

Ways of Perceiving:

Introduction:

Abject Red is an exhibition that explores the complexities of pain and menstruation, the bodies of women, and the realities shaped by biology, power, and culture of society through art. This exhibition aims to show women's voices and lived experiences of menstruation and pain and examine how it is socially marginalized. Bringing artists who confront menstruation and pain not as a private and hidden inconvenience but as a complicated physical issue and emotional condition that has been medicalized but mostly been dismissed as a disgusting and overreacting global thing. Paintings, installations, and sculptures in the exhibition will show a more impactful meaning of what is hidden in these more intimate moments. Menstruation shows cramps, hormonal fluctuation, fatigue, endometriosis, and the cycle of blood flow throughout a woman's monthly cycle. According to the NHS (2024), it states that endometriosis involves cells like those in the lining of the womb growing elsewhere in the body. This exhibition draws from the works of renowned artists such as Judy Chicago, Poulomi Basu, Johanna Falzone, Vanessa Teigs, Carina Ubeda, Roz Bonnet, and Jamie McCartney that present a diverse range of artistic approaches to what pain and menstruation are about.

Context & Artists and Artworks:

This exhibition represents the pain and menstruation as a real physical experience that is often ignored, treated as an overreaction, and seen as gross. A period is not only a uterus cycle but also shaped by religion, biology, culture, medication, and society expectations.

Abject Red features the works of Judy Chicago, Poulomi Basu, Johanna Falzone, Vanessa Teigs, Carina Ubeda, Roz Bonnet and Jamie McCartney, which has a diverse range of photography, sculptures, prints and different materials like pads, tampons and menstruation blood. Each explores the uniqueness of menstruation and pain and approaches to each medium and materials.

Judy Chicago (Figure 1) is a feminist artist who created *The Menstruation Bathroom* from the WomenHouse which showcases, *BAGZATO* (2014), a bin “overflowing with bloody stains all over the floor, blood-drenched pads neatly hanging near the toilet and shelves stacked with sanitary products.” Chicago confronts the social taboo of menstruation as it is seen as hidden and private, but she showcases it publicly as it wasn't discussed in the 80s. She interrupts the expectations of how menstruation should be treated as shameful and hidden, which allows the viewers to tackle what the society sees as concealed. Within *Object Red*, the Menstruation Bathroom strengthens how menstruation and pain experiences should not be hidden which corresponds how this exhibition challenges the view on taboo and stigma.

Poulomi Basu (Figure 2) is an Indian artist who explores the violence against marginalized women by creating *The Risky Lives of Women Sent into Exile*. Basu addresses how culture and region contribute to the isolation of Nepal women as menstruation takes away their purity and it's a sin. Basu's use of photography captures the harsh truth of religion belief of menstruation as she uses the dim lighting. The use of stillness in the photos represents how the separation of women on their menstruation is treated as a sin and stigma. This highlights Knight (1991, p. 3) as he states that the “taboo around menstruation, which is deeply rooted in every traditional culture around the world.” This comforts viewer as it creates empathy of why menstruation is seen as impure and ignored in certain cultures.

Johanna Falzone (Figure 3) who uses pop art, illustration and feminist installations, created *Threaded Together* presents pads sewed with red thread. Falzone addresses the common thread women have through their monthly cycles, the shared experiences with biological processes and womanhood. Falzone uses everyday sanitary pads to challenge that menstruation sanitary products should be hidden or private. *Threaded Together* red threads stitched together represents that every woman deals with menstruation as a collective experience which indicates that menstruation should not be a secrecy to society as it's worldwide in woman. This is reinforced by Prendergast (1991, p. 441), who writes “gendered burdens of bodily responsibility of shame, physical restraint and secrecy.” This challenges the viewers to feel familiar with the biological process of menstruation and not feel uncomfortable to this ‘secrecy’ issue.

Vanessa Teigs (Figure 4) is an American artist who created menstruation painting like mandala pattern such as Ruby Red. Teigs uses her own period blood from her cycles which symbolizes femininity, fertility, and the balance between control and chaos. Vanessa Teigs uses her menstruation as a medium to challenge the cultural beliefs of menstruation as its seen as shameful and disgusting. The use of mandala patterns signifies the spiritual and ritual side of Asian cultures, Invaluable (2018), which is “guided through the cosmic process of transforming the universe from one of suffering into one of joy and happiness,” this represents how powerful a natural process like period cycles is. This challenges the viewers discomfort about the disgusting and shameful stigma and encourages them to reconsider how they see female bodies about menstruation.

