



COMFORT

THE BREAST QUILT



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**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

COMFORT

THE BREAST QUILT

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Contents

07 - 08	In numbers
09 - 10	Introduction
11 - 12	Foreword
13 - 15	Teens and the Boob Lady
17 - 18	88 Synonyms
21 - 22	Spring Time
23 - 25	Blessed with Big Boobs?
27 - 28	Breast is Best
29 - 28	Cancer Stories
29 - 33	Poland Syndrome
39 - 41	Midlife Marvels & Wise Women
43 - 162	Breasts A-Z
163 - 164	How the quilt was made
165 - 166	Feedback
167 - 168	Find out more & Contact
169 - 172	With Thanks
173 - 192	Appendix- Case Studies
192 - 193	Index

Embroidery, facing page: Helen Davies



IN NUMBERS

400 fabric squares dyed and overlocked

237 people took part

210 knots tying the quilt together

183 squares make up the Comfort Quilt

183 stories written

30 days of workhops

16 workshop venues

6 days stitching the squares together

5 machine needles broken

4 days quilting



Lois Blackburn

Artist maker. Project lead

Introduction

The project, 'Comfort' the Breast Quilt, is abundant in rich and diverse themes. From puberty, to aging, to sexual harassment, breastfeeding, sexualization, transgender experiences, ill health, operations, body image, acceptance - the list goes on.

'Comfort' was made by 180 women and teens, including trans and non-binary people. It explores our hopes & dreams, embarrassments, pleasure, pain & joy. Workshops were held across the UK with Cancer Support groups, Homeless Day Centres, 3 Schools, a Trans Clinic, Poland's Syndrome support, Women's Groups and Art students. For those who couldn't join a group, I sent postal packs.

A reoccurring theme in workshops was body-image. Sadly, for many people, a negative body-image can be a destructive thing. A recent global study of women led by Viren Swami, professor at Anglia Ruskin University, suggests 70% of women are dissatisfied with their breast size, with women reporting they are less likely to practice breast

self-examination, which has a direct impact on their health.

What ways can we challenge this way of thinking, when the odds seem so stacked against us? Over the last 20 years I have found the art of making to be the perfect vehicle to investigate, ask questions, listen, record, explore difficult taboo or embarrassing subjects in meaningful ways. For Comfort, I invited each participant to fill in an evaluation form and from the responses, 59% said they felt more positive about their breasts after completing the project.

Working with our hands can encourage us to slow down, look at a subject from many angles, and challenge our preconceptions. It can connect us with others and allow us to see ourselves differently. It installs a sense of pride and value and gently challenges us to go out of our comfort zones and create work for exhibitions and publications.

The subjects might have been difficult at times, but creating this quilt was great fun and a celebratory experience. In every session there has been lots of laughter. And let's not

forget pleasure: the pleasure of our breasts and the pleasure of making.

Throughout this catalogue, you will find stories told by the participants in their own words. It's not always easy or the right time to share our story, but when you read or hear someone else's you may feel less alone, less different, and more connected.

Hearing, or reading someone else's story, can give you courage to share your own. And it's not just the big stories that are inspirational and important, it's the everyday.

Some of the stories are in extract form with the whole story in the appendix. Each experience shared whether in stitch or in words is valuable.

I want to thank again every person who shared their stories and artwork for this project. I hope it has helped you. I'm confident it will help others.

Foreword

[Kate Codrington](#)

Menopause expert, mentor, facilitator, writer, artist.

The following is edits of a transcript of the Instagram live discussion 27.11.22

I'm fascinated by breasts because they are signifiers of femininity and gender in our world. In a patriarchal society, this can become a problem, as they can become colonised by other people; by our lovers, by strangers in the street, by children if you breast feed. They're given meaning, we give stories about our breasts. They can become colonised by the medical profession, by doctors, they become sources of danger, of risk to us, depending on our family history. So all of these things mean that we disconnect from our breasts, and they

belong to somebody else, and they are 'done to'. This is a huge issue, because energetically, they're a source of love- if you think of the heart centre, our breasts can generate love outwards, and our breasts can bring love into our heart. We are more than just the pain.

Coming together to share stories, listening to other people's experiences, we start to make connections in our own brains. It's part of climbing out of the patriarchal narrative, of reclaiming who we are.

I think there is something about letting the body speak, or letting your breasts express what they need to express- that might be rage, love, moving through shame, giving or receiving all kinds of things. But while they're cloaked in shame and disassociated, we don't get to express that, and in a way that continues the status quo, where our bodies belong to the other, and we don't get to receive that for ourselves. And these stories (collected in the project) start the process of our healing, that reclaiming, so we get our bodies back.



Teens and the Boob Lady

‘Cat calls, oh my god, they happen everywhere, in school, out of school...’

‘Oh nice tits’, is one we’ve heard a lot. It’s mostly teenage boys, but sometimes adults... We shouldn’t have to put up with it, but we get used to it.’ (aged 15)

‘Someone first shouted something at me when I was 11. (another girl joins in) It happened to me when I was in year 7, I was so embarrassed.’ (aged 15)

Working with teenage girls and non-binary teens at schools, opened up some distressing conversations. I was devastated to find that our young people are still encountering rife sexism, name calling, un-invited touching, and constant assessments of their bodies.

‘I’ve struggled with my body image for years and having small boobs hasn’t helped at all. I feel like to fit in today’s beauty standards I have to have big boobs and a slim belly. Sometimes I feel that insecure that I won’t leave my house or I just feel disgusted by my body. I’m beginning to accept my body and my small boobs but it’s very difficult.’ (aged 17)

Having these conversations at schools gave me a path into talking to my own daughter: a way for her to share her experiences. My daughter asked,

‘Why are you working with the girls? It’s the boys you need to work with, they’re the ones with the problem.’

In workshop sessions there were often lots of giggles. To get past this, I’d approach that embarrassment head on, asking them to share all of the names they’d ever heard for breasts. No word was forbidden, from sweet and innocent, to offensive and sexist. The list itself in turn prompted many conversations, for instance, is the word itself offensive, or the tone or volume at which that the word is used? In some of the adult groups we were lucky enough to have people who spoke another language, so another layer of words were revealed.

Once we got past the embarrassment, the girls talked more openly in the workshops and outside the workshops:

‘The #TeamBoob badges are still being worn by the girls, sparking conversations, making the



impact bigger. The parents' feedback has also been very good. One parent has cancer, the project has brought the child and them closer together. Joy

In many school sessions we had the bonus of working with the school nurse, who could talk about health and wellbeing issues. We witnessed the teens being empowered as their confidence and knowledge increased. The girls even requested a session on how to self-examine breasts.

'Get familiar with your body. Look for changes: the colour and texture. Look in the mirror. Use all your senses, hands, eyes - get to know what's normal.' Anna, School nurse.

It turns out you are never too young to start getting to know your boobs. The hope is that if a young person can talk more openly about their breasts, then if they have concerns it's easier to talk to a parent, nurse or GP. Between and after the school sessions, I became known as 'The Boob Lady'. Teachers fed back that one of the girls, who didn't normally engage, spoke to Ofstead about the project and her involvement in it. Girls were proud of their pieces. They shared photos of

their work from my Instagram page with their parents. Some of the girls went home and encouraged their mums to do breast examinations.

The teacher called it 'aspirational' for those who don't normally get involved, to work with a practicing artist on a project that would be exhibited nationally. It was, 'part of something special.'

The project has a longer legacy. In one of the schools, they are using it as a stimulus for other group PSHA. This includes discussions on breast feeding, body image, or sexual harassment. One school was working with the students to become 'boob ambassadors', to share stories and advice in assemblies.

The evaluations revealed that the teens had an improved sense of their bodies after doing this work. And they created some fabulous boobs!

Lois Blackburn



88 Synonyms

Assets
Babs
Baby Café
Baps (Yorkshire)
Bazoobies
Bazookas
Big Mommy Milkers (Transfem, lgbtq)
Big Naturals (Transfem)
Bigger buns
Bloomers
Boobies
Boobish
Boobs
Bosom
Breast
Bruste (German)
Bubs (German)
Busen (German)
Bust
Cannons
Chebs
Cherries
Cherry Bakewells
Chest
Chesticles
Clevage
Cobs (Nottingham)
Coconuts
Cuddle feeding (Welsh)

Cuddles (Welsh)
Diddis
Digestives
Dug (Shakespeare)
Feminine Charm (Trans)
Fried Eggs
Girls
Hupen (German)
Ittie Bitty Titty Committee
Jedwoods
Jubes
Jugs
Juicy Melons
Knockers
Les Lolos (French)
Mama (Spanish)
Mameh (Turkish/Fari, informal/Sexual)
Mammeries
Mammory Glands
Melons
Meme (Greek)
Milkers (Sicilian)
Mimma (Sicilian)
Miya (Czech)
Moobs (Trans)
Nemme (Italian, just for Breast feeding)
Nigel + Farage
Norks (Derbyshire)
Pecho (Spanish)

Pesan (Farsi old)
Petto (Italian)
Prsa (Czech)
Rack
Sacks
Semo (Italian)
Sineh (Turkish/Fari, Formal)
Small pillows
Stan (Hindi / Sanskerit)
Stethos (Greek)
Tata
Tatty Bojangles
Tatty Bongles
Teta (Spanish)
Tette (Italian, for breast feeding)
The Big Titty Gof GF
The Girls
The Ladies
The Twins
Tibbies
Tits
Titten (German)
Track of Land
Udders
Vizia (Greek)
Vorbau (German)
Wabs
Wangers (Yorkshire)
Zinna (Sicilian)



Spring time- aged 18-24ish

What are the 'breast' stories and experiences of young women (including non-binary people) taking part in the project? In their own words...

'(Being part of this project) has really made me consider my relationship and how I feel about my boobs. I wouldn't say I dislike them that much. I actually think I just dislike how they would look through somebody else's eyes. I have always had judgement/comments past by other people about my body (boobs in particular). Even now I actively avoid wearing low-cut tops, as I don't like comments that sexualise my boobs, which happens every time I wear a top. **I do, however, love my boobs, and sometimes they have made me feel so amazing and powerful**, especially doing my years as a circus performer.'

'When I was a teenager **I thought, when I got to my 20s or 30s, I wouldn't care**, what people thought, but I do.'

'My sister called my boobs funny looking, and it made me so self-conscious. I compared to people online, friends, celebrities, et cetera. **This ruined my body image.'**

'When I was young, **my tiny breasts were source of great embarrassment**. I wanted big bouncy boobs to make a nice curvy shape in my clothes to make me desirable to men. I wore pointless and uncomfortable AA bras for years, just feel more grown-up and womanlier.'

'When I turned 14, I had a sudden growth spurt. Not only did my body become taller and wider, but also more womanly. My breast size tripled in size rapidly in less than six months, from an A cup to a cup D. I always dreamed of having a cleavage before my adolescence, and that dream came true. **This made me feel beautiful and adored** because my figure changed and I felt more adult physically and mentally'

'Last summer, I looked for trendy bikini tops... the majority of stores they sold the triangle, bikini tops. I bought one, tried it on and I hated how it suited my boobs. This made me feel fat,

abnormal and suffer body image. Additionally, the majority of summer outfits were worn by models with small busts.'

'I understand that certain clothes will draw attention, but **it's not acceptable**, there's less tolerance for it.'

"It's not a 'you' problem, it's a 'them' problem."

'I had been in the nightclub in my 20s, doing my make up in the ladies' toilets. A man came into the toilets.

I'm a tall lady and he was very short. He came up to me and said, "you're a man, come on admit it, you're a man." I said "no", and was so shocked and upset, plus what he was doing in the ladies' toilets? He reached to touch my neck to search for an Adam's apple...

He repeated "It's okay you can tell me." My femininity was challenged. **I flashed my boobs at him to prove I wasn't. Why did I do that?** In hindsight it was his insecurities not mine. He wasn't the first to ask this question and years later I had breast augmentation.

My mum cried on me before saying "Why change your body and put yourself through this, you are beautiful as you are." I had a surge of confidence for two years after, but I didn't like male comments I got. I thought I done it for me."

Read the whole of Alison Wanstall-Blake's story here...

'When you go on holiday and go topless, it can be a really nice feeling- everyone was doing it, so it was just normal, I didn't think I would do it, but it was fun.'

'I've never had big boobs, but they're certainly smaller than they were in adolescence and honestly, I wouldn't have it any other way. I guess **I always found bras to be a prison of support** and the beauty of my itty bitties is the blessing of escaping captivity...indefinitely. With a clasp undone, two sisters dance together delicately and tell jokes on my chest all day. To acquiesce to their liberation, was to free a butterfly.'

Blessed with Big Boobs?

One question that kept coming up during the project: Why are larger breasts so tempting and alluring to so many people? There was no definitive answer. Some of the teenagers commented, 'They might be appealing to others, yes, but there are drawbacks for yourself- They can be embarrassing, they get in the way, can be painful, difficult to find the right underwear - and underwear can be expensive. They're over sexualized on Social Media... In porn, the bigger breasts are glorified, huge breasts are normalized.'

In people's own words:

'I remember being young and hearing my mum talk about how much she hated her boobs. I have inherited her large boobs and her hatred of them. I wonder if I'd like them if I was thinner? then they'd be smaller. I see myself as matronly not attractive.'

Lots of people think they have a right to comment on your boobs like you don't know that they are there! Recently colleagues were talking about how they hated big boobs and it felt like a direct attack on me.

They hurt my back, are horrible in the summer, heat and bras are always uncomfortable. Neither of my children would breast feed so it feels like they aren't good for anything!

As I get older, I am trying to embrace my body more and stop the negative self-talk. It would be wonderful to look in the mirror and be neutral on what I see- I can't even imagine what it would be like to like myself. I would never talk about others as I talk about myself.

I'm glad I had boys, so as least I didn't hand this on to them. And that's pretty sad.'

Jessica Finch

'In the past I have been told I am "blessed with big boobs"'. I was always unsure what this meant... My Mum said my boobs came from my Grandma on my Dads side. From what I can tell I don't think she had a blessed life due to the size of her Bosom!

The only explanation I have ever come to is that big breasts are seen as attractive. Is this really a blessing? That someone would view my chest as attractive and work backwards to my personality? What if my personality doesn't live up to the size of my breasts? What if my personality doesn't even matter?

My chest grew quickly, bringing with it stretch marks. I notice them every day. I see the veins that run through them. How can anyone else not notice these obvious flaws? I have always thought that smaller breasts are more attractive. Petite, perky and a lot easier to dress. None of this trying to truss them up in multi-way bras, the thick straps, watching them

try to escape over the top of a wrap around bra, boob tape not even an option.

The other side to gaining large boobs seemingly quickly is receiving attention whether wanted or unwanted. This not only from boys my own age but from older men, any comments not leaving me feeling proud but more, dirty. Making me want to hide rather than have them on display. How do you prepare young girls for this sudden attention they didn't ask for?

I don't know whether my life would have been easier with smaller breasts and we all say we want what we haven't got, so maybe I would have been jealous of girls with bigger boobs, maybe girls were jealous of me! As with anything your experiences shape you, I have learnt to be more assertive, joke about my assets, find it funny and call people out when they look at my chest before my face. I especially enjoy when someone accidentally brushes past them and goes bright red. I cannot say I have never used my breasts to my advantage and why shouldn't I. Another well known phrase "if you've got it flaunt it".

