



IMAG

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Imagination Has No Quarantine but It Is Free to Fly

Seija Ulkuniemi

10.24981/2414-3332-10.2020-8

Abstract

If you are forbidden from leaving your home, how can you create a project that involves taking photos of people? In my visual essay, I introduce innovative projects that students completed for my course “Private Photography in Service of Art Education” at the University of Granada during the time of confinement in spring 2020. I studied students’ projects, including the accompanying texts, asking: How did the confinement affect the projects? The work of 10 out of 16 students was somehow “contaminated” by the virus. Luckily, the results are positive: This essay offers some new ways to use private photography in visual art education.

Keywords

confinement, private, photography, Covid-19, project

My workshop-type course is part of a master's degree in visual art education (MAVE, see <https://artes-visuales.org/>) and includes an independent final project. As students attained their bachelor's degree in a variety of disciplines, including art, art history, media, social studies, and pedagogy, I offer them several options so that the project best serves their professional and personal interests. The project needs to involve private photos or the genre of private/family photography in some way. I present them with some of my articles to start with (Ulkuniemi, 2003, 2007 & 2009). The work may be theoretical, an artwork, or more socially oriented, involving other people. This spring, the confinement due to Covid-19 forced the students to adapt their ideas and find alternative realisations. The subtitles with bolded text summarise the effects of the virus on each project.

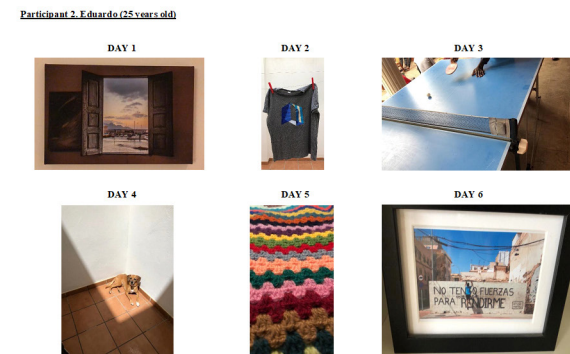
The idea for a collective project arose from the necessity to stay at home

The idea for **David Diepa García's** work *Family Confinement Through Photography – A Week in my Life* arose directly from the confinement. David wanted people to examine their home and daily life more carefully than they normally do. He asked several people to take one photo a day at home for six days from the 26th to the 31st of March. In addition to David, the seven other participants living in four households were also in confinement; only one was working in a pharmacy and could leave her home. Below are the sequences of photos after the name and age of each participant.

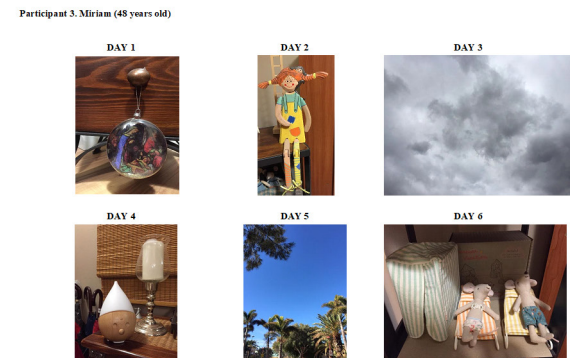
Maria, 25



Eduardo, 25

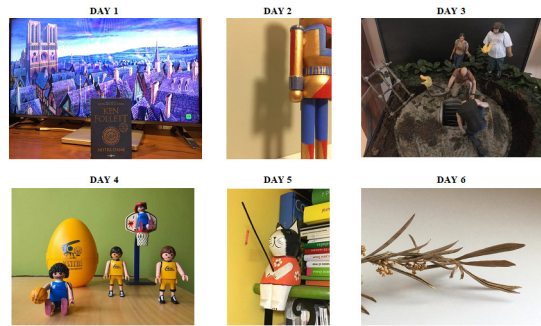


Miriam, 48



Javier, 43

Participant 4, Javier (43 years old)



