

Ways of Perceiving

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EXHIBITION TITLE: BODY POSITIVITY

The show is about artworks that celebrate different body types. This is important because many people view their body in a negative light. In western culture, we see fashion models and film stars as having the 'perfect' body. People who fall outside this standard often see themselves as imperfect. This is commonly discussed in relation to women. I feel that woman's bodies have been degraded and picked apart by the media for far too long and I wanted the artworks to represent the beauty, elegance, strength and determination each the five artists have to create a positive influence for young women in the art world. I also wanted to discuss these artworks because the years they came out at very interesting to me. Especially the paintings created in the 2010's and 1990's. I chose this topic because women deserve to feel good about themselves and their bodies and they deserve to not live in a society where their bodies are picked apart and stereotyped every day. Every body type deserves to be represented and celebrated.

The main theory will be about western perception of beauty and the female body. The artists to be included in the exhibition will be Jenny Saville, Prudence Flint, Joanna Thangiah, Jessica So Ren Tang and one of my own pieces.

The first art piece is 'Propped' by Jenny Saville, 1992. Saville's work often looks at the natural body, showing all its flaws (Risaliti, 2023).

In the 1990s, there were a lot of 'skinny' women depicted on television and in magazines. Size 0 had become the beauty standard (Owen & Laurel-Seller, 2006). As such, bigger bodies were seen as imperfect. Saville created this image of herself propped on a pedestal at a deliberately unflattering angle to show a different type of body. Being put on a pedestal is a metaphor for idolising someone, so it could be argued that 'Propped' is challenging the notion of the 'perfect' body. The work also displays the human body as a powerhouse and how all women, no matter what body size they are, should show their body love and respect, and not to discuss about it in a negative way. The work also shows how women can be powerful and should be proud of their stretch marks, pigmentation, rosacea and veins showing. Back in the 1990's the tiniest bit of

healthy weight seen on a celebrity such as Britney Spears would be ridiculed and constantly being put down. However, Saville made her mark by showing off this powerful image of a woman that would rarely look like the celebrities on TV and would not meet the 'fashion norms'.



