

The Art of Aging

A photo story on the themes of beauty and
sensuality in women aged 70 and over

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After obtaining a master's degree with honours in photography from University of the Arts London, Arianne Clément travelled far and wide to find inspiration, often getting involved in humanitarian projects with the marginalized, her preferred subjects.

She now devotes her work principally to portraying the elderly. Her celebrated portraits of seniors have been exhibited nationally and internationally, and won her several prizes, grants and honours.

What these distinctions reflect first and foremost are the sensitivity and boldness of her work and the unique connection she manages to create with her models.

Her pictures and stories were published in major newspapers and prestigious journals all around the world and her work was met with enthusiastic response online, creating a buzz in social media.

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This project owes its existence to a revelation I experienced when I encountered Marie-Berthe, a young 102-year-old beauty whose ease and casualness in front of the lens was as impressive as it was inspiring. I was immediately taken with the old woman and the way she totally - almost unconsciously - felt beautiful and attractive and was not afraid to show it off. What if beauty could not be reduced to an idealized aesthetic? What if, beyond the traces left by the passage of time on our features, beauty could be something less tangible but more lasting?

This vision is far removed from learned ideas and clichés commonly associated with beauty. It doesn't have to be something that we are born with or without and neither does it have to be the privilege of youth. Beauty has to be much more and, hopefully much better, than this. It is a way of being. Something to cultivate, teach and learn from, and something that each of the eight women (and two men) that reveal themselves in this project are marvelous examples of. As models, they have been a great inspiration to me and it is my hope that my portraits will transmit their spirit and maybe also a precious lesson on the venerable art of aging.

The elders whose intimacy is revealed and celebrated here share with me a notion of beauty and sensuality that inspires a state of grace. Lightness and depth are here side by side in a provocative but thoroughly pleasurable display. Like dozens of other potential subjects, the models featured here answered my invitation issued on social media over the last few months. They were willing to contribute in their own way to redefine the way we view beauty, sensuality and old age.

Borrowing from the conventions of Nude and Boudoir photography, the pictures show my fascination with the human body and its great potential for emotional expression. It is therefore of great importance to me to establish a strong bond with my models, with the goal of laying them bare both physically and psychologically. The subjects, captured in their uniqueness, diversity and vulnerability, are sublimated by the use of black-and-white which enhances their presence and adds a poetic dimension to each portrait.

These pictures also aim to illustrate my irritation with the very conformist way we view beauty and with the pervasive presence of certain imagery that subdue many women into body shaming and a fear of getting old. Camera in hand, I hope to offer different images here – pictures that celebrate a diversity of bodies as well as a different way of feeling beautiful and sensuous.



Dolorès, 78 years old

I like to take care of my appearance. I have a giving, very human nature; I like to help others, family as well as strangers.

I am a committed and deeply respectful person. I am usually gentle, although I can also play rough.

When I take the time to make myself up and dress attractively, I feel sexy, but as I age I find that tenderness becomes more important.

Grandmother Wolf, 70 years old

Even if I live alone, sexuality is still present in my life. Sexuality is part of life, only it is transformed as the years pass, that is all. Nowadays, I seek more spiritual relationships, more communication, more connection. The relationship must be a way of sharing, it must be meaningful physically, emotionally and sensually. It must be experienced with the heart. I feel beautiful, I am beautiful. I see the light that dwells inside me. More and more, I accept my wrinkles, my curves, and all the signs of aging that shape my body. My face is the witness to my tears and my joys.

By taking part in this photo project, I want to transmit my conviction that life is always ahead of us, and we must make the most of it for as long as possible. We need to accept that things will be different as we experience the various stages of our lives.



Ginette, 72 years old

Some men have said that I was sensuous and that I still am, but it must have been some unconscious attitude on my part. To me, at least, I feel natural. The sexuality of the woman changes as she ages because we are not seeking and feeling the same things in the same manner. There is sensuality in tenderness, gentle touch, caresses and even in the looks. With my spouse, gestures and sweet talk are important, but erectile difficulties restrict the complete sexual act. However, touches may sometimes compensate.

I volunteered to participate in this photo project because I think it is important for mature women to take their place in society. After one turns 65, one can feel she has also retired from life itself, but that's absolutely not true!



Lisa, 70 years old

I see myself as a sensuous woman, sensitive to nature's various perfumes. I like to feel the earth under my feet, I like to hug trees and talk to them, I like to bathe naked in a river, I like the odors of the morning, I like to taste different dishes, I like to feel my body when I run and when I walk, I like the beauty of a flowered window, a colored door, I like to hear the churches' bells, I like to listen to music, I like the champagne's bubbles, I like to caress and be caressed, I like to explore with my hands, I like to cut vegetables and make soups, I like to feel the sun's warmth and the rain's tickle on my skin, I like hugs, all the hugs, I like to dance, I like the movement of bodies, I like to laugh. I like to feel my man's body warmth, I like when our skin touches, I like when he makes me laugh, I like when he comes close to me as he gets in bed, I like when he massages my feet.

This photographic experiment gave me the opportunity to accept myself and to exhibit my splendor and my vulnerability. What a magnificent journey!

