

# Srinia Chowdhury, Katy Stubbs and Nala Turner: femininity and strength

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Mar 8 • Written By Nick Duxbury

[International Women's Day](#) has long been an important day in my calendar, mainly because it's my mother's birthday, so it's always been a day to celebrate an influential woman. As I have gotten older, International Women's Day has become an important day to celebrate talented and driven teammates, as I play a [mixed-sex sport called korfbal](#) where half of the players in a team are female as well as featuring skilled and knowledgeable female coaches and referees – a sport that truly embraces sexual equality. Now, as someone researching and promoting artists, it is an important day to highlight a few of the extraordinarily talented women included in this exhibition.

These three artists are about as distanced geographically as you could get, [Srinia Chowdhury](#) is based in Delhi, [Katy Stubbs](#) in London and [Nala Turner](#) is in Brooklyn, New York, but the reason I have grouped them together is to do with their treatment of the expectations of women as a subject matter. I can't begin to think of a more suitable subject to look at on International Women's Day and, for the most part, these incredible women are going to speak for themselves.

*"I expect my pieces to provoke strong feelings... I am always battling against what is expected of me as a person at predominately white institutions, careers; as an artist, and as a Black female."*

Turner's pieces range in scope from very subtle, but beautiful, *Portrait mugs* to more confrontational *Rhetoric vessels* that feature lettering that looks like daubed on graffiti.

*"... you are invited to participate in the representation or perception of the Black female. Through a Portraiture mug, you place her image on your own lips and taste what it feels like to be misperceived. Through a Rhetoric vessel, you are challenged to read aloud the absolute nonsense Black women are forced to absorb both in professional and social settings."*

*"There is a continued idea that society, particularly White society, persists uneasy with the strength of Black females; that Black women are distinctly characterized as less beautiful and viewed with little feminine regard."*

*"I've found themes that are clear constants in my work: femininity, strength, cultural misnomers regarding black women. These things were showing up in all my work – showing up differently, but always there."*

*"I find that the personal topic of my various series to be critical to the overarching goal of my works – to redefine Black femininity."*

*"I made works that moved away from appearances and expectations about 'strong Black women' from a Euro-normative standard, to what Black women can say for and about themselves instead."*

Similarly, Chowdhury works in series' that explore her society's attitude to and treatment of women, from the incredible [Moral Police series](#) to her subtle but powerful series of paper clay collages.

*"I am a storyteller. My works are a combination of form and narration. I love using ceramics because it allows me to sculpt, draw and paint all in one medium. Inspiration for my sculptures/installation stems from my longstanding curiosity of human behaviour, my observation of daily life..."*

*"... if some work is issue centric then it should be able to evoke their feelings towards that issue. Art has the capacity to make one think..."*

On Chowdhury's *Moral Police 4* (pictured) the Hindu reads: 'Sarva Mangala Mangalye, Shive Saravatha Sadhika. Sharanye Trayambake Gauri, Narayani Namostute' which translates as: 'The one who bestows auspiciousness on one and all, the one who accomplishes all objectives, to the mother of the three worlds, O Gauri, I bow again and again to you.' This Hindu mantra praises the goddess Durga and Chowdhury is saying that the female god grants optimism and success when prayed to regardless of gender, but conversely women in India are still treated as inferiors, creating huge gender gaps in the workforce and real fears of sexual violence. On a small warning sign on the top of *Moral Police 4* is written 'Sewabhabhi' meaning a woman who is dutiful.

*"Through the clay, artist Srinia Chowdhury reminds herself of a promise – to use art as a tool for social and political comment."*

*"Srinia's art is a reflection of her everyday life and society as a whole – both condemning it while also adding a satirical narrative."*

*"... she dwells on herself as a person and where she comes from and feels there are many layers and textures to our existence."*

On the face of it, Stubbs' work may not immediately seem to fit in with these commentaries on the expectations of women; her work is far more playful than that of Chowdhury and Turner and she engages her practice with elements of art history not normally associated with ceramics, namely renaissance painting, alongside her own training as an illustrator and comic book artist. However, her subject matter often centres on strong and empowered women, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* and *Susanna and the Elders* being prime examples, but also challenging ideas of masculinity with *Don't Kill Animals* and idealised female beauty with *David Buys Golitha for One Night of Passion* and *No Skinny Girls Allowed*.

*"Katy's illustrative style is wobbly and cheeky, poking fun at the crispness of traditional ceramics and stiffness of classical art."*

*"... not smoking, not eating meat [is] really important to me in reality, but in ceramics you can have freedom to do all the bad things I'm too shy to do or spend too long worrying about in real life."*

*"I find myself getting quite attached to the characters of a piece, investing a lot of thought in their emotional lives."*

*"It's about this blandness of life; the guilt and shame and the fallibility of humans."*

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1-3 – Nala Turner; *Nala Turner: Redefining Black Femininity*; 2020; Color Bloc Magazine

4 – Nala Turner; *The Courage To Push Through*; 2019; All The Art

5-6 – Nala Turner; *Nala Turner: Redefining Black Femininity*; 2020; Color Bloc Magazine

7 – Srinia Chowdhury; *Srinia Chowdhury*; 2020; <https://nhclayproject.org/srinia-chowdhury>

8 – Srinia Chowdhury; *Srinia Chowdhury, the rising sculptor from India*; 2015; <https://ibtn9.com/2015/12/exclusive-interview-srinia-chowdhury-the-rising-sculptor-from-india/>

9 – Surbhi Gupta; *The Shape of Ideas*; 2018; The Indian Express

10-11 – Team Mojarto; *Srinia Chowdhury: Clay Can Humble The Ego*; 2017; <https://www.mojarto.com/blogs/srinia-chowdhury-clay-can-humble-the-ego>

12 – Peach Doble; *Artist Katy Stubbs on moulding her dishy stories out of clay*; 2019; <https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/katy-stubbs-illustration-ceramics-131219>

13-15 – Katy Stubbs; *Katy Stubbs: Price Choppers*; 2020; ALMA ZEVI

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Nala Turner; *Rhetoric vessels*; 2020



Srinia Chowdhury; *Paper clay series*



Srinia Chowdhury; *Moral Police 4 (detail)*



Katy Stubbs; *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*; 2018



Katy Stubbs; *David Buys Golitha for One Night of Passion*; 2015



Katy Stubbs; *Susanna and the Elders*; 2018





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