

COLOR
BEN HASSETT

PHOTOGRAPHIC COLOR
CHARLOTTE COTTON

Since the “proto-photographers” brought their medium into being two centuries ago, rendering color has been the challenge and tantalizing ideal of photography. By the early 1850s, amidst the cultural fascination with the scope of the medium’s veracious fidelity, the variance of light sensitive chemicals’ reactions to different colors of light marked this emergent monochromatic medium as holding inherently chromatic properties. Color photographs were initially achieved with washes of watercolor paint, carefully applied onto precious, hand-held portrait photographs to simulate blushing skin. Rich overall color casts were developed in the late 1860s with the invention of the laborious carbon printing process that hardened and transformed a photographic negative into a subtle pigment-printing plate. In 1903, the legendary Lumière brothers, who pioneered film-making, patented the autochrome photograph - with light sensitized, tiny grains of potato starch tinted blue-violet, red-orange and green coated on glass slides - used primarily by botanists, geologists, archeologists and ethnographers, photographically recording ecologies for the first time. In more recent history, analog color film was industrially produced and generally available. Color slide film – under the “chrome” moniker - was the mid-20th-century color photography mode of choice, cumulatively generating a Kodachrome golden-toned vision of American family life and leisure. Professional color

slide film defined and constrained the possibilities of fashion and advertising color imagery until the early 1980s. Without a color photographic print as an essential part of the process, control of chrome film coloration relied on color gel film pegged in front of studio lights and hinged almost entirely on the moment of image capture. Since the heyday of instant Polaroid film in the mid. 1970s (and its re-animation as a boutique photographic material in 2009) the tangibly rich and suggestive coloration - of a process where all the chemical layers for exposing, developing, and fixing a color photograph are held in a single envelope – has been a physical symbol of photographic magic and its rapid reveal of an idealized moment just passed.

This staccato through a partial history of color photography is the context within which Ben Hassett innovates and experiments with color. He channels the medium's chromatic history, gains his permissions from it, references its palettes for contemporary viewership and commits to the very same principles and practice of intricate experimentation as his forebears. *Color* draws from Hassett's archive over the past ten years, with each image created with digital capture and post-production software but carrying "analog thinking" forward – using in-camera and studio lighting knowledge – to create images of depth and intentionality that go far beyond the automated

processes and aesthetics of algorithmic image-making. Color images that hold its maker's vision have always been chased by the medium's innovators. They are photographic visions that must be *rendered* and never merely found. While photography is a medium that has been considered as directly tracing subjects and scenarios drawn from the empirical reality in front of the camera's lens - captured in a matter of seconds or milliseconds - color is always *made*. Perhaps more than the frame, composition or ostensible subject, the rendering of color is the most personal manifestation of a photographer's vision. Color is subjective and expressive in a primary way. A color image is brought forth from the endless combinations of complimentary and contrasting hues. It is shaped out of each decision and its consequence - from ideation and into image capture, through to post-production and eventual realization in printed and screen-based form.

It is testimony to the experimental independence of the pre-eminent fashion and beauty photographer Ben Hassett that the organizing principle and title of this survey book is *Color*. A chromatic spectrum – from deep, saturated hues to almost-phosphorescent brightness - manifests the substance, materialism and exalted alchemy of photography that continues to obsess this photographer. Color is the enduring, elemental energy with

which Hassett has continually pushed beyond conventional forms, driven by his internal creative compass. He uses the fleeting interests and fast ebb and flow of fashion and beauty image-making in which he operates as his prompt. Many of the photographs shown here were unpublished until now, reflecting, perhaps, his drive to inhabit photographic space that is free from convention, and where he can make his about-turns, and startling counterarguments for the premise of an image.

Color is Ben Hassett's pluralistic, celebratory ode to photography and the experimental journey on which it has taken him. In his hands, color is multiform: a symbolic detail that resists easy translation; a visual strategy that upends our expectations of what can be beautiful; a cast that permeates and amplifies the emotional register of its subject; a monochromatic palette that withdraws all visual interference; the singular, literal subject of his most abstract photographs; and a visual space where opposing registers of color come together. *Color* calls forth a mediumistic chorus of photographic history, triggering our visual memory banks that are shaped (by osmosis) by the chemicals and silver salts - gels and flashes - that get us to the present and expansive moment in the story of photography.







