

Artist and photographer Maureen Douglas-Green talks about the women who are the inspiration behind a major new exhibition in Cornwall...

‘When my wife’s condition has stabilised, she’ll model for the life drawing.’ That statement, as the result of a lecturer bemoaning the lack of female life models, was life-changing. A neurological condition extinguished my chosen profession as a teacher, but so many doors opened for me that I had no time to regret the changes that life gave me. The advent of digital photography also changed my life.

Chaperoning a young model on her first photographic shoot with a friend who had photographed me as a ‘bomb-proof model’, I wondered why I didn’t photograph her. So started my passion for photographing the nude form. As a naturist who had been on both sides of the camera, I understood and empathised with those with whom I worked. They trusted me; I had ‘been there, done that, got the T-shirt’. They knew I wouldn’t ask anything of them that I had not done or would not be prepared to do.

Many ladies wanted to work with me. I recognise the grace, femininity and true character that is often masked by clothes. I have no qualms about asking people to work with me. I was the first photographer to work with all the ladies in my pictures in the

exhibition. Philippa, at 62, was a naturist and totally at ease with her body; Sally is an artist and lecturer; Fran and Carolyn, in their 40s, are mothers who came to the beach on an ‘I will if you will’ deal. Kemi, in her 50s, enjoyed life-modelling but was initially reticent about being photographed. Elaine, formerly a model for Robert Lenkiewicz, continues to life model, as does Lisa. Michelle took some persuading, but positively glowed with the experience.

One thing all of the ladies had in common was that they loved the sessions. Friends were told and persuaded they also had to be photographed by me. Every model found it so liberating. They found they were able to be themselves, without the expectations of others influencing them. The finished pictures delighted them. They could see themselves as they are: beautiful women.

Myself? My body bears life marks. I am me. I accept me for the person I am. Creativity is one thing for which I live. I love sharing it with others so that they can feel good about the real people they are.

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The
beauty
of maturity

The model's story

So how exactly does a run-of-the mill, non-naturist middle-aged female, in possession of numerous saggy and wobbly bits, find herself agreeing to have a fine art shot or two of herself included in an exhibition?

Along with the mandatory David Cassidy magazine pull-outs, as a teenager I had a poster of Picasso's *Blue Nude* on my bedroom wall. Compared to my other experiences of seeing unclothed figures at that time (typically ladies lounging around with a couple of harp-playing cherubs in a forest clearing or, alternatively, Samantha Fox) this painting appeared to have both simplicity and subtlety, finally letting me understand that a naked body could be beautiful. As I've got older, I often wonder if the model had been as amazed as me, and how it made her feel knowing others took pleasure from looking at her.

In common with many folk, reaching 50 seemed to concentrate the mind on the timescales of life, the uncertainty of the future and suddenly realising that you should no longer put off opportunities that come your way. Having recently got married, I tried to think of something personal, different and unique to give as a gift to my husband and having seen a set of outstanding pictures in a Sunday paper supplement, the idea to present him with a set of photos that just might capture an essence of me took flight. I discussed the idea with my husband and we decided to see if this could actually happen – and then we came across Howard Nowlan.

Never confident being the centre of attention, never feeling particularly confident even with just ordinary snapshots being taken, I was still unsure as to whether I could do this.

We had an initial

meeting to discuss what we wanted to achieve, what I would be comfortable with and how this could be achieved. Living by the coast for most of my life, I feel very at home by the water, so when Howard suggested a certain spot that seemed ideal, along with a large inhale, I said yes.

I fully admit to having been incredibly nervous on the day and of being *au naturel*. I guess the closest thing I can compare "that moment" to is like taking that first dive into water – taking a deep breath at the anticipation of the cold but, once you're in, it's actually fantastic!

Although it was late September we were blessed with a sunny day and surprisingly warm day. Howard was so very good at making me feel relaxed, I was absolutely astounded that within such a short space of time how much fun I was having, to feel such freedom and for it seeming the most natural thing in the world to be walking along a beach naked, with a photographer in tow! It was a day full of laughter and smiles.

The end results far exceed my expectations; Howard had taken shots that I had difficulty believing they were of me. My husband had come along for the shoot, thoroughly enjoyed the day and so now when we look at the photos we have the shared memories of an incredible experience.

As for the exhibition, I blame it on *Midsomer Murders*. In one episode the lady of the manor holds a party to unveil a nude painting of herself, hanging over the fireplace; tongue in cheek, I remarked to my husband, wouldn't it be wonderful to have the courage to do that?

Like many people, my life has been touched far too closely by cancer and I've accepted an opportunity to contribute in my small way – and in doing so, a huge thank you for allowing me to cross off another item on my bucket list, swapping Stuart House for my "fireplace"!

Raising awareness of the natural mature female form



The Beauty of Maturity, being held at Stuart House in Liskeard, Cornwall, between July 13-18, features the work of two local artists, Maureen Douglas-Green and Howard Nowlan. Taking inspiration from the beauty of land and seascapes, they explore the beauty of the older female nude form. They raise awareness of the natural mature form to show that personality, grace and femininity outweigh the stereotypical concept of the female model.

All models featured are in their 40s, 50s and 60s and have given permission for their images to be displayed to raise money for St Luke's Hospice in Plymouth, where dedicated staff provide end-of-life care to thousands of patients each year. Most of us have been affected by cancer in some way, hence the choice of a local hospice seemed relevant and personal. While some of the models are experienced and even naturists, many of the images were taken for private portfolios of ladies going naked on camera for the first time, and in one case as a 50th birthday present for her husband. The results are stunning and the exhibition hopes to persuade others to be more self-confident in their bodies.

Please come along (or tell others) and support the exhibition at Stuart House, Barras Street, Liskeard, Cornwall PL14 6AB. The event is open from 10am to 3.30pm Monday to Friday and from 10am to 12.30pm on Saturday. If you cannot make it, please visit www.justgiving.com/TheBeautyofMaturity and make a small donation in aid of St Luke's to applaud these brave women.

The Beauty of Maturity

– photography by Maureen Douglas-Green and Howard Nowlan, celebrating the beauty of the mature nude female form.

Stuart House

Barras Street

Liskeard

PL14 6AB

Monday 13th July

to

Saturday 18th July

Mon. - Fri. 10am-3.30pm

Sat. 10am-12.30pm



Helping to support St. Luke's Hospice

www.justgiving.com/TheBeautyofMaturity

