

“Only the yearning for sustainable futures can construct a livable present. The anticipation of endurance, of making it to a possible “tomorrow”; transposes energies from the future back into the present”. Rosi Braidotti

MENSES ANTIDOTE - *an auto-performative bio-sculpture* **DESCRIPTION**

The artwork that I would like to produce is the installation of an interactive auto-performative bio-sculpture that comprises a live/body performance called: *Menses Antidote*.

Menses antidote is a bio-sculpture that stands as a sci-fi totem invoking the magic held in the organ that birth us into life before it becomes synthetically engineered in the lab, and encourages re-thinking the future of our existence. The “frozen womb”, sculpted with the artist’s frozen menstrual blood at the center of the bio-sculpture, mimics the inner parts of the female sexual organs and symbolizes the ancestral notion of the “Earth being a living womb”. The melting process, activated by the bio-sculpture’s “central brain” and conducted by an alchemical apparatus, transforms the blood into a tonic-cure that the artist drinks. The audience is invited to acoustically and kinetically interact with the bio-sculpture, discovering behind a steaming vitrine the invigorating medical properties of an organic female substance.

THE BIO-SCULPTURE DESIGN & TECHNOLOGY

Menses Antidote, designed by Isabel, the artist, and Tim Vets, *PHD* in electronic and sound design *U Gent*, proposes a foldable mobile structure of lightweight materials that can be easily transported and installed in an exhibiting venue.

Menses Antidote’s upper part is a vitrine that exhibits the “frozen womb” placed in the top of an alchemical glass apparatus, and its lower part is an open box, displaying the “central brain”: the auto-performative operational system.

Vitrine

The “frozen womb’s” design is based in 3d medical representation the female sexual organs’ internal parts: the uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries and vagina. It is sculpted through a 3d printing and silicone mold processes. Previous to each exhibition the artist menstrual blood is placed into the mold, frozen, transported and installed inside the alchemical apparatus.

The alchemical glass apparatus uses lab tubes to conduct the systematic blood dripping into a lab vessel, where it mixes up with a small dose of alcohol, becoming the antidote. The antidote evacuates the apparatus through a valve dispenser that the artist collects in a lab measure cup. Through an alcohol dispenser, the artist places alcohol back into the apparatus for the manufacturing of her next doses. The upper part of the exhibiting vitrine is a closed cube covered by transparent polycarbonate where 10 small magnetic wiping balls stand. In the cooling activity of the bio-sculpture, the audience manipulates the balls to wipe out the steam, getting a closer look of the melting “frozen womb”. During the warm endeavors, the

vitrine is transparent and the “frozen womb” can be contemplated from close or afar. On the outer side of the vitrine there is a brief scientific explanation pointing out the therapeutic benefits of *menstrual blood (*See explanation of benefits in the last paragraph of page 4*).

Central brain

The lower part of the bio-sculpture is an open rectangular box that contains an electronic circuitry, providing the power to activate the assemblage of technological devices that are programmed to control the operative system of the bio-sculpture.

The technological assemblage’s main device is an *Axoloti* board, which firmware and software controls a freezing and a sound system. The freezing system is composed of two DIY freezers located on the top and bottom of the “Frozen womb”, inside the upper closed part of the exhibiting vitrine. Each freezer is made with *Peltier* thermoelectric modules. On the outside as well as the inside of each of these *Peltier* arrays, ventilators are fitted, providing cold and hot air circulation. A barometric pressure thermometer and electronic timer, inside the covered part of the vitrine, are programmed to manipulate the freezing speed of the 2 DIY freezers in order to progressively melt the “frozen womb” any time between 1 to 28 days. On the other hand, the sound system has a *Piezo* electric sensor, functioning as a contact microphone, placed under the sustaining glass of the “frozen womb”. The *Piezo* captures the dripping sounds that are amplified by a soundboard and projected into the space with speaker cones.

MENSES ANTIDOTE EXHIBITION

The exhibition of *Menses Antidote* can be programmed in performance, visual art festivals and art galleries that deal with: art-science technology and nature, Bio-art, Live-art, Hybrid art, Eco-feminism, techno pagan feminism, and Queer-art. In all events it can be programmed to perform according to the event duration.

Throughout the exhibition, the audiences are invited to visit the bio-sculpture during the day. According to the bio-sculpture’s processes the audience can either: 1. Manipulate the wiping balls, intimately viewing the “frozen womb”. 2. Contemplate the uncanny beauty of the bio-sculpture auto-performing. 3. Spectate the live performance of the artist drinking the antidote. In the three described scenarios, the visitors are welcomed to read the small exhibiting plate that explains the therapeutic geniuses of menstrual blood. The performance ends with the total dissolution of the “frozen womb”.

At the end of the exhibiting process, the audience is invited to participate in a debate moderated by Isabel. Here Isabel will present some of the female sexual organs’ obscured potencies, meet the technologies that are re-designing these organs and mutating the ontological path of humanity. Questions such as: Who is taking the decisions that change the course of our existence? Could women be designed with an organ that only provokes pleasure and massively produces magical antidotes? Can be brought onto the table.

THE RESEARCH

Isabel artistic work explores the ontological crack between the native and the engineered, between the unlicensed knowledge of the relocated and the official facts; aiming to dig up chapters left out of history books, blur the limits between fiction/reality and re-think the memory of the future.

