



W ⊕ R D S A B ⊕ U + I I I E A C A D E M I C

“To a lot of people my very existence is a provocation”— meet Parma Ham: artist, agitator, and curator of London’s Wraith night

FEBRUARY 13, 2020

For London based artist, [Parma Ham](#), pushing boundaries has become their raison d’être. While the old guards of Western culture buttress themselves with a heightened conservatism, the agender agitator has produced a unique artistic vision to challenge staid normative notions of gender, identity, and the body. In the spirit of Punk Rock DIY, they create their own culture for their own kind of human.

Ham came to the attention of the world back in 2014 for their [extreme hair style](#) and has since been a mouthpiece for goth culture, gender non-conformity, and sexuality. As curator and creator of the infamous nightclub event, [Wraith](#), Ham regularly brings together a collective of equally provocative and vocal artists. Alongside their own band Cult of the New Flesh, resident performers [Salvia](#) and [WenZhelini](#) offer revellers an evening of bloodletting, sadism, ritual, sex acts, and lurid hedonism.





Parma Ham. Image by Parma Ham

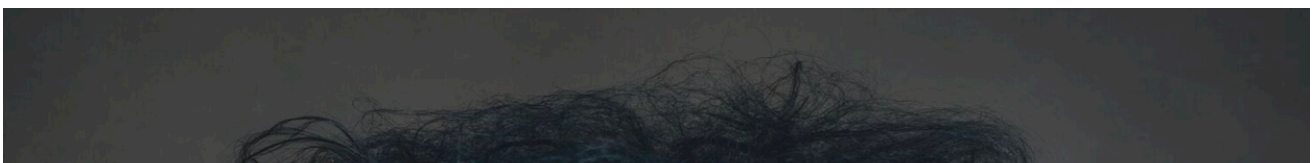
In their design project, [Nullo](#) (a term describing an individual that voluntarily removes their genitals), Ham and Salvia manufacture a haunting alien aesthetic that encourages nebulous boundaries between physical and digital realities to create and accommodate an updated augmented sexuality. Imbued is a critique of binaries and exploration of sexuality that transgress the limits of the body to build new ways of experiencing it.

Ham's upcoming 2020 exhibition, *The Flesh that Dreams are made of*, will explore how our imagination can affect the ways we see and treat our bodies. It is a vision where unbridled body modification can render the human form quaint and where fantasies will completely efface corporeal selves.

The [fourth instalment of Wraith](#) is on February 28, 2020.

How would you define yourself? Provocateur, transgressor, nihilist?

I like the sound of transgressor, and it is transgressors I like to keep company with. I think at a time when so much of the world is pushing back to imaginary pastiches of the past—politically, socially, and even artistically, it takes bold people to do the direct opposite of that and challenge expectations and conventions in order to move forward and progress. Society needs extreme forces of positivity and acceptance in order to balance out the nasty shrieks of negativity and greed.





Parma Ham. Image by Damien Frost

What is the essential element of your work; what moves you to create?

I ask myself “will this benefit the world by me putting it out? Or has it already been done, but better?”, if the answer is yes, I disregard and move on. This maxim is

what guides me right now; I know what I need in the world, and if I can't find something pre-existing I'm going to find a way to create it, so work, objects and events are born out of necessity.

I never understood why writers, artists or musicians put work out that ultimately wasn't anything new or doesn't challenge or compete against what else is already out there. I'm not sure if it's the healthiest way of going about things, and for many years I held myself back, because I thought there was no way I could create work as good as some of the great thinkers of our times.