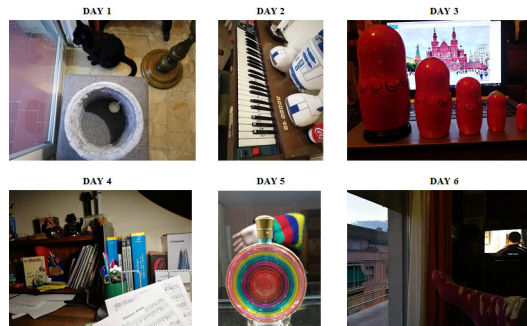
Eulalia, 56

Participant 7, Eulalia (56 years old)



Cristina, 47

Participant 5, Cristina (47 years old)



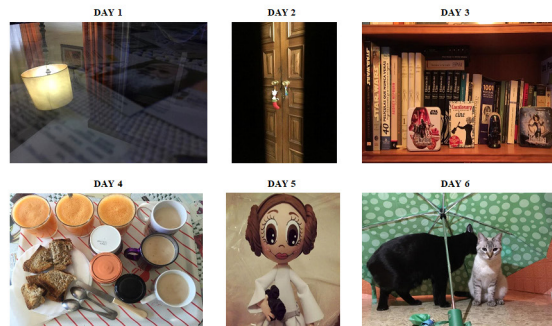
José Luis, 54

Participant 8, José Luis (54 years old)



David, 42

Participant 6, David (42 years old)



Forced to work at home with one's partner instead of with a team in a spacious office

Alba Miguel Gil needed to realise her *untitled final project* at home due the confinement. She was interested in using photos to examine her appearance – how our visual representations give information to other people and how they may contradict how we feel inside ourselves.

Alba chose to work with her partner to get to know each other literally from different perspectives and to see herself through an external gaze. She snapped photos in turn with her partner five times daily for family photos from untypical angles.

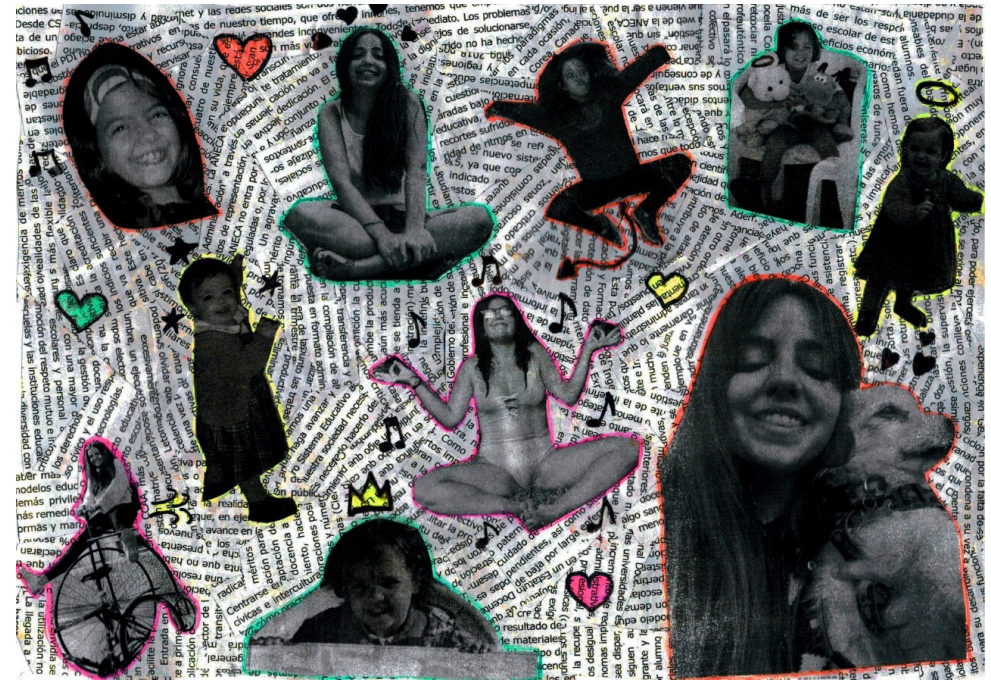






The need to enhance joy was evoked in confinement

As Irene Vilchez Barea could not meet her friends and other loved ones, she started to examine her collection of private photographs. She wanted to make something that spreads joy. Her work, *The Happy Girl*, is based on her selection of photos that show her feeling happy in another person's company. She cut out her own images and glued them on paper, creating a collage in which she highlighted her contours with fluorescent colours. Reflecting on her work, she noticed that although her appearance has changed, her "way of being remains the same—a very smiling person".