Roz Bonnet (Figure 5) is an artist and curator that collaborates in contemporary art projects such as The Art of Menstruation. Roz Bonnet uses sculpture to give a physical meaning to menstruation that is seen as hidden and ignored. Bonnet’s work draws the cultural beliefs like Christianity where it's seen as a ‘curse’ of Eve. This corresponds to Sharma, K (2021, p1) as they state, “Taboos across various cultures and religions have led the women seeing their menses as an inconvenient ‘curse’.” This highlights how menstruation is seen as a stigma, its deeply rooted in the cultural beliefs and traditions about period cycles. This challenges the viewers to break from their beliefs and encourage them to change their attitude towards menstruation, not see them as a ‘curse’ but see it as a powerful biological process.

Jamie McCartney (Figure 6) is known for the ten-panelled wall sculpture, The Great Wall of Vagina, which is a comprising plaster cast mould taken from 400 women volunteers’ genitals. McCartney addresses the misinformation about genital anxiety and the beauty standards of how society sees woman bodies. The Great Wall of Vagina uses 400 volunteers to give a wide variety to help reject the beauty standard society thinks today. This allows the viewer to see that there's different types of vaginas, reducing the genital anxiety and what should look ‘normal’, creating more confidence about their natural and valid bodies. Displaying all these 400 volunteers on a large-scale panel provides diversity of woman bodies which challenges the social normalization against body types. This expands the theme Abject Red as it addresses the normalization of stigma

against menstruation and the female bodies which allows the viewers to feel confident and see their identity as powerful.

Carina Ubeda (Figure 8) creates art using her own menstruation blood from her cycles over the span of five years such as Ruby Red. Ubeda's use of cloths addresses the conceal of menstruation as it is seen as hidden. Carina Ubeda uses her own blood to challenge the cultural beliefs of menstruation seen as dirty and disgusting. Overtime she collects her menstruation blood to create the normalization of menstruation continues throughout the woman's life. The taboo and stigma over woman's bodies and how society and cultures see it as disgusting, challenges the viewers discomfort of how they see it and allows attitude change over menstruation and pain. This idea is reflected in Buckley, T (1989, p. 103), who states that "menstrual pollution and taboo, their significance and their role in social behaviour."

The map (figure 8) of the exhibition, I used the layout from the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery on level 0. I used this Glynn Vivian (2019) layout form for my exhibition *Abject Red*, menstruation, and pain because it was a good open space to place these artworks. The lighting in the Glynn Vivian gallery was perfect, as they use spotlights and general lighting that can focus the attention on all the menstruation and pain artworks and can maintain consistent visibility in all parts of the day.

In conclusion, the reason I have chosen menstruation and pain for the centre of my exhibition is because the artists raise awareness on this issue and how to reduce the shame in the cultures we live in. *Abject Red* explores how menstruation and pain is shaped by a biological process, power and how society perceives it as taboo and stigma. Throughout these artworks by Judy Chicago, Poulomi Basu, Johanna Falzone, Vanessa Teigs, Roz Bonnet, Jamie McCartney and Carina Ubeda, they all reveal how menstruation is seen as hidden, private, shameful, impure, and shaped by society and culture. This shows the importance of feminism, raising awareness to the world on what is normal for a female and how it should be normalised on a day-to-day basis. I personally feel connected to this topic because being brought up in a household where it was taboo to talk about menstruation and a father that finds it uncomfortable and disgusting topic.

Appendix:

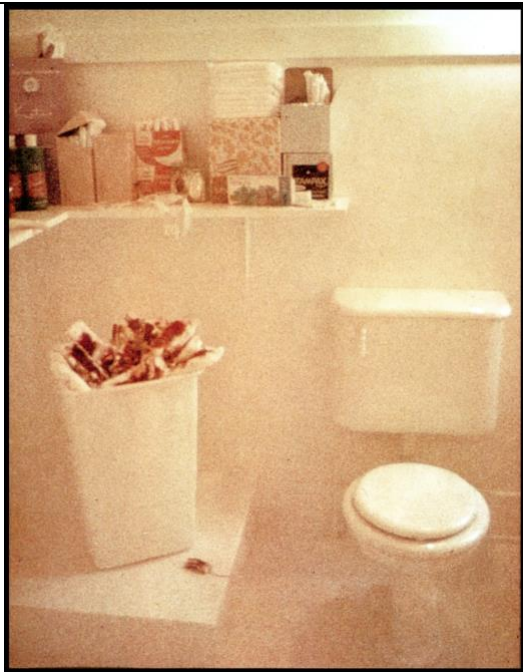


Figure 1

Name: Menstruation Bathroom from
Womanhouse

Artist: Judy Chicago

Year: 1972

Medium: Photographic print

Dimensions: (660 x 504 mm)



