

Daze at the Beach

Evidence

Photographs by **Mona Kuhn**

Short story by **Frederic Tuten**

Essay by **Gordon Baldwin**

Steidl, 96 pages, \$50

In *Evidence*, photographer Mona Kuhn presents sensuality at its most distilled. Using a narrow depth of field to blur unnecessary detail, she often focuses on the finely textured golden skin of one of a dozen or so naked bodies. Set in and around what looks like a laid-back summer house, the images depict people lounging on couches or standing outside. Kuhn selected her models from a group of nudists on the coast of France, and their calm gazes and relaxed bodies suggest that there are long-term relationships among them. Sunlight streams through the windows, changing over the course of the book to imply a single day's passing.

Nearly all the models are classically beautiful, with bronzed bodies and flawless faces. In Kuhn's careful compositions, they cannot help but recall the long history of the nude in art, a point Gordon Baldwin makes in his introduction. In *Bather*,



Mona Kuhn, *Bather*, 2006.

for example, the pretty blond woman bending to wash her feet at an outdoor spigot reminds us of a Degas figure. In other images, the blurred sections suggest the brushy approximations of painting.

The short story that closes the book, "Self Portrait with Beach," by the novelist Frederic Tuten, provides a different context for Kuhn's work. In it, a man spends a day at the beach with his attractive young girlfriend and loses her in pursuit of a drink he believes will restore his own youth. The story illuminates how Kuhn's images, which sometimes resemble advertising or fashion photography, also speak to our culture's obsession with youth and beauty. Her concern isn't to sell products but to record the feeling of so much bare skin.

—*Rebecca Robertson*