



SIGRID ROTHE
ROCKAWAY BEACH

Manhattan's East Village is not necessarily known as a monarchy, but it also has its own form of aristocracy, and Sigrid Rothe is definitely a member. Even when, on a fine summer morning, she walks the two blocks from her apartment to the swimming pool, dressed in flip-flops and a sarong, she is immediately met by the cheerful, open greetings of the locals. A lightly swinging friendliness that the East Village is known for, which is not easy to get and can never be bought.

The East Village was Rothe's home for 30 years. Downtown Manhattan accelerated and crystallized her development; downtown made her into what she is: a great photographer – not least because she understands photography as a kind of painting. One only has to get up close enough, then reality as we know it dissolves, the structures become blurred, the familiar order melts, the colors begin to pop. Like in a psychedelic dream, but without drugs, a journey to the unknown-familiar, the ornament as the basic rhythm of the world, armed with just a camera and macro lenses.

Rothe combines this sense for the possible, this insistence on partially reinventing reality, with the legacy of those wild 1960s which the photographer got to know at Stefan Aust's magazine *St Pauli Nachrichten*, where suddenly everything seemed to be permitted, along as it generated a good mood and looked great.

Once captivated by this promise of liberated beauty, Rothe consciously chose New York as the center of her life. She photographed fashion in Manhattan in summer and in Miami in winter – and influenced by Warhol and Mapplethorpe began to push her fashion photos further, transforming them into art. After a lingerie shooting, which bored her, she placed flowers on the enlargements, going right up close, photographing them again and again, creating surreal hybrids, complex rhythms of organic forms, painting with the camera.

The radical this-worldliness of Miami, its Caribbean colors - often maligned by northern Europeans as "exaggerated" - especially appealed to Rothe. Her blues are deep and heavy, her yellows dense and intractable, her greens fathomless and enticing, and all these qualities

combined appear to be concentrated in her favorite color red. It must explode, according to Rothe's laid-back manifesto. "I simply love it when it pops".

Rothe has perfected this approach and technique, manipulating the sunlight with mirrors and colored sheets placed in front of the window. It is a delight to see the unknown worlds she conjures in the studio.

That Rothe can also do things completely differently is demonstrated by her pictures of hurricane "Sandy" that struck her chosen home of New York exactly 5 years ago.

In the destruction of the storm, the burst concrete elements, the ripped asphalt, the sand clogging everything, the rusty metal, she discovered a beauty, an almost delicate poetry of destruction, which such natural forces also carry within them. That vanitas motif which has accompanied art since the Thirty Years War, shines through in her close-ups, her catastrophe pictures from the Rockaways. Everything is fleeting, built on sand, including the powerful, vigorous, brutal this-worldly, supposedly strongest country in the world, America.

A few days after the disaster, Rothe made her way to the beach, where Queens had previously tamed the Atlantic with concrete, and where the sea had now reclaimed a part of the borough. At first she saw no one, the people had withdrawn from the force of nature, no longer trusting the ocean. Perhaps they didn't want to add insult to injury by also bearing witness to this defeat of our civilization.

After hours in the sun, rubble, and storm, Rothe finally saw another person in this wasteland. When she got closer she saw it was Patti Smith, another queen of the East Village.

Rock away, Queens.



Rockaway # 1832
Rockaway # 1925
Rockaway # 2027

Rockaway # 2024
Rockaway # 1915
Rockaway # 1893

Rockaway # 2139
Rockaway # 2110
Rockaway # 1835



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