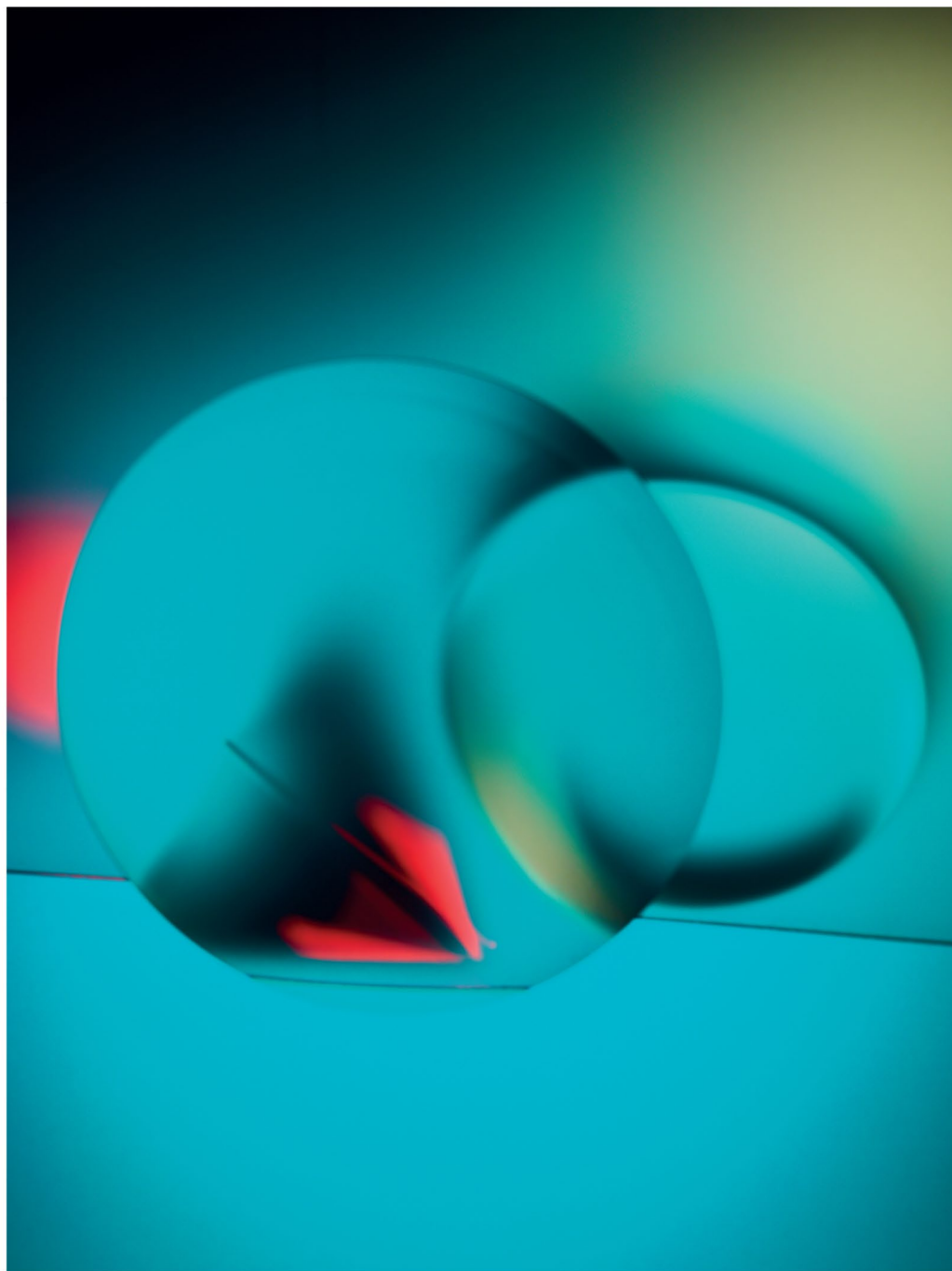


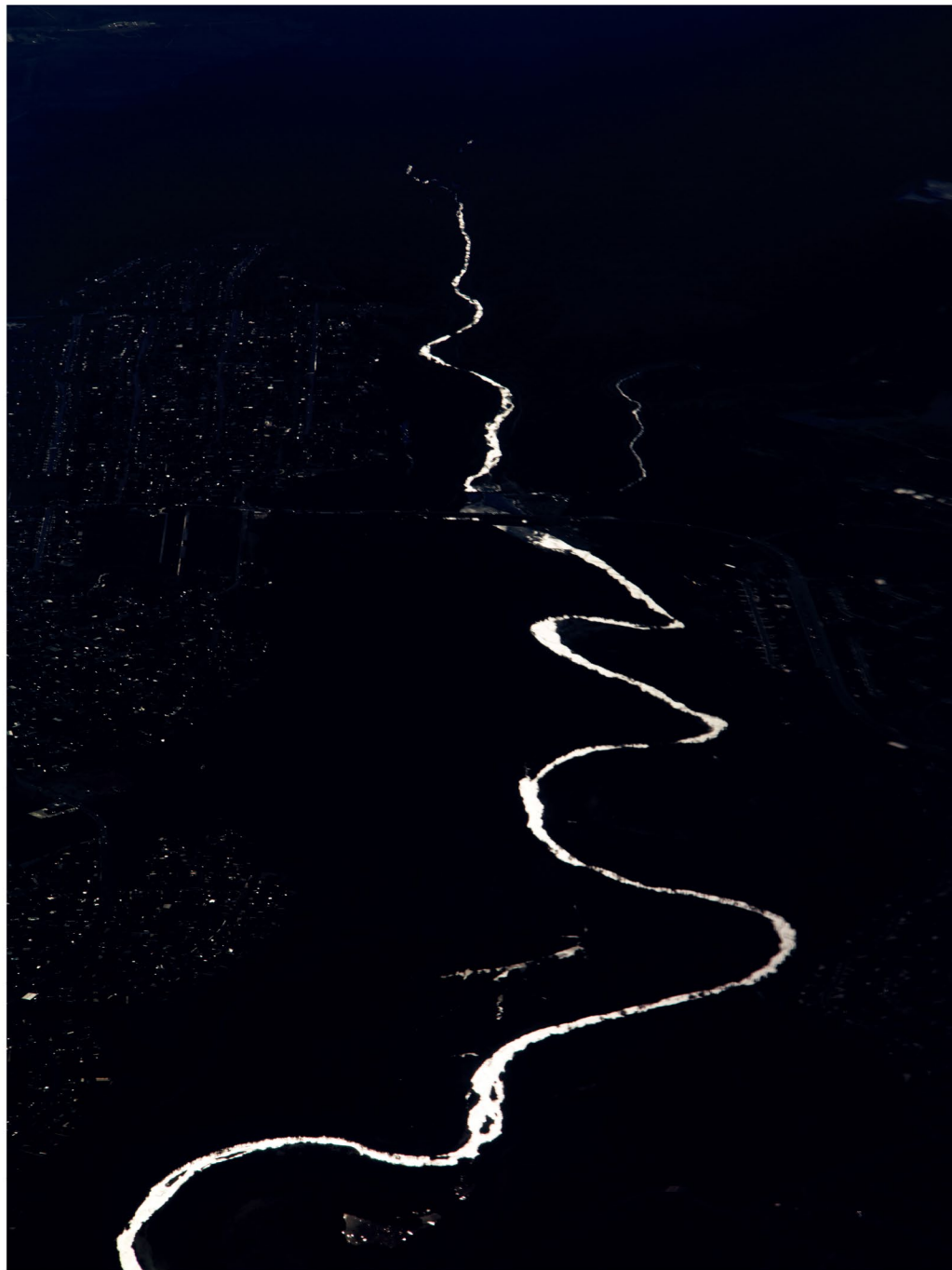




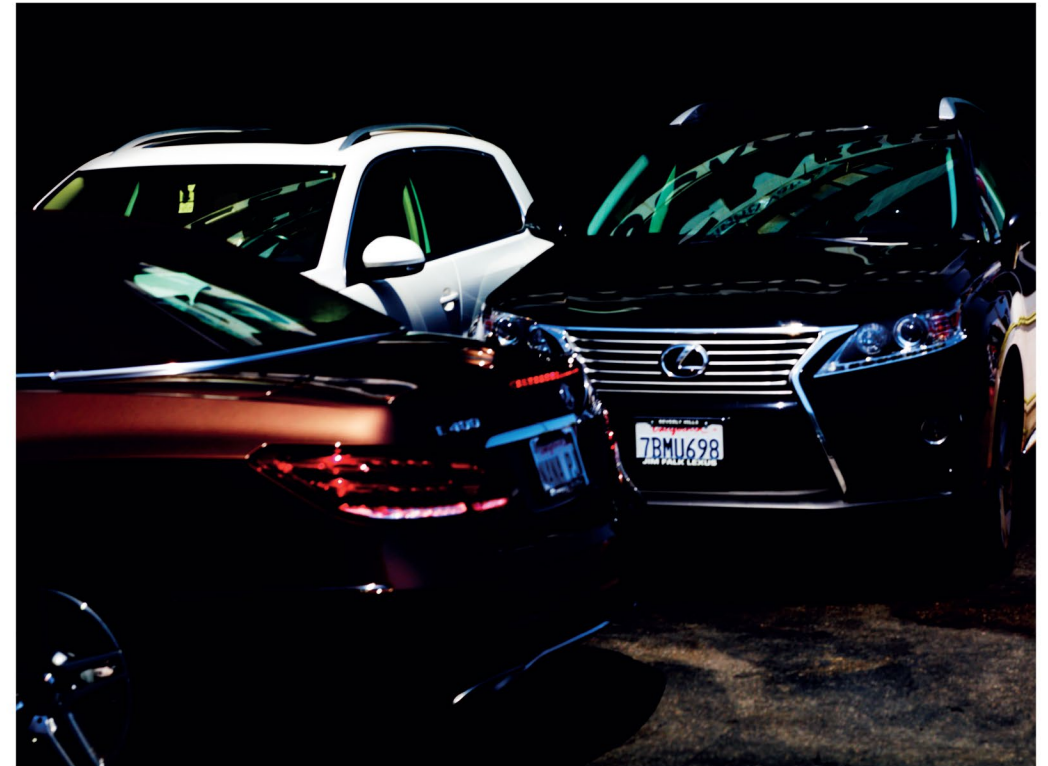






