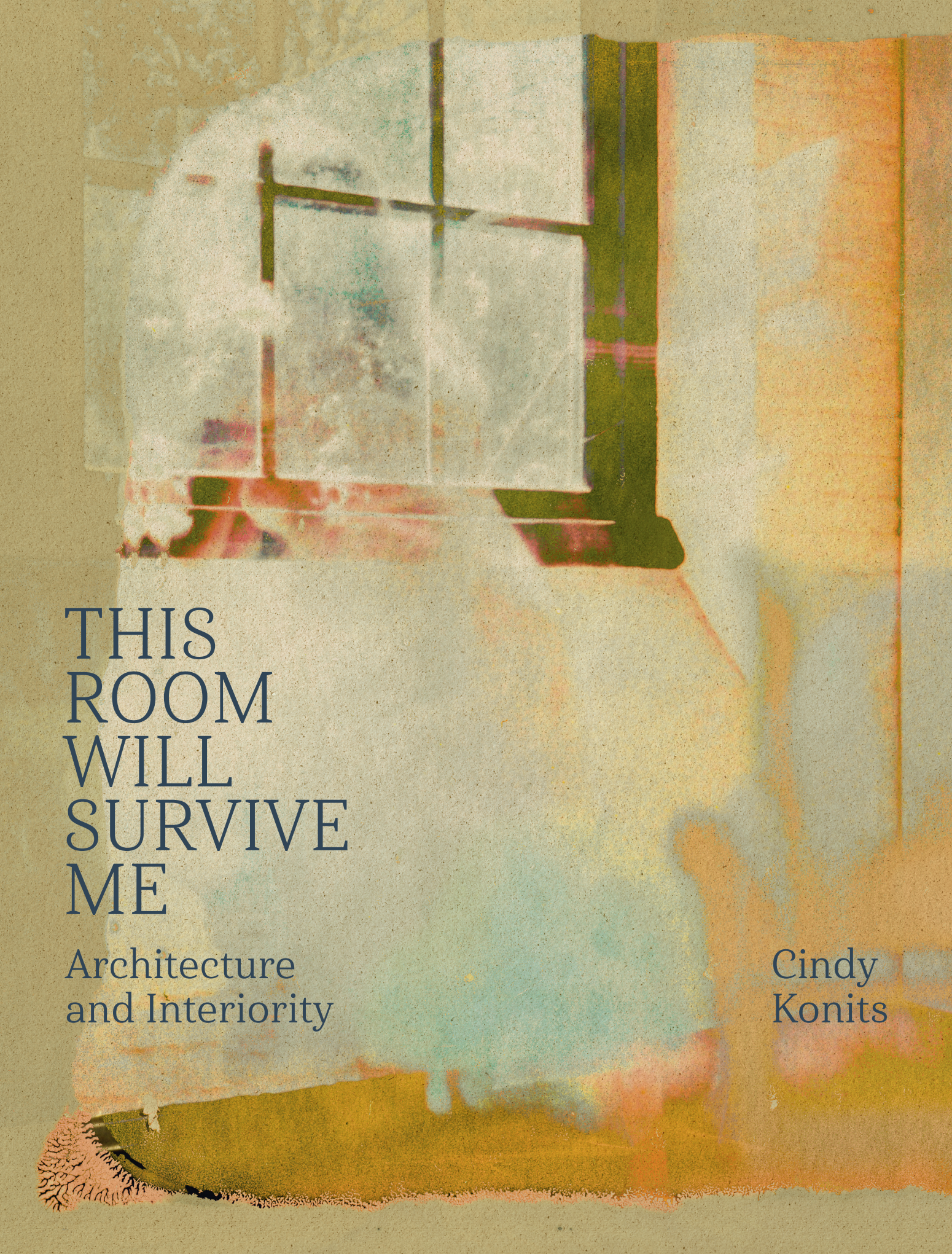


THIS ROOM WILL SURVIVE ME

Architecture and Interiority

Cindy Konits

FOR PHIL

THIS ROOM WILL SURVIVE ME

Architecture and Interiority

Cindy Konits

Schilt Publishing

TORSOS IN SPACE, LIGHT AND TIME

By Juhani Pallasmaa, Architect,
Professor Emeritus, Writer (Helsinki)

Cindy Konits's photographic Polaroids fuse spaces of rooms and nature with a female figure, creating uniquely poetic images. These fusions of space and the human torso make me think of the psychoanalytic notion of introjection, that refers to the way a newborn relates with the world through the interior of her mouth. The images depict the photographer's home and her body, projecting a nearness, intimacy and credibility. "The house is always a cradle", Gaston Bachelard suggested, while I think of home as a womb, and an experience of naked skin. The experience of home is haptic and existential more than visual; we dwell through our skin. Regardless of the intimacy of these photographed scenes, there is no feeling of voyeurism.

The seemingly natural illumination in the images creates a sense of clarity and truth, akin to Edward Hopper's paintings of his wife Jo. The partial erasure of the human body and its recomposition bring to mind the tormented figures of Francis Bacon. However, the painter's violence and agony of the flesh is replaced by a sense of enigma, mystery, and a concealed erotic air. The female figure is often seen against a window or a door opening, recalling the multitude of famous paintings of women at a window, from Johannes Vermeer to Caspar David Friedrich and Salvador Dalí.

Poetic images evoke other images, and an endless layeredness and field of infinite references are qualities of great artistic works. The last film of Michelangelo Antonioni, Beyond the Clouds, ends in the words of the photographer protagonist: "But we know that behind every image revealed, there is another image more faithful to reality, and in the back of that image there is another, and yet another behind the last one, and so on, up to the true image of the absolute mysterious reality that no one will ever see."

The images of Cindy Konits convey an air of revelation or miracle and make one think of the benevolent scenes in old icon paintings or the sensuous scenes of Duccio di Buoninsegna and other masters of the Sienese school, in which buildings have the scale of humans. The setting and human figures are integrated and buildings appear as the well-fitting clothes of their dwellers. The softened, eroded edges of her figures suggest alternating acts of remembering and forgetting, appearing and disappearing, focusing and unfocusing, recognition and estrangement. Sometimes, the etching brightness of illumination nearly erodes the human torso, as if she had left in a rush, or evaporated like water in excessive heat. The images appear momentary, as if they were in the process of becoming or disappearing.

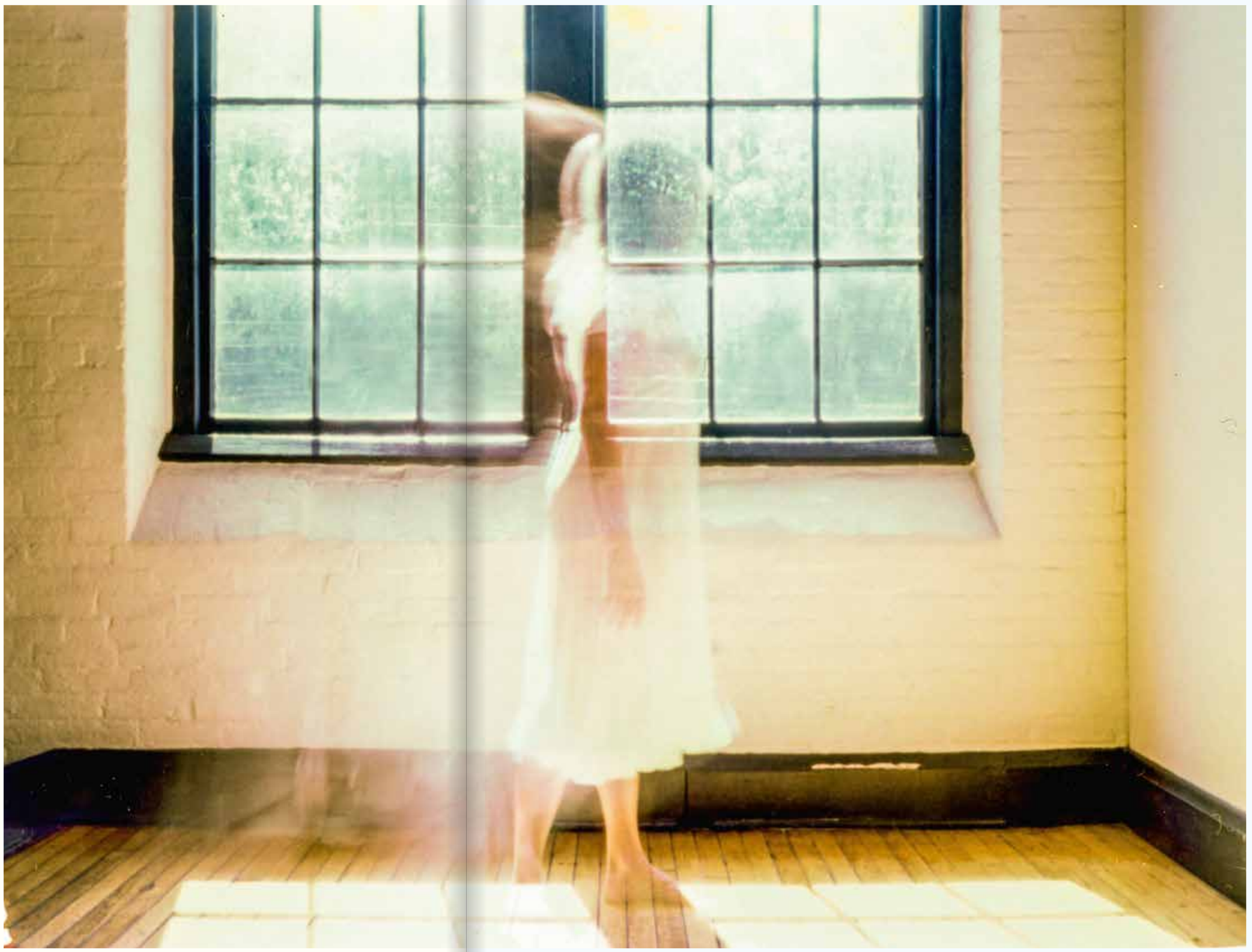
These instant Polaroid images create an air of dreaminess, nostalgia and desire. The female figure becomes part of a wall or wallpaper, or is wrapped in bedclothes or the shadows and darknesses of the room. Paintings on the walls of the rooms expand the imagery and narrative into further enigmatic realms. Sometimes the edges of the photograph are eroded, worn or torn, as if consumed by water, time and processes of forgetting. The eroded images with their diluted boundaries may also appear as fragments of watercolors, rather than photographic plates; the technical lettering (FUJI FP-100 926211) left on the print, however, brings the aquarelle image back to the realm of photography, and creates a dialogue between two processes of image-making, both engaging water.

