

Hans Georg Berger

ROSES

Portraits of roses from the rose garden of the Hermitage of Santa Caterina

These rose portraits grow out of a secret garden dedicated to the rose's perfume, mystery and refinement – the Hortus Conclusus of the Hermitage of Santa Caterina, a small monastery on the Island of Elba, in the Tyrrhenian Sea. There I planted, in the 1980s, my very personal choice of historic and botanic roses, roses from China and Europe, and roses of the early 20th century.

After 20 years of gardening and contemplation, and only on the very clear days of early summer, I started to use my Hasselblad camera to photograph these roses, which had become my favourites, good friends and companions. I cautiously cut some branches, plucked perfect flowers here and there to bring them into the monastery's shade and coolness. I treated them like delicate visitors coming from far away, waiting for them to become accustomed to the new surroundings. I observed a transformation: the sudden acceleration of their fading made their appearance and intensity grow, and their colours and scent became even richer, as if their passage from sunlight to shade had created a suspended instance of their lives. It is this delicate moment that I have tried to capture and translate.

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