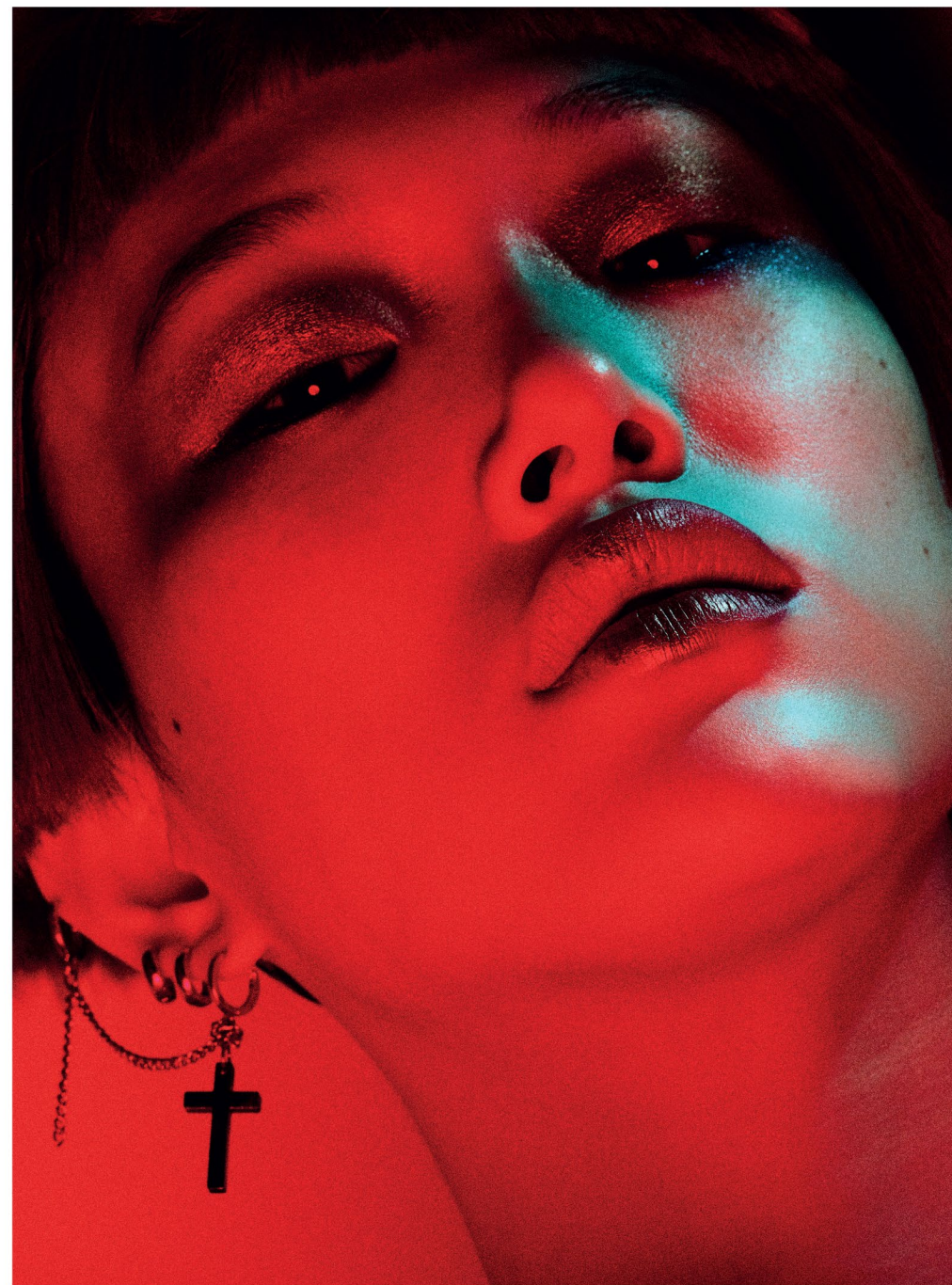


























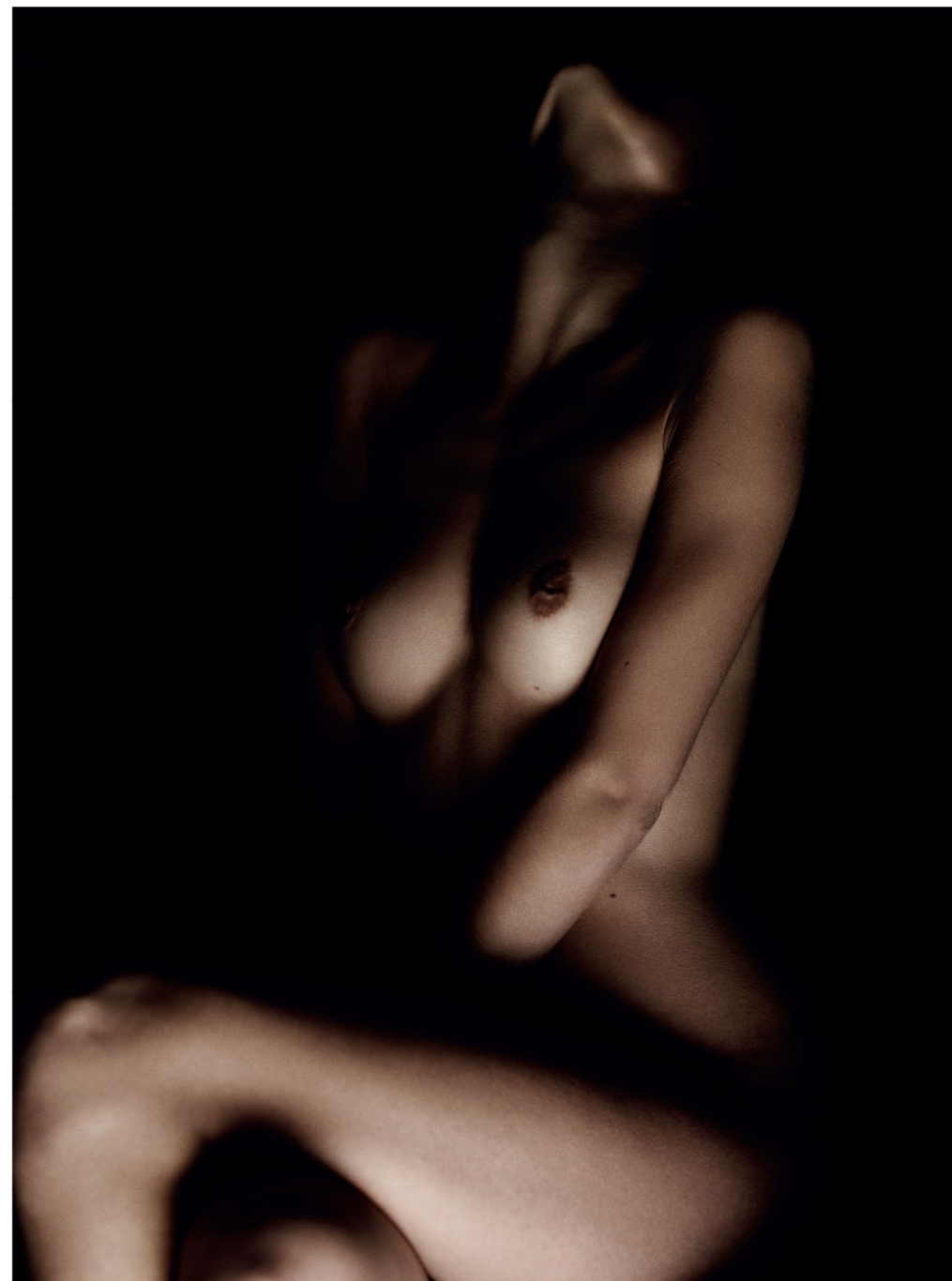






