

BLOUIN ARTINFO

Top 7 Things to See at Cincinnati's FotoFocus Biennial 2014

BY ANNELIESE COOPER | OCTOBER 14, 2014



Courtesy Raeber von Stenglin, Zurich and Peter Lav Gallery, Copenhagen



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Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs

Biggest Cross in Texas, 2005, from
"The Great Unreal"

39x50cm C-Print, mounted and
framed

On view at "Taiyo Onorato & Nico
Krebs: The One-Eyed Thief" at the
Contemporary Arts Center

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It's not surprising that FotoFocus founder Thomas Schiff specializes in panoramas. Though an insurance salesman by trade, Schiff's passion led him to publish seven books of his expansive images — and his vision for the FotoFocus Biennial proves equally as sweeping. Following 2012's inaugural outing, Schiff and his team, including executive director Mary Ellen Goeke and newly appointed [artistic director Kevin Moore](#), have done their due diligence in suffusing the city of Cincinnati with "lens-based art" for the month of October — whether integrating exhibitions into local institutions, transforming abandoned buildings into white cube galleries, or even sliding art photographs into the ad space on several of the city's bus stops. All told, FotoFocus comprises exhibitions at 50 participating venues scattered throughout the region, from museums to galleries to universities, in addition to hosting a series of lectures and screenings [scheduled throughout the month](#).

Still, it's worth noting that the biennial's participant roster has slimmed somewhat from the first edition, following the introduction of an application process (before, inclusion in "FotoFocus" had been open to just about every institution that expressed interest). The event's change in nomenclature, from 2012's plain "FotoFocus" to the somewhat more haute-sounding "biennial," is also notable, as is the introduction of Moore's curatorial eye with his six central exhibitions. Though Moore's organizing theme, "Photography in Dialogue," encourages the medium to run up against its various formal tenets by, say, putting still images in conversation with film, one of the biennial's most rewarding exchanges is between the international and local artists. United under the FotoFocus program, for example, the elaborate multimedia installation of Swiss duo Taiyo Onorato and Nico Krebs runs parallel to the slice-of-life prints from three local women photographers that decorate the upper floor of the YWCA, evoking not only photography's scope of form, but of effect.

With more than [\\$829 million invested](#) in downtown Cincinnati's development in the past decade, it's possible to imagine that the city's smattering of empty brown-papered storefronts might soon be overtaken, perhaps even permanently "white-cubed" — just as the biennial's promised 2016 edition will likely draw even more cutting-edge works from around the globe. In the meantime, we've rounded up our top seven must-see works at this year's FotoFocus Biennial.

"Taiyo Onorato & Nico Krebs: The One-Eyed Thief" at the Contemporary Arts Center

Walking into Onorato and Krebs's first-ever US exhibition can be a bit disconcerting — if not for the eerie, trompe l'oeil nature of their photographs, then at least for the sound installation lurking in an alcove just behind the elevator: a machine rigged to whack mallets against metal and glass at varying intervals. These intermittent clangs serve as an appropriately disjointed soundtrack for what amounts to a mini-retrospective of sorts, from three of their latest series: "The Great Unreal," documentary shots from several US road trips; "Constructions," in which they built wooden structures to mimic outlines of Berlin buildings and subsequently set them on fire; and "Spins," in which motion blur turns geometric forms into supernatural cyclones. Though perhaps denotatively disparate, Moore's selection of the duo's work feels united by an overriding sense of cheekiness — see also: the artists' series of sculptures that shove camera lenses into stacks of books and turtle shells, testing the boundaries of the biennial's establishing credo of "lens-based art."