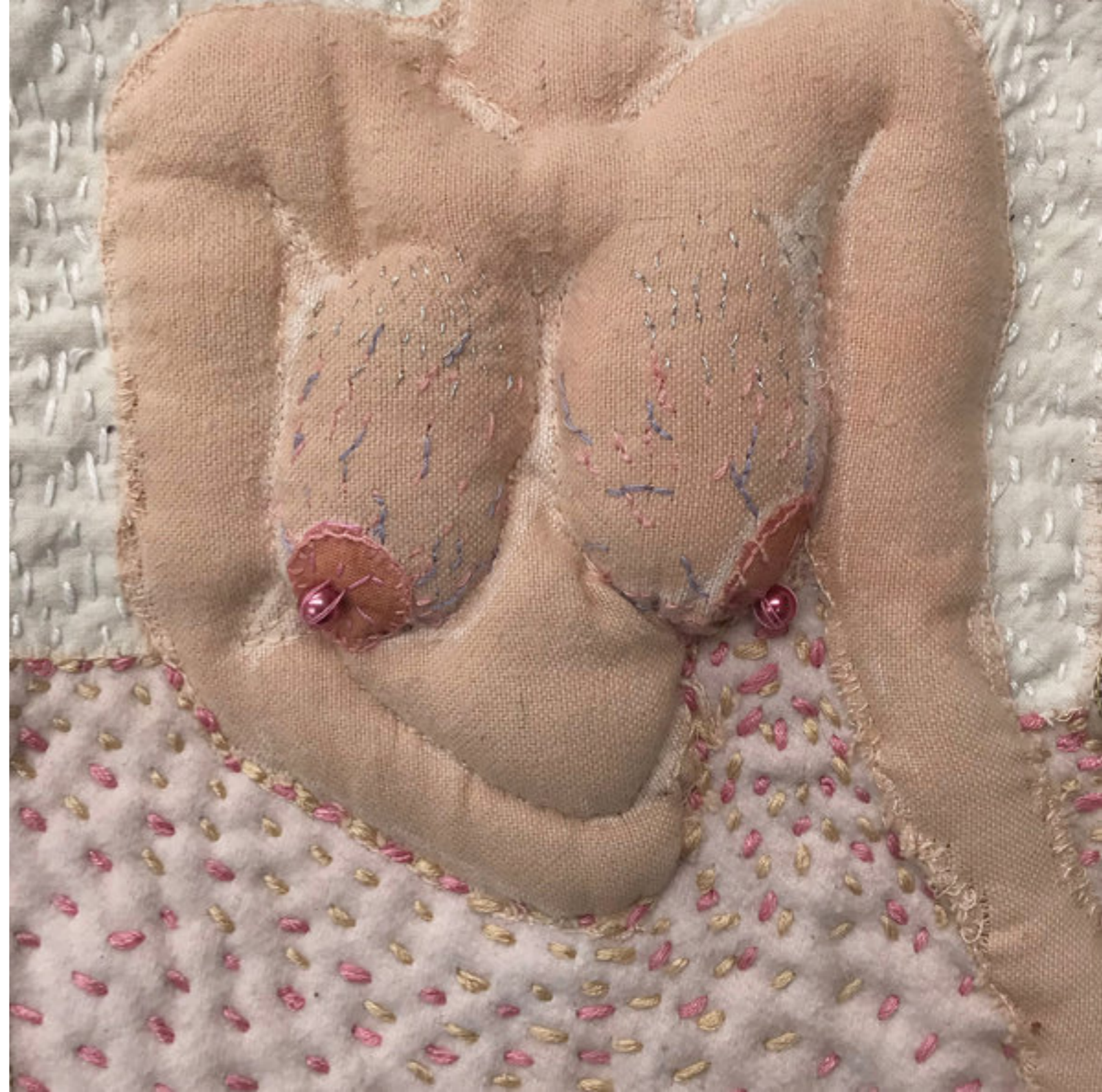
Of course as I get older there is the question of will they sag? If I were to have children would

they grow even bigger and gain more stretch marks? Happily projects like this one exist and hopefully will help irradiate those worries and help us accept our bodies for what they are, vessels that carry us through life and deserve to be loved for everything they give us and not stigmatised for what they “should” look like.

Rachel Cleary

‘I have spent many years trying to accept and like my own, if I’m honest, aged 59, my breasts are too large for my body (I’m very short), and I’d prefer them to be smaller. It gets all sweaty and itchy underneath them if I’m hot, and like Miranda, they clap when I turn over in bed! In photos of myself in a bikini just after puberty, they look perfect. I think it was when I started to train to be a dancer a few years later and was forced to look at myself in a leotard all day that they began to seem too big; the so-called ‘ideal dancers’ body’ was supposed to be small-breasted, at least in the 1980s.’

Tamsin Grainger



Breast is Best

Other than the madness of ‘Feed on Demand’, (I took it literally with my first baby and he seemed permanently attached to the breast) I found breast feeding a very positive experience. However it’s certainly not the same for every woman. Do we choose to breastfeed or not? What if you want to breastfeed and you can’t? What are the joys of breastfeeding? The conveniences? Do we feel judged?

In women’s own words:

‘Before my son was born **I was deeply concerned that my tiny boobs weren’t only disappointing to look at, I feared they weren’t going to function properly either.** I couldn’t believe my minuscule mammaries could possibly contain enough milk making equipment to sustain a growing child.

Despite my worries, my boobs gradually swelled to size teenage me long for. They look fabulous, but more importantly, they made plenty of milk... So much milk... And my ravenous son grew big and strong. As my son

grew, and my boobs shrunk to the pre pregnancy size, I thought of them with the new acceptance and respect. They were a bit small and disappointing, but at least they didn’t give me black eyes or backache when I moved... And they had done me proud when I really need them.’

‘My boob is inspired by my joy of breastfeeding two little boys. The zzz’s represent the blissful sleep that came along with it for us all. I am eternally grateful for being able to feed my children like this, as I know it is isn’t always easy.’

Lucy Rock

‘When I had my daughter in my late 30s, I tried to breastfeed for a couple of weeks. **It was horrendous – painful** and I was so relieved to have to then bottle feed her OMG – peace and calm rained.’

‘When our bodies do something different from the norm, we automatically feel it’s our fault, we have failed in some way, there is a lot of that around breast feeding.’

Kate Codrington

‘I have breast fed three children and having had an abundance of milk with my girls. My son breastfed until he was two. My family said you’ll still be feeding him at the school gates, which made me mad. I enjoyed my body’s ability to feed my children and get exasperated by young women who only think of their boobs are size as a sex object and won’t even contemplate breastfeeding. But that’s their choice.’

‘I breastfed successfully twice: The first time it took 6 weeks of tears and frustration from both my daughter and me before **a wonderful, volunteer breastfeeding supporter helped me** overcome my concern at using a nipple shield. I only had to use it for a few weeks and then I could feed skin-to-skin, so I encourage others to keep going and/or ask for help if they want to make it work – you will get there eventually, happily. It was another story with my second daughter. She somehow crept up my torso immediately after she was born and latched straight on before her cord was even cut! They are 26 and 31 now (my daughters, that is) and I’m mighty proud of them.’

Tasmin Grainger

When my twins were born, I had always imagined that my feeding choice would be to breastfeed. **I thought that instinctively, the babies and I would know what to do,** but it turned out factors such as prematurity, low-birth-weight, and challenges with latching made the feeding journey, less straightforward.

I really struggled with looking after two tiny babies, whilst expressing milk every 3 to 4 hours throughout the day and night. I joined groups and online forums, for those who were on similar journey, and although supportive at times, continually led to feelings of inadequacy due to low milk supply. I will sit eating flapjack (I’d heard that oats were good for milk production), as well as fenugreek tablets that made me smell like a curry whilst crying because I would never produce enough milk.

Around the 12th week of expressing milk, combined with formula feeding, I decided that none of this was worth the amount of upset that I can constantly feel, and I stopped expressing, I had tried my best!

Melissa Oughton

Cancer Stories

‘Ladies fondle your fancies, massage your melons or whatever you call them just give them an inspection. Maybe give your other half free reign for 15 minutes to play with them but don’t leave it until manana.

It was in those 10 minutes...probably more like 10 seconds of matrimonial school morning foreplay when my story began.

“What’s this?”

“What do you mean, what’s this?”

“This lump”

“Where?”

“On here, feel”

I take my hand to the exact same spot on my boob where Alex’s finger has landed as if he is Indiana Jones and is showing me the lost city on a map.

“Here”

“Oh yes”

“It’s a lump. You need to get that checked out”.

Claire Rajah- (Read her full case study in the [Appendix](#))

‘At 44, I received a diagnosis of breast cancer for Christmas. I’d always thought my boobs were so small the lump would have nowhere to hide, but a large cancerous mole mass had managed to grow undetected in my left boob. A full mastectomy later, my left boob is now prosthetic. A faster recovery and less medical intervention and getting on with my life were more important to me now than reconstruction and conventions of beauty.

Now, when I look at my remaining breast, it looks great, pert and healthy. Such a shame I could not see this before.’ Anon

Boobalicious. ‘Sixth of May 2022. I was recalled from my routine mammogram for further tests.

Despite the low risk, I knew something had been found and predicted it would be my left breast. My husband is recovering from having a pacemaker fitted in his left muscle, so it was ironic that I should be facing, losing a left breast. After more scans and biopsies, I received my diagnosis three weeks later. The cancer was 7 cm but neither I or my surgeon

Embroidery, facing page: Nancy Murphy



could feel it. The only option was a mastectomy.

Prior to surgery I was really worried that I would struggle with my new body. My husband was adamant he did not want me to have an implant. These came with their own risks and the surgery would be twice as long. I don't recall much in the two weeks leading up to surgery, but sewing and embroidery were part of helping me emotionally process what was about to happen. Since surgery, I have felt relief and gratitude.

Our minds and bodies are remarkable.

Although I'm yet to return to swimming I'm comfortable with my new look and call my NHS prosthesis "Boobalicious". Sometimes I go flat and see this as an act of resistance against what is deemed as female beauty.'

Annie Salmon

'Age 32. Breast cancer, left side. Mastectomy, reconstruction, chemotherapy.
Age 52, lumpectomy, right side radiotherapy.

Both experiences were a shock, but the outcome is positive, holistic support from staff, superb family, and friends support.

Now – new post, as a breast, specialist nurse, to help empower women, who are coping with breast cancer and the treatment needed. **I had a 3-D nipple tattoo in 2015, 14 years after mastectomy, which made me feel complete.'**

'Mammograms usually start at the age of 50 or before, **I was 53 years old in 2020, I had been chasing a mammogram for 3 years.** I had two Aunties both with breast cancer. I contacted the family history unit, as I wanted to rule out the possibility of having it. Then Covid hit. A few months later the unit did contact me. I had completed a lengthy questionnaire and they considered my risk to be one in 6, and that was the end of that. Eventually in September 2020, after several phone calls chasing, I got my 1st screening appointment.

Following my screening, I was called for further tests, on 20/10/20 I was told I had an area that was suspicious of a breast cancer, and another area that was an area of concern. I was on my own with the nurse, as Covid rules applied. I had prepared myself, telling myself to be strong, you

can do this, that type of thing. I had a few tears when playing the recording back to my husband, and the reality of the situation. Two weeks later it was confirmed I had breast cancer, in my left breast the one with the inverted nipple, I had a benign area and a cancerous area, and in another area, calcium deposits, which could indicate an early sign of breast cancer, I had to have further tests. The cancer was 14mm, grade 1, they said. They could not tell me if I would lose my breast at this stage. Eventually I was given a date for my lumpectomy operation, which was 2.12.20.

Following the operation, I had a large amount of blue dye remaining, in my breast, which they inject to show up the lymph nodes, for removing. I wasn't happy with my breast at first, the scars from the incision and the biopsies, it had been glued back and had a big dent.

I was extremely strong and I returned to work 3 weeks after my operation. My results came back and the cancer was bigger than first thought, 28mm and a grade 2, so they did further tests, more waiting, but I was cancer free! The tests were to determine the course of treatment, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, medication. Again I was extremely lucky, my score came back at 13, (a score of over 25 they recommended chemotherapy). I had a course of radiotherapy and I am on medication for 5 years.

My breast looks better, I even think it has grown a bit more in size, and doesn't look out of place with the other one. The nipple area is better, more like a small hole, than inverted. I think only this last week or so the remaining blue dye has eventually gone. **Having to bear my breast so much for treatment, I don't feel embarrassed any more, my breast tells a story.'**

Cheryl Jones

*When Stephanie Ashton was asked what advice would she like to share, she answered: **'Body image is important, so try to make things better for yourself.** I lost all my eyelashes and eyebrows when I started my treatment, my hair fell out as well. I must admit I loved my hair when it started coming back, it was lovely and short, but it did come back very fine. My eyebrows would not grow back completely as one of them only goes halfway, but I just have them tinted and shaped from time to time. My eyes lashes are very fine as well, just use a long lash mascara...'*

(Read Stephanie's full case study in the [Appendix](#))

Both the cancer support groups I worked with, showcased the power of group and peer support. I visited Breast Friends at [Blythe House Hospice](#), and [KeepingABreast](#), Liverpool, where I met a mix of women, some of whom were at the beginning of treatment, some had had reconstruction surgery, some not, some a lumpectomy. At the end of one of the sessions as we were leaving, one women turned to me and said:

‘We haven’t talked about the positive side of cancer- we’ve met and got to know each other, and wouldn’t have otherwise. Everyone is wonderful. We look forward to it. **They’ve changed my life more than cancer did.**’

Embroidery, facing page: Cheryl Jones



Poland Syndrome, one breasted warriors

In every workshop of this project, I spoke about my experiences of the rare condition Poland Syndrome. I found it very embarrassing at first, but my constant drive was to raise awareness. In those groups I might just have spoken to a mother, daughter, sibling, or friend, of someone with the condition.

Poland Syndrome is a rare limb difference you are born with, affecting both men and women. The body is affected on one side, where muscle, or even bones and organs are absent or underdeveloped. People living with it can go through years of torment, some adults live with debilitating mental health issues due to a lifetime of hiding their bodies.

I have a photo of me aged about 16. A black and white portrait; my face and my naked chest. There is no smile, no pout, instead a penetrating stare directly back at the viewer. Look closely and the photo reveals my lop-sided breast, a result of [Poland Syndrome](#).

Puberty hit me around 10 years old, quickly revealing differences in the way I was growing to the other girls. For me Poland's meant only one breast, the 'easier end' of this rare congenital disease.

Like many other people with Poland Syndrome I had no idea of what it was, or why I had it. In puberty I even wondered if it was my own fault- my nipples had itched as they developed, I worried did I itch them too much? (The nipple on the flat side looked broken up)

My mum knew about my lopsided breasts, and was supportive, it was just the way I was. At Primary School it was a different thing- I was teased, songs were made up about me, I was made to feel other, different, a freak.

My mum managed to find me a cone shaped foam insert for my bra, I went to a secondary school where nobody knew me, and somehow, I managed to disguise myself and my breast. The teasing was for different things now!

Aged 15, I was in a first proper relationship. Like every boyfriend since I don't remember him flinching or reacting oddly when he saw me naked. Boyfriends/partners have shown curiosity but have never been rude. Sadly, I know of some women with the condition who worry about how their partners are going to react when they see them naked.

It's difficult to pin down how the condition has affected me growing up. As a late teen and in my early 20s, I consciously revealed my whole body on a nudist beach in Cornwall, a bit of a F*** you rebellion. But it was a complex relationship with my body, like so many

people, I've never had a good confident sense of body image.

In my late teens, a doctor explained that I could have a breast augmentation operation for the affected breast to even them out. It wasn't until my mid 20s until I decided to find out more. 30 years later, just before Christmas I had my 5th breast operation. Somehow, I didn't take on board when I had my first operation that the implants wouldn't last for ever- I guess when you're in your 20s, ten to fifteen years seems a long time away. Or perhaps I was never told. (I've heard about other women with the condition who weren't)

My first 3 implants were silicon and saline based, when they end their lifespan and rupture the silicon escapes from the chest, and moves around the body, and can be quite uncomfortable. Some people are worried and campaigning about the potential health issues of silicone implants and are having them removed.

Two of my implant operations have resulted in capsular contracture, when tissue capsule forms that is hard and dense, it's painful and

distorts the shape. My most recent operation was my first fat transfer breast augmentation, it's the first natural looking and feeling breast I've had on that side, although, at the moment, much smaller than the other. I'm hoping for a follow up operation later this year- or next.

I've managed to breast feed both my children on the unaffected breast, in fact one of the surgeons explained that I was born with twice the normal milk ducts in that breast, strangely and wonderfully preparing my body for breast feeding.

In all of the encounters with surgeons, I only remember one mentioning that I might have 'slight Poland Syndrome,' and that was a passing comment. Thanks to the [Poland Syndrome charity PIP](#), awareness and support for people with this rare condition is improving. Through the organisation I can now say with confidence that I have Poland Syndrome.

Through PIP, for the first time in my life I met another women with the condition, and share experiences. Her whole chest cavity has been affected, she explained;

'It wasn't the Poland's- it was trying to hide it that was the problem.'

As an artist I often speak about the power of sharing stories, across different ages, backgrounds, strength, sharing experiences with people, feeling less alone. Taking a leap of faith and revealing my own story was not easy, but as one of the driving points behind this whole project, I can say that I am proud I have.

Lois Blackburn



Embroidery, facing page: Lois Blackburn

Midlife Marvels & Wise Women

How do we feel in midlife about our breasts?

Has the way we see ourselves changed? Does the menopause impact our breasts? What advice would you give your younger self?

In women's own words:

'I remember being very self-conscious as a teenager developing breasts and boys being very interested in them. At parties **there was a lot of boob action** and boys interested in bras. It seemed quite funny at the time. Now I'm mid 50s and they're a bit bigger- a bit too big but as there are no other problems, I'm okay with them. Although they can knock things over.'

