

Reiner Ruthenbeck belonged to that generation of artists who began in the sixties to question prevailing forms of sculpture and to develop new ways of working. As a trained photographer he travelled to Paris in the fifties, where he came into contact with the Surrealism. Ruthenbeck's view through the lens was focussed on normal everyday things, which in the stillness can take on a life of their own. This magic emanates from Ruthenbeck's first objects, in which one encounters something strange emerging from the familiar.

Ruthenbeck's most unusual works were the ash heaps which made his name around 1970. The coarsely granular slag is poured to form a conical heap, penetrated by bars or thin steel rods. This fosters a state of subtle tension between the heaps shaped by gravity and the rigid steel. Ruthenbeck pursued these thoughts further in the paper piles, fragile volumes in space. In his work, action freezes to become a picture.

Ruthenbeck was fascinated by the properties of modest materials, which became works almost of their own accord. He preferred to work with wooden bars, cotton fabric and metal panels. His handling was simple and at the same time refined: His decisions are reduced to a minimum, shape and tension are brought about by gravity and the manner of suspension. Thus, the appearance, impression and impact vary. Sculptural forms are not determined by the material, but arise as if by themselves. The titles of the works describe what is to be seen. By ordering the materials into pairs of opposites – black/white, blue/red, hard/soft, open/concealed – they create a kind of abstraction negating the material and hence a feeling of unity, wholeness, and quietness. "Not being full up, but fullness!", was Ruthenbeck's maxim.