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KILLER TEXT ON ART



Lois & Richard Rosenthal Center for Contemporary Arts, 2003, designed by Zaha Hadid

## MOVING TOWARDS THE LIGHT IN CINCINNATI (1)

by Ezrha Jean Black ·

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I have a lot more to say about art and the city—more specifically *this* city, Los Angeles; and the way we engage both and what it all means. But I also have a lot to say about art and fashion and the way *they* engage each other; and it hasn't been easy getting the artists or the designers to engage with me for even five minutes. (I have my theories about one of them. But you'll have to wait to guess who it was. Let's just call him **Mr. Big** for right now.) Fortunately, there were a couple of exceptions; hence there might actually *be* a story for the magazine.

I have no reason to complain. Wrangling is a big part of a lot of jobs; why should mine be any different? Still, time has not been on my side here; and I tend to, uh, run a bit late to start with. So while I've been running behind, our editrix-in-chief saw fit to send me out of town—no, not to Paris, where I am *surely* due to interview **Rick Owens** any minute now—but to the **FotoFocus Biennial 2014** in Cincinnati.

That's Cincinnati, *Ohio*. Land of **Chrissie Hynde**, **Devo**, and—would you believe?—**Phyllis Diller**. Heartland (in every sense) to American industrial power—industrial rubber and glass; electronics; Procter & Gamble. Seat to the **Taft** political dynasty. I was reminded of the Tafts earlier just last night, when I visited what was essentially the family seat until roughly around the time William Howard Taft became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. By that time, his brother and his wife Anna had already decided to turn the house into a museum for their growing art collection and bequeath it to the City. I'm so glad they did. It's a very nice place to look at art and have a drink (okay you don't need a drink—but a scotch & soda never hurts).

The occasion was the opening of a photography show, **Paris Night & Day**, a prelude to the FotoFocus Biennial—a concise, thoughtful survey of great, mostly (though not all) French, photographers' takes—'decisive,' incisive; but also intimate, hidden-in-plain-view; disconsolate and daunting; mordant and scarrified views of a city we associate with grandeur, celebration, and elegance. From the proto-surreal **Eugène Atget**, to the swift and sure coup/clin d'oeil of **Henri Cartier-Bresson**, the complicated, almost narrative realism of **Ilse Bing** and **Lisette Model**, the discreet shadows of **Brassai** and the elegance of **André Kertész**—here misery and darkness abide disquietingly with the pleasure and light. I was especially moved by the 1926 Kertész "Clochards by the Seine," Model's 1937 "Young Man Asleep," Atget's (1900) photograph of a homeless man, "The Miserable Sleeper," the oppressive industrial pall of Félix Thiollier's 1900 "Tipping A Coal Bin."

But industrial cities move towards the light as well as away from it; and Cincinnati appears to be 'lightborne'—pun intended, dusting off, renovating, and reconfiguring its industrial Beaux-Arts architectural treasures, and raising gorgeous new contemporary monuments cheek-to-jowl with them. My hotel is a case in point (**21C**—the gorgeously renovated **Metropole**—a Hotel AND Museum, as they emphasize; and you'll just have to take my word for the moment), which happens to be right next door to the 2003 **Contemporary Arts Center** designed by **Zaha Hadid**. But I haven't even scratched the surface. **Nancy Glier** and **Paul Kreft** were my excellent guides to the city, giving me what amounted to an architectural history within the time it took to get from the airport to the Taft Museum. I'd give you my notes on the lecture-by-taxicab—but I've got to dash off to a couple more right now, featuring **David Benjamin Sherry**, **Elizabeth Siegel**, **Kevin Moore** (the FotoFocus director), and **Jeff Rosenheim** from the Metropolitan Museum in New York.