



Getting to Know Cincinnati's 2018 FotoFocus Biennial

CityBeat's Kathy Schwartz will keep you covered throughout October as she visits exhibits and events that make up FotoFocus. For her first report, she visits the biggest venues of the lens-based biennial.

KATHY SCHWARTZ - OCT 10, 2018 11 AM

Nathaniel M. Stein, curator of *Life: Gillian Wearing* at the **Cincinnati Art Museum**, can't cover up his enthusiasm over the debut of "Wearing, Gillian," a five-minute film from the British artist who's known for taking on the appearance of other people in her self-portrait photographs.

"Everything in her career has been gathered together and explodes," Stein excitedly tells me as I enter the museum's media preview.

Don't worry — Wearing hasn't pulled a Banksy-type prank with art that self-destructs. But her mind-blowing exhibit will leave you rethinking what a camera captures.

Wearing purports to reveal herself to us in her video. But with the aid of artificial intelligence technology, both male and female actors pop up on screen with the artist's facial features as they deliver confessionals. Near the end someone — *maybe* it's the artist — asks, "Do you feel you know me a bit now?"

The answer is no and yes, because in some way we all put on a performance and wear a mask.

Through Dec. 30. \$6-12, free members and FotoFocus passport holders. More info: cincinnatiartmuseum.org.



"High Five," 2003. Acrylic and marker on card, 3¼ x 5½ inches. COURTESY OF RICK MALLETTTE

Chris Engman's exhibit at the **Weston Art Gallery** is teasingly titled *Prospect and Refuge*. His installation in the street-level gallery invites visitors to become immersed in an oasis of leafy trees, filtered sunlight and running water. The relaxing scene is overhead, under our feet and all around us. It looks so natural, yet the California artist readily exposes the wooden framework that supports his illusion. "Containment," created specifically for FotoFocus, is a super-sized reminder of the limits of photography vs. reality.

Cincinnati artist Rick Mallette's snowmen, affixed to old postcards as decals and sometimes painted into vacation scenes, should be the official mascots of *Wide Angle: Photography Out of Bounds*, in the downstairs galleries. This colorful group exhibition of 20 regional and internationally known collage artists suggests that it's pure folly to attempt to freeze a single moment in time by taking a photograph. These makers believe that when one medium melts into another, the results more accurately reflect how messy and magical the world and our memories can be.

Both shows continue through Nov. 18. Free. Mallette leads a Families Create workshop 10 a.m.-noon Oct. 13; \$5 per child. Southbank Quartet performs in the galleries 2 p.m. Oct. 14. Free. More info: westonartgallery.com.



Eugène Atget, printed by Berenice Abbott, "Animal Circus at the Invalides Square (Fête des Invalides)", 1898 (negative), about 1930 (print), gelatin silver print. COURTESY OF THE PHILADELPHIA MUSEUM OF ART: GIFT OF MR. AND MRS. CARL ZIGROSSER, 1968, 1968-162-34

Visiting *From Paris to New York: Photographs by Eugène Atget and Berenice Abbott* is like viewing an arthouse movie in which an intriguing storyline unfolds with moody cinematography.

The early scenes at the **Taft Museum of Art** swing toward the surreal as a dying Frenchman documents what is disappearing. In comes a young, strong-willed American. Upon returning home in 1929, our (anti)heroine first champions the old man. Then she finds her own style and distances herself from him while capturing a changing New York City. It's not until decades later that she acknowledges her debt. Exhibit curator and FotoFocus artistic director Kevin Moore pays homage to both photographers in the exhibit's final gallery, where he displays pictures from the two side-by-side to illustrate Atget's influence on Abbott's greatness. Moore told a media tour that he doesn't think Abbott would have approved of his decision. But it would

have been a waste if these two stars didn't share some screen time.

Through Jan. 20. \$5-10; free members and FotoFocus passport holders. Free to all on Sundays.



Francis Bruguière, "Couple Embraced", about 1929. Gelatin silver print, 97/16 × 77/16 inches. COURTESY OF THE J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES

The **Contemporary Arts Center** has devoted all floors to FotoFocus and the biennial's Open Archive theme.

No Two Alike is the show most deserving of your attention. I kept retracing my steps to compare the botanical photos of Karl Blossfeldt with Francis Bruguière's cut-paper abstractions and Thomas Ruff's contemporary riffs on the late artists' 1920s work. Each look rewarded me with the reminder that, even with the Internet, the natural world is our largest archive. Every gentle curve or sharp angle is a template for that which is manmade.

Mamma Andersson: Memory Banks treats visitors to a behind-the-scenes look at cases of random snapshots, magazine pages and other ephemera that inspire the Swedish painter—showing that FotoFocus isn't for photographers only.

While touring *The Fold — Space, time and the image*, a collection by Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari, I found myself drawn to the images that normally wouldn't be saved. Accidental double-exposures and portraits made from stained and scratched negatives are beautiful precisely because they're imperfect, unlike the rows upon rows of wedding photos also in the show.

"No Two Alike" continues through Jan. 13. "Memory Banks" and "The Fold" run through Feb. 10. More info: contemporaryartscenter.org.

For info about \$25 FotoFocus passports and all programming, go to fotofocusbiennial.org.