Figure 1: Propped (1992) by Jenny Saville

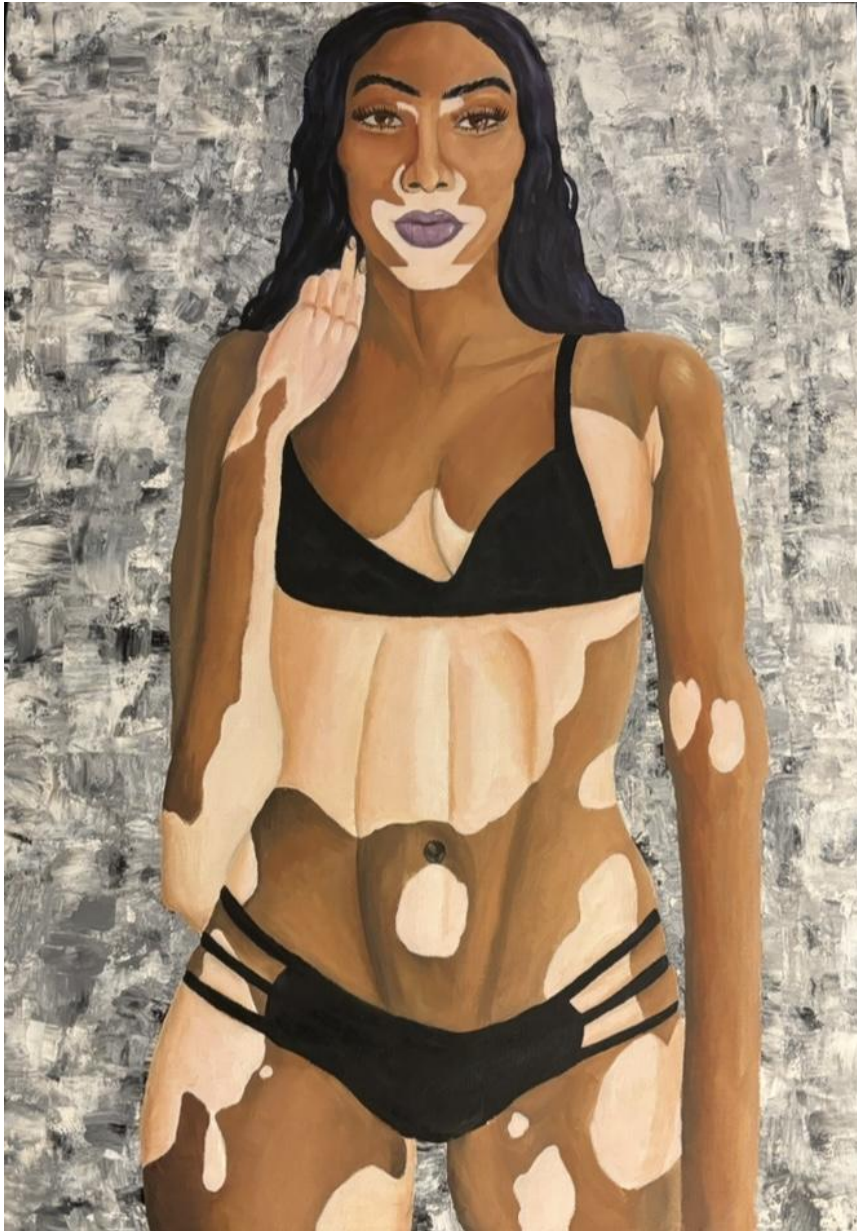


Figure 2: Winnie Harlow (2023) by Emma Moses

I made this work (fig.2) using oil paint. It is a painting of the fashion super model Winnie Harlow. Harlow is a body positivity activist, and she is not afraid to show her beautiful, pigmented skin. She has a skin condition called Vitiligo. My artwork that was inspired by Harlow was made in 2023 and was created amongst the height of Harlow's modelling career. During this time Harlow also became an advocate and inspiration for young girls and boys with vitiligo. The work itself addresses different skin types and skin conditions and how beautiful and different they are. This shows that body positivity does not have to just reflect weight and height but also the texture and conditions of the skin and body itself. As a public figure, Harlow has been instrumental in

raising vitiligo awareness in the mainstream media by collaborating with brands such as Nike and Coach (Witcher, 2018).



Figure 3:Untitled (2014) Joanna Thangiah

This piece was digitally illustrated in 2014 by Joanna Thangiah. Thangiah's works often depicts young women stating how they feel about certain topics of body image and mental health. The piece depicts a young woman commenting about how she does not 'promote obesity'. Instead, Thangiah celebrates 'survival'. This suggests that Thangiah is insinuating that life is stressful and how mental health can have a deep impact when it comes to taking care of yourself to the best of your ability on a day to day basis. In 2014 the conversation surrounding the female body was still being discussed in a negative way. For example, during 2010 to 2012 people were still

heavily invested in being skinny and watching celebrities who were skinny. Although, when it came closer to 2013 to 2014 the curvy body type was starting to make a positive appearance and slowly starting to become more accepted with the body positivity movement (Edwards, 2025). The year 2014 was also the time of when an app called Instagram started to become popular amongst teenagers. Most artworks found on the app had bright and quirky backgrounds. This is where Thangiah's work would be picked up and gain traction amongst teens. These pieces then encouraged teen girls to fight back about body images and weight being a constant topic of negative discussion.



Figure 4: The Visit (2019) Prudence Flint

'The Visit' was painted in 2019 by Prudence Flint. Flint's works often depicts the mundane daily tasks of a woman, such as showering or folding laundry (Qi & Wang, 2024). She created these using oil paint.

The piece depicts a woman in a bathroom with her head and hair flipped over. This insinuated that she is going to either tie her hair up or drying wet hair. The work addresses how the paintings and life does not have to be exciting and orchestrated to be a good topic for a painting. For example, on Instagram more people are now promoting and showing off a 'fake life' compared to the real mundane tasks of daily life (Dennis, 2022). In 2019 It was nearing the start of covid and media and influencers showing off their exciting life was at an all-time high. However, many people would then start to feel that their life was boring and would put themselves down and dig

themselves deeper into the rabbit hole. This painting also depicts a natural, 'slightly exaggerated' female body and not placing them in a sexy or flattering position. The painting shows that an angle like this can be beautiful and skilfully painted in its own right.



Figure 5: GIRL03 (2016) Jessica So Ren Tang

'GIRL03' was embroidered and made in 2016 by Jessica So Ren Tang. Tang's work often depicts women in seductive poses, embroidered with elegant floral-patterned fabrics (Gipson, 2022).

This artwork is of a silhouette of a woman in a kneeling position, decorated in a floral yellow, white and pink patterned fabric for the skin. The hair is a blocked-out silhouette of black, and the bra and pants are a textured fluffy fabric. This work is beautiful in its simplicity. It has no face or facial features and incorporates a floral and nature theme to the body. This suggests that the human body is fragile and elegant, like a flower. In 2015 to 2016 young women started a trend on

Instagram where they cover their face and have flowers surround them. However, flowers have been incorporated with artworks involving young woman for many years before this piece was made. Tang's work is very feminine and adding flowers adds more to the theme. The work addresses simple youth and beauty accompanied with a floral design. Such simple work makes people view this in a positive light.

