

The Body Project: Anatomy, Relationships, and Representation
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MU Craft Studio

Art Installation

Large Nudes

I started my large nude series to challenge conventional media-driven standards of beauty and show that the large body is also beautiful. The work falls into two distinct areas: in one set, my self-portraits are abstract details of the abundantly fleshy body; in the other, my self-portraits include more of my personal identity, creating a more contemplative, and complete, picture of my body.

I find that by truncating the body with an active frame, I focus on how the line of the body is abstracted into volumetric shapes that show the mass of the large figure. This abstraction permits the body a certain freedom it doesn't have in real life, allowing the body to appear as if it is something else entirely: a wad of light-colored fabric, a pile of freshly mixed dough, or a group of smooth rocks. Visually, the deep lines between abstract shapes of skin expose the energy within the body; the line helps propel the planes made of flesh and gives them force.

Conversely, when I pull the camera away from myself I am able to capture more of my body, and my environment. There is a softness to this set of images that is unlike the softness of my abundant flesh, a softness that is imbued in the feeling of the photographs. Often in these images part of my face or part of my hair comes into the frame, bringing in more of my identity with it. While less abstract, they are more narrative in style.

Reaction to the series has been positive, but some viewers have been unsure how to respond. My work was "interesting" rather than "erotic", and "daring" rather than "dark". This was somewhat expected; the series drove me to push my audience's boundaries of comfort as well as my own. Fashion photography focuses almost exclusively on thin, sometimes emaciated, women. My figure, however, is large, considerably different than the supposed "norm" the media has showed us. Although I have never tried to emulate a model body or look, I often compare myself to the idealized standard; my sense of self is strong, but I still struggle with feeling like I have a grotesque figure. In my later work I was more carefully focusing the camera to reduce the blurriness of my body, allowing my arms to open up, and portraying more of my torso and rolls of flesh; eventually I felt comfortable showing even more of my body, including identifiable features, and the texture of my skin.

My original intent in this figure study was to challenge media-driven standards of beauty by showing an overweight body as being beautiful; I have since realized I need to challenge my own standards first to allow myself to feel beautiful. I photograph my own

body, daring myself to feel comfortable with other people viewing me as well as really looking at myself. I am forcing myself to become the observer, as well as the observed. I have begun to feel more at home in my body, able to see it as simultaneously terrifying and beautiful.