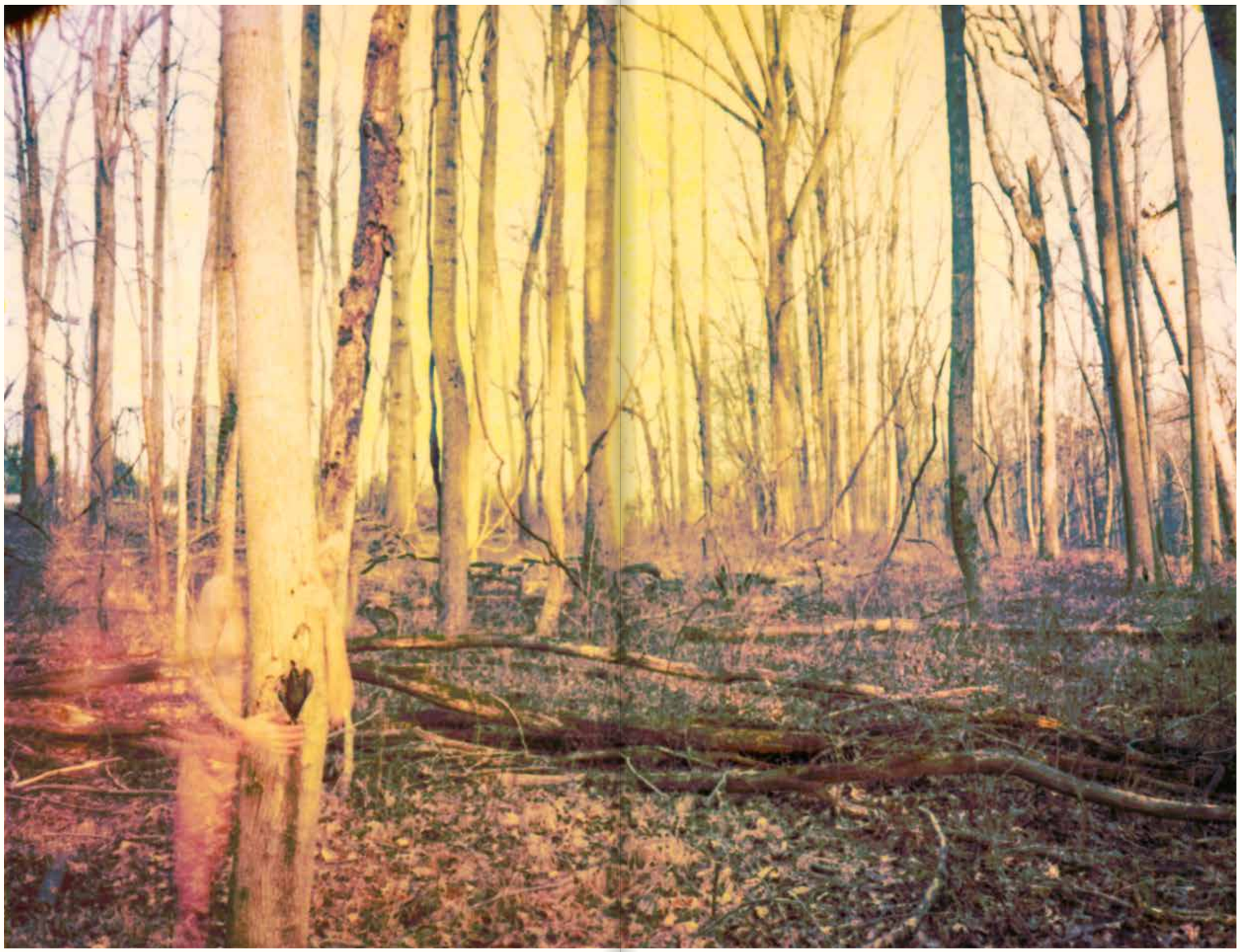
The translucency of light echoes the transparency of textiles, and also the material surfaces seem to be in a stage of transformation, either losing or gaining materiality and solidity. Sometimes the room is filled with a coloured darkness, in which the figure is embedded as a pearl in a ring. The figures are soft, translucent and uncertain, often to the point of being almost entirely erased. In one of the images, suggesting a ruined interior, the female torso is barely distinguishable high up on the window sill while our attention is caught by a luminous triangle suggesting the concept of trinity, which appears to be created by a light source outside the viewer's field of vision. Also in the outdoor images an intimate and containing space is carved by illumination; the torso occupies a protective space of light, suggesting the innocent ambience of a fairytale.

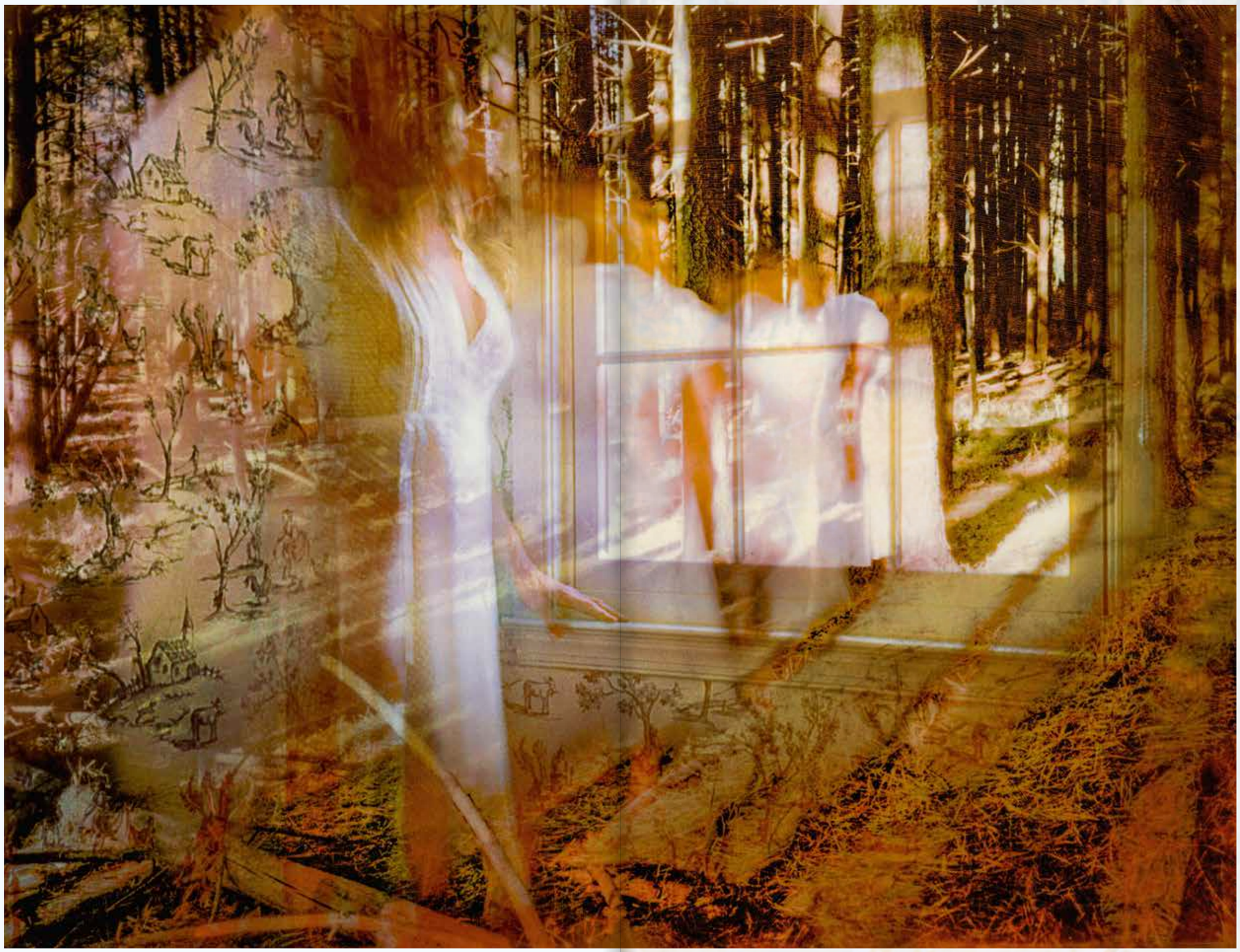
The lack of focus and stable gestalt makes the eye slide across the image, turning the experience into a peripheral search, a haptic caress across the surfaces in search of focus, stability and meaning. These are images of the skin as much as of the eye, of imagination and fantasy as much as the viewer's sense.

