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NEW YORK IN FOCUS

Love Letters to a Dowager of a Muse



Linda Troeller

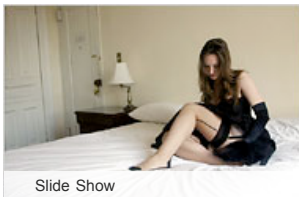
IRENE TSCHACHAZOV, Painter "I've lived here 50 years in three wonderful apartments with three wonderful husbands." More Photos >

By CAROLINE H. DWORIN Published: July 22, 2007

WHILE a procession of renowned residents — Andy Warhol, Arthur Miller, O. Henry and Sarah Bernhardt — have passed through the rooms of the Chelsea Hotel on West 23rd Street, they are not the only people who gave the century-old brick and wrought-iron embodiment of New York's artistic life its panache. Most of its artists work below the radar, adding their own talent and inspiration to a larger hive of creativity.

The famous and the less famous live in the pages of Linda Troeller's new collection of photographs, "Atmosphere: An Artist's Memoir of the Chelsea Hotel," which pairs a visual diary with letters from residents addressed to their home. Ms. Troeller, who since 1994 has occupied several different rooms at the Chelsea, documents the period from her arrival until 2006, first on 35-millimeter color slides and later digitally.

Multimedia



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Backstage at the Chelsea

Moody, often blurred and set in rooms cast with bohemian clutter, these images capture tenants in their downbeat moments, mouths half-open, eyes half-closed, midstep or midconversation.

The work comes at a troubling time for the legendary residence. Last month, its 60-year-long management by the Bard family ended, with a new management team led by a

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large company taking over. The move left many concerned about possible changes in the atmosphere of the hotel, a place where artists were sometimes given flexibility on rent payment and all residents were hand-picked.

Many of the letters accompanying the 70 photographs mention Stanley Bard, 73, the longtime manager, who always had a room for an artist he felt needed it. "They would hole up in that atmosphere," Ms. Troeller says of her neighbors, "and put it in their brain."

Letters speak of the energy of this coveted address that attracted many of the greatest: [Tennessee Williams](#) stayed there; Dylan Thomas was staying there when he died. Yet Ms. Troeller's is a backstage peek at a diva without makeup, a look at an un-self-conscious little world often lost in a grander narrative.

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