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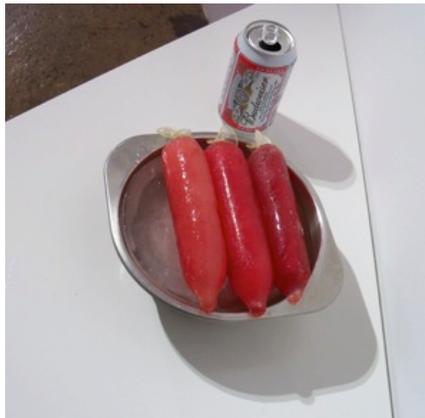
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ART / SEX **A Long Time Coming: Jana Leo's Self-Abusive Performance Art**

Posted by [Benjamin Sutton](#) on Mon, Sep 20, 2010 at 4:04 PM

On Saturday evening I joined a small crowd of thirty or so squeezing into the quickly warming hallway-like space at 14A Orchard Street, the **consistently excellent** gallery **Invisible-Exports**, for a performance by the artist **Jana Leo**, whose work appears in their current exhibition **Mine**. The piece, *Some Like It Cold*, was to have three parts and last "about twenty minutes" according to gallery co-director Ben Tischer, but ended up lasting more like an hour, with only the first part coming off as planned. Still, Leo definitely got her point across.



Visitors were stopped at the door by a friendly mustachioed man who looked right out of a **Cody Critcheloe** video, checking IDs to make sure everyone was over 18. The performance would be adult in nature, although that wasn't immediately apparent. As the audience crowded around the narrowest part of the gallery, where acts one and two were to take place, Leo, a short, energetic woman with a slender frame and curly hair, came jauntily out of the back room wearing a bright green tanktop and plaid skirt, carrying a Hula hoop and what at first looked like a popsicle or **Freezie** to the tune of "**Lollipop**" (the old pop tune, not the Lil Wayne track). The frozen treat, it turns out, consisted of red ice inside a condom, and the first act continued for a good 15 minutes as Leo's Hula hooping and licking got increasingly manic, and especially unsettling during awkward pauses between the song ending and beginning again. The tightly packed audience, most of whom couldn't see more than the performer's head, could hear Leo's loud slurping in these pauses, and the unwelcome running commentary from a drunk attendee in the front row. As the phallic Freezie melted to almost nothing, the first act ended, and Leo disappeared into the back room.

She returned shortly thereafter, with three more of the condom popsicles in a metal bowl (pictured), and walked through the audience with a big smile on her face, offering them to the—at this point—sweaty audience. A man grabbed one, but put it back as Leo went to begin the second act. He quickly found out just how wise his decision was. Leo sat down in front of the audience, tied a strap around her arm, and produced a needle with which to draw blood—the photos in Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose's piece "**Wall of Pain**," incidentally, were affixed to the wall I was trying desperately not to lean on with hypodermic needles. As Leo looked for a vein she asked for someone to bring her water; it became clear that the condom Freezies were made of her own blood, diluted in water and frozen. For better or worse, she wasn't able to find a vein, and stopped to explain the goal of the piece, to address the ways in which we give up control of our own bodies, like in medical situations. Sex seemed like another obvious instance of this and, sure enough, the third act (after a brief intermission) was going there.

As the final section began, to the tune of Hirsute Pursuit's comically filthy track "**Cock Thoughts**," the audience crammed further into the narrow middle of the gallery to find Leo in the back area, lying naked on her back, holding a thick piece of glass over her with her hands and feet, with a naked man in his late-20s or early-30s standing over her masturbating. Something like Vito Acconci's "**Seedbed**"—and Marina Abramovic's **re-appropriation** thereof—for a culture habituated to the unhidden voyeurism of hardcore porn. As the song repeated several times, with its hilarious chorus of "Nice... Deep... Accommodating... Cock thoughts," we all waited for the performance's figurative and literal climax. And waited, and waited, and waited. It eventually became apparent that the intended ending would never come, and while we waited for someone to call it, many people going out into the cool evening air, the gallery directors Tischer and Risa Needleman explained that the non-performing male performer had responded to a Craigslist ad. Two other respondents had said they'd attend, but in the end only the one showed up, and it was hard not to feel sorry for him—and to imagine that, had they been three men, there might have been a greater sense of camaraderie and things might have