Interiority:
The quality or condition of being interior; inner character or nature, especially as relating to the mind or inner life.

Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford (Oxford University Press) n.d., www.oed.com; accessed January 15, 2026.







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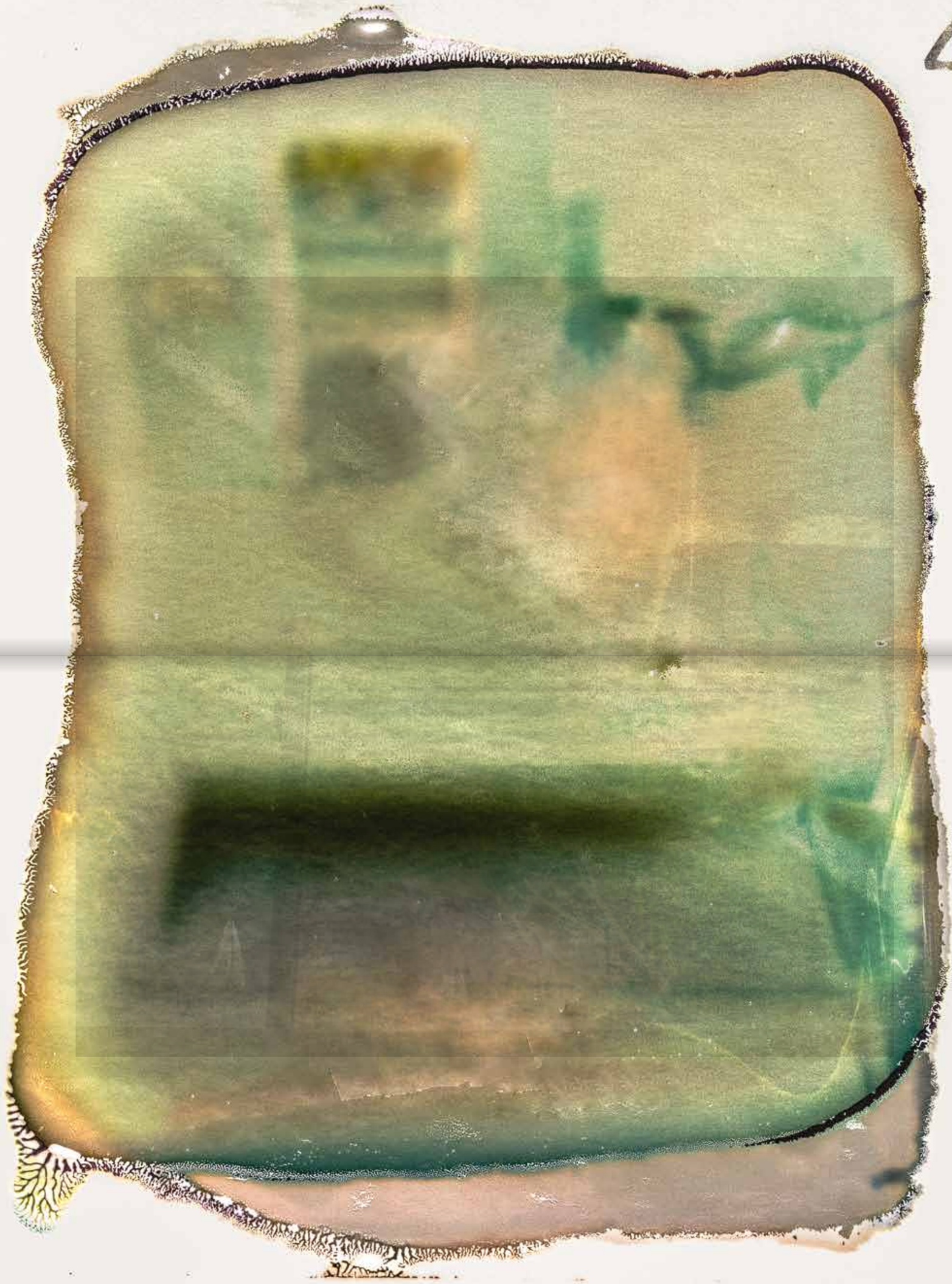

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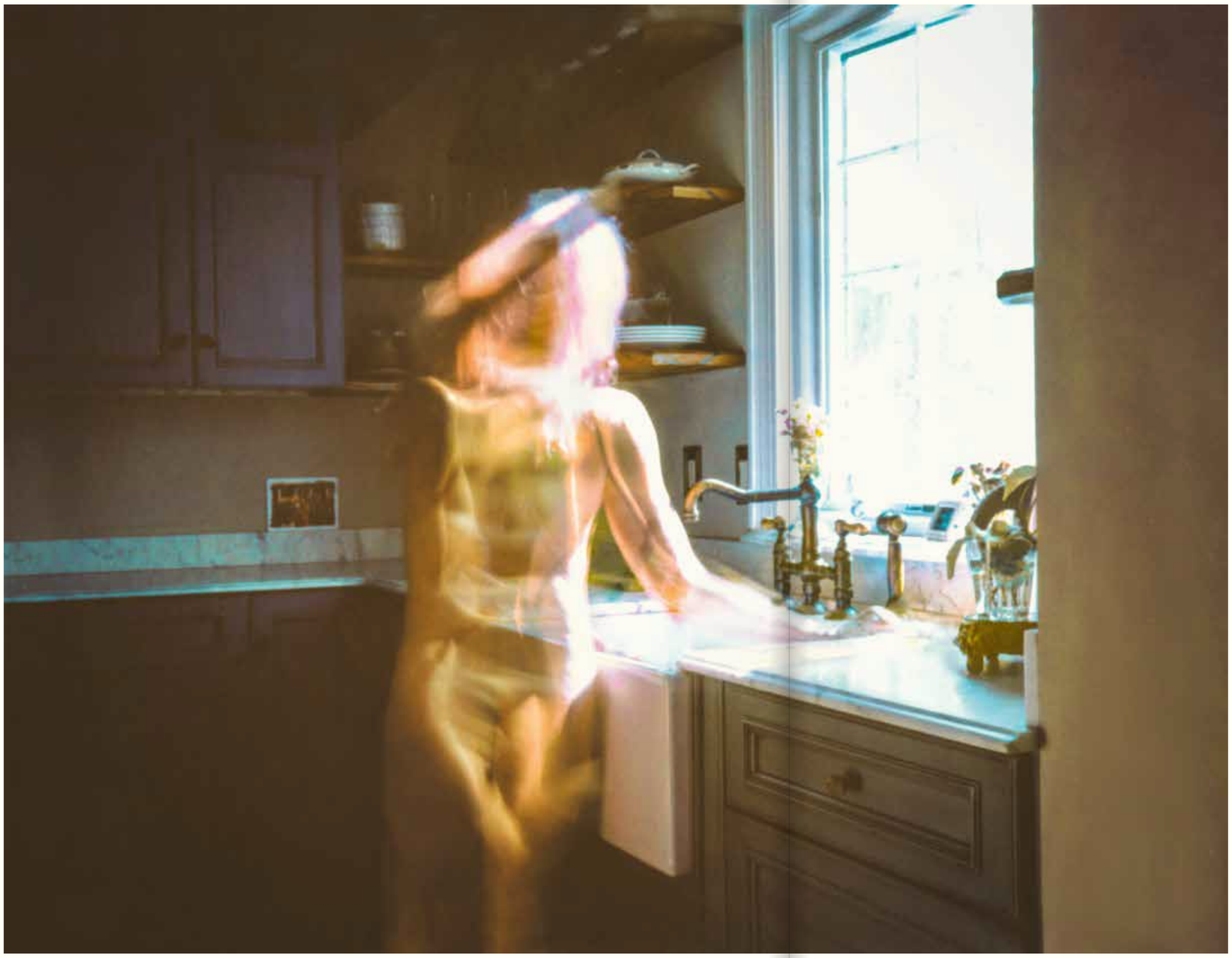

