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Portrait Of The Female Body's Healing And Homecoming

As an intimate, multisensory exhibition, Vasudhaa Narayanan's spoiled fruit lays bare the complicated relationship between women and their bodies through a tender, collaborative lens, evoking reflections on agency, self-reconciliation and feeling whole

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spoiled fruit by Vasudhaa Narayanan is on view till 20 December at Fulcrum, Mumbai **Photo: Abner Fernandes**

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SUMMARY OF THIS ARTICLE

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exhibition navigates themes of shame, trauma, pleasure, and reconciliation, inviting participants and viewers alike to reflect on personal and collective experiences of inhabiting the female body.

- By documenting intimate narratives, confessions, and bodily realities, the project creates a multisensory feminist archive that challenges conventions, amplifies women's voices, and evokes what it truly means to reconnect with and feel at home in one's body.

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At first sight, there's only skin. Close-ups of women's bare bodies: a belly sinking into the mattress, strands of body hair gathering on the lower back, stretch marks spreading like sand ripples. Then comes the stillness. These photographs of women at repose, cross-legged, lying sideways, standing languidly, cast a soporific spell. There's no attempt at elegance or poise; these are not subjects or Muses. They're what the artist and maker of these images, Vasudhaa Narayanan, describes as "bodies at rest, bodies that just are."

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Currently on view at Fulcrum, Mumbai, Narayanan's solo exhibition 'spoiled fruit' encompasses photographs, sound, and text amassed in collaboration with over 30 women from across India. Five years in the making, the show delves deep into the private, political, and poetic concerns of residing in the **female body**.

The inspiration stemmed from an injury. Recovering from surgery for a torn ACL in 2019, the Mumbai-based artist recalls being "unable to carry the weight of her body," requiring assistance to even walk to the bathroom. "I felt completely disconnected from my body, but I wanted to sit in that discomfort and start looking at myself," says Narayanan. With a camera and self-compassion in hand, she sought to record herself undressed, letting the "lens become a space of negotiation between shame and tenderness," an exercise in manifesting gratitude for her body, which gradually branched into this project with other people, including both acquaintances and strangers.

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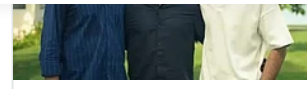
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"Most of the women were sitting with their nudity, becoming aware of it, for the first time," shares Narayanan. Instead of directing the participants to pose, she enabled them to slowly, naturally slip into a comfortable state of embodying their physical selves, wherein some remarked on being "unaware of time passing." It's this rare ease, born from actively shedding one's inhibitions, that occupies every frame, with the camera as a passive witness.

Writer and cultural critic Susan Sontag once rebuked how **women are conditioned** "to see their bodies in parts, and to evaluate each part separately", leading to "an anxious, fretful, often despairing scrutiny." However, through Narayanan's photographs, the parts form a collective, where presence, not appraisal, and self-ownership, not objectification, stand out. Birthmarks, bulges, body hair, folds, curves, stretch marks, and dark patches present themselves not as flaws but as facts embedded in the flesh.

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Narayanan layers this physical reality with an interior dimension, seeking to “turn the gaze inwards.” The show features a confessional soundscape – created in collaboration with sound artist Moinak Bose – which plays on loop as attendants survey the photographs. In it, women speak about postpartum malaise, **menstrual taboos**, **patriarchal** diktats, and navigating shame, agency, and pleasure. Their anonymous voices, distinct yet in chorus, flow into a stream of consciousness: one that broadcasts the shared insecurities, frustrations, and, most of all, desires that women house within themselves.

Equally revealing is the artist book, which attendants flip through, gloves on, entrusted with sensitive, first-hand accounts and additional photographs. “I remember visiting my uncle who said, “Your stomach is as big as a 40-year-old woman,” reads one record. Others reveal violent interactions, unpleasant doctor visits, intimate reflections, deep-rooted longings and more: a tactile record that nullifies traditions of silence and empowers expression.

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The project draws its name from when Narayanan, as a child, had asked her mother about spoiled fruit and was told, “They’re not spoiled, just hurt.” While the myriad aches and scars that women encounter surface through the project, there’s ample room for reconciliation and resistance.

In each frame, the female body announces itself and takes space. In each testimony, the injuries are put on the record. In each participant, every woman can find a mirror.

As an ensemble, the images, sound, and text suggest: where unwelcome remarks, looks, and touch alongside conventions, critics, and constraints leave deep impressions, can nakedness summon a healing of the fractured links between women and their bodies? In ‘spoiled fruit’, nudity emerges as both defiance and presence: a personal, political, and performative act that allows women to reclaim and inhabit their corporeal selves freely and fully.

Dressed herself while photographing the unclothed women, Narayanan balanced the dynamic in multiple ways. She observed the unclad bodies only through the lens. While speaking to the participants, she kept her gaze on their faces and placed herself below eye level so that “they feel in control

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...however, came from mutual vulnerability.

“There was an equal exchange, as I also spoke about my experiences, facilitating a collaborative relationship,” mentions Narayanan. “This approach carried into the curation, with participants’ consent and comfort central to the material included in the project.”

On show till 20 December, the exhibition is far from the culmination of spoiled fruit. The project currently features only women from **urban India**. Resources permitting, Narayanan intends to expand the scope and scale of work—bringing in participants from a wider range of geographies and backgrounds—and further explore how land, labour, caste, or exile shape women’s relationships with their bodies.

The project aims to be a comprehensive **feminist** archive. Yet more than a document, it’s an invitation to rest. “Whether I like it or not, my body is viewed differently from me,” says one of the women in the soundscape. Spoiled fruit asks: What does it feel like, and what does it truly mean, to come home to your body?

Saundarya Jain is a features writer and content strategist who also writes poetry.

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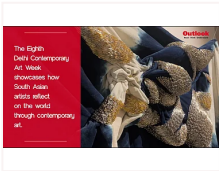


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