

way *CK One* never did, but there was nothing 'new' or transgressive. To me it smelled conventionally feminine and then conventionally masculine – first like vanilla and flowers, and then dry and 'blue', and nowhere near as good as the scents boys wore in the early 2000s. I was at another airport. A man kept coughing behind me as we were waiting in line to get on the plane – that's my fault, I thought, paranoid, as people glanced in my direction (at least they can smell this one). I don't know if I would be wearing *CK2* if I were 16 now, but it's possible I guess. It definitely wouldn't be the only one.

Tortoiseshell spots in a toilet bowl, brown smudges on muslin, pale red faded into compressed cotton. Translucent orange-red encased in plastic, air bubbles and thick residue; fibres drawn into wispy trails. A gradient of colour from pillar-box to purple, which makes me taste of iron.¹

The blood of menstruation is a special, kept-secret kind of blood, accumulating in the womb to form a lattice for the egg, the product of a cyclic concoction of hormones. Periodically let to flow, the blood of menstruation marks a lack of fertilization, a loss of seed – is this the first reason why, it remains, with its 'smell of swamps and wilted violets', reviled by patriarchy? Why its status, 'more suspicious than that flowing from children's cuts and scratches', is *still* associated with shame?² Periods are a fact of life, and a fact of not-life; a reminder of one's capacity to reproduce and the object of not-having-reproduced.

Flowing counter to the anti-refrain of 'No future', where one kind of non-reproduction meets another, there is something about the representation of menstrual cycles in culture that offers repetitive temporal reassurance. While signifiers like 'career', 'home' and 'retirement' fade to historical mirage, our bodies in general continue their business, unaware of the unsupportive environment of the world. Except in cases of severe stress, undernourishment or illness, and until we reach a certain age, reproductive cycles tick on.³ In these end-times, especially, the experience of biology can feel out-of-sync with reality. One may feel separate from the body that cycles through production, emptying and loss, and contrary to its repeated nature, the new arrival of blood may be met with surprise; a scarlet reminder of what circles inside. For some, it is cathartic to frame the abject matter of menstruation and name it 'art'; for others, it is about bodies in disarray, bodies of disorder.

I think this while scrolling through Instagram grids of dark blood shapes, from Rorschach butterflies to slug-like clots. As adverts for sanitary towels present us with a liquid blue like detergent and products are marketed to us to mask nether scents and traces, here, as in the history of menstrual art, monthly bleeds are captured as carmine. Like all social media posts, and all art based on bodily fluids, these images inscribe the self (/selves), but in this particular genre, they do not often contain actual flesh, just the fluid that has crossed its borders. The posts seem collected in a mood between self-fascination and self-separation. There's @part_her_red_sea (Blood. Sketches. Rituals.), @cuppa_blood, who records the contents of her Mooncup, and @bloodycunt's videos of blood slowly streaming down the bath, tagged #genderqueer and #bodypositive. Such images come out of an online visual culture

1 *The Period Piece* (2013) is the name of a series by Hawaii-based artist Lani Beloso, who bled for 12 hours over a canvas 13 times to collect her total lost blood for one year.

2 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, Constance Borde and Sylvie

Malovany-Chevalier trans., London, Vintage, 2011, p.337

3 An installation at Silicon Roundabout, London, advertizes egg freezing with the slogan: No Real Free Time.

that Hannah Black has described as a 'regime of compulsory visibility and compulsory obscurity'.⁴ Here, the period posters make visible what society prefers to censor.

Wondering why these amateur artists self-document their bleeding; why I want to write about this anyway. The task is becoming laboured and messy. A line from Chris Kraus: 'Life had put me in the abject position, so I thought I might as well take advantage of it.'⁵ Is it the very prospect of our future that is abject?

Judy

'However we feel about our own menstruation is how we feel about seeing its image in front of us.' Judy Chicago, perhaps the best-known artist of periods, wrote this in a text accompanying her installation *Menstruation Bathroom* – a cleanly private space in which an overflowing bucket of red waste, held within the collaborative whole-house exhibition of 'Womanhouse' in 1972. Does such an image reflect our experience, make unity of it, or does it make us fearful, make us fear ourselves?

