



throughout the film: young and old, clean and contaminated, inside and outside, male and female, right and wrong. By tying seemingly unrelated narratives together through allegory—such as mastitis and the girls’ corrupted innocence—Simnett performs her own sort of contamination in the viewer. In doing so, she reveals something not seen but felt, that is difficult to shake off long after one has left the space.

These references to biological phenomena and their various anthropomorphisms root this world back in some sort of primary ground where raw feeling and the irrational logic of children are the only constants. Simnett’s use of theatrical scirms to create the set for the farm reference the simultaneously hermetic and porous nature of membranes, where the daughter and father can leave but the mother and boys cannot. In the segment adapted from *Blood*, turbinate bones personified as mean childhood friends act out revenge on a giant Papier-mâché nose for being removed, and a similarly tragic scene from *Blue Roses* depicts a pulsating varicose vein that erupts into an oozing gelatinous mass.

However, far from taking us away from reality, this beautifully theatrical world of song, scirms and art house horror

sharpen our focus onto the aspects of the reality it interweaves, comprised of bright lights, serenely sterile doctor’s offices, syringes and vials, that interest Simnett most. Suddenly, our knee-jerk reactions and primal fears are activated and the horror and violence of medicine that we endure unquestioningly—and even volunteer for—becomes impossible to ignore. But it is not just for cheap thrills. Simnett awakens a perception that pushes meaning beyond language and into the sensory. Her choice to edit the footage so that each screen shows a different clip of the current scene forces one to abandon any reliance on a single linear story structure or source, further activating the psychophysical nature of the work.

In this way Simnett’s style has a curiously subversive power to it. In *Blue Roses*, which features a woman undergoing a varicose vein reduction, the childlike voice-over says: “He said it was because I crossed my legs too long” as if the doctor was scolding her like an imprudent child. Then, in the end she contradicts what he says about it not hurting, and her vein explodes. Similarly, in the *Worst Gift* Simnett pushes a doctor to give her a voice reduction “so my voice can be low like all the boys”. When he refuses, she threatens him saying that if he doesn’t

MARIANNA SIMNETT: BLOOD IN MY MILK

New Museum, New York

September 4, 2018 - January 6, 2019

Installed as a five-channel looping video piece in the basement at the New Museum, *Blood in My Milk* weaves together a survey of Marianna Simnett’s most important works to date—*The Udder* (2014), *Blood* (2015), *Blue Roses* (2015), and *Worst Gift* (2017). The red carpet and malformed bean bag chairs strewn across the large room make one feel as if they are entering some kind of subterranean womb that is both inviting and cold. As one enters her filmic universe, it becomes immediately clear that such viscerally opposed sensations are the very plane upon which Simnett activates her narratives.

At the beginning of the segment taken from the *Udder* we see a young girl walking towards the camera along a sloppy mud path in a field. It is morning, and the farm appears to be conducting its daily activities. The father waves from his tractor and the mother cleans the windows of the house from the inside. This satisfying display of routine is undercut by the voiceover of the girl, which harbors a sort of horror in its fairytale like cadence: “Head down, she says. I’m too beautiful to leave the farm. I must never wear hair long. Attracts the wrong kinds of minds.” This cuts to an udder being closely shorn while her mother’s voice details the importance of removing all hair from the udder to prevent infection.

Already, Simnett is lining up the relationships she traverses, muddles and rewires

Marianna Simnett, *Blood In My Milk* (2018), (September 04, 2018 to January 6, 2019) at New Museum, New York. LEFT Frame enlargement. BELOW installation views. Courtesy the artist and New Museum, New York. Photo credit Maris Hutchinson / EPW Studio.





Marianna Simnett, *Blood In My Milk*
(Worst Gift) (2017), frame enlargement.
Courtesy the artist and Matt's Gallery.

BELOW
Marianna Simnett, *Blood In My Milk*
(Blue Roses) (2015), frame enlargement.
Courtesy the artist and Comar.

he will never see a neck again. His cowering acquiescence suggests that he has a weakness for piercing necks that she succeeded to use against him.

In both cases, the central authority is weakened by something terrifying and violent that it created but is now beyond its control. This can be seen in *Udder*, where the girl cuts off her own nose as a way to preserve the patriarchal notion of her chastity. The very apt phrase, “to cut off your nose to spite your face” cannot be ignored here, along with the childlike foreboding behind its power. “The nose knows” is repeated throughout the piece, echoing the way that Simnett anthropomorphizes parts of the body as a way to enter, activate and perhaps attempt to take back control of it.

In a time where boundaries that traditionally demarcate balances of power and gender identity are being redrawn, while privatization and advancements in biotechnology are changing the face of healthcare, how we relate to and shape our bodies are undergoing dramatic shifts. By connecting and interweaving disparate elements tied to these various themes, Simnett’s work suggests an opportunity for these relationships to be reexamined and retold.

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