

Gallery Statement:

“Celebrating Women, Celebrating Bodies” is a project prompted and inspired by the many conversations, struggles, thoughts, worries, and joys that women experience in regards to their bodies and the bodies of others. In my personal experience, body image is a regular part of the daily dialogue of Bowdoin life. Discussion about body image pervades conversation around the dinner table and extends to topics as broad as exercise, style, relationships, sports, eating, and involvement in classes. But often when overhearing or participating in these conversations, I wonder how productive they are for our self-worth, happiness, health, and self-content.

The goal of “Celebrating Women, Celebrating Bodies” was to help women distance themselves from these self-critical internal and external dialogues by hopefully providing a space for a positive body experience. Part of what the show aims to do is challenge the idea that nudity inherently sexualizes the subject in a manner beyond her control. I urge our viewers to behold the subjects for what they bring to the photos, rather than with a decontextualized or imposed sexualization associated with nudity.

Before the shoot, I had the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with photography Professor Michael Kolster in which he probed me to think more deeply about why we chose the medium of photography, why nudes, and why only women. Our vision was to give each model as much control as possible over her final image, as well as her experience. We chose to photograph nude to give models an experience of being present with their own bare bodies while still having the agency to determine how much they wanted to share with the audience. Understanding that people of all genders have complicated relationships with their bodies, I chose to focus this exhibit specifically on *women* as a result of my work at the Women’s Resource Center. It is a shoot that celebrates women in solidarity with one another.

Our project started with the hope of creating the opportunity for Bowdoin women to view their own body as not only worthy of art, but also a piece of art itself. The first component of this was creating an environment at 24 College Street that invited women to relax, have fun, connect with other women, and take a positive risk. Each shot was designed by the models themselves, who were asked to choose and plan poses that would make them feel comfortable, powerful, and proud. In order to extend the voices of our models into the exhibit itself, after each woman was photographed, we asked her to write a reaction to the experience. These responses have been interspersed throughout the exhibit and are, to me, a very important part of this show.

I owe many thanks to our models for their willingness, enthusiasm, and courage to participate, our photographers Valerie Wirtschafter and Christopher Omachi for their thoughtfulness, creativity, and dedication, to the team of women who saw the project through: Janki Kaneria, Sarah Vallimarescu, Nadja Shaw, Emily Ausubel, and to Melissa Quinby without whose support and advice the project would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Michael Kolster, Allen Delong, Bonnie Pardue, Alex Pigott, Megan Gould, and Kyle Downs for their help.

Laura Armstrong
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Exhibition Producer

Photographs taken by Valerie Wirtschafter and Christopher Omachi