Figure 2

Name: The Risky Lives of Women Sent into Exile – For menstruating

Artist: Poulomi Basu

Medium: Photographs

Year: 2017



Figure 3

Name: Threaded Together

Artist: Johanna Falzone

Medium: Pads and threads

Year: 2013

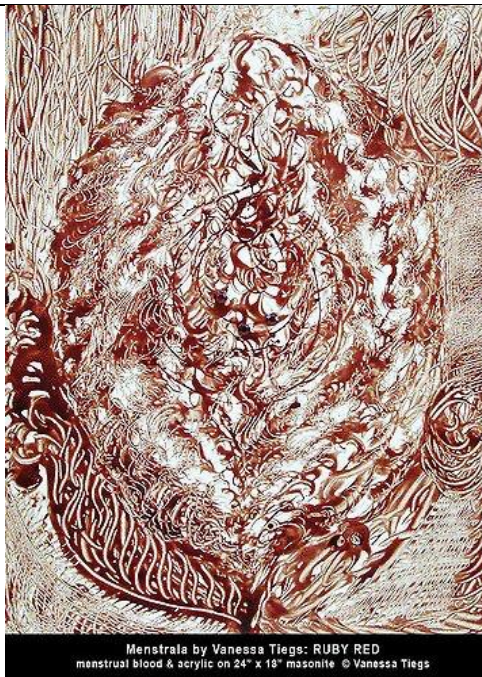


Figure 4

Name: Menstrala Collection

Artist: Vanessa Tiegs

Medium: Period blood

Year: 2003

Menstrala by Vanessa Tiegs: RUBY RED
menstrual blood & acrylic on 24" x 18" masonite © Vanessa Tiegs



Figure 5

Name: The Art of Menstruation

Artist: Roz Bonnet

Medium: Sculpture, tampons

Year: 2006



Figure 6

Name: The Great Wall of Vagina

Artist: Jamie McCartney

Year: 2006

Medium: sculpture



Figure 7

Name: Cloths/ Panos

Artist: Carina Ubeda

Medium: Panos, menstrual blood

Year: 2013

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- Fig 1. Judy Chicago. (1972). *WomanHouse*. [Exhibition]. Available at: <https://judychicago.com/gallery/womanhouse/pr-artwork/> [Accessed 27 April 2026].
- Fig 2. Poulomi Basu. (2017). *The Risky Lives of Women Sent Into Exile—For Menstruating*. Exhibition. Available at: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/article/menstruation-rituals-nepal> [Accessed 27 April 2026].
- Fig 3. Johanna Falzone. (2013). *Threaded Together*. [Online]. Society of Menstruation Cycle Research. Available at: <https://www.menstruationresearch.org/tag/johanna-falzone/> [Accessed 27 April 2026].
- Fig 4. Vanessa Teigs. (2003). *Mentrala*. [Online]. Venus Geist. Last Updated: 2026. Available at: <https://www.vanessatiegs.com/mentrala/> [Accessed 27 April 2026].
- Fig 5. Roz Bonnet. (2006). *The Art of Menstruation at the Museum of Menstruation and Women's Health*. [Online]. Exhibition. Available at: <http://www.mum.org/armbonne.htm> [Accessed 27 April 2026].

- Fig 6. Jamie McCartney. (2006). *Four hundred women*. [Online]. The Great Wall of Vulva. Last Updated: 2026. Available at: <https://www.thegreatwallofvulva.com> [Accessed 27 April 2026].
- Fig 7. Carina Ubeda. (2013). [Online]. Categorized art collection. Available at: <https://categorized-art-collection.tumblr.com/post/65463313491/carina-úbeda-paños-2013-for-five-year> [Accessed 27 April 2026].

Figure 8

Gallery Map



f1.



f3.



f4.



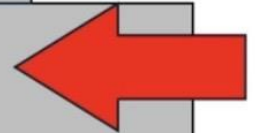
f2.



f7.



f5.



STAIRS



f6.

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