

121.6M SHARES

Powerful photo series fights back against the way we police women's bodies

Ellen Scott for Metro.co.uk Tuesday 14 Feb 2017 2:40 pm

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Harshini Devi Retna performs as Lakshmi. (Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Vinoth Raj Pillai)

Just a reminder that no matter what a woman is wearing, she never deserves to be harassed, groped, or raped. Never.

It's been said so many times. It shouldn't be something people need to be reminded of.

### 10 Disney-inspired crafts anyone can make

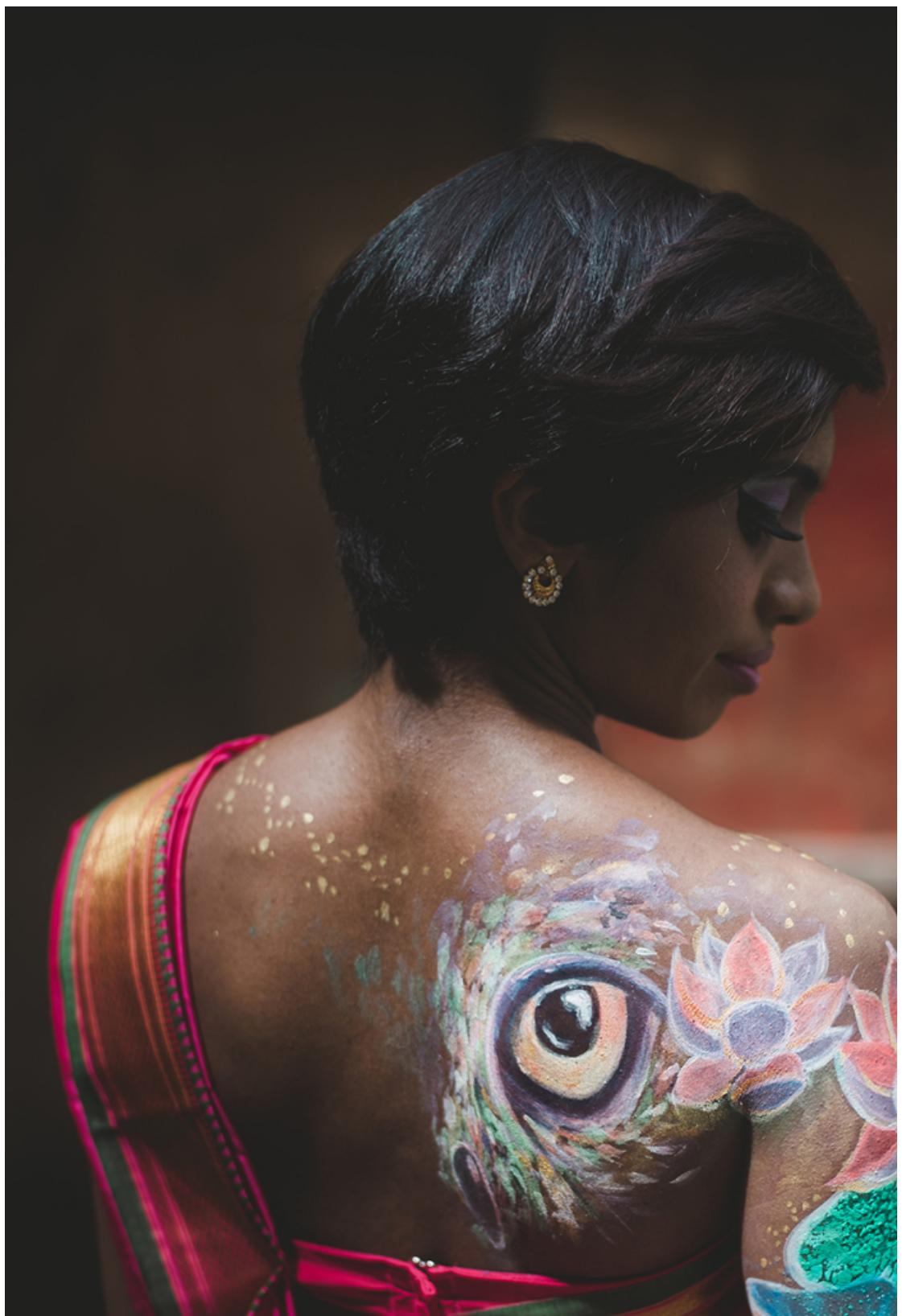
But we still keep hearing people trying to police the way women dress, blaming harassment and assault on their choices, and shaming women simply for being women.

So reminders are needed. And if they come in the form of a powerful photo series to get the message across, we're all for it.

A month ago, artist [Ruby Subramaniam](#) saw a Facebook group warning Hindu women to 'expect getting sprayed with aerosol paint should they be "inappropriately dressed" at a Thaipusam event on 9 February.'

She wasn't impressed with the group's body-policing attitude.





(Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Vinoth Raj Pillai)

'I thought it was ironic that people worshiped female deities but were still asserting their dominance on women in such disrespectful manner,' Ruby told metro.co.uk.

As an act of protest, Ruby decided to create a photo series, painting artwork directly on to dancers' bodies to transform them into the goddesses celebrated in the Thaipusam festival – but in a way that celebrates women's bodies, rather than trying to regulate them.



(Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Vinoth Raj Pillai)

Over the course of fourteen days, Ruby and her friends collaborated to create 'This Body is Mine', a photo series reinterpreting Hindu goddesses in a modern day context, while also fighting back against the moral-policing of women's bodies.

'Studying the Hindu Goddesses, they often speak about her character and thus, she was surrounded by elements that embodied those values,' Ruby explains.

'None of the Holy texts reveal information about the length of her saree blouse (or any other part of her attire really, except colors that she wore).



Rathimalar Govinarajoo as Saraswathy. (Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Kenny Loh)



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(Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Kenny Loh)

'And if you get a chance to visit the ancient temples in India, you will find stone statues that make the pillars of the grand temples.

'If those statues came to life, they would be considered provocative as some would only have thin strips of saree cloths stretch across the body.

(Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Kenny Loh)

‘So how do you put your palms together and worship these deities – but give no respect to the women that embody those values?’

Ruby approached classical Indian dancers to pose for the photo series, asking Nalina Nair (who took on the role of Kali), Harshini Devi Retna (Lakshmi), and Rathimalar Govindarajoo (Saraswathy).

Each woman was chosen not just for her appearance and dance skills, but for how she embodies the values of the Hindu goddesses.

‘The dancers brought my artwork to life,’ said Ruby.

Nalina Nair as Kali. (Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Vicknes Waran)

She worked with photographers to capture her paintings in motion, risking backlash from passersby to create each image.

‘We definitely felt fear lurking in the back of our minds,’ said Ruby. ‘We had to be on guard all the time.

(Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Vicknes Waran)

(Picture: Ruby Subramiam/Vicknes Waran)

‘We roamed Kuala Lumpur city centre finding a dark alley to signify women as lotus that rise beautifully amidst its filthy surroundings.

‘We found ourselves in the midst of a drug addicts’ den. Unsure of what may come, we began the shoot nervous.’

So the process of creating the images definitely wasn’t easy. But it was entirely worth it once Ruby started to share the series.

(Picture: Ruby Subramaniam/Vicknes Waran)

‘The empowering feeling only grew once we started posting the pictures up on social media,’ she told us.

‘We were expecting a negative reaction but we finally felt like we could breathe when the positive feedback for this campaign outweighed the negative.’

The message Ruby would like her artwork to send is simple: ‘Women are allowed to use their bodies as they please.’