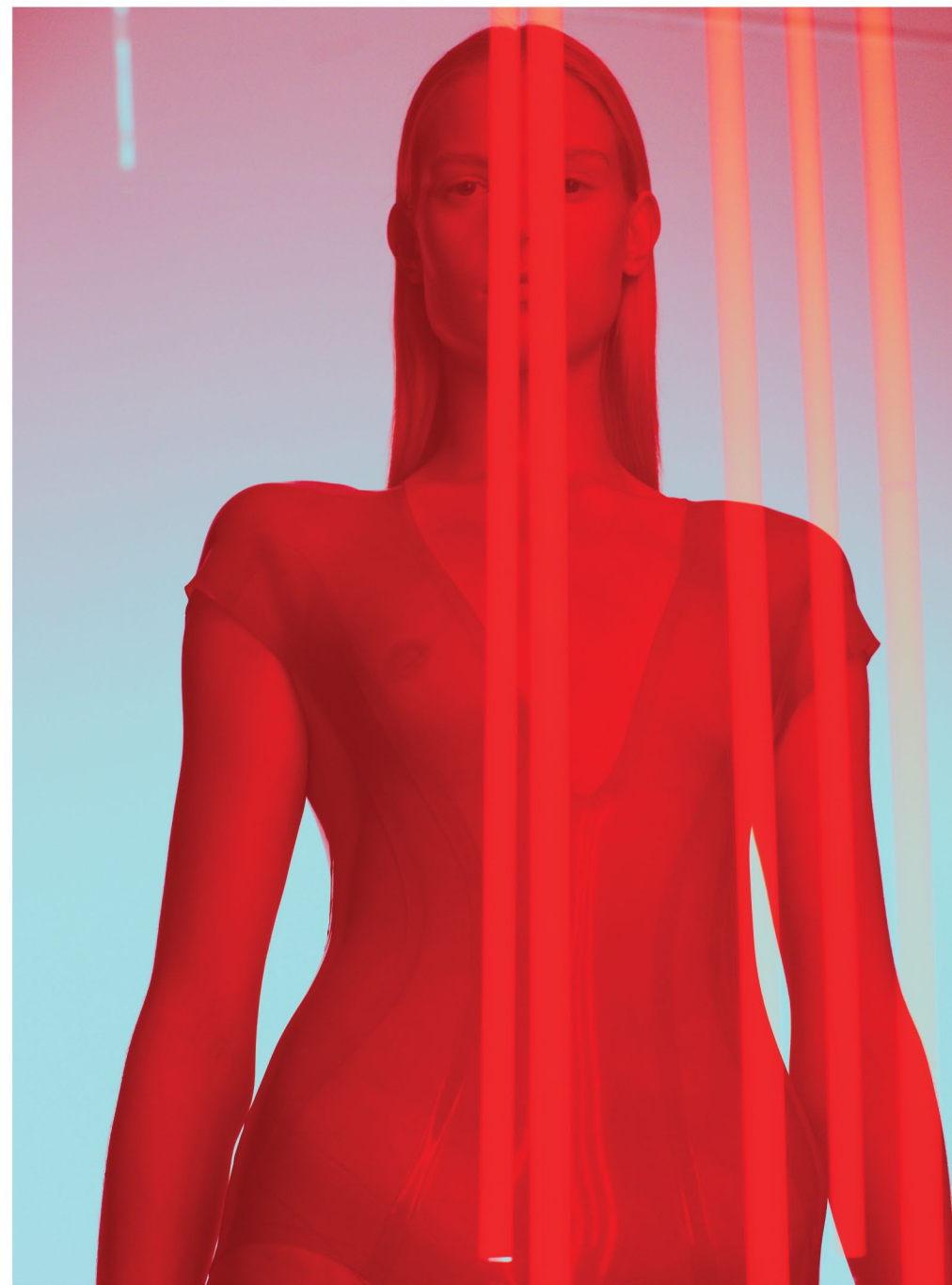






















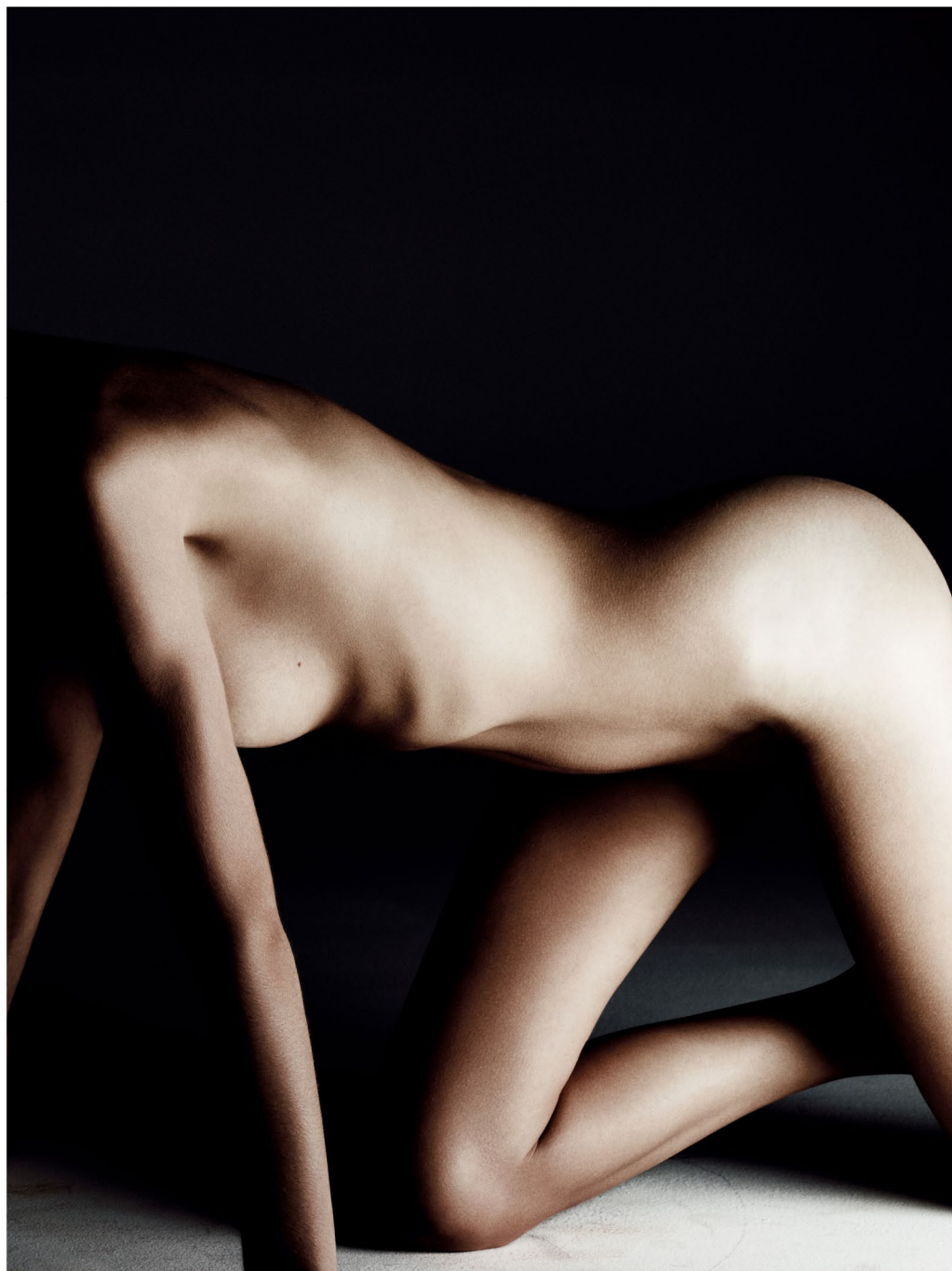








