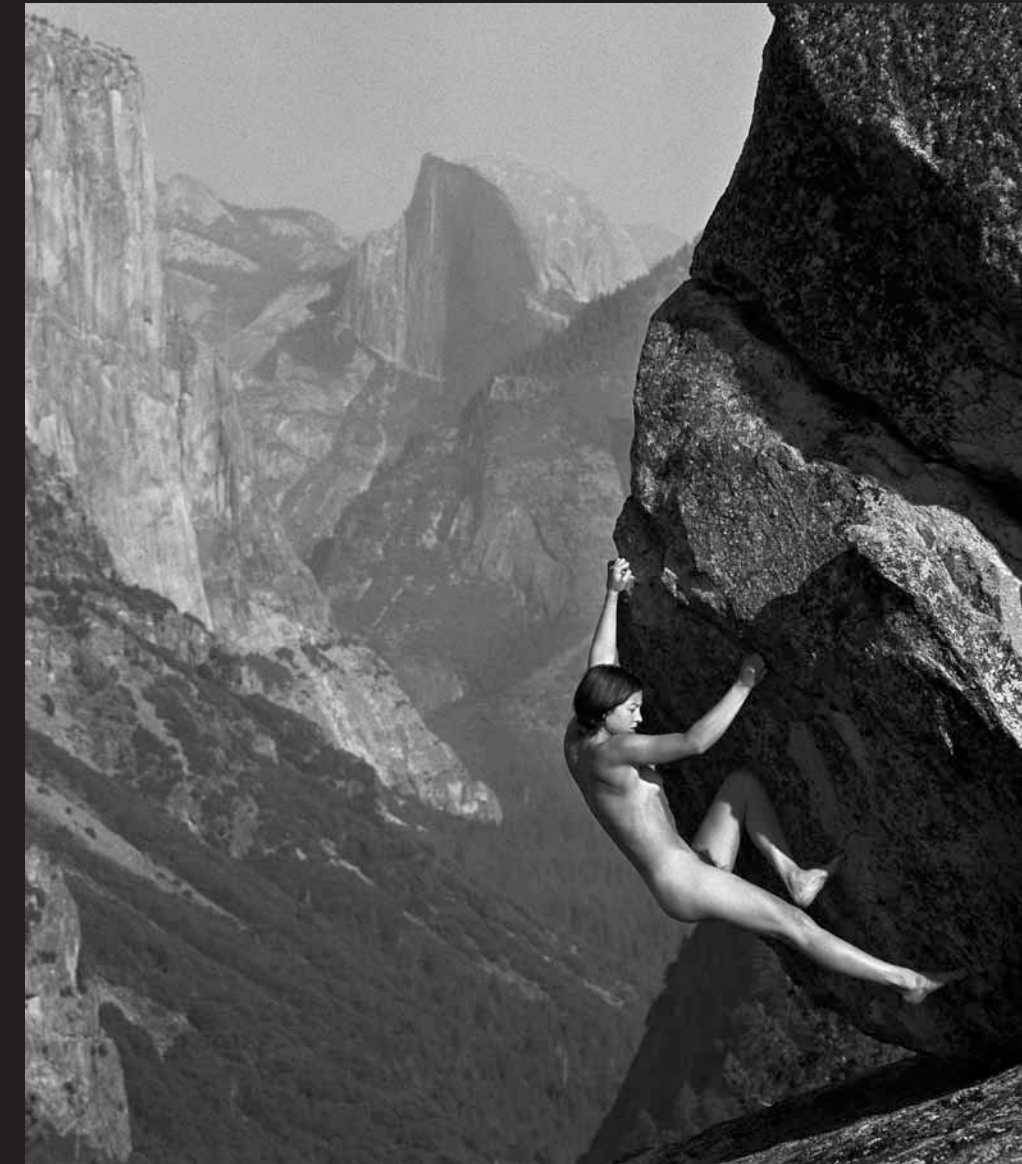