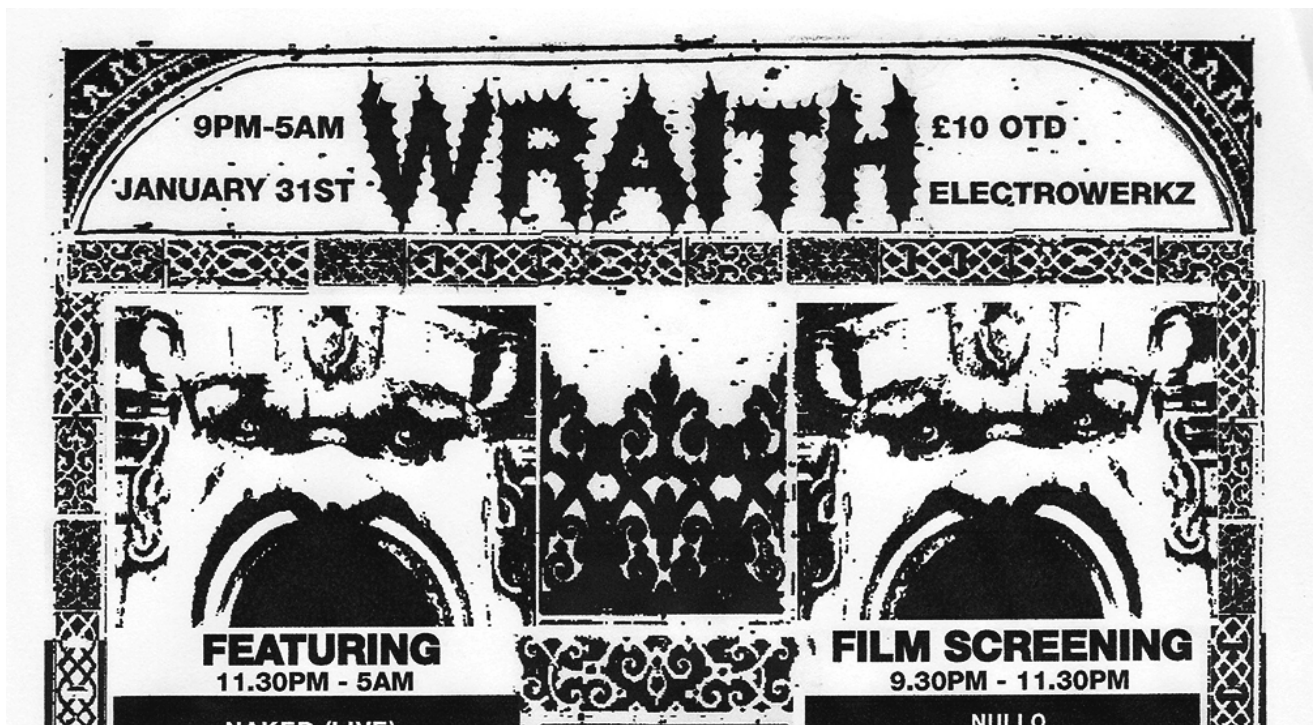




“Ouroboros”. By Parma Ham

Tell us more about Wraith. How did it come to fruition?

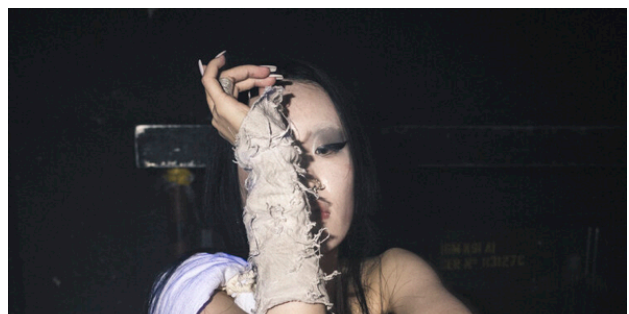
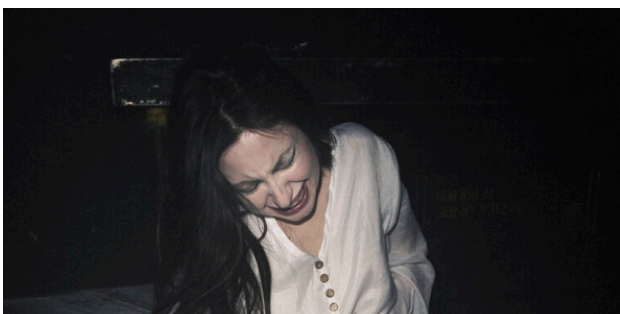
I was forced to create Wraith; I needed to present my work, and the work of my friends, and there was nowhere else that existed that could provide an appropriate context for it. I combine that with my vision of night life where I want to incorporate all the creative disciplines - fashion, music, art, performance under the guise of a transgressive and hedonistic nightclub; and create a hub for collaboration and bringing worlds together. I think night clubs are very focused on music, and the context of galleries is often stale, but since our community and subculture has a wealth of multidisciplinary artists amongst us, it seems only right we should work on these things together.