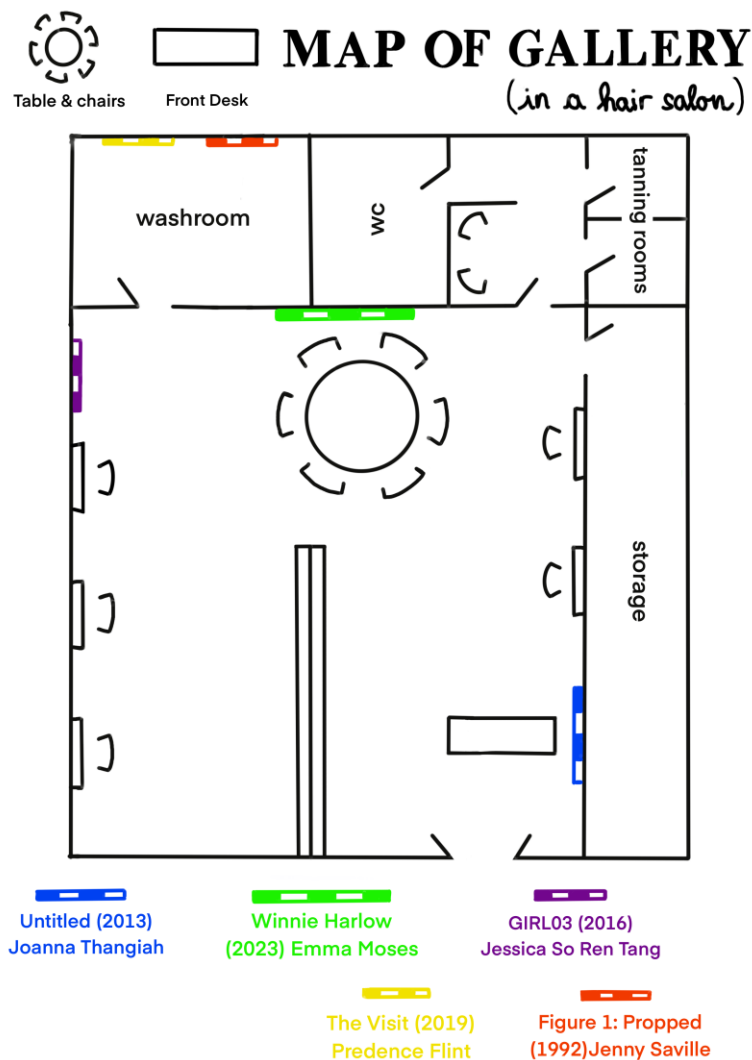


Figure 6: Gallery map

In conclusion, the works selected for this exhibition fall into the category of body positivity. I selected to exhibit in a hair salon I go to called V.I.P because it is a very female dominated hair salon and I felt that having a gallery of artworks empowering women would be a great addition to the shop walls (Elke Krasny, 2022).

I decided to put the artwork by Joanna Thangiah next to the front doors of the shop and front desk because I wanted this gallery space's first piece to be explosive and sending a straightforward message on fighting back against negative and hurtful comments on the female body. This is so viewers know from the very beginning of the exhibition that if this is not the place or pieces for them then to turn the other way.

I also decided to put 'Winnie Harlow' by Emma Moses next to the coffee table because this is a space that will be viewed by people communicating and chatting with one another. This would hopefully then start a conversation on "who is she?", "what skin condition does she have? It's beautiful" or "I've seen her somewhere before!". All these questions are positive and expand people's knowledge and make them less ignorant to negative information about vitiligo.

I also decided to place the 'GIRL03' art work by the door to because I wanted all sides of the hair salon main floor to be incorporated into the exhibition as well as each piece having their own space away from each other. I also placed the embroidery outside the washroom and not in it because the damp air would ruin the fabric. The art piece is placed there so it is a reminder to women to remember they can be both elegant and sexy at the same time.

In this map, I decided to put the Figure 1: 'Propped' by Jenny Saville Art piece in the washroom along with 'The Visit' by Predence Flint because Saville's resembles a form of nudity and so does Flint's but with the female figure playing with their hair. I also decided to place Saville's piece in the washroom because it is away from direct public eye as some people could become easily offended by the nudity of the painting itself. I feel that both paintings complement each other well with a strong sense of women empowerment in their own skin with stretchmarks, skin pigmentation, redness and how the skin flaps over itself showing that all skin is beautiful with all its shapes and curves.

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