

SFGATE

Photography festival coming to San Francisco

By **Michelle Robertson**, San Francisco Chronicle

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On the heels of the landmark re-opening of SFMOMA and the inauguration of the Minnesota Street Project, the robust photography community in the Bay Area has long lamented the lack of a festival to match their fervor. PHOTOFAIRS | San Francisco hopes to change that.

PHOTOFAIRS, presented by the World Photography Organisation, will take place January 27-29 at the Fort Mason Festival Pavilion. The fair will present over 300 pieces of work, with a focus on some of the foremost international galleries— M97 Gallery in Shanghai, Photo12 Galleries in Paris/LA, Danziger Gallery in New York – and the essential photographic talent of the West Coast.

“San Francisco is a major photo capital, but ironically, a lot of people don’t realize this,” said PHOTOFAIRS Artistic Director Alexander Montague-Sparey.

As to why the city currently lacks a fair devoted solely to photography – we already have the renowned Art Market, also held at Fort Mason, and the SF Art Book Fair – Montague-Sparey explains that international curators have been hesitant to touch down on the West Coast.

“After the failure of Paris Photo LA, I think a lot of people in the business were scared to come here,” he said, “But no fair with solely a local focus will stand the test of time.”

Bay Area artists are more in need of community and financial support than ever; therefore, some may be quick to critique PHOTOFAIRS’ international emphasis. Nonetheless, London-based Montague-Sparey is quick to emphasize that the fair will be firmly grounded within its own time and place.

“San Francisco is the most entrepreneurial city in the world, so photography — as a medium so linked to modernity — is truly a perfect fit for the community,” he said.

The fair’s curation will also focus “on living artists, on giving those who really need the exposure a platform for their work to be seen,” said Sarah Shepard, Fair Manager. She stresses that many of the featured artists are younger than 40-years-old and have never exhibited in San Francisco. Their works will be displayed alongside the likes of Irving Penn, Danny Lyon, Edward Weston, and Herbert List.

While the periphery of the fair provides a platform for traditional formats of photography, the center section features a curated exhibition of works that stray from traditional chromogenic and silver formats. Instead, “Insights” will highlight refreshing approaches and contemporary practices.

Montague-Sparey hopes to see collectors use this section “as a platform to acquire works they would not usually have access to on their domestic soil.” Art markets in San Francisco can sometimes feel like see-and-be-seen events, with trendy folk in designer glasses waxing poetic about this sculpture or that installation. Shepard believes that PHOTOFAIRS will feel more accessible to the unversed and curious.

“When people see art, they want to understand it and they want to be educated about it,” she said. “Photography is often more accessible than other art forms.” The price points of are often equally accessible for novice collectors.

A bevy of educational events will punctuate the three-day fair, including “Conversations,” which will feature discussions on everything from photobooks to the American social landscape and creative process. The festival venue is only a slice of the action, as events will take place throughout the city at partner spaces, like the de Young, SFMOMA, Minnesota Street Project, and the Asian Art Museum.

For more seasoned photography aficionados or those looking for an intensive crash course in the medium, the VIP program features exclusive access to Pier 24; behind-the-scenes views of the Ed Ruscha Archive and Danny Lyon exhibition at the De Young; and artist studio visits with Sean McFarland, Erica Deeman, and Klea McKenna at Minnesota Street Project.

