

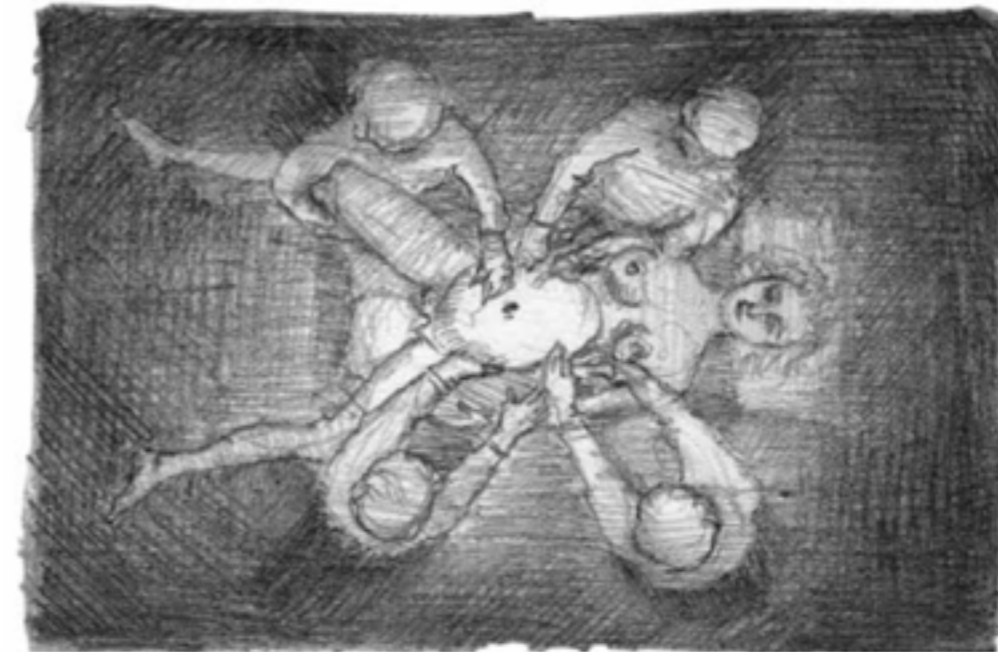
**GROWING**

**AGATA  
WIECZOREK**

**IN 2020 THE POLISH ARTIST AGATA WIECZOREK, IN RESIDENCE – STUDIO NATIONAL DES ARTS CONTEMPORAINS, PRODUCED A SERIES OF PHOTOGRAPHS AND A COURT METRAGE CALLED *GROWING*. ESTELLE BENAZET HEUGENHAUSER, THE PROJECT'S PRODUCTION MANAGER AS WELL AS AN AUTHOR, TALKS ABOUT THE FILM AND ITS SCOPE.**

## COLD ROOM

## ESTELLE BENAZET HEUGENHAUSER



In a surgical area, nurses work around a mannequin with its legs spread out on stirrups. Hands work in unison, peel back the belly like the lid of a trunk, and, in the middle of the plastic and metal structure, a small humanoid ready to be born appears. Other hands, on the side of the silicone vulva, attempt to extract the little body, a piston mechanism is activated and gives birth to it. Behind the one-way mirror, Ewa simulates the breathing of the humanoid giving birth.

Filmed at the PRÉSAGE simulation centre in Lille, a place of learning for future doctors, this first sequence directed by Agata Wieczorek exposes the rapport between humans and machines, reminding us that science fiction plays a significant role in the present. Using high-tech mannequins, we learn by simulating treatments. Our diagnoses are becoming automated, we are turning into cyborgs, and with this advanced method used by the applied sciences, the generation of knowledge occurs like any other machine operation.

After the scene portraying the delivery of the humanoid, Ewa, the protagonist, a medical student, faces the little one: the child's mouth moves as if to express something, but it is simply a pneumatic reaction of the silicone being. Drops bead on Ewa's forehead. Her complexion looks paler and paler. She faints. Then the atmosphere changes – the cold, cottony white is superseded by red-orange light. Next shot: Ewa, lying on a hospital bed, undergoing an ultrasound. She is now also pregnant but denies her pregnancy. The doctor congratulates her and refrains from mentioning the possible choice of abortion. Ewa goes home. Later, in her flat, blood runs down her legs. Ewa gives birth alone. On the floor where the clots of flesh have spread, she uncovers this abject and shiny being that she has given birth to. She grabs a knife and chops it up.

