

The Skin I Live In at [Cornerhouse](http://www.cornerhouse.org/)

Reviewed by [Anne Ryan](#) August 2011

As Manchester celebrated a rather damp Pride it seemed appropriate to see the latest film from Pedro Almodovar a bizarre and elegant tale, which makes one question our ideas of love, obsession, beauty and perfection.

The film opens with a mysterious woman, the stunning Elen Anaya alone in a locked room where she's practicing yoga, and the camera lingers over her perfect body. Who is she and what brought her to this prison? And what is her relationship to the renowned plastic surgeon played by Antonio Banderas.

Once more Almodovar tackles the themes of sexuality, gender identity and motherhood - there are traces of his usual humour, notably in the character of the world's most stupid jewel thief who appears in a tiger costume.

But this is a true horror film with echoes of both Frankenstein and Pygmalion. Almodovar also pays tribute to classic Hollywood melodramas: with the Mrs Danvers figure of the housekeeper played by Marisa Parades; and Suspicion, where a suave Cary Grant appears to threaten the life of his new wife, the young Joan Fontaine. Indeed in his world weary elegance Banderas often reminds one of this more dangerous Grant.

In his character Banderas shows how his skill and his work have become perverted from a branch of surgery developed to help pilots terribly burned in the last war to a means by which men can create the perfect woman.

This perfect woman, Elena Anaya, is unnaturally beautiful lithe, strong, with a creamy plastic skin, that one can well believe was created in a laboratory. She is the most luscious object in a beautiful film, which makes a visual treat of Banderas' Toledo manor house.

On one level this is a melodrama, but I also found myself questioning society's attitudes to beauty and the increasing acceptance of cosmetic surgery. It seems that this is one of the few industries prospering in the recession, and for many young women breast augmentation has taken its place on their wish list alongside the latest 'it' bag. Botox has become almost commonplace. Who would have thought that the office worker on a minimum wage would crave the same frozen features as socialites and Hollywood stars. Is this merely a reflection of a shallow society obsessed with celebrities, a capitalism that has finally destroyed moral values or does it represent a deeper craving for perfection?

If the latter we should learn from this film that this search can only end in disappointment, it is a chimera, and perfection does not lie in the surgeon's knife. Perhaps we should question the motives of those who seek this plastic beauty and also of those who meet a need that surely lies in a psychological or spiritual lack.

More Info

Cast: Antonio Banderas, Blanca Suarez, Elena Anaya, Marisa Paredes

Country: Spain

Year: 2011

Subtitles: Full English