

Why Abortion Matters

JEX BLACKMORE



JEX BLACKMORE, "Sin is in the blood"
(installation detail), 2021.

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Their horror is not

For those unfamiliar with my work, or for those who have followed it in part, much of what I've done over the last decade has traced a single question: how power operates, conceals itself, and fractures. That inquiry has taken many forms: writing, performance, video, installation, protest. Sometimes serious, sometimes absurd, because power itself moves between those registers. My focus has often been on the intersections of sex, religion, and government, domains that appear distinct but in practice reinforce one another's authority. This work is not abstract. Their convergence determines how we are taught to inhabit our bodies, which desires are permitted, and which forms of selfhood are suppressed. To me, understanding these relationships is essential, because they shape not only our social order, but our very perception of what it means to exist freely.

Among these subjects, abortion and the policing of reproduction have remained central to my focus. They are where questions of power become material, where ideology meets flesh. The control of reproduction is not an isolated moral debate; it is a mechanism through which authority maintains itself. When the state, the church, or any institution claims possession over the body, it is asserting the right to define the boundaries of selfhood. Abortion sits at the center of that conflict.

The question of abortion has never been about life. It has always been about jurisdiction. It is the most direct expression of human freedom: the right to determine what occurs within the boundaries of one's own body. Everything else, the theology, the legislation, the shame, has been engineered to keep the body under supervision.



sacred and violated, as the only property we are born owning and the first thing they try to seize. To defend abortion is to defend the body itself, not as an object or a moral theater, but as a sovereign nation with its own borders, language, and laws. Autonomy requires action, and sometimes, it requires risk.

They will tell us to be grateful for what we are given: for legality bounded by weeks or zip codes, for permissions signed by parents or partners. They will call this freedom. It is not. It is bureaucracy performing morality, control disguised as care. The expectation that we should applaud incremental reforms and liberal ballot measures that trade autonomy for political convenience would be laughable if it were not so violent. Even *Roe v. Wade*, heralded as liberation, was built on the premise that the state could decide when autonomy begins and ends. That was never freedom. It was conditional permission, and conditional permission is another form of control. We do not accept partial rights or conditional mercy. We refuse to perform gratitude for access that was ours to begin with. The body is not a compromise. It is not a negotiation. It is a site of decision, of agency, of sovereignty that requires no consent but our own.

We are not asking for understanding. We are declaring independence. The right to decide what happens within one's own body is not a favor bestowed; it is a birthright reclaimed. Abortion matters to me because it is the line that cannot be crossed, the last frontier of the self. To defend that line is to defend every other freedom that depends on bodily autonomy: the freedom to move, to express, to transition, to love, to exist without surveillance or sanction. When we surrender that line, we surrender everything: our bodies, our pleasure, our futures.

They want obedience. They will get resistance. They want silence. They will get testimony. They want our wombs, and we will give them revolution.*

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The violence has never been the procedure. It is the denial, the insistence that autonomy is negotiable, conditional, or owed. A society that criminalizes abortion does not fear death; it fears defiance. To end a pregnancy is to refuse conscription, to puncture the mythology that the body exists for others. It is to reclaim pleasure as one's own, fertility as one's own, destiny as one's own.

Those who criminalize abortion do not want to save lives. They want to preserve hierarchy. The same order that sanctifies war, profit, and incarceration suddenly claims moral agony over a medical procedure that ends potential life in order to protect actual life. Their horror is not about embryos; it is about empire. It is about the loss of dominion when a person with a uterus acts as a free agent, untethered from the biological leash designed to keep them compliant.

Abortion terrifies those in power because it reveals how fragile their control has always been. It reminds them that creation can also mean refusal. That the womb, so fetishized as a site of purity and production, can also be the site of revolution. To abort is not to destroy life, but to assert it: to claim the authority to define one's own becoming.

We are taught to carry shame before we carry knowledge. From the first blood, the body is marked as dangerous, unpredictable, in need of containment. The story told about those who can reproduce is a parable of control: how to keep us obedient while pretending we are sacred. We are told that parenthood is salvation, that endurance is virtue, that pain is our inheritance. But abortion interrupts that script. It says: I will not bear what I do not choose. It is the moment the narrative slips from their grasp, the instant the myth of inevitable sacrifice dissolves.

The policing of abortion is the prototype for all forms of bodily governance. It is where the machinery of



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surveillance and morality converges, regulating who we sleep with, how we express gender, and what families are allowed to exist. Control the womb and you control the species. Control reproduction and you control the imagination. Every anti-abortion law is a confession: they do not trust us to be free.

To those who call abortion a tragedy, I ask what, exactly, they mourn. Is it the loss of potential, or the disruption of a belief that every life is sacred? The idea that all life holds equal value dissolves quickly under scrutiny. If every life is sacred, why is so little done to sustain it once it exists; in war, in poverty, in prisons, in the steady neglect of those already born? The notion of sanctity has become a shield for authority, a way to disguise control as compassion. There is nothing tragic about asserting freedom. The tragedy lies in being compelled to reproduce for someone else's idea of morality, nation, or god. The grief we carry is not for the potential lives we end, but for the actual lives they are willing to endanger to keep us obedient. Grief, when faced squarely, becomes action.

I believe in direct action. In hands that pass pills and bodies that cross borders. In whisper networks that become movements. In the quiet defiance of those who help another access care when the law says they should not. In mutual aid in its truest form, where help is not charity but continuity: networks of care that grow stronger across generations and borders, adapting to risk, bound by responsibility rather than law. This is what freedom looks like when the state and institution abandons it: people creating it themselves, again and again, through risk and tenderness. Abortion is not a symbol of despair but of endurance. It is proof that self-determination is a muscle that must be used or it will atrophy.

I will not romanticize this. Autonomy is not gentle, and it is not romantic. It requires confrontation. It demands recognition of the body as a political site, as terrain both

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JEX BLACKMORE, "Sex Militant," 2019. Photo by Alex Austin.

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about embryos;

The evidence is everywhere. It appears in medically unnecessary ultrasound-viewing laws designed to induce guilt, in parental consent policies that reclassify minors as wards of the state, in waiting periods that convert medical care into punishment. It existed long before these, in the medical experiments performed on enslaved Black women and in the birth control trials imposed on poor Puerto Rican women without consent. It exists in the surveillance of miscarriage, in the policing of pregnancy, in the prosecution of those who self-manage their care. These mechanisms are not about protecting life; they are about producing compliance. Every regulation, every procedural delay, every moral injunction serves the same purpose: to remind those with the capacity for reproduction that their bodies remain contested territory.

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Abortion exposes the expectation that some bodies exist in service to the state. It rejects the demand to reproduce for nation, race, or faith. The insistence on compulsory birth is not moral but political, a form of population control masked as virtue. To refuse it is to interrupt a lineage of exploitation: the conscription of bodies into labor, purity, and patriotism. Abortion marks the boundary where power tests its reach, where the state, the church, and the patriarch converge to remind us that they still believe they own the map of our flesh. To end a pregnancy by choice is to redraw that map. When power is defied, it responds with punishment.