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Rothen as her alter ego *Blondie* – a sweet but aloof housewife whom is developing into a rebel.

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LIVINGSTON MANOR, NY
PHOTOS AND INTERVIEW BY KATE DRNE
MARIANNA IS REPRESENTED BY STEVENKASHER.COM

Marianna Rothen

Artist & Filmmaker

& 'Blondie' her 'eccentric' alter ego



“I think distress is beautiful and underrated. A life without distress would be a very boring one. For me, strength of character has to come from distress. I am just drawn to it, everything for me is a ‘life or death’ situation – it’s either distress or a heightened state of euphoria.”

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Above: Rothen's home and set for her photographs. Bottom: Props for her characters.

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"Our place is an 1860s farmhouse on 93 acres. The place is particularly beautiful because it has never been renovated. For now, until it's repaired, we sleep here without water or electricity making the experience extra special. We cook our meals over the open fire, up on the hill at the edge of the forest. I love that the house sits back from the road, so when you look out of the windows, there is nothing but fields and forest. This last weekend I woke up surrounded by a mist that lingered throughout the morning — beautiful and mysterious. Each weekend is really a new exploration filled with surprises."

WORK AND S:

"My photographs and short films depict women placed in nature or in manmade structures, a domestic environment. I try to find fragmented narratives to string a series of images together. My short films are extensions of my photographs, a more scripted playground where these women can really come to life. Happiness, beauty, the need to be understood and expectations of society are all themes running throughout my work."

ON DISCIPLINE:

"It took a long time to learn how to turn the creative impulse into a discipline. Channeling something specific and studying it while knowing what I am doing is the most exciting thing. I still need to learn to relax a little. My pendulum always sways strongly in one direction."

HER BOOK 'SNOW AND ROSES AND OTHER TALES':

"It's a story about female characters who go from the confines of domestic drudgery to a world of freedom and independence. It's laid out like a film, an evolution if you will, with storybook chapters. It covers nearly ten years of work. I started some of the pictures in 2005, took some breaks, and then most of the photographs came from 2010 onwards. The entire book, except one photograph, is shot in upstate New York. One of the artists you featured, Mike Osterhout has let me use his home and church multiple times. Today it's hard for me to imagine how I was able to do all of those shoots without having had my own place! I was really lucky to have friends like Mike and others upstate."

'BLONDIE', HER ALTER EGO:

"Blondie is a sweet but aloof housewife. An incredible blonde, kind of like a Monica Vitti type. She is developing into a rebel, becoming more eccentric. The film "A Woman Under the Influence" is an example of the kind of direction she's heading. I have tried to do self-portraits with other characters but for some reason I keep coming back to Blondie. When I put on her wig I instinctively go into her character."

HER CHARACTERS' WARDROBES:

Most of the costumes are sent to me, each month, from a dear friend in Australia, Greg Perano. We joke that it's called 'The House Of

Perano Collection' but it's actually wonderful and cheap vintage pieces he finds. In a way, by sending me these fabulous costumes, he's collaborating from a distance.

HER RELATIONSHIP TO HER CHARACTERS:

"They are definitely my dream girls, or women I fantasize being. Their lives are so dramatic and interesting! I can feel them all very close to me. Although my inspiration comes from outside sources, my work is very personal. One of my models said that, when she sees herself in my work, she feels like she's looking at me or making an expression that I would make."

WHAT SHE REFLECTS UPON:

"Ideas about the life I knew growing up versus the life I have now. I was brought up in the 80's but my European parents and family were very much connected to the post war world. I was taught to live a traditional life in the safest way. I am also still very influenced by the people I met immediately after I left home. That time was very impactful and what these people showed me still impresses me today; music, books, film, art, this was my unofficial schooling."

ON MODELING AND INSECURITIES:

"Actually, when I left modeling a lot of insecurities left me. When you model, the end is always looming and you ask yourself, "How can I support myself if one day the work suddenly stops? Who will hire a washed up girl? What happens when beauty fades and you have no college education?"

When I was 22 I was already considered an older girl. From one day to the next, I went from feeling like I was the youngest to being the oldest!

The biggest insecurity was probably being considered 'A Model'. It made me feel small and unimportant, as if I had nothing to offer beyond my face value. Strangely, now that I no longer do it, I have no issue with it being part of my history. Life certainly doesn't stop when you stop modeling. It has been a very positive force in my life and I would not have had these kinds of opportunities had I stayed in my hometown in Canada."

ARTISTS SHE'S INCLINED TO REPLICATE:

"Robert Altman in the '70s. The women, the mood, the characters, the subtle unease. Everything was perfect, and just when you think you had a film figured out it turns around and completely surprises you. In some of his films he has this tragic death at the end, which is always done in this perfectly sad way where you really feel for them and the ones they left behind. My favorite quote from the 'Altman on Altman' book: "Altman has often said that the greatest films are the ones you leave not being able to explain but knowing that you have experienced something very special". I feel this is incredibly true for any kind of good art."

PITFALLS OF BEING AN ARTIST:

"I would prefer not have to finance my work but, then again, that brings a large degree of independence. Limitations can be very important — some of my best work has been created using tiny budgets."

ON UPSTATE:

"I have always loved how Upstate is so transformative — it has many different identities. Anything is possible. It is still off the radar by today's standards and this makes for a very special community of people, a lot of them are creative, forging new ways for themselves."

I once heard someone say that 'upstate is retirement for hipsters'. This bothers me quite a bit because there is nothing 'retired' about Upstate. I find that, away from the distractions of city life, it is an incredibly productive place. Most people I know that live upstate have become much more prolific artists as a result of relocating. And they're living a healthier life."

WHAT SHE IS WORKING ON:

"I have all the photographs that I want to do over the summer mapped out from film stills. Whenever I watch a film I see so many frames as possibilities for fantastic photographs — mostly dramatic situations, of course."

There are certain elements in films that keep coming up and this fascinates me. The phone, the weapon, the mirror, the book; I am interested in how they could work to reveal stories in photographs. And this house will be my set."

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A glimpse of her 94 acres of land.

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If only these walls could talk...



A large collection of art books and portrait of Ludwig Van Beethoven were left behind by the previous owner.