

Edita Schubert

## *Self-Portrait Behind a Perforated Canvas*

Opening:  
Friday 7 July  
6 — 9 pm

Exhibition:  
7 July —  
31 August  
2023

*Dissection as evening nude*  
by Laura McLean-Ferris

To me, the most beautiful concept of embodied apprehension – a form of seeing that would involve the entire being, rather than just the eyes – is Lisa Robertson’s description of the search for a “sense-textile” in her novel *The Baudelaire Fractal* (2020). The idea crystallizes in the young narrator’s desire for an experience of aesthetics in which the senses would be more evenly redistributed, and in which women could make images in which they become apparent to themselves, as she grasps the comparative paltriness offered by the dominant technologies of the image: “John Berger”, Robertson writes, “in an essay on Caravaggio, once spoke of the universe on the other side of the skin, a phrase that lodged itself in my imaginary for years. Were there kinds of images that were not part of the dire contract of beauty and scorn? How did one comprehend this other universe?”

I am writing this on a train. The mangy, dove grey window blind covers slightly more than half of the window to my right (I could change this). Outside the white summer sky is low and dull, hovering clammily over the spongy wet rice fields. It’s hot, and the air conditioning in the carriage is broken, rendering every experience thick. My skirt sticks and glowers uncomfortably around points of contact with my skin. In this dimension, bodies and landscapes are pushing through the textiles that frame them.

“Dissection as evening nude” is a phrase Edita Schubert used to sum up the character of her work *Self-Portrait Behind a Perforated Canvas* (1977), a set of performance images that the artist made by pushing body parts and objects through holes in a canvas: small, precise incisions made using a surgical scalpel, and held open with medical tape, tools used at the

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medical school where she was employed as a draughtsperson. Schubert's phrase is mysterious, a little Duchampian, almost as though it could be a mistranslation or a mishearing. But Schubert also said that she was irritated, as student, that she should be expected to paint nudes lying on sofas, and to use a brush on canvas, to transpose that most archaic image onto a support with paint. "It simply got on my nerves", she said, "that taut surface on which I had to talk about something". Rather than paint an image of a body on top of the canvas, Schubert made a cut, creating a more porous textile, where the body, as well as images and objects, might pass through.

Using occlusion and revelation, Schubert created a cumulative image of herself as an artist and artistic subject, as one who smells, tastes, kisses, touches, thinks, projects, directs, looks back. Her fingers, lips, and nose poke through, along with locks of hair and cotton swabs and a small image of Giorgione's *The Tempest* (1506-8) – a work to which she continually returned throughout her career. Each element is a small suggestion of sensuous facets of experience that usually wander, hidden, in the light of day. Vestiges of dailiness rush through each of the apertures: "Perception opened, and surface became epistemology."