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PRESS RELEASE

Museum Europäischer Kulturen

Arnimallee 25, 14195 Berlin-Dahlem

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Flow. The Exhibition on Menstruation

6 October 2023 – 6 October 2024

A special exhibition of the Museum Europäischer Kulturen – Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

Press conference: Thursday, 5 October 2023, 11 am

Exhibition opening: Thursday, 5 October 2023, 6 pm

Some 2 billion people in the world menstruate. An additional 1.5 billion have had or will have their periods. Nevertheless, menstruation is considered a taboo topic. Through personal objects and museum artefacts, interviews, music, film, and art, the exhibition explores the discourses and debates of the last decades, traces the development of menstrual products from the late 19th century to the present day, and gives space to the voices of menstruators.

Menstruation has been part of the public discussion for about ten years now. Women publish period manifestos, campaign against period poverty and inadequate supply, develop new menstrual products, and post their experiences under hashtags such as **#menstruationmatters** and **#periodpositivity**. Yet, even though sex education is taught in every school today and period products for a wide range of needs are available, there is still a long way to go towards achieving "period dignity". Research into understanding all bodily processes related to menstruation remains incomplete. And there are still other hurdles, such as period poverty and the difficulty to openly discuss periods, which need to be overcome so that menstruation can be addressed with dignity.

With **Flow. The Exhibition on Menstruation**, the Museum Europäischer Kulturen (MEK) presents a history of pragmatism and utopias, of inventiveness and activism. It brings together around 100 historical and brand-new menstrual products as well as advertisements. Diagrams, interviews, and hands-on discovery stations convey the current state of knowledge. Featuring almost 200 everyday objects, photos, graphics, newspaper articles, and social media posts, the exhibition broadens the discourse that has accompanied menstruation for decades: It covers topics such as work and effectiveness, period poverty, waste, "normality", our bond with nature, and state of mind.

Focus is given to the experiences and voices of menstruators themselves. The exhibition is rounded off by numerous film and music excerpts, as well as works of art. The exhibition will focus on four central thematic areas: the "History of undergarments and menstrual products", "Sex education and the current state of knowledge", "Discourses concerning menstruation", and "Pop culture and art".

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The theme of the "**History of undergarments and menstrual products**" deals with the development and marketing of specially designed menstrual products since the mid-19th century. A hundred years ago, there were already precursors to all of the menstrual articles available today. At the same time, Do It Yourself-solutions remained widespread until the late 20th century. A "photo studio" allows visitors to try on reproductions of historical "undergarments for special days" and thereby experience on their own bodies what has changed over the decades.

The theme of "**Sex education and the current state of knowledge**" provides basic information about the menstrual cycle and menstruation. With the help of diagrams, exhibits, and interviews with experts, museum visitors are acquainted with the current state of knowledge, open questions are addressed, and refuted theories are confronted.

In the third thematic area, "**Discourses concerning menstruation**", the exhibition explores the discursive field that has formed the framework for talking about menstruation since the late 19th century. The continuous reformulation and re-evaluation of menstruation can be summarized under four major "demands" that have been placed on menstruators in various forms over the decades. These are: "Don't / Do that!", "That's how you should be!", "I bleed, therefore I am?", and "Something has to change!". The individual themes are impressively illustrated through numerous exhibits, huge banners with advertisements and photos, as well as found objects from the press and social media.

The final thematic area, "**Pop culture and art**" examines the contribution made by music, comedy, art, and film to the public discussion on menstruation. Here, exhibition content is also conveyed interactively through numerous **hands-on stations**. This participatory orientation aims to provide visitors with multi-perspective and sensory-motor access to the issues. Special activities are offered to school classes and teachers.

Flow. The Exhibition on Menstruation is curated by Jana Wittenzellner, deputy director of the Museum Europäischer Kulturen, Franka Schneider, research associate and curator of the textile collection at MEK, and Sofia Botvinnik, research associate and curator of outreach at MEK.

Curator guided tours offer further exciting insights into the exhibition and are held on the fourth Sunday of the month (summer break: December, July and August 2024) (15.00). Guided tours for teenagers and adults will take place every 2 months starting in November 2023 on the second Saturday of the month (15.00). Beginning in February 2024, the MEK will host **three theme days**: 25 February 2024 will focus on menstrual products; to mark World Menstruation Day on 26 May 2024, the MEK will highlight things that need to change; and on 22 September 2024, at the end of the exhibition, we will discuss the current state of affairs and what the future has in store. Each of these days offers a comprehensive programme featuring talks with invited guests, opportunities for exchange, workshops, and film screenings. Information on the education and outreach programme will soon be available [online](#).

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