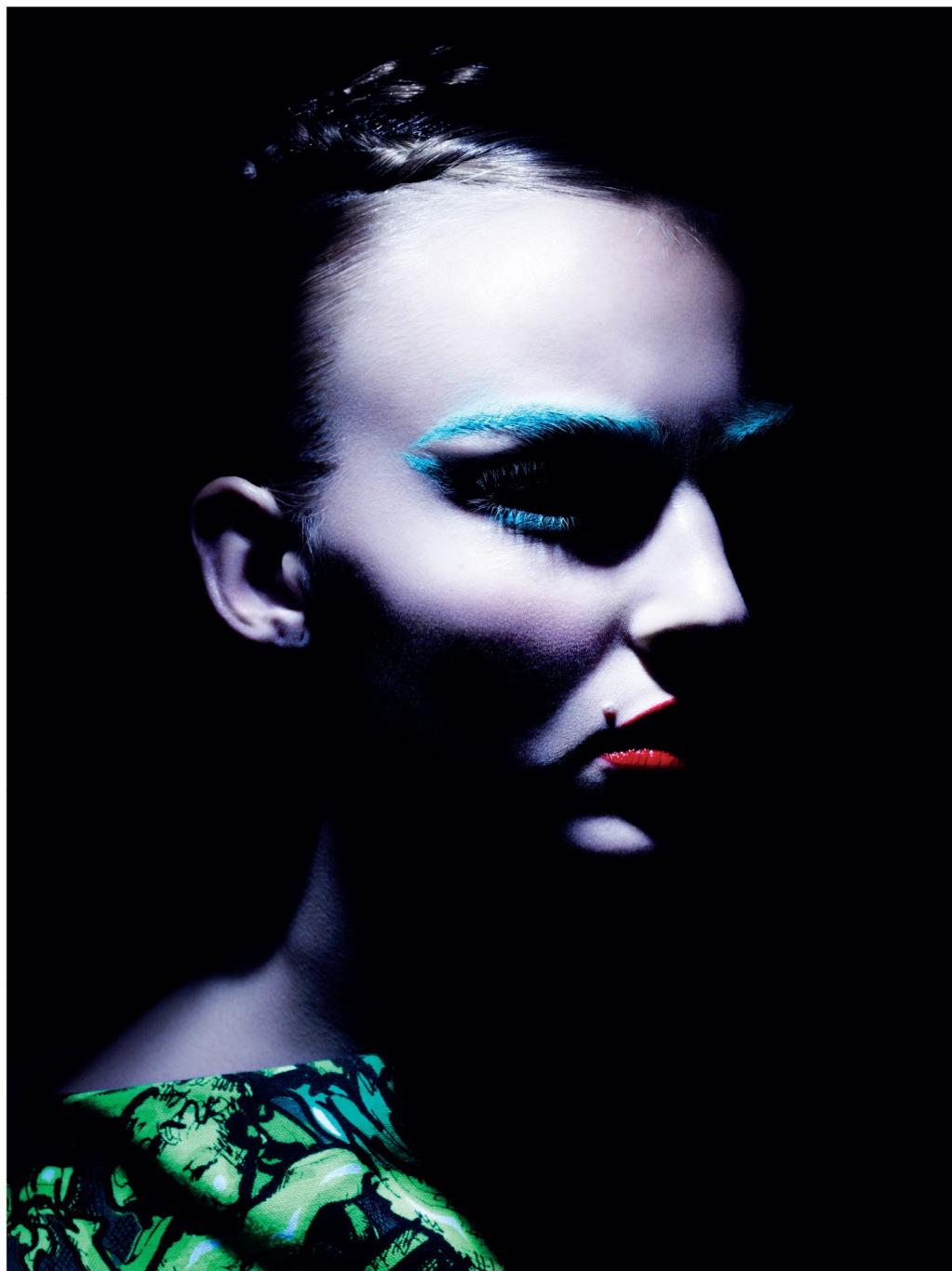


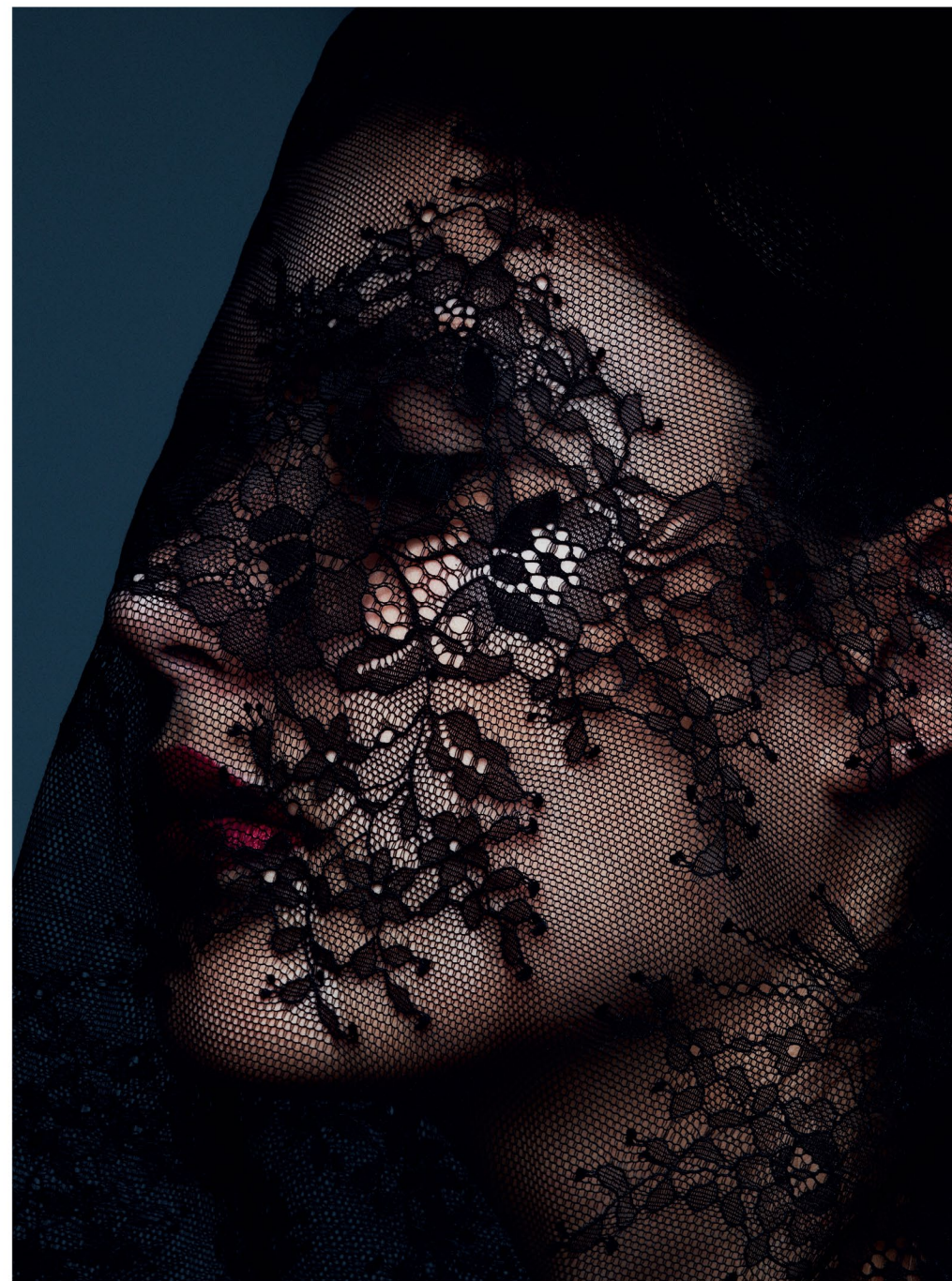