Poster design: Hila Angelica.

As far as the structure goes, I guess you can say that I curate Wraith, but I am always in conversation with our resident performers Salvia and Wenzhelini, resident DJ Less Than Human, and our house band Cult of The New Flesh which I am part of alongside Angus & Alexi. Carol Bonarde, who is an incredible band photographer, is our resident photographer and we are busy creating zines to document the work and the people of our group.





Rotten Peach. Image by No One Studio



Wenzhelini. Image by No One Studio

It's very beautiful to work on something with others that have a shared interest, while not having any economic goal. I think in these parameters you can make the best and purest art, unadulterated by money and power.



Salvia. Image by No One Studio.





Luzia Lowe. Image by No_One Studio.

What you are trying to motivate in your audience: conversation, provocation? Your work could elicit defensiveness among outsiders because it transgresses boundaries fundamental to their understanding of the body and norms. Is that a concern—being able to communicate with people outside of your immediate community?

To a lot of people my very existence is a provocation, but that problem is with that audience, and not me.

I don't really think of anyone else when I'm creating. I work based on what I would like to see and what I need. My own desire is to make things that push the boundaries of my own experience; and I make the assumption that the audience around me might appreciate the same things as me, so I share it.

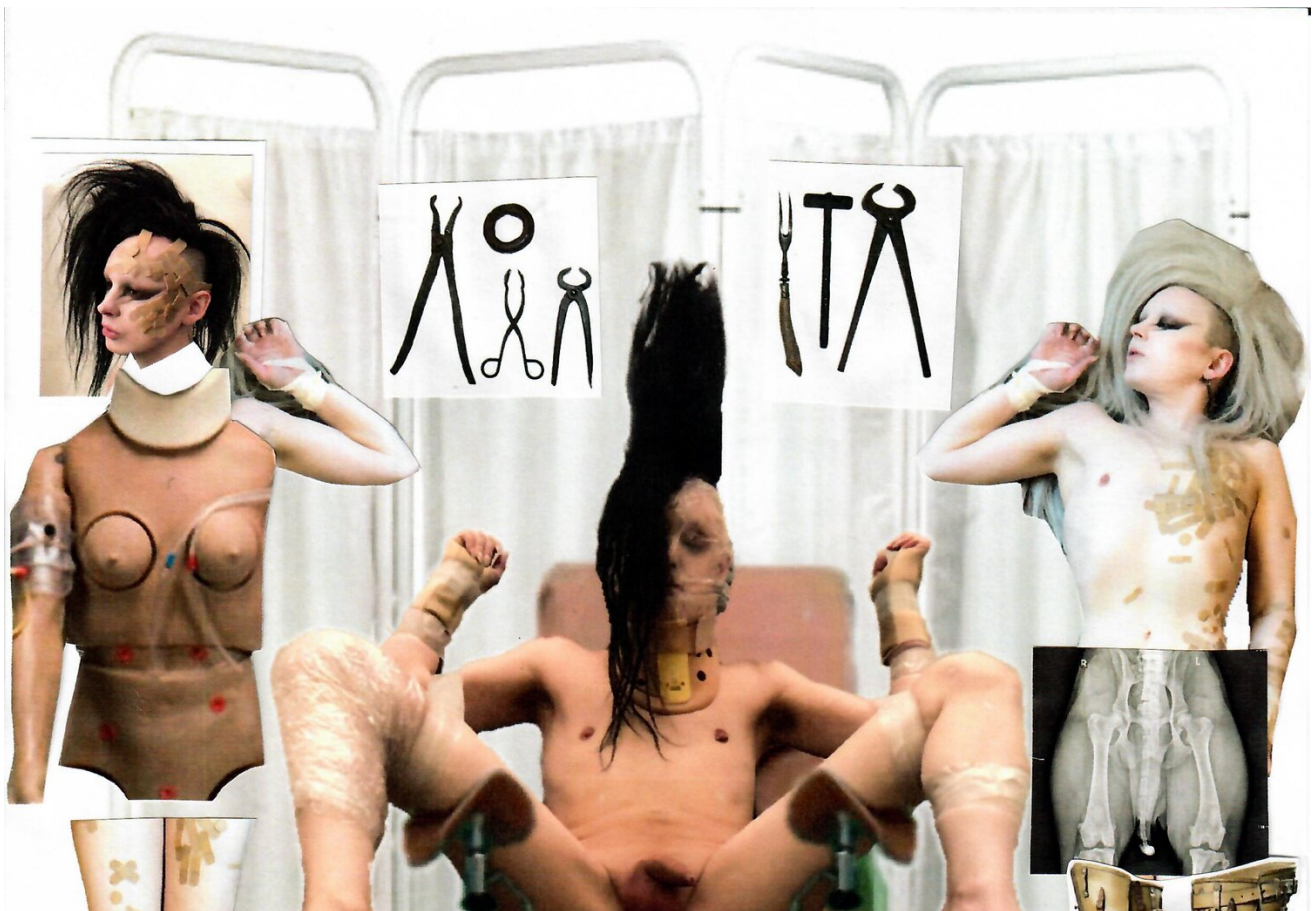
This underpins my event Wraith, which is a platform for myself, my friends and the alt scene in London. We make and produce work for ourselves and for our immediate subculture / community. Sure, it's rewarding to have work in galleries, museums, and magazines and hit that mainstream audience, but I get more pleasure, conversation, inspiration and engagement when working with and for friends in our own context.

