

## Still Searching the Archive as FotoFocus Month Ends

*CityBeat's Kathy Schwartz has been keeping you informed about FotoFocus throughout October. This is her last report on the lens-based biennial.*

**KATHY SCHWARTZ** - OCT 31, 2018 4 PM



Mark Patsfall, Boston Common // 2017 archival digital print, 11 x 14 in. COURTESY OF CLAY STREET PRESS

Since 2012, every other October in Cincinnati has been known as FotoFocus month. But a number of exhibits continue into November and beyond, so you can continue to explore the Open Archive.

A takeaway from FotoFocus 2018 should be that, on some level, every one of us is an archivist for the past, present and future.

“This biennial is very much about memory,” FotoFocus artistic director Kevin Moore told me. “How do you keep it? Can you keep it? How does it fail you? How do you change it?”

Mark Patsfall, director of Clay Street Press in Over-the-Rhine, invites visitors on an archaeological adventure through photos, IDs, ticket stubs and other items from his baby-boomer childhood and adolescence in *Evidence (of a life lived)*. He knows what the collection means to him, but he wonders what narrative anyone else might build from this ephemera that he’s scanned and framed.

Patsfall had tucked the treasures, dated from 1949 to 1975, in a miniature safe and then forgot about them for decades. His former wife found the metal box in a closet and returned it to him. Cracking open the vault and reconstructing his past made Patsfall wonder what would have happened if his little archive had been left for future homeowners to discover. What lens would they use to look at his life? Would the images and mementos he had saved provide enough information not just about him, but also the times he grew up in?



**Mark Patsfall and Larry. Taken circa 1959 // 2017 archival digital print, 14 x 11 inches.***COURTESY OF CLAY STREET PRESS*

To satisfy his curiosity, Patsfall hands viewers a quiz to complete while surveying the exhibit. Can you determine the specialty of the Massachusetts restaurant listed on a pay stub? What's the significance of a McCarthy button? Where the heck was Walter's International Wax Museum? Fill out the sheet and receive a catalog with background about every image in the show.

Patsfall had lost the code for opening his safe, but by asking viewers to find their own meanings in these images, he's hit the right combination for revealing his story. Patsfall came of age in the 1960s and '70s, with a draft card and a stint in Vietnam. Though younger generations might not be able to connect with that, his personal account is also part of a shared archive of timeless experiences like holiday celebrations, baseball games, rock concerts, first crushes and first cars.

Though Patsfall doesn't ask it, one more question hangs over the show: Smartphone selfies have replaced photo booths. StubHub offers up mobile tickets, not tangible

souvenirs. In the digital age, what will you be able to hold onto as evidence of a life lived?

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*Through Dec. 15. Free. More info [here](#). For more info on all FotoFocus exhibits, visit [fotofocusbiennial.org](http://fotofocusbiennial.org).*