

## *I Am Red*

A Performance art work by Lilia Gestson

I am a woman  
I bleed  
I will not be silenced  
I will not be discreet  
I will not let companies put toxic chemicals into my body  
I will not let people put toxic words into my mind  
I am tired  
I am ready  
I am red

*I Am Red* is a performance art work that spanned a time period of 4 days. I dressed in all white and actively asked women to write with a red pen on my clothing their responses to the prompt: “**If you could say whatever you wanted about your period in public without being discreet, what would you say?**” With their permission, I then drew a venus symbol on those who participated to symbolize female empowerment and the continuation of the conversation.

This artwork was inspired by my own frustration with my menstrual cycle and the lack of open conversation within our society about this topic. Though we are making large strides, there is still stigma around the topic of menstruation and it causes many to feel uncomfortable and ultimately hide this aspect of their life. Menstruation is an important part of a woman’s identity and for many, including myself, it is a traumatic experience every month. As a personal aspect of ourselves and our body, we should be able to freely express this topic and be able to have these personal conversations with anyone, not only our personal friends and family. I want to promote this conversation and create an outlet for women who need a platform to express their feelings about their own menstruation. It is important that we continue to make strides to an open future where women no longer have to be discreet or worry about making people uncomfortable when menstruating.

132 women participated

73 women declined

205 women were asked to participate

During this piece I asked two hundred and five women this question and had varying results. I approached most of the women I talked to and tried to approach anyone I saw that did not look in an immediate hurry. One hundred and thirty two women bravely started this conversation with me and shared their stories as they expressed their thoughts through writing on my clothing. Though many said yes, I also received seventy three negative responses from women who either appeared very uncomfortable with the topic, were in a rush to go somewhere, or had no opinion about their period. I respect their responses and hope that in the future this topic can be discussed with more liberty and ease. The women that were excited

about the idea and the opportunity were amazing to interact, talk, and share stories with. I was also pleasantly surprised about the amount of men that came up to me asking about the piece and showing serious interest in making a statement and writing on my clothing. The amount of men who read my clothing and eagerly documented or conversed with me about the topic was amazing and I look forward to doing variations of the piece in the future where I include them in the formal conversation of menstruation.

My own experience with this performance was also eye opening. I found the first few minutes of every day difficult. It felt awkward starting this conversation with strangers, but after the first few people I fell into a pattern and felt very liberated by the conversations. I also felt liberated wearing the clothing that so many amazing women wrote on about their menstrual experiences. By the end of each day I felt more tired than most days and felt emotionally drained. These conversations though about a regular aspect of our life were very emotional which I had not anticipated and they took more energy than most every day conversations. Balancing the performance with my everyday life was also an interesting challenge and pushed me to be open to personal conversations at all moments of my day.

My own experiences with my menstrual cycle that fueled and inspired this piece are ongoing and ever changing. I experience extreme cramping and pain with my periods that usually leaves me every few months in bed wrapped up in a robe and heating pad, popping Ibuprofen, and just waiting for it to end. Though some months are better than others, I have not found a regular pattern to my menstrual pain. I know many women who experience this same pain and have it in even more severe doses, including many women that I had the pleasure of meeting during this performance. Along with having painful menstrual cycles, I also have very sensitive skin and in the past year have found myself allergic to many menstrual products including a variety of pads and tampons. This inspired more research into the ingredients that go into these products which are not required to be labeled on product packaging and have been found to be very toxic to the body. This led me to all organic products with ingredients that are clearly listed on the packaging and contain fewer harmful chemicals. Changing the products I use has greatly changed the way I experience my period. The aspect of my experience that ultimately led me to this idea was the silencing I felt from many of my male friends that outwardly told me they did not want to hear about my period. As an aspect of my body and life experience, I found that people were very uneasy with the topic and closed off to the conversation. With this series of work I would like to help people open up about menstruation and feel more comfortable talking about it in public.