

# Mona Kuhn

## *Unpredictable Beauty*

—R. O.

Fate, magic, accident, craft, chemistry... The development of humankind has taken various paths, many of which have had nothing to do with the will of the people behind them. It is now clear to us, though, that the role played by chance in all of this is limited only to the start. Intelligence makes its appearance when the accident, sudden shock, error or whatever you want to call it quickly becomes a discovery. That is when beauty arises, and in that moment of discovery new paths to the future open up.

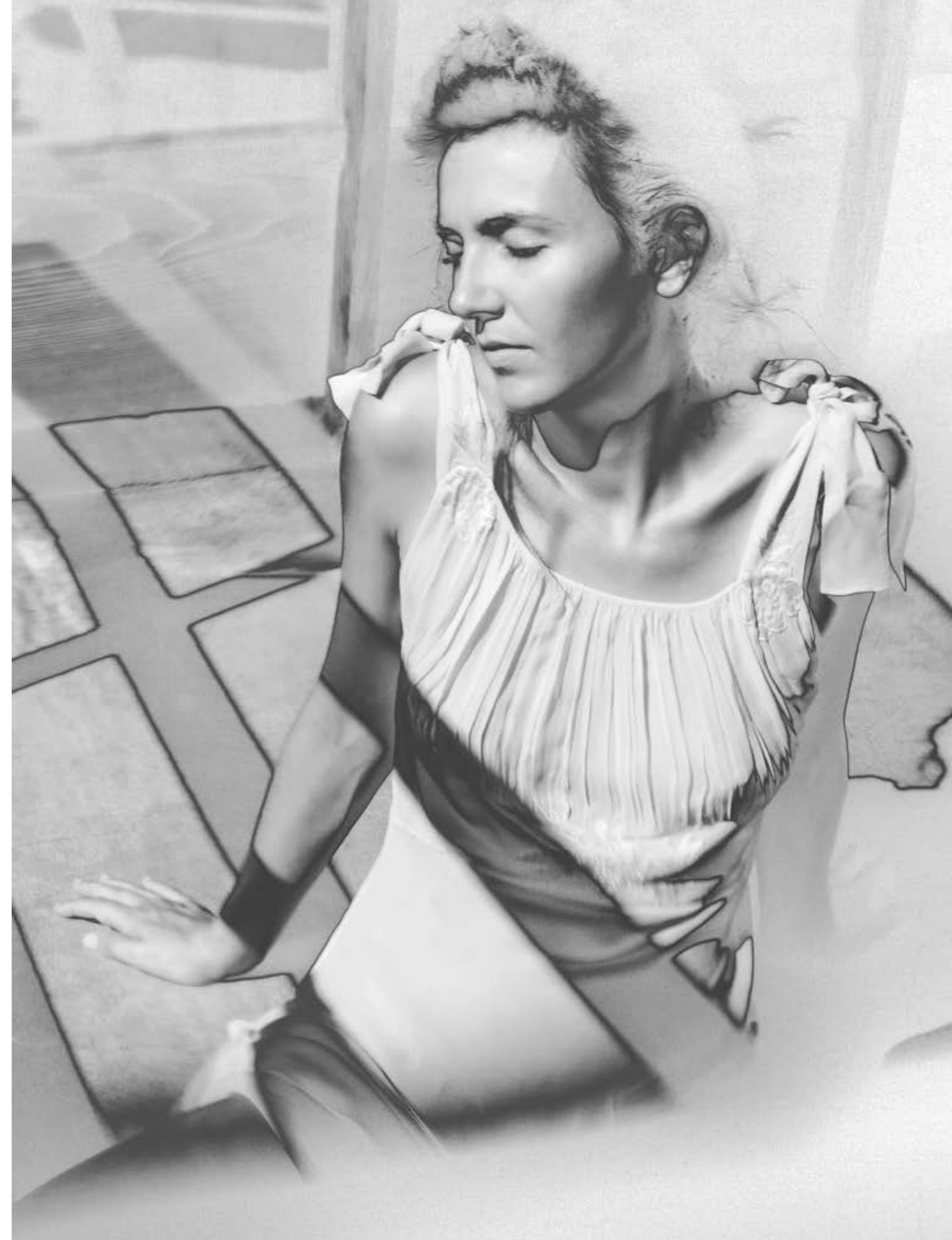
Essentially a photographer, Mona Kuhn has followed the path taken by the great artists, forming part of a tradition shaped by leading names but doing so with a style all of her own. Nudes are a major area of interest for her, one to which she has taken an approach that combines the psychological portrait with the contemporary nude and where the relationship with the models and the people she works with is essential, to the point that they become a team and the relationship takes on a more personal feel, with trust and the time invested in developing each project taking on great significance. The series selected here, however, relates to the idea of the accident or error in the origins of photography. Few artists have been as determined as Kuhn in investigating the process known as solarization, a technique employed by the Surrealists. The following is a brief commentary by Kuhn on the source and nature of this accident, which has now become just another accepted and frequently used style or characteristic form of photography:

Pseudo-solarization or the Sabatier effect first came into being through an accident in a photographic darkroom. According to

legend, the artist Man Ray discovered the phenomenon in 1931, when his colleague and partner Lee Miller scared herself in the laboratory and turned on the main light, while a print still lay in the developer bath. The silver-bromide-coated paper was re-exposed, with the result that edges and contours formed in the border areas of the already developed silver: from an originally realistic image an abstraction was born. An effect of distortion, which the Surrealists in Man Ray's circle would subsequently perfect—an artisanal process whereby each print is unique.

In this issue, we present images from Kuhn's *Kings Road* series, which were exhibited at Kunsthaus Göttingen in Germany and published in the book of the same name, edited by Gerhard Steidl. They were displayed as offset prints on paper, as they were in the book, albeit in larger scales, which meant that the accident reappeared somewhat unexpectedly. Kuhn produced solarized images for her book, original gelatin silver prints. Reproducing these copies in all their silvery brilliance in the offset printing process seemed a virtually impossible task, with Kuhn and Steidl experimenting in the latter's print house with black, dark grey, and light and dark silver.

The magic of the resulting copies stemmed from yet another chemical accident, as the oil-based black ink failed to bond with the layer of metallic silver ink beneath it, with solarization effects appearing at the edges of the images. Not unlike the darkroom, the results in the print house were unpredictable, never the same and impossible to repeat. And so, an imperfect





Mona Kuhn. *Emblem*, 2021, from the series *Kings Road*. © Mona Kuhn. Courtesy of the artist and Edwynn Houk Gallery.  
 [P. 109] Mona Kuhn. *Flicker*, 2025, from the series *Moonstruck*. © Mona Kuhn. Courtesy of the artist and Edwynn Houk Gallery.