

Under Your Skin

By Despo Magoni in Central Booking Magazine,
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Oscar Wilde once wrote: "All art is at once surface and symbol. Those who go beneath the surface do so at their own peril." His words came back to me in early 2011 when I began taking apart my copy of *Gross Anatomy*, a book I kept in my studio. Over the years, I used it as a reference while exploring the human condition in my paintings, drawings, and works on paper. Although, at first, I abandoned the anatomy book to the trash pile while cleaning my studio, I found myself retrieving it from the curb. It became the catalyst for my next project. I decided to use the book, changing the context in which it had existed for me in the past. In this new incarnation, it took on new meaning, allowing me to unravel not only its pages, but also the heart and soul of the human condition.

In the past, I often painted the body, particularly the face, as a way of fathoming the haunting dimensions of the psyche. I saw the exploration of these elements as enabling one to span the chasm of human emotions and to configure one's environment.

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By peeling off the pages of the old anatomy book, I was symbolically dismantling the body and revealing the mechanisms beneath. This physical tearing allowed me to examine the different parts of the body while acknowledging the complex structures working underneath the surface, all of which enable life and experience in the world. My curiosity functioned in very much the same way as a child taking a toy apart for the sheer joy of seeing how it works.

Working directly with the pages of the cannibalized book, I created ten folios, twelve small books and three accordion books. In each of these configurations, I was inspired by what was already printed on the page: the raw images of our interior selves. I marveled at the beauty, order, diversity, and coordination between the parts. I was struck by the way they create a system similar to a finely tuned orchestra: each organ performs skillfully and in acute awareness and harmony with the whole.



Despo Magoni, twelve sixteen-page books from *Under Your Skin* installation.

As the work evolved, the title I initially envisioned, *Taking the Body Apart*, changed: first from *The Landscape Within*, to *Ecce Homo*, and then, to *The Music Within*. However, when the installation was finished in April 2012 and I saw the piece in its entirety, I decided to change the name one final time, calling it *Under Your Skin*.

I create my hand-made books without any previous formal knowledge of bookmaking. My approach is immediate and instinctive, which, at times, makes the process trying. However, despite these occasional challenges, my method is always rewarding and exciting for me.



Despo Magoni, ten folios from *Under Your Skin* Installation.

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The imagery - a combination of painting, drawing and collage conveys a direct intimacy between who we are and what we are made of. It reflects the bloody mess and the commotion that takes place under the skin. My aggressive approach on the surface of the delicate paper is a reference to the strength and fragility of the human body and its hesitation between the temporary and the eternal.



Despo Magoni, two twelve-page accordion books from *Under Your Skin* Installation.