

Lindsay Preston Zappas, September 22, 2021



Photo: Ilona Szwarc, "Virgin Soap" at Diane Rosenstein. Image courtesy of the artist and Diane Rosenstein Gallery. Photo: Robert Wedemeyer.

At Diane Rosenstein in Hollywood, Ilona Szwarc's "Virgin Soap" is a mixed media exhibition that aestheticizes and sensualizes the artist's process while blurring the boundaries between maker, model, object, and subject. The show includes photographs that picture the artist in a stylized blue space making a lifecast of a female model's torso and mouth. Yet beyond simple documentation of the process, the pictures are stylized and almost advertorial. In a series of photos that feel both instructional and kinky, the topless model is dressed in slime-green bottoms to match the wet silicone casting material that Szwarc slathers over her exposed breasts and over her mouth. Once removed from the model, the mold itself becomes fodder for a set of photographs wherein the mold feels oddly lifelike.

One photograph, "Color of my nipple is rosy pink," shows Szwarc leaning over the finished cast torso, which has been painted in life-like skin tones, with a knife to cut excess material off the top of the cast. This typical step of the casting process is infused with strange gravitas and becomes violent and almost cannibalistic. The cast torso in the picture is also presented in the exhibition, exalted on lime green pedestals made from transparent acrylic — a trophy-like doppelganger of Szwarc's model that closes the loop of the artist's aestheticized and dramatized studio process.