

L'ŒIL DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

What's new, Katja Ruge? Interview by Nadine Dinter

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Katja Ruge - Photo J Konrad Schmidt



Helena Hauff und Nina Kraviz, backstage Time Warp 25 Jahre, 2019 Mannheim - copyright Katja Ruge



Genesis P. Orridge, 2006, Hamburg, taken from my book Fotoreportage23 In Search of Ian Curtis - copyright Katja Ruge



VUUDUU, 2018 Hamburg - copyright Katja Ruge



Akua 2018, Mojo Club Hamburg - copyright Katja Ruge



Amelie Lens, 2018, Hamburg - copyright Katja Ruge



B.Traits, London, 2018 - copyright Katja Ruge



Björk, 1993, Hamburg - copyright Katja Ruge



Gloria De Oliveira, free project, Hamburg, 2019
- copyright Katja Ruge



Teri Gender Bender, 2011 Hamburg - copyright
Katja Ruge



Sonae, 2019 for her Remix Album - copyright
Katja Ruge



The Hacker, Berlin, 2018 - copyright Katja
Ruge



F.C. Gundlach 2014, Hamburg - copyright
Katja Ruge



Krakow loves Adana for Electric Lights Photo
Project, 2020 - copyright Katja Ruge



Volker Hinz, 2019 - copyright Katja Hinz



Madame Chloé from the One Room One Light
Exhibition - copyright Katja Ruge



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Helena Hauff und Nina Kraviz, backstage Time Warp 25 Jahre, 2019 Mannheim - copyright Katja Ruge

During the last Triennale of Photography in Hamburg, I ran accross the photographer **Katja Ruge** during the opening at the Deichtorhallen. Apparently, she had recognized me over Instagram. Due to her great energy and radiant freshness, we kept in touch.

In 2019, I met her again during the big anniversary exhibition tour of the BFF – Berufsverband Freier Fotografen and Filmgestalter, I promoted in Stuttgart, Berlin and Hamburg. Her portrait of DJane VUUDUU became one of my favourite images inside the group show, and I started digging deeper into Ruge´s photographic world of photography (and music). The fusion of those two, seemingly aligned passions, but in fact two completely different worlds, has become the trademark of Katja Ruge´s art over the years. Like Olaf Heine and rock music, it´s the world of techno vibes & photography, which you see and feel in her portraits.

With an upcoming exhibition in Hamburg and her scheduled lecture during EMOP Berlin 2020 in October, I decided to meet with her and get to know more about “what´s new”.

Nadine Dinter: You are famous for your unique mix of “photography” and “music”. Explain us a little bit more about what this entails.

Katja Ruge: I`m a photographer, DJ, music producer and I run a party series for 10 years now.

The Love for Photography started when I learned in a photo lab. At the school we had to take our own photos. It just happened. Later I worked in a photo agency and my boss asked me if I go to all these concerts, take a camera.

First job was to do live photos of a Heavy Metal band at Markthalle Hamburg. I had no clue what I was doing but it was magic. I forgot space and time.

The combination of music and visuality drives me since then every day, every night.

When looking at your own photographs, how would you describe your trademark?

KR: Real People, Good Vibes. Something in-between. And lots of invisible lines.

Do you allow music during your photo shootings? Or is it even something to spice up the atmosphere and loosen up the people in front of your camera?

KR: I work a lot on location so most of the time it's more the sound that surrounds us rather than setting up a boom box with good music. Often I ask people that I portrait to bring their fave music with them. I also have playlists on my Spotify with „photographic music“. I have a lack of concentration when the music takes off too much. It needs to be more background in a way that it melts into the photo session. I'm looking more for the flow. Then magic happens.

In your “first life”, you have worked as a photo assistant, then music promoter and art director, before starting our own business in 2000.

Which encounters/co-operations count among your favourite experiences during these years?

KR: Next to my job I always took photos and did assignments for magazines such as *Der Spiegel*, *Manager Magazin* or *Allegra*. It was mad but I needed the secure stuff till I finally said now let's jump into being a full-time freelance photographer. Each job I did had its special experience which I don't want to miss.

Music promotion I learned to care about artists, this reflects till today deeply in my way to work. I always want to have a good and creative atmosphere.

My work in one of the photo agency was insane. I saw every week new sessions of Herb Ritts, Wayne Maser, David LaChapelle, Mary Ellen Mark. Many iconic photographs in the 90s went over my desk. For seeing these photographs every day for a time period I'm extremely thankful, it shaped my understanding of image construction, positioning people and what makes a photo special.

In the 90s, you lived in Manchester, were deeply involved in the Rave-scene around the infamous Hacienda Club, and shot the highly regarded “Fotoreportage 23 1- In Search Of Ian Curtis”. Tell us a little bit about this project? How did the idea come up, where did you meet and how long did you work on this project?

