

MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

FT Weekend Magazine

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THE BODY

A PHOTOGRAPHY SPECIAL

PERFORMANCE



'FOUR RUNNERS (BEFORE PRACTICE)', 2018-19
'SPIKES (FIG. 8)', 2018-19

SAM CONTIS

TRANSIT
2018-22

Sam Contis's photographs of a girls' cross-country running team at a Pennsylvania high school are a homecoming of sorts. Contis joined the team herself at the age of 13, around the same time she took her first photography class. She began taking her camera to practice, photographing her teammates. She returned to that same club six years ago, once again with her camera, to photograph the team's daily practice and race days. Over every season for four years she captured the runners as they grew up.

Like Degas's studies of ballet dancers, which he worked on over several decades of observation, or the Victorian photographer Eadweard Muybridge's galloping horses, Contis's portraits, some

colour and some black and white, are realist studies of the "motion of the body": girls' feet upturned so they can clean the mud from their trainers; arms wrapped languidly around one another as they sit and talk in their running kit; pensively staring across the field as they prepare to race.

They are social studies too: a rare picture of the tenderness of teenage friendships. "When they go out to race, they're pushing through an incredible amount of pain. The body is in crisis," Contis says. "But I think the other side of that is that they learn how to care not only for themselves, but they really are attentive to one another."

Showing up each day, building up the girls' trust over the months

and years, Contis also captures the moments in which adolescent self-consciousness falls away. "When you are fully exerting yourself physically, there's no energy left to be conscious of the world around you," she says. "It puts you in this other place, which I think is very beautiful."

What we see is the body as it moves, or prepares to move, across a landscape, but also as it transitions from childhood to young adulthood. "Maybe, subconsciously, I was interested that nothing is fixed at this age," Contis concludes. "You're really figuring out who you want to be and how you want to be seen."

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Text by Baya Simons





SAM CONTIS
'SPINE', 2020-22