'A year ago, at the age of 54, **I made the big decision to have breast reduction surgery...** In my forties perimenopause happened. To my horror despite not gaining any weight I went up another 5 cup sizes ending up as 30H. I say 30H but actually I had asymmetry, and one breast was larger than the other, so I think I

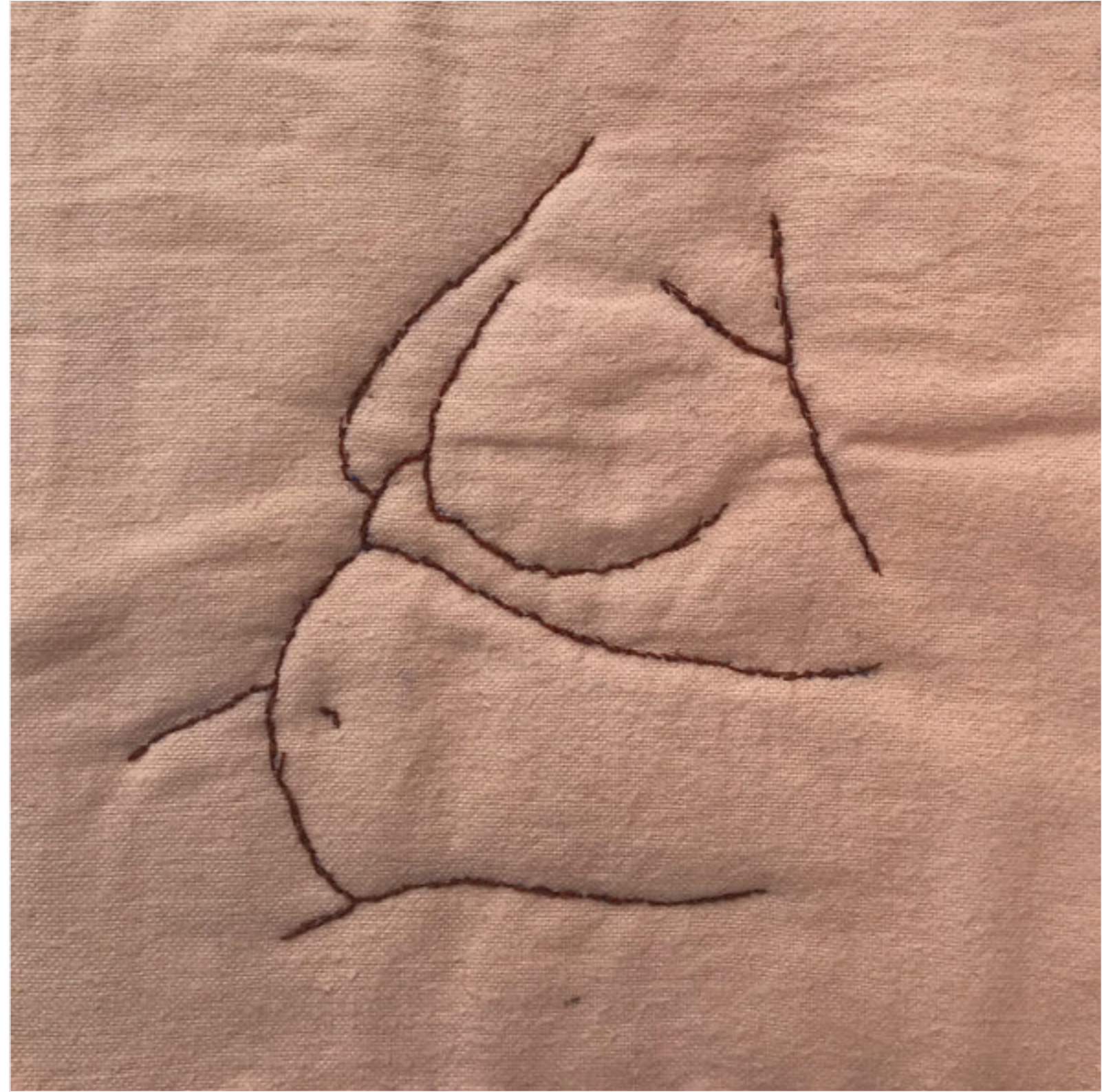
was more like GG and HH. I was fortunate in that I didn't get a lot of pain or spinal damage or skin irritation that can occur with very large breasts. I did however feel very self-conscious and would definitely always be focused on dressing to distract attention from my chest.

What was immediate straight away post surgery was how much deeper I could breathe. I have asthma and my peak flow meter showed an increase of 25% more lung capacity! I live in a hilly place and could walk up hill without coughing and taking breaks. Biggest of all for me is that I can wear what I want. I can actually go braless if I want to.

I honestly feel like I've got the body back that I had in my 20's. One where I actually feel body neutrality again. I'm not self conscious or always worrying about how I look, if I look matronly or too sexual. It's a year on and some days I can't believe I took the leap to do this but just like the other women on the support group I have no regrets and it has only brought me happiness and a sense of peace in my body again.'

Caroline Turner (read her whole case study in the [Appendix](#).)

Embroidery, facing page: Marilyn



‘I always had an ambition to do a streak, but never had the ‘balls’ to see it through...I was reminded the other day of my usual party trick before the days of camera phones with passwords etc. I would ‘steal’ friends cameras, take a picture of my tits & arse and wait impatiently for them to discover the photos, hours, days, or event weeks later.’

Colette Hazelwood.

‘I’ve always **attracted unwanted attention**, men only interested in me for my boobs.’

‘The Me-To movement made me cross- it was just normal to me, what always happened to me.’

‘As I was growing up, I’ve got a lot of comments about my boobs – **my nickname at school was ‘bounce’**. I was embarrassed by them. Now I’m proud of my boobs but their sheer weight has taken its toll on my back. I’d quite like them to shrink in my old age.’

‘As a teen, I was totally unconnected to my body, and quite disgusted by it, I felt like it betrayed me by growing and hurting and

getting lumpy. In my 20s, I occasionally felt sexy, but it was totally dependent on comments and actions of others (men). Now I’m 41 and childless, and as my body settles down, ready to change again, **I feel like I wasted all that time disliking it when I had the chance to do anything.**’

‘I wanted to represent ageing breasts in my work for the Comfort Quilt. I am 60 in a few month's time - it feels like a major stage change - and my breasts are at their heaviest and most saggy! I tried to be honest, though that is hard, photographing myself and staying as true to life as possible. In fact, the result seems a little scary which is interesting and will give me some food for thought. [The embroidered breast it] - resembles some of the elderly breasts I have seen on pictures of old (wise) women from tribes where their breasts are always uncovered. I think I must have been one of them in a former life as I enjoy that feeling (though of course it is taboo here in the UK and so I hardly ever get to).’

Tamsin Granger

Embroidery, facing page: Tamsin Granger



Comfort A to Z



Taking up the slack

'As a teenager, my mother didn't consider my breast large enough for a bra, long after friends had moved on from vests, and my first bra was hand me down with a safety pin to take up the slack.'

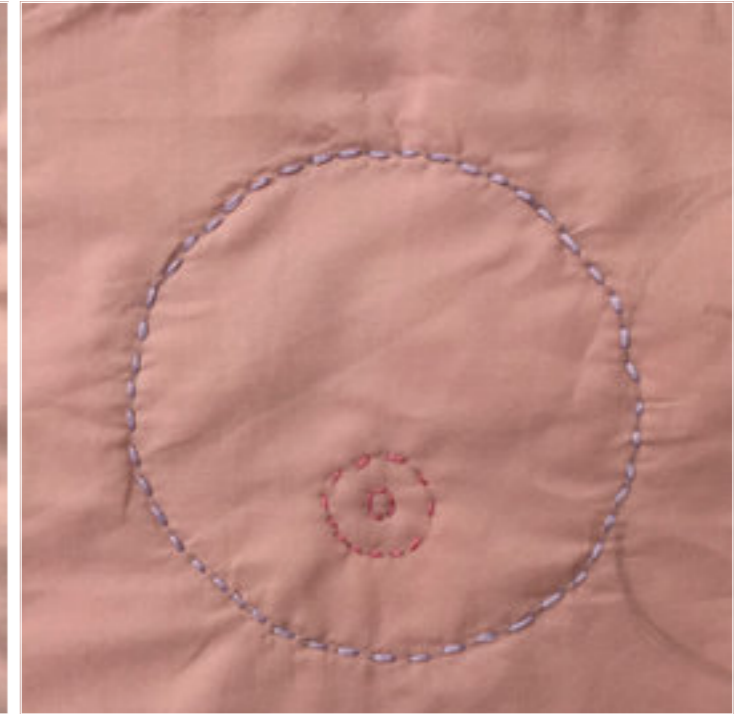
Aged 60+

01 Abbie Douthwaite
Applique, hand stitch, button

02 Abi Sharman
Hand stitch

03 Abigail Tole
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

04 Aishwarya
Hand Stitch, applique





Connect with your breasts

‘Connecting with your breasts can be really simple. To breath into your breasts, start with a breath coming from the belly, and inhale softly, then as your belly and ribcage expands you can develop more sensory awareness of your breasts and notice how they feel. You do that once a day, to remember that they’re yours, and no one knows what you’re up to! And if it interests you, touch your breast with love. A gentle massage of stroking and holding can be a beautiful thing to incorporate into your life.

Your guide is to slow down and do what feels good to reclaim your breasts for yourself and bring them home.’

[Kate Codrington](#)

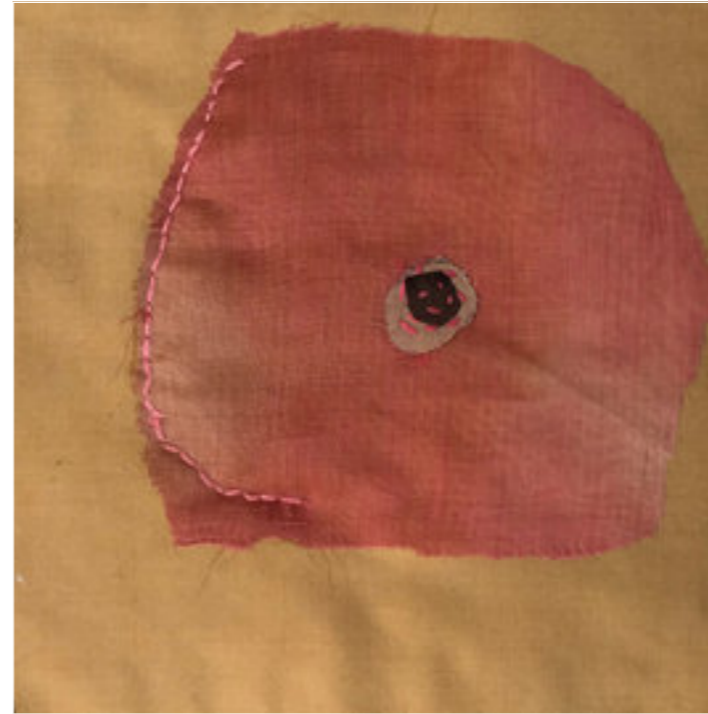
- 05 Alice Bowen
Applique, hand stitch, sequins
- 06 Alice
Applique, machine stitch
- 07 Alison Wanstall-Blake
Applique, hand stitch, sequins, paper, glue
- 08 Amanda
Applique, hand stitch, piercing, print



Just laugh

'I would tell my younger sister to love herself and be confident, no matter what, and if people have an opinion on her body to just laugh and ignore them.'

Aged 15



09 Amanda Yates
Applique, hand stitch

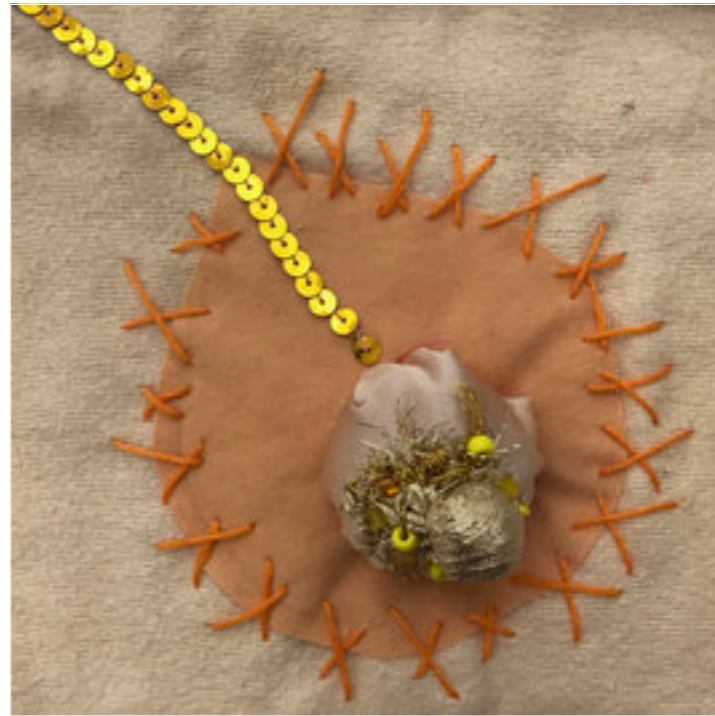
10 Amy MacDonald
Applique, hand stitch, machine stitch, paper,
artificial flowers

11 Andrea
Hand Stitch

12 Andrea
Applique, hand stitch







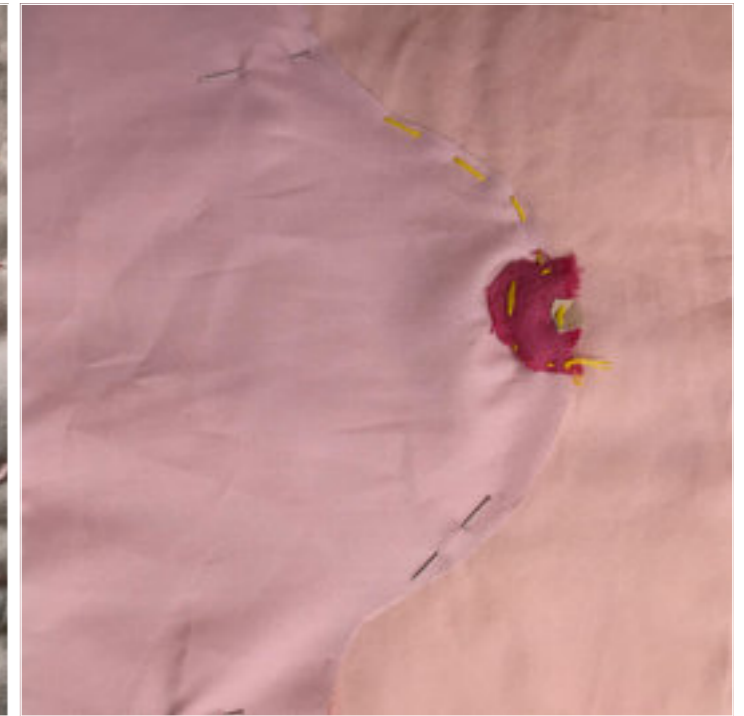
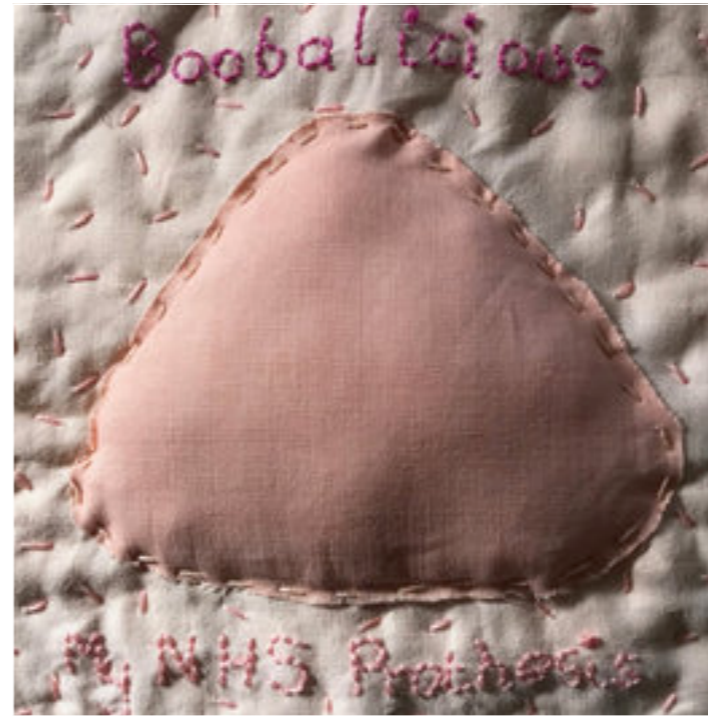
13 Andrea MacDonald
Applique, hand stitch, sequins, beading

14. Angel
Applique, hand stitch

15 Annabel Frost
Applique, hand stitch

16 Anne Bryan
Hand Stitch





You are beautiful

'Love your body the way that it is- you are beautiful'

17 Annie @whiteleaze

Applique, hand stitch

18 Anonymous

Applique, hand stitch

19 Anonymous

Handstitch

20 Anonymous

Applique, hand and machine stitch, lace, ribbon



Naturally

'I included a green vine in my design to represent how people forget they are born with naturally different shaped breasts and not all breasts are the same shape or colour naturally.' (aged 15)



21 Anonymous
Applique, hand & machine stitch, ribbon, lace

22 Anonymous
Applique, hand & machine stitch

23 Anonymous
Applique, hand & machine stitch, lace, bead

24 Anonymous
Applique, hand stitch, ribbon, sequins, knitting

Secret rebellion

'I had my nipple pierced when I was working in a job that made me feel constrained and controlled, so the piercing was secret rebellion.'

