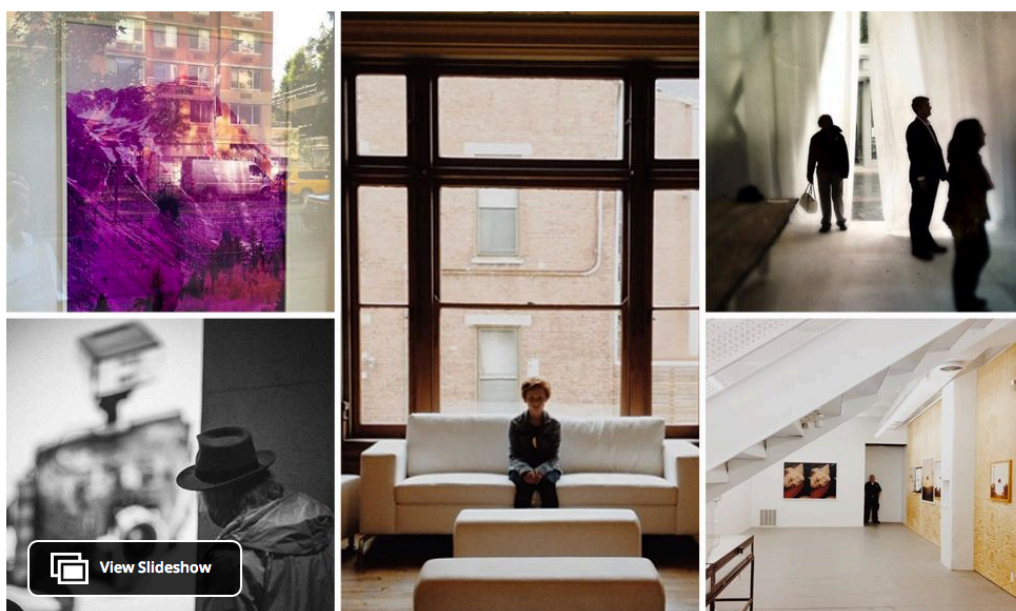


# BLOUINARTINFO

## Instagram Takes the Stage at Cincinnati's FotoFocus Biennial

BY ANNELIESE COOPER | OCTOBER 21, 2014



Clockwise: #FotoFocus2014 as seen by architect G. Haviland Argo III, photographer Maddie Hordinski, photographer Brad Austin Smith, and photographer Robin McKerrill.  
(Courtesy @havilandargo/@maddie\_hordinski/@jasper674/@robinmckerrill via Instagram)

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When considering the state of modern photography, it's difficult to ignore (as much as one might want to) one of its most prevalent quotidian forms: Instagram, the ever-updating photo gallery lodged in just about everyone's pocket. So, in organizing his program for Cincinnati's 2014 FotoFocus Biennial, artistic director Kevin Moore decided to embrace the trend head-on with "Fotogram@Arthub," an Instagram-based exhibition dictated by the hashtag #FotoFocus2014. Though bolstered by 20 dedicated "Fotogrammers" — prominent biennial guests and members of the local arts community who were tasked with uploading at least two tagged pictures per day — the show also allowed for visitor participation. During the biennial's opening weekend, a rotating stream of the 100 most recent #FotoFocus2014 images were broadcast on various LCD flat-screens at locations throughout the city, including the 21c Museum Hotel and bars Japp's Since 1879 and Neon's Unplugged.

As its name suggests, the exhibition's primary venue was the Arthub, a temporary structure that biennial organizers had commissioned earlier in the 2014 planning process from Cincinnati-based architect José Garcia, and which proved to be a fitting place to host a show of this theme. "It had to look temporary but feel very present," Garcia said of the white tent-like cube that sits in Cincinnati's Washington Park, through November 1. "In a few weeks, everything goes away — which is pretty much the idea of Instagram." Moore concurred, noting that Instagram represents "a sort of ephemeral platform — a new space in the world for viewing photography, instead of the gallery wall or the museum wall."

And still, that's where today's artists seem intent to bring it — from local Cincinnati gallery Photosmith, whose FotoFocus satellite show consists of prints made using the Hipstamatic app, to [Richard Prince's Instagram-based "New Portraits,"](#) which are causing a stir at Gagosian (Jerry Saltz dubbed them "[genius trolling](#)"). "Fotogram" could easily be accused of having done the same — taking the app's traditional handheld stream and putting it in the context of an exhibition — yet the real-time "last 100" nature of its featured photos acted as a constant incentive for participants to keep posting, proving it as much a social experiment as a visual exhibition. "This is how social media works, and we'll see what happens," Moore said.

So what did happen, exactly? Well, approximately 1,200 photos, for a start. From basic pictures of photographs at FotoFocus exhibitions to a handful of [Vivian Maier](#)-esque selfies in reflective surfaces, the feed underscored not only the use of Instagram photos as proof of one's presence at an event, but also the participants' desire to express their personal take. (Moore seemed a bit surprised that the feed was occasionally hijacked by galleries or companies for blatant self-promotion — but of course, it's also worth noting that the tag itself denotes at least some level of new-media branding for the biennial.)

On Saturday evening of the biennial's opening weekend, after the experiment had some time to unfold, three of Moore's "Fotogrammers" — Nion McEvoy, CEO of San Francisco's Chronicle Books; Haviland Argo, a Louisville-based architect; and Ivan Shaw, photography director at Vogue — participated in a panel to discuss their Instagram experiences. Naturally they touched on the hot-button issues of selfies and oversharing ("Were we all narcissistic to begin with and it's just easier to express now?" Shaw wondered, rhetorically), and also tended to agree on the app's myriad limitations. Shaw was quick to note that it leads to a "squaring of the world," imposed by its even-sided cropping constraints, and the stringent Facebook-based content rules — far more severe than other photo-sharing sites such as Flickr and Tumblr. (Any hint of nudity, for example, incurs a suspension.)

When it came to the matter of young Instagram celebrities and/or Prince's Gagosian series, however, opinions became more tangled and a few lingering questions emerged: Does Instagram encourage appropriation, or is it all just clever manipulation of images? Is it dominated more by skillful photography or simply by a reflection of popular trends? And what will be the long-term effect on the world of professional photography when an entire generation grows up with cameras and Hipstamatic filters at their fingertips?

Of course, while the panel took place, the #FotoFocus2014 stream scrolled past on the wall behind the speakers, and by the end of the hour, there were several cheekily snapped shots of the discussion in the mix. At one point, an image of Shaw recognizing his own image behind his head was then projected behind him — a reminder of the app's instantaneous documentary powers, as well as its users' seemingly endless zeal. Indeed, though "Fotogram@Arthub" proper closed after the opening weekend, the #FotoFocus2014 hashtag powers on, accruing images daily — as does its ever-addictive platform.

## Slideshow: Fotogrammers Take Over FotoFocus 2014

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G. Haviland Argo III (Architect, Artist, and Board Member)

A reflection in a piece by David Benjamin Sherry.

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