Menstruation has since feminism's first waves been held up as a mirror of disallowed femininity – why, De Beauvoir thought, 'its flow endangers woman herself, whose mana is thus materialised.'⁶ Mana's two syllables conjure whole systems of cultural forces, as rich and irreducible as 'woman herself'.⁷ But one may bleed and may not feel a 'woman'; one may be a woman and not bleed. For each, menstruation summons a spectrum of responses and swings between states: an oscillation from fulfilled embodiment (I am woman, it is time for me to bleed), to disassociation or denial (why am I woman, why am I bleeding?), or distance from the body's processes (my body bleeds, I disagree). It is necessary to rewrite the French feminist's phrase, 'woman is her body as man is his but her body is something other than her', to something like *our bodies are something other than us*.⁸

Penny

London-based artist Penny Goring studied art in the eighties and early nineties, when the adjective 'feminist' was generally applied as a criticism. She writes me a potted history of her womb's activities in a dense email body, the traumas of the reproductive system as well as the effects of life events on the way she has bled. 'Why are you drawn to the theme of menstruation?' I had asked her, too broadly. 'Considering that I make work involving my life and body', she replied, 'it would have been stranger *not to*.'

on foundation in 1981 a girl made a painting of a woman heavily menstruating and she was ridiculed n shamed for it – n deemed deeply uncool. in 1st year painting in 1992 a girl painted something in red about periods on the back of her black leather jacket and it was the same: she was sneered at n given the side-eye, written off as hysterical/untalented/irrelevant...

in early recovery from 2006–2009 i painted alone relentlessly, never showing a soul, and i went deep into where i wanted to go – thats wen i drew *Blood Foot* and *Shit Foot*, and made many paintings with similar subject matter: women examining their overblown labia, women with their own phallic extensions that were most definitely not penises, women wading in shit, giving birth etc...

22

23

Blood Foot's red is shared from lips to nips then paired vagina; it trickles down the inside of each leg in a free bleed that covers one foot entirely. Feet primordially made most contact with the bare earth, and *Blood Foot* returns reproductive waste to the ground.

I suggest menstrual blood as a beautiful kind of waste, and Penny sends me macros from #pisswave, an ongoing collaborative project with hella troy pis: *born dirty* – she in a St. Tropez T-shirt with a pink cut-out womb over her lips; a Victoria sponge with a giant strawberry on top, jam and cream, blood and cum, and a red caption calling out the 'lak of period picz' on Google. In the *Voodoo Tampon* project, also made with hella troy pis, the tampon's cylinder is a flashing icon made for internet consumption – as brazen as Chicago's 1971 *Red Flag*. These series, as well as #pisswave's *Blodcatz* (cat memes with glowing red eyes), poke fun at the historical sectioning of periods as abject: 'Imao period blod iz teh antichrist ov patriarchy'.

Fannie

Fannie Sosa, a Brazil-based artist whose twerking workshops and image output want to de-centre and decolonize the female reproductive system, to save it from male supremacy and whiteness, recently wrote on Twitter: Mxnstrual art is trending rn (mooncup for life). But if we are thrown forward on one of L7's used punk tampons⁹ – from the likes of Chicago's soiled bathroom or Carolee Schneemann's 1985 *Fresh Blood* performance, spun out of a pre-menstrual dream – to the present, how much has changed? As structural misogyny hasn't gone away, and body politics meet intersectional challenges, periods continue to be 'weaponized'.¹⁰

Sosa's practice embodies mana and the blood of the womb, which is healing, she says, nutritious, even... to remember a time before feminised bodies were associated with pain and impurity. Her hip-swirling routines have roots in Neolithic fertility rituals and abortive dances, as well as modern bounce culture – where 'it was mothers teaching their daughters' how to grind.¹¹ She posts pictures of her bloodstained underwear on Instagram (*Mooning on White*, 2015), and, for Valentines

4 'Birthing Gods', with Imri Kahn, *The Born-Digital Institution*, Rhizome & Sternberg Press, 2016.

5 Interview with Giovanni Intra, http://www.artnet.com/magazine_pre2000/index/intra-/intra11-13-97.asp

6 *The Second Sex*, pp. 173–4

7 The idea of mana is taken by De Beauvoir from Polynesian and Southern Pacific cultures, presumed to signify mysterious forces that may as much stand for positive protection – the indigenous communities that, she claims, placed fibres soaked in menstrual blood on the bow of their boats – as for contaminating curse or too-wild threat.