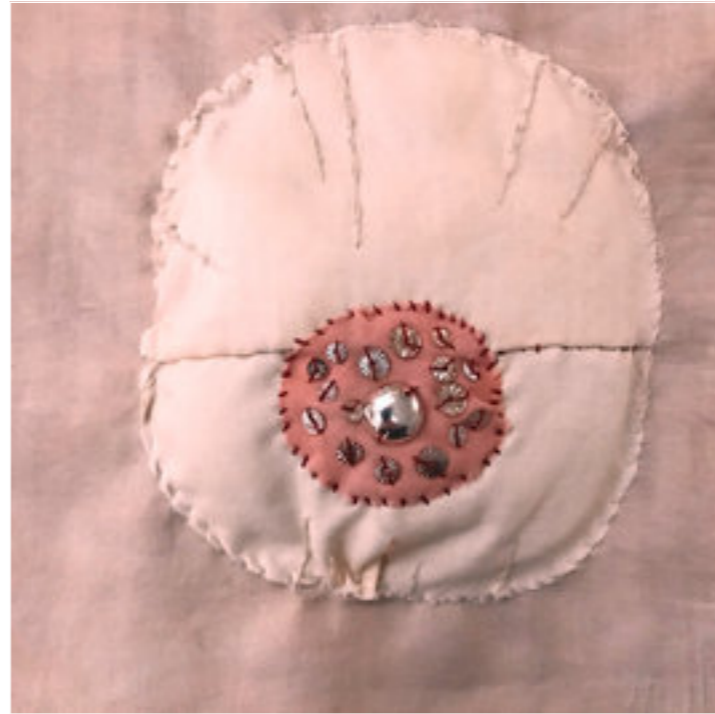
25 Anonymous
Applique, hand stitch

26 Anonymous
Applique, hand stitch, metal ring

27 Anonymous
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

28 Anonymous
Applique, hand stitch, beading





29 Anonymous
Applique, hand stitch, sequins, bead

30 Anonymous
Applique, hand stitch

31 Anushka
Applique, hand stitch, ribbon

32 Baya (aged 13)
Applique, hand stitch, sequins



Is it really our breasts we need to change?

“...Be aware of what you wish for, and get help if you are becoming fixated about them (bodywork therapy or counselling, for example).

Now that I'm older, I know women who have always wanted their breasts to be different and when they got breast cancer and had plastic surgery, they were still unhappy afterwards. I think that suggests that it isn't really our breasts we need to change so much as something deeper.

How is it we really want to be? **Is it really the size or shape of our breasts or is it something more fundamental?** I'd say, join in a project like 'Comfort' and spend some time looking at and thinking about your relationship to your breasts and see what magic happens.'

Tamsin Grainger



33 Bev
Applique, hand stitch

34 Billie
Applique, hand stitch, sequins, piercing

35 Billie
Applique, hand stitch

36 Billie
Applique, hand stitch, piercing, Silicone areola nipple

Everyone's figure is different and unique

Everyone's figure is different and unique, I want to celebrate how diverse everybody's cup size is and the overall body composition.

If any of my relatives do feel abnormal, I would mention that they are not the only female who's who is encountering these feelings.

Aged 17



37 Button Girl
Applique, hand stitch, buttons

38 Caedy McNicholls
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

39 Caedy McNicholls
Applique, hand stitch, button, ribbon

40 Caroline Turner
Applique, hand stitch

Love yourself

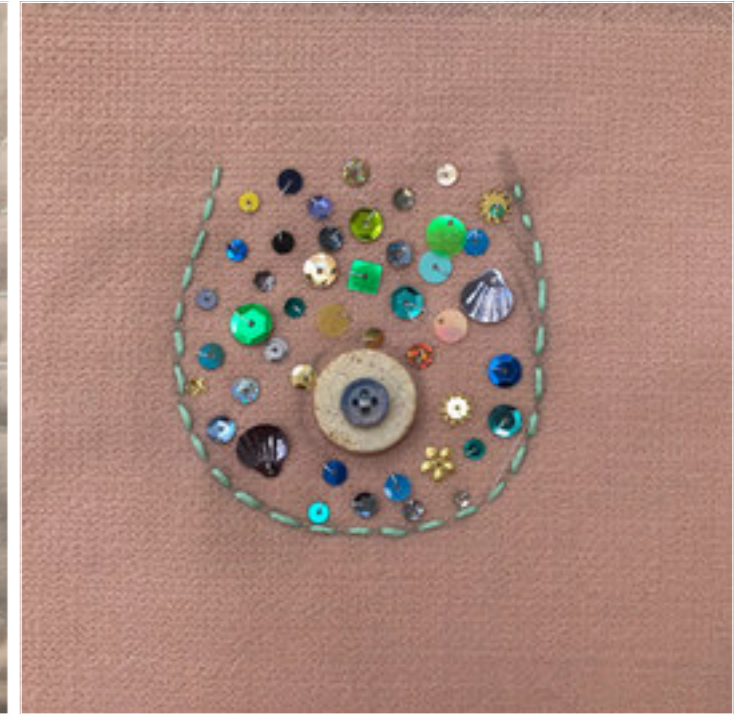
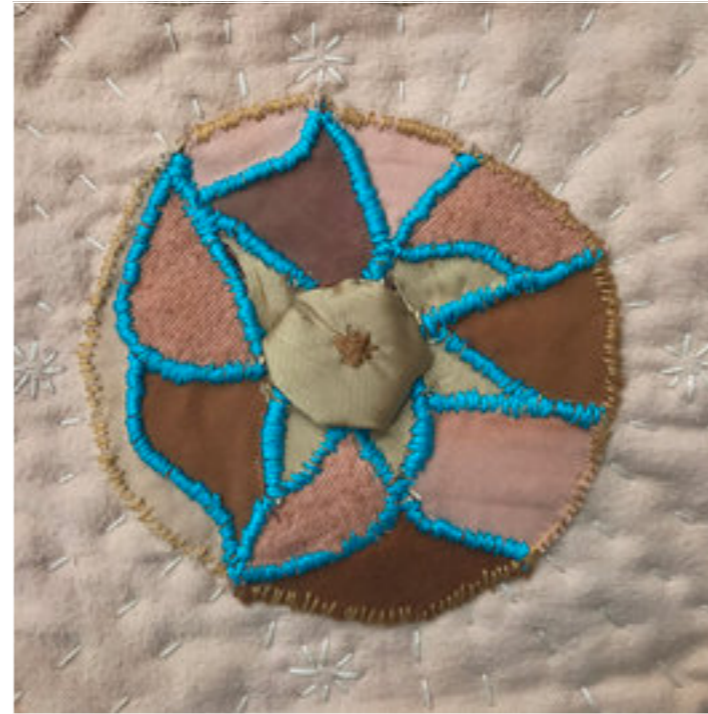
'Don't listen to other people's opinions. They are their opinions. Love yourself and your body.'

41 Caroline Turner
Applique, hand stitch

42 Cat
Hand stitch, beads

43 Cate
Hand stitch

44 Catherine Kirk
Applique, hand stitch



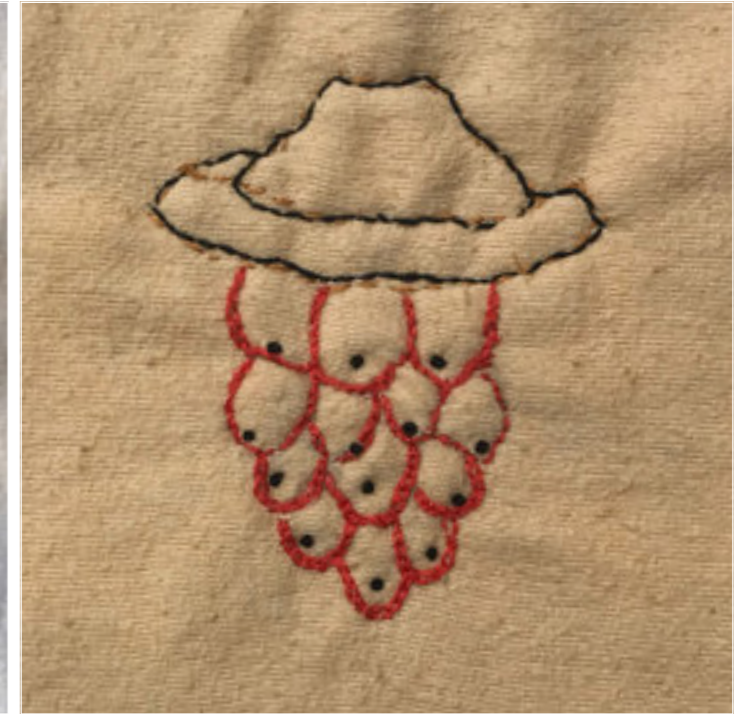
My best breast

I had a statue of Diana of Ephesus, Goddess of Fertility, Greek mythology... Find the rest of the story.

Catherine

I made one breast with a blue feather and flower, to represent the blue dye, my left breast, the other my right breast, my best breast, my celebratory breast

Cheryl Jones

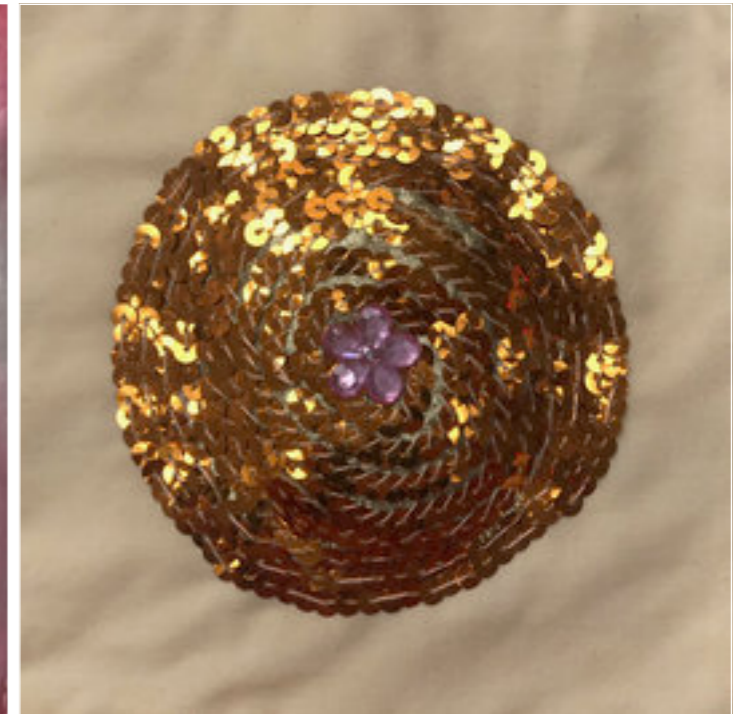


45 Catherine M
Applique, hand stitch

46 Catherine
Hand stitch

47 Cheryl Jones
Applique, hand stitch, feather, bead

48 Cheryl Jones
Applique, hand stitch, sequins, bead



Work hard on resisting comparisons

When I think about my adolescence and young adulthood, I can see now I can now see I made fashion choices to minimise my femininity... To stay safe? On the streets of London perhaps. I would say, work hard on resisting comparisons and love your shape as you are.

Annie Salmon

49 Chloe May

Hand stitch

50 Clare

Applique, hand stitch

51 Clare

Applique, hand stitch

52 Clare Rajah

Applique, hand stitch, bottle tops



53 A Silver Nipple Ring

'I'm a Contemporary Jewellery Designer maker, so textiles is usually out of my comfort zone.

With this in mind I decided to play to my strengths and make a silver nipple ring. Not the pierced ones we're all familiar with, but a literal silver nipple ring - a ring that looks like a nipple.

The ring is mounted into my 'breast'. It's removable so it can be worn and played with by the viewer. It's attached to a long chain so it can be pulled through, worn and pushed back into place onto the breast.

The breast is surrounded by Barb Wire, this isn't intended as a comment on territory, protection or boundaries - it's simply my signature range of silver jewellery and perhaps what I'm best known for.'

[Colette Hazelwood](#)



53 Colette Hazelwood
Hand stitch, silver nipple ring, chain

54 Connie (aged 15)
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

55 Cynthia
Applique, hand stitch

56 Cynthia
Applique, hand stitch



Not tears of joy

(the sequins) 'Represents my feelings of coldness and emotions, not tears of joy.'

Debbie O'Connor



57 Daisy
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

58 Davi Anastasiou
Applique, hand stitch

59 Debbie O'Connor
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

60 Demi Swainston
Applique, hand stitch, machine stitch





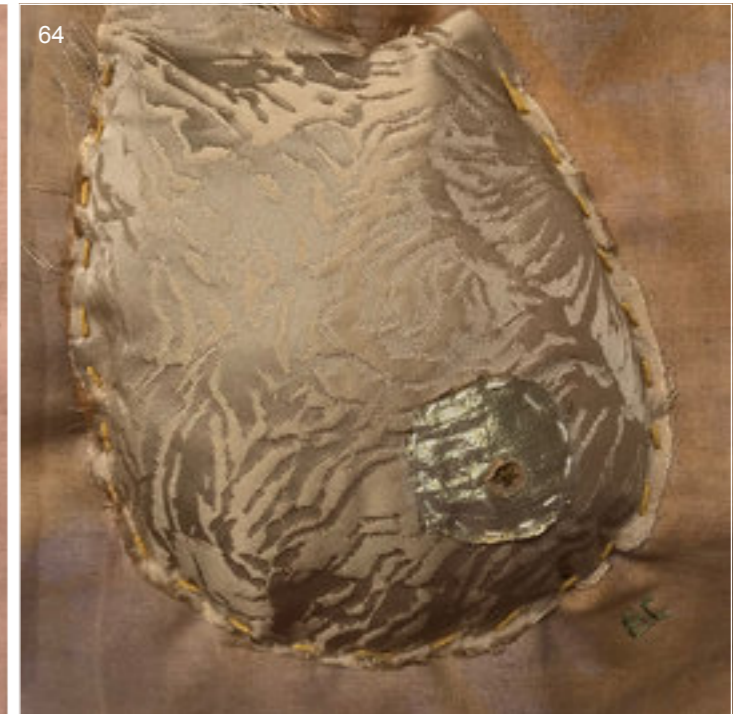
61 Dinya
Hand stitch, bead



62 Eleanor Jones
Applique, hand stitch



63 Eli
Applique, hand stitch, button



64 Elia Clarke
Applique, hand stitch





65 Eliza
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

66 Ella May (aged 15)
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

67 Emily
Applique, hand stitch

68 Emily Devine
Applique, hand stitch, artificial flower, beads



My first bra

'My first bra was brought by my Grandma. A padded bra 'up to here!', I said, 'I can't wear that, I'll go to school tomorrow looking like I've grown them overnight!'

69 Esme

Applique, hand stitch, bead

70 Esme Speakman (aged 12)

Applique, hand stitch

71 EW (aged 15)

Applique, hand stitch

72 Farfar

Applique, hand stitch



'I've tried a stick on bra, it just fell off.'

'If you feel uncomfortable in a bra- don't wear one at all.'

73 Fran
Applique, hand stitch, fake jewels, feathers

74 Fran
Applique, hand stitch, beads, sequins

75 Gem Hale
Applique, hand stitch, bead

76 Gemma
Applique, hand stitch





Totally liberating

'Bras are uncomfortable and I stopped wearing underwire ones ages ago – I couldn't see the point and read they are bad for you, which they certainly feel.'

During Covid, I stopped wearing one when I'm at home (a lot) and it still comes off as often as possible. Totally liberating.'