Above: "Growing" - storyboard frame, drawing, 2021, Agata Wieczorek  
P. 13-23: "Growing", film by Agata Wieczorek, 17'25", 2021  
Produced by Le Fresnoy - Studio National des Arts Contemporains, supervised by Athina Rachel Tsangari © Agata Wieczorek - Le Fresnoy - Studio National - 2021  
P. 24-29: From the series "Artefacts", photography, 2020

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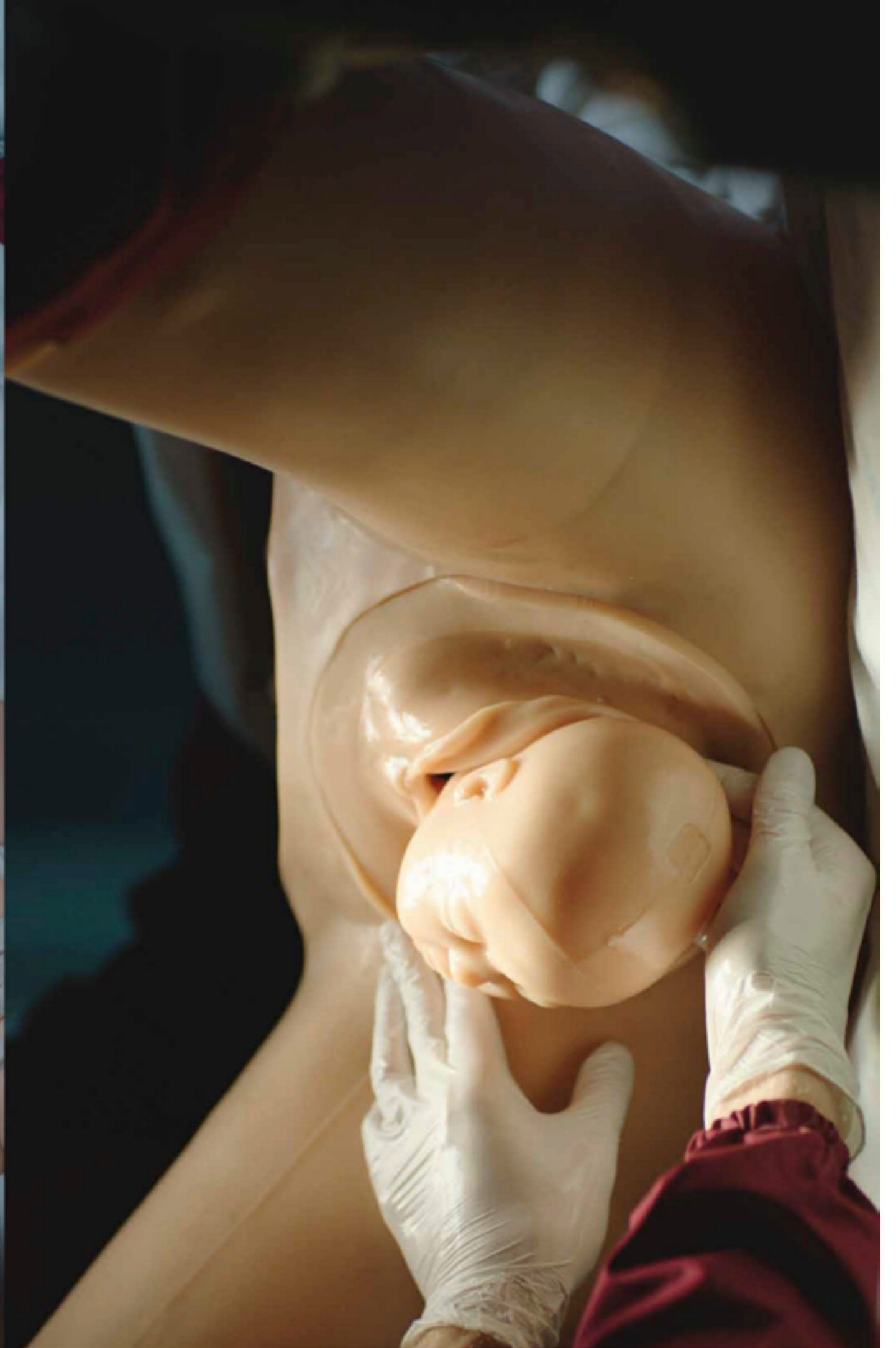
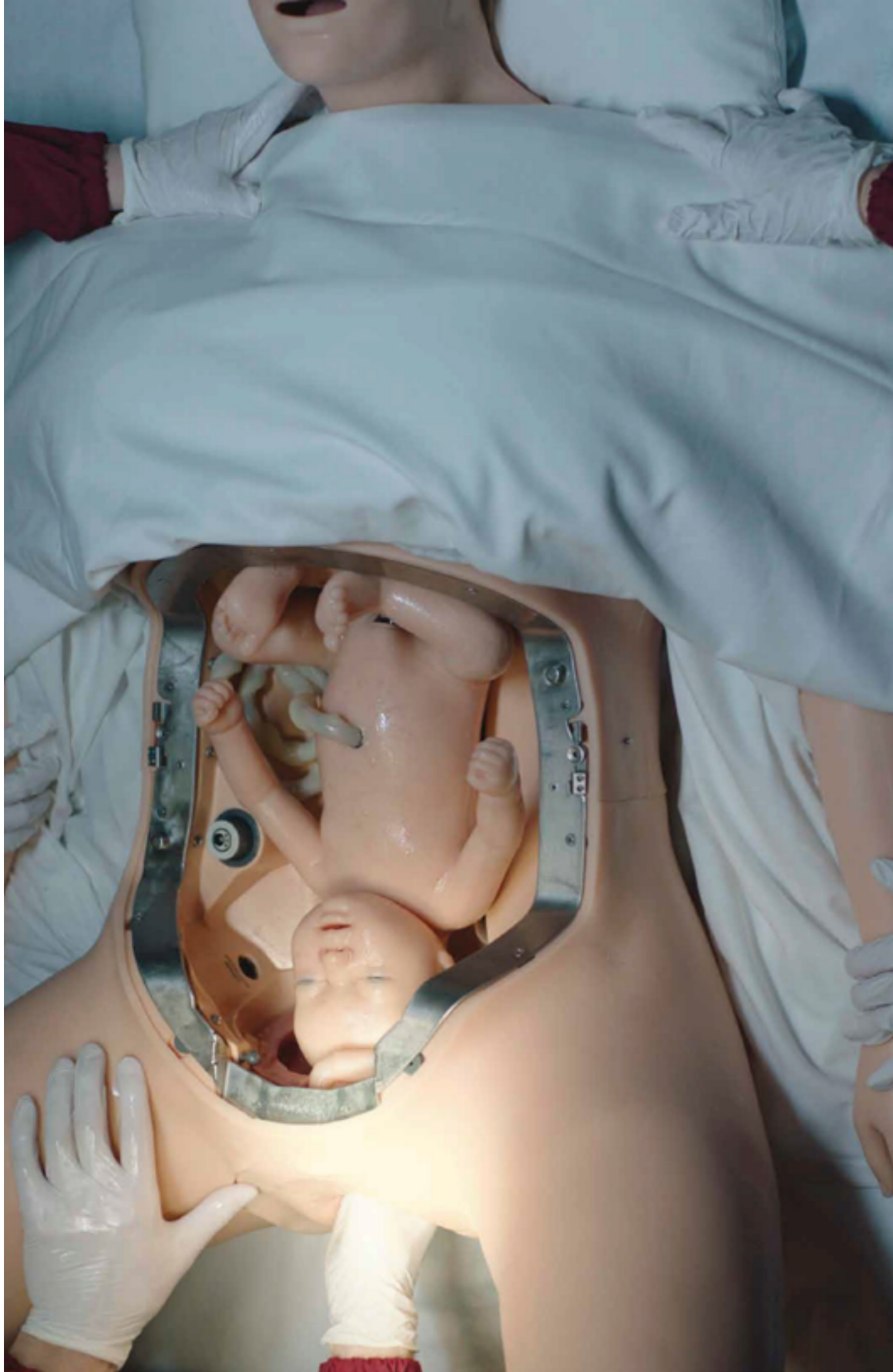
A former student of the National Film School in Łódź, where Polanski also studied (*Repulsion*, *Rosemary's Baby*), Wieczorek is the heir to a cinematographic heritage of horror. Sweat, lymph, metal, blood: her film borrows from body-horror (a sub-genre in which bodies are shown to transform violently under the effect of events such as illness) and from slasher (another horror sub-genre, in which a psychopath who kills with a knife is often portrayed); but it also seeks to reinvest them: unlike the women in these films, who are usually given a passive role, here, the character of Ewa makes a choice: she kills her alien to survive.

