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The Road Less Traveled 50th anniversary program was conceived by Amy Horst, deputy director for programming. The exhibition series was organized and curated by Arts Center Curator Karen Patterson. Special thanks to Emily Schlemowitz, assistant curator, and Amy Chaloupka, guest curator.

Front Image Cutline:
Stella Waitzkin, *The Wreck of the UPS* (individual element), c. 1993–2003; polyester resin and mixed media; 12 x 7 x 5 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.



JOHN MICHAEL **KOHLER ARTS CENTER**

VOLUMES: STELLA WAITZKIN

+ Rita Barros

June 4, 2017–March 4, 2018

Stella Waitzkin (1920–2003) began her career in the 1940s studying painting and drawing with abstract expressionists Hans Hoffman and Willem de Kooning in New York City. In the 1960s and 1970s, her ways of working expanded to casting and melting glass and polyester resin to create sculptural forms, experimenting with performance art and film. During this time, Waitzkin's work flourished under the roof of Manhattan's cultural landmark, the Hotel Chelsea, a haven for creatives of all walks including Beat writers, jazz and rock musicians, filmmakers, and visual artists.

Residing for over three decades at the Chelsea, Stella fashioned her personal vision, composing the walls of her small fourth-floor apartment with a library of colorful, cast-resin books and other sculptural and found objects that she termed a "Lost Library." Void of words, these ghost books enveloped her space, visually reinforcing her belief that "words are lies"; a proclamation Waitzkin once made to Beat poet Allen Ginsberg as he sat in her living-room art environment.

In 2007, with the help of the Waitzkin Memorial Trust, the Arts Center became home to an elaborate three-wall section of Stella Waitzkin's Chelsea environment, and in 2016, the Arts Center acquired more than one hundred additional works of Waitzkin's.

VOLUMES is one of fifteen exhibitions on view through 2017 as part of the John Michael Kohler Arts Center's 50th-anniversary series, THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED. Twenty thought leaders were invited to lend their expertise and provide new insight into the Arts Center's collection of artist-built environments.

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Stella Waitzkin, *Details of a Lost Library* (site detail, Hotel Chelsea, New York, NY), c. 1969–2003. Courtesy of the Waitzkin Memorial Library Trust. Photo: 2006.

Rita Barros's work lies on the border between a documentary and a self-reflexive approach. Starting from a strictly subjective point of view, she has looked upon realities and subjects such as daily life at the Hotel Chelsea, the September 11 attacks, and the self-portrait. Also a resident at the Chelsea for over three decades, Barros (NY) has documented the vibrant and ever-evolving spirit of the hotel through portraits of neighbors, guests, and friends. Her photographic and written response to Waitzkin's art environment illuminates the bohemian community of the Chelsea that fortified aspects of both her and Waitzkin's work, particularly their performative nature.

Here, Barros discusses her role in the development of the exhibition and what drew her to the work of Stella Waitzkin.

How were you introduced to the work of Stella Waitzkin?

I moved to the Chelsea Hotel in NYC in 1984. It turned out my apartment is where Arthur C. Clarke wrote the script for *2001: A Space Odyssey*. (Lately, I've been thinking a lot about Hal.) That year I was introduced to Stella, and she later invited me for a visit. I still remember her opening the door with her short, curly, salt-and-pepper hair and then walking through this long, dark corridor full of things and paintings into a large living room also packed full. At first it was hard to figure out what was on the walls, but when I adjusted my eyes I realized they were covered in what looked like floor to ceiling bookcases. When I got closer, I realized that these were no regular books. They were beautifully made resin-cast objects.



Rita Barros, Chelsea Hotel, 1991. Courtesy of the artist, NY.

My father was a book collector of rare editions and stunningly bound books, but these were different. They were sculptures that stood out by their idiosyncrasy: books that cannot be read but are to be admired as a work of art, an installation. The apartment was a world unto itself, and Stella was the magician who made all this come to life.

The old Chelsea had this incredible fascination. Each door led to a genuine world of experiences, smells, dreams, and ideas. This is what led me to start photographing my neighbors in their own environments. Stella agreed to sit for me, but somehow our schedules got in the way and by '93 she was around less often.

Twenty-odd years later, I met her granddaughter Katya and visited her in Room 403. This time it was much tougher since the Chelsea had been sold, and Katya was trying with all her strength to keep the memory of Stella's old place, which still had a lot of her work in it. Unfortunately, and to Katya's great distress, she had to let it go, and now the memory has been gutted out of the original apartment. Even the inside walls are gone.



Stella Waitzkin, untitled (element from *Three Cornered Library*), c. 1969–2003; polyester resin; (top to bottom) 7 1/8 x 4 3/4 x 2 1/4 in.; 7 1/4 x 7 1/8 x 4 1/2 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.



Stella Waitzkin, untitled (element from *Three Cornered Library*), c. 1969–2003; polyester resin; 10 x 8 x 10 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.

How does your background inform your responses to Stella?

The idea of creating books as objects/sculptures has been part of my work since 1999.

After the project of photographing my neighbors at the Chelsea Hotel was published (*Fifteen Years: Chelsea Hotel*, Camara Municipal de Lisboa, 1999), I started making books by hand exploring the different possibilities of working with paper and books—some I designed as accordion and some as flip-books. I love the hands-on approach and the ability to create the rhythms of a photo story within a confined space without a publisher's interference. These are visual books that can become sculptures, or they can be held for a more intimate experience. They can be seen left to right or vice versa, exploring the ambiguous reading of a photograph. I have made more than sixty editions, and I have also collaborated with other artists. I have also shown the work using different display methods in various exhibitions. As an homage to Stella, I have created for *The Road Less Traveled*, an accordion book with the story of Room 403 from 2012 to 2016

Has working on the exhibition changed or expanded your notions about what you do?

Working on this exhibition has been quite a nostalgic experience. Revisiting my archives of thirty years brought back the old Chelsea and so many sweet memories, the chance encounters, the different worlds living side by side, the amazing and warm staff. I feel so fortunate to have experienced this fun, creative, and exciting space that the new owners have strangled. To see this contrast is quite an emotional shock, although this destruction is still part of my daily living.

The body of work I made of the Chelsea with its high and low moments made me travel in time and think how nostalgia is so closely linked to photography and how unpredictable our lives can be.

I am particularly thankful to the Kohler Arts Center for making me revisit my archives and giving me this wonderful opportunity to show the work side by side with Stella Waitzkin.



Rita Barros, *Eye on the Roof*, 2012; archival inkjet print; 13 x 19 in. Courtesy of the artist, NY.



Stella Waitzkin, *The Wreck of the UPS* (individual element), c. 1993–2003; polyester resin and mixed media; 16 1/2 x 16 1/4 x 12 1/4 in. John Michael Kohler Arts Center Collection, gift of Kohler Foundation Inc.