Work became more intensive as meeting family members was impossible

Susana López Marañés created two final projects. Susana felt her feelings and reflections during both processes were especially intense as she could not meet her family members.

Susana's *untitled project* was about the ability of photos to evoke hidden memories. She started from a photo representing happiness – the same one she chose for the first class. Susana is in a bouncy castle where she remembered being alone, but when examining her collections, she realised she had shared the experience with her sister.

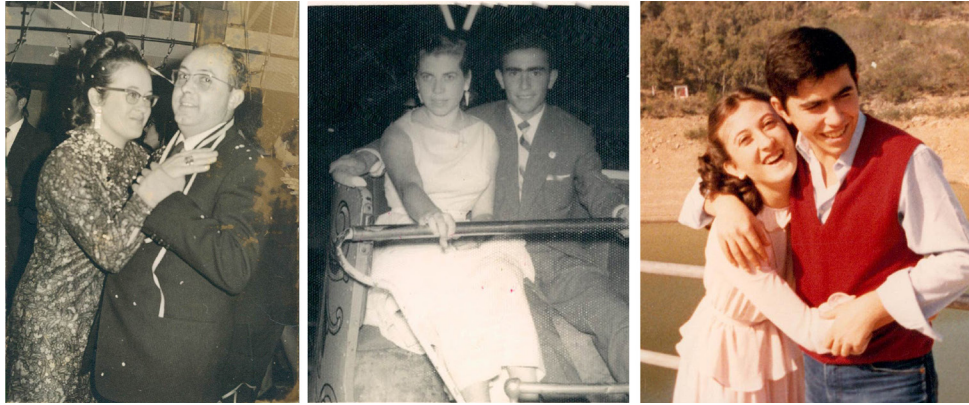


Pondering her relationship with her sister, Susana understood her sister “was always there.” She composed a triptych that represents the growth of their sisterhood.



In her other project, *Memories*, Susana concentrated on the relationship between generations. Drawing on family photos of three generations, she selected and composed them according to the following themes:

1. Descent – “They all show off their youth.”



2. Home – “The whole set reflects the shelter that children find in their parents’ laps.”



3. New generation – “This composition reflects the excitement of being a parent for the first time.”



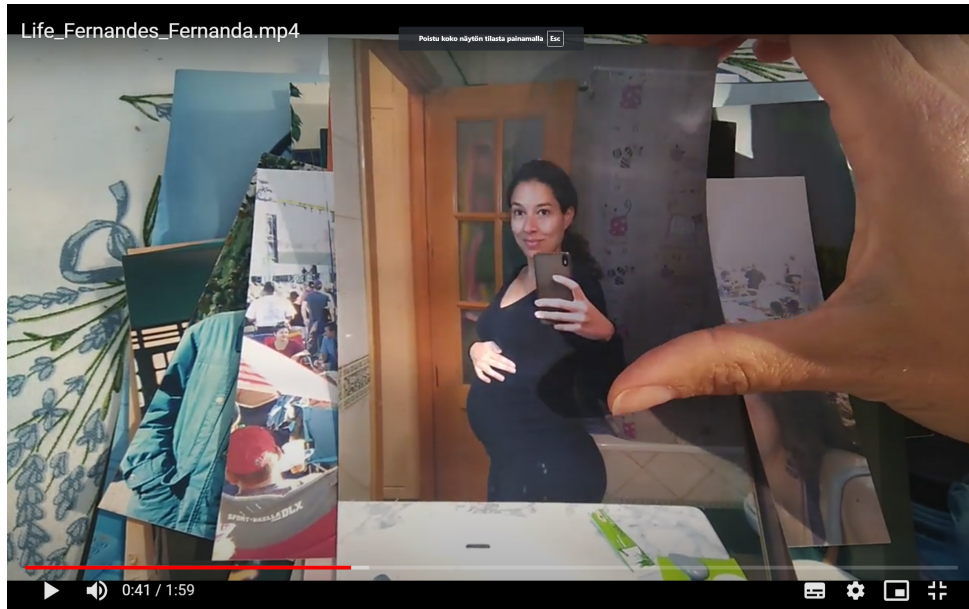
4. The last work, *Memories*, is a digital photo collage where use of a scanner gives a sweeping effect evoking “the passage of time in the face of the volatility of the physical.”