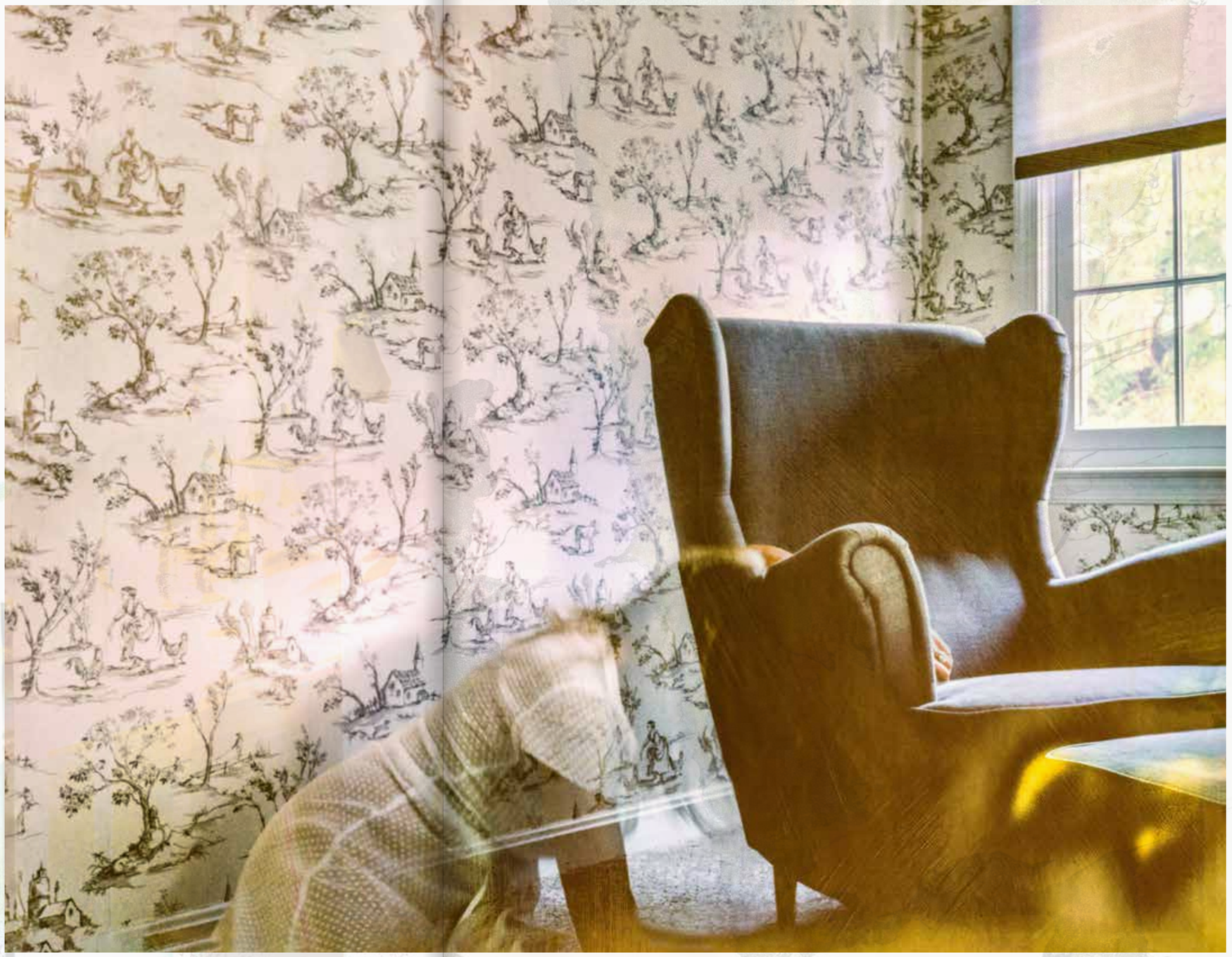

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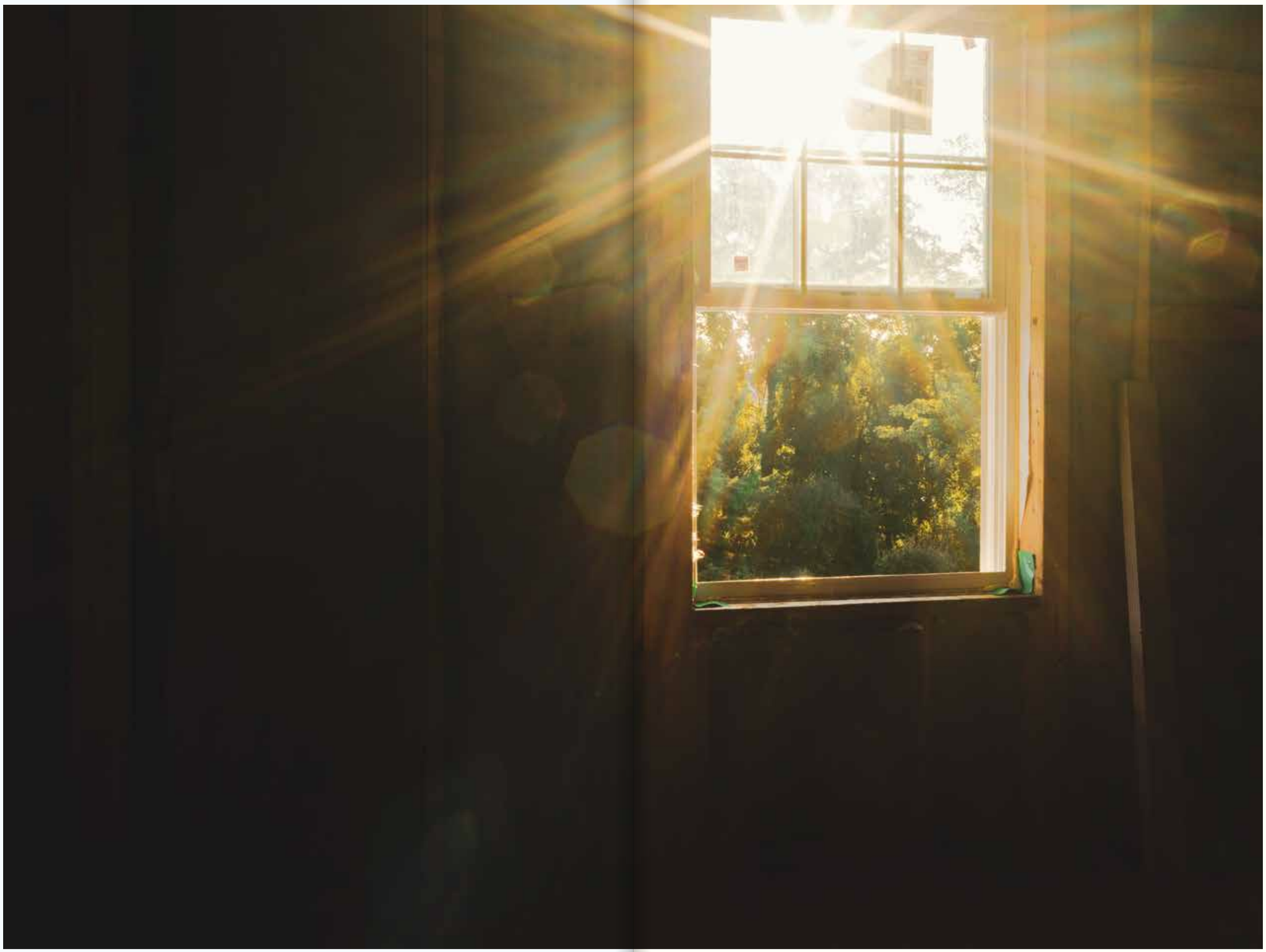

