

## Requiem For The Chelsea

Rita Barros Presents In Cascais A Multimedia Exhibition On The Death Of A Myth: The Chelsea Hotel.

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There are buildings that define the cultural life of cities. In New York, bohemia, and artistic creation (also self-destruction) were embodied in the Chelsea Hotel. Opened in 1885, on 23 Street - which was then the border between the rich metropolis and the poor unhealthy neighborhoods of the Lower Manhattan where immigrants were piled up - it functioned as an attraction for writers, actors, musicians, and painters. Neither the multi-disciplinary artist nor the high rise had yet been invented; with 12 floors, the Chelsea was the tallest building in the city. One of its first fans may have been Mark Twain who chose the Chelsea as a meeting place; one of the last will be Rita Barros, the Portuguese artist who for 40 years has lived in the apartment 1008, the same where Arthur C. Clarke wrote the script "2001: A Space Odyssey" for Stanley Kubrick's film. The list of permanent or transient guests is the who's who of the American culture of the XX century, high and low, left and right wing, famous or infamous. The playwright, Arthur Miller, enjoyed the break up with Marilyn Monroe writing "After the Fall" (1964) in apartment 614 of the Chelsea; Nancy Spungen, the girlfriend of Sid Vicious (from the Sex Pistols) was stabbed to death in the room 100 in 1978.

The work - not only photographic- of Barros has almost always been focused on what is around her. First, she distinguished herself by the portraits of artists with or without connection to the Chelsea. (Less than a month ago The New York Times used one of Rita Barros' photos to illustrate the necrology of Allen Midgette, Andy Warhol's double who impersonated the artist in a series of conferences in American universities in 1967). The Chelsea has always been for Barros her bohemian "bubble" to use a hip word in the time of confinement.

In 1999 she published "Fifteen Years: Chelsea Hotel", a collection of portraits of her neighbors and friends and famous guests captured in the microcosmos of their rooms or apartments. Images that are pages of a diary or life theater, at home and in person. When the mind "travels alone through weird seas of thought" one doesn't need to leave home to create a work of art.

In 2001, Barros captured the collective attack on the World Trade Center. Ten years later the hotel was sold and the Chelsea bubble burst. The historic mark - New York City Landmark since 1966, with the right to be part of National Registry of Historical Places since 1977 - stopped being a residential hotel to be transformed into a contemporary luxury boutique, whipping out the past, erasing the memory and forcing the exit of those who lived there. Protected by law, to a certain extent, the residents were persecuted and sacrificed with water and energy shut offs (even in full winter) vibrations and deafening sounds, dust and air pollution etc. Barros used her cameras to portray this whirlwind in photographic series such as: "Displacement 1 & 2" and videos with titles such as "Another Happy Day" or "Probability of a Hole", both in 2012, which were shown at the Biblioteca da Faculdade de Ciencias e Tecnologia da

Universidade de Lisboa in 2014 (transparency declaration: I was the curator of this exhibition).

Like the other one said, the fight goes on.

It's been 10 years since Barros is one of the fifty resisters. How to hold on? How to live and work in such conditions, mostly during the pandemic when the external options are reduced? To be on the safe side Rita Barros sold part of her furniture and placed in storage her personal objects, photographing everything before their exile. Today, apartment 1008 has its walls decorated with the respective copies in paper. In her words "by living with these copies, they became the 'real objects'. And since they absorbed the energy of space and time, I felt I had to document this new phase, in my fight to keep my home still a home". In the end the digital-virtual can be even more real than the real! This is the work that is now being shown at the Centro Cultural de Cascais: "Room 1008: The Last Days".

How to evaluate the result? Noting that Barros' art has been simplified since the baroque and chromatic opulence of her portraits of the late 80's and early 90's. Reduced to the essential, which is the purification of the form of its contents, the images become abstract and more and more universal. A lesson in life worth learning. The photographs are accompanied by an accordion artist book "#1008", with 76 images distributed in 74 pages, and almost 12 meters long, made between 2015-2020. Is this a record? Everything is perfectly hung and lit in a superb exhibition. The stroke of genius came with the decision to complement the photos eloquent quietness with the urban cacophony of New York in a series of videos and photograms projected in a huge screen in a separate room. In these "NYC Notes" we relive the last American elections and the recent popular causes. Many stores are closed, and some are boarded up, but the posters, graffiti and the people scream messages and slogans: Vote Him Out; Can't Breathe; We The People; Democracy Prevail.

"Adopt a Dot Today", shows a video of an empty High Line with safety distance stickers on the ground. The relief is found in the singing of the birds indifferent to the human restlessness. From the windows of 1008, Barros filmed a snowstorm surrealistically dreamlike. As in Augusto Gil poem: "Snow falls in nature.../ - And in my heart." Bye-bye, Chelsea Hotel.

Translated from the Portuguese