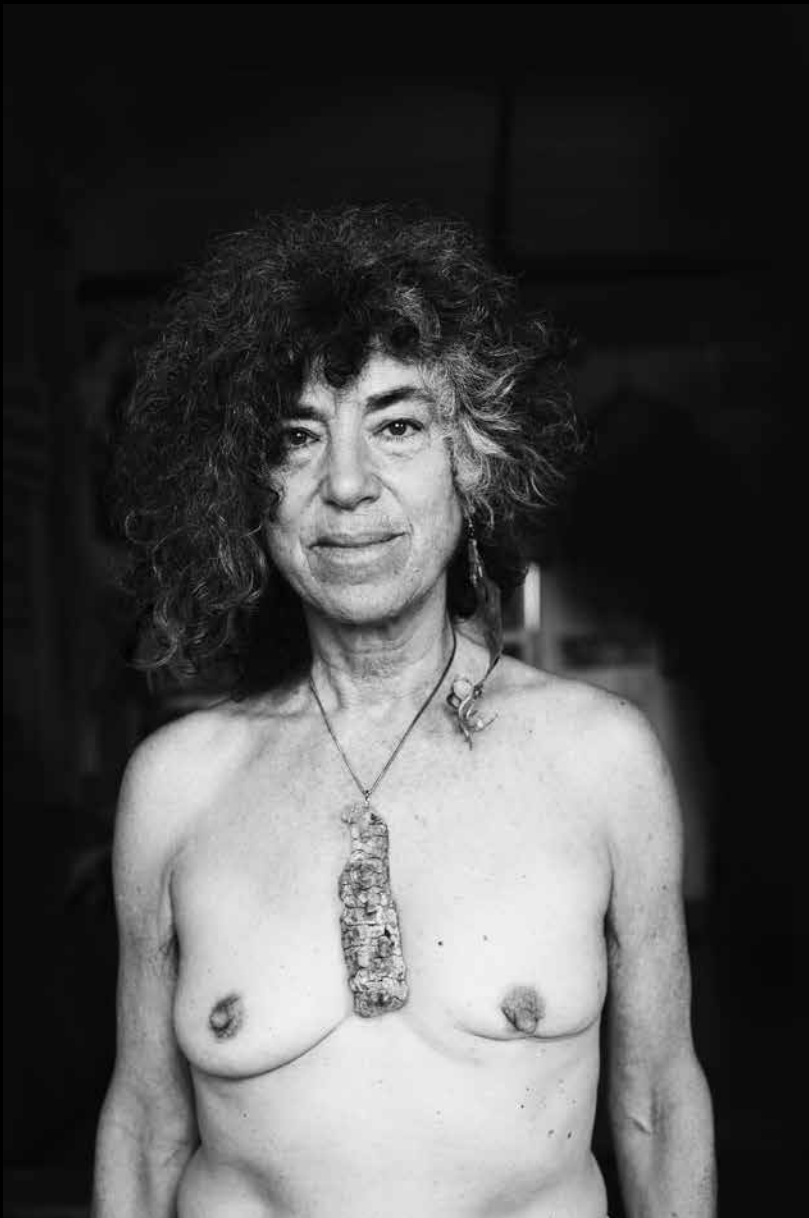


Merutzah, 70 years old

I would say since my breast cancer and a car accident at the same time that I marvel everyday at the miracle that I am alive and thriving. Everything is more vivid and more vibrant.

I am very comfortable in my skin, so in that sense I feel attractive. In regards to my sexuality, what has changed for me is a slower and more languid expression of my sensuality than when I was younger. It feels deeper and because I have been with my partner David (63 years old) monogamously for 24 years, there is a deep trust and comfort with each other's bodies and desires. Making love for me is about my partner making me feel beautiful. I always feel loved... but I regularly need reminders that I am beautiful.

I think people need to update their idea of what a 70-year-old vibrant, fun and loving woman looks like. And that we still are sensual sexual beings. I think we need to embrace our "imperfections" resulting from our aging or our recovering from cancer and even proudly display them... They are our war medallions.



Lyette, 74 years old

I always had a fulfilling sexuality. However, my sexuality has changed since I now live alone: my freedom has become more important. When we age, we must adapt to the changes our body goes through: weight excess, pain in the joints, vaginal dryness, fatigue, decrease of the libido. It is most important to learn to love your body as it is. Generally speaking, I still feel attractive. When I was younger, my smile, my sensuality, and my boldness made me attractive and I think nothing has changed. But it does not have the same importance to me anymore.

I wanted to take part in this project because I wanted to show that older and curvy women also are beautiful and sensual. I was convinced that the list of chubby participants would not be very long so I dared to “strip” and I am proud.



Marie-Berthe, 102 years old

For me, everything that is artistic is beautiful: frames, poems, paintings, flowers. In a person, it's the personality, the face, the smile and the eyes that matter. Personally, I find myself beautiful and, when I am not, I make sure that I am! I like to be well groomed and wear jewelry, dresses and accessories. I have always been stylish; I thus earned myself the nickname "the pompous". I only was with one men in my life; my beloved husband, and even if he died long ago I always reminded faithful to him.





Christine, 88 years old

I am a very sensuous woman. I like caresses, I like to feel that I am somebody. I like to feel that my partner has tenderness for me. I always have been a cuddler, and it certainly has not faded as I got older. Each night I grab Paul (101 years old) in a spoon and I hold him strongly in my arms through the night. Even a fly could not come between us!

Taking part in this project gave me drive to keep going. I am proud to have dared! I feel that I contribute to pass on an important message. I want to encourage the elderly to take their place, to loosen up and not take themselves too seriously, to continue to have fun, to laugh, to kiss and to love.