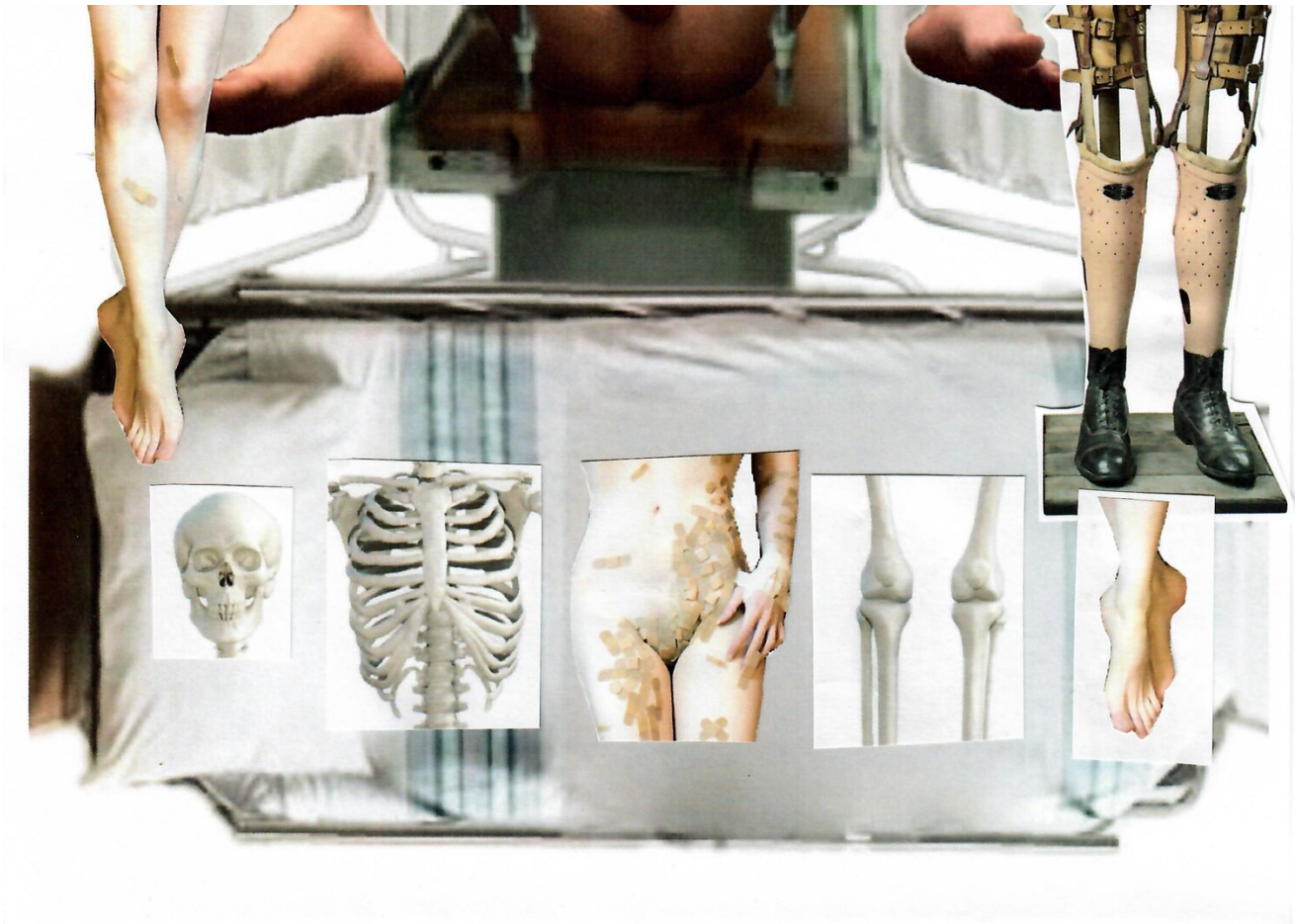
I'm fortunate with social media that I've gained a large and more mainstream audience where I have exposure to people outside of my immediate context. I think the world needs people like us pushing in the opposite direction to conservatism and exposing people to alternative ways of living. I think artists play a critical role in breaking down borders and binaries, and at a time when so much of the world attempts to return to an idealised world that never existed, I want to work towards creating a new future.

For some people I imagine your work might appear as gratuitous nihilism. Can you explain the intellectual and moral scaffolding that informs your work?

That stems from the realisation that the built world - society, morality, politics, art, gender etc is the product of white, straight, cis male dominated binary thinking. A form of leadership that is self-appointed and not the right fit for me. The principle of nihilism is to deconstruct the way things are and start again in order to create new ways I can experience the world. It's the DIY mentality and perhaps a bit of stubbornness in that I'm going to do things my way.

Regarding morality, it is just as subjective as taste, and just as malleable according to its context across time and space. I can't really explain why some people think I'm evil for having big hair, being open with fetish and sexuality and so forth, but they do. It seems pretty straightforward to me that billionaires, politicians corrupt by money and the hate speech that enforces these status quo's is the real evil, and it seems a lot of people don't have the sense to tell apart what is actually a threat to society, and what offends their sensibilities that mean nothing in comparison.





“Nullified”. By Parma Ham

What were some influences throughout your earlier days? I see parallels with the work of Genesis P-Orridge.

I try to not be influenced by others so I can carve my own path, there might be inspirational aspects to others that get me thinking about my own trajectory. I love Gen however! They truly created their own universe, and there's many sides of both their work and their life that inspires and pushes boundaries. I think I've taken on a similar DIY aspect, mixed with experimentation and willingness to try different collaborations and styles, and have a reluctance to be pinned down.

Tell us about your relationship with “binary”.

