



NUDE Sitting solemnly among the whispering curves of nude women in Ralph Gibson's new volume from Taschen are statues. Time hesitates around their unseeing eyes, their bodies pushing hard against the pull of life. Their missing limbs and rain-etched torsos announce they cannot escape history.

Through this juxtaposition, Gibson asks if a photographer is perhaps better equipped than a sculptor to halt time. His sumptuous, oversized volume presents hundreds of women in states of unwavering beauty. Although the images reflect over four decades of work, there is little sense of historical disjuncture from page to page. Take away a woman's clothing and her body has its own temporality. Only details draw viewers into linear momentum—tattoos draw one figure into the present, while a macramé bikini pulls one into the past.

Carefully arranged, arms often reach upward, elevating the subject's breasts so they resemble marble orbs from a classical vision. Heads and faces are cropped away, disconnecting the body from individual identity. And yet these photographs are not wholly idealized. Strong light and shadow make flesh ripple softly beneath the surface. The physicality of his settings ground Gibson's shots in reality—a bright beach, a dark interior in an empty opera house. In a nod to Man Ray in the 1920s, Gibson often places his women in window frames, where curtains and cross bars cast graphic shadows over starkly illuminated skin.

Collectors of photography and photographic books will want to explore this elegant and erotic offering. The first two hundred copies are art editions, each boasting an original print from the photographer. But it also speaks to anyone who embraces the depth and dimensionality of the female form ■ *Ellen Lupton-Nude, Ralph Gibson, 2009, Taschen, taschen.com*