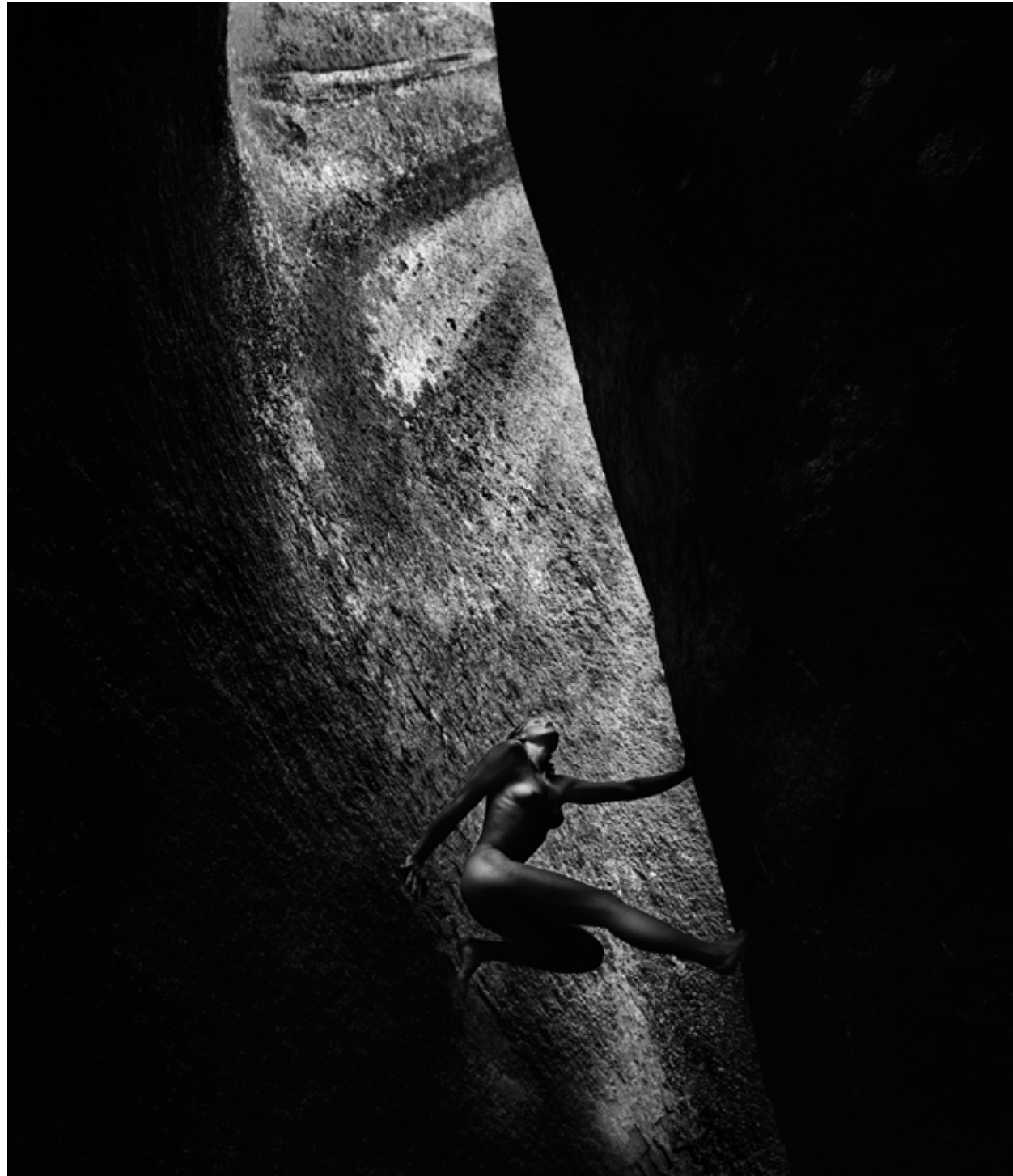


