

Bodily Fictions, Fall 2020-2021

Professor Christina Dokou

Body Project

Athina Stefanakou "Scars: Mastectomy"

This project began after seeing the inspirational and very powerful photographs of American photographer David Jay for the scar project. More specifically, he had photographed women that had undergone single or double mastectomies with their scars visible to illustrate, in a sense, the slogan of the project which is: "Breast cancer is not just a pink ribbon".

After seeing and reading interviews and testimonies of women that have been through breast cancer, many of them mentioned that they weren't really informed about the possibility of not having reconstructive surgery after their mastectomy which they would have considered as an option, since it is not an easy procedure in general. So, I tried to think how a woman might think about her options and how much her surroundings influence her in making the final choice.

As a result, my project is a collage that consists of 3 parts on a horizontal level, the first part is created to look like an Instagram post and in this one I wanted to show the standards of beauty today and the obsession with the perfect body in the realm of social media. Then, the second part depicts a woman that has breast cancer and the comments she hears from her environment and her own thoughts. The third part continues with the same woman, trying to 'escape' from the world that views her only as a patient, by sticking out from the collage. The faces are blurred in all of them to imply their interchangeability and the effort to define ourselves in our own terms.

The last 2 parts, in which I have included color, are the more symbolic ones and they are placed on a vertical level. First, there is a 'painting' with all the different types of breasts in an attempt to resignify the notion of symmetry and perfection and it is titled: "Femina Heroica Sublima". This title is an appropriation of a work from the American painter Barnett Newman whose title is: "Vir Heroicus Sublimis". Newman claimed that he created this painting in order to give people access to the sublime in an era of no legends. I, on the other hand, changed the title, because I wanted to show that even though a disease does not mean that you are a hero, still the way we cope with it has heroic elements. So, the heroic isn't after all linked to some grand epic, but it can be found in everyday hardships. Also, the beautiful or even the sublime here is not perfection or something that transcends life, but it can be found in all the different manifestations of life. The woman standing by the side of the 'painting' is a woman that has undergone double mastectomy and her scars are visible. I chose to depict her in a such a way, because I think that this issue is rarely discussed and many women, including myself before this project, don't really know what it means to have a mastectomy and what it entails. The woman bears under her chest 2 stanzas from Jane Hirshfield's poem: "For what binds us" which affirms the notion that our wounds make us stronger in life.

Finally, even though I haven't been through such an experience and it was really hard to offer my view for fear that I might oversimplify some decisions that are hard to make, I wanted to make clear that I don't promote 'going flat' over plastic surgery, but I wanted rather to show that every woman has the right to make her choice according to what she thinks is better for her.







