

# LET *it* SHINE

Can a photograph project your true beauty? Jini Reddy meets a photographer who promises to reveal your inner goddess



Julie Stanton

**If you positively loathe having your photo taken – because you feel too fat, too wrinkled, too old, too ugly,** in short because you feel you don't quite make the grade, then the idea of turning yourself into a work of art for the camera may be a little hard to swallow.

But one woman is doing her best to change all that: Samjhana Moon, founder of Goddess Portraiture believes that we women are far too hard on ourselves: "Society puts across a very limited idea of beauty – and as women, we're constantly trying to shrink to fit these images. We need to learn to recognise our inner qualities and squash the urge to instantly criticise or improve on ourselves.

"I believe that beauty is a feeling we project from within – if we feel sexy and beautiful then this will come out. And we most often feel this way when we are

**For Natalia Blas, a 35-year-old project manager, who runs her own business and works 12-hour days, seven days a week, winning a day in front of the camera was an exhilarating experience: "Samjhana talked me through feeling the tree and the flowers I was touching, the sun on my face, and the wind. She didn't coach me much about what to do or how to pose – most instructions were to relax and feel the calm these live beings were offering me.**



Natalia Blas

**I realised how much I had missed this contact with nature and drew enormous positive energy from the session because I was doing something new, outside of my routine, something good for my physical and mental wellbeing. It helped me to reconnect to my true feelings. I couldn't believe the person in the photos was me – it was amazing that I looked so relaxed in front of a camera. Even if you are simply interested in some good photos of yourself in nature, you will end up finding out something about yourself."**

having fun, laughing, being wild and completely unselfconscious. Unfortunately, these aren't the moments when we have a mirror to hand, so we rarely see our true beauty recorded." With her photography, Samjhana aims to capture these moments, and in doing so provide women – even the shyest and most cautious – with images that will blow them away.

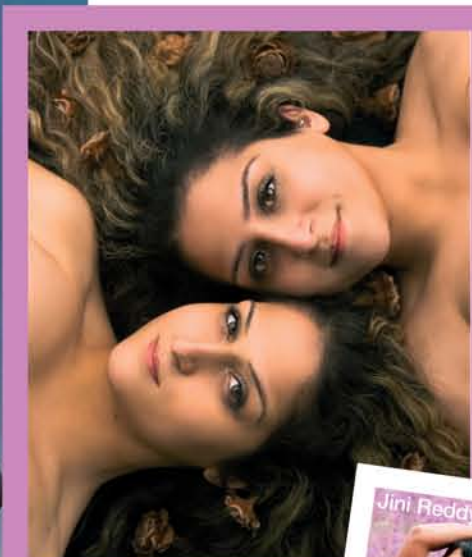
Citing both Paganism and Buddhism as influences, evangelical about the healing power of nature and keen to foster a deeper awareness of our connection to it, she prefers to photograph women in natural landscapes. When you book a session with her, Samjhana sends you a questionnaire asking you all sorts of intriguing questions, which, if you're already a nature lover, will leave you in a delicious state of anticipation, and if you're not, will get your 'green' juices flowing.

For example, she asks: "If I asked you to lie down on a boulder or a fresh bed of leaves would you be co-operative?" And: "In which environments do you feel most alive and connected to Mother Earth?" She also encourages you to think about which elements of weather and nature you prefer – and whether you're happy to consider 'unveiling', in other words taking your kit off, or some of it. ("You never know, you may surprise yourself on the day," she says.)



## THE GODDESS GUIDE

Practise gratitude! Recognise and acknowledge the beauty in everything around you, in the actions and appearance of others and the majesty of nature. As you retire to bed think of five things you are grateful for. This helps to raise your vibration and attract more of the good stuff.

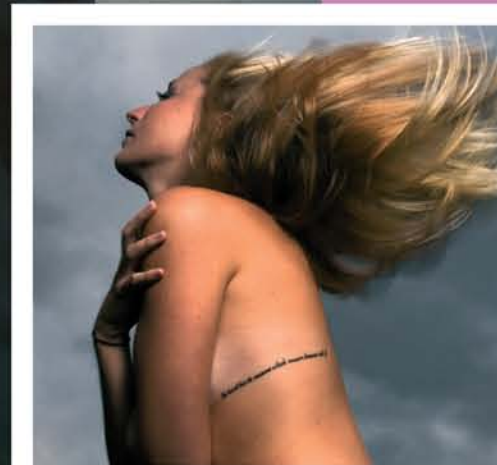


Jini Reddy

### GIRLS' WORLD

What really happens during a goddess session...

I had told Samjhana that I wanted to be photographed in a field of wildflowers and she has found me the perfect one in the South Downs, filled with poppies, but also gorgeous yellow and purple flowers. I've brought with me a yellow dress, a mauve one, and my mother's beautiful blue and fuchsia sari. What I can't provide, however, is the perfectly photogenic face or body, and I'm worried I'm going to be her first failure. Samjhana has told me we'll do the make-up on site but I've forgotten my foundation and concealer – crucial to my confidence as I'd had an accident a few weeks earlier and am still sporting a few bruises. Fortunately Samjhana expertly applies my make-up.



