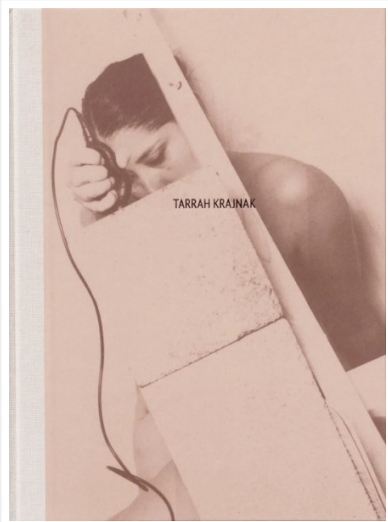


Book of the Week: Selected by Britland Tracy



Master Rituals II: Weston's Nudes.

By Tarrah Krajinak.



Master Rituals II: Weston's Nudes

Photographs by Tarrah Krajinak

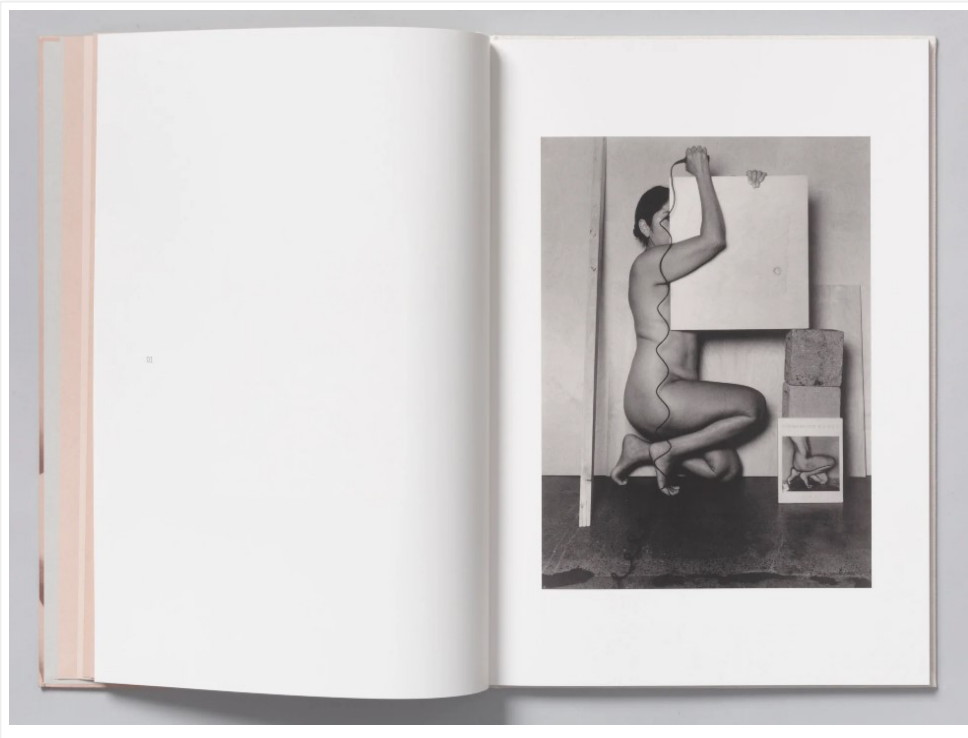
TBW Books, Oakland, 2022. In English. 52 pp., 10x13½".

I leaf through the fleshy end sheets that preface Tarrah Krajinak's *Master Rituals II: Edward Weston*, struck with the realization that, on purpose, I have navigated adult life in the photo world with a now-conspicuous dearth of knowledge of almost all things Edward Weston. Here is what I recall upon opening this book:

1. He kept his apertures small in the camera and tonal ranges large in the darkroom, and the history books all thank him for it.
2. He photographed the curves of a bell pepper like those of a woman, and vice-versa.

One can imagine that in Weston's World, a bell pepper is

perhaps the platonic ideal of a photographic subject: malleable, smooth but not shiny, organically contoured, inert yet anthropomorphic in the right light, at the right angle. It comes in a variety of skin tones: yellow, orange, red, green. And if it droops, wilts, rots, bruises, or was not a very appealing piece of produce in the first place, its fresher replacement is just a garden or grocery away. (I recently learned that, once his vegetal subjects began to sag, he ate them.) Parallel comparisons to portraits of faceless nude women from the last century are not hard lines to draw here.



Tarrah Krajinak reimagines herself as both bell pepper-woman and master-Weston through her series of seventeen black-and-white, large format, nude self-portraits, methodically sequenced on the right side of each spread with the gravitas of a twentieth-century virtuoso's monograph — a formality that subverts this book's exquisitely sardonic tone. She reincarnates the exact gestures of his female models (whose names, for historical record, were Charis Wilson and Bertha Wardell) in suspended animations of "bent over" and "holding ankle" and "standing from behind". She employs materials outside the confines of herself and her camera as both assistants and partitions — cinder blocks, hefty

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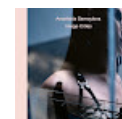
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rocks, white foam core board, plywood plinths — and often present in her images are Weston's own portraits of fragmented women, lingering on the periphery as visual references. His legacy as a canonical photographer is relegated to instructional prop; Krajnak clicks the shutter.

