

Sandra Gottlieb

Room

By **Mary Hrbacek**

For ten years Sandra Gottlieb has observed and photographed the changes in natural light that transform the shoreline and horizon near her home at Rockaway Beach, New York. Her digital C-prints capture light fluctuations that rapidly alter the tones defining sea, sun and sky, on a daily basis. Gottlieb is not interested in storm clouds, or the effects of the wind on the ocean. She is tuned into the cycles and rhythms that create the light effects to be seen most dramatically at dawn and dusk. For many people tuned to city-life, nature and its splendor have become remote, even forgotten. These photographs remind us of the calming, regenerative effects that everyday contact with a natural environment can bring.

In the *Seascape Series*, 1996 – 2006, Gottlieb explores the territory between the abstract and the real. The seascape provides the source for a minimal format in which heightened purity of expression can be achieved through the interaction of color and image. Color is her primary expressive element; she sensitively juxtaposes flat realms of pure color with blackened indefinable hues. These unusual color relationships are enhanced by ambient light and atmospheric mist.

These minimal formats stress the uncluttered grandeur of the natural environment. Gottlieb's



Sandra Gottlieb, from flower series. 2009.

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photographs convey the reflected light on the sea at the apex of its luminosity, when it lingers as traces of color on rippling water. *Horizontal # 14* is a medley of warm yellow and pale reddish purple, which mingles and blends in an emotionally stirring combination. Gottlieb’s spare use of art elements creates ephemeral poetic works that hint at Winslow Homer’s Caribbean watercolor series. Her photographs capture a sense of pulsing energy that gives them a feeling of truth and reality.

In her *City Tulip* series, Gottlieb tunes into the delicacy and fragility of interacting shadows cast by petals on tulips in a City flowerbed. She focuses her camera on close-ups of jutting stamens and pistils, within the surrounding curling petals. Tulips are especially symbolic of rebirth and the opportunity for renewal this rebirth implies. The allegorical implications of flowers as signifiers of fragility, youth, beauty and the fleeting character of life’s passages become pronounced in these closely observed, selective floral images. *City Tulip #5* shows the inner section of the flower that seems to morph into an insect within its center. *Tulip #5* features grey shadows that blend with soft yellow stains on white petals. Here the stamens poke up from the lower format, revealing fuzzy looking greenish tips. Gottlieb’s archival digital C-prints capture details that make the moment eternal.

Photography has long come into its own as a form that extends and amplifies the visual culture well beyond the camera’s obvious documentary capabilities. Gottlieb’s attention to natural themes, sensitively conveying their frailty and mutability, is daring in its clarity and sincerity. **M**

Ed. Note:

Room is a high-end minimalist furniture and accessories store in Tribeca, which also exhibits original artwork. The exhibition runs through August 15, and the address is 182 Duane St., New York, NY 10013. Tel: 212.226.1045



Sandra Gottlieb, from flower series. 2009.