On our own doorsteps, in our own lives, we are often too entangled to recognize the simplest connections. As soon as we venture out to other places, and into unfamiliar contexts, we capture life in its essence, in new clarity and intensity.

Ilona Klimek, born in Cologne in 1970, takes you to Rotterdam - twinned with Cologne since 1958 - where the images featured in the series 'Urban Chaos' originate.

Going back to her childhood experiences, Klimek has a special, emotional relationship with the Dutch coastal region, a bond which can never be broken. As a photographer, she is fascinated by the possibilities offered the area's special light, due to the reflections of sand and sea. "Rotterdam is always two shades brighter!" she says, her eyes glinting with the enthusiasm of the professional photographer, one who revels in the light and how it complements her image composition. Her recordings with a Mamiya medium format camera are particularly rich in nuances and form the broad light-dark scale, the wide range of sounds especially well.

Curious and open to anything new and unknown, Rotterdam was a love at first sight. With around 630,000 inhabitants, Rotterdam is the second largest city in the Netherlands. As early as the 14th century, the port of Rotterdam developed into an important cargo hub, through which influences from all around the world found their way into the city. Wealthy merchants ensured the development of Rotterdam from the 19th century onwards and the city founders realized that an actively controlled inflow of labor and the associated increase in know-how would encourage and facilitate economic development. This wide-ranging view was also rooted in the religious humanism of Erasmus of Rotterdam, who in the 16th century, as an important and politically influential European thinker, made tolerance an integral part of the Northern Netherland mentality. To this day, Rotterdam still unites the agility of a trading city with the influence of many cultures, including the colonial past of the Netherlands. It shimmers between inspiring diversity, an immense wealth of sensory impressions and the abysses and challenges of unresolved questions that all "melting pot" societies know. Almost half of today's citizens have a migration background - between 1900 and 1930 the population rose from 318,000 to 580,000 people and the population is one of the most recent in the Netherlands. Problems such as unemployment, social polarization and intercultural conflicts are well known here, and to this extent Rotterdam is a prototype, an experimental arrangement for the tasks that all the wealthy, highly developed democracies have to solve in a globalized world affected by political and cultural tensions. However, due to the flourishing commercial port, Rotterdam was always dependent on growth and responded to the challenges of immigration through an active integration policy introduced as early as the 1970s. The vitality of the city is therefore testament to innovative concepts and the perseverance to implement them. Innovative power is also reflected in the contemporary architecture of Rotterdam, which was largely destroyed during the Second

World War and subsequently renovated from the ground up. The contemporary architecture of the city is urban, ambitious, a sign of prosperity and a testament to political, economic, and cultural significance.

In Rotterdam, a fresh, sometimes bracing wind blows in from the sea. The people who live in the city play music in their streets, they ride bikes, are old or overweight, perhaps have a baby early in life, and attach significance to their mobile phone or chosen brand of fashion. Klimek's series 'Urban Chaos' belongs to the genre of street photography. The motifs are not staged and the subjects captured have no situational awareness of the photograph. The art of photography is based on the use of existing light conditions and the situational selection of the subjects - which can often involve several hours of watching and waiting for a single motif. In this way, Ilona Klimek has portrayed urban people in Rotterdam as examples of their individual entanglements and local contexts, offering them as illustrations for discussion, discussion, identification, perhaps for joy, for amusement, for love, or as an incentive and a deterrent. It is up to you to fill the black and white photographs with your own personal colors.

Text / Sabine Klement