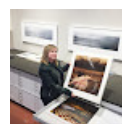


This is how she lets us in on the joke, unveiling the smoke and mirrors of the medium through her own photographic mastery. She reveals the shutter release cord, the contortions required to simultaneously fragment choice curves of the body and compose the frame with self-possessed agency. Some photographs are printed directly onto the page as darkroom test strips, illuminating the extent to which her shadows and highlights can be manipulated — a decision fatigue which silver gelatin loyalists know all too well. With this fourth wall broken, Weston suddenly seems much less rarified.

There is an accelerating indignation in *Master Rituals II* that crescendos in what is plausibly the greatest centerfold-odalisque-reclining nude of all time, as Krajnak sprawls verso to recto against sheets of plywood and a fanned, spikey houseplant, armored with just a gas mask and an insubordinate gaze. After nearly a dozen portraits depicting a bended knee here and a twisted torso there, the curtain is pulled back on their maker. At last, a face. The face of a Peruvian-born, indigenous woman staring back at the camera while her presence is implied behind it. This picture is an outlier in



Photographer's Showcase: Colette Campbell-Jones -- Stories from Underground



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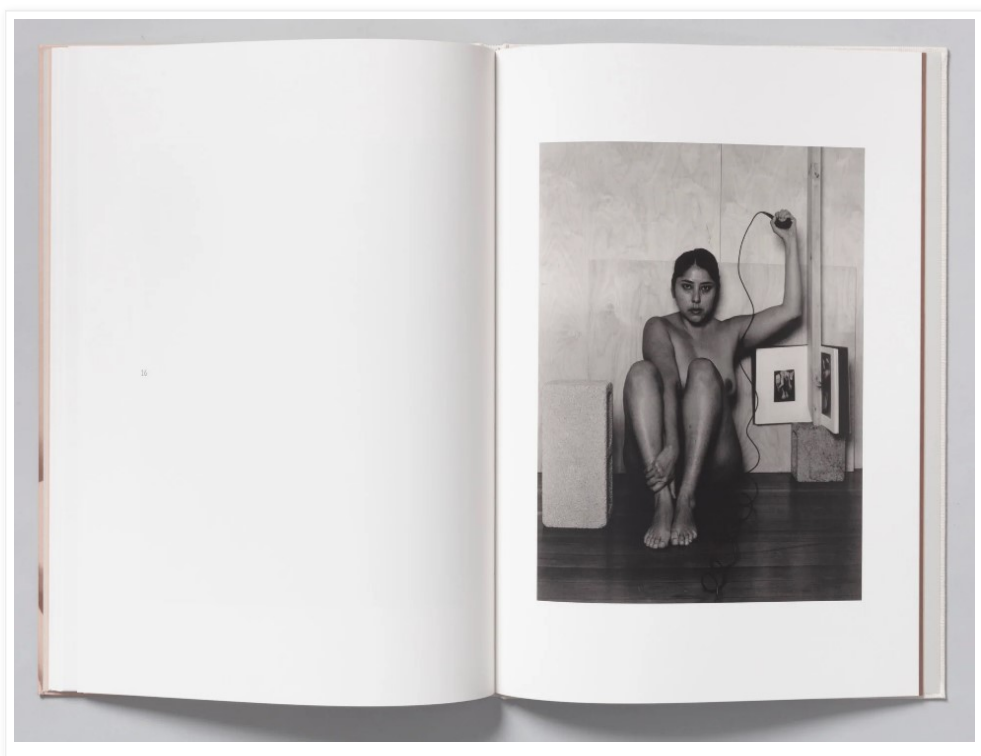
that it reproaches nothing specific to Weston's portfolio but rather all that is white, colonizing and heteronormative in the history of art about women idealized by men. It's Guerrilla Girls-meets-*Venus of Urbino*.

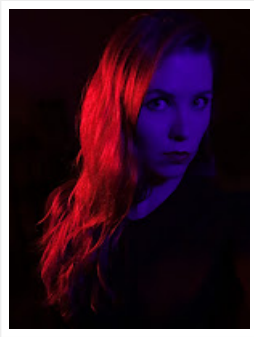


The gas mask comes off in the final self-portrait, but Krajinak's eye contact remains. She crosses her limbs but faces the camera. Her raised arm grips the shutter release and hovers above one last pair of Weston portraits: another contorted woman cropped at the neck on the left, and on the right, angled slightly away from the camera — what's that? — the unmistakable *Bell Pepper No. 30*.

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Britland Tracy is an artist and educator from the Pacific Northwest whose work engages photography, text, and ephemera to observe the intricacies of human connection and discord. She has published two books, *Show Me Yours* and *Pardon My Creep*, and exhibited her work internationally. She holds a BA in French from the University of Washington and an MFA from the University of Colorado, where she continues to teach remotely for the Department of Critical Media Practices while living in Marfa, Texas.

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