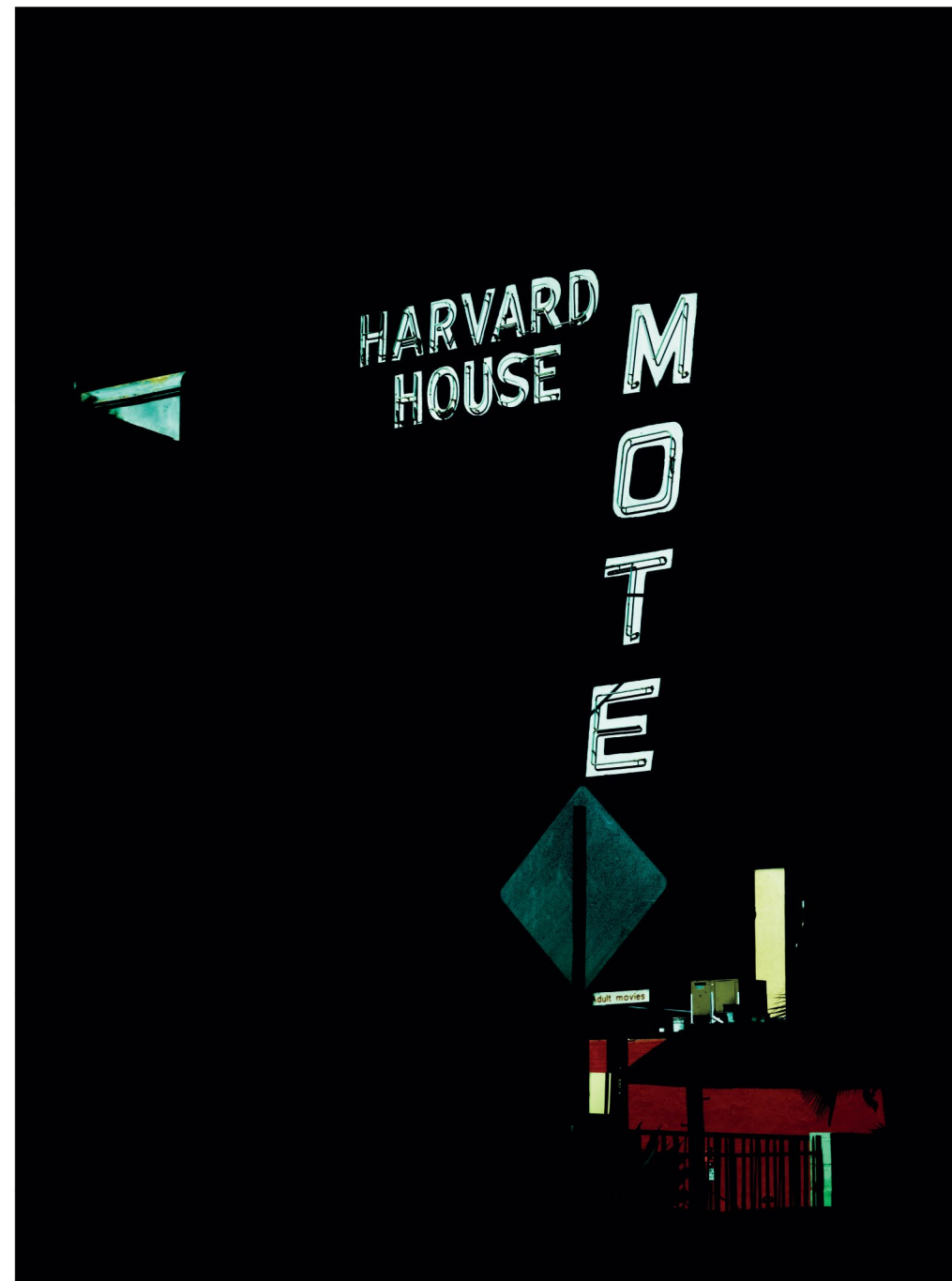






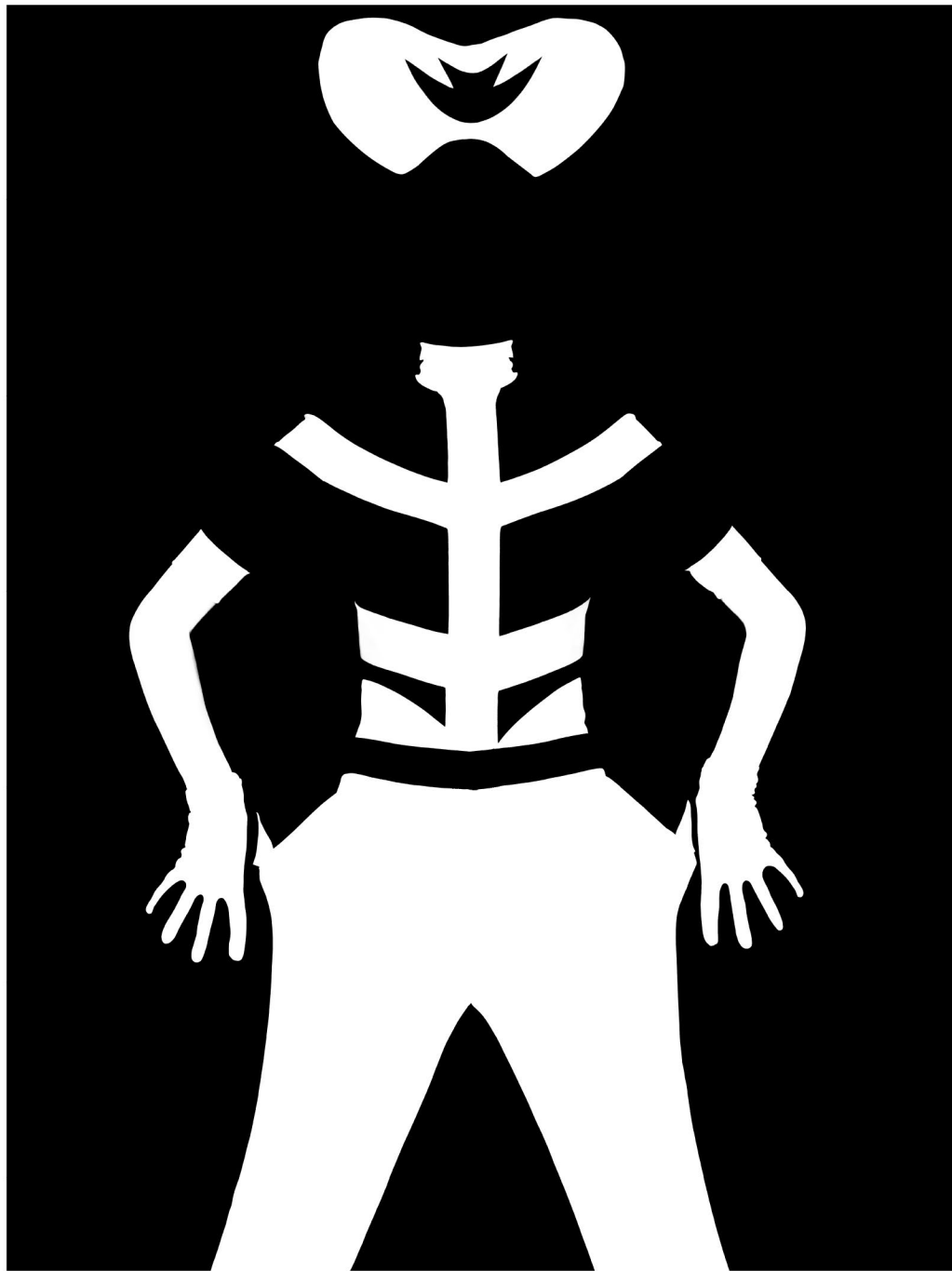








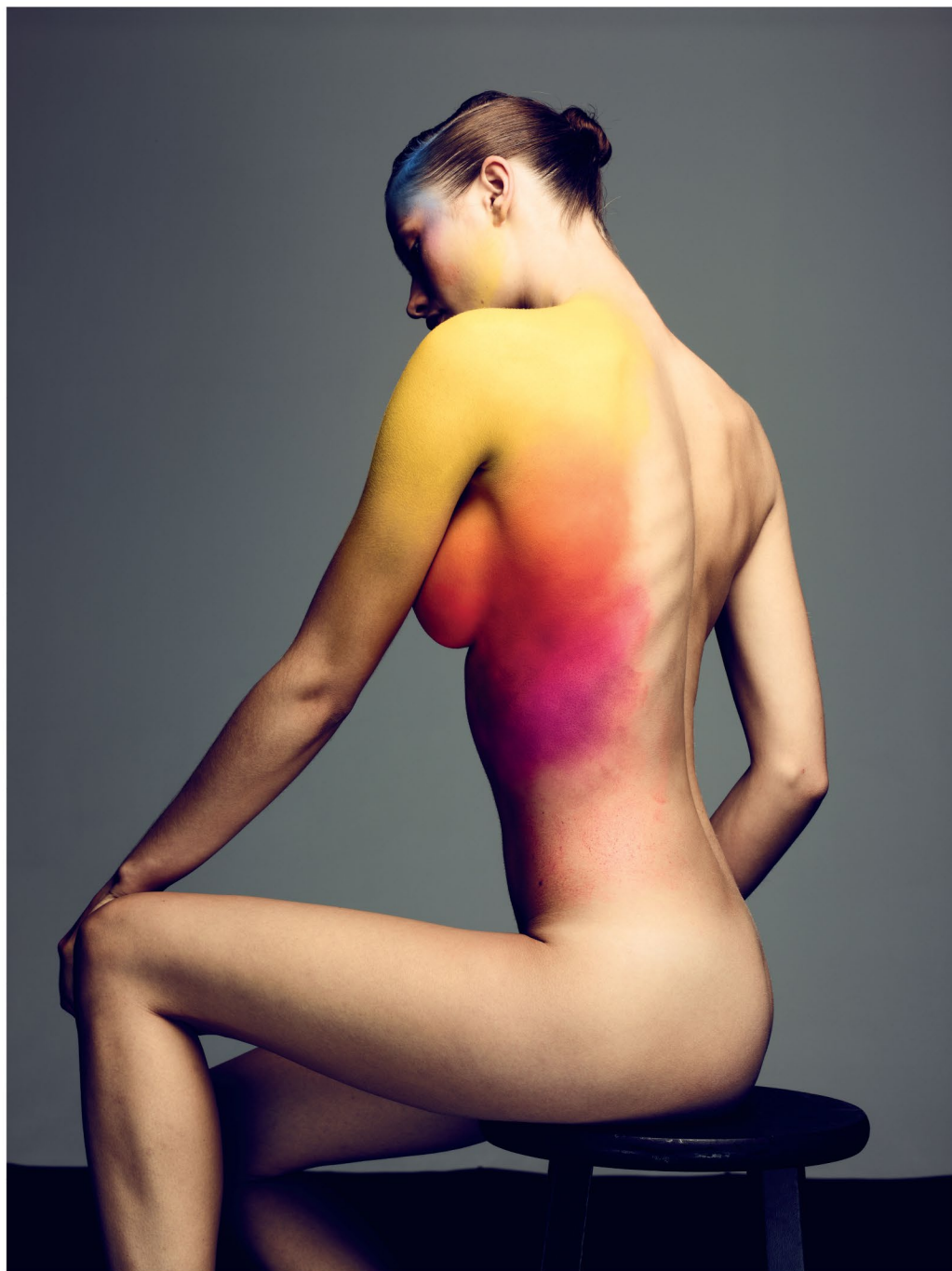


