

Biennial festival FotoFocus aims to create new community experiences



[Enlarge](#) Filmmaker Miranda July, left, and Kelly Gallagher, a filmmaker and assistant professor of film at Syracuse University, presented at FotoFocus in 2018. JACOB DRABIK

By Leyla Shokoohi
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FotoFocus is marking its 10th anniversary this year with the expansion of its film offerings through "Second Screens," a free monthly series.

FotoFocus, a biannual festival celebrating lens-based art, brought on C. Jacqueline Wood, a Cincinnati-based filmmaker and artist, as Film Curator at Large to focus on film and video programming both prior to and during the festival.

"(FotoFocus) decided to introduce some new initiatives, and this is one of them," said Wood, who's most familiar to local audiences for the Mini

Microcinema, her People's Liberty-spawned art film house located on Main Street in Over-the-Rhine.

The physical location of the Mini recently closed after three years of operation. Wood, who has contributed curatorially to FotoFocus in more limited capacities, is eager to build on the appreciation for film demonstrated by Cincinnati audiences.

"Personally, it aligns with a nice change in my life because the end of the Mini signifies the end of a chapter," Wood said. "What's really lovely about FotoFocus is they support research and travel, so I will be visiting a lot of film festivals this year. I'm going to be bringing back really fantastic work to Cincinnati in a way I was never able to do."

Wood's relationship with FotoFocus began in 2018, when the organization featured the Mini and Wood's curatorial vision as one of its prominent programming components. She implemented "Cinema and the Archive," a month-long screening series at the Mini, and was also given the opportunity to curate one of the biennial's keynote speakers, bringing in Miranda July, a well-known filmmaker, artist and author.

"We'd been wanting to work more deeply with film," said Mary Ellen Goeke, FotoFocus executive director. "We've got opportunities with each month's presentation to really highlight an important film or filmmaker, but it's also an opportunity to say, 'Yes, FotoFocus is presenting this.' We're moving around the city to show off many interesting, significant venues that we're lucky to have here."

Over-the-Rhine-based FotoFocus is the largest photography and lens-based biennial in the U.S. The organization was founded in 2010, celebrating its medium with a festival every two years, held in October, and a symposium in the non-biennial years. More than 60,000 visitors attended the first biennial in 2012, and more than 200,000 attended the 2018 iteration.

In addition to core programming and keynote speakers, FotoFocus provides grants and financial support to several organizations and artists. To date, the non-profit organization has given away nearly \$5 million.

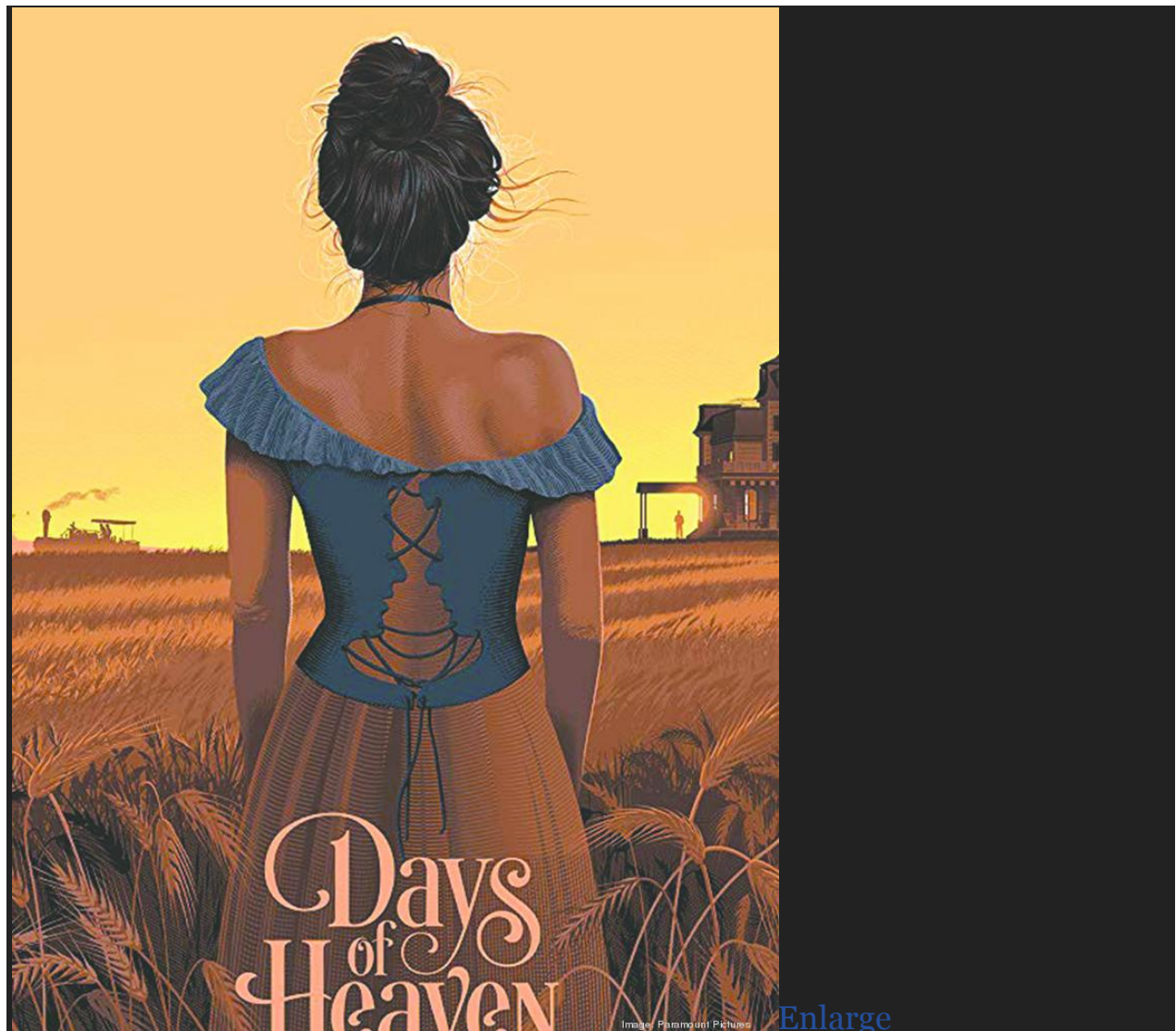
"The vision is to inspire conversations about the world through the art of photography and lens-based practices," said Carissa Barnard, FotoFocus deputy director of exhibitions and programming.