Faced with the vision of a contagious pregnancy, and then the mutilation of a little being, it is not disgust or fear that seizes us, but a fever, like after a beating. The brutality of the images is the only possible response to the violence suffered by all these women who have a mother's destiny imposed upon them by a social and cultural mechanism. It is also a way of alerting us to the current political context in Poland, where the right to abortion was abolished in October 2020. It should be remembered that 42 per cent of women in the world still do not have access to this human right.

Agata Wieczorek's practice combines film and photography while moving between constructed documentary and documented fiction. She frequently operates with concealment and visibility, by entering and working with hermetic industries and socially marginalised groups in order to explore unexposed production and consumption of cultural 'fetishes' — artefacts that represent tabooed desires and utopian endeavours with reference to the body, gender and identity.

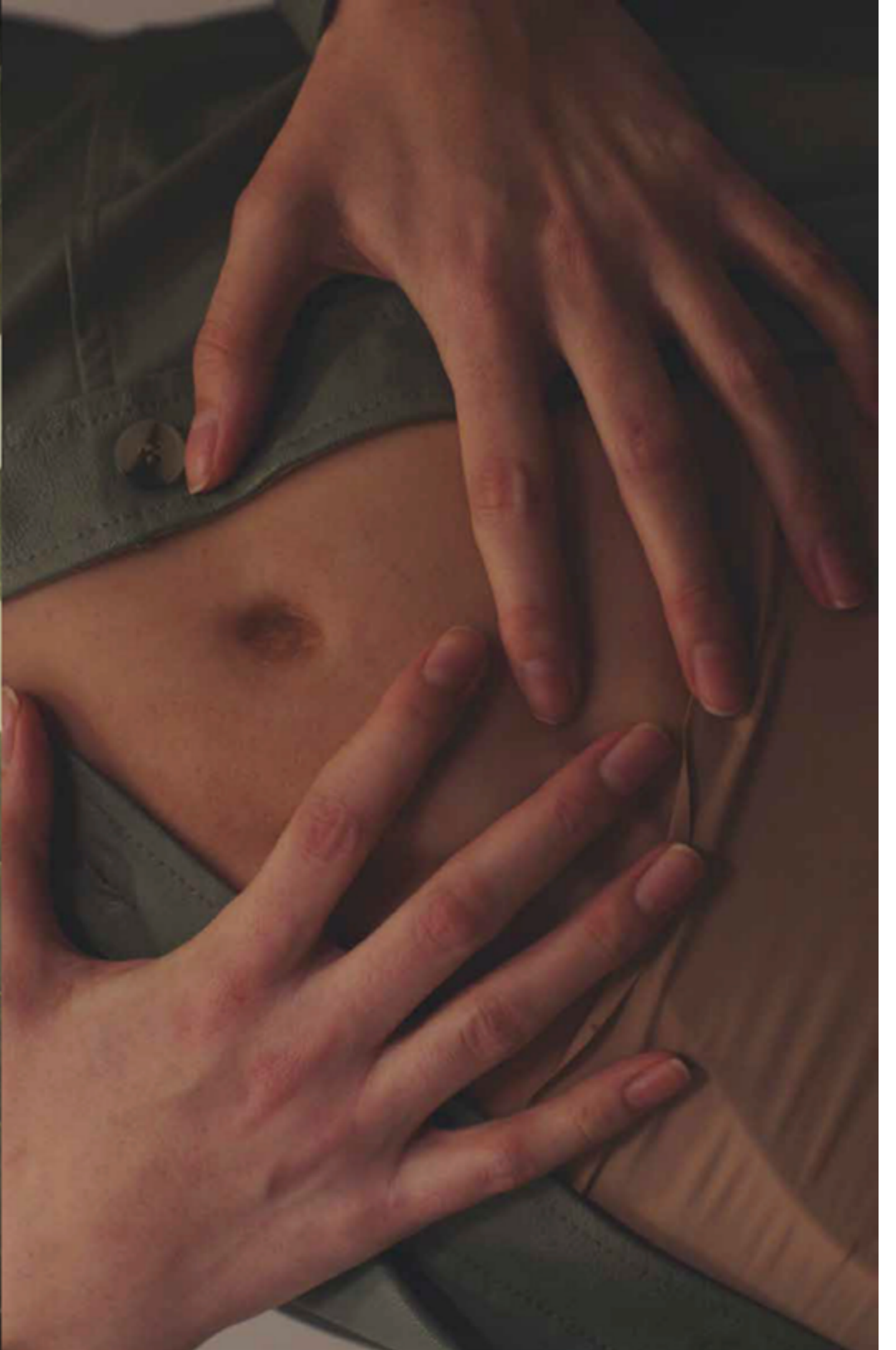
Estelle Benazet Heugenhauser is an author. She lives between Paris and Tourcoing in France. She writes unruly texts, which are widely distributed. Her short story *Bécher son visage* was published in September 2020 by Éditions de la Chambre Verte. At the same time, she works for the production and writing of contemporary art films, notably at Le Fresnoy – Studio National des Arts Contemporains.





