

#FEEDME

A breastfeeding awareness campaign

#FEEDME is a photography exhibition by artists Agatha A. Nitecka and Robert Appleton of RAN studio, curated by Avenir Art. It features a series of women breastfeeding on the go, in public places across landmark locations in London including the V&A, Portobello Market, Brick Lane and Tate.

Over a hundred mothers volunteered to take part in this awareness campaign using their image to vocalise the positivity of public breastfeeding. The final selection represents the diversity of London with each mother varying in age and ethnicity and their children also ranging from two months to four years old

“We wanted to show beautiful interactions between the mothers involved, their children and the city of London, and to reframe how women and men engage with public breastfeeding in the UK,” says Agatha. “In the UK, we understand the reasons why breastfeeding is important for mums and babies but at the same time, we don’t all feel entirely comfortable with mothers breastfeeding out and about. Every single time we see a mother breastfeeding, whether in real life or

just an image, it helps to normalise what should be entirely normal. It helps the next woman we see in the cafe or on the train. It helps the little girl who may not breastfeed for another 20 years. It makes a difference. It’s no exaggeration to say this project will have an impact that could change lives.”

ABM Magazine talked to some of the women involved.

Annabel Spooner always knew she would breastfeed but since having her two sons (aged four and fifteen months), she has found that she often has to defend her choice to do so. It was because of this, that Annabel was drawn to the #FEEDME campaign: an opportunity, she felt, to give public breastfeeding some positive exposure and to celebrate diversity. “As a black woman living in the UK, images of women who nurse and who look like me are grossly under-represented. I wanted to help provide representation for women like me. We are here. We exist!”

On the day of the shoot, Annabel met photographer, Agatha, and her partner, Robbie, at her local theatre BAC. “It was one of the first theatres I went to as a child and it’s a place dear to

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Annabel, right



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my heart. I chose to sit by the bar, on a stool, as a bold statement and a call to arms for breastfeeding mums not to hide.

“I identify as an ambivert and feel my image really reflects that. My ‘No Fear Here’ badge is visible. I am calmly speaking and feeding my son. This is a normal occurrence and it should be seen as such.”

Annabel hopes that the #FEEDME images will give women the confidence to breastfeed when and where they wish. “There are women all over the UK, confined to toilet stalls to feed their precious children, in a bid to appease café owners and the public. This must stop. We (mothers) make the best and most loyal customers in cafés and coffee shops, so make us feel welcome! We are literally feeding the future and must be supported to do so.

“I hope that a few social taboos are blown to dust with these images of women confidently feeding.”

Laura Reed, is a first-time mum to eight-month old, Ada. Ada was born at 42 weeks by c-section and Laura says she was “totally naive to the effect her birth would have on breastfeeding. She didn’t latch on until Day 3. She lost too much weight but after four weeks of a gruelling schedule of feeding/pumping/topping-up with pumped

milk, we finally got into the swing of things and she’s been climbing those percentiles ever since!”

Laura is a friend of photographer, Agatha, and hearing her friend speak so passionately about the #FEEDME project convinced her to take part. “Before having Ada, I was anxious about public feeding but now that she’s here, I really don’t care what people think! I’m discreet for my own modesty and I wouldn’t want to make people feel awkward but now I’m in the ‘club’, I’m all for however and whenever! It’s an important campaign for me in that respect.”

Laura and Ada’s photo shows them outside a café. “Agatha and I sat and chatted for a bit and then I took Ada out of her sling and fed her. That was basically it. She did keep looking at the camera and getting distracted as she’s so interested in people and her surroundings nowadays. When I saw our image, I was so proud of Agatha, Robbie and the campaign. But also of myself for managing to stick at it this for so long. When I first started breastfeeding, I was aiming for four months, then six. Here I am now at eight months and hoping to make it to twelve!

“I’ve had such lovely positive comments from family and friends so far about our photo. It would be nice if the campaign helped normalise breastfeeding and if it helped anxious



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mums to be. I was anxious and I think images like this, showing lots of normal scenarios, would've helped me."

