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## Altered Images Aim to Get Under Your Skin

*Art \* In her debut solo-show in Santa Ana, former administrator Naida Osline's Polaroids capture the body's parts as 'beautiful monsters.'*

September 08, 2001 | VIVIAN LETRAN | TIMES STAFF WRITER

The 25 framed Polaroid snapshots hanging at Grand Central Art Center in Santa Ana are small enough to make you intensely curious, drawing you in for a close-up look. Then they make you want to wince.

Such is the effect of "Deeper Skin," a solo exhibit by photographer Naida Osline, who served as director of the Huntington Beach Art Center from 1995 to 1999.

Focused on the abnormalities of the human body, the prints resemble a freakish medical document filled with photographs of diseased skin, large, open wounds, exaggerated growths, protrusions and altered genitalia. They seem real, yet they are created using latex, foam, makeup, prosthetics, props and lighting.

Osline, the model in most of her photographs, worked on the series for the last 2 1/2 years. She sees the images as metaphors for the altered human form and its vulnerability in an era of genetic engineering and cosmetic surgery.

The show's essayist and art center facilitator Mike McGee says the prints conjure "notions of science fiction, B-movies, midway freak shows, space aliens, tabloid journalism, scientific experiments gone awry, and bad acid trips."

Her latest works were spawned from a series she began four years ago called "Captiva," in which she documented whimsical costumes and makeup with subjects ranging from impersonators of Elvis and Abe Lincoln to Energizer Bunnies. Intrigued by people's desire to alter their identities, she attended sci-fi conventions and went to grocery stores on Halloween.

McGee saw Osline's first photo series in a group show at the "Spurgeon Experience" exhibit last year in Santa Ana and invited her to show her new work.

But the "Deeper Skin" images go beyond the light-hearted "Captiva" pieces, Osline says. They examine the tensions that lie beneath the skin rather than what's simply on the surface.

"I'm interested in what would be considered abnormal behavior and physically abnormal," Osline said. "The photos are of physical oddities--the things we might like to hide because we see it as a vulnerability. That's why I shoot the tender areas--the bottom of the foot, small of the back, genitalia and armpits. It's like a collection of home surgeries."

The snapshots are produced with a Polaroid 180 camera that uses "peel off" film to create instant images.

"I think there's an element of grotesqueness and beauty in the way the body parts are lit or positioned. I think they're beautiful monsters in a way," Osline said.

### A Shift From Administration

Exhibiting as an artist also has its travails. When her work was shown at the Laguna Art Museum's exhibition "Cyborg Manifesto" in April, her inclusion in the group show raised eyebrows in the art community because of her long-term relationship with the museum's exhibitions curator, Tyler Stallings.

"I'm showing my work as an artist and people want to talk to me about the art center and my relationship with Tyler," Osline said. "How many years have to go by before I'm not the director of art center and I'm not just viewed as Tyler's girlfriend? I've moved on and I hope people will too."

For now, she's enjoying her creative freedom.

"Being an administrator in the arts is like being an administrator in any field. It's a lot of paperwork and bureaucracy. It's a job," Osline said. "As an artist, there's so much more freedom to communicate a singular and direct vision. I'm excited about this show and the feedback I might get for my own development as an artist."

"Putting your work and yourself out there is the ultimate vulnerability."

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\07 "Deeper Skin," Grand Central Art Center, 125 N. Broadway, Suite A, Santa Ana. Gallery hours: Tuesdays-Sundays, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Free. Ends Oct. 28. (714) 567-7233.