STONE  NUDES



ART IN MOTION



STONE ♀ NUDES

ART IN MOTION

Photographs by Dean Fidelman

Edited by John Long

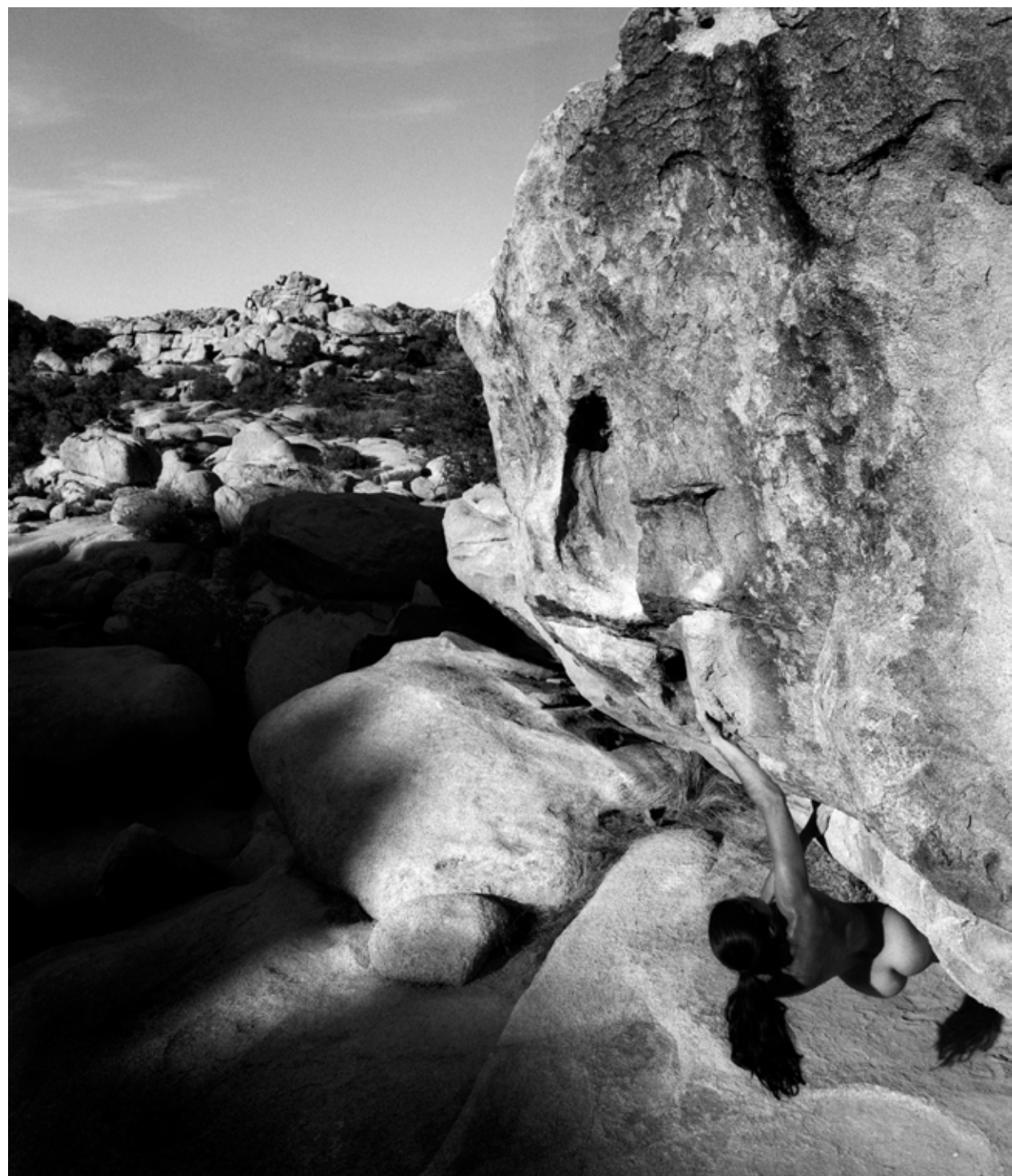


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Introduction

John Long

Friends and neighbors might look at a photograph of a spot lit nude balled up on a studio floor and say, “Oh, that’s art.” The same friends study a Stone Nude, feel a rush of adrenalin and wonder out loud what they are looking at. Connoisseurs recognize the fusion of the iconic and the naturalistic, but even they are sometimes challenged to define what a Stone Nude actually *is*. The images themselves are silent in this regard. Since the first *January* photo in the first Stone Nude calendar was printed over a decade ago, and now one hundred and forty something Stone Nudes later, no trace of photographer Dean Fidelman has ever appeared on the face of the climber, the granite buttress, the earth, tree, river, or cloud.

Not to say Stone Nudes are accidents; they rank among the more consciously wrought images in our contemporary *oeuvre*. And they only look singular, rooted as they are in traditional artistic conventions. According to Fidelman, “the whole Megillah” springs from four early twentieth century photographers: E. J. Bellocq, Julian Mandel, Arundel Holmes Nicholls, and Marcel Paul Meys. Here, the past explains the present.

After photography was invented in 1839 (official date varies), photographers typically positioned their nudes in the synthetic, breathless poses common to classical painting, often tricking out the set with ersatz Roman stage props. Then came franco-creole American photographer E. J. Bellocq, whose sitters were mostly prostitutes from the Storyville red light district of New Orleans, and who he shot in an unapologetic, organic style. Here were subjects as unselfconscious in their nudity as Botticelli’s Venus, a result attributed to their affinity with the photographer, a kind of Cajun Toulouse-Lautrec,

hydrocephalic and dwarf-like, but who “always behaved polite,” according to one of his Storyville sitters.

