



undressing

# mona

**SENSUAL, SEXY AND SEDUCTIVE ... PHOTOGRAPHS**

BY NICHOLAS FAHEY PHOTOGRAPHY BY (C) MONA KUHN, COURTESY OF FAHEY/KLEIN GALLERY, LOS ANGELES

To undress before the camera or an easel is to don the garments of representation; to take off one dress or costume, and put on another known as "the nude." — Victor Tupitsyn

Sensual yet subtle creations that capture a kindred interconnection with her models is a specialty that photographer Mona Kuhn has mastered over the years. Kuhn's carefree nature and exotic background ease the inhibitions of anyone in her presence. She develops radiant environments while inhabiting the likes of pristine beach villages that oftentimes seem to float on the idea of voyeur. Perhaps it's Kuhn's inner beauty and gentle nature that help release the true persona of each and every human she photographs. Choosing to focus on "nudes" for quite sometime, her pictures capture moments that are only viable in the uniquely comfortable environments she creates. 944 caught up with the distinctive photographer and discovered just what makes her shutter go off.

**944: What about the idea of "nude as a costume" initially intrigued you?**

KUHN: The "nude as a costume" is a concept that came up during my conversation with philosopher Victor Tupitsyn. The assertion that although someone has been disrobed, he/she remains clothed in their own skin and confidence. Our body language in the nude still follows a playful theater plot — as if the nude itself were the costume.

**How do you try to convey sensuality?**

I like beauty and I like the body, so in a way it's hard for that mix not to become sensual. I do not search for sensuality at first, rather for ways of capturing a moment and fixing memory of time spent together in the format of an image.

**Where do you find your inspiration?**

I find most of my inspiration in people and in the body, as a canon of art. Every time I look at art — regardless of the medium, whether it be painting or ceramics, video or sculptures — I find myself drawn to works related to people. It's a big curiosity for me to see how generations before us and ahead of us represent themselves. In "people," I mean humans and in "humans," I mean this capsule we embody.

**Why did you decide to create relationships with your subjects?**

There is something extra special about knowing your subjects. A great fashion model is trained to perform, and as a result every frame is a great frame. But none of that has to do with that person's genuine inner self. By taking my time to really know someone I can portray something beyond the image itself.

**How do you make your subjects feel so comfortable while in a work environment?**

Respect is crucial, especially with the nude, but equally crucial is to create an environment where people feel welcomed and trusted. As I started photographing the nude, it became clear to me that I needed to move beyond the studio as I was interested in achieving a more authentic relationship with the human subject. I started renting a beach house on the west coast of France. I wasn't interested

in just photographing someone naked, I was interested in representing them as clothed in their own skin, secure of themselves.

**What part of Mona Kuhn did you sacrifice to become the photographer you are today?**

I sacrificed *other parts* of my life to become a photographer. I remember working long hours in the darkroom while my college reunion took place, or while my best friends would go out skiing for the weekend. So I sacrificed on the fun and social part of life, but I also gained a lot in equal or larger amounts. Look at my work: it's social and fun.

**What kind of things do you do to push your work to the next level?**

I make sure my work is seen in the right context, such as prominent galleries and selective collections. On a personal note, I push myself forward by reading interesting books and looking at other artists whose work interests me. Once in a while, we get together and discuss life and art. It's exciting to have a dialogue with your contemporaries, and it invariably pushes your mind forward.

**If you were not a photographer forever, what else would you consider doing?**

I am not sure if I will be a photographer forever. I prefer to think that I will be someone committed and engaged in the creative field. I have a fascination for the intricate ways a curatorial mind combines concepts and works of art. I can see myself tapping into arts on paper and working on curatorial projects.

**What advice do you have to offer?**

I would advise you to go for long walks away from the crowds. During that time, remove your mind from daily complexities. You'll slowly listen to your inner thoughts, a mumbling of inner voices. Allow your inner self to be heard and follow it.

Born to German parents and raised in Brazil, Kuhn moved to the U.S. for school. She has since lived and worked in San Francisco and now resides in LA where she pursues teaching and photography. Her work continues to flourish with her new book *Evidence*, available next month. [www.monakuhn.com](http://www.monakuhn.com)

# kuhn