8 For a trans man's perspective on periods and non-binary bodies see <http://everydayfeminism.com/2014/11/trans-guys-guide-menstruation/>

9 The band's lead singer, Donita Sparks, threw her tampon into the audience after they received abuse on stage in 1992.

10 In 2015, Kiran Gandhi freebled while running the London marathon, bringing attention to the fact that only 12% of women worldwide have access to sanitary products; In Ireland women fired tweets with details of their cycles to the Prime Minister to protest anti-abortion laws; and in the US, the #periodsarenotaninsult hashtag called out Trump's misogynist comments on CNN.

11 Interview with Alison Hugill, 'On Twerking and the Commons', Berlin Art Link, June 2015, <http://www.berlinartlink.com/2015/06/22/artfeminism-an-interview-with-fannie-sosa-on-twerking-and-the-commons/>

Day, an inside cam-shot of a bleeding cervix. Sosa revives the sacred practices that colonialism once razed in societies that have few rituals left, where 'No future' returns not as countercultural chant but as delimiting horizon. Like the flows of sun salutations or the planetary orbits of horoscope narratives, returning to ancient movements soothes minds with little sense of forward direction but a heightened sense of time.

Lucy

For British artist Lucy Stein, it is a sense of advancing time, as well as a recording of loss, that returns her to motifs of menstruation. She tells me how she thinks of her practice as 'an embodied life's project or project of living', alongside her interests in threshold spaces, pagan histories, and 'the private customs of women'.¹²

I painted *The Curse* in 2012 after reading *The Wise Wound* [an alternative cultural history of menstruation] for the first time. I wanted to try to describe the otherworldly feeling of coming on your period ... slightly pulsating, as though you are mainlined in to the earth and her rhythms.

She hung the series *Moonblood/Bloodmoon* (2015) – 14 paintings responding to the moods of her cycle, expressed, to the dismay of her gallerist, in violent sways between styles – at approximately ovarian level, in order to 'elicit from a viewer what [Austrian painter] Maria Lassnig called "body consciousness". Or, she continues, to provoke 'a process akin to sympathetic magic'. Stein consciously aligns paint's thick liquidity with blood and lubricant, but when she included menstrual blood amongst the materials of this series, she chose not to list it. 'I saw those works as potions or spells and wanted that as the obvious but secret ingredient, unmarketable.'

Aware of the reductionist clichés associated with 'feminine' painting, where the work's merit is confined to the emotional harbour of the womb and the paint's stain is 'culturally coded as menstrual', Stein reclaims the potential of menarche's creativity to turn hysteric painting into something heroic.¹³ 'The stain and all its connotations is always there underneath, seeping through and embedded into the fabric of the thing' – but there is little unknowing about this. Traces of menstrual blood in painting are less about ego than the libidinal mark-making of sperm or the territorial spray of piss; they re-inscribe the importance of othered bodies in places where this bloodshed is condemned rather than embraced. As Carolee Schneemann asked at the end of *Fresh Blood*: IF BLOOD WERE A MENTAL PRODUCT WOULD IT BE ACCEPTABLE?¹⁴

Stein goes on: I suppose I'm also trying to work through some feelings about biological reproduction: whether to aim for it or not, whether the pressing need for it can ever be resolved by making art ... A millennial dilemma. ... [It's] about loss and making tangible that loss. Loss of time and hope and laying waste to my eggs.

If for Kristeva, 'the abject is the violence of mourning for an "object" that has always already been lost', the art of menstruation takes the lost object, the unconsummated, and re-creates it.¹⁵ This is not to say that this art is always abject – the rote reading of the bleeding body – but, moreover, that it turns the self 'outside in' and the category of

abjection inside out.¹⁶ The ritualistic process of art-making transforms the lost object into a productive and protesting object of art.¹⁷

Community Codes

Looking back to the bloody patterns of Instagram and Tumblr, it seems that the elsewhere rehearsed prescription of social media as contemporary ritual (inglorious ritual) fits. These rhythmic performances are linked to the public-private life of the selfie generation, sure, but they are more than a narcissistic gesture or appeal for attention. Sociologist Karen Gregory has suggested that social media helps elaborate 'an improvised narrative arc of personal spiritual development [which] can mitigate the dislocation and desperation of precarity.'¹⁸ In this reading, online expressions are immediately reified as 'one's [provisional] life story' is converted into social or actual capital for the users or the platforms.¹⁹ While the period posts do act as an outlet for an alienating experience, they resist becoming just another instantiation of self-branding. Their gridded repetitions try to put disorder in order, and their shared hashtags of #menstrala and #periodart represent what it might mean to bleed collectively. Un-pretty and undesirable, the images make visible what society prefers to censor.

