

An Artist's Perspective on *the female form*



Several years ago, I hated my body. I didn't like any part of it and I didn't care that it could run and dance and laugh and hike and play the piano. I didn't participate in certain activities if it meant I had to physically use my body or show parts of it I didn't like. One day my best friend, Sarah, confronted me, pointing out that it was really holding me back to the point of incapacitating me. She declared that she was going to make a project out of me and that she wasn't going to stop until I was cured of my poor body image. Just hearing her say the words were enough to jolt me into realizing I had a real problem.

We started with simple things like going to the community pool. Being around all those women who were free, not only in the water, but outside of it, (and in a swimsuit too!) made me start to realize that I had a body that I could move and do things with.

Her next project was for me to skinny dip with her! To feel the water of a lake on my bare skin. This was WAY out of my comfort zone, but she insisted it would help.

The last two projects were ones I took on on my own. I told Sarah about them and she approved wholeheartedly.

The first I sort of stumbled upon. I adore art and had discovered a framing store that also housed local artists' paintings and drawings. I went in and met the owners, two sisters who invited me to peruse the art. I started in the back and there on a low shelf, I saw the most beautiful drawing I had ever seen. It was in charcoal and it was of a woman. She was turned with her back to the artist, sitting on the ground and curled forward. She was so beautiful. I had to have that drawing but thought she was probably very expensive. I immediately went to the sisters and asked

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how much it was and if they knew the artist. They laughed, said the artist was their brother, that he needed a model and would probably trade it to me in exchange for a couple sittings. I gasped and said that I had never modeled before and that I didn't know if I could do such a thing. But then I thought about it again. I walked back to the drawing and imagined myself in that position. She looked so free and thankful for her body. I decided I would do it. Before I changed my mind, I gave the sisters my phone number and told them I was interested, and to have their brother call me.

Later that week, I got a call from him. He was thrilled and wanted to set up a time immediately. I made up an excuse and said that maybe next week would be a better time. It was October. After many more excuses and a need to "get through the holidays first," I finally decided I was ready. In late January, after a beautiful Sunday and some hot soup, I drove to his art studio and tentatively walked in. I felt like I was in a dream. What was I doing? Artists only wanted to draw beautiful things, right? We started with some standing poses. He made suggestions for ways to move my arms and twist my body. I felt shy, like I wasn't doing it right, but then an interesting

thing started to happen. I raised my arm over my head and he said, "That's it, right there, the shape of your arm is perfect." I twisted my body to the left and he said, "Beautiful, that curve in your spine is just what I'm looking for." I'd hear the scratch of the charcoal as I held myself frozen and wondered about his use of the word beautiful. Was I really beautiful? For the next pose, I sat down with my knees curled under me and wrapped my arms around myself. Again came those positive words, "I want to capture the fullness and curve of your thighs, that pose is perfect for this drawing. It's going to be extraordinary!"

[I considered his phrase, "...the fullness and curve of my thighs"]

Those thighs that I had hated all my life? Those big bubbly, strong thighs? Was the lighting off? Was he really talking about me in that way? And then I realized, I had been judging my body all along on what I had been socialized to think was normal: skinny, skinny, skinny. Could it be that there were other definitions of beauty? I continued sitting for artists for the next several years and they all had the same reaction. Those things that I had felt were

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flaws all my life, turned out to be beautiful to others who had much broader and healthier definitions of beauty.

The last project was a sort of art project, another that I took on myself. You can read more about that and the details of our first two projects in my book, Purposeful Eating.

It was and continues to be a journey. I have to admit that I'm still not totally comfortable with my body, but I'm more comfortable with it today than I've ever been, and eating well, moving my body and being good to myself are ways that I continue to love and cherish myself.

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