



ARTIST

Flurina Rothenberger

TITLE

From the portfolio Images from the African Continent

DATE

2004 – 2017

DIMENSIONS

14 in H x 10.5 in W

MEDIUM

Inkjet Prints

IMAGE NOTES

Portfolio Print Signed Artist Proof

CATALOGUE NUMBER

2017.011

FLURINA ROTHENBERGER

BORN

March 28 1977 at 19:00

BIRTHPLACE

Manneroe, Switzerland

GENDER

Female

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Raised in West Africa

LIGHT WORK RELATIONSHIP

Artist-in-Residence, 2017
Light Work Hallway Gallery, 2017
New Voices: Recent Acquisitions from the Light Work Collection

LIGHT WORK PUBLICATIONS

Contact Sheet 197

BIOGRAPHY

Flurina Rothenberger is a Swiss photographer raised in Zuénoula, Côte d'Ivoire. She has spent most of her career photographing the continent where she grew up, Africa. Her photographs focus on the expanding urban landscape, often based in some of the fastest growing economies in the world, and the people that move within it. She published *I love to dress like I am coming from somewhere and I have a place to go* in 2015 with Edition Patrick Frey, covering 10 years of working across different African countries. The book was edited and designed by the graphic design duo Hammer, with whom Flurina collaborates on a majority of her projects. The youngest result of their collaboration is Edition Nice, a self-published youth magazine conceived with young contributors in Pemba, Moçambique. Flurina Rothenberger is the co-founder of Klaym, an independent association and movement founded in 2015 that is dedicated to support, train and publish talented photographers, visual artists and writers in African countries. Flurina holds a degree in photography from the University of Arts Zurich and regularly lectures at F+F School of Arts and Design Zurich. Her work has been exhibited and awarded with the Swiss Design Award.

ESSAYS

Flurina Rothenberger has been devoted to the African continent for years as a photographer, networker, and collaborator. The social, political, and economic futures of diverse African countries are in the hands of the younger generation, and young women and men are very present in her pictures. Their attitudes, their styles vary—they reflect tradition, yet at the same time they appropriate (pop-)cultural elements that originated mainly in the US. Rothenberger's work shows how digital media both strongly influence and re-orient visual styles and narratives. But current technologies of picture-taking do not destroy the cultural or traditional heritages. Instead, these innovations create a conceptual space in which modern and traditional references coexist, a space that reflects both local and global identities. Rothenberger spent her childhood and most of her years as a young adult in the rural town of Zuénoula, in the center of Côte d'Ivoire. She then studied photography in Switzerland with the intent to return and work on the African continent. Over the last twenty years, she has worked both on commissioned photographic projects for various clients as well as on many personal projects in different African countries. She is well aware of the particular context in which she works: the negotiation of roles for Western photographers is a constant area of tension. In most African countries, the production of photographic images was for a long time the sole province of representatives of the colonial powers. Representation has thus always been, and continues to be, a site of exploitation, and each side contests visibility. The continent of Africa is so rich in its size, in the number of its societies, and in their individual stories, that the media cannot honor all parties equally—not in adequately conveying content nor in questions regarding what is appropriately and commercially profitable. Rothenberger's experience as a commissioned photographer has taught her that most non-African clients misunderstand issues related to the African context because they lack sufficient background knowledge. In the process, ignorance and the multitude of prevalent stereotypes inevitably clash with actual facts. Rothenberger's approach to taking someone's portrait is thus well-informed, thoughtful, and based on the understanding of a dialogue. "A portrait says a lot about a person's desires and aspirations and thus also communicates the conditioned reality in which someone lives," she notes. "In my opinion, a portrait always does this by exposing both contexts: the context in which the portrayed person moved as well as the context in which the photographer moves." To foster a dialogue at eye level between people from the African continent and those from the West, Rothenberger considers it essential to face and accept the complex circumstances of one's own origins, to listen to critical voices and let them inform one, and to create works for which one can take responsibility. At the same time, accounting for the complex realities of the fifty-three countries on the African continent requires much more space for image production than is typically available. Rothenberger's understanding and questioning of the semantics of images developed in parallel with her grasp of the issue of mobility, both with regard to the course of her own life and that of time in general. Contemporary formation of identity is nowadays as much rooted in a geographical area's culture as it is rooted in the culture of migration. Within this reality, the tradition of storytelling holds an important position in both cultures, especially in relation to one's own roots. Most of the communities that Rothenberger visits consider someone a good storyteller if they can involve the audience in the actual telling of the story and if they can react to any situation instinctively and wittily while interacting with the audience. Visual communication also strongly reflects this habit of performative storytelling. Here the parallel becomes obvious between the visual tradition of photography's golden age in Africa and phenomena appearing fifty years later, such as music videos and Facebook selfies. These traits distinguish the cultures in which Rothenberger works and are an integral part of her approach. An initial step of her photographic work involves integrating her counterparts in any project by adapting to them and their wishes. Her engagement as a networker and collaborator is thus a vital part of Rothenberger's photographic practice. Appearing in January 2018, the second issue of the NICE Magazine featured her photographic treatment of the creative minds of Abidjan and tied together two central motifs in Rothenberger's approach: her interest in youth culture and in what factors determine both the creation and perception of photographs from African countries. Nadine Wietlisbach Nadine Wietlisbach is the director of Fotomuseum Winterthur in Winterthur, Switzerland. Flurina Rothenberger lives in Zurich, Switzerland, and completed her residency in April, 2017.