Jewels is also a first-time-mum. She always wanted to exclusively breastfeed on demand but says she didn't understand how challenging that would be for her. "I am an early childhood educator and have worked in a nursery and as a nanny so I felt I had some clue when it came to babies. But I found I was just as clueless as the next first-time-mum! We battled through a tongue-tie and lots of tears (mine mostly!), cracked nipples and feeling hopeless before we finally got there. Practise makes perfect, as they say! I learnt to trust my body and trust my baby.

"I truly believe without the support at home and at my local Breastfeeding Café, I would've given up. I am immensely glad that I was determined and I persevered. The joy I have in breastfeeding my baby now, eight months in, is wonderful. It's a beautiful experience. Wow – try telling me I would've said that in the first week of having my baby home and I would've laughed you out the door!"

On the day of the shoot, Jewels met Agatha in Clapham. "She had already made me feel at ease by clearly explaining what they hoped to achieve with my photo and the

project as a whole. She worked around me, my baby and our needs. So, the location was somewhere easy for us to get to and the photoshoot itself was quick. She made me feel comfortable throughout. We wanted to get a photo that was very 'London' and with a big red bus and gloomy skies, I think we nailed it!"

Seeing the image for the first time, Jewels says she felt emotional. "It's just such an awesome project to be involved in and something that my daughter and I will be able to look back on forever.

"I was hesitant at first to post my image on my social media. I didn't want any other mums to feel I was judging their choice not to breastfeed or feel upset if breastfeeding hadn't worked for them. But I realised this was my own insecurities about upsetting people and this project isn't about me. It's about showing the world that breastfeeding in public should be accepted. I clicked that post button and waited nervously... The support I have had has been amazing! All positive comments. Plenty of love.

"I hope the project inspires some open discussions about mums needing support – especially during those crucial first few weeks. I hope that people realise that breastfeeding in public (or anywhere for that



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matter) is natural and nothing to ever be ashamed of.”

Laceinne, a 31-year-old first-time-mum, heard about the project through Instagram and was keen to be involved to show that “breastfeeding is natural, its normal and its fun!” On the day of the shoot, she met the photographer on Portobello Road, close to where she lives. “It was perfect timing: my daughter was ready to eat so I simply got her latched and we started shooting!”

Seeing her image now, has made Laceinne proud and she hopes that the campaign will help normalise breastfeeding. “As a vegan, committed to living a holistic and natural life, I live the way I believe nature intended. This means, I could never give my child cow’s milk or supplemental chemically derived synthetic nutrients. Cow’s milk is meant to grow a baby calf into a 1600 pound cow!

Saskia describes her seven-month-old son, Max, as a “boob monster. We are having an amazing journey so far and have been breastfeeding in all kinds of places! On trains, in tube station, on the bus, in Indonesia, cafes, restaurants and - my all-time favourite - even in Victoria Secret!

“Initially I was a bit nervous so kept my eyes firmly fixed on little Max’s

face. Within a few weeks, it was just part of our day and I wouldn’t have noticed if someone was watching. My partner Aidan is incredibly supportive and I’ve had such amazing support from both sides of the family which has been really encouraging.

Seeing a request for #FEEDME participants on Facebook, Saskia jumped at the chance to get involved. “I thought if I can show even more people how amazing and normal it is, well, that’s a huge win for breastfeeding!”

Saskia says she feels proud that her photo will be seen by so many “new mums, old mums, soon-to-be-mums and everyone else. I hope that some who see it will feel more comfortable to breastfeed in public and to continue to do so for as long as they wish.”

The #FEEDME campaign was launched in International Women's week and will showcase across London via digital billboards from Kings Road to Shoreditch High Street, Cromwell Road, Clapham Junction and many more popular locations.

Limited prints are available online at www.avenirart.com with proceeds donated to the Association of Breastfeeding Mothers