



Woodman's
"Self-deceit
#1," Rome,
1978.

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN IMAGINING

P O R T F O L I O

Francesca Woodman By Chris Townsend
Phaidon Press; 256 pages; 50 color
and 250 black-and-white photographs; \$75

The photographic legacy of Francesca Woodman has been clouded by critical mythology in the 25 years since her death. A suicide at 22, she had taken revealing pictures



Untitled,
New York,
1979–80

FRANCESCA WOODMAN/COURTESY GEORGE AND BETTY WOODMAN

of herself since the age of 13, and given that inward focus—naked self-portraiture being a staple of the 1970s art-school world she inhabited for most of her creative life—it would be easy to revere Woodman as a feminist (as critics have) or to dismiss her as just another narcissistic photographer using the medium as a diary. While certainly the work of an immature artist struggling to define a vision, her images are much more interesting than that. In fact, the most successful

of them aren't about Woodman's anatomy.

Instead, they explore the human figure in relation to a space and its defining surfaces. By blurring, cropping, covering, and otherwise obscuring her own body, Woodman isn't being coy; she is making the image less about her physical self. Her photographs' spaces (abandoned rooms), her actions within them (jumping, posing), and the props they include (clothing, fragments of paper) seem more a representation of Woodman's

internal life and suggest its very tenuousness.

This comprehensive monograph is big enough to prove that Woodman's work is substantial; but too big, given her short career, to be filled with fully realized works. Variations from a given shoot, iterations of a particular idea, entries from her writerly journals, and postcards to friends and family make the book a fascinating study of the photographer's practice and thought process.

—MARVIN GOOD