Susana finds this methodology aided her self-discovery. She could see the changes in her family history, and the process helped her to mature: “Seeing my parents in situations very close to my own experiences as a teenager, I could break the mental/social/hierarchical barrier of the daughter-father and daughter-mother relationship, seeing my parents as my equals but with more experience.”

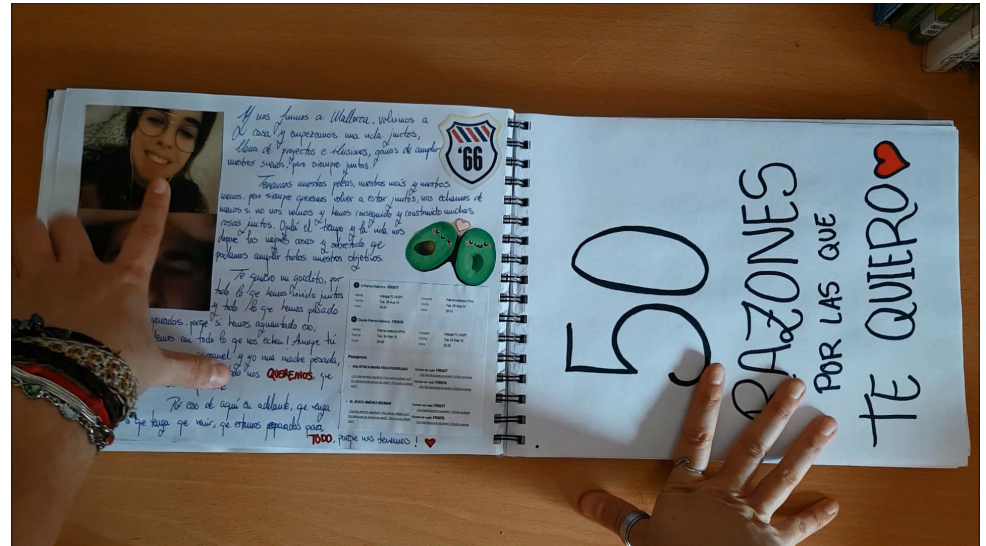
The situation affected the selection of photos and the efficiency of the work process

The untitled video by **Fernanda Tássia Fernandes Alves** deals with a selection of meaningful family photos, through which she re-lives both the happy moments (“saudade”) and times of sadness. Fernanda is singing a Brazilian song from her childhood while rifling through her collection, which evoked multitudes of feelings in her. She was also able to re-think her values and life decisions. The confinement led her to select some photos of people who she now especially missed. As kindergarten was closed, Fernanda’s son was at home, which forced her to work more efficiently than usual. Due to music copyright rules, I can only show some photos from the video:



A change of plan: From childhood images to an album celebrating a love affair

África M. Polo Rodriguez had planned to go to her parents' home to look for her childhood photographs for her final project. Due to the virus, instead, she collected photos taken during the years she has spent with her partner. She composed an album with lots of text to celebrate their shared history. Here are some shots from the video where she shows all the pages.



A joint reminiscence project became individual

Yasmina Fernández Pérez wanted to make postcard prints, but the print shops were closed. Then she had an idea to make a reminiscence project about her friend Mima, who died of cancer last summer. She had hoped to have a circle of friends talking around a photo of Mima, but in the end, she worked alone to create *Looking at the Sea – In Memory of Mima*: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XGmoYyKL_NstVBOXHY_5gBPU8gYKFb4G/view

Yasmina stated that creating the video helped her in her grief as she could express what Mima meant to her. She found this exercise was “about trust and not imposing your opinion” and something that “you can always practice with yourself, regardless of resources”.

