

Description

Book Review: Immaculate Forms: Uncovering the History of Women’s Bodies By Helen King

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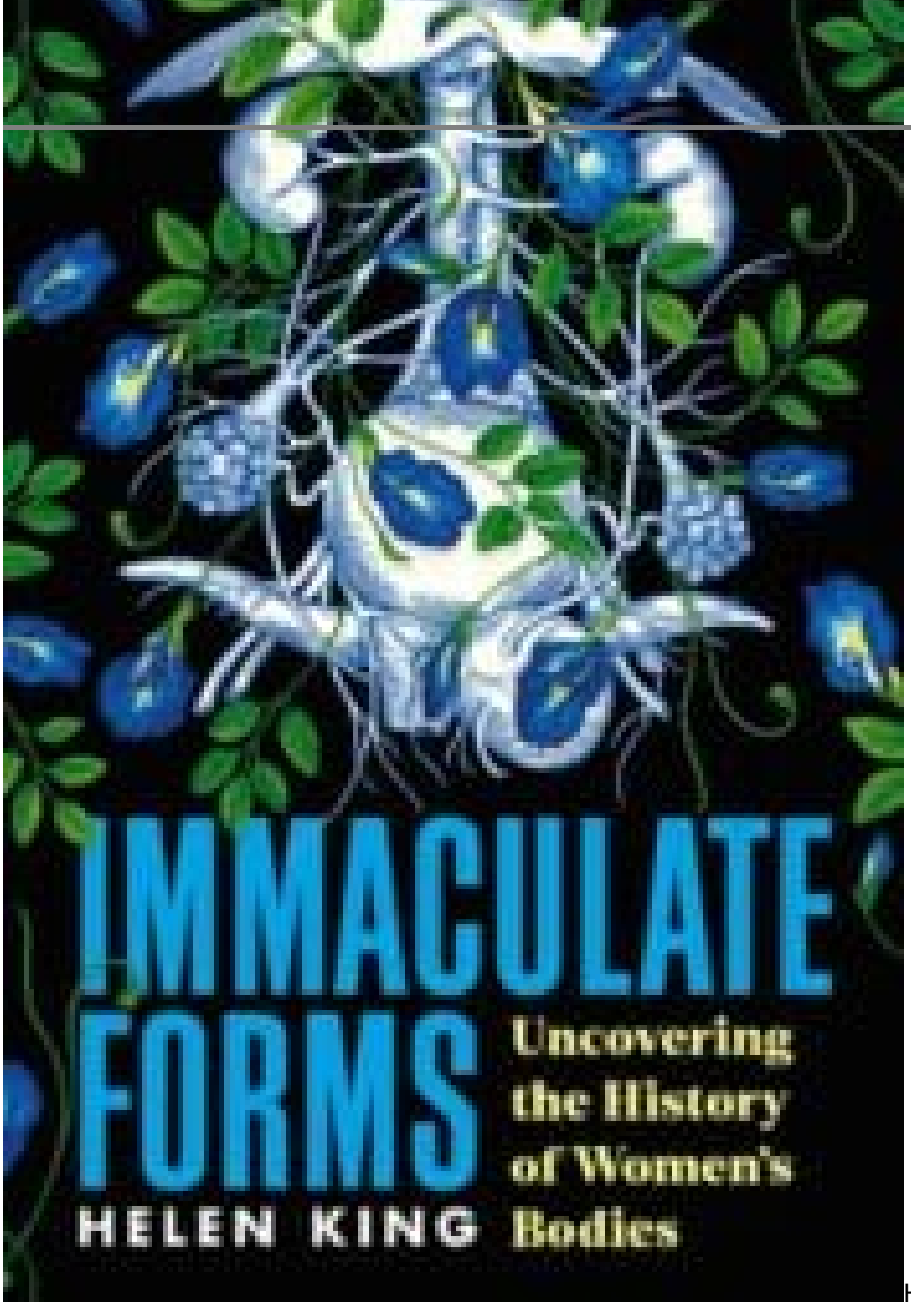

Helen King explores four key parts of the female body – breasts, clitoris, hymen and womb – referring to medical, mythical, classical, religious, historical and artistic perspectives to further our understanding of women's bodies and societies' views on this throughout time and into the 21st Century.

Much of this book explores how knowledge of the female form has developed and changed as mankind has gained more insight into the workings of the human body. The male form has been the default with women's bodies being seen as the anomaly. Much of the historical narrative has been provided by men wishing to understand and explain (often to other men) the workings of the female body.

Women have been vilified and, in the middle-ages, seen as witches for knowing too much about female anatomy and daring to share this knowledge. Knowledge of the clitoris is a prime example of this where men have claimed throughout history to have discovered the clitoris while women's reputations have been damaged for possession of this knowledge. Historically, knowledge of the power of the clitoris to provide pleasure to women has been suppressed, one would assume in order to control women and ensure that women could not pleasure themselves.

In the chapter which discusses the clitoris, King tells us there are societies where the clitoris features in folktales and is seen as having power: ‘often ignored and maligned, and rarely celebrated, the clitoris has, over the course of history, been treated variously as a myth, a joke, an abnormality, a shameful secret – and, very occasionally, a symbol of power.’ She explores the breasts, hymen and womb with depth and ease of explanation, facilitating understanding of the many reasons that women’s bodies are regarded as they are.

> ..King has created a fascinating read for anybody interested in women, our bodies and our rights.

By exploring the history, from ancient to modern, of the female form and the contrast between virtue and lust and societies’ various perspectives on these, King has created a fascinating read for anybody interested in women, our bodies and our rights. **TPM**

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