Tasmin Grainger



77 Georgia
Applique, hand stitch

78 Georgina Holly
Applique, hand stitch, sequins, beads

79 Giada Gentile
Applique, hand stitch

80 H.E
Applique, hand stitch, buttons







81 Hannah Leach
Applique, hand stitch

82 Heather Skowood
Applique, hand stitch

83 Helen Davies
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

84 Helene D
Applique, hand stitch



84

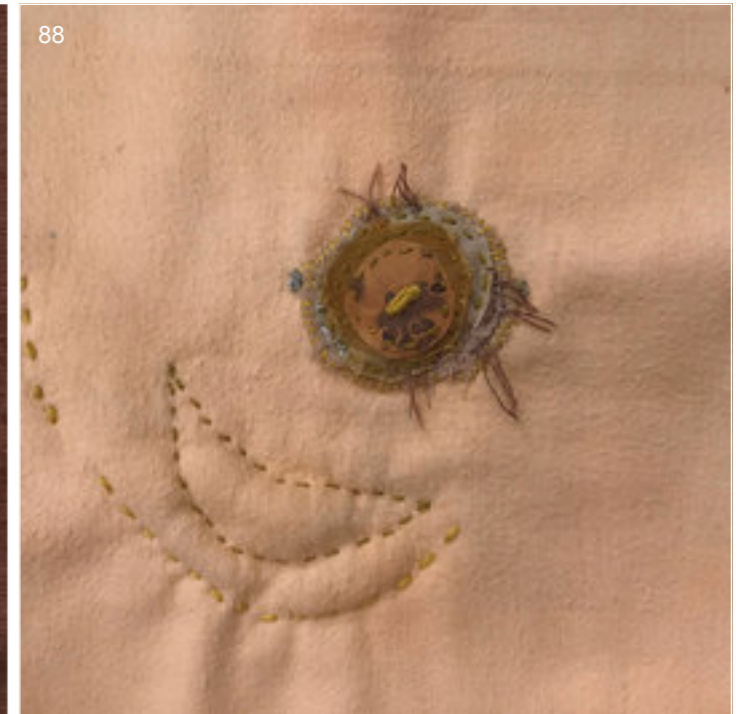


85 Holly Adlem
Applique, hand stitch

86 Anon
Applique, hand stitch, beading

87 Isabel
Applique, hand stitch

88 Issac
Applique, hand stitch







89 J.B
Applique, hand stitch, bead

90 J.P
Applique, hand stitch, beads

91 Jane O'Byrne
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

92 Jean R
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

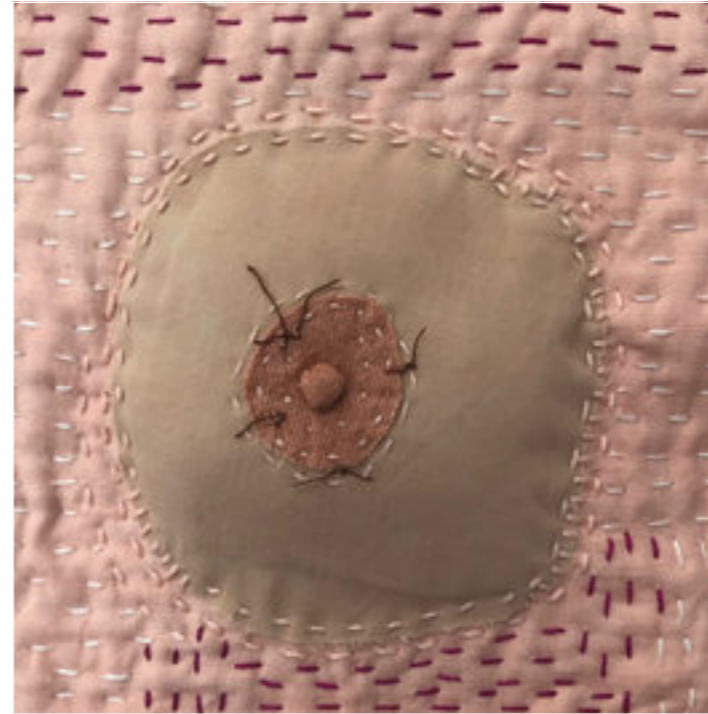


96 'Half wool, yet fully woman'

'The woolly boob in my quilt square was the first one brilliant friend, knitted for me during my breast cancer treatment. I regularly wear the other wool prosthetics she made.

When I squeeze one into my bra, I remember the good people, I'm lucky enough to have in my life.

The black creeping cancer cell and breast cancer awareness weapons acknowledge my journey to asymmetry, and acceptance, half wool, yet fully woman.'



93 Jenny Adlem
Applique, hand stitch

94 Jessica CT
Applique, hand stitch, beadwork

95 Joy
Applique, hand stitch, beadwork

96 JR
Applique, hand stitch, knitting, ribbon



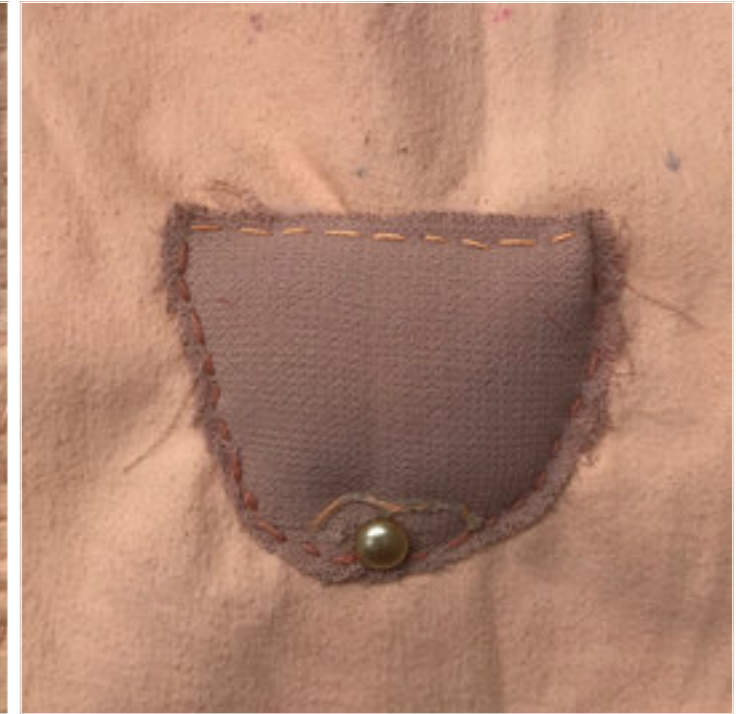
99. Breast Friends

‘Our piece of work reflects [Blythe House Breast Friends Group](#), and what the group means to those that attend. The knitted breast itself is by a team of volunteers, Breast Buddies, who design and knit for women who have had breast surgery following a diagnosis of cancer. The hands around the breast, reflect the group – caring, supportive, friendship, advice, and a listening ear.’

Karen and Louise.



97 Julia Triston
Applique, hand stitch



98 K.L.
Applique, hand stitch, bead



99 Karen and Louise
Applique, hand stitch, knitting, buttons



100 Karunaradha
Applique, hand stitch



101 Katherine Parrish
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

102 Katherine Parrish
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

103 Kelly Collinge
Applique, hand stitch

104 Keris
Applique, hand stitch



Love your body

'Don't compare to models or social media, they're not like you and that's okay, they're mainly fake. Love with your body for what it can do for you.'

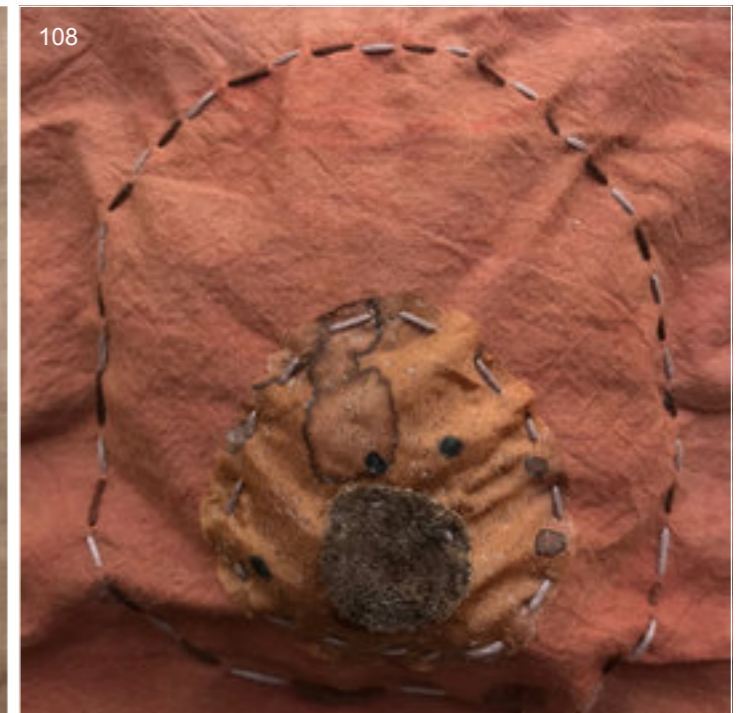
aged 19

105 Kerry Wagstaffe
Applique, hand stitch

106 Kerry Wagstaffe
Applique, hand stitch

107 Kim Adlem
Applique, hand stitch

108 Kirsten
Applique, hand stitch





109 Kirstie Harris
Applique, hand stitch, beads

110 Kristen
Applique, hand stitch

111 L.M.W
Applique, hand stitch, lace

112 Lani
Applique, hand stitch, beads



Advice to my younger self

'My advice to my younger self and other over awkward girls is, your body can do so much. You might be strong or fast. You might be able to grow and feed a baby. You might climb mountains, or make art or help people. What shape you are, and what men think about that, it's completely incidental, and please try to be able to put that secondly, behind the other amazing things, your body and brain can do.'

113 Laura Bradshaw

Applique, hand stitch

114 Laura McEwan

Applique, hand stitch, beads

115 Lauren McDougall

Applique, hand stitch

116 Lesley M

Applique, hand stitch







Work at being in peace

It can sometimes feel overwhelming as a parent to know how we can support our young people. (Lois) 'I'm interested in your thoughts about what we tell our younger people, they're facing so much pressure...'

'I've a teenage girl to, and the only thing I can do, (as obviously she doesn't listen to me) but what she does do is watch what I do, and what she's learning from is my relationship with my body- so really all I can do against the almighty tsunami of information from TikTok, is work at being at peace with my body, and that is a work in progress.'

[Kate Codrington](#)

117 Liane Clarkson
Applique, hand stitch

118 Lily (aged 15)
Applique, hand stitch

119 L.W.W (aged 15)
Applique, hand stitch

120 Linda
Applique, hand stitch





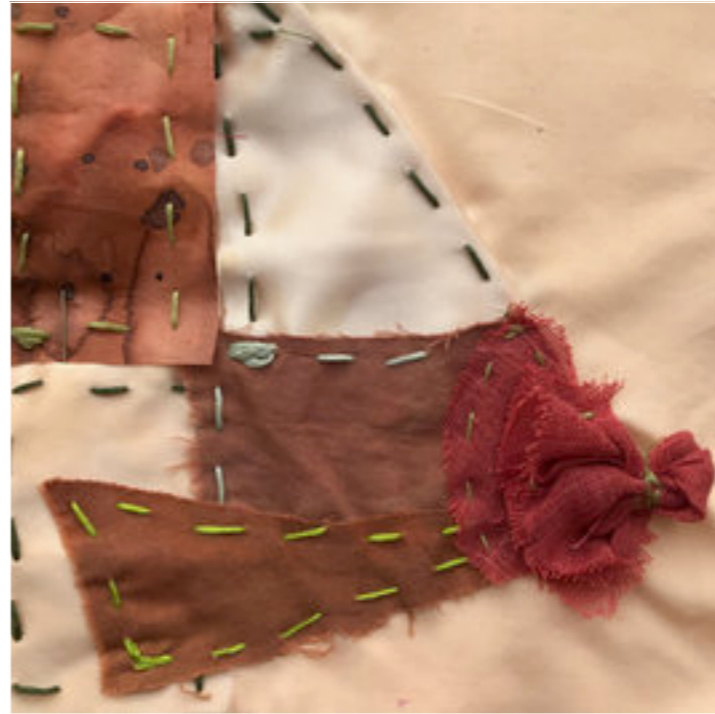
121 Linda H
 Applique, hand stitch, machine stitch

122 Lisa Lomas
 Sadly, I recieved this piece to late to be added to the quilt

123 Lisa Lomas
 Sadly, I recieved this piece to late to be added to the quilt

124 Liz
 Applique, hand stitch





125 Lois Bennett
Applique, hand stitch

126 Lois Blackburn
Applique, hand stitch

127 Lois Blackburn
Applique, hand & machine stitch, batik on silk

128 Lois Blackburn
Applique, hand & machine stitch, batik on silk



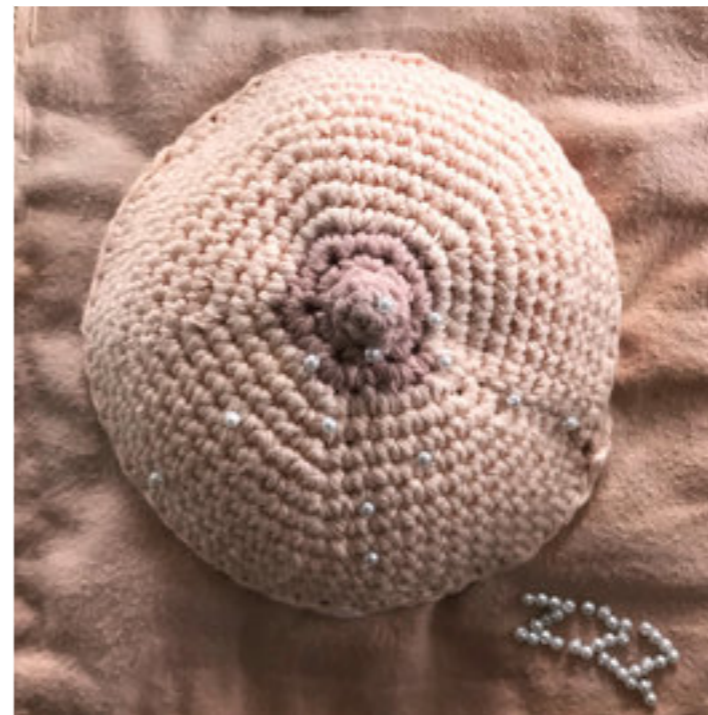
129 Strawberry Birthmark

...It was intensely pink, vivid, and distinct. I was bashful about my birthmark, when I was young – I just wanted to fit in and be the same as my friends [...] even small things can have a big impact on how you feel about yourself.

As a teenager, I was even more self-conscious about it, because by this point, everything was about boys, love, crushes, snogging, and blimey, maybe even relationships. [...] I worried that my birth mark look like a love bite – I couldn't decide if this was a good or a bad thing. Maybe it will give the impression I was doing things I shouldn't be doing.

Sign of experience could be embarrassing (I had very judgemental grandparents and mother, and the whole teenage love thing was intensely mine and private).

Read the whole of Lou's case study in the [Appendix](#).



129 Lou
Applique, hand stitch, button

130 Lucy Melling
Applique, hand stitch, lace, beads

131 Lucy Rock
Applique, hand stitch, crochet, beads

132 Lyla Stokes (aged 11)
Applique, hand stitch



My right boob? Well, that's a different story

'I've had three left boobs, so far. My first left boob came with puberty. It had a good shape and fitted comfortably into a C cup. I didn't think much about it too much.

My second left boob came with motherhood. Blooming, functional and resplendent. Lined with silver stretch marks, up to a G and didn't feel like mine anymore. It overwhelmed me, hurting my shoulders and didn't fit into my clothes. But it made me proud as I comforted, fed and protected my daughter.

My third left boob came with cancer. Grade 3, Hormone Positive 16mm, Ductal, Carcinoma, removed and treated quickly and efficiently by amazing NHS. It's wonky, slightly square in shape, discoloured and puckering from radiotherapy with a fine scar underneath that looks like a smile.' Mari



133 Lyn Shinie
Applique, hand stitch, ribbon

134 M.T
Applique, hand stitch, beading

135 Mari
Applique, hand stitch

136 Maria
Applique, hand stitch



You know where the door is

'I'm flat chested, but I'm alright with the way I am. If anyone has a problem then they know where the door is!'

137 Marylyn
Applique, hand stitch

138 Marylyn
Applique, hand stitch

139 Maxine Kennedy
Applique, hand stitch

140 Maxine Kennedy
Applique, hand stitch, sequins





142. Liquid Gold

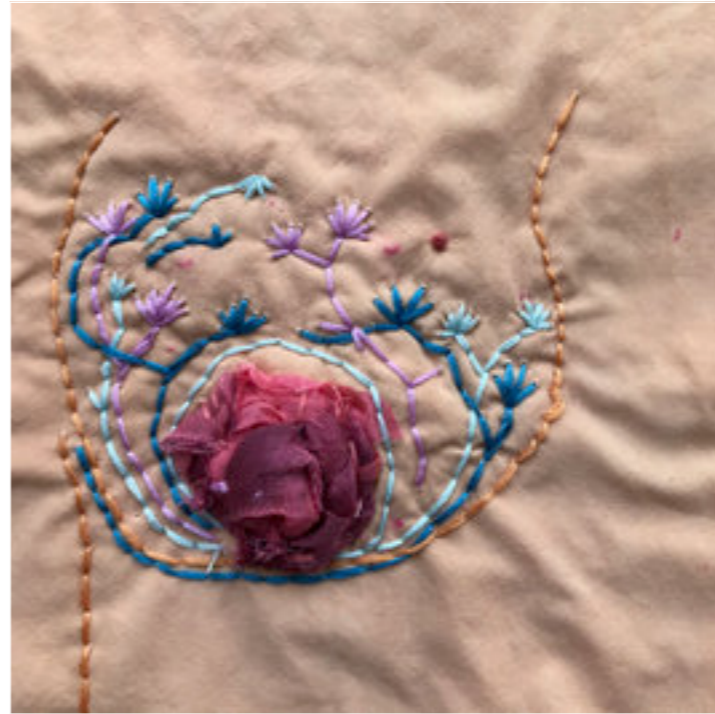
'My piece of work is based on my feeding journey, the nurses at the hospital always talked about Colostrum being 'liquid gold', so I wanted to include that in the piece, as well as the drops of milk, being similar in shape to tear drops.'

