

Carmen Winant

WHO SAYS PAIN IS EROTIC?

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Fortnight Institute

60 East 4th St.

New York, NY

Carmen Winant has long collected images of women, driven by the hope that their aggregate will help her understand *something* about female authorship, impulse, and willful representation through looking. For this exhibition she turns to her archive of over five thousand pictures to consider the elusive subject of healing.

Through parallel story lines involving female agency and submission, feminist history and self-help books, Winant's dense collages prompt the questions: Why are women always depicted as the receiver of demonstrative touch? Can healing be transferred through pictures? In what moments can contact be both violent and tender? Can something so enormously internal - emotional and bodily restoration - possibly be depicted in an outward way? What happens when pleasure and pain touch one another? When, in fact, is pain indeed erotic?

These conflicts are vested in the history and makings of collage itself. From the Dada artists to the Beats and Feminists, the medium has long served as an index of social conflict and an expression of interior and societal struggle. By literally disjoining material in order to collide it with itself, Winant's dismantled, closely set compositions reference a social and bodily uneasiness; bodies are literally pulled to pieces. In this sense, collage is both a visual strategy of non-linear storytelling and a political ideology.

The use of the color red, absorbed here on found images, paper and frames as food coloring, is derived from the radical 1970 feminist book *The Female Eunuch*, in which Germaine Greer notably wrote of women who were seeking bodily and societal freedom: "If you think you are emancipated, you might consider the idea of tasting your own menstrual blood - if it makes you sick, you've a long way to go, baby."

Draw the tips of your fingers to the base of your neck, and then the temples of your skull, and then to the arches of your feet. Press firmly and with increasing force, practicing a kind of patience of touch that you usually reserve for other bodies. Some reactive twitching is normal (as is feeling nothing). Is it possible to avoid anticipating contact, even though you're the one administering it? Stop applying pressure in the seconds before bruising, orgasm, or injury occurs. Remember that sometimes being tender means being a little brutal. Remember that the site of original trauma usually gives way to the pressure point. Remember that it's sometimes necessary to heal alone, especially if you are a woman, especially if your damage is related to inhabiting a female body. Avoid being photographed in the process unless you have no choice. The average session is fifteen to forty minutes. See you later, sweetheart.

Attend a meeting of any sort, pledge total commitment to a cause, especially if you are the cause. Now allow yourself to be touched by other people, in both formal and informal settings (holding hands, hugging or sex, physical therapy, slow dancing, grappling and grazing). Allow others, men, to take command of your pelvis, eye sockets, the crown of your head, the valley just under the ribs in the middle-seam of your torso, the two soft tissue spots just beneath your kneecaps, your skin. Surrender your neck in the name of healing, inviting strangulation in and allowing yourself to be tenderized in new and different ways. Can you imagine your own burial? These things are group healing: talk therapy, organized and impromptu protests, giving birth, blood transfusions. Afterwards, clean up and go your own way.

- Carmen Winant