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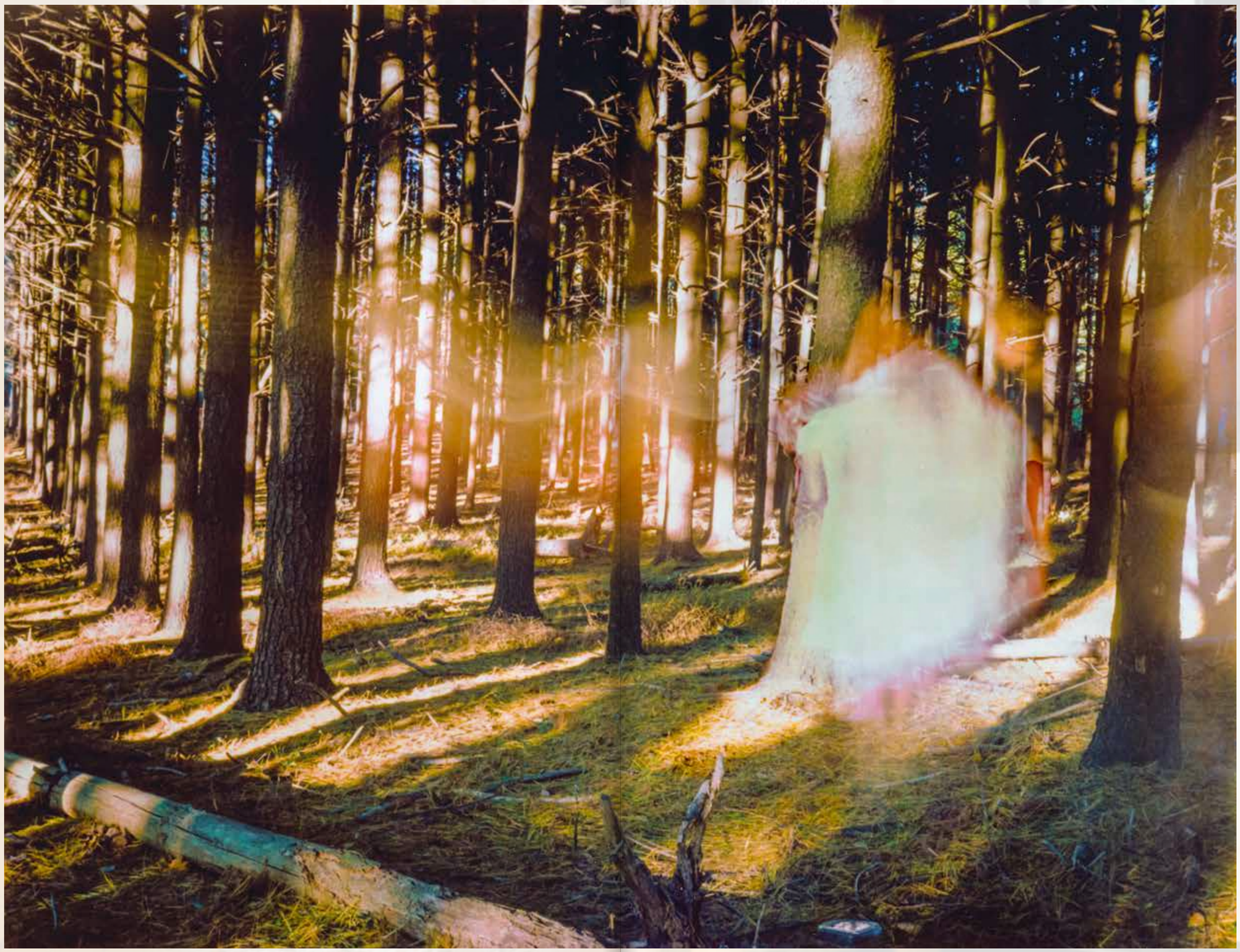

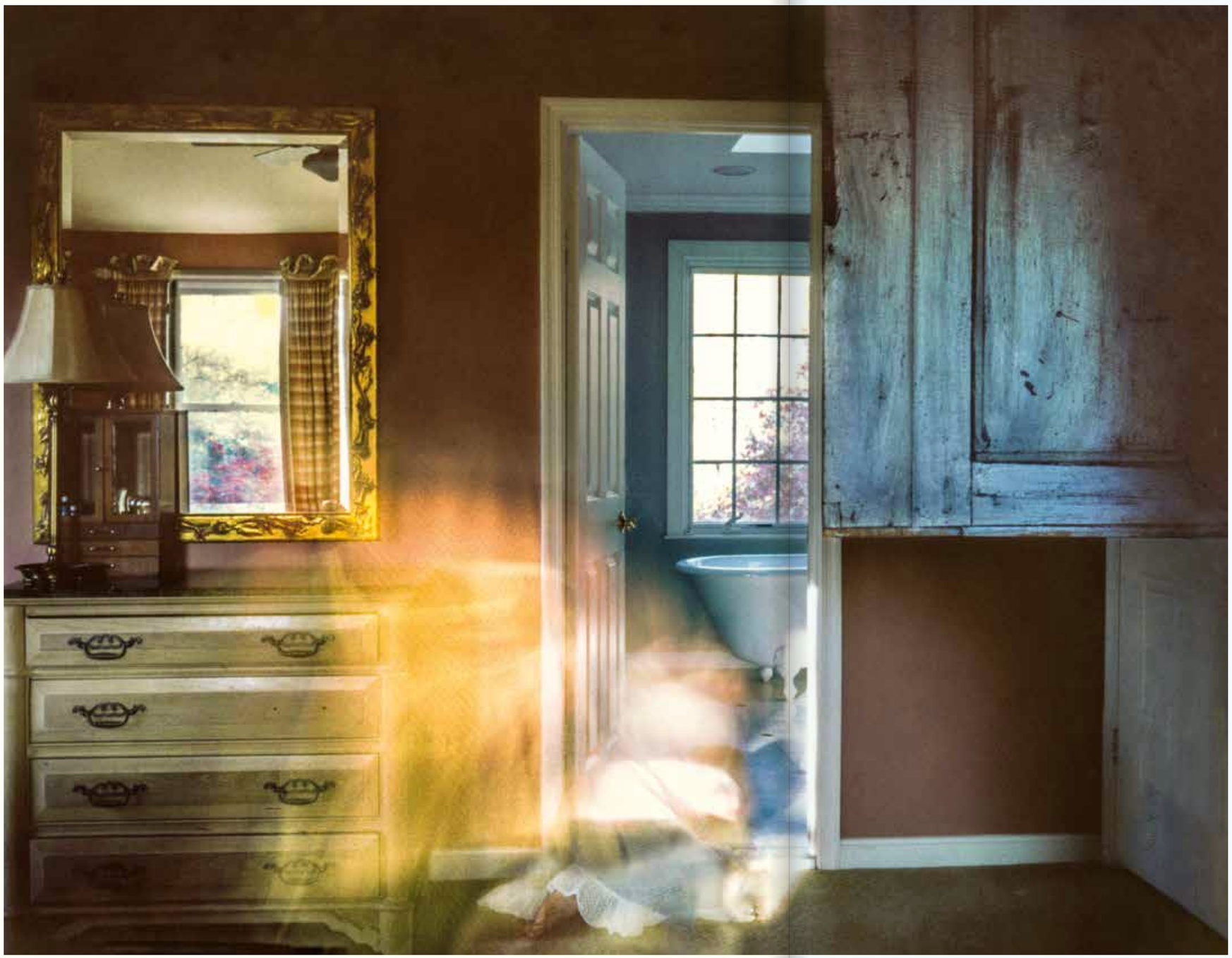

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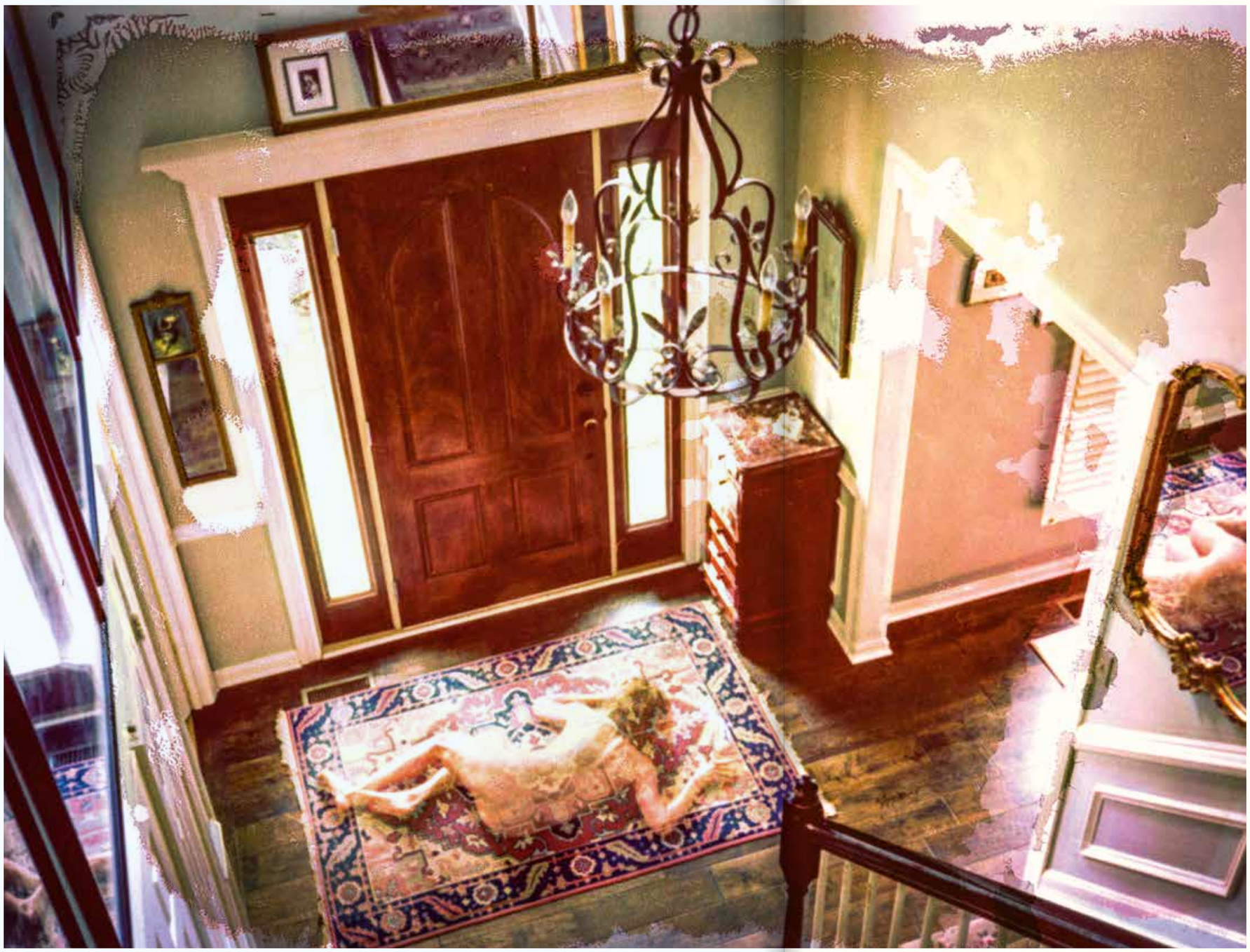

