

## Preface

Monica Castiglioni

New York City, always the easy muse, photographed countless times. When I decided to try I had no starting point or inspiration, even though there are so many of them!

When Cindy Allen asked me if I wanted to take part in *Design Trust for the Public Space in NYC*, I thought what could be more public than the pedestrian crosswalks upon which both young and old, poor and rich have always slowly or quickly passed? I'm petite and I made myself even smaller, shrinking to the size of an ant. And so I exhibited a series from the Jaywalker Family, highlighting details of New York City's crosswalks, with all the skid marks and paint smudges, overlappings of layers of asphalt, as if the history of humankind itself were being narrated by the streets: gentility and disrespect.

It didn't take long for me to start walking, slowly, along the city streets and inevitably enter the magical world of reflections in puddles, a world we usually pass over in order to avoid wetting those shoes that oftentimes make us run and don't allow us the linger upon the mirrors of water that reflect us and our habitat.

The funny thing, which you can't see, is that during the scorching days of August I feared having to bring bottles of water to fill the potholes!, and risk being dragged into a nuthouse or splashed by a speeding car!

## A Glimpse in the Puddle

Uscha Pohl

Some chance encounters are like lightning, bringing thunder and storm, rain and shine. Meeting Monica Castiglioni in a bustling downtown art event ten years ago was one of them. Her ring was sparkling in the dim gallery light. It fearlessly spanned no less than three fingers, shooting across in a strong silver line.

If life tends to offer a little finger, Monica Castiglioni will shake the whole hand. Jewelry designer, photographer, and visual artist, Monica's oeuvre is truly multi media. Her company Anthias, which she shares with Natsuko Toyofuku, creates stunning jewelry and limited-edition pieces, while her personal work constantly covers new territory.

Her renaissance heart pounds with the curiosity of discovery. In her atelier she uses wax and fire to transform materials, and with similar facility she employs modern technology with digital photography, video, and Photoshop. As she sculpts and shapes, she transports her feelings into the physical world, communicating through materials and images, whether it is precious metals, a photo-print, or pixels on a screen. She does so playfully, passionately, humbly, strongly, beautifully. Her energy is boundless, her vision is unique and firm. When it comes to her jewels she is adamant about her materials: no diamonds or gold—only solid silver and bronze combined with pearls and stones.

Monica's photographic work shows her passion for life equally enthusiastically. She shapes the subject matter with her inner eye and throws it back to us in a way we have never seen before. She draws us in through simple intimacy or bold abstraction. She is deeply involved, and hence involves us—in yet another form, always. Her use of light, color, form, and movement is radiant. The element of surprise consistently causes a double take. Her imaginative eye, caring heart, and sparkling personality combined with the spontaneous and relentless energy of a child finds a new twist at every turn. Paying homage to the moment captured, each image lets its subject shine in a new, bright light.

*A Glimpse in the Puddle* is a striking example. Have you ever looked at a puddle like this before? Her take on this occurrence—easily bypassed in daily life—is a beautiful, poetic tribute to New York and the neighborhood of Tribeca.

This Triangle Below Canal Street is and has been home, and home away from home, for both Monica and myself for many years now, although separately, at different times in our lives. Moving there in 1994, I adored wandering the windswept, desolate streets and alleyways, along cobblestone roads with old factory buildings seemingly held together by wooden planks. And if I wasn't out and about, my corner window connected me to the world. Overlooking the navel of New York's Avenue of the Americas it was impossible not to feel very much part of the city's every movement, every hour of the day. It felt like there were few of us in the area at that time, artists mainly, all tucked away in under-heated but spacious, block-deep lofts with semi-functional freight elevators. The Franklin Furnace was still just across the

street, although an anonymous caller had shut down the underground performance space. Then one Sunday morning I saw a well-dressed young couple hailing a cab at our street corner for the very first time, and I knew we were in for a big change.

Today it is Monica looking out of that window in the early morning hours and seeing the city wake. I only partake from far across the ocean, through mails and photos, through Skype and phone calls, and now, thank you Monica, through this book.

*A Glimpse in the Puddle* is a virtual tour spanning past, present, and future, and a visual ballad on transience, sadness, and hope. Always, hope. In Monica's words: "If rain represents the tears of the earth, I like to remember that there is always the sun behind the clouds, and sooner or later it will bring everything alive again." And she presents the city through its fragmented reflection in street puddles.

In her pictures the buildings beam back at us, look at us as with eyes, speak to us through their mirror image. Lingering, they are lucid, while framed or interjected by the ground in the pattern of the cobblestones, street markings, tarmac holes, canalization lids, or gutter grills. Sprinkled, they are at times with the remnants of human civilization: cigarette butts or cans washed down by the falling water. Collecting the rays of the sun, we find the city in its wet reflection golden like liquid gold, slippery, running, abstract, bright and shining, aloof and high in the sky.

Monica pulls our gaze right down to the ground, only to show us what goes on way above our heads. The puddle in the street offers a momentary natural mirror and symbol: it alludes to the temporariness not only of the reflection, but also of its subject. It becomes abstract and takes on another life, one of its own.

We used to love the constant change of New York. We were happy to be swept along by the speed of its transformation. We still are. But with *A Glimpse in the Puddle*, Monica claims subtly what she otherwise would shout out loud: what is being destroyed now is irretrievable. Most is already gone, and there is little to still hold on to. The New York we know will soon cease to exist. And Monica, pacing the streets, is restless. She is witnessing the annihilation of values—quite literally shoveled into the ground. A new building site stops her stride. Gates, a fence, barricades, another building has been torn down.

The puddle by its side represents hope. There will be sun, after the rain. The floating water patches are like windows in a train; we look up, we lean out, we catch a glimpse. What was it? It was hazy, it was beautiful, it is gone.