Binary systems and false binary decisions are everywhere. I don't think you can limit humans and their experience to black or white, we are all a lot more complex than that. My initial resistance began as I struggled as a teenager against the binary

in relation to identity politics - male or female, and gay or straight. I've since come to the conclusion it's a false dilemma. You don't need to pick anything. Politics uses a lot of binaries 'left' or 'right', 'us' against 'them', and I think these principles only serve to divide.

I identify as agender, meaning lacking gender. I don't see how limiting parts of my identity and the human experience to a binary like gender is useful. Even asking me to go by a pronoun seems unnecessary as I just don't subscribe to that system. I know some people like to conflate gender with sex, but frankly referring to me as a he based on my assumed genitalia seems personal and gross. I'm happy to go by them/they to make things easy for others, but just referring to me as Parma Ham is preferable.

Tell us about the Nullo project.

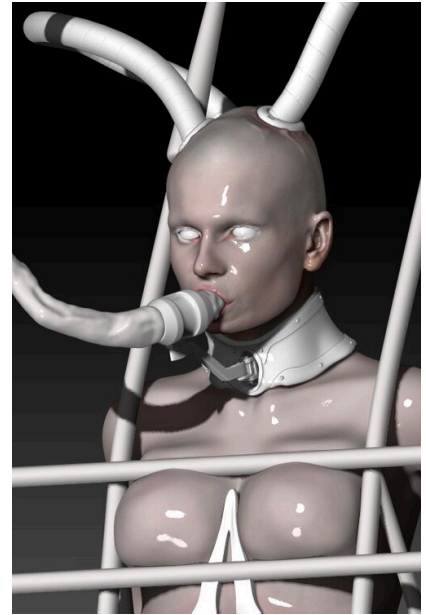
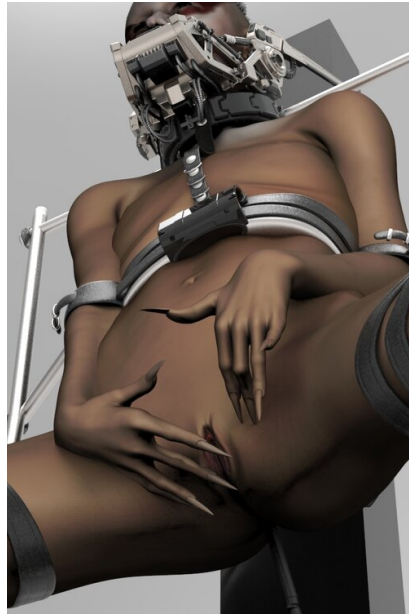
I work on [Nullo](#) with my partner Salvia, and our departure point was how our gender identities affect our sexuality and sexual role. We've been conditioned to sex being an act between a positive and negative (or active and passive), and the loaded sub/dom and masc/fem roles that usually go with that. To go beyond these simple but fundamental sex binaries pushes us into transhuman territory. We already live as transhuman from the way our lives are integrating with technology, our hands are almost welded to our smart phones and hence our mind is permanently connected with the internet just like cyborgs.



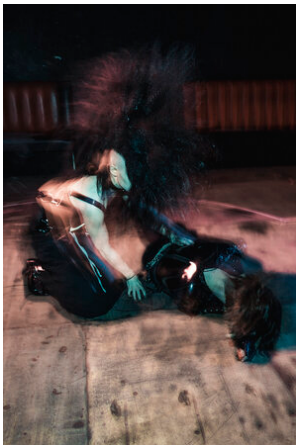


Erotomechanics Set by Nullo

What we find interesting is the way our digital experience impacts our bodies and particularly the way we view and understand them. It's only fitting that sex and sexuality is also updated to accommodate our desires in newfound realities. The Nullo project is a form of augmentation, the digital dream that has become reality; it's a bit like having an avatar, but then altering and adorning our real time body to match it, because that too is an avatar as the digital and organic worlds merge.



Nullo x Kaan Ulgener



Nullo Sissy Slut AW2020. Images by No_One Studio

Tell us about Cult of the New Flesh. It sounds like you're interpreting Hermann Nitsch through a queer contemporary lens – to me that's fascinating, what does that look like, and why do you want to do that?