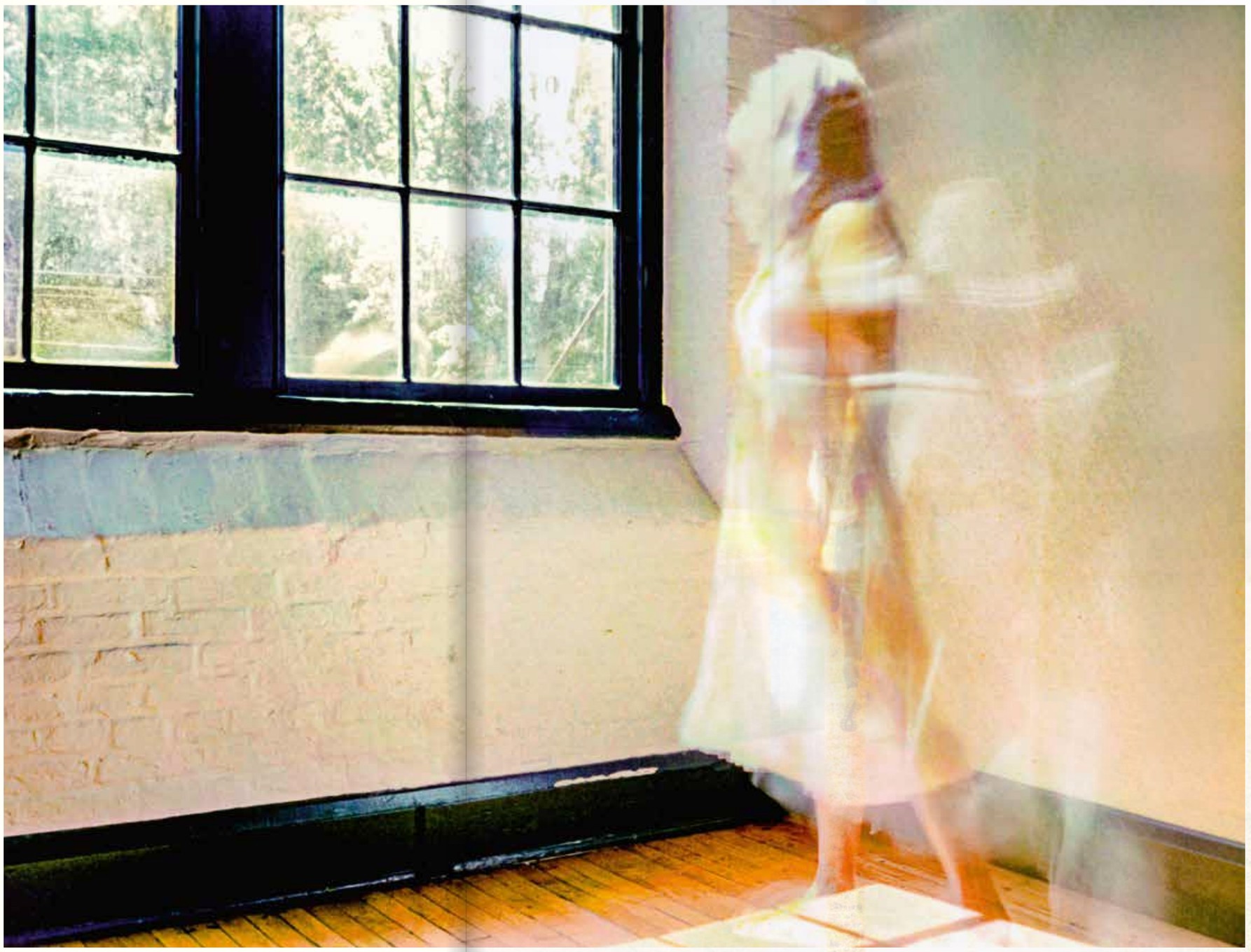

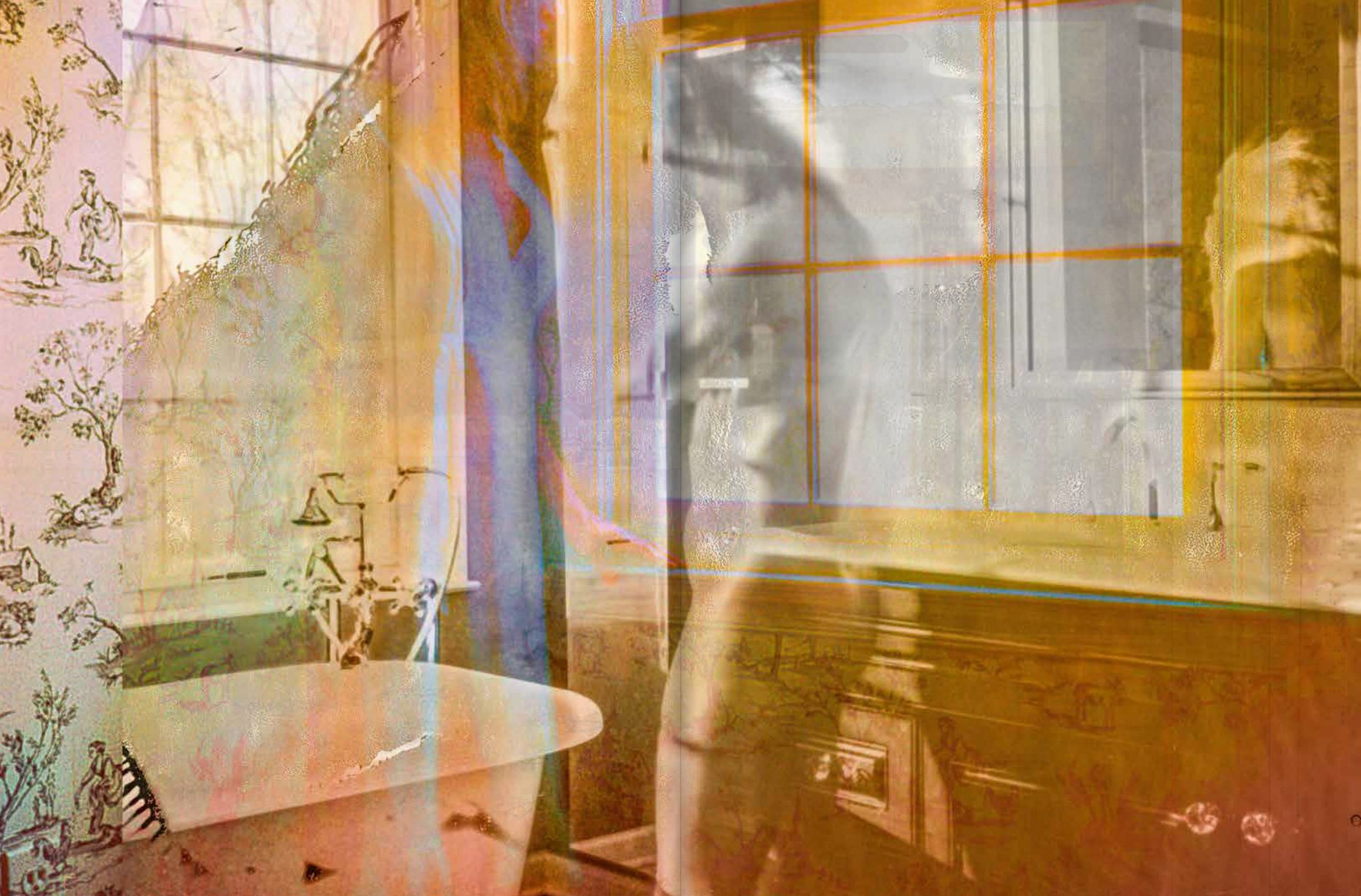

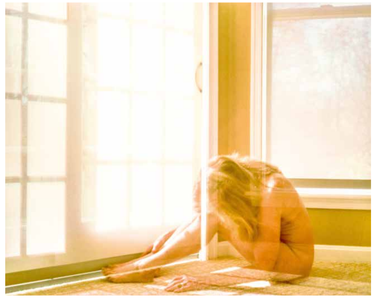

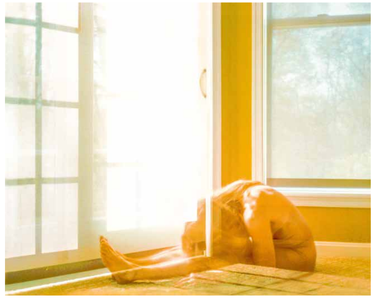

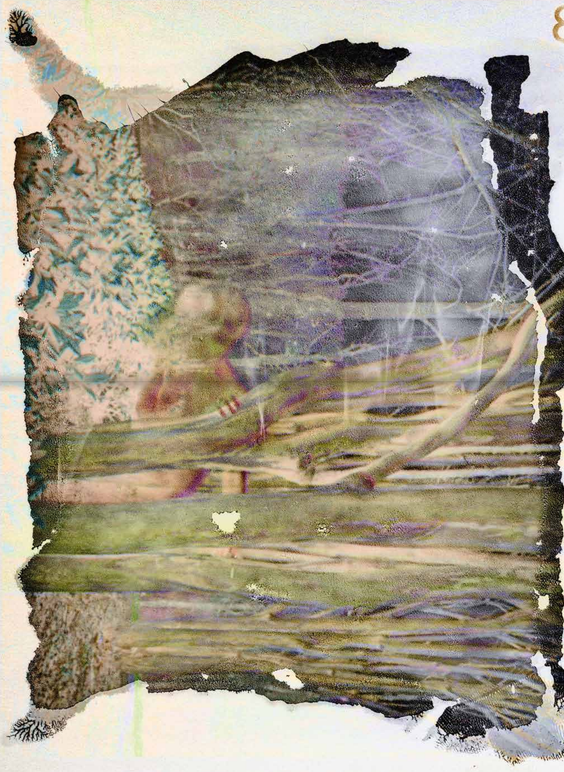

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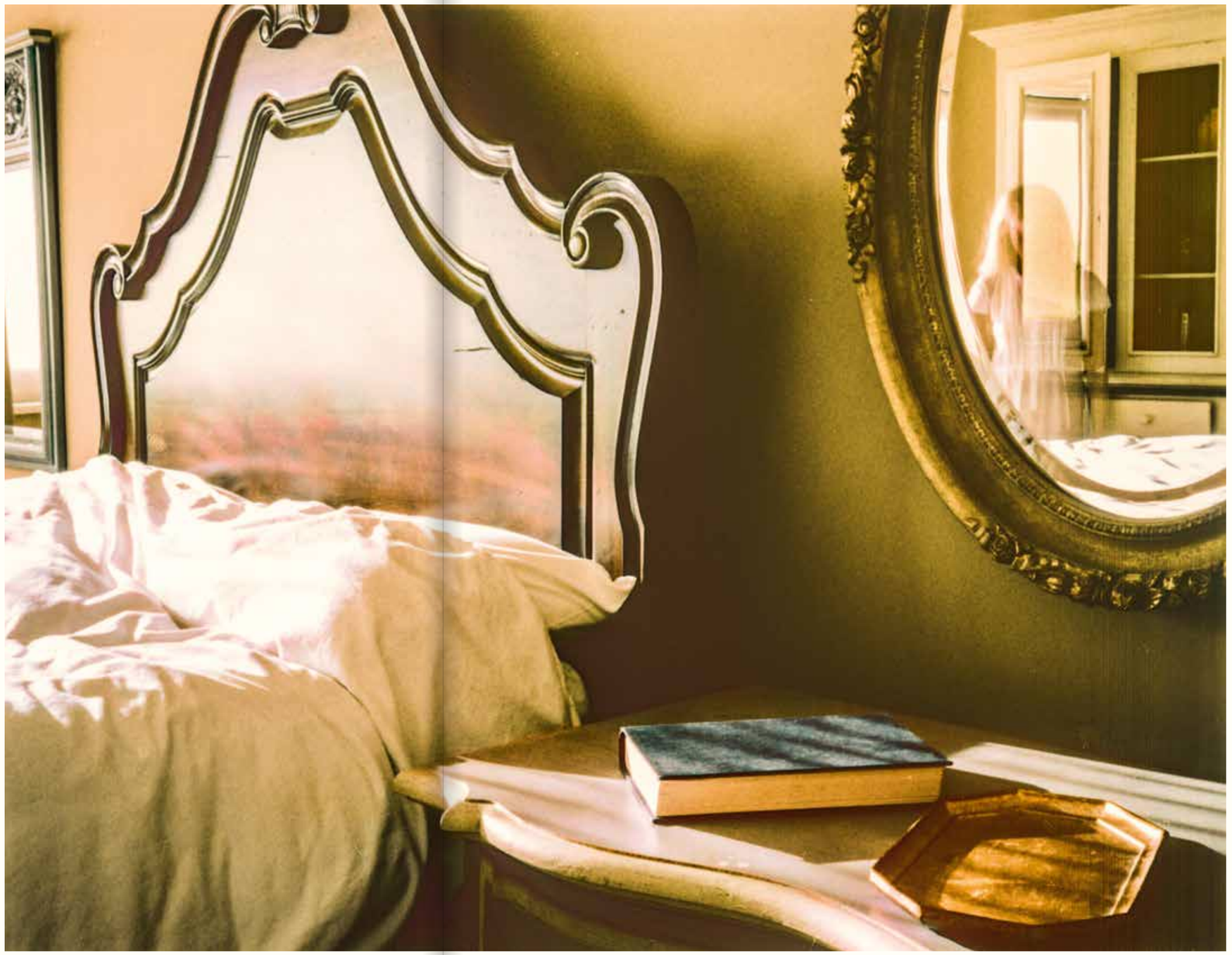

With her photographs, Cindy Konits marks a new direction in photography, which, in the wake of philosophers of life and existentialists, could be called a kind of existential documentary. The subject of the photographs is all of us, to whom the photographer forms a bridge to open the time planes of past-present-future.

Borbála Jász
Art Historian and Philosopher of Art

AN INTERVIEW WITH CINDY KONITS

By Gary Van Zante

Let's begin with your latest series "This Room Will Survive Me" and then look back to provide the reader some context for its development. How long have you been working on this series and how did it begin? How does this series differ from your previous work?

I have been working on "This Room" since the discovery of an obsolete Fuji professional instant camera and a batch of expired film at the bottom of my studio closet in September 2019. I began experimenting with it by photographing myself in an abandoned house outside my neighborhood. Eventually, I turned my instant camera on myself in my home in a flood of early morning window light. I was struck by the fusion of my body with other objects in the room — bedsheets, furniture and wallpaper, for example. One day, the chance reading of an aphorism by Don Paterson in an old *New Yorker* magazine revealed to me vividly the unintentional outcome of what I had been photographing. "Almost everything in the room will survive you. To the room, you are already a ghost."[1]

This was a moment of penetrating insight for me. The Polaroid images in dense light and long exposures referenced the analytic room, a space so significant to the interpretation of the subconscious in psychoanalysis. Also in that moment I reconnected with memories of growing up in a very artistic family that was endlessly involved with home-related design implements and projects, such as my mother's kiln in the basement for firing spoon holders, or my father's paintings of Audubon birds on ceramic plates, or the ceramic wall hangings they designed together. My mother and older sister were avid interior designers and both parents invested time and energy crafting the landscape of the home in which I grew up.

I also recalled my decision to pursue a master's degree in community planning, after studying psychology and education as an undergraduate. I did not have ambitions in architecture growing up, because I perceived the profession to be male-dominated and weighted conceptually toward engineering, building structures, and skyscrapers. I'm sure I was heavily influenced by reading *The Fountainhead*. I was not aware of the psychological and humanistic focus in the field at the time. My professional interest did, however, evolve to be the place-based, people-centered field of community planning. It is very interesting and gratifying to discover, so many years later, a consistency with this early academic interest in my photographs of everyday spaces. In "This Room," architecture became an active framework for the formulation of thoughts, emotions and self-perception.

