


*This Is Who I Am:
Our Beauty in All Shapes and Sizes*
By Rosanne Olson
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It takes only a quick tour of the category “Nude” in an online bookstore to appreciate Rosanne Olson’s rare and extraordinary approach to the nude portrait. Although the nude portrait category lists more than 600 books, there are fewer than half a dozen that approach the female nude as other than idealized or erotic, if not both.

Calling upon friends and friends of friends, Olson spent four years recruiting women of all ages and body types, and asking them to pose naked and unashamed of their very human contours. Each subject has a story to tell, and the tales are often repeated, of how she has struggled to come to terms with her less-than-perfect body as measured by the influence of media or cultural standards. With Olson’s questionnaire to guide their thoughts, the photographer lights her subjects against seamless studio backdrops and eases them into a comfort zone of gloriously naked poses.

These all-too-familiar bodies flourish under Olson’s gaze: every sag, wrinkle, bulge or scar is transformed into an evocative sepia-toned petal of flesh. The women bloom in every photograph. From little girls in their mother’s naked arms to 95-year-old grandmothers; from muscular athletes to cancer survivors to pretty young women struggling with self image—they gaze, they drape themselves, they frolic as gracefully beautiful as any classic Weston nude. Olson’s message is hardly new, but her book is a welcome sight. All of us less than perfect beings: take heart. 

—Kay Kenny