

THE NEWS RECORD

FotoFocus' 'anchor' exhibit opens at CAC



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A first glance at "The One-Eyed Thief" art exhibition registers as unassuming — harmless even — as its framed photographs hang quietly on the wall in a careful arrangement. Its sculptures sit motionless in glass cages. Projectors hum silently as they flicker through reels of black and white film.

But the first extensive American exhibit of Swiss photographers Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs, which opened last Friday at the Contemporary Arts Center in downtown Cincinnati, is a project with many tricks up its sleeve.

"The One-Eyed Thief" is one of the more visually graceful exhibits in the CAC—subtle but powerful, and secluded on the museum's fifth floor. The exhibit is comprised of three separate collections. Its New York-based curator, Kevin Moore, calls it the "anchor" of Cincinnati's 2014 biennial FotoFocus, whose theme this year is "Photography in Dialogue."

"This time we decided it needed to be a little more focused and condensed," said Moore, who is serving as the artistic designer for this year's FotoFocus, about adding a theme to this year's celebration. "'Dialogue' has a larger set of references: photography in relation to other media—sound, or sculpture, or painting, or contemporary photography in dialogue with the history of photography. So each of the exhibitions respect some aspect of that."

Fitting with the theme, Onorato and Krebs' exhibit is visually conversational with its viewers as well as with the history of photography and its traditions. The gallery first seen within the Berlin-based duo's exhibit is "The Great Unreal"—a collection of photographs taken during a road trip through the United States.

The result of each individual image is a collective mosaic of the American West captured through an often-humorous lens. The familiar desert landscape, with long stretches of never-ending highway and snowcapped mountain ranges, is investigated with a manipulative playfulness as the camera captures the happy accidents and eccentricities of nature. Though Krebs and Onorato are completely conscious of photography's history and rules, they are not afraid to detach from them, reimagining the traditions of the medium with a clever perspective. Their documentation of Berlin's urban environment in the "Constructions" series replaces the objectivity of infrastructure with a subjectivity that reinterprets their role in the city as well as the photographer's role in society.

Another series in the exhibit implants the camera into the "organic," combining objects from nature (turtle shells,

branches) with vintage cameras. The project emphasizes the humorous element Onorato and Krebs exploit throughout the exhibit.

Both Onorato and Krebs are well informed of photography's past of capturing reality (both artists graduated from M.F.A. programs), but this exhibit seems to revolve around the unreality of images, questioning the very honesty of photographs.

"The One-Eyed Thief" is the somewhat central exhibition of FotoFocus, which will commence officially on Oct. 8, though many galleries are already opening their contributions to the event (including DAAP's showing of "The Sochi Project," reviewed last week).

FotoFocus isn't only on display in Cincinnati, Moore said. Exhibits that originated in Los Angeles are being brought to the city.

"We do have a rule, an obligation to bring whatever the show is to Cincinnati eventually. But it's about engaging an international dialogue," Moore said.

Three televised installations in the "Construction" series depict footage shot on 16mm film of Berlin structures caught on fire, though the way the video is made makes it appear that the fire is being drawn inward. The process shown mimics the exhibit: just as the tape brings the fire slowly back to its source, the images featured in "The One-Eyed Thief" return to the origins of photography, but through an inevitable form of destruction.

You can find out more about FotoFocus and its exhibits at fotofocuscincinnati.org.