

HUFFPOST

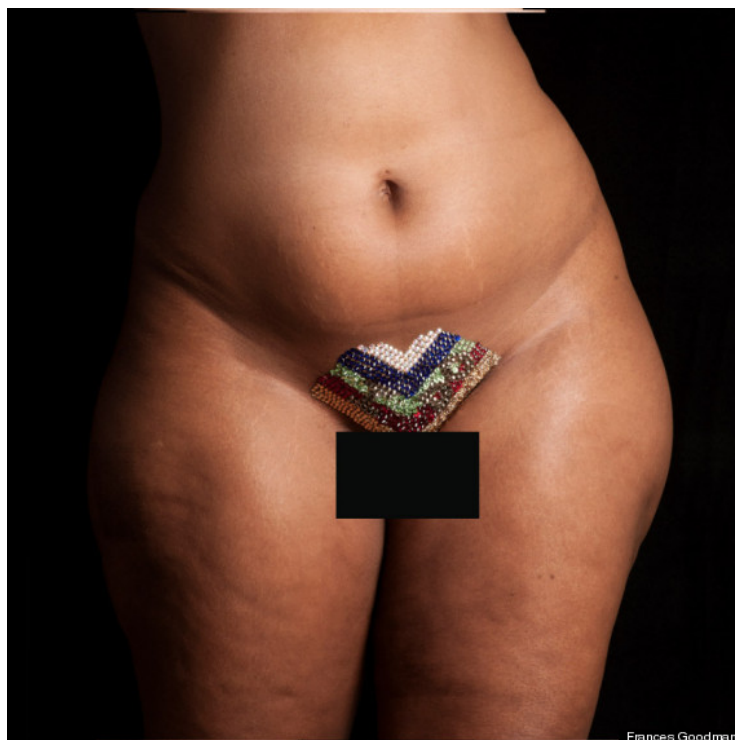
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Frances Goodman's 'Vajazzling Series' Comes To (Art) Amalgamated (NSFW, PHOTOS)

By Priscilla Frank

Even if you are not familiar with the trend of vajazzling, you can probably imagine what it entails. Normally, we wouldn't think of the ostentatious pastime as the pinnacle of feminism -- you are, after all, doing to your vagina what a pre-teen does to her favorite denim jacket. And yet South African artist Frances Goodman claims her "Vajazzling Series" empowers the body, employs the female gaze and reclaims the practice for women across the world.

Goodman faces two big challenges here. The first is whether the thrust of the works can compensate for the gimmicky and possibly tasteless appeal of the exhibition. The second is whether the empowering message Goodman wants to impart can truly be evoked from one of the more insipid feminine trends today. Predictably, she is more successful in the first challenge than the second.



The photographs do grab your attention, though this shouldn't come as a shock. While a brief Google affair with vajazzling results mostly in butterflies and lightning bolts that we'll call "minimalist," these women are boasting the royal vajazzle treatment. The brave models, who mostly responded to an ad in the Village Voice, proudly display their razor burn and goosebumps

in the gaps between their bling. The glorified vaginas, blown up and literally in your face, are pretty damn dazzling.

When discussing her works, Goodman spoke of her interest in the middle-class transition from obsessing over needs to obsessing over desires -- specifically, our desire to be desired. Much of her work, including pieces outside the "Vajazzling Series," addresses the choices we make regarding our bodies. In this sense the bedazzled vaginas resemble Renaissance dowry portraits, featuring women wearing ornate jewels with crests emblazoned across their chests.

The trouble Goodman faces is separating the mixed messages of mocking the sparkly ritual and owning it. Goodman presents the intimate regions of a woman's body as consumed by consumerism... but then glorifies this in an effort to empower us again. The result is kind of bizarre and humorous, but doesn't make a home-hitting point about why vajazzling is a meaningful symbol for a woman's complex relationship with her body image.

Women do not need to hear yet again, through art or otherwise, that we have a screwed-up relationship with our bodies. We know we do. Maybe the empowerment lies in the viewer's ability to not take any of it too seriously. This is an exhibition about vajazzling, after all.

'The Vajazzling Series' is part of Frances Goodman's exhibition "Touched" at (Art)Amalgamated in New York.

We censored the images below, but we highly recommend visiting the gallery in person to get the whole NSFW experience:

