

Lee Friedlander: 10 Nudes

July 19 – August 30, 2025

10 Nudes is an exhibition of black and white photographs by Lee Friedlander (b. 1934). Friedlander's nudes, taken between 1977-1990, were first shown together in 1991 at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in an exhibition of 52 photographs curated by John Szarkowski that coincided with the publication of the book *Lee Friedlander: Nudes*. *10 Nudes* marks the first presentation of work from this series in Los Angeles.

The nude for Friedlander is female and printed, like all his non-commercial work, in black and white. He openly engages with the genre, well aware of past examples from the history of photography—Edward Weston, André Kertész, Bill Brandt, Irving Penn, and of course E. J. Bellocq whose Storyville photographs he printed from rediscovered glass negatives. But Friedlander's nudes do not feel predetermined. As MoMA curator Peter Galassi writes in his catalog essay for the Friedlander retrospective in 2005, "What makes the past a gift instead of a burden (for photographer and viewer alike) is Friedlander's trusting curiosity—the confidence at once unassuming and audacious, that the lessons of the past and the wiles of his craft will conspire with the fascination of his eye and the concreteness of his subject to create something that he himself couldn't have guessed at."

Friedlander photographed the models he hired in their homes—domestic spaces with velvet couches, metal radiators, cluttered coffee tables, patterned fabrics, brass lamps with glass globes, and net curtains. There is something relaxed in these settings, unlike the austere blankness of a photography studio. The familiar setting creates a comfort. The models take unconventional and exposing poses without embarrassment and, in my view, without the feeling that they have been manipulated or exploited. Indeed, they present their bodies with surprising bluntness. They recline, sit, lean, crouch, curl, sprawl, and extend. We see their figures, pubic hair, leg hair, freckles, tan lines, birthmarks, and scars. All this, Friedlander includes and keeps visible.

Photographing the models in close proximity, Friedlander uses a handheld Leica and often a flash. He delights in resonances and continuities, like the smooth roundness of a lamp shade and a model's thigh from the back, and the zebra pattern that continues across a model's chest from the shadow of a window blind. His compositions fill the frame. In *Nude* (1979), the eye can follow a line from the model's elbow in the upper left corner, down her arm and torso to her waist, where it turns in an upward slant toward her knee, then sharply down to her foot in the lower right corner of the frame. The flash, when used, adds a distinctive luster, highlighting the

curves of breasts, thighs, knees, even fingertips; yet it also accentuates contours, sharpening the lines that carve out the shapes made by the body, and strengthens contrasts and shadows.

There is a reality to Friedlander's nudes that holds my attention. They have a beauty, but they do not present an ideal. Less icons or types, the models are individual women who happen to be naked. Which is not to say that we have access to these women or their interiority; the photograph places us at a remove. The models hold their poses, pensive and still. Despite seeing inside their homes, we have little sense of their personal realities. Even the model who would go on to become a celebrity feels anonymous in the photograph. What we do see is a physical reality that is candid and thrilling.

Friedlander made two books of nudes: *Lee Friedlander: Nudes*, published in 1991, consisting of 84 plates, and *The Nudes: A Second Look*, published in 2013, consisting of 155 plates with some overlap. Between the two, there are 192 distinct images. The quantity brings out the continuities across the series as well as the particularities within each photograph. Poses and shapes recur, as do models. The models are women of a similar age, living in a particular time. Each time I open the books, I find myself lingering over different images, noticing new details. Taking pleasure in female nudes is fraught, and I still struggle to articulate why Friedlander's so resonate with me, but what I do know is when they are in front of me, I want to keep looking at them.

Alina Sinetos

10 Nudes, presented in a combination of early and contemporary prints, is curated by Alina Sinetos at CASTLE. Many thanks to Fraenkel Gallery for facilitating this opportunity.