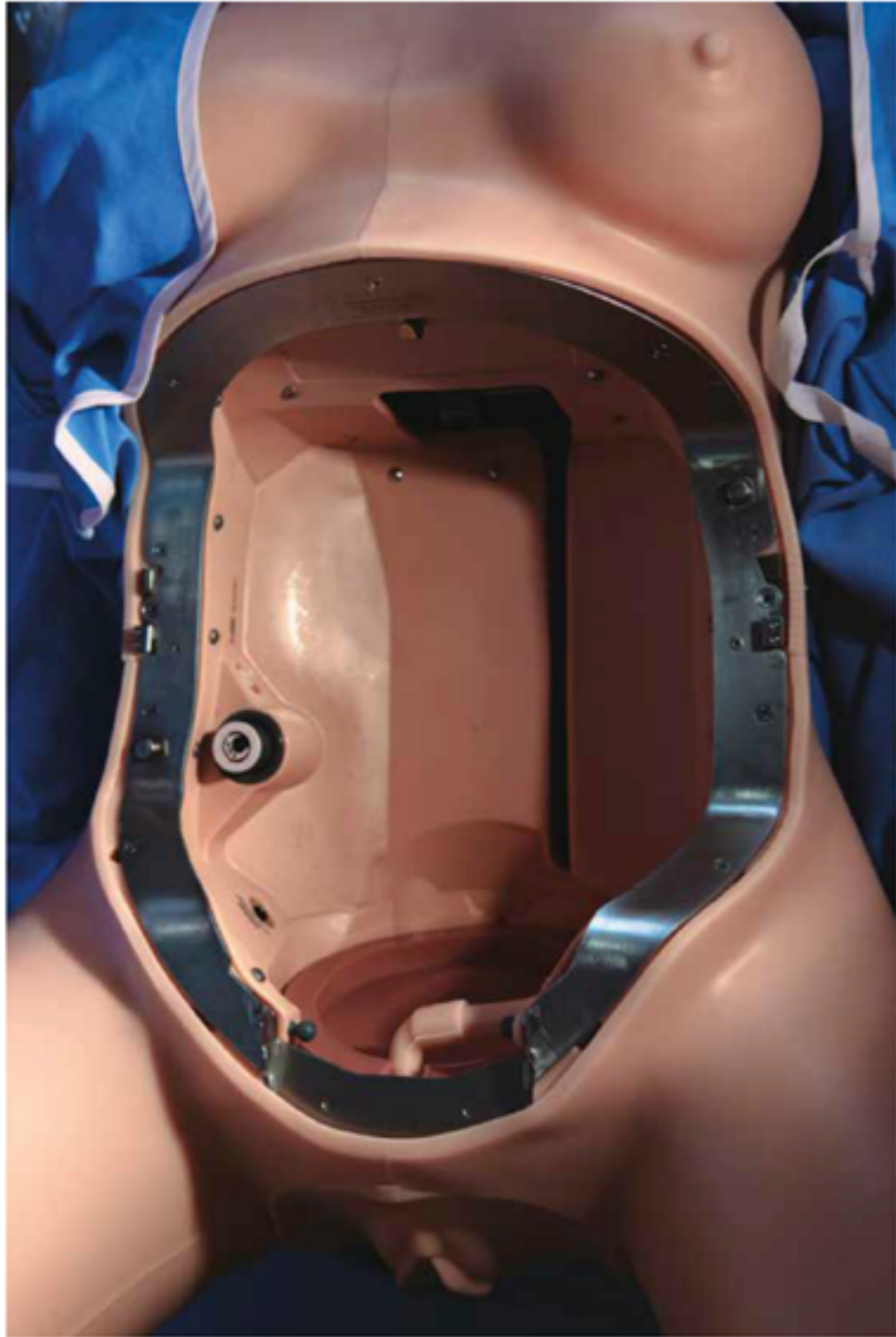








# ARTEFACTS









*Changing Times : Art facing a New World* - publication (book), The Eyes, Paris, 2021