

A self-taught painter and photographer, Alexandra Jacoby is not a vagina expert. The vagina vérité® project was born out of a conversation with a friend about what their vaginas looked like, and how they compared to other vaginas. As there was no visual reference available, Jacoby set about creating vulva portraits. Jacoby has made 83 vagina portraits to date and plans to publish a book of the images, and to exhibit widely. In between exhibitions, Jacoby has the v-portraits installed on her living room wall, welcomes viewers and holds salons.

artist statement

One day, out of the blue, a friend of mine asked me if I liked the way my vagina looked. Apropos nothing. Did I like the way my vagina looked? As I answered, I realized that I had never really taken a good look at my vagina, and that, other than a bit of porn, I hadn't actually seen any other women's vaginas. While I was pretty sure that they were all different, I had no evidence to point to when talking with my friend, who clearly thought there was something wrong with how hers looked.

I began asking around and found that most women had not seen other women's vaginas—or necessarily their own. The conversations, which often began awkwardly, revealed how little we knew about our vaginas. Our gynecologists and lovers were on intimate terms with them, but not us.

Why and how did it come to be that the vagina, the gateway to life, would hold this lowly place in our collective consciousness?

That's when the vagina vérité® project began. The v-portraits are close-up, there are no stylists, no details about the model to set the mood for fantasy—just the elusive faces of the vagina in plain view. Each beautiful and strikingly unique.

The women who participate in this project may or may not be comfortable with their bodies. They range in age and lifestyle, and relationship with their vaginas. The one thing they have in common is trusting me with their v-portraits.

My vision is that vagina vérité® will act as a collective mirror, to spark conversation about self-image, intimacy, sexuality and identity—to bring into focus the value of our individual experiences and expression. I look forward to publishing the book. So we can see ourselves for ourselves. — Alexandra Jacoby

highlights of vagina vérité® exhibitions

Wimodaughsis at Vagina Festival. *Sage Theater.*

October 2008, NYC

vagina vérité® set the tone of the Vagina Festival visual art exhibition of paintings, photography, sculpture, print, and video, curated by Rose Merola. Wimodaughsis engaged viewers with a range of work that explored our bodies, sense of self, sexuality, and our relationships.

Red Tent Women's Project. November 2007, NYC.

Vagina, vulva, pussy, cunt – and have you heard the latest celebrity darling: vajayjay? Why are there so many words and why do none of them seem right? Discussion explored these questions and our responses to the v-portraits.

visual art at Vagina Festival. February 2007, NYC.

vagina vérité® inspired the creation of Vagina Festival, a visual and performance art experience, opening a space for conversations we don't usually get to have. Visual artists, performance artists, musicians, and speakers came together to raise awareness about the pervasiveness of violence against women, and raised money for V-Day.

The V-Factor: A Private Matter in the Public Eye. November 2006, Montclair.

With over 60 v-portraits revealing what most women have not had a chance to see—the amazing diversity that unites us—our salon discussion explored the dynamic interplay between society's view on 'the -v' and our own evolving sense of self.

rated R for Random. *Agni Gallery.* September 2006, NYC.

Jacoby presented the v-portraits in book form for the first time at Agni Gallery as part of the *rated R for Random* exhibition.

Society for Menstrual Cycle Research Conference.

June 2005, Boulder.

An installation of 50 v-portraits and printed excerpts from vaginaverite.com questionnaire-responses sparked health professionals and researchers in conversation about how our personal experiences of our bodies relate to health and well-being.

Love Your Tree. *ABC Carpet & Home.* Dec 2004-Jan 2005, NYC.

Spire (a 6' 3" totem of eight v-portraits) was part of the *Love Your Tree* exhibition, curated by Paula Allen, of 16 photographers' work on women's relationships with their bodies. The *Love Your Tree* space was created as a companion to Eve Ensler's *The Good Body*—a place for women to gather, talk and listen.

Threat. *A Gathering of the Tribes.* Oct-Nov, 2004, NYC.

As part of the *Threat* exhibition, a group show of paintings, photographs and assemblages, a wall of 41 v-portraits, unabashed, soft and proud, posed a challenge to the concept of power as domination.

Decoration & Handicraft: Re-visioning 1970's Feminist Art. *Parson's School of Design.* April 2003, NYC.

With the v-portraits installed on the classroom blackboard, Jacoby presented the project and explored the complexities of representing female sexuality with students.

yOur Exhibition. *Smithfield.* December 2002, NYC.

The first public exhibition of 30 v-portraits surprised and stimulated viewers at Smithfield, a bar on the lower east side of Manhattan. It was attended by 130 women, many of whom had heard much about the project, but still didn't know what to expect. Some were nervous about attending.