

"The many turns and changes in my life, all the new beginnings are for me, now, towards the end of my life, the product of a quest for something else. Something that is behind things ... I would still like to be able to find out what it is."

This is one of Ellen Auerbach's typical responses to the repeated questions and to the interest being shown in her work; something which she, now at the age of ninety-two, finds amazing. Naturally she enjoys the vitality that comes with this, especially the unique contact at her age with a younger, curious generation. But still she distances herself somewhat from the late recognition and acknowledgment her photographic work has received — she feels both honored and embarrassed by it.

Of course these new beginnings were not always of her own choosing. In 1933, Ellen Rosenberg was forced to flee from Nazi Germany. The inevitable changes in her life which resulted are reduced in retrospect to names of cities: starting with Berlin, then Tel Aviv, London, and New York. The places she worked in mark stations of her life, and bear, for example, no relationship to her photographic interests. Existential problems, apart from the necessity of somehow having to earn a living led Ellen Rosenberg down a path which enabled her to develop her own personal photographic language. These problems and situations are evident in only a few individual photographs, however, and Ellen Auerbach takes very little pleasure in talking about them.

While studying under Walter Peterhans and later, when working with her friend Grete Stern during her years in Berlin, she had developed ideas for her own photography in the future — but these were qualified by existing work opportunities.

This first-ever overview of Ellen Auerbach's work clearly demonstrates how her quest for an emphatic confrontation with images or photographic confrontation with her subjects continued after she emigrated. But photography was never a dominating orientation in her life, and herein lies the reason for the distance and irony with which she accepts the late recognition of her photographic work. She never had, and today does not have, the ambition to dedicate herself totally to photography.

"If I were the way I wanted to be, I would never have produced anything." She has managed to live a simple life up to now. The strength and resilience with which she continues to meet challenges is not born of a fighting spirit but rather of a profound aversion to inflexibility and assimilation. Because of this the photographer Ellen Auerbach has committed herself neither to a methodical nor to a thematic approach to her work.

"... Something that is behind things ... I would still like to be able to find out what it is." Behind this statement lies Ellen Auerbach's effort to look and review in order to comprehend the appreciation being shown to her today: A rare and wonderful chance for an elderly lady. Salute, Ellen.

Ute Eskildsen, March 4 1998