Individual project focussing on intimate belongings instead of group project

Valentina Baldini planned to make a collective photo work where people would have been together physically in the same room showing some of their belongings and telling why the objects were important to them, taking photos, and giving them new meanings. Her reference was Sophie Calle’s (1994) autobiographical book *True Stories* (see examples: <https://www.artbook.com/9782330060404.html>).

Due to the confinement, Valentina asked eleven people from Argentina and Spain to take a photo of their night table and explain the importance of the objects on it. Her project *Nightstands* aims to show “the intimacy of the nightstands as a private space that is not shared with others”. Valentina wants to remind us of our relationship with objects—how we identify with them and how they represent us. Valentina’s project incorporates an anthropological approach: “. . . the comforts of their homes and the qualities of their objects tell us about the contemporary human being.” She notes that some objects, such as Satisfyer, books, chocolates, photos of a loved one, were repeated. Here is one example from Valentina’s text (from participant “C”):

C.

1. Chocolate, the last nibble of the day and sometimes the first.
2. Echinacea, so I do not forget.
3. The vitamin pills that I always forget.
4. Valerian in case I can’t sleep.
5. Ventolin in case my partner cannot breathe.
6. A book, although I do not read before sleeping because I wake up more.
6. Ibuprofen in case.
7. Condoms (probably expired).
8. Arnica and a massager for my sore back.
9. Satisfyer and lubricant that accompany the chocolate.
10. Lighter, although I do not smoke in bed, but it is the only one that nobody steals from me.
10. Comb because I only comb my hair in bed.
11. Anti-noise earphones for noise outside.
12. Seemingly obsolete but unbreakable watch.
13. Very chachi steel water bottle.
14. Calendula ointment for my hands.