"You can talk about the state and the history of the world through the art of photography," she said. "If you look at the biennial offerings, we support conversations, artistic practices that give us this full gamut of appreciation of

the world. It's very much democratic, the camera, the ability to take a photograph."

Second Screens takes place on the second Tuesday of the month in different venues across the city, and Wood's take on her task is very intentional.

"My vision for Second Screens is an eclectic mix of important work that will bring in different demographics and highlight important voices," Wood said. "I always like to mix serious work with fun work. I like to mix political with storytelling, with narrative, with avant-garde, with classic Hollywood cinema, with the most extreme art films. How do you look at that mix and make sense of it?"



Second Screens will show Terrence Malick's film "Days of Heaven" on Feb. 11 at the Cincinnati Museum Center. PARAMOUNT PICTURES

The first Second Screens took place Jan. 14 at the Woodward Theater, with a screening of "Varda by Agnès," a documentary by the late French New Wave filmmaker Agnes Varda about her own life and career.

On Feb. 11, Terrence Malick's "Days of Heaven" will screen at the Newsreel Theater in the Cincinnati Museum Center. On March 10, "United Skates," a documentary about the underground subculture of African-American roller skate communities, will screen at Rhinegeist in Over-the-Rhine.

"We're going to be doing a roller-skating demo," said Wood of that screening. "It's bringing cinema to unexpected places in the city. We're going to be engaging new and different audiences while also catering to our FotoFocus fan base."

In April, "Monterey Pop" will screen at Lightborne Studios in Over-the-Rhine, the only soundstage in the city of Cincinnati.

"We want to make a concert experience for people, because the film is a document of the Monterey Pop Festival that happened in 1967," Wood said. "One of the most powerful shots of film is the close-up, so if we can actually feel like we're close to these performers and these experiences, that is the power of the medium. So we're going to make this rockstar, concert-like performance."

May features "Two Journeys – A Shorts Program," curated by Nora Sweeney, a Cincinnati native, screening at the 21C. June's screening, "NSFW," will feature animated work that examines the human form, selected by Wood from an open call for submissions by local animators and filmmakers. Submissions opened this month.

The second half of the year's programming will be announced in the spring.

"My hope is to reach not only film lovers, but new, younger audiences that are hungry to go to an event and watch a film with a community. Since streaming is such a huge part of our culture now, actually going to a theater and watching a film communally is rare," Wood said. "It's about creating a new experience, an offering in this city that doesn't exist."

FotoFocus, founded in 2010, aims to create a dialogue between contemporary lens-based art and the history of photography. FotoFocus has awarded more than 100 grants to artists and institutions since 2010 for the production and presentation of photography and lens-based art.

IF YOU GO

What: "Second Screens," a free, monthly film screening curated by C. Jacqueline Wood

When: Second Tuesdays through 2020

Where: Locations across the city

Information: www.fotofocus.org