A decade later, throughout the 1920s and 1930s, German born Julian Mandel (pseudonym of Julian Walery) was pole

star for the “plein-air,” or open-air movement in photography. The bulk of Mandel’s nudes were daffy *frauleins* posing by mirrors, holding vases for no apparent reason and hugging themselves because the experience was just that rapturous. But occasionally Mandel wandered into the backyard and talked a nude into a waist-deep pond or onto the crab grass. The pale skin tones of the women contrasted sharply with the complimentary textures and harsh shadows of Nature, and their postcard-sized, “deco-style” images sold well. Concurrent with Mandel, New Yorker Arundel Holmes Nicholls also favored outdoor settings. Much of Nicholls’ work feels as stagey Mandel’s efforts. Exceptions include the “Nude in Stream” and “Nude at Beach” series, where the subjects feel native and true, birthing a shot-on-the-fly, verité vibe, captured, not arranged.

For ten long years, noted French painter Marcel Paul Meys had been photographing so many forgettable salon nudes. Around 1920, Meys lugged his box camera to the grandest panoramas in Europe, and summarily stuck a nude in the foreground, creating his “Nude in Landscape” series. The Parisian never resolved the austere lines and magnificent distances of these vistas with the nudes who, with their bamboo flute and bunch of wine grapes, feel as natural to the Bernese Alps or the Italian Dolomites as a polar bear in Death Valley. Nevertheless Meys was first to place a nude in a wilderness of soaring mountains and plunging canyons, opening the frame to the romantic excesses of European landscape painting.

Bellocq’s subjects were friends or lovers, often captured in their private *boudoirs*, and the images, intimate as their tryst with a *John*, emerged through the existential consonance of setting, subject, and photographer. Mandel moved the work to the “plein-air,” and explored the hard contrasts. Nichols, also working outdoors, inched his nudes away from stylized posturing and hinted at spontaneous, noir styling. Mays left