Indeed, we don't see the posts that are taken down, apart from in the most high-profile example of the removal from Instagram of Canadian-Indian artist Rupi Kaur's photographs of blood imprints on knickers and blotches on a shower floor (2010). Kaur protested, publishing the images on her blog, where what strikes me most is that – set in the bright white bathroom or kept close to the duvet – they are not particularly messy. The blood is natural looking but stylized, so that the

12 All quotes from Stein from email interview, January 2015. These themes were harnessed in the group exhibition 'Neo Pagan Bitch Witch', which Stein co-curated with France-Lise McGurn at Evelyn's Yard, February 2015

13 This is Lisa Saltzman discussing the critical reception of New York School painter Helen Frankenthaler in the '50s-'70s, in 'Reconsidering the Stain'. Frankenthaler was described by critics as bleeding 'on the raw linen'; (here, not literally) 'she stained the sheets'. Critics were drawn towards Frankenthaler's intuitive fluidity and 'soak-stain technique', while ignoring her formal choices and control of the canvas. While Pollock's splatters were allowed to be libidinal, but still cerebral, gestures of masculinity, Frankenthaler's were 'the trace of an involuntary bodily function, of uncontrolled nature.' See 'Reconsidering the Stain' in *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History after Post-Modernism*, Norma Bailey and Mary D. Garrard eds., University of California Press, Berkeley, 2005, pp. 372–383, esp. 376

14 Henry Sayre, *Object of Perfor-*

mance, The American Avant-Garde Since 1970, University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 170

15 In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas recounts research from the anthropologist Lévy-Bruhl that stated that the Maoris 'regard menstrual blood as the sort of human being manqué', whose in-between status gives rise to fear. Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, Leon S. Roudiez trans., Columbia University Press, 1982, p. 15

16 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, London, Routledge, 2004, p. 86

17 Zanele Muholi's *Isilumo siyaluma* series ('Period Pains', 2011) actualizes period art as protest, with kaleidoscopic prints of her collected blood as memorials for the ongoing sexual violence against lesbians in South Africa.

18 Rob Horning reading Karen Gregory on 'strategies of affective resistance' in 'Precarity and Affective Resistance', *The New Inquiry*, 14 February, 2012, <http://thenewinquiry.com/blogs/marginal-utility/precarity-and-affective-resistance/>

19 Ibid.

photographs frame what is in reality uncontainable. Still, as signs of feminine potency infiltrating Instagram's aspirational order, they make the masculine gaze of tech and its 'community codes' recoil. Though such representation places a border around reality, it comes out of the chaos of experience, and confronts this – whereas society's 'logic of prohibition' seeks to cover the chaos up.²⁰ What is feared must be controlled by rules and customs meant to protect people from dirt or danger – like the religious purification rituals that separate the polluting fluid from daily life²¹ – but this act of separation endows the 'dirty' with a special status. The forbidden fluid seeps steadily through; what is sectioned is also made sacred.

While the art of menstruation protests against the bleeding woman's confiscation from life, art itself marks a separation from reality, by nature unreal, objectified. As Paul B. Preciado wrote of Chicago's early work: 'The aim of art is no longer to produce an "object" but rather to invent an apparatus of re-subjectification that is capable of producing a "subject": another conscience, another body.'²² A subversive subject-making takes place, to make sense of or draw distance from the body; to reclaim one's story and its suppressed substances.

If the signifying substance of feminine fertility has been transferred, in patriarchal systems, onto the idea of death, I want to read the persistence of the art of menstruation as an assertion of being – in proximity to death, but issued from deep within life, bearing the traces of shared, but subjective, experience. The appearance of blood each month is a sign of fertility and function, but our reactions to this are ambivalent and always shifting. Blood waste becomes emblematic of a future that, as it spills into our pants, could still happen, but hasn't. I want to read the recent interest in periods, or at least, my own, as a form of resistance – a rebellion against reproduction itself.

