

'A wide-eyed view of a crazy country'

In 1960 photographer Inge Morath set out on a road trip from New York to Nevada, where she met her future husband Arthur Miller. This is how he recalled that meeting



'She caught Marilyn's anguish beneath her celebrity'... Monroe consults with Arthur Miller about her performance between takes of *The Misfits*. Photograph: Inge Morath

Arthur Miller

Monday 20 November 2006 11.29 GMTFirst published on Monday 20 November 2006 11.29 GMT

Frank Taylor, who was an old friend of mine, and who I inveigled into being the producer [of *The Misfits*], thought it would be a great idea to get Magnum to send over as many people as they could to photograph it. I didn't know any photographers and I had no opinion about it; it was the last thing in the world I was worried about. Henri [Cartier-Bresson] and Inge decided to do a motor trip across the country. Both were Europeans, of course, and they thought that, driving across the country, they would run into all kinds of wonderful, different cooking experiences, as they would in Europe. When confronted with the inevitable hamburger everywhere, they were driven back to eating carrots and apples and tea.

The 1960s in America, of course, was the despair and the secret hope of a lot of European intellectuals. The freedom, the local inventiveness, the friendliness, charmed them. And Inge, I know, was pleasantly surprised by how dear the people were. Of course, most people were to her; she was very affectionate toward people, and they reacted in a similar way. However, it was a difficult trip because she couldn't eat meat and Henri liked more delicate cooking. So

they were driven half mad by the carrots and the apples and the tea. And they arrived in Reno half-starved and ready to go to work.

Inge wrote a diary of this trip. It's a brilliant description of 1960s America. It's a European's wise and, at the same time, wide-eyed view of this crazy country. She caught all the insane contradictions that were here because they were very fresh to her; she was unprepared for them. You've got to remember that world war two was still engraved in their minds. They had witnessed, and in Inge's case she had suffered, a great deal in Nazi Germany from the effects of the war.

So this fresh country was overwhelming. At the same time, she had some odd experiences here. When she arrived she had to apply for a visa and one of the questions was "your colour". So she put down "pink". It never dawned on her that any government would ask what colour you were, and it was quite a shock. She didn't know what to make of it.

Inge, as an Austrian, had found herself in a defensive position in London and Paris, where she had been working and living [after the war]. Americans, in contrast, were far less ready to condemn her. Ironically, she felt uneasy here because we didn't condemn fascism enough, nor did we see the signs of it in American culture. She was quick to notice whenever that smell came up of repression and racism.

Reno, initially, and The Misfits in particular, was a circus for Inge; a rich mine of subjects. My first glimpse of her was in the Mapes Hotel coffee shop, where she was sitting at a table laughing with John Huston. She had worked on Huston's film *Moulin Rouge* some time earlier, and had earned his respect as an artist. Huston's admiration and respect came in part from the work, of course, but it was also because of her bravery. As far as he was concerned, that was the major virtue of anyone.

Inge took comparatively few pictures. When she pointed the camera she felt a certain responsibility for what it was looking at. Her pictures of Marilyn are particularly empathic and touching as she caught Marilyn's anguish beneath her celebrity, the pain as well as her joy in life. Many of the pictures of the Magnum group have become part of the mythology of The Misfits. Inge's, I think, are especially tender and beautiful.

Inge believed that to photograph a place you had to know the language. So she studied Chinese for about seven years before she went to China, and she did, similarly, with Russian before she went to Russia. Travel with her was a

privilege because I would never have been able to penetrate that way. She was unobtrusive and she simply took [her subjects'] side of the lens. People quickly caught on that she was a different kind of a person than they were expecting in a photographer. She had a great talent for drawing people in, even without the camera.

Text extracted from a discussion at the Howard Greenberg Gallery, New York, May 2004. This and Inge Morath's road diary taken from **Inge Morath: Road to Reno**, published by Steidl in December, priced £30. To order a copy for £27 with free UK p&p go to theguardian.com/bookshop or call 0870 836 0875.