

Hurricanes: The Sound and the Fury

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HURRICANE I, 2000

Clifford Ross

It took Clifford Ross a few years of photographing hurricanes and being dissatisfied with the results before he realized that the central drama was in the ocean. And that if he wanted to capture it, he'd have to get in it. "There's an apocryphal tale that Turner lashed himself to a ship's mast" says Ross describing the 19th century painter's desire to depict stormy seas. Ross matches that devotion by getting into breakers to his neck, "I'm putting people into a position they would not normally be."

Having started out just donning a bathing suit, over the years he's refined his equipment from waders, tightly belted at the waist, to his present set up—wetsuit, flotation vest and a rope tied to his assistant on the beach. And no, his assistant has no special lifeguard training, "I guess I have to pray that our relationship is as strong as I think it is," Ross chuckles.

The artist, a New York City native, first became interested in photographing hurricanes in the mid-'90s, he thought he'd be chasing them all over the world. Until he realized he could just stay put on Georgica Beach, a few miles from his Long Island home. "I sit like a fisherman and wait," says Ross who lenses eight to 12 storms per year. He doesn't use waterproof cameras, "I don't want anything between me and the wave," says Ross. Despite photographing in water anywhere from his ankles to his neck, "the camera and I have both survived," says Ross. "Its like dancers who say they leave their body during a performance. I'm so riveted by what I see, and trying to stay upright, I don't feel any fear."

While Ross admits to a certain amount of thrill seeking, its bearing witness to man's negative influence on the environment that's important to him. "Man made pollution has likely increased the intensity of droughts and hurricanes worldwide," says Ross. He sees his photos as a warning on some level. "When hurricanes land, they force us to look at what we're doing to nature. Did we cause some portion of this? Did we increase the intensity? The thought that we've added fuel to the fire—it's appalling."

Ross's hurricane photos will be exhibited as part of Coal + Ice at the Ai Weiwei designed Three Shadows Photography Center in Beijing. The exhibition, on view September 24th to November 28th, focuses on coal, and the impact it has on the environment.

(*Original Article is [here](#)*)