

Donna Fish

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How Obnoxious Are the Voices in Your Head?

What's Your Reaction?

I think we could safely say that when any woman steps into a dressing room to try on clothing, her inner dialogue is not exactly complimentary. Am I just speaking for myself, or do we tend to get fairly self-critical, and focus on the negative, vs. the positive, when left to the mercy of that mirror and brutal lighting.

Last week, I was on a panel discussion for an art show entitled: 'Power and Burden of Beauty' by Rachel Hovnanian. Part of this installation involves a dressing room that you enter. Inside the dressing room is a collection of white bathing suits with different sizes attached to them, and a fun house mirror. A running tape is filled with comments like: "My thighs are so fat", and "I shouldn't have eaten that"; the usual comments, right, that if not voiced out loud, can be such rote, that all the women I have seen emerging from this space, have the same wry smile on their faces.

Not that I am at all immune either, but I often think of that statement by Erica Jong: "You're not fat, you're just living in the wrong country."

Every country though, in the world has their own brand of beauty and it is no less punishing than here in North America. Think of the bound feet in China, the elongated necks in Africa, outstretched lips, there is never a shortage in the ways a culture finds a body part to focus on.

With the fashion industry and the media playing such a major role here, we are subjected to an idealization of thin; size 0. (Although I am sure there is size inflation; a current size 0 is without a doubt the old 4, even 6. When I go to Montreal to try on clothing, I am a full 3 sizes larger than in the U.S.) So while we may be horrified by other cultures and what women do to be beautiful, we perhaps lose a little perspective of the ways we torture ourselves. The array of options are increasing; from obsessional diet and exercise, to the knife, injectables, lipo; it goes on and on.

What's a girl to do? Particularly given that the images that we see are not changing significantly tomorrow. How do we at least raise the level of awareness, to understand our context, and the impact on us?

Rachel Hovnanian does this quite successfully in her show. She helps us to recognize our negative 'self talk', and she has begun a dialogue

Let's 'out' this body hatred and body shame that seems to be such a significant tape loop in women's minds.

Visit this exhibit: It is at the Jason McCoy satellite space from Oct. 30-Nov. 7th, 520 West 20th St., and continues Nov. 10-Dec. 22nd, 41 E.57th St. at the Jason McCoy Gallery.