Photographica no. 6 - Photography and models: histories of the nude

Deadline: Jun 15, 2022

Photographica journal (Laureline Meizel, Editorial secretary)

Call for Papers Photographica no. 6

Photography and models: histories of the nude

In 1998, the Bibliothèque nationale de France presented, under the direction of Sylvie Aubenas, Sylvianne de Decker, Catherine Mathon and Hélène Pinet, the exhibition “The art of the nude in the 19th century. The photographer and his model.” Across some 300 items, the exhibition and its catalog – which would become a major reference – traced the complex and diverse histories of nude photography in its first century of existence. By looking at this history through the lens of artists’ studios, the curatorial team shed new light on the complexity of the subject, nude photography, which from the earliest days of the daguerreotype has held an ambiguous position amid iconographic genres. Ranging from the more academically oriented nudes for artists to erotic and pornographic photography, from the standardization of poses to the search for new markets, nude photography has always represented a complex practice: It reveals experimental processes between photographers and artists, exchanges and itineraries between studios, ambitious commercial ventures (cf. Émile Bayard’s Aesthetic Nude in 1905) and bodies of work that were as fascinating as they were enigmatic (cf. the album by Charles-François Jeandel or the François-Rupert Carabin collection).

Yet, beyond the scope of the studio, nude photography – like ethnographic or colonial photography with which it shares many problematic aspects, notably the often-violent domination of the body – is an iconography that allows us to understand the commodification of the naked body – female and male – from early on, and its transformation into a commodity. The implications of this idea in the history of European photography were explored in the 1980s and 1990s, notably by American historians, be it from a theoretical perspective (cf. Solomon-Godeau, 1991) or through production and censorship (cf. McCauley, 1994, and specifically chapter 4 “Braquehais and the Photographic Nude”; see also History of Photography vol. 18, no. 1, Spring 1994, edited by James Crump). However, more recently, these questions have received little scholarly attention.

If the history of pornographic photography in the nineteenth century was articulated via artists’ models, the emergence of porn studies in the 1980s generated only marginal comment on these objects (Braudy, 1997; Fleisher, 2000), and inquiries into their participation in the visual imaginary of prostitution (Rexer, 2021) or circulation are even scarcer. In gender studies, the question has focused, on the one hand, on the representation of the female body, especially the media treatment of femininity (Geers, 2016) and, on the other hand, on that of women photographers (see

notably the exhibition Who's afraid of women photographers? 2016). More recently, a third strand, based on the individual experiences of models, has called for a rethinking of the model as a co-producer of images and as a person with their own name, identity, and history (cf. exhibition The Black Model, 2019, and Schopp, 2018). While film studies have produced a broad reflection on the male gaze across the cultural industries, photographic scholarship still struggles to reconsider this difficult-to-watch and yet massive corpus (Arrouye and Guérin, 2013); similarly, entire sections of the iconographic production of some artists of the nineteenth (Fantin-Latour collection) and twentieth centuries embody these complexities (Balthus collection).

The sixth issue of the journal Photographica aims to explore the question of the nude model in photography. Following Wendy Grossman's study of the model Adrienne Fidelin (published in Photographica no. 2 (April 2021) in a study that is both deconstructivist and analytical of the uses of the medium) and building on a reflection on the very genre of nude photography – both female and male – this new issue of Photographica (April 2023) seeks to question the role of the model in the history of photography:

How can we consider and look at this historically massive part of photographic production today, and to what extent can it represent a subject of study? What does the object "nude photography" reveal with regard to processes of normalization, domination, and production in the history of photography? How does this photographic form influence its circulation and lead to new modes of distribution? What is a model in photography and how can the history of photography deal with this subject?

Based on these questions, several themes may be explored:
- an ethnographic perspective: the production of nude photographs in a given period and/or geographic framework
- the historical evolution of norms and repression, with regard to obscenity and nude photography
- the historicization, normalization, and codification of the model: the model as model
- the circulation of photographic "models" (magazines, publications)
- nude photography as an economic and industrial sector and its diverse supports (ephemeral documents, periodicals, books, prints, postcards, ...)
- itineraries of people posing as nude models in photographers' and painters' studios
- the historicization of the relationship between nude models and photographers in the context of the shooting

Deadline to submit articles: June 15, 2022

Articles should be submitted in French or English.
They should not exceed 35,000 characters (spaces and notes included).
They should also be anonymised. In a separate document, please include name, e-mail address, position, and institutional affiliation (university, research unit), along with a list of publications for the author(s).
Suggested illustrations (15 max.) with captions and credits can be joined.

Article submissions will be evaluated in double-blind peer-review. They may be accepted, accepted with modifications, or refused.

Submissions should be sent to: redaction@photographica-revue.fr.

Selected Bibliography:

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Crump, James (dir.), History of Photography, vol. 18, no 1, printemps 1994.
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Fleischer, Alain, La Pornographie, une idée fixe de la photographie. Paris : la Musardine, 2000.
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McCauley, Elizabeth Anne, Industrial Madness. Commercial Photography in Paris 1848-1871. New Haven (CT) and London : Yale University Press, 1994.
Mulvey, Laura, Au-delà du plaisir visuel. Féminisme, énigmes, cinéphilie. Paris : Éditions Mimésis, 2017.
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Robert, Marie et Galifot Thomas, Qui a peur des femmes photographes ?, cat. exp. (Paris, musée d'Orsay, 14 oct. 2015-24 janv. 2016). Paris : Hazan/Musée d'Orsay, 2015.
Schopp, Claude, L'origine du monde. Vie du modèle. Paris : Phébus, 2018.
Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, Photography After Photography : Gender, Genre, History. Durham (NC) : Duke University Press, 2017.
Solomon-Godeau, Abigail, Photography at the dock. Essays on Photographic History, Institutions, and Practices. Minneapolis (MN) : University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
Tachou, Frédéric, Et le sexe entra dans la modernité. Photographie obscène et cinéma pornographique primitif, aux origines d'une industrie. Paris : Klinscksieck, 2013.

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CFP: Photographica no. 6 - Photography and models: histories of the nude. In: ArtHist.net, Mar 5, 2022 (accessed Nov 29, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/36074>.