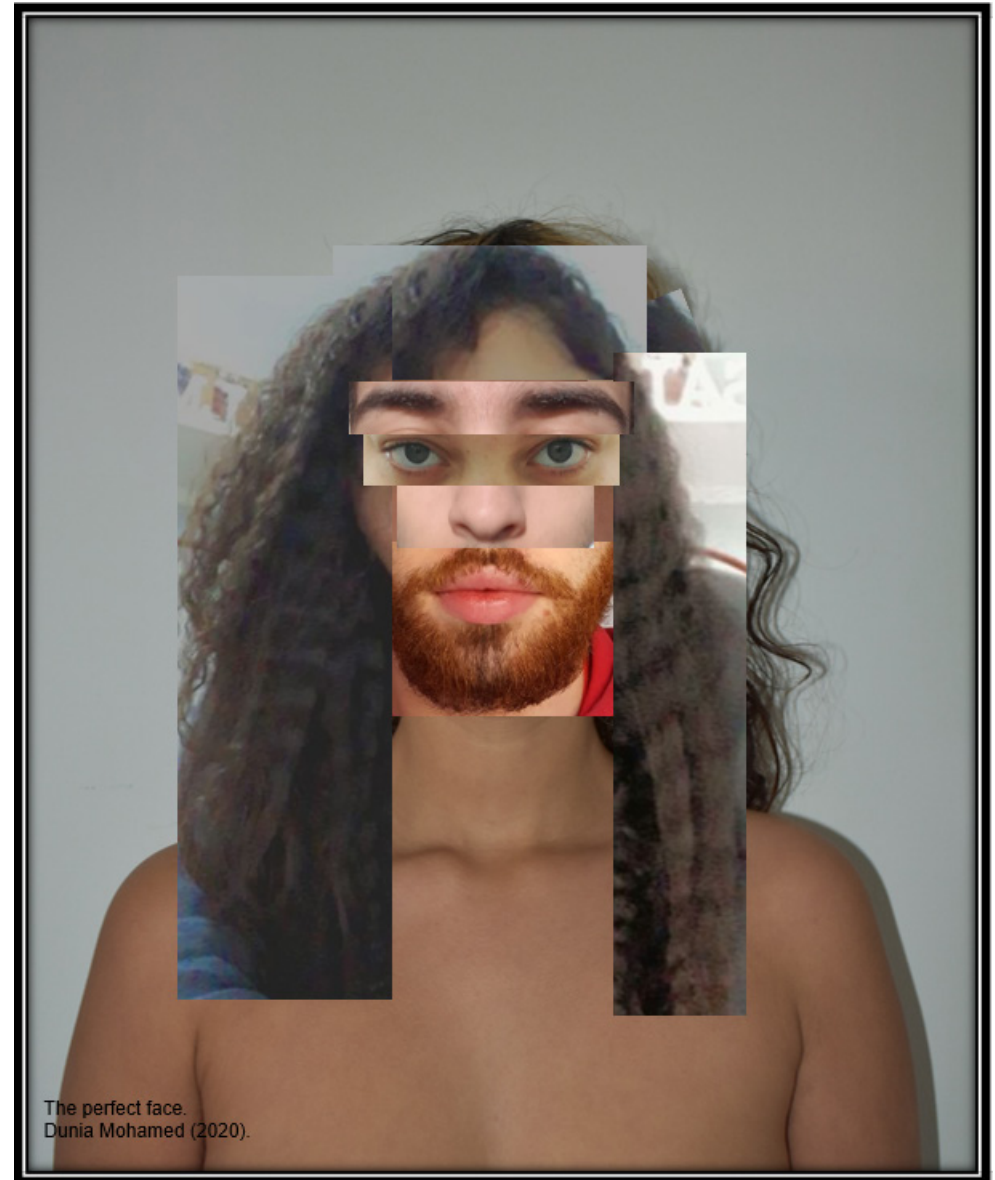


Inviting participants to take photos of their favourite body parts

Artist Filip Čustić (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filip_%C4%86usti%C4%87) inspired **Dunia Mohamed Abdelkader** in her project *The Perfect Body*. Dunia intended to ask fourteen people she knew to choose the part of their body that they liked best, and Dunia would have taken a photo of it. Due to the virus, Dunia asked the participants to take the photos themselves. Dunia admitted having had problems getting photos of some areas such as the upper legs or the nose. To complete the missing body parts, Dunia put out a request via Instagram for people to share some shots.

Dunia wanted to compose a multicultural body using parts of people with various backgrounds, to break the taboo on nudity, to create a gender- and sex-free work, and to show a variety of opinions about the body. She constructed two compositions with the photos: a facial and a whole-body image.