The process of initiating "This Room" reflected my common approach to new work, which is rooted in experimentation with technology and methods unfamiliar to me. Parallel with this investigation is the exploration of a psychological subject matter, often undefined at the outset, which consistently leads to something learned about myself, my family history, and ultimately to an insight into my experience of the world. Technologies *vis-à-vis* psychological insights are the through line in my work as a whole, with each individual project distinguished by details of content, form and execution.

For example, my first extended series of black and white analog photographs was of women in non-traditional jobs, such as ship fitting, longshoring and firefighting. That series emerged from a class in black and white darkroom photography where I created self-portraits, my go-to format for experimentation. One day in Baltimore City, I was struck by the sight of a female bricklayer on a high scaffold outside a dormitory. I created environmental portraits of her, interviewed her, and began searching for women in similar jobs which were unconventional for women at that time and often still are. Only when what became my series "The Best Woman for the Job" was exhibited at the Baltimore Museum of Industry during Women's History Month in 1992, when I was interviewed for a television feature, did I realize that beyond reminding women by example that they are free to make choices, I was also especially concerned with my need to always challenge self-, or societally-imposed boundaries.

A few years after that work I was selected to participate in an MFA class of artists working in various media who were developing new work that responded in some way to the collection of Baroque art in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. To me, the primary characteristic distinguishing the subject matter of Baroque art from other periods was the sensual erotic imagery that was framed as mythology or allegory — this despite the fact that the most important patron of that art was the Catholic Church. I saw a parallel

1. In Adam Gopnik, "Brevity, Soul, Wit," *The New Yorker*, July 22, 2019, pp. 66-68, p. 67.

in the content and function of that work in the Baroque period with the pornography newly accessible through the paradigm-shifting public technology of the internet. Many web hackers and users with technical skills were drawn to the hunt for pornography, thereby driving home internet adoption. In both cases visual erotica functioned as persuasion. The increased seeking out of erotica as a general social response coincided with a collective anxiety response to the emergence of disruptive technologies. Similarly, in Baroque times, the telescope de-centered earth (and humans) in the Cosmos, as in the 1990s the internet represented the collapse of the gate-keepers once maintaining centrally-controlled information sources.

