

# BOMB

"Clarity Haynes and Loie Hollowell on the Taboos of Blood and Bleeding"

By Editor's Cut

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Simon Marmion, *The Lamentation of Christ*, 1473, oil and tempera on oak panel, 20.5 x 13 inches.

For BOMB's fall 2025 issue, artists Clarity Haynes and Loie Hollowell reveal how their paintings put bodily experiences, including birth and pregnancy, "into shape and light as a way of healing." In this passage—which didn't make it into the print interview but is now available exclusively to BOMB members—the painters reflect on the ways blood can be perceived as sacred or shameful.

—Benjamin Samuel, Senior Editor

**Clarity Haynes** I recently read *Wonderful Blood* by Caroline Bynum, which is about medieval paintings of Christ.

JESSICA  
SILVERMAN

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

**Loie Hollowell** Ooh. Side note: I was just at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna with my kids, and we got to see massive paintings with writhing, tortured bodies and Jesus on the cross with blood dripping down. My daughter was fascinated by Jesus and his death and all the rapture in those dramatic scenes. They were such sensuous depictions of Christ.

**CH** I know! Androgynous, sexy Jesus? It's so gay.

**LH** I would have been an easy convert if I had walked into a church in the seventeenth century and seen those paintings.

**CH** (laughter) They're totally erotic. You know there have been blood cults that worship the supposed remnants of Christ? Bynum writes about how Jesus's blood is considered so sacred that some paintings have three-dimensional droplets of blood—which totally relates to your work. It's like, the blood is so sacred that they had to make it come out of the canvas.

**LH** The first thing I started sculpting on my paintings was the mandorla shape I use to abstract my vagina. The shape is very droplet-like. I wanted viewers to want to lick it and touch it.

**CH** I wonder how we went from the idea that the blood of Christ is sacred and if it's bright red—new blood—it signifies life to the idea that any blood associated with a woman is absolutely taboo. Birth and pregnancy are taboo—there's so much projected shame and abjection and misogyny and horror and disgust. Almost all the major religions are patriarchal, and many have cast women as being lesser, unclean, and degraded, unless they're in the role of the chaste mother.

**LH** Meanwhile, Jesus's blood is sacrificial blood.

**CH** That's true. It's also male, so it's sacred. With my *Crowning* paintings, I was thinking of bright red blood as the blood of life.

**LH** The energy it takes to make a baby—how depleted we are throughout pregnancy—is a sacrifice we make for the future.

**CH** Right. And yet there's all this degradation associated with the idea of the female body. That's partly why I confront the taboo of depicting birth and the blood of birth. Why is it so terrible to see these particular sources of blood when, for much of its history, Western painting has been about depicting blood?

I came out as a lesbian in 1990. After my first year of college, I wanted to bring my first girlfriend home, but my father said he wasn't yet ready to be "visually confronted." I'll never forget that phrase. Some people think that homosexual and trans people are okay as long as they stay hidden or in the closet. To come out and be yourself, you can't listen to that. You have to be able to say, "I don't care what I've been told. I'm going to choose a different destiny." That's part of why I tend to depict things that people aren't ready to see. I also feel like that's just part of living as a queer person.

**JESSICA  
SILVERMAN**

621 Grant Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94108  
jessicasilvermangallery.com +1 415 255 9508

LHIt's funny to think of people not being ready to see your work when fifty percent of people—probably more—have breasts and vaginas. A lot of those people have given birth, and all of them have been born, mostly through vaginal delivery.

Is the patriarchy fearful of the blood of periods and birth because it represents the potential loss of life, given historically high maternal death and miscarriage rates? I'm trying to give our society some benefit of the doubt. Is that fear of blood tied to those who overturned our abortion rights? An abortion is bloody and seen by those people as the loss of a life.

It's all totally misguided because, biologically, miscarriages and abortions take place in order to save the life of the pregnant person so that they can go on to have viable and wanted pregnancies if they so choose. I feel so much relief once I get my period. For a week leading up to my period, my sleep is thrown off and I'm so irritable, but I feel myself again once I start bleeding.

CHI've always had horrible PMS, and I've been so resentful of having a period because I never planned to have a kid. I fully hope that someday we will be able to just not have periods if we don't want kids and opt out of all this. Everybody who menstruates has an intimate familiarity with blood that isn't the result of an accident or being hurt. I'm remembering a friend of mine who years ago dressed up as a menstrual blood vampire for Halloween!

LH(laughter) Nice. I could talk about blood forever.

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