properties and metaphorical potentialities of skin incorporated in art and visual culture? How does skin connect such disciplines as language, literature, philosophy, art, medicine, and science? We seek articles that probe skin as a material, conceptual, metaphorical, bodily, and artistic interface. For example, skin as a multisensory organ, architectural skin, the materiality of skin or the skin of matter, skin and identity, etc.

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Deadline for abstracts: June 1, 2024. Max. 400 words to edward.payne@cc.au.dk and lks@cc.au.dk.

Deadline for articles: November 1, 2024.

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In November 2024, we will—depending on financial support—organize a seminar at Aarhus University where contributors will have the opportunity to share ideas and provide feedback on each other's contributions. The volume will be published in spring 2026.

Reference:

CFP: *Passepartout*, No. 46: Skin. In: ArtHist.net, Apr 8, 2024 (accessed Jul 12, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/41593>>.