The genesis of *Menses Antidote* starts over a decade ago, when Isabel joined a school of Amerindian and Taoist knowledge in Chile, followed by her later work as a filmmaker engaged in the autonomy struggle of the Polynesian Rapa Nui community at Easter Island. Inspired in the indigenous notion of “the Earth is a womb of an alive mother”, similarly comprised in other equivalents such as Gaia; Isabel experientially surveyed tribal ceremonies that give meaning to this concept. Navigating from practices of human flesh and ecosystems DNA exchanges, into excavating the insides of her own female organs, Isabel finds correlations in the cyclic, fertile, orgasmic and life/death giver faculties between the Earth and the female *matriz*.

Throughout this empirical and cultural analysis, Isabel encountered the human need to create artifacts that penetrate the earth and the female *matriz*. At this point Isabel expanded her cultural analysis to enquiring the extra-logical principals that operate in Totemic anthropomorphism and that can be found bioengineering and gynecological technologies. From rustic archaeological tools to contemporary high tech machines, it seems that “what we have been doing to the Earth we do to the female organs”. In the midst of capitalizing values pollinating the world, the raw, wherein the Planet and the female body, are engineered into commodities that are becoming synthetically engineered.

In the desire of reimagining the functioning of society towards the Earth and her body otherwise, in May 2015, Isabel joined *a.pass*, a post-master in Brussels for advanced performance and scenography research. In this context she focused in the female body trying to coil down the idea that the formatted femininity proposed by beauty industry, correlates to society’s dependence in gynecological machines and masses unawareness of the female sexual organs’ full potencies. Consequently she developed a bio-autonomous practice by which she re-claims the alchemical agencies of her intimate erogenous cavities trying to reconstruct the concept of femininity and point out the empty gaps of scientific perspectives concerning the female organs’ powers. By stimulating her sexual topographies, she harvests her female fluids, and by conjugating scientific and holistic information, she understands that these substances contain animal-like nutritious substances, with plant-like medical properties, that can enhance health, beauty and wellbeing.

Inspired in Donna Haraway’s *Speculative Fabulations*, Isabel is currently expanding her artistic practice-based research into how to write in situ feminist utopian sci-fi stories that remain alive; alive as they rely in the audience’s imaginary faculty to propose liberation dispositives for a hyper objectified/commodified female body. This investigation is unfolding into different steps that feed each other, and *Menses Antidote* is one of them.

This bio-sculpture is an experiment that tests if the true/false oscillation can stimulate the audiences' trans-individual agency to re-imagine the future, not only of the organs that birth us into life, but also of human kind otherwise.

The prototype of *Menses Antidote*, which “frozen womb” melted at room temperature, performed during the 5 hours “Magic Night” event at *a.pass* in July 2015. The pedagogical explanation of menstrual blood healing faculties was exposed in a pamphlet and Isabel publicly drank the tonic-cure. The controversial reactions, which navigated from craving to reclaim the body back from medical paws, in to wanting to drink the artist's tonic-cure, grow in the audience until the date, as some enthusiastically reach out to debate with the artist. However Isabel realized the importance of incorporating electronic devices into the bio-sculpture, for it to be a more accurate reflex of the “progression” that the female body is taking and better instigate the audience's agency to imagine the future otherwise.

THE MEANING OF MENSES ANTIDOTE

Menses is the Greek word for menstruation and *Menses Antidote* proposes the bio-autonomous gesture of recycling the medicine that the body produces back to the body. The average menstrual cycle is 28 days, therefore the metaphor of programing the bio-sculpture to perform to a maximum of 28 days.

The melting process of the “frozen womb” symbolically juxtaposes the idea that: “What we are doing to the Planet Earth we are doing to the human womb”. As the Earth is being remodeled by technological exploitation, the human womb is dissolved from its original nature, as its being commodified. Today, 2017, Bio-medical engineering promise to bio-print artificial uterus and CRISPR genetic technology is re-codifying the DNA information of a human embryo. In the midst of this new ontological phenomenon, *Menses Antidote* reclaims the alchemical agencies wherein the organs that birth us into life, before they become synthetically engineered. Thus, the confronting paradox within the anthropomorphic “frozen womb”, which comes to exist through 3d printing process but that contains an organic matter that is manipulated by an electronic machine. Moreover, the dichotomy of having DIY freezers transforming the “frozen womb” into a tonic-cure that the artist drinks, tackles the resistance against the powers that rule our hyper capitalized society, exposing a chapter in the history of culture around the question of autonomy.

Drinking menstrual blood has been a custom carried out in Indigenous, ancient European and Asian cultures. This practice was a way of linking the self to the talents of those that came before and after you, invigorating the sense of existing. This truly sounds like Sci-fi myth! Doesn't it? However, recent medical research explains the tangible faculties held in menstrual blood that connect to the ancient revitalizing notion. Menstrual blood is constituted of water, phosphorus, potassium, vitamins, glucose, etc. and most importantly potent mother cells. Recent scientific research proves that these stem cells are a unique source for cell transplantation and tissue engineering and uses them in therapies that treat: Alzheimer's, Parkinson, blindness, Multiple Sclerosis, Diabetes, spinal cord injuries, brain strokes, etc. Subsequently, Menstrual blood functions as a reparatory system and a tonic-cure for the body.