At first I feel slightly wooden as I twirl about. Things improve when I take off my bikini top, and artfully drape my mum's sari over me while lying on the ground. Ahh, I think, this is more like it, as I relax and roll around and look directly at the camera.

Towards the end of the day, we head to a field of purple flowers and I pull on my mauve dress – I'm tired and don't feel especially inspired but when Samjhana shows me all the photos she's taken in the viewfinder I'm gobsmacked. Even to my critical and unforgiving eye they look lovely. I feel – there's no other way to put it – gorgeous and strong.



### THE GODDESS GUIDE

Trust your intuition. We as women are blessed with emotional intelligence, so learn to trust your instinctive nature. Often your first thought is a deeper knowing self. Most things that come after the initial reaction are based on logic and social conditioning and these do not always serve us on our individual life journey.

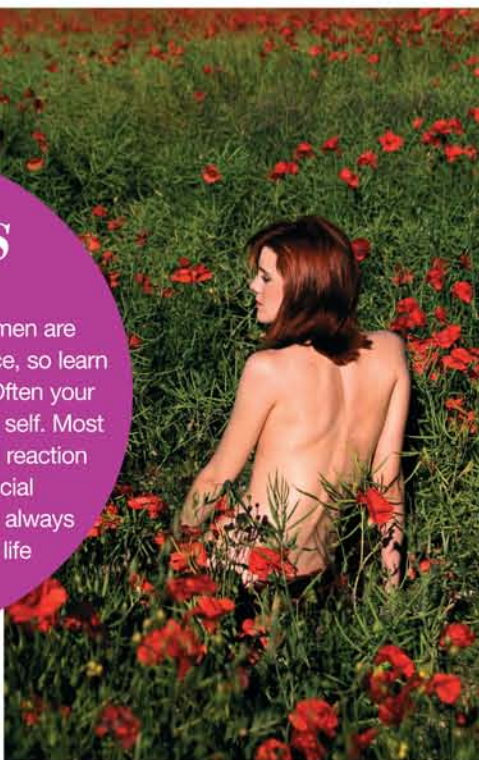
Samjhana is particularly keen to use her photography to help women who are emerging from emotional or health-related trauma: "A session will remove you from the situation you're in and perhaps alter your perception of it. If nothing else, it will give you a day out to enjoy yourself and forget all about your problems," she says, "although if you want to talk, I will listen. I really let my client lead the day. She shows me what she's looking to get out of it, and at the end, if it's appropriate, I may introduce her to things that may be able to help her – it might be a holistic therapy, or some book or workshop I can recommend. Above all, my aim is to channel healing energy through photography and provide a nurturing experience in a natural environment."



Samjhana Moon

She certainly succeeded with 45-year-old Julie Stanton, a former dancer and bulimia sufferer who met the photographer purely by chance. Says Samjhana: "It was a wonderful

synchronicity – I saw a peacock blue dress in a charity shop that I wanted to wear to my launch party and got chatting to Julie who worked there. I told her what I do, and she said she'd love to be a goddess, but that she didn't think she'd be here for much longer. In other words, she felt suicidal. But she was very excited about the project, and I felt I wanted to help her. How could I say no? Talking to her made me realise that it is important to portray our darkness too:



our sadness, our depression, our unhappiness, which is all part of who we are, all part of our growth, and not just the soft and the feminine.

"On the day, I photographed her in London's Richmond Park in various poses – one in particular, taken on a fallen tree was quite striking. She was very upbeat during the session, and said it had helped her to return to the glory she remembered as a dancer. The session and the images gave her the confidence to begin socialising again after 15 years. She recently celebrated a birthday with friends where she dined in a restaurant without bingeing or purging, which is incredible." NH

For more information, visit [goddessportraiture.co.uk](http://goddessportraiture.co.uk) or call 07749 543 469.

### 6 ways to let your inner goddess shine

Try these tips from Samjhana to harness your true feminine power

- Gracefully accept compliments. Acknowledge them and repeat them to yourself as affirmations whilst looking in the mirror. If you find this uncomfortable try replacing: "I don't like my" with "I'm learning to like my".
- Appreciate the synchronicity of daily events and accept responsibility for them. You are creating your future in every moment so it's vital to stay present and aware of the karmic laws of cause and effect. If you harm another you harm yourself and vice versa. Love and respect all living things, practise acts of kindness towards others and reward yourself for achievements.
- Maintain a healthy diet that energises you. Nourish your body with lots of 'live' organic foods which support your body's natural alkaline state. Limit or eliminate toxins to allow your body and mind to function in the optimal state.
- Understand that you are unique and capable of personal evolution. Free yourself from old patterns and find your own

- way of contributing to the world by exploring your creative nature. Don't be afraid to try new things as they may uncover talents you were unaware of.
- Take time out to tune into your body and mind. This may be 10 to 20 minutes relaxing with a favourite crystal before rising in the morning or more organised meditation with music, yoga or tai chi.
- Embrace your vulnerability by responding to your cyclic nature. Recognising the synchronicity of your moods and menstruation in relation to the gravitational changes created by the moon can enrich your everyday life.

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