

MUSÉE

VANGUARD OF PHOTOGRAPHY CULTURE



Sam Contis. *Untitled (Inbal, April 6)*, 2018 (Duet), Archival Pigment Prints, each image: 24 x 34 inches (60.96 x 86.36 cm), Edition 1/5 + II AP, Courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery.

Muscles contract, bodies suspend in mid-air; at the core of Sam Contis' photography dwells a sense of turbulent stillness and dynamism, a palpable tension that one immediately feels upon entering the room. In *Duet*, Sam Contis' second solo exhibition with the Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery, the expression of motion within the still life of black and white photography potently conveys the curious indeterminacy of the human form, at once unlatched yet bound by gravity.

The entire series is interested in the body of a single subject, the New York- and Berlin-based vocalist Inbal Hever. The two made acquaintance in 2016 when Contis saw Hever perform at a rehearsal in Berlin. The intimate nature of the rehearsal room allowed Contis to take in the subtle details of the singer's shifting physicality during the performance, from the strain of the singer's neck to the wrinkles between her brows, a moment of observation that inspired the collaboration between the two artists for the next six years.

The exhibition's title, *Duet*, aptly describes the interaction between Contis and Hever as photographer and performer, but it also points to other dualisms and symmetries. There is something utterly captivating about how the images, showing Hever engaged in a private rehearsal, convey the sheer force and liveliness of the moving body and face. The outbursts of energy coming from Hever's

body are much like the outburst of a camera shutter rapidly capturing the instance of a second in which the body changes.

At the same time, the tangible, almost tactile nature of Contis' portraits of Hever in motion is paradoxically a result of distorted images. While inviting the viewer to gaze upon and familiarize themselves with the subject of the portrait, the familiarity is recognized in the strangeness, the unusual, and the unexpectedness of the human flesh.

In separateness and in closeness, in the publicness of performing, and in the privacy of perceiving, one can find duets throughout this exhibit, but the duet that Contis wanted to address most in her series is the binary between interior and exterior spaces. "Over the years, we (Hever and I) met up in different makeshift studio spaces, often domestic spaces that weren't either of our homes," Contis explains, elaborating that "I was always photographing her in natural light, so proximity to the window was important, and we were always opening and closing windows to modulate the sound going out and the sound from outside coming in. I started to think of this as akin to the body bringing air in and pushing it out—the windows became ways of thinking about interiors and exteriors, and the space of the studio as another body." The exhibit's design was set up to exemplify this, with two rooms of the gallery showing two distinct but connected sequences of

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images.

While the front gallery focuses on Hever, the back gallery reveals a different collection, demonstrating the spaces where the two artists met to work together. Here, Contis presents the viewer with photographs of windows from the various studios, which glean into the courtyards and trees that lie beyond. In doing so, Contis directs the view outward, opposite to what the previous gallery had done, which was to focus our attention on a single subject.

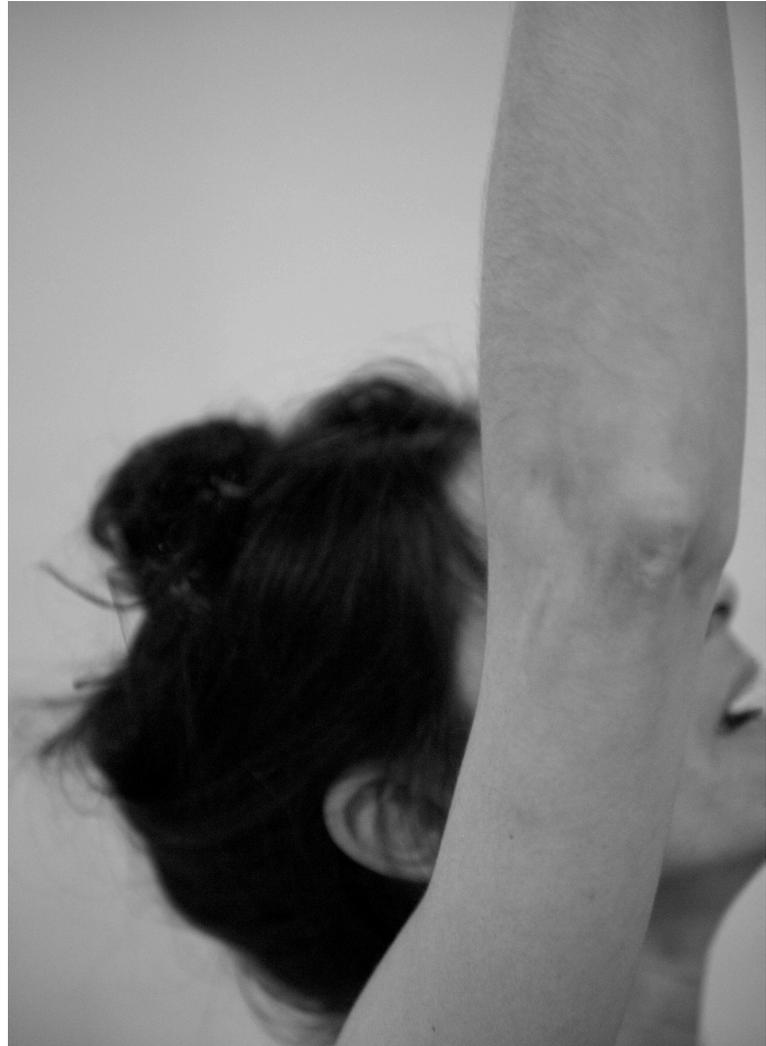
Another distinct element of the second room is the two speakers that stand in the middle, facing one another. They project the audio recording of Hever's singing, which permeates the room and its center space, a void now filled in by Hever's voice. Even though her image is absent in the second room, the singer is still present with the viewer; the exterior space in the photographed windows thus becomes another way of seeing the body as landscape and the space as the body.

- Lia Jung

Sam Contis: *Duet* will be on view at Claus Von Nichtssagend Gallery from May 18th through June 18th, 2022.



Sam Contis. *Untitled (Inbal, July 16), 2021 (Duet), Archival Pigment Print, Image size: 5 x 7 inches (12.70 x 17.78 cm), paper size: 16 1/2 x 18 inches (41.91 x 45.72 cm), Edition 1/5 + II AP, Courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery.*



Sam Contis. *Untitled (Inbal, May 14), 2019 (Duet), Archival Pigment Prints, Left Image: 28 x 20 inches (71.12 x 50.80 cm), Right Image: 33 x 24 inches (83.82 x 60.96 cm), Edition 1/5 + II AP, Courtesy of the artist and Klaus von Nichtssagend Gallery.*