



Renate Aller

Behind the lens

RENATE ALLER

Visual artist & photographer

www.renatealler.com



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When did you have the idea for the *Side Walk* project?

As a reaction to people's lives in solitude... the photo project took place in April and May 2020, when New York City

was the epicentre of the pandemic. I started by hosting friends and neighbours on our sidewalk or visiting them in their street, with the camera in self-timer mode recording these encounters, with face masks on, six feet apart. These sidewalk visits gave us a deep sense of community where community had been forced apart.

It had been nearly a month since we were 'sheltering in place' when I spoke to my friend Aimee Good on the phone. We missed seeing each other, and I suggested meeting up in front of our house on the sidewalk. I asked if I could take a photo, as I felt the need to create 'new memories' as a marker of time in this strange world where time seemed to have slowed down and, at the same time, history confronted us with rapid changes.

By always wearing the same black dress, I put myself into these images as a 'placeholder' to bring the body of work into context for others, aiming to create a universal experience. This is how we connect: the relationship between the work, the surrounding and the viewer.

I named our photo that day 'Guardians of Peoples' Hopes'. These images were just intended for us, as a memory of a time we had never encountered before in our entire lives.

What was the biggest surprise about this project?

Little did I know this would lead to a major New York museum exhibition and a book with Kehrer Verlag. The New-York Historical Society Museum's curator Marilyn S Kushner wrote the essay, and is currently working with me on the layout and installation planning. Independent curator Lara Pan wrote the second essay, and will be curating an exhibition in Paris later this year. The solo exhibition in the New-York Historical Society Museum will be on the occasion of the anniversary of the pandemic, from March to July 2022.

How would you describe the book?

I received an email, which best describes the book and its intention. "I leafed through the book three times in a row. The pictures are telling a story that concerns all of us for the last year. That is why I stopped and repeatedly re-visited the images. I was very touched by this book. I see myself mirrored in the narrative, and in the book form it becomes even clearer

Top: James Hall.

Above: Aimee Good. The image is also called 'Guardians Of Peoples' Hopes'.

how consistent your project describes the situation we are in. I was very taken how the opposite poles of loneliness and togetherness brought up similar emotions. It is satisfying to see how good photography, in a well-produced book form, can move a reader."

What cameras and lenses do you normally use?

I am very comfortable with the Nikon D850. I love the fixed 400mm lens, which I rent as it is very expensive, or the Nikkor 105mm, which I used for the *Side Walk* project.

My father taught me that a good-quality lens is more important than the camera body, and this advice has always served me well. ●

Renate Aller's book *Side Walk: 6' Apart* in New York City is published by Kehrer Verlag (ISBN 978-3-96900-032-8), price €30. Find out more at: www.kehrerverlag.com