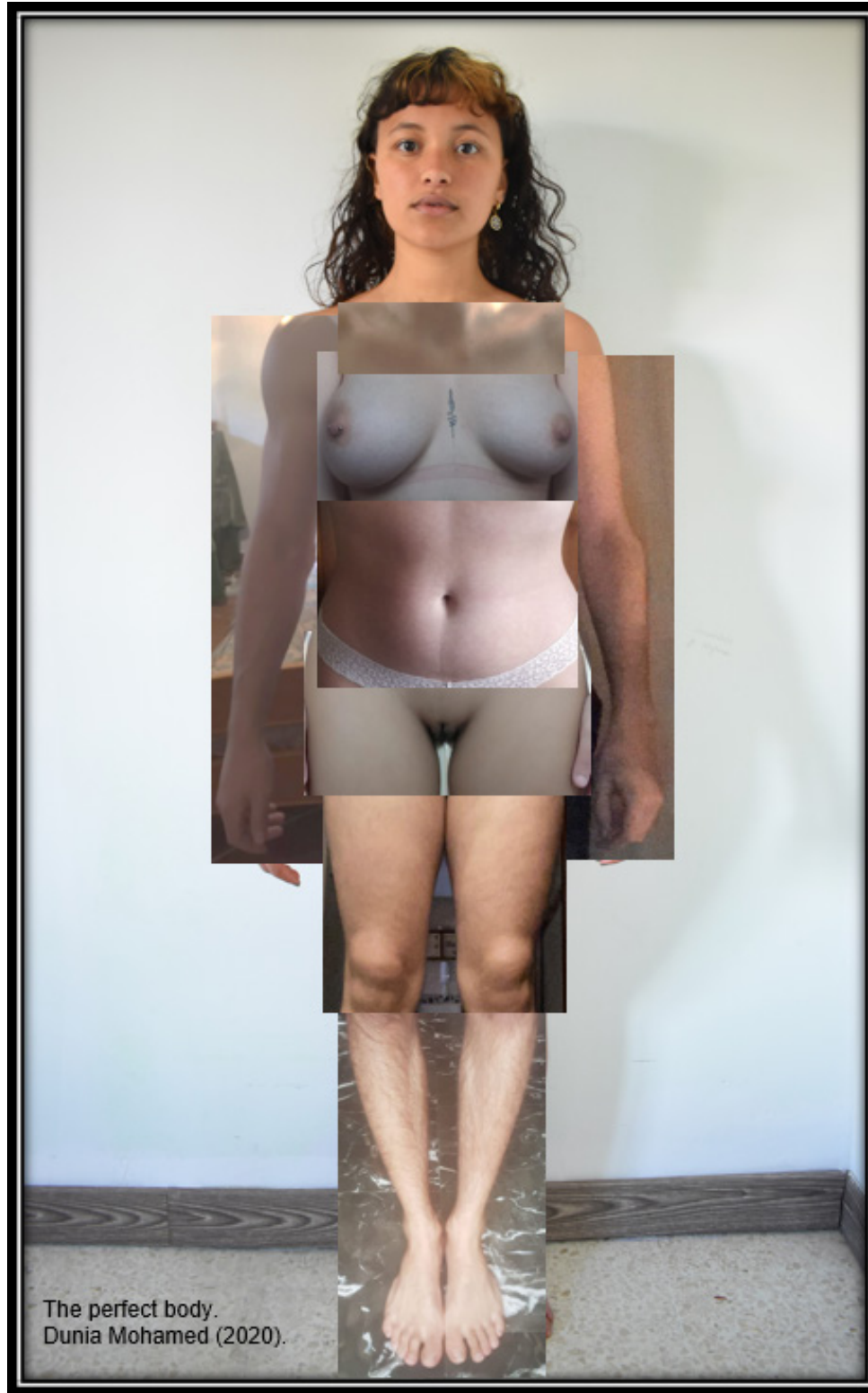
Below is a list of the participants with their age and their favourite body part. I provide a few of the statements by participants about why they liked that part of their body.



- Salma (17): hair
- Brahem (23): eyebrows
- Christian (20): beard – His biggest attraction is his red beard, for which he was bullied during school, but he learned to accept himself.
- Maryam (11): eyes
- Ibrahima (12): nose

The base of this image is the body of Fatima, the only person who said she liked her whole body.

- Alvaro (21): right arm
- Jose (25): left arm
- Inés (23): clavicle
- Ainhoa (24): breasts
- Marina (24): abdomen
- Blanca (23): vulva – Blanca says it's the only part she's always felt safe with, that she's felt insecure about every single part of her body except her vulva, which she's always liked and she says looks pretty.
- Mellda (18): upper legs
- Naim (17): feet



The perfect body.
Dunia Mohamed (2020).

Expression of personal fears became a metaphor of shared Covid-19 isolation

Isabel Fabero López first wanted to do a private photo workshop with her friends, but as this became impossible, she started to ponder what she could do at home. After rifling through her photos, she decided to represent her personal fears caused by various situations she cannot solve. Her metaphorical-poetic work *Immersion* shows her inside a fishbowl.



Isabel argues that her feelings expressed in the work can be compared with the effect Covid-19 has on many of us: “I am in a bubble and the outside world is lurking there with the virus; it is something that I cannot control. In the new normal, we will each be in our security bubble so that the virus does not reach us.”



Despite her general anxiety, Isabel also writes that the virus has revealed something valuable. Thanks to Covid-19, she realised “how happy we are on a daily basis, just doing our daily routine.”

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