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MONA KUHN, *Photographs*

Steidl, Göttingen, Germany, 2004; limited edition of 100, slip-cased with an original 10 x 10" C-print

When we first encounter the naked human form among the pages of Mona Kuhn's book *Photographs*, it feels surprisingly natural, unforced. Kuhn offers a series of exquisite vignettes of the human body, focusing closely enough to reveal the intimate physical landscape of her subjects and yet gaining enough distance that she invites viewers to see themselves in each bodily sketch. Kuhn clearly connects to her subjects with an intimacy that far transcends the mechanics of the camera. It is through this connection that Kuhn offers such a forgiving lens, in front of which her subjects present themselves unreservedly.

Though garmentless, Kuhn's subjects are clothed in confidence. They don't scream, "Look at me!" but rather more simply state, "This is me."

Kuhn considers the wrinkle, the bicep, the dirty fingernail, one single pore, the belly button—and yet, never is she too close that we can't see, or at least imagine, the rest of the body that claims such delicate details. In many ways she decontextualizes her subjects, gracefully managing to shed the bodily judgment to which we subject ourselves and each other to exhaustion. She suggests an almost idyllic world in which all forms of the body coexist naturally, on every point of the life spectrum that begins in perfection, flourishes with growth, and ends in degeneration.

Kuhn presents a dynamic coexistence between a certain nostalgia in her black-and-white work and a more present reality in her color imagery. A nude body on the beach rendered in the rich silvers of black-and-white seems worlds away from the flower-and-fruit arrangement, sharing the foreground with a daily newspaper before deferring the background to several lounging subjects, also nude. Kuhn's palette is so versatile that she hovers effortlessly between the practical and mundane on one hand and the ideal and dreamlike on the other. Through her work, Kuhn suggests that the fundamental freedom of a body unfettered by clothes or costumes can and does exist everywhere, from dreams to everyday life.

—Whitney Grace