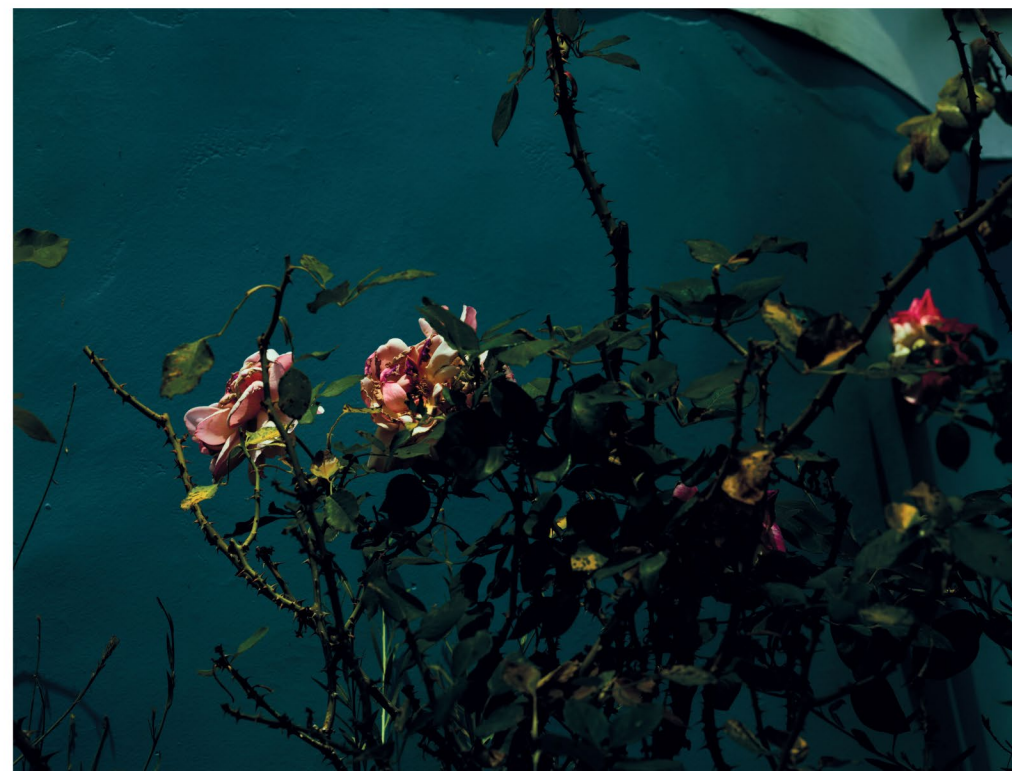














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FRONT COVER VOGUE JAPAN 2014 BACK COVER STILL LIFE 2018

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