

# Artist's plastic surgeries defy beauty standards

**French woman undergoes numerous cosmetic procedures**



Joe Kohen / AP

French performance artist Orlan poses April 22 in New York. A bulging saline implant is visible above her left eye. While women in reality shows such as "Extreme Makeover" undergo plastic surgery to improve their looks, Orlan radically transforms herself to challenge traditional perceptions of beauty.

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NEW YORK - French performance artist Orlan, who has undergone numerous plastic surgeries to transform her face and body to challenge traditional perceptions of beauty, says art "has to shock."

And with her carnal art — which has included reshaping her face to resemble Zimbabwe's Ndebele giraffe women and performing during her surgeries — she achieves that end.

"The whole idea of (my work) is to be against the idea of social pressure put on a woman's body," Orlan said through an interpreter Thursday during a discussion of her work at Manhattan's Museum of Arts & Design. The 56-year-old artist was joined by Dr. Dimitri Panfilov, a plastic surgeon from the private clinic, "Nefrititi" in Bonn, Germany.

Orlan, whose only noticeable cosmetic enhancement was a pair of bulging saline implants embedded over her eyebrows, said, "I am against the ideas of normal beauty."

### **Surgery and makeup**

For Orlan, plastic surgery isn't tummy tucks, liposuction, breast reduction or lip augmentation. It's an expression of the sublime and grotesque, eccentricities carved into human flesh and sculpted in living bone.

"Art has to shock to justify itself," she said.

Orlan's work is graphic and bizarre, a mixture of the absurd and exotic.

During a multimedia presentation, she showed a 40-year history of her work, which began with black-and-white nude poses and ended with thematic performances of her undergoing plastic surgery in graphic detail.

Orlan's results attempt to resemble nonwestern images of beauty, like the Ndebele giraffe women, who lengthen their necks by wearing dozens of tight neck rings.

Other images she conjures through surgery and makeup are that of a Persian Mangbetu woman, whose head is wrapped in a complex braid, and an Olmec monarch, whose nose is elongated artificially in a death ritual.

Orlan says her carnal art rebels against the Christian revulsion to pleasures of the flesh, and consists of "mutant hybrids," a combination of tribal art with modern technology.

### **'An around-the-world tour of beauty'**

"This is an around-the-world tour of beauty," she said.

More shocking perhaps are Orlan's performances during her surgeries, some of which have their own thematic motifs. During one surgery, she is dressed as a Madonna figure, holding up a large black cross in one hand and a white cross in the other, while the doctors and nurses, in costumes, peel back layers of bloody skin.

Although Orlan says her plastic surgery performances are painless, her work is permeated with a faint sense of masochism.

"My work is against the idea of pain," she said. "Pain is not good as a form of redemption."

Even the blood and flesh discarded after her surgeries are used. For one piece, she encased a piece of her flesh in glass and attached it to a tableau.

"The body is a sculpture and a pedestal," she said.

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