FotoFocus Biennial 2014: ‘Photography as Dialogue’

A conversation with Kevin Moore, curator and artistic director

By Mara Seibroder

FotoFocus is a biennial lens-based art festival celebrating photography as the medium of our time. This year’s festival features special exhibitions and live events that explore photography’s role in society and culture. The festival’s theme this year is “Photography as Dialogue.”

Kevin Moore, director of FotoFocus, spoke with Express Cincinnati about the festival and its impact on the local arts community.

Q: How did you become involved with FotoFocus?

A: In 2009, I curated the “Renaissance” exhibition (color photography in America, 1876-1980) at the Cincinnati Art Museum that FotoFocus founder Joel Schachner and I put together and held in various locations. After that, I was asked to lead FotoFocus as director.

Q: What was it like to organize such a large-scale event?

A: It’s definitely a big job! You have to plan for a year in advance. The festival takes place over two weeks, and we have to schedule events for every day of the festival.

Q: How does the content of the theme “Photography as Dialogue” apply to this year’s Biennial?

A: The theme of “Photography as Dialogue” invites viewers to consider the role of photography in society and culture. It’s about how photography can be used to communicate ideas and concepts.

Q: How has the festival evolved since its inception?

A: FotoFocus has grown significantly since its inception. We’ve added new programs and events, and we’ve reached out to the community to engage with our work.

Q: What can people expect from this year’s FotoFocus event?

A: People can expect a diverse range of exhibitions, workshops, and public programs that will explore the role of photography in contemporary culture.

Q: With more than 100 events, how important was it for you and other organizers to find new venues that would reach a diverse audience?

A: Yes, it was important to find new venues to reach a diverse audience. We’ve worked hard to make sure that the festival is accessible to everyone.

The contemporary is pronounced; it mixes with so many things.

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A: We decided early on that it would be in Washington Park. It changed a lot as just the Byways I've been coming to Cincinnati. In trying to place museum shows, we realized we wanted to do more than just these. One day we were standing around Washington Park and wondering about the empty buildings along the way. We wanted pop-up gallery shows and we found three storefronts ready to be remodeled or restored on one corner and we turned them into white cubes, even leaving out the windows. Another one is Lightbome Studios. It will host the “Screening” exhibition.

And there will be a nightly program built by Jesse Garcia, and that will be the heart of activities in Washington Park. There will have been on Instagram, there will be seven easy-to-navigate Instagram pages. “Lightbome” is a self-curated exhibition -- a symbolic place where all these activities converge in the live feed. Anyone can join, they just have to be on Instagram.

It’s important to understand it’s all very light. We want to stimulate people at the sophisticated end, but reach the masses with some basics, and the range of shows reflects that.

Some are intellectual, some compelling, but you also don’t have to know anything about photography or art. There’s something for people at many different levels.

Kevin Moore’s ‘don’t miss’ FotoFocus picks:

Contemporary Arts Center, 44 E. Sixth St., downtown

“Face/Worries and New Kobe: The One-Eyed Thief” A collaborative production by the two Swiss intra disciplinary artists, which -- according to Moore -- “illuminates everything about Photography in Dialogue.”

FotoFocus pop-up gallery, 5000 Elm St., Over-the-Rhine

“Third Reunion: Sherry: Western Romance.” Classic American landscape photography with thoughtful curatorial approach from local private collections.

FotoFocus pop-up gallery, 1600 Elm St., Over-the-Rhine

“Vivian Maier: A Quiet Pursuit.” Full of stop action photography, cinematic photos made by a passionate street photographer who kept her life’s work secret from all but a few.

Lightbome Studios, 22 E. 14th St., Over-the-Rhine

“Screening.” The video accompaniment to “Stills.” “Screening” consists of 14 paired video films. There are no show times, just two separate screening rooms at 7 and 9pm each night, with couches to sit on and a cash bar playing two-hour loops of the films.

Michael Lewis Gallery, 995 Vine St., downtown

“Stills.” Envisioned as a complement to “Screening,” “Stills” features 15 contemporary artists who deal with stop action photography.

For more FotoFocus events, see the Express Art Calendar, page 6 and 7, or visit fotosfocustx.com.