KR: I lived in Manchester for around 2 1/2 years. I was lucky that I got in contact with

Peter J. Walsh who was the staff photographer of the club Hacienda run by New Order and Tony Wilson / Factory Records. Peter worked there so I was there as well. Involved I must say no, but I was lucky to be there at the time. It was nuts and crazy. People partied like mad. Like you do when you're young and there is all this great new music. It was all about that. I love when people are dedicated.

My photo project "Fotoreportage 23 – In Search Of Ian Curtis" I started in 2005, when I heard there will be a docu movie about Ian Curtis. I googled and found this list of places you have to visit as a JD fan and was intrigued. With the first help of my friend Gareth Davies, I met Mark Reeder in Berlin and my friend Tonie in Manchester drove me around. I started with the places and then later ask people to participate that had a connect to Ian. It was a haunting experience. And it became a book with photos on the cover of Ian Curtis shot by Mark Reeder. They were in a shelf hidden for over 25 years and I still can't believe and are forever thankful I could use them for the book cover. Annik Honore organized the first exhibition in Brussels.

You have portrayed icons such as Björk, DJ Koze and rapper M.I. A. – how do you plan your shootings and how much liberty do you get in creating the vision you have in your mind?

KR: Most of the time planning is not possible. I'm the total expert in taking photos with what's there and how is the mood of the artist in this moment (and mine, haha:)).

I meet them in hotels or rooms of record companies. Mostly I try to go outside, if that's not possible I look for a nice spot inside. Most of my sessions last only half an hour, I love this very concentrated energy.

When I do art direction as well and come up with a complete idea, location, stylist and make up/ hair it's a beautiful process with mood-boards and listen to the artist music. That's always my first connection and where I get ideas. Listen to DJ mixes and records. And if I need to decide and clear things I need to walk it out.

You are an official professional member of the renowned *BFF – Berufsverband Freier Filmgestalter und Fotografen*; which only has a few female members vs. the majority of male ones. Do you feel that female photographers are still encountering some kind of disadvantage or discrimination with regard to being booked for assigned work?

KR: As you know I have this photo project „Ladyflash – Women in Music“. It's work in progress. I portrayed over 100 female musicians whether they are very famous or not. They have been exhibited all the same size to not focus through size of their fame. A lot of people asked me why I did it and not showing *Peaches*, *Robyn*, *Janelle Monae* or *Beth Ditto* bigger. I wanted complete equal rights. It starts with your own work. To answer your question; There is and will be disadvantage or discrimination for as long as we need to make such difference between people. Rich and Poor, Black and White, Women and Men. There is still a long way to go.

With the upcoming photography festival EMOP Berlin 2020, you will be presenting your work as part of the series “Meet the Pro”. Would you like to give us a little sneak preview?

KR: A lot of people who are not deeply rooted in the music world don't know my work so I'm gonna make a beautiful round trip through it. People will have the possibility to touch the photos, sit down and dive into it. The reaction when people actually can hold a photo is beautiful. And I have a little surprise too.

Your next show “One Room, One Light” will be opening at Tempel1844 Gallery in Hamburg, at the beginning of September. What is the project about?

KR: When the lockdown started gallery owner Thomas Holthoff in Hamburg who is doing this beautiful space send out via mail the opportunity to use it. Kind of a flat fallen out of time as an artist residency and space to create. It was part of the reform synagogue of the liberal New Israelite Temple Association in Hamburg, founded in 1817.

I immediately said I want to give local artists a space to come around and visit me, we take photos, eat, drink, talk, exchange.

Ended up doing also a session for RockCity e.V. a local supporter of the music scene run by amazing and ambitious women. The photos show several artists with slogan shirts to support them. The shirts are sold online and the money goes to struggling artists.

For the next generation of aspiring female photographers, what's your advice?

KR: I noticed that a lot of women overthink too much. And look too much at others. I did in the past. It blocked me. When you get over it you start to find your true self. You do work that is real and full of Love.

It is great to find a mentor, somebody who helps you to grow as a person. This I find today more important than the latest skills in photography or a total perfect social media account.

Once I met Iris Apfel at the airport at Heathrow. I loved her coat so I told her. Without knowing who she was we had a great chat about being visible and “do your own thing no matter what people think”. And tried out face-balm at Boots Drugstore;)

SAVE THE DATES:

Exhibition „ONE ROOM – ONE LIGHT“

@ Tempel 1844

Poolstrasse 12

20355 Hamburg

1st opening: 4 September 2020, 7 – 10 p.m.

2nd opening: 5 September 2020, 6 – 9 p.m.

Duration: 4.-11. September 2020

Daily from 6 – 8 p.m., and by appointment

EMOP Berlin 2020 / “Meet the Pro” with Katja Ruge

17 October 2020, 3 – 5 pm,

@ Berning & Rondo

Brunnenstr. 152

10115 Berlin

In order to reserve your spot, visit the EMOP Berlin website at www.emop-berlin.eu

More at: <http://www.katjaruge.de/> and <https://soundcloud.com/canlovebesynth>

Follow Katja Ruge at: @katjaruge

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Nadine Dinter

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