141 Mazie Bradbury-Price
Applique, hand & machine stitch

142 Melissa Oughton
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

143 Michael J.F
Applique, hand stitch, lace

144 Michele
Applique, hand stitch



145 Millie Pink
Applique, hand stitch



146 Mills Rowe
Applique, hand stitch



147 Milly Devine
Applique, hand stitch



148 Mimi Lunn
Applique, hand stitch

Sports bra's all the way

'Get a bra that's the right size, and comfy- Sports bra's all the way.'

149 Miss Tree (aged 15)
Applique, hand stitch

150 Mrs Meir
Applique, hand & machine stitch

151 Mrs Q
Applique, hand & machine stitch

152 Mx. Gaius Mortimer Elial Cullen
Applique, hand stitch





Be kind to yourself

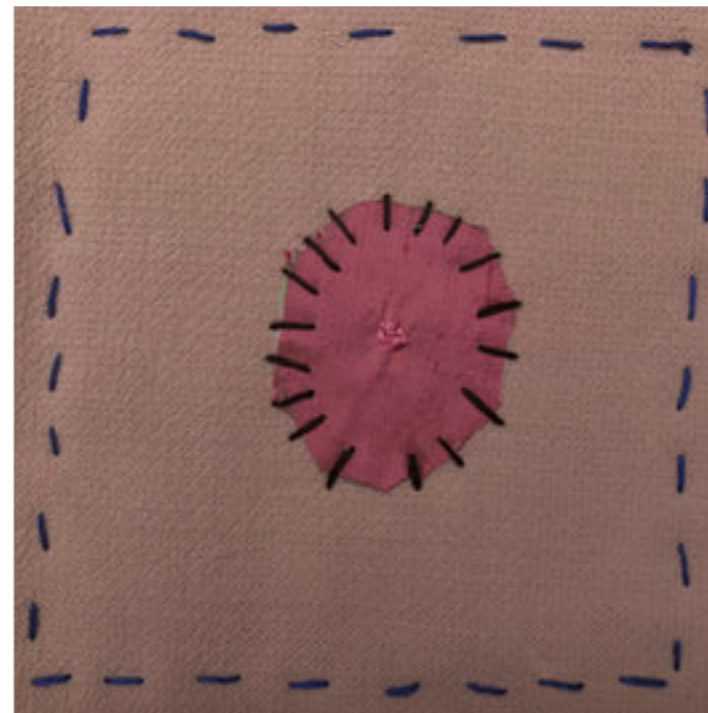
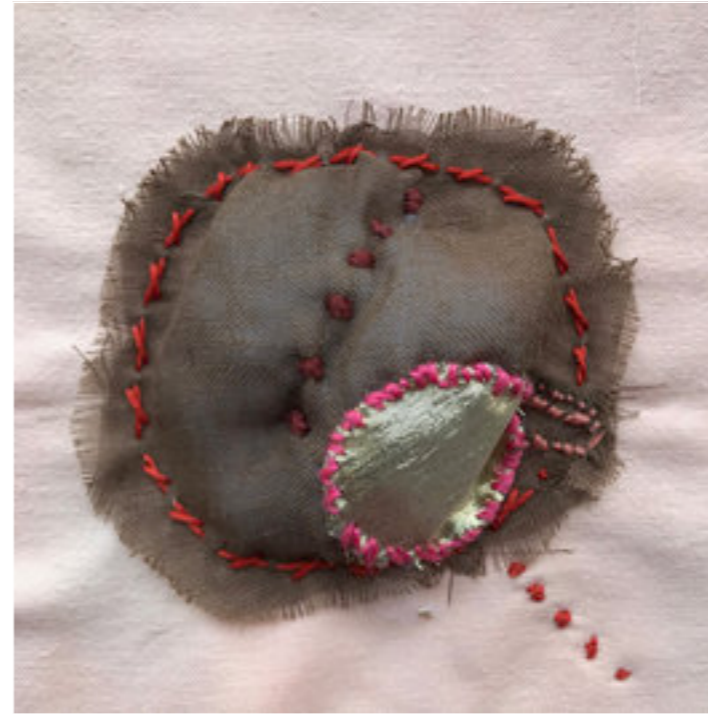
'Be yourself, be open to choices, stay positive, stay active, be kind to yourself and enjoy spending time with family and friends.'

153 Nancy Murphy
Applique, hand stitch

154 Nasra Mohamed
Applique, hand stitch

155 Nat Thorne
Applique, hand stitch

156 Natallie Kelshall
Applique, hand stitch, knitting





158 Simply Breasts

Small, they grow.
They hurt, they show –
boys see, unwanted touch,
Leave me and them alone.
They grow and feed milk,
they hurt. They satisfy
you and I.
They shrink, they sag,
then the genetic tests, lag...
I hurt, then, eventually, I know
I am negative!
What relief.
A lump, what now?
Relief, so brief...

Nina Low



157 Nerissa Cargil Thompson

Applique, hand stitch

158 Nina Low

Applique, hand stitch

159 Phoebe-Jane

Applique, hand stitch, beadwork

160 Rachel Haines

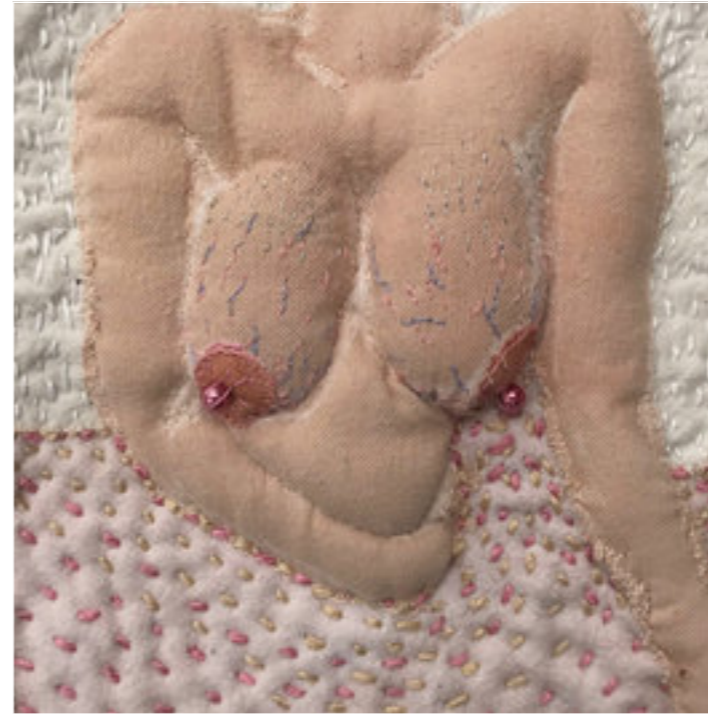
Applique, hand stitch, beadwork, sequins



Barbie Boob

'When I first had surgery, my breast had no nipple, so I called it my Barbie Boob!'

Ruth



161 Rachel Cleary
Applique, hand stitch, beads

162 Rachel O'Riordan
Applique, hand stitch

163 Ruth
Applique, hand stitch

164 Sam
Applique, hand stitch, button







165 Sam Fillingham ([PIP-UK](#))

Applique, hand stitch

166 Sandra Raw

Applique, hand stitch, sequins

167 Sarah Watts

Applique, hand stitch

168 Shelia Haldane

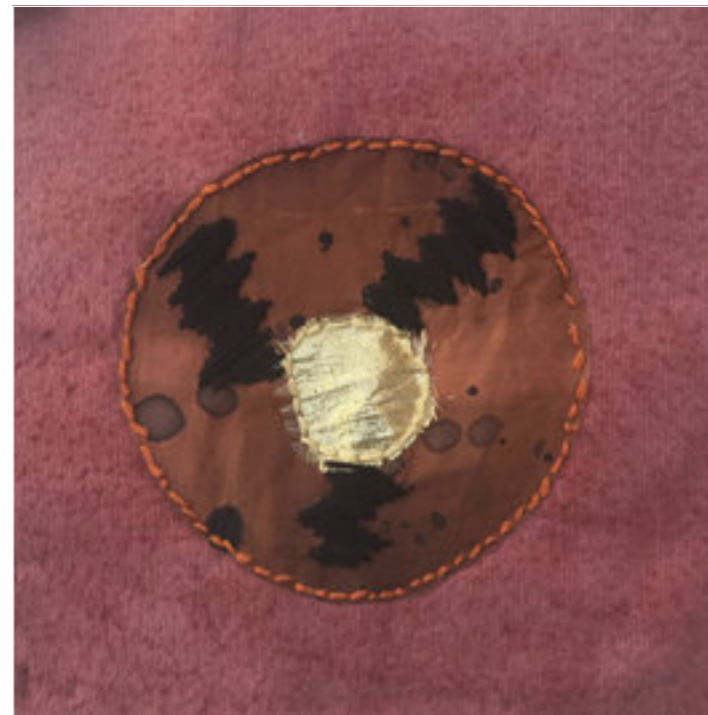
Applique, hand stitch, machine stitch



Black dots

The black dots around the breast, represent the pain I still have. The flower is where the lumpectome was.

Stehanie Ashton (read her full case study in the [Appendix](#))

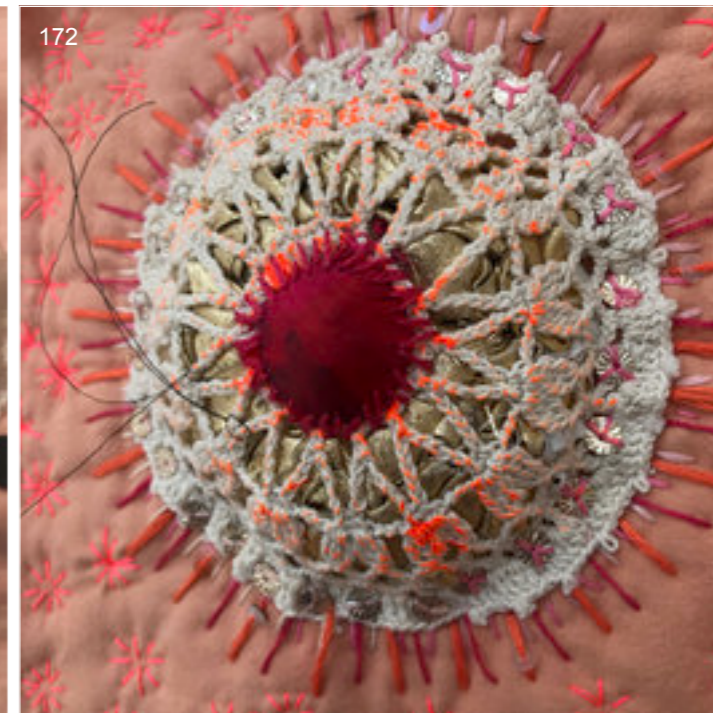
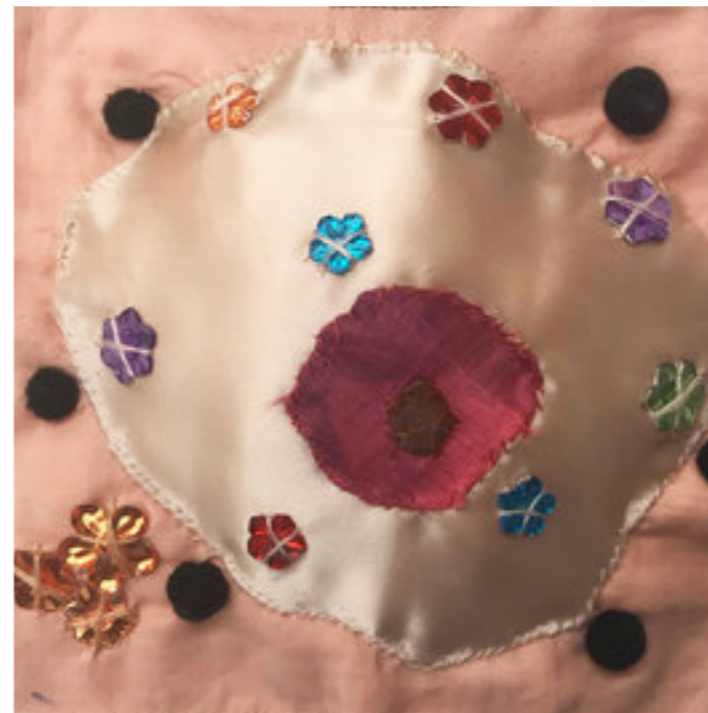


