As dozens of women began to step forward during the historic 2017 “Me Too” movement, they sought justice against those who had abused their bodies; justice after the fact. Still today, women are not offered the knowledge, research, or means to protect and control ourselves from abuses of power and the exploitation of our physical being. For centuries politicians and marketing teams have used women’s bodies to establish social norms, professional hierarchies, and health and beauty standards. These status quos, advertisements, research studies, and policies put women at risk of toxic practices and, in some cases, of literally ingesting toxins. For example, before 1906 manufacturers were not required to disclose “poisonous or deleterious” substances in medicine;¹ it was not until 1938 that the FDA began regulating ingredients in cosmetics;² and today there is still no policy requiring research of contents of tampons or menstrual products.³ Her Right to Know presents archival documents and marketing material alongside contemporary artworks that aim to open up a dialogue about women’s bodies and health, and the social injustices that have been placed on women dating back to the 18th century and continue into present day.

Exploring women’s relationships to medicine, cosmetics, health, and control, contemporary artists A.K. Burns, Vitoria Hadba, Coralina Rodriguez Meyer, and Alison Kizu-Blair illuminate and explode many of the constructs and associations of the female body. Burns presents an IUD Anti-Fertility Necklace to “ward off capitalist reproductive politics.”⁴ Hadba’s sculptures depict menstruation products as simultaneously violent – their shape mimics bullets – and valuable, as they “ameliorate the discomforts of women’s physiology.” Meyer manipulates imagery of fallopian tubes and uterus into scales of justice, highlighting the authority of the judicial system in highly personal decisions regarding a woman’s reproductive rights in Cunt Quilt (Choice). In her work IUD / IED, which is an IUD scaled to fit the Statue of Liberty’s uterus, Meyer further draws attention to the female body as a place for political discourse. Kizu-Blair’s snarky makeup tutorial HAG to SWAG walks the line between the attractive and the repulsive, questioning notions of beauty and performances of femininity. Displayed alongside archival material from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the artworks draw out problems and connections across centuries of women’s health.

Curated by Kristen Clevenson, M.A. candidate, Art History, Hunter College

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³ Jamie Kohen, “The History of the Regulation of Menstrual Tampons” LEDA at Harvard Law School, April 6, 2001, https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/8852185/Kohen.html?sequence=2. New York representatives have pushed to pass the Menstrual Products Right to Know Act for years, but have been unsuccessful.
A.K. Burns

*IUD Anti-Fertility Necklace, 2017*

Brass and gold

Often displayed in the hand of Burns’s sculpture of Artemis, goddess of the hunt, this necklace becomes both a protective charm and a weapon. It protects the wearer from unplanned pregnancy, but also allows for limited reproduction of the human race. The gold also calls to mind notions of worth and monetary value, pointing to the capitalist motivation behind reproductive politics.

Vitoria Hadba

*Wounded Wombs, 2015*

Cast bronze and copper

Also calling attention to inherent value, Hadba seeks to reimagine feared or ignored tampons as glamorized sculptures. Cast in both bronze and copper, the shape recalls that of bullets, pointing to the threatening nature of menstrual product alongside the larger fear of the responsibilities and associations of menstruation as “becoming a woman” despite being only a pubescent teenager.

Coralina Rodriguez Meyer

*IUD / IED: Intra Uterine Devices / Improvised Explosive Devices for the Statue of Liberty, 2012*

Vintage hartman suitcase, bullnose, end cap, nipple lead pipe, plastic plumbing tube, cotton building tampon, cotton thread, greenscreen fabric, cardboard landscape, adhesive, resin

As part of her City of Today for Feminine Urbanism, Meyer creates an intrauterine device scaled for the Statue of Liberty with a tampon fuse to mimic an improvised explosive device. As such, she imagines lady Liberty’s innards as a vessel for political discourse.

Meyer began collecting worn-out women’s underwear for collective “Stitch n Bitch” events, where women and allies gather to create quilts to be carried on protestors' backs during marches for equality. Created during a gathering anticipating the supreme court nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, this quilt connects the scales of justice with ovaries and a uterus, highlighting judicial control of women’s right to choose.

Coralina Rodriguez Meyer

*Cunt Quilt (Choice), 2018*

Stained Queen sized bed sheet, donated women’s underwear, thread

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Alison Kizu-Blair

*HAG to SWAG, 2018*

Video, 7min

Inspired by Youtube makeup tutorials, Kizu-Blair draws attention to the insidious undertones of familiar media. Speaking deliberately to a female audience, she offers to help “mutate into your butterfly bewitching best self!” However, written into the perky tone is an element of revulsion, both for the grotesque makeup choices and the makeup tutorials’ larger role within traditions of restricted ideas of beauty and femininity.

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