

Emily Butler

SHEDDING

SKIN
NAILS
HAIR
JOINTS
MUSCLES
ENERGY
SLEEP
FOGGY HEAD
Animal or algae...

*Hello
Congratulations
This is for you*

A large translucent skin hangs in the space, carefully positioned so that its full breadth is visible. It appears at once like a cast-off crustacean shell, a reptile's skin, and a gauze hazmat suit, strange, yet delicate. As you look closer, you notice pockets stitched into the surface containing curious, mostly silver objects: coins, a lighter, marbles, a lice comb. The figure has no head, which indicates it might be the protective layer shed by a monstrous figure. Yet, part of its internal structure or entrails are also visible, hinting that this creature may now be vulnerable.

Agata Madejska's *Housing T (Current Affairs)* (2024) holds these contradictions in balance. It embodies the superstructures she navigates daily, such as shelter and social conformity, while also containing the provisions she carries for others: as a teacher, parent or family member. The small items suggest an archaeology of hers and her son T's pockets, who moves through rules and state of affairs, assembling his own system of value before he, too, is inevitably socialised.

The sloughed skin points towards the cyclical nature of responsibility, as well as its expenditure as a fragile form. Hung up in the space, it offers a temporary suspension from prescribed roles, a moment in which the body might reclaim autonomy and respite from the social structures that bind us daily and that loop endlessly like the figure eight. Conversely, the exhibition's title *8-8-8* invokes Robert Owen's 1817 call for a balanced rhythm of work, recreation, and rest. *Housing T* visualises the protective and ideological layers we build up around us, and the fleeting relief of shedding them.

The verb *shed* carries a rich etymology: it means to separate, to divide, such as to comb hair, and to discharge blood or tears. As a noun, it means a light storage structure. In her precise gestures and minimal arrangements, Madejska offers a grammar of form that highlights the excesses that society keeps at bay: bodily fluids, pests, foreign matter, non-normative bodies... At the same time, she magnifies the invisible structures that connect us within the fabric of society: housing, family, employment, subsistence, security.

Meanwhile, an urgent, insistent voice calls out to us.

*Hello
Congratulations
Your attention is needed*

In the accompanying pulsing audio piece *Hello, Congratulations* (2024), Madejska melds together congratulatory spam messages promising dreams, luxury, and beauty, but also "guns, tech, ships, villas" along with urgent reproductive health-services numbers. These intermingle with abstracted

lines from Bernard Mandeville's poem *The Fable of the Bees* (1714), a satire on the relationship between prosperity and morality, which suggests that a successful free market is, rather, fuelled by vice. Plucked from their original context, the texts reveal the insidious tangle between capitalism, rhetorical seduction and self-interest. Here, by highlighting an invitation to cheat the system, through corruption or vice, Madejska underlines how ultimately this reinforces the very system it claims to subvert. Like the looping symbol of infinity – the number 8 repeated in her exhibition title – there seems to be no viable alternative to capitalism. Her inquiry explores the linguistic and moral grammar governing today's economies, asking whether self-respect can in reality be weaponised.

The sound stimulates our senses like an ASMR track, its deep bass pulsing like a heartbeat, grey tones grating, modulated by Madejska's own echoing yet insistent voice. Playing on our expectations of female softness, or the serviceability of a bot, the repetition of "hello congratulations" becomes increasingly uncanny. The spoken words move from a soothing promise to magnifying the dark side of capitalism: "Keep it sly, Ready to screw". Madejska's practice has long explored the relationship between language and power, tracing the nearly invisible forces of coercion that permeate everyday life.

*Hello
Congratulations
We are waiting for it to continue like this
Rehearsals and failures
Please take a quick look*

Finally, *Options* (2025), are a group of fluorescent tubes featuring barely noticeable names such as 'Sophia'. They are ghostly reminders of a controversial UK government cyber-security recruitment campaign of 2020. Its posters presented characters including Naomi, Dan, Jahmal, Fatima, Omar and Sophia, whose lines of work (a call-centre operator, supermarket employees, a ballet dancer, a barber, and a vintage clothing shop assistant) were dismissed in favour of the slogan that his or her "next job could be in cyber (she just doesn't know it)". Released at the height of pandemic-era cuts to the arts, the campaign was swiftly dropped after backlash about how these individuals' activities were devalued through it. Here, Madejska revives its spectral traces, inviting us to look carefully at what has been discarded or silenced.

Together, the bodies of work examine how value is assigned, economically, socially and materially. Madejska draws on her long-standing interest in the semiotics of objects and images, and their relation to systems of power. She considers what circulates at the limits of legibility: faint, material and sonic traces, and structural residues. Her work addresses worker precarity, housing insecurity, reproductive rights, and the invisible, undervalued nature of the labour of care and maintenance, often borne by women. Throughout the show Madejska asks, how might one shed trauma and build new structures and languages of support instead?

*Hello
Congratulations
How did we do?
Do we not owe the growth of wine
To the dry shabby crooked vine?
Offers and news
I hope you don't mind*

Emily Butler is a freelance curator, writer and editor. She is also a PhD researcher in Curating at the University of Reading / OnCurating Academy, Berlin, on the topic of artists and curators as (mis)translators, as they work increasingly across borders, between languages, sign systems and cultures.

She is Adjunct Curator at Griffin Art Projects Vancouver. Previously, she served as Head of Programmes at the Contemporary Arts Society in Vancouver, Platform Talks Curator at Art Toronto (2024), and Conversations Curator at Art Basel (2021–2023). From 2010 to 2022, she was a curator at Whitechapel Gallery in London. She has also held roles in the Visual Arts team at the British Council, Antony Gormley Studio, and the Centre Pompidou. She contributes to international publications, and has been a visiting lecturer at Emily Carr University, Royal College of Art, OnCurating Academy and London Metropolitan University.

Agata Madejska

8-8-8

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