

Description of Artwork

Boris Petrović

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# ‘Sewing (a) Woman’<sup>1</sup>

## Female Genital Mutilation

!Scene 1

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*“In the early days of the Industrial Revolution in this country, many young girls worked in garment factories. The hours were long, the pay poor, and the working conditions dismal. They operated treadle-type sewing machines which required constant pushing of the treadle with one or both feet. Gradually the girls discovered that by pushing the treadle a certain way with their thighs pressed together, they could rub the labia minora and massage the clitoris. What had been drudgery became almost a pleasure. The long hours at the sewing machines melted away as this new diversion took hold.”*

EVERYTHING YOU WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT SEX  
But Were Afraid To Ask  
Explained by David Reuben, M.D.

!Scene 2

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“When you are cut you will not be a slut looking for men here and there like a prostitute.”

“You are docile, waiting for your husband because after you are cut, sex is for having children not for anything else.”

In Europe there are an estimated 700,000 victims of FGM, with around 140,000 in the UK and 100,000 in France (released in early 2016, the report showed that 513.000 girls and women were either affected - or at risk of undergoing FGM in the U.S.)

Despite it being illegal in many countries, the practice still continues as people think their daughters need the operation to find a husband and will be outcast if they don't have it. One tribal leader claimed girls cannot ‘control their emotions’ if they keep their normal genitals.

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<sup>1</sup> SeWoMan

Waris Dirie (*Somali model, author, actress and social activist*)

*In her horrific ordeal, her genitalia was cut and her vagina sewn up using thorns.*

*She said: 'The society I grew up in, girls and women are not respected. They [men] can abuse you, misuse you, rape you, mutilate you, beat you up and dismiss you, if they want.*

*'People believe a girl will not be faithful if she develops any sexual feelings or pleasure.*

*'Therefore they destroy the girl's sexuality in cutting her genitals. It is the worst form of child abuse.'*

!Scene 3

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“Circumcision is an important festival. It's a celebration like Christmas. It unites people. There is feasting and drinking and dancing.”

“When you are cut that's when you can grow healthily into a woman because the bad blood is not there anymore. In the body there is good blood and bad blood. After a girl is cut the bad blood is gone.” Agnès Kerubo described female cutter in Kenya's village.

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female\\_genital\\_mutilation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Female_genital_mutilation)

!Scene 4

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## About

What prompted me to do the paintings/objects?

On the one hand, it was Gustave Courbet's *L'origine du Monde*.

The scene painted by Courbet has sparked so much attention and controversy through history that I was more interested in the reaction of people to artwork than just artwork. Today, in the era of pornography, Courbet's painting (in the form of various reproductions) is sometimes forbidden and disputed, as well as artworks inspired by *L'origine du Monde*.

My paintings are the very opposite of the Courbet's work that celebrates life and bodily enjoyment.

On the other hand, finding out that there is a technique that deprives women of pleasure came as a shock to me, not so much the fact that it exists but the realisation that it is so widespread, even in the 'developed' world.

SeWoMan paintings are based on the technique of oil on canvas. The canvas is the basis, the beginning of the artwork, white, clean, "unspoiled", handsome. Through my action, I take the virginity of the canvas. I took it by my energy, by acting on the canvas: by exerting pressure and scratches, by penetrating it with my brush and my paint. At the same time, I made sure not to damage it, to safeguard it...

At first glance, my canvas seems minimalistic – like a Japanese kanji drawn in one stroke. The brush was used as a katana. The resulting gesture (symbol) resembles a katana, a sign, and recalls a vagina, "female weapon". It is appealing and clean. As he approaches it, the viewer can see a cut, a stitch. A damage that is "repaired" is visible because the canvas is sewn. The canvas was injured and treated. None of this has been done properly. Everything is violent. The enjoyment is interrupted, as women's enjoyment is interrupted by FGM . An observer can be attracted to the scene and be deceived by the scene.

Canvases are sewn with the stitch used for sewing leather.

My artworks can also be seen as a reference to the current political situation. The world is dysfunctional, the world is in crisis. Wars are being waged to make the economy evolve. To make better life, we destroy and violently correct. "Einstürzende Neubauten".

And we are very moral.

I feel like a prisoner in this world. The hierarchy is known. This prison has its own rules, a culture, a codex. If you do not respect them, you go into isolation. The world is very similar to prison life. Since we are prisoners of this world, we can see those paintings as a form of rebellion by the prisoners who are sewing their mouth.

