

I STILL SEND YOU A LOT OF AFFECTION AND I KISS YOU THROUGH MY DENTURES

ISABELLE MASSU IN CONVERSATION WITH PAULINE CURNIER JARDIN

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process. In trying to picture what result the artists' work is getting to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

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Isabelle: Where do you think your interest in older women came from?

Pauline: My grandmother was a huge influence on me. She'd sit in front of the TV and tell stories. She collected horror movies on VHS and taxidermized animals. She was really into lingerie coquine. Not for herself, she would buy the most outrageously sexy underwear for my cousins, like stuff from a porn film...

Brilliant.

Having someone like that gives you a lot of strength and somehow a trajectory for the future that's hopeful. I carry her with me in my personal style, that's why I've always worn oversized glasses.

I see.

So you had a look at the performance and the teaser for the feature film I'm developing, Sebastiano Blu?

I watched them both. You look like Cher in the 70s in that performance.

Well, she's one of my style icons...

And all those menopausal women on the beach in the teaser, they're pretty hot... I'm getting distracted... In any case, it was pretty remarkable to see women of all ages menstruating in the church at the end of the performance.

Think of all the blood that's lost during our periods. I had this image of every woman in the world bleeding together, young and old. It's scary but also pretty funny. Like a splatter movie once a month. It makes us quite powerful as women. There's something intriguing about seeing an older woman bleed between her legs.

It's an image you never think of, like a looping of time.

So it was through this project, I got interested in the menopause specifically. Virginie Despentes talks about women who are "off the market" from male desire - say because you're too ugly, or butch or fat. Being menopausal seems like the most literal way a woman could be taken off the market.

Well, I decided to put myself off the market for men many years ago, long before going through menopause!

Maybe the menopause is the last niche where capitalism cannot go. Maybe it's some kind of haven from it. But to be honest, I don't know enough about the real experience of it.

Well, there are several stages of menopause. At perimenopause, your periods get less frequent, your hormones are starting to change. Premenopause, you start having hot flashes. And then there's full-blown menopause...

Is that when your hormone levels are really fucked up?

Yes, you can get hormone treatment to deal with it. But there can be side effects and cancer risks, depending on your family background. That's one of the first things doctors will ask you before prescribing any treatments. Some women choose alternative medicine, but that never worked for me.

So what are the effects of the drugs?

It depends, each woman reacts differently. Apparently women who have given birth don't react as strongly to menopause. There can be all sorts of side effects, good and bad. Did you know hormones can help you get wet too?

Really? Or is that just hearsay?

Isabelle: No really! It's all hormonal. The drugs can help with osteoporosis too. Some gynecologists in France won't prescribe the hormones as there's a lot of menopausal women who just get treatments to get softer skin not because they feel side effects from menopause...

Fucking hell... just for softer skin?

Yes. So it took me ages to get treatment because gynecologists would not give me anything... For six years, I was on the floor crying, wanting to kill everybody, well men in particular! And then I had two young kids in the midst of all this...

Men! (laughs)

Well, to be honest even when I got on the medication, I still felt like that! (laughs)
Thinking about the time of witches, holding rituals on the beach... There's no doubt these women were menopausal. Going through the menopause is like having a fire burning within you.
I think there's a lot of female strength that we are not exploring.

Yes! I had this intuition that menopausal women have these dark superpowers!
Imagine a menopausal horror movie. Older women going on killing sprees, seeking vengeance for young women who have been harassed!

I can tell you there was one year where they weren't prescribing the hormone medication in the pharmacy - that was definitely a time for vengeance...

I had another thought. If middle-aged men get Viagra, why isn't there a super libido enhancer for middle-aged women on the market?

That would be great. Imagine every menopausal woman in the world on fire and on the hunt for sex.

Maybe when I get there, this potion will exist.

Well, maybe you won't need it. There's a huge misconception around sexuality and menopausal women. Sexually active women are much more open and free after their forties. Friends have told me their sex life has gone into overdrive after 50...

How come?

Not having to perform to the image of the body frees you up. Your body is not the object of desire anymore. So when desire emerges, it is really yours, not in relation to an image of the body, it's for you.

So would you say the negative image of menopause is just driven by society?

Of course! It's scary for people, both male and female. I think there's this general fear - what is a woman if she can't procreate? This might be even scarier for younger women than men.

What's magic is it's hidden too. There's a lot of unknown strength and potential... it's like a secret society.

Yes. There's this power in letting go. You don't care. And this disturbs people. Like the mother and daughter in the documentary Grey Gardens from the Maysle's Brothers.

Ah this is one of my cult classics. Those two were beautiful.

And they really didn't give a shit!

Yes! They had each other, so they didn't need to.

Well if a woman has arrived at a point in life, where she has gone through and seen so much that she doesn't care anymore, that's a power that other people don't have.

Dieting, exercising to "look good", all these women that think they still have to hold on to that!

After 60, no matter how much botox you do, your body will sag, so while your body is still physically strong it's just not looked at in the same way.

So you're in the world in a different way... because you're no longer the object of desire anymore?

Well, the desire is there, it's just extremely taboo!

But things won't stay like that... times are changing.

You bet. I just had a vision of a parade of older women in the street bleeding all together...