COTNF is principally a music project that was developed simultaneously with Wraith, the project incorporates large performative elements. My collaborators Angus and Alexi are both at art school, and I work at a gallery, so when we set out to work on music we knew it would be a multidisciplinary collaboration. We knew

we wanted to do something with our bodies and focus on creating rituals. Not rituals in a spiritual or religious sense, but as a way to story tell, express identity and experiences, and reaffirm our subculture by bringing people together. We like the drama, and the power that goes into it, and the emotion that comes out of it. We reference historical rituals like the crucifixion and that's where visually we might share visceral similarities to Nitsch; but the context of queer kids doing it in a London nightclub in 2020 while making industrial techno goth has a whole host of different references compared to an old Austrian man doing it in a field in the 1970s, so yes quite different!





New Flesh by Damien Frost

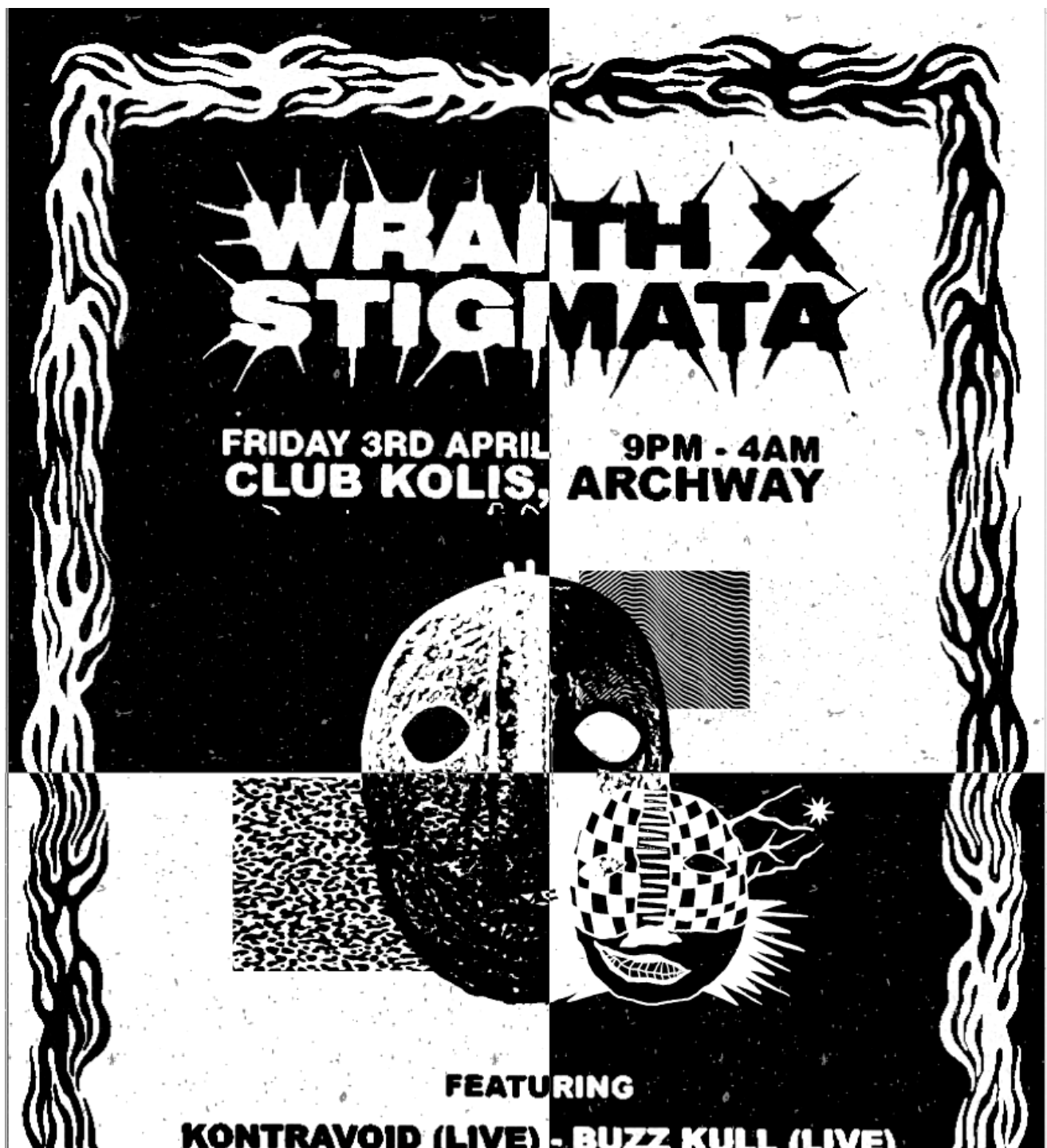
Tell us about alien aesthetics.

