

Daydreaming into the enthralling world of the female breast

Introduction in the catalogue of
Images of the Female Breast by Masters of Photography

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One of my favorites in this catalogue is the fascinating photograph of La Loren and Jayne Mansfield by Joe Shere. La Loren looks, it seems to me, with a mixture of envy and humor towards the so well displayed extraordinary breasts of her rival. Loren seems to recognize her superior, covering her own bosom behind a decent black curtain.

Mansfield's careful offer of Mother Nature, is like a million dollar yacht at the harbor of San Tropez, where one can stroll by and gasp at this display of wealth and luxury, but probably is not invited for a drink. Yet, despite her stainless smile, it looks to me as if Mansfield with her careful sculpted blond crown is offering her breasts for a feast and says 'eat them with your eyes, I am the Great Mother of all mothers and lovers alike'. Enjoy, touch, surrender with all your senses. Perception and imagination are intimately related.



The intriguing collection of Alfonso Pluchinotta is as much a tribute to the female breast as it is a playful survey. It depicts not only the multifaceted beauty of the breast, it embodies a profound study of the imaginary of the breast, in which humor, irony and fear play a part, as the female breast has been the object of admiration, desire and obsession since time immemorial.

When in the third century Agatha refused to be the governor's bedmate, her breasts were cut off as punishment. Luckily God sent Saint Peter in a vision to heal her overnight and restore them. Ever since, Agatha has been the patron saint of breasts, purity and nowadays breastcancer.

At present fear is a major feature for women. Statistics tell us that one out of nine women in the Western world will be affected by breast cancer. The image of beauty countered by the fear of death. The sweet and beautiful fullness of Mother Nature countered by diminishment if not demolition. An immense medical industry has grown up around the screening, treating, healing and restoring of the breast.

Disease aside, reshaping one's breasts to conform to the standards set by today's culture and fashion tends almost to become a common practice in modern society.

Receiving new breasts as a birthday present from her parents when a girl turns eighteen seems to be the latest novelty in dealing with the feeling of uncertainty in their developing personality of a young woman.

Ads for cosmetic surgery appear on the front pages of newspapers.

In the music industry it is common knowledge that it is 'no tits, no income'. For a rapper or any singer they are an indispensable ingredient if the product is to sell.

Breast is big business. And so it was in prehistoric times. The oldest known piece of art representing the human body shows a lady with enormous breasts. It was discovered in 2008 in Hohle Felse in Germany. No doubt, like the Venus of Willendorf and many others after, this small pendant, dating back some 40,000 years, was used in the worship of that masterpiece of creation, the female breast, then and now, for ever inciting our imagination.

From my first encounter with the female breast, sucking at my mother's breast, I have little remembrance. Nevertheless I can feel and taste her softness, filling me with this rich full milk. Ever since I love to hold my lover's breasts in my hands, such a nourishing touch it is, and suck them, caress them, devote myself to them. So many feelings they arouse. The response of the nipples, blood and desire find their way.

Perception is a very intimate, private matter. It is directly connected to our imagination, the superb central psychological function that gives us the potential to be free, able to travel as far as we desire in our mind, free as a bird and boundlessly creative. At the same time however, it touches on the very building blocks of our psyche, our inner fabric and who we fundamentally are. The images we possess of ourselves and the world around us, in greater part an unconscious awareness, determine our emotions, thoughts and behavior. In our appreciation of a picture we are unconsciously taken into the deeper engravings of our brain, the meeting point of brain and mind. The trillions of connections in the mind-brain contain all our experiences as well as those of our ancestors. Each image revives these patterns. The discovery of mirror neurons by Rizzolatti, Gallese, Fogassi and Fadiga in Parma at the end of the 20th century, promises to be the beginning of revolutionary insights into the creative workings of imagery in our souls, body and mind. The longer and more attentive one dwells on an image, the deeper the layers of the mind-brain that disclose themselves. Carl Jung and Roberto Assagioli, pioneers in mental imagery, put it this way: focusing attention on an image will make it 'pregnant' in the sense that it will give birth to deeper contents, hidden fruits in the psyche. Focusing attention will lead you closer to the origins of the psyche, in a sense to the very origins of existence, like meditation is aiming at.

With the breast Mother Nature is calling on you. What it stirs in you depends on the working and patterns and interweavings of your imagination, history and culture.

Breastfeeding has become a controversial issue in Western society. Obsession with the aesthetic aspect, economic questions, the fact that breastfeeding might not be looked on favorably at the places of work or might be simply impossible with the child in a nursery elsewhere are some of the underlying reasons. Then influential and shrewd companies, like Nestlé in Africa, tried with 'scientific arguments' to convince the public that artificial milk is healthier. How deep can one fall?

On visiting a baby clinic a friend of mine overheard a woman exclaiming 'I am not a cow', expressing her disgust with the animal side of breastfeeding. A curious statement, for we are after all mammals. Physically and emotionally we need the breast. True, we can do without, but at what cost?

How different was my experience in the remote mountain area of Chitral in fundamentalist Islamic Pakistan. While traditionally women conceal their bodies from the eyes of a foreigner, on many occasions in the families I was associated with, I witnessed mothers unhesitatingly bare their breasts to feed and comfort their children.



The four girls in the moving photograph by Antanas Sukes seem to summarize some of the principal attitudes.

The girl on the right, timidly covers up what's inevitably developing. Behind her. Hé, look at my funny feet. Dissociation. The third. Proud to be, here I am! Ready for it. Front stage. Acceptance and approval (or is it submission)? Preparing for what is coming up. My turn in life, I'm next.

As for Jerry Schatzberg' image on the cover of this catalogue, ain't it a wonderful choice? The pointed spiral of light, reminding our brain-mind of the great inner light, archetype of the source of all things, mingled with the sweet softness of the breast, what more we can desire?



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