"David Benjamin Sherry: Western Romance" at 1500 Elm Street

His large-scale monochrome landscapes seem like they could be created through a quick click of Photoshop's "Colorize" function, but David Benjamin Sherry does all of his work the hard way, with an 8x10 film camera and manipulation of CMYK chemicals — he makes sure to refer to his works as "traditional color darkroom photographs," so as to emphasize the painstaking, old-school nature of his process. Perhaps to commemorate this fact, under Moore's curatorial direction, Sherry's works are hung next those of the original landscape greats, such as Ansel Adams, Carleton Watkins, and Edward Weston. "I've always kind of been into the melodrama of photography," Sherry said in a [panel discussion](#) — and indeed, especially when set alongside his predecessors' smaller-format black and white prints, the bright, massive images take on all the more zeal. "It's amazing to think how limited Edward Weston was by this format and size," said Moore. But, as he pointed out, it's perhaps even more a testament to Weston and his ilk that their works still hold their own. (Sherry's additional work, meanwhile, is on view at [Salon 94 in Manhattan](#).)

"Paris Night & Day" at the Taft Museum

Harking back to some of photography's earliest explorations, this exhibition presents classic examples from 19th-century Paris — from Henri Cartier-Bresson's spontaneous yet exquisitely composed "decisive moments" to Man Ray's staged and solarized nudes, with Ilse Bing's self-portraits and Brassai's brothel shots in between. For photo-tech buffs, the hall is also dotted with examples of actual Leica and Bergheil cameras, along with wall text detailing early development processes.

"Eyes on the Street" at the Cincinnati Art Museum

In the age of the iPhone and the surveillance camera, perhaps no photographic genre is quite so ubiquitous as "street photography" — an area that receives a refreshingly multifaceted treatment in this exhibition. Those who missed James Nares's mesmerizing "Street" at the Metropolitan Museum last year have another chance to watch the achingly high-def, slow-mo capture of a typical day on 34th Street, flanked by works from Philip-Lorca diCorcia's infamous "Heads" series — including the photograph an Orthodox Jewish man that sparked 2006's [landmark ruling](#) protecting street photography as "artistic expression."

“Stills” at Michael Lowe Gallery

John Waters’s filmstrip reminiscent “Inga #3,” 1994, has been generating a great deal of buzz — especially in light of [his performance](#) during the biennial’s opening weekend — but the real show-stealers of “Stills” are downstairs at Michael Lowe Gallery. There, visitors will find Moyra Davey’s wall-sized grid of candidly snapped “Subway Riders I,” 2011, each creased and postmarked as a letter, alongside the vibrant sidewalk drama of Paul Graham’s large-format diptych “34th Street, 4th June 2010, 3.12.58 pm,” 2010. “It’s like a two-frame movie,” said Nion McEvoy, CEO of Chronicle Books, who loaned the majority of the exhibition from his personal collection. “You see them each individually, as resonant with each other, and then you see them as sequential.”

“Screenings” at Lightborne Studios

Following “Stills” to its logical conclusion, “Screenings” presents a complementary set of 12 art films, which Moore originally put together for this past year’s edition of Paris Photo LA — from “I’m Gonna,” 1996, Martha Colburn’s three-minute poetry-spliced re-edit of an Australian action movie to Moyra Davey’s “Les Goddesses,” 2011, an hour-long self-expository meditation on English writer Mary Wollestoncraft. Once the program has run its course, visitors would be remiss not to pop next door to check out the rest of Lightborne, Thomas Schiff’s film studio, designed by José Garcia — also the hand behind FotoFocus’s tent-like “Arthub” erected in Washington Park. The lobby alone is worth a look, outfitted with a curving ramp and freestanding staircase in sleek warehouse-style concrete, and decked out with hand-blown, locally crafted light fixtures.

“Vivian Maier: A Quiet Pursuit” at 1400 Elm Street

Since the discovery of Vivian Maier’s photographic trove in 2007, much has been made of the then-unknown nanny’s work — including a book, [a documentary](#), and now some [ongoing legal hay](#). Moore’s FotoFocus show, however, represents what he deemed “one of the first interpretive exhibitions of her work,” for which he’s pulled together a collection of Maier’s reflective-surface self-portraits, with a particular focus on her depictions of other women that include some shadow of her presence in the frame. “There’s some sort of interesting psychological need to be in proximity to other people, women especially, but also to be separate,” Moore said, “and her camera — her activity as a photographer — allows her to negotiate that.”