As humans we are experts at altering our environments to suit our needs and desires, so it's only fitting that the body is a blank slate open to customisation. The groundwork and desire to do this has always been around. I think the desire behind alien aesthetics shares ground with the general body mod community. The artist Orlan had alien facial implants in the 1980s and her whole practice precludes the alien aesthetics of today. I think due to social media and the accessibility and ease of photoshop style apps a new form of (digital) body modification has gained huge popularity. We're now at a point where these surreal and extreme edited looks from social media are being realised in real life through surgery, 3D printing and silicone. The movement is dependent on new technology and the way it's distributed, so that's why it's suddenly appeared at once in a cohesive manner.

Many of the leaders in this phenomenon identify with an "otherness" - largely bought on by identifying as LGBTQ+, and it's this that inspires a form of outsider art which seems like bodily mutation to others.

And you have a new exhibition coming up—The Flesh That Dreams Are Made Of?

The title is a lyric from the song *Flesh* by The Invincible Limit. I thought it was suitable as it's a show about our bodies and how our imagination affects how we see them, and how we treat them. The exhibition will be staged throughout 2020 in Wraith in London before travelling to the USA, and I love that it ties to music through its namesake whilst being held in nightclub. The exhibition will feature new work by artists mostly known through Instagram, and explores how the body is desecrated, destroyed and transformed, through our fantasies, yes alien aesthetics will be featured heavily!



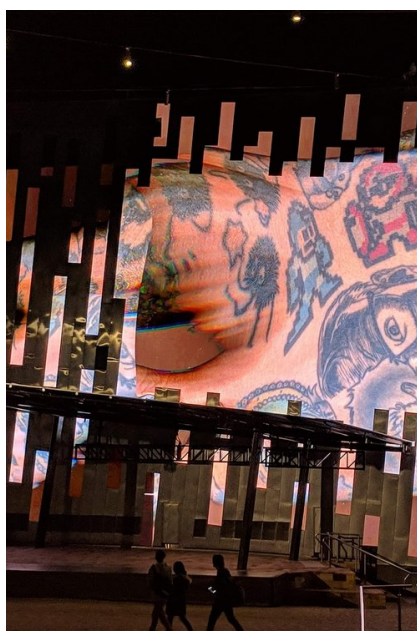


Upcoming Wraith Event. Artwork by Hila Angelica.

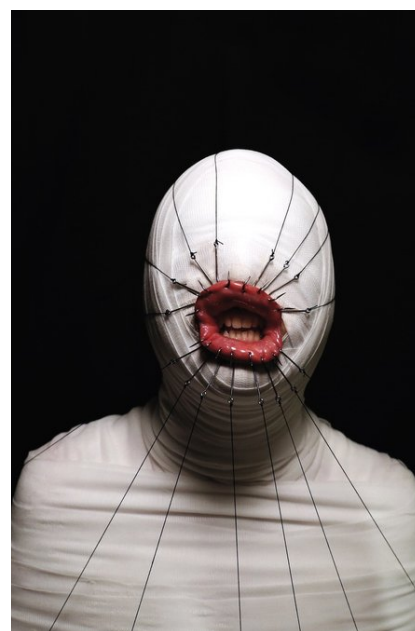
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