With thanks to Lizzie, Lucy, Naomi, Nine and Penny

20 Kristeva, p.64

21 Many communities place menstruating women in quarantine, forbidding them from daily activities like sex, cooking and prayer. In some villages in central India, women are banished to remote huts, *gaokor*, for the duration of their bleed, which may

leave them more vulnerable to sexual assault.

22 'Revisiting Womanhouse', Peau de Rat blog, October 2013, <http://lemagazine.jeudepaume.org/blogs/beatrizpreciado/2013/10/03/revisiting-womanhouse/>

Product Comparison: The Fridge

Lizzie Homersham

GreenScreenRefrigerator

Mark Leckey

In *GreenScreenRefrigerator* (2010) disembodied hands stroke the surfaces of smart fridges and the artist entertains the notion of human-object communication and a collapsed subject-object distinction in a 'utopia of equivalence' (Esther Leslie, *Afterall*, 2013). Leckey has elaborated on his interest in this digitally facilitated 'utopia' with reference to autism: 'autism is about an inability to deal with oversensorial input [...] my theory [is] that a lot of people on the spectrum write the code that creates the algorithms that we learn by. So we are inadvertently absorbing autistic behaviours' (*Art Monthly*, Dec–Jan 2015).

Hotpoint Ultima TFUL163XVH Fridge Larder Freestanding Stainless Steel [Energy Class A++]

Hotpoint

The stainless steel finished Hotpoint TFUL163XVH Tall Larder Fridge is packed with features to make sure your food is always looked after. It has a storage capacity of 323 litres and is 1670 mm high. With an excellent A++ energy efficiency rating, which means you will be saving money on bills and also be helping the environment as it only consumes 172 kwh/h energy annually, the Hotpoint TFUL163XVH Tall Larder Fridge features six shelves and one vegetable/salad container. Its dimensions are 1670 x 595 x 645 (HxWxD) mm. This fridge comes equipped with a reversible door so that you can easily reverse the door opening direction according to your personal preference. This smart feature also lets you make optimum utilization of the limited available kitchen space. The easily installable Hotpoint TFUL163XVH Tall Larder Fridge requires 5 mm clearance on either side for convenient set up.

THE SMART FRRRIDGE. Chilly Forecast for Internet Frrridge
Kunstverein Medienturm, Graz
11 December 2010–19 February 2011
AIDS-3D, Nicolas Ceccaldi, Simon Denny,

Yngve Holen, Ilja Karilampi, Morag Keil, Marlie Mul

White goods Yes. **cool n fresh** Yes. **Self-preserving** Yes. **internet** Yes. **Contemporary Art Daily** Yes. **Expanded fridge environment** Yes. **Smart fridge (1) in custom skin, photographed by smart fridge (2)** Yes. **Open smart fridge (2), photographed by smart fridge (1)** Yes. **Precarity rucksacks and sledges** Yes. **Festive** Yes. **Shiny** Yes. **Screens** Yes. **Modular** Yes. **Readymade** Yes. **Minimal** Yes. **Sarah Lucas-esque mouldy sex apples** Yes. **Network capital** Yes. **Energy efficient** Yes. **Easy installation.** Yes. **Flights London to Graz, Paris to Graz, Stockholm to Graz** Yes.

Vilma Gold

21 November–19 December 2015

Gili Tal

This is the fridge installation that led to my dream of the night of 1 January 2016: I received a book proposal by the artist Gili Tal, instructing that her words, an outline for a story about a children's party where guests were given rotten food – sandwiches cut into triangles with weeping green-brown lettuce at their edges – should be read aloud while a second person peeled back layers of cling-film on trays of rancid prawns.

Customer reviews:

aqnb on 6/11/2015

Little information is given about the show, save for an accompanying video showing the bustle of a restaurant from outside its windows.

Tal has exhibited at London's Lima Zulu and Tallin's Temnikova & Kasela, as well as Sandy Brown in Berlin where she presented *Panoramic Views of the City* inspired by love as a brand and private wealth.

The video for this exhibition opens with the wind swaying through the tin can-potted plants that sit atop the outside tables. Two men that appear to be workers exit the restaurant carrying white buckets, and shortly afterwards a man clad in black... a waiter drops something off at the window table. Cars are seen passing against the reflection of the restaurant's glass, and people shuffle at intervals carrying bags, bundled against the cold.