169 Sophia Williamson (aged 15)
Applique, hand stitch

170 Star (aged 15)
Applique, hand stitch, beads

171 Stephanie Ashton
Applique, hand stitch, beads

172 Sue Green
Applique, hand stitch, horse hair, sequins



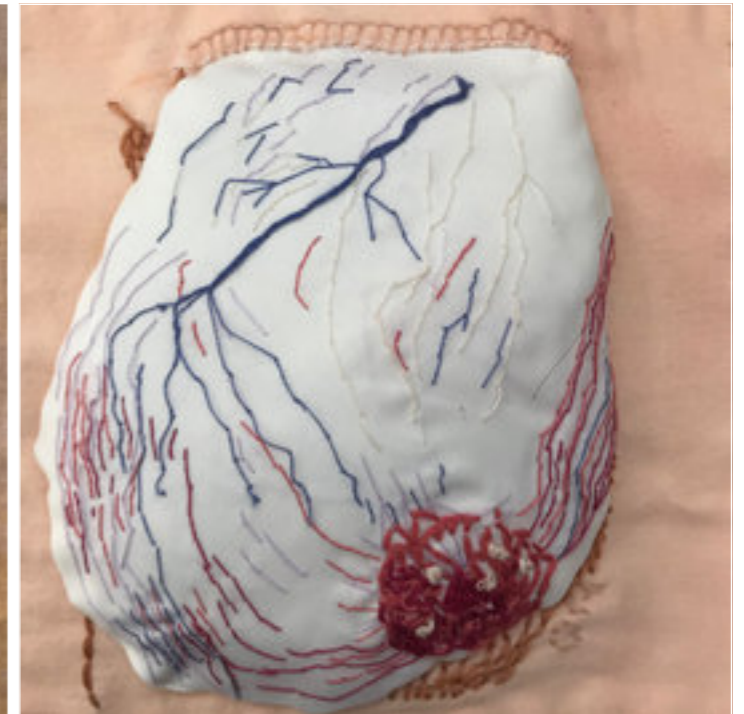


173 Susan Davies
Applique, hand & machine stitch, knitting,
bead

174 Susan Davies
Applique, hand & machine stitch, knitting,
bead

175 Tamara
Applique, hand stitch

176 [Tamsin Grainger](#)
Applique, hand stitch



Check your boobs

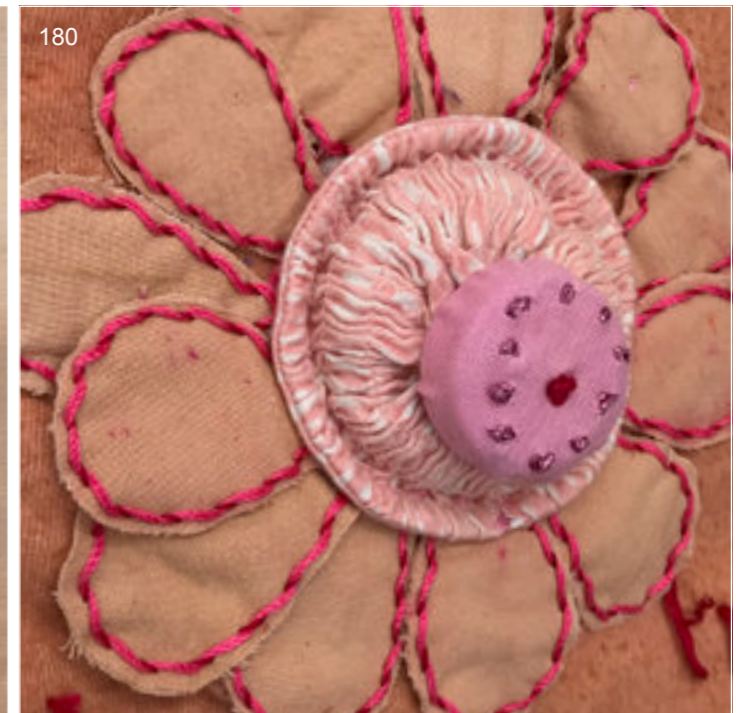
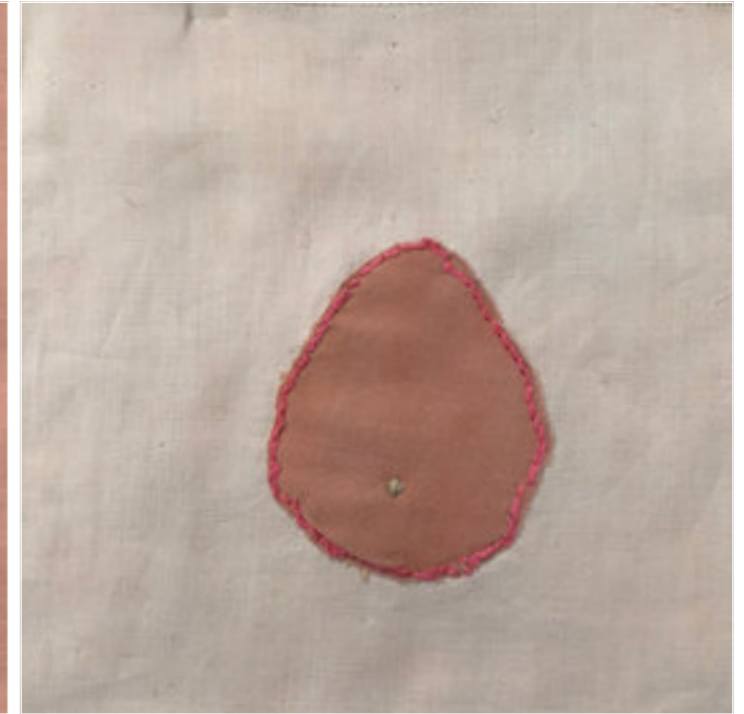
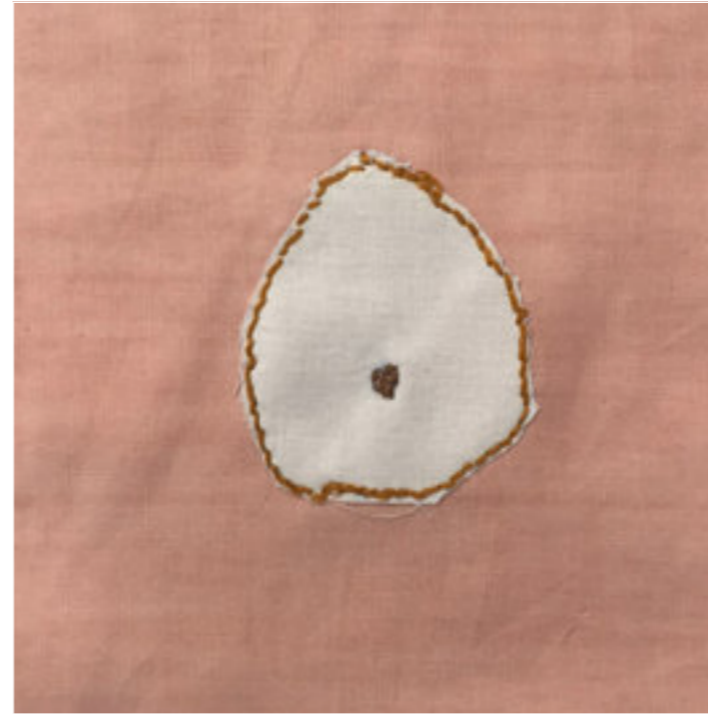
'You need to check your boobs for lumps, even if they are tiny. **You don't need massive knockers to feed a child.**'

177 Teresa
Applique, hand stitch

178 Teresa
Applique, hand stitch

179 Tia Billington
Applique, hand stitch, sequins

180 Tracy Pimlott
Applique, hand stitch, bottle top



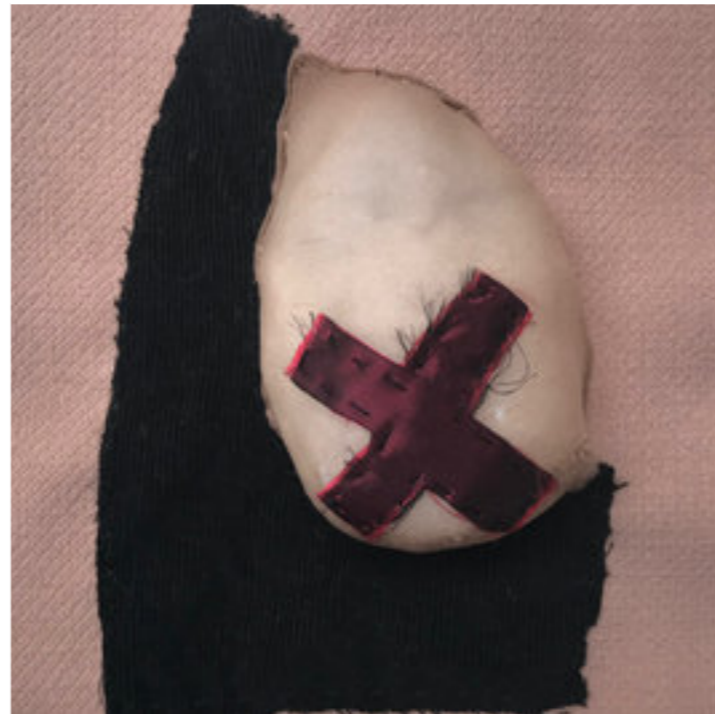




181 Valerie Thompson
Applique, hand stitch

182 Vera Batolotti
Applique, hand stitch

183 Victoria Evans
Applique, hand stitch



How the quilt was made

All my projects start and end with conversations.

The Comfort project evolved very naturally as a follow up to The Menopause Quilt and from thinking about my own experiences. These included, the embarrassment of Poland's Syndrome, the experience of multiple operations, and the joy of breastfeeding. From the initial idea, I had tentative conversations with friends which re-enforced my idea for a project. Everyone has a story to tell about their breasts.

The next stage was finding the partners: charities and groups that could host workshops. My goal was to find ways to work with a diverse group of teens, women, trans and non-binary people - revealing a wide range of experiences of our chests. I was successful in my funding proposal to Arts Council England and gained match funding through my first Crowdfunding campaign.

I worked with 16 different groups, and many individuals through postal packs. Everyone taking part created their own embroidered breast for the quilt. I provided the theme, the materials, showed examples, and stimulated discussion.

There have been challenges along the way, not just with the subject matter, but in the physical making of the art. Many participants described themselves as 'not creative,' or people who can't sew. I love finding ways to overcome these challenges and find it very rewarding to see people who are lacking in confidence taking their first tentative steps in creativity.

As often is the case with embarrassing subject matters, once it's out in the open, and you've got past the initial awkwardness, I found how much people seemed to want to talk about their experiences and were happy to create a boob in embroidery.

I spent many, many days, moving the embroidered squares around on my design board, looking for the 'right' composition, blunting many scissors, breaking countless needles and blistered my fingers whilst sewing the squares together. I didn't help myself by

using such a wide range of base materials and wadding thickness. All my projects seem to involve steep learning curves.

The exhibitions have started. I know there are gaps in the country where it's not being toured to, for which I apologise. Perhaps next year... My hope is that when the work leaves my studio, that the exhibitions and this catalogue will provoke further conversations, discussion, and questions. There are many subjects that I only just touched upon; themes that I would like to have had more examples of such as cosmetic surgery, and the pleasure of our breasts.

Creating artwork for Comfort has allowed us to slow down, to reflect on difficult subjects, ask questions, absorb ideas, and challenge preconceptions. Already the young people I worked with at the High Schools are taking on the challenge of education, and awareness raising about our breasts. If you have taken part in this project, or simply been part of its audience, I hope that it might just make it a little easier to open up conversations with a relative or friend.



Feedback

Over the years I have seen countless occasions where creating art can support people's mental health. Going into the project Comfort, I was apprehensive about the subject matter. How would people connect to it and deal with the embarrassment? Would the project have a positive or negative impact on our body image?

I created an evaluation document that participants could complete at the end of a workshop session or in a home pack. **Out of 67 responses, 40 people said that taking part in the project, made them feel more positive about their breast image, that's 59%.** Nobody said taking part had a negative impact. 14 said there was no change, 11 said no change.

I invited participants to write a line or two about the project. The following are a snapshot of participant's feedback. In their own words:

'I've loved being involved. It been a real kickstart for me to engage with creativity again so thank you so much. I've not done anything for 10 years, the same amount of time that my chronic illnesses crept in. I completely lost confidence to get started again but this project has given me some. I've even started an online painting course last week!' Caroline Turner

'I thought the project was a fantastic opportunity to communicate your feelings to other women, which made me feel less about being an outcast and more included into a community.' Anon aged 14-17

It made me stop to think about them, and I realized I feel so comfortable in myself now.'

'I don't usually come to art/craft groups, but I thoroughly enjoyed it- I normally feel I can't do anything, I haven't the confidence- I think it was you Lois, proper down to earth. I'll definitely come back.' Linda

'I looked you up and found your work to be very inspiring. There's a depth to your art which goes far beyond its aesthetic magnificence. So I hope you never stop doing

what you do, for your sparkling love on your earth like glitter.' Abbie.

'It's an amazing thing to offer to young people as it can ease insecurity and normalise our bodies.' Anon. Aged 14.

'The project helps people show their feelings towards the subject without using words. Anon' aged 14-17

'I think it is a great way to unite people who share both the struggles and I guess successes of having breasts.' Anon aged 18-24

'This is a beautiful project. I am grateful to be a part of it.' Anon, aged 14-17

'A fantastic project, thoroughly enjoyed being taken out of my comfort zone with sewing. A great talking point.'

'It was so relaxing and enjoyable and such a sense of achievement at the end with our squares. I feel really proud to be part of your project.'

'A powerful and inclusive project that explores such a vast array of experiences.' (Trans support group)

'This project is a wonderful idea and very empowering.' (trans support group)

'I think it was an incredible experience. A new creative activity. It was my first time holding a needle, putting thread into needle.'

'I feel very happy and content and empowered.'

'Great! I feel like a child again, and empowered and thoughtful.'

'Many thanks. It was inspirational. Loved the collaboration and seeing other women's creativity.'

Find Out More

Instagram Live Conversation with
[Kate Codrington](#)

kate codrington



menoPause Podcast conversation with
[Kylie Patchett](#)



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A GREAT BIG THANK YOU TO:

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[All Words, All Actions, All Weathers](#), Conference, Derbyshire

[Back on Track](#), Manchester

[Blythe House Hospice](#), Derbyshire

[Booth Centre](#), for people affected by homelessness, Manchester

[Glasgow Women's Library](#)

[Keepingabreast](#), Liverpool

[Lime Art](#), Manchester

[Macmillian Cancer](#), Craft Group, Wythenshawe

[New Mills Women's Group](#), Derbyshire

[PIP-UK](#) Poland Syndrome Support Group

[Strode College](#)

[The Infirmary Museum](#), Worcester

Tibshelf Community School, Derbyshire

Trans Support Group, Nottingham

Tupton Hall School, Chesterfield

Wiltstrophe School, Long Eaton



Exhibition venues

[All Words. All Actions. All Weathers.](#) Conference, Derbyshire 25th November 2022

[Festival of Quilts.](#) Birmingham, 3rd August 2023 to 6th August 2023

[Blythe House Hospice.](#) Derbyshire, 6th September 2023

[The Infirmary Museum.](#) Worcester, 22nd September to December 2023

[Glasgow Women's Library.](#) 11th Jan 2024 to 9th March 2024

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Helena Reynolds & Ann Wright [Arts Derbyshire](#)

Kate Codrington, [Mentor, facilitator, writer, artist](#)

Peter, Bella and Joe Inman, thanks as ever for your love, support, advice and encouragement.

And finally Arts Council England and all the marvellous people who contributed embroidered boobs and stories for the project, it wouldn't have happened without you!

Appendix

Case Studies

Please find enclosed the entries from our South London contingent. We had a lovely evening sewing, chatting - and possibly drinking - together: five mothers ^{Ages 49-55} and one daughter (one mum sewing separately). +24

Some of our breast stories are sewn into our Squares, but collectively we talked about:

- size - embracing having small breasts when younger, in spite of larger breasts being considered (at the time) more desirable. And they are also more practical!
- change - eventually coming to love our breasts when younger, only to have them ravaged by time (and children!)
- friends - two who were unable to make that evening who have just come out the other side of chemo + mastectomies. Thankful to still have them now lives
- texture - not smooth globes, but lumpy, bumpy things with veins, pimples, dimples and nipples.
- difference / similarity - although all breasts are completely different, why do we all think ~~our~~ our own are wrong or ugly? (rhetorical question!)

Alison Wanstall-Blake

Case Study

I had been in the nightclub in my 20s, doing my make up in the ladies toilets. The night was going so well, my friend had a Fimo Jewellery store, there were 30 of my friends there, but it took a downward turn. A man came into the toilets.

I'm a tall lady and he was very short. He came up to me and said, "you're a man, come on admit it, you're a man." I said "no", and was so shocked and upset, plus what he was doing in the ladies toilets? He reached to touch my neck to search for an Adam's apple, to find more.

He repeated "It's okay you can tell me." My femininity was challenged. I flashed my boobs at him to prove I wasn't. Why did I do that?!? In hindsight it was his insecurities not mine. He wasn't the first to ask this question and years later I had breast augmentation.

My mum cried on me before saying "Why change your body and put yourself through this, you are beautiful as you are." I had a surge of confidence for two years after, but I didn't like male comments I got. I thought I done it for me.

The implants were P.I.P (Poly Implant Prothese), supposedly faulty/risky. I had gone

with the best and expensive surgery group. They refused to do a scan/ultrasound. I needed peace of mind to know they were okay, and years of sleepless nights frightened if they would erupt.

The NHS did sort me a scan and I was told I had a bubble, but I'll be okay. They would've taken them out, but not replace as I had gone private. I didn't do this as I didn't want sagging skin.

Many years later on maternity leave, I paid for new ones. Cost me a lot, but gave me peace of mind. Now older, I wish I just had them out and a lift.

I've become much more assertive now. I now know how sad he was.

Caroline Turner

Case Study

A year ago at the age of 54, I made the big decision to have breast reduction surgery. I say big decision as I paid privately so it took a large chunk of money, and a big decision as it is also a major operation and it took me as someone living with chronic illness around 7 weeks to recover.

When I was a teen and in my twenties I really didn't think about my breasts or have an opinion on them. They were just there, not something that demanded my focus. Then I ended up taking anti-depressants for 9 months and gaining weight. As soon as I stopped the medication I lost weight everywhere except my chest and I ended up several cup sizes bigger than before. I've always been slim and the increase in this area left me with a very hourglass figure. I would always be careful with how I dressed making sure I wasn't drawing attention to my chest area and trying to find ways to look smaller.

Then my forties and perimenopause happened. To my horror despite not gaining any weight I went up another 5 cup sizes ending up as 30H. I say 30H but actually I had asymmetry and one breast was larger than the other so I think I was more like GG and HH. I was fortunate in that I didn't get a lot of pain or spinal damage or skin irritation that can occur

with very large breasts. I did however feel very self-conscious and would definitely always be focused on dressing to distract attention from my chest.

During this time a friend at work who suffered with back pain had a reduction on the NHS and was so happy with the results. Whilst I was happy for her I never considered this for myself. I felt strongly that I should work on being accepting of my body as it was.

So what made me change my mind? I started thinking about it during lockdown. Lockdown was very long for me as I was on the government's shielding list as I have several chronic illnesses. I also got diagnosed with an autoimmune disease during lockdown.

Lockdown was extremely isolating. I kept busy as I was working from home throughout but it was hard not to be able to see friends and family for such a long time. Then, my mum died. It was very sudden with her feeling unwell, having a fall and then at hospital having a scan and finding out she had cancer, a lot of it. She was dead 10 days later. These experiences made me re-evaluate my life and think about what I wanted from the life I had left. I'm never going to get better from my illnesses. They are conditions I live with and

manage every day through lots of self-care. I am focused on trying to make myself feel more comfortable in a body that is constantly attacking me. That led me to thinking about surgery now that I had inherited some money.

