

## What Needs to Be Done Before FotoFocus '14

BY STEVEN ROSEN · NOVEMBER 14TH, 2012 · THE BIG PICTURE



*"The Immigrant" by Nelson Ransheim*

I hope the inaugural FotoFocus, which has formally concluded although related exhibits still are up around town, was successful by the standards of its organizers, and that they are eager to plan for the next one in 2014.

Clearly, FotoFocus increased public awareness of photography and lens-based interest. But did that translate into enough attendance for all the events? It would be great if the greater arts community could urge things to happen to grow public interest in photography before FotoFocus '14.

Ongoing photography exhibitions, especially contemporary, should continue and even increase on a regular basis at the Cincinnati Art Museum. It has had large and small ones in the past five years and will have a James Welling show early next year, not long after its current FotoFocus-related exhibits end.

Would it be possible for the museum to have dedicated gallery space for photography, a home to rotate its own holdings and constantly stage ongoing temporary exhibits? Once the current renovation of the old Art Academy building is finished and the museum moves its offices there, it will gain an area for special exhibitions on the ground floor of the main complex. It's planning to inaugurate that next fall, with the long-planned retrospective of Tom Wesselmann, the Cincinnati native who was a pioneering Pop painter.

But maybe as a result of such moves, the museum could also gain dedicated gallery space for photography. I lived in L.A. when the Getty Museum greatly expanded its photography galleries in 2006, and the result was remarkable — they became among the packed, busy spaces in the museum, a real destination.

I ran this idea past James Crump, the art museum's chief curator/photography curator as well as FotoFocus co-chair, who had this to say via email: "We are discussing new ways in which we can rotate light-sensitive materials more frequently in the art museum, which of course includes photography."

Meanwhile, we should all pay more attention to efforts by our commercial spaces to have photography shows, especially at Over-the-Rhine's Iris BookCafe & Gallery, where William Messer consistently curates intriguing photography shows.

Having attended Friday night's *13 Most Beautiful...Songs for Andy Warhol's Screen Tests* concert at the Emery Theatre, which the Contemporary Arts Center sponsored in connection with its FotoFocus-related *Image Machine: Andy Warhol and Photography*, I wish some venue would commit to an ongoing, dramatic presentation of film/video.

At that concert, Dean & Britta played music to projections of the short, silent, filmed "portraits" Warhol took of visitors to his Factory in the 1960s.

Those same screen-test films are on display at CAC, playing on monitors in a gallery, but watching them there is a passive experience — there are so many distractions. At the Emery, it was transfixing. Granted, you can't always have a band playing live to art videos and films in a theater — it would be cost-prohibitive. But what if some arts venue set up a film/video screening room, removed from everything else, with proper seating, lighting and sound? A place you could really spend time watching the work?

FotoFocus prompted several shows devoted to our regional photographic legacy — both photojournalism and fine art. (At the Freedom Center until Jan. 2 is the important *Freedom of the Press: I Am a Witness — Enquirer Photojournalists Share Their Most Memorable Moments*.) I wish we had an accessible venue — maybe a new non-profit, member-supported photography space — that could include ongoing "historic regional photography" programming. There is so much work that could benefit from this — as Cincinnati Museum Center's FotoFocus show devoted to Paul Briol revealed.

Nelson Ronsheim, whose early-mid-20th century black-and-white photographs of Cincinnati are sensually atmospheric, is awaiting rediscovery. (See accompanying photo.) The Museum Center has the unheralded work of George Rosenthal, who, with architect John Garber, documented the West End before interstate construction tore down much of it. And there are memorable images and great stories behind Jon Hughes' documentation of John Updike's visit to University of Cincinnati in 2001 and Cal Kowal's photographs of street musician Mr. Spoons.

The possibilities are endless. If we go forward — into the past as well as the future of photography here and beyond, we'll help make FotoFocus '14 a success.

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**CONTACT STEVEN ROSEN:** [srosen@citybeat.com](mailto:srosen@citybeat.com)

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