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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

Sam Contis

In 2016, when the photographer Sam Contis was ending the project for which she's best known—a five-year study of the all-male student body and the cattle-ranch campus of Deep Springs College, in California—a chance encounter on a trip to Berlin led her art in a new direction. Watching the mezzo-soprano Inbal Hever rehearse an otherworldly solo by the composer Chaya Czernowin, Contis became fascinated by the subtle demands that the exertion of breath placed on the vocalist's body. Contis went on to photograph Hever, off and on, for the next six years, always in small practice rooms with natural light. The superbly restrained results are on view at the Klaus von Nichtsagend gallery's new location, in Tribeca, through June 18. The format of the portraits shifts virtuosically: color, black-and-white, intimate diptychs, large prints, documentary, nearly abstract. In the process, Contis establishes her project's lineage, from Eadweard Muybridge's locomotion studies and the spirit photographers of the nineteenth century (an allusion seen above in "Inbal July 18, 2018") to Alfred Stieglitz's decades-long composite portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe and "The Sound I Saw," Roy DeCarava's exaltation of jazz. Audio of Hever's rendition of Czernowin's piece animates the exhibition; on May 26, at 7, she performs live, surrounded by pictures of windows—Contis's record of the spaces in which the two women met to create this stunning, expansive duet.



Art work by Sam Contis / Courtesy the artist / Klaus von Nichtsagend

— Andrea K. Scott