I found a support group on Facebook for women seeking breast reductions in the UK. It was filled with women of all ages just like me who felt uncomfortable with how large their breasts were who were either thinking about surgery or who had just had surgery. The group was amazing with all these women supporting each other. One message was clear, even the women who had some complications with healing said they had no regrets and that it was life changing. In fact breast reduction surgery carries one of the highest satisfaction rates of any cosmetic procedure.

After lurking for a bit I started to ask questions and got a realistic idea of what the operation and the recovery would entail and also to research surgeons in my local area. I booked a consultation and then went ahead with the operation 3 months later.

What was immediate straight away post surgery was how much deeper I could breathe. I have asthma and my peak flow

meter showed an increase of 25% more lung capacity! I live in a hilly place and could walk up hill without coughing and taking breaks.

Biggest of all for me is that I can wear what I want. I can actually go braless if I want to. I've always disliked summer partly because I struggled with how to dress but this summer felt so different because I could feel cool and not have a huge underwire digging in me.

I honestly feel like I've got the body back that I had in my 20's. One where I actually feel body neutrality again. I'm not self conscious or always worrying about how I look, if I look matronly or too sexual.

It's a year on and some days I can't believe I took the leap to do this but just like the other women on the support group I have no regrets and it has only brought me happiness and a sense of peace in my body again.

Embroidery, facing page: Caroline Turner



Cheryl Jones

Case Study

My breasts started growing at an early age, around 9 years old, I've always had big boobs. I remember at school being teased and one particular boy used to chase me around calling 'molest a breast,' he never caught me!

My breasts grew quickly and nipples were inverted, I was always very embarrassed, could never show them, in changing rooms, or sunbathing. After a few years my right boob nipple did develop, the left one never did.

Mammograms usually start at the age of 50 or before, I was 53 years old in 2020, I had been chasing a mammogram for 3 years. I had two Aunties, one in Dec 19 and the other Feb 2020 both with breast cancer. I contacted the family history unit, as I wanted to rule out the possibility of having it, and with not being screened I thought they might see me. Then Covid hit. A few months later the unit did contact me. I had completed a lengthy questionnaire and they considered my risk to be one in 6, and that was the end of that. Eventually in September 2020, after several phone calls chasing, I got my 1st screening appointment.

Following my screening, I was called for further tests, on 20/10/20 I was told I had an area that was suspicious of a breast cancer, and another

area that was an area of concern. I was on my own with the nurse, as Covid rules applied. I had prepared myself, telling myself to be strong, you can do this, that type of thing. I had a few tears when playing the recording back to my husband, and the reality of the situation.

Two weeks later it was confirmed I had breast cancer, in my left breast the one with the inverted nipple, I had a benign area and a cancerous area, and in another area, calcium deposits, which could indicate an early sign of breast cancer, I had to have further tests. The cancer was 14mm, grade 1, they said. They could not tell me if I would lose my breast at this stage. I had to go for another test and wait for the results. Luckily they managed to biopsy the calcium, and eventually on 17 December 2020, I was given a date for my lumpectomy operation, which was Dec 2nd 2020.

Following the operation, I had a large amount of blue dye remaining, in my breast, which they inject to show up the lymph nodes, for removing. I wasn't happy with my breast at first, the scars from the incision and the biopsies, it had been glued back and had a big dent.

I was extremely strong and I returned to work 3 weeks after my operation. My results came back and the cancer was bigger than first thought, 28mm and a grade 2, so they did further tests, more waiting, but I was cancer free! The tests were to determine the course of treatment, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, medication. Again I was extremely lucky, my score came back at 13, (a score of over 25 they recommended chemotherapy). I had a course of radiotherapy and I am on medication for 5 years.

My breast looks better, I even think it has grown a bit more in size, and doesn't look out of place with the other one. The nipple area is better, more like a small hole, than inverted. I think only this last week or so the remaining blue dye has eventually gone. **Having to bear my breast so much for treatment, I don't feel embarrassed any more, my breast tells a story.**

For the quilt, I made one breast with a blue feather and flower, to represent the blue dye, my left breast, the other my right breast, my best breast, my celebratory breast.

Claire Rajah

Case Study

Ladies fondle your fancies, massage your melons or whatever you call them just give them an inspection. Maybe give your other half free reign for 15 minutes to play with them but don't leave it until manana.

It was in those 10 minutes...probably more like 10 seconds of matrimonial school morning foreplay when my story began.

“What's this?”

“What do you mean, what's this?”

“This lump”

“Where?”

“On here, feel”

I take my hand to the exact same spot on my boob where Alex's finger has landed as if he is Indiana Jones and is showing me the lost city on a map.

“Here”

“Oh yes”

“It's a lump. You need to get that checked out”.

With the thought of having to negotiate my doctor's online booking system and the sound of teenagers awaking for breakfast, foreplay has abruptly come to an end.

During my lunchtime I find the opportunity to make an online appointment with my GP and this activity enables me to get away from that colleague who can shrivel your salad with their monotone descriptions of their weekend washing routine.

Fast track to my doctor's surgery two days later, and I'm in the room with one of our local doctors who also doubles-up as the headmaster's wife from the village school. As she's having a good fondle I'm having a mental workout trying not to mention playground politics or something just as naff. Thankfully the doctor, who obviously doesn't recognise me from the PTA summer fetes and annual school plays tells me that she has felt a bump. Lump or bump does it really matter? The doctors believe it does and put my name and my number (oh I just sang those last four words) into the system for a squeeze at the breast clinic.

One week on and the good old NHS has set me a date to attend the breast clinic. At this stage in the journey I'm thinking it's just one of

those things I can't pronounce. To reiterate my medical diagnosis without any scientific knowledge, both my mum and I agree it's just a lump because 'no one in our family has had cancer'. Looking back I'm ignorant as a Daily Mile reader yet with a positive outlook. Does one even exist?

Having secured a day-off in the week, which is no easy feat when you work in a school, I merrily drive the 45-minute car journey into the urban sprawl to attend the breast clinic. Perfect is my synopsis to the day as I connect to the hospital's free wifi and settle into one of the comfy chairs and get out my book. All this peace and quiet on a full day's pay just for getting your tits out. What is there not to like?

After reading at least one chapter of my book I'm then led into a small white room with a hospital bed where I'm politely asked to strip to the waist and lay on the bed. The consultant, who introduces herself, quickly finds the lump and then promptly tells me to get dressed and hands me some paperwork. I soon discovered this is the hospital's terminology for go and get lost in our rabbit warren and we'll see you whenever you surface from our maze of wards and rooms.

Is it a treasure or a scavenger hunt I'm going on? My first quest is to locate the mammogram room. A hop, skip and jump or maybe a plod to the next floor and I've found it. Oh I am pleased with myself. No time for another chapter, it's a speedy exchange of paper work and another strip of the blouse and bra. At this rate I might as well walk around with my tits out.

Before I go on I need to tell you I don't do human touch freely, and especially from strangers. There's no rhyme or reason behind it. It's just the way it is. In a crisis, I'm more than happy to offer endless tea and sympathy yet hugs can be like drinking cold coffee.

A virgin to the mammogram machine. I'm thankful to the mammologist's verbal instructions yet it appears that what I hear isn't what I'm doing. And here it comes. I have to be manhandled to turn left, right, stand straight and not once does she tell me to smile for the camera. I get rigid as she turns me this way and yet still I make benign chats about the lack of windows in this room and what time she finishes. None of this is physically upsetting except for the part when it feels like your breast is being briefly squashed by a large metal trowel.

Pictures taken I'm then given some new paperwork and asked to complete part two of the scavenger challenge to leave this building without a cancer diagnosis. This time the challenge is to get myself to the biopsy room. On this occasion I bail-out halfway and ask for directions from persons in uniforms.

Biopsy ward found and paperwork handed over to the receptionist, I'm just about to settle myself into another chapter of my book when I called into a room. Two nurses greet me and we all begin another round of pleasantries while I undress. I'm asked to lie down on the table and given a white sheet to cover myself with until the doctor arrives. This isn't too bad. Conversation is flowing and we are even exchanging a few laughs together, which continues as the doctor enters and introduces herself.

The doctor's next question stumps me as she asks me what did they tell me upstairs. Upstairs, I quickly gather is the mammogram ward. The question is repeated to me several times and is even rephrased for me. After appearing like an incomprehensible alien, the doctor says 'Sarah you have got cancer.' My reply is no Oscar winning acceptance speech, just a 'Oh I wasn't expecting that'

After much waffling that probably didn't make much sense to me or anyone else in the room, I asked to lie down while they did a biopsy. Since the C word has been thrown around the room we go back to casual lighthearted conversations. **Did someone say cancer?**

Lou

Case Study

My mum called it a strawberry birthmark, the mark I was born with on the right hand side of my chest – it was like two circles, one on top of each other, almost figure of eight. It was intensely pink, vivid, and distinct.

I was bashful about my birthmark, when I was young – I just wanted to fit in and be the same as my friends, but it made me stand out, and I felt different. Not in a big way, and of course it was usually covered up, but even small things can have a big impact on how you feel about yourself.

As a teenager, I was even more self-conscious about it, because by this point, everything was about boys, love, crushes, snogging, and blimey, maybe even relationships. Overarching it all were the idealised representations of girls and women in magazines, adverts, and on TV, those perfect, blank, eyed goddesses. There were many ways I fell short of this perfection, but the birthmark seemed like an additional curse.

I worried that my birth mark look like a love-bite – I couldn't decide if this was a good or a bad thing. Maybe it will give the impression I was doing things I shouldn't be doing. But perhaps that was okay... Girls who had boyfriends and experience were cooler,

weren't they? On the other hand, a visible sign of experience could be embarrassing (I had very judge mental grandparents and mother, who would tell everyone everything, and the whole teenage love thing was intensely mine and private).

By my twenties, I was happier in my skin, more confident about who I was in less bothered by other peoples opinions, imaginary or otherwise, and I've met someone who I would still be with 30 years later. And anyway, my birthmark was fading.

Now at 53, all that's left is a slight indentation in my skin – you wouldn't know it had ever been there. I miss it. Mostly because now I know the difference is something to be celebrated and valued, but a little bit because it symbolises youth, and that is well, and truly in the rear view mirror!

In taking part in this project, it's been really good to think about and articulate these things, and to do so with a group of friends who have been going who have been through so much and who have been in each other's lives for over 20 years. We've all spoken about our bodies and how we feel about them, and that has led onto bigger conversations about life,

love and loss, so thank you for enabling that – it's been wonderful.

Stephanie Ashton

Case Study

Nobody likes to hear the word cancer, the sudden fears that go through your mind, is it treatable or not?

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in July 2016, and had a lumpectomy operation in October 2016. I then started my treatment in December 19, 2016, of Chemo and Radiotherapy. The treatment was for about six months. I felt so weak, I had fatigue and found it hard to concentrate when people were talking to me. I got very tired during the day, most of the time I just lay on the sofa and had to rest. If I slept in the day, I could not sleep at night. Once I got a bit of energy back, I used it to go out for walks.

Since my radiotherapy, I have pains in my leg and not able to walk as far as I used to. I still get a pain in my breast and it feels quite tender at times. My journey through my cancer treatment feels like I have been through a tunnel and come out the other end. There have been times when I have felt quite low and very upset, but in the back of my mind, I knew I had to be strong and positive.

I met some good friends on my travels through my treatment, I like to think that I have helped a lot of people out with advice. I knew my body will never be the same, you lose your body

image in a lot of ways, but I just do what I can do now and I'm still here to spend time with my family and friends, and that is the most important thing to me. Always remember to stay strong and positive and that will get you through the bad days.

This has made me much stronger person now, so that is a good thing.

What advice?

Body image is important, so try to make things better for yourself. I lost all my eyelashes and eyebrows when I started my treatment, my hair fell out as well. I must admit I loved my hair when it started coming back, it was lovely and short, but it did come back very fine. My eyebrows would not grow back completely as one of them only goes halfway, but I just have them tinted and shaped from time to time. My eyes lashes are very fine as well, just use a long lash mascara.

The biggest thing was my breast, as I had a lumpectomy operation, and now one of my breast does not look the same as the other one and slightly smaller, and my nipple on my breast is not right in the middle. I know nobody sees them, but I do every day and to me this means a lot.

Tamsin Grainger

Case Study

I love other women's breasts, but though I have spent many years trying to accept and like my own, if I'm honest, aged 59, my breasts are too large for my body (I'm very short), and I'd prefer them to be smaller. It gets all sweaty and itchy underneath them if I'm hot, and like Miranda, they clap when I turn over in bed!

In photos of myself in a bikini just after puberty, they look perfect. I think it was when I started to train to be a dancer a few years later and was forced to look at myself in a leotard all day that they began to seem too big; the so-called 'ideal dancers' body' was supposed to be small-breasted, at least in the 1980s.

Over the years, my breasts and I have had some good and some hard times. I had regular pre-menstrual tenderness and various mammary skin issues. I breastfed successfully twice: The first time it took 6 weeks of tears and frustration from both my daughter and me before a wonderful, volunteer breastfeeding supporter helped me overcome my concern at using a nipple shield. I only had to use it for a few weeks and then I could feed skin-to-skin, so I encourage others to keep going and/or ask for help if they want to make it work – you will get there eventually, happily.

It was another story with my second daughter. She somehow crept up my torso immediately after she was born and latched straight on before her cord was even cut! They are 26 and 31 now (my daughters, that is) and I'm mighty proud of them.

The people I can remember getting feedback from (men and women I have had relationships with) said they liked smaller breasts, though as I write this, I can appreciate that might have been my feelings being reflected back to me. I particularly admire women who have them in the middle – mine are at the bottom and pointed downwards. They are also covered in silvery stretch marks and are noticeably different sizes. Luckily, they are very sensitive and I have always got a lot of pleasure when they are touched, so I'm grateful for that.

Bras are uncomfortable and I stopped wearing underwire ones ages ago – I couldn't see the point and read they are bad for you, which they certainly feel. During Covid, I stopped wearing one when I'm at home (a lot) and it still comes off as often as possible. Totally liberating.

Menopause lasted around 10 years, at the end of which my breasts very suddenly lost all

elasticity, and now I am managing the fear that no-one will want to spend time with them and I'll remain alone; I focus on my work, family and friends and am content.

Index

A

abnormal 21, 64
acceptance 8, 12, 21, 24, 26, 100, 177, 184, 190
advice 14, 31, 38, 102, 110, 170, 188–189
asymmetry 38, 100, 176

B

beautiful 12, 20–21, 28, 30, 46, 54, 165, 174
body image 8, 12, 14, 20–21, 31, 35, 164, 188–189
bras 20–23, 38, 88, 191
breastfeeding 190
breasts 2, 4, 8–10, 12, 14, 16–17, 20–24, 26–28, 30–32, 34–36, 38, 40, 44, 46, 56, 62, 68, 72, 100, 102, 144, 146, 152, 162–165, 174, 176–177, 180–181, 183–184, 188–191

C

cancer 4, 8, 14, 28, 30–32, 62, 100, 102, 128, 168, 177, 180–181, 183–185, 188
case study 28, 31, 38, 124, 152, 174, 176, 180, 182, 186, 188, 190

Comfort 1–2, 6, 8–9, 30, 40, 42, 62, 72, 128, 162–165, 177
confidence 9, 14, 21, 35–36, 48, 162, 164, 174, 187
covid 30, 88, 180–181, 191

E

embarrassment 8–9, 12, 20, 22, 31, 34, 40, 124, 162, 164, 180–181, 187
embroidered 40, 162, 171
empowered 14, 30, 165
evaluation 9, 14, 164, 177
exhibition 9, 14, 163, 170

F

friends 20, 30, 32, 34, 40, 44, 100, 102, 124, 140, 162–163, 174, 177, 186–189, 191

I

implants 30, 35, 174
inspirational 9, 26, 164–165

K

Kate Codrington 10, 26, 46, 116, 166, 170

L

liberating 21, 88, 191
Lois Blackburn 2, 8, 14, 36, 122, 166
love 10, 20, 24, 31, 46, 48, 54, 66, 70, 106, 124, 162, 164–165, 170, 186–187, 189–190

M

mammogram 28, 30, 180, 184
mastectomy 28, 30
menopause 10, 38, 162, 176, 191

N

nipples 34, 180, 191

O

offensive 12

P

pleasure 8–9, 163, 191
Poland Syndrome 4, 34, 36, 168
positive 9, 26, 30, 32, 128, 140, 164, 183, 188–189
powerful 20, 32, 36, 165
puberty 8, 24, 34, 128, 190

Q

quilting 2, 4, 6, 8–9, 40, 100, 118, 162, 170, 181

S

sexism 12
sexual 8, 14, 17, 22, 38, 178
shame 10, 28
stretch marks 23–24, 128, 191

surgery 30, 32, 38, 62, 102, 146, 163, 175–177, 183

T

teenagers 12, 20, 22, 26, 38, 44, 116, 124, 183, 186–187
Trans 8, 17, 162, 165, 168

