

Photos are more than just naked abstraction

By Doug MacCash

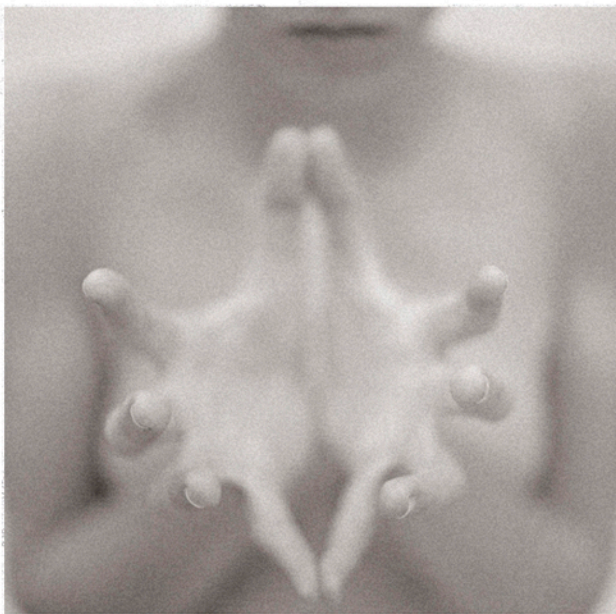
Art critic

REVIEW

Mexican-born, San Francisco-based photographer Mona Kuhn's nudes at Bassetti Fine Art Photographs in the French Quarter are visual balancing acts. She's a classicist, interested in the complexities of the human body for its own sake, but she's also a modernist, using the camera to crop, distort and otherwise abstract the human form.

The male and female models she chooses are attractive, but they aren't astonishingly beautiful centerfold types. She poses her models in revealing postures, but there's nothing erotic about them. Her photos are intimate, but they are also cool and emotionally distant. They are neither entirely sweet nor sour, neither entirely rough nor smooth and neither entirely happy nor sad.

Of course it's those intriguing dichotomies that draw us to Kuhn's photos. And once we're close to these relatively large (15 inch square) prints, which she de-



'Menta,' one of the best of Mona Kuhn's photographs, is a haunting abstraction created simply by drawing the model's fingertips into focus and allowing everything else to remain a soft haze.

velops herself, we find that her technical virtuosity matches her compositional skills. Minute detail such as freckles, flecks of sand and eyelashes, captured by her medium-format Hasselblad

camera, hover strangely amid indistinct backgrounds of blurred highlights and shadows. Of all Kuhn's visual dichotomies, this contrast of sharp and soft focus is the most effective.

PHOTOS OF NUDES

By Mona Kuhn

What: Moody black and white semi-abstract photographs of men, women and children.

Where: Bassetti Fine Art Photography, 233 Chartres St., 529-9811.

When: Tues-Sat, 10:30 a.m. to 5:30, through Dec. 15.

Prices: Photos printed in editions of 25 are \$600 to \$1,000.

And the shots in which the contrast is the most exaggerated are the best in the show. In the foreground of "Dirk," "Two Hands," a boy's hands hang limply. They are so sharply focused that you can see the grains of sand crusted on his fingers. In the background his body fades away into the distance like a puff of smoke.

In "Sacra," a young woman's hand glitters with detail in the foreground, while her face dissolves alluringly behind it like a memory. And, best of all, in "Menta," a young woman's hands reach toward the camera. Only the very tips of her fingers are in focus, everything else blurs into a soft gray-on-gray mass, like a human sea anemone.

Stylistically, this is the path Kuhn should follow.