Yapci Ramos

"Red -Hot" breaks boundaries, shatters taboos, and bleeds with challenge.

BY ELYSSA GOODMAN - MARCH 20TH 2018

Yapci Ramos's Red Hot video installation at the Catinca Tabacaru Gallery is displayed in full view of the street so you can see it perfectly even when the gallery is closed, as it is when I visit it on a Tuesday afternoon. Standing in front of the gallery's glass front, I watch as a tower of screens show shots of Ramos's naked torso from behind as she smears her own menstrual blood with her hands on a white wall tiled in tiny squares, lines of droplets running down her fingers and the wall itself. Sometimes her back is marked with the bright red outlines from where her bra once laid, but in each screen her hands wipe a different, single word into existence: "Go. Calm. Why. Come. Now. Time. Be. Path. You." And others begin to appear on screens left, right, and center. Words stay up until each screen is filled then one by one Ramos washes them away, the bright white grout turning pink in its watery wake, only to be replaced anew. But Red Hot is not just about "blood," and the entire existence for the piece is very much wrapped up in my fear of not telling these high school boys exactly what's up: in so many cultures around the world, the U.S. by no means excluded, menstruation is still a shame-filled taboo. We're brought up not to talk about it, not to acknowledge it, and certainly not to see it. Ramos's Red Hot rebels against that line of thinking. "Why do we have to keep in silence with this?" Ramos asks. "If I have my period, I have my period! I want to be very open with this and I don't want to be all the time having this taboo."Red Hot, named for both the color and the warmth of the project's leading material, is both confrontational and curious, created by Ramos over the course of two years. With the closeness of the project's screens—these screens that are so familiar and ubiquitous in our lives via the now ever-present cellphones and computers—Ramos feels viewers are able to get closer literally and metaphorically to the topic, and hopes that the closeness can produce change in how menstruation is viewed. The challenge, in other words, is to get familiar with something you don't normally see (menstrual blood) through a medium you do normally see (screens and video). The project first came from a desire to reconnect with herself after having spent most of her two-decade career, during which her work has been exhibited around the world, focusing on the complexity of interaction between external subjects and the forces that relate them to "otherness." A prior project, for example, was "Bitches and Whores," a multimedia work that dispels stereotypes of prostitutes from around the world alongside images of stray dogs in Aruba. Whereas Ramos's work had previously been about other people, forRed Hot she looked inward. Or as Ramos says, "I turned to see myself." Ramos feels the introspection of this piece has pushed her work in a new direction, changing how she sees, how she started to understand the complexity of an image within a given narrative, and how she thinks about space all while maintaining the personal connection she has always felt to her work. She also acknowledges the project came from what she calls "an unconscious legacy." Ramos is from the Canary Islands, a Spanish community off the coast of Morocco. The Berber culture, prevalent in the area, instructed a woman's ritual purification in the ocean once her menstrual cycle completed. "In my case it's like a broken tradition because I do this personal purification," Ramos says. It's a ritual with her own twist, one whose viewing is also not restricted to women only as the Berber ritual was previously. By opening up her ritual for men to see as it floats on screen, Ramos hopes they will perceive a common ground or a reflection they can understand. "Maybe they can't connect with the blood exactly," she says, "but they can get there." It's an important effort in a moment when the conversations about gender, the space women occupy in society, and menstruation are in great upheaval. While Ramos did not anticipate this when she started the project two years ago and her original intention was not to make a political work, it seems to be a victory of happenstance that Red Hot is especially relevant now, she says. "Sometimes you work on something and you appear in a moment like that. I never would have expected all of this happening in the world how it is now," she says. "It wasn't the intention but this [project] has something for a woman to say in the world."