

KLAUS VON NICHTSSAGEND GALLERY

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MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

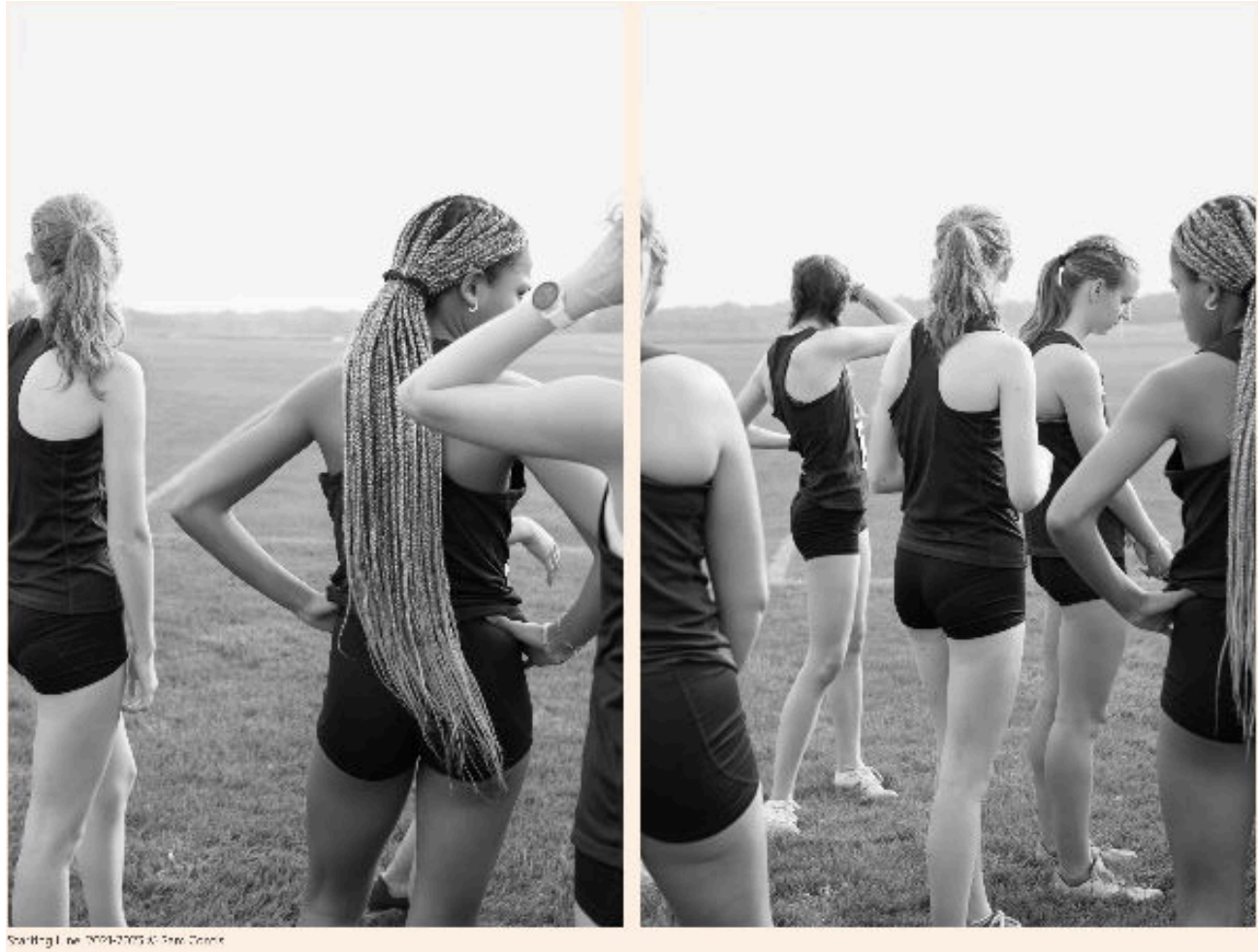
# FT Weekend Magazine

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**THE BODY**

**A PHOTOGRAPHY SPECIAL**



Swelling Line 2021-2023 © Eric Clontar

## The body on camera

We talk about the human body as a machine, an instrument, a vessel. We say that it has its own language and its own genre of horror. It can be a temple or a weapon, an agent of fear and shock or delight and beauty. Through 12 photography projects, this special issue touches all of these iterations of the human form. Basketball players readying themselves to leap for the ball appear like figures from a Renaissance painting. Bodies that find deep water terrifying tentatively learn to swim. Dancers contort themselves into strange shapes. Those denied access to healthcare endure terror.

The issue looks out onto a year in which the body will be a site of contest. Olympic records are broken at increasingly higher rates and, at this year's Paris games, the body will likely be pushed further and faster than ever before. At the same time, bodily freedoms that were hard won come under threat yet again. The photography presented here attempts to think about the body amid all of this complexity.

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Sam Contis's photographs of a girls' cross-country running team at a Pennsylvania high school are a homecoming of sorts. Contis joined the team herself at the age of 13, around the same time she took her first photography class. She began taking her camera to practice, photographing her teammates. She returned to that same club six years ago, once again with her camera, to photograph the team's daily practice and race days. Over every season for four years she captured the runners as they grew up.

Like Degas's studies of ballet dancers, which he worked on over several decades of observation, or the Victorian photographer Eadweard Muybridge's galloping horses, Contis's portraits, some colour and some black and white, are realist studies of the "motion of the body": girls' feet upturned so they can clean the mud from their trainers; arms wrapped languidly around one another as they sit and talk in their running kit; pensively staring across the field as they prepare to race.

They are social studies too: a rare picture of the tenderness of teenage friendships. "When they go out to race, they're pushing through an incredible amount of pain. The body is in crisis," Contis says. "But I think the other side of that is that they learn how to care not only for themselves, but they really are attentive to one another."

Showing up each day, building up the girls' trust over the months and years, Contis also captures the moments in which adolescent self-consciousness falls away. "When you are fully exerting yourself physically, there's no energy left to be conscious of the world around you," she says. "It puts you in this other place, which I think is very beautiful."

What we see is the body as it moves, or prepares to move, across a landscape, but also as it transitions from childhood to young adulthood. "Maybe, subconsciously, I was interested that nothing is fixed at this age," Contis concludes. "You're really figuring out who you want to be and how you want to be seen."

- Baya Simons



'SPINE', 2020-22