Since an internet modem installed in the Walters Art Gallery was not an option in 1995, I created an interactive CD-ROM, *The I For Pleasure,* for the gallery visitor to explore the juxtaposition of these historical phenomena as if they were accessing the internet. A click on any figure in the painting "Las Meninas" by Velázquez lead the user through a different media path of Baroque or Internet images. I choose "Las Meninas" because of its masterful depiction of the power of the gaze, in which the viewer is trapped in a web of looking and being looked at, turning him or her into an active participant in the scene. I continued to address the power of the gaze in several later projects.

"This Room" had some especially difficult and unusual technical challenges. Can you describe what they were and how you produced the work?

This project was already underway before the pandemic, but during lockdown I found a way to use isolation as a creative advantage, working now as a lone figure in nature and in built environments as my process became the series "This Room." I discovered that I was able to maintain a physically exposed, meditative frame of mind, with less likelihood of people entering the scene at random, creating images in buildings under construction or in aging and dilapidated spaces. I continued exploring my own home and studio spaces, and by June 2025, I had amassed approximately 700 instant prints, averaging 3-7 from every shoot.

Once I began this series I was always hyper-aware of a unique and singular direct light found in a specific place and time that also vanishes within minutes or even seconds of noting it. I frequently spotted the parameters and returned the following day with ample time to prepare and account for changes in the details. The uniquely small f/64 aperture of my Fuji instant camera, which is normally found only in lenses designed for large format view cameras, made work in bright light possible, but I often attached a neutral density filter to the lens to further reduce the light entering it. This allowed me to extend exposures even further so I had more time to manage locking the shutter open with a remote cord to enter the scene slowly, according to points of reference I imagined for the purposes of composition. When I reached that point and position, I counted upwards of a 45-second exposure time in a meditative state, then returned slowly to the camera to close the shutter. The exposure count was determined with a manual spot meter pointed at the deepest shadow, followed by rough calculation of middle gray. The minute and a half instant film development time allowed quick assessment of the resulting image. An interesting aspect of this process is that exposure time determined content and composition of the image, not just the correct amount of light reaching the film. My pace and my position in stillness influenced the "shape" of the light in the image. Given my essentially random process of metering, I was always surprised to find that my calculations for the first of up to six experimental exposure and movement variations in a session were usually the most successful technically and aesthetically.

Your work has an ambiguity and spectral quality that is reminiscent of American nineteenth century spirit photography. Were you aware of any historical precedents in conceptualizing this work?

I wasn't initially conscious of any historical precedent at the start of "This Room." I later recalled multimedia artist Zoe Beloff's surreal and socially conscious work on the history of technology *vis-à-vis* the paranormal, the subconscious and psychoanalysis. Specifically, her digital interactive work "Beyond," which investigates how digital and psychic technologies, devices and methods that shape or influence human consciousness (including early cinema, hypnosis, spirit photography, seances and recording machines), shape our understanding of ourselves.[2]

It has been intriguing and a personal honor to hear the name of artist Francesca Woodman come up as frequently as it has in response to "This Room." I wasn't familiar with Woodman's work when making the series, but I greatly admire any example of how an artist's engagement with her work will draw a viewer into interiority. Her spectral representations of embodied architectural space, where her body appears pressed to walls, all while guarding against self-disclosure, deeply resonate for me. In the development of "This Room" I was aware that although I was creating self-portraits, I, too, wanted to suggest human embodiment — but not my body. The project is not, in fact, about *my* subjectivity.

2. "Beyond," Zoe Beloff, 1997, updated 2021, https://www.zoebeloff.com/beyond/]

Yet, your photographs are often seen as highly introspective. Do you agree, and do you consciously try to engage the viewer in that interiority?

I believe an element of the subjectivity of the artist is evident in every work of art, even if the art is not *about* the artist's subjectivity. In the images comprising "This Room" I experienced introspection in architecture and an awareness of being looked at in the presence of a camera loaded with film and an open shutter at the same time. Maybe this is a means of communication with an unknown viewer. My message would be to feel what you see in the image. Though my experience of architecture and life is unique to me, I like to remind myself that we are all far more similar than we are different — genetically, socially. Therefore, the more personally resonant a work is for me, the greater the chance another individual will find something of themselves in it. My images ask the viewer to consider their experience in the space of architecture. Addressing this question engages interiority.

Let's step back again. What brought you to photography as an artistic medium? How did you see the camera in your early work, as a tool, perhaps, to find your vision as an artist?

I was primarily drawn to photography as an artistic medium to be empowered, to stand behind the camera and own the gaze rather than be subjected to it. The simple act of operating the camera was truly intoxicating to me, having grown up in a family obsessed with appearances reflected in fashion and good looks. As the youngest of my siblings — my brother and sister were significantly older— I was often a subject of scrutiny. Also, later, the birth of my first child impacted my relationship to the camera. As a new mother I felt suddenly divided in two, disoriented by a sense of loss of self in my new role. Making photographs helped me focus on the present while transitioning through a paradigm shift in relation to time and my emotional legacy, which is my family. Photography and architecture together and separately anchored my sense of self through time. I have been fascinated from the start by the uncanny ability of the camera to see things I was not conscious of seeing, grounding me in awareness of my own motivations and concerns through photographs I create.

It naturally follows to ask if there is any other medium that you could see using, or in fact have used, to express your vision as an artist?

The whole range of media technologies from writing and print to photography, radio, computers, the internet, audio and video systems all represent languages to me, like systems of code, or alphabets and words, which explain the world, creating and communicating meaning. I want to explore visually these invisible media technologies to reveal how things work.

What do you see as the challenges to photographic practice today, or in your particular approach as a photographer?

My formal training in photography was shaped by post-modern ideas, which have strongly influenced how I think about photography and its role in how people relate to one another. I believe the biggest challenge for photographers today is making images that still carry meaning in a world that is flooded with images —a world in which it is hard to know what is true, especially in our new era of AI. Many photographers feel that we are creating images with the camera, but do we realize that we don't understand the algorithms that operate the camera? We play with AI and know it generates images that look real in a process beyond human comprehension. We understand the crisis. But what do we do about it?

Before his death in 1991, media philosopher Vilém Flusser wrote about technical images changing the way people see and understand the world on a global scale. He explained that images, which circulated instantly and everywhere, shaped shared ways of seeing. Stories were no longer experienced as clear sequences of cause and effect. I think the challenge for photographers today is the same now as it was when Flusser wrote, but even more magnified. We need to keep pushing back against the idea that images are neutral or transparent by revealing how an image is made, for example, showing rough edges, artifacts, and by making images that are deeply personal. Making photographs that interrupt what appears to be real can encourage viewers to question what they are seeing. At the same time this approach also asks photographers to think carefully about why they are making images in the first place.

Thank You

Elizabeth Avedon
for fending off doubt with persistent,
beautiful words.

Gary Van Zante
for revealing a through line from a watercolor painting
to this book.

Teun van der Heijden
for helping me tell my story once again.

Maarten Schilt
for sitting down for a cup of coffee with me
at Photo London 2025.

ISBN 978 90 5330 966 7

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Cindy Konits began photographing herself with an obsolete professional instant camera and expired film after discovering it, unused, at the bottom of her studio closet. The camera's features enable the creation of slow, meditative self-portraits in sunlight and shadow, within and between rooms and the surrounding landscape. In these images, Konits examines architecture as a holding environment that supports emotional and reflective thought, functioning as a container for the storage and recall of experience embedded in rooms, buildings, and the physical features that define natural boundaries. Approaching the threshold of a room, one is aware of being separate from it, but once inside, the room disappears from conscious awareness, as self and architecture merge. *This Room Will Survive Me* invites readers to experience rooms inwardly and sense the slow flow of time and memory.

Cindy Konits (American, b. 1954) is a lens-based artist exploring family history and identity in the face of evolving technology. She won first prize in Visual Art Open, Photography and Digital Art 2023, first and second prize in The Photo Review Competition 2021, 2022, numerous Julia Cameron, Pollux awards and first prizes London, Budapest and Vienna International Photo Awards. Solo exhibitions traveled from The Baltimore Museum of Industry and The Baltimore Jewish Museum with NEA and NEH grants respectively. Her film "The Way I See It," nominated Best Documentary Short, screened in 19 international film festivals and her work is held in public and private collections.

Cindy's work was firstly edited by **Elizabeth Avedon** and then handed over to designer **Teun van der Heijden**. The combination of these two exceptional creative minds led to the brilliant visual flow this book contains.

With an essay by **Juhani Pallasmaa**, theorist, writer of over 70 books and 800 essays, and former director of both the Finnish Museum of Architecture and the Architecture Program at Helsinki University of Technology.

Gary Van Zante interviewed Konits over several months in the fall of 2025. Van Zante curated over 60 exhibitions of photography, design and architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Museum from 2001 to 2025, and has published books and essays on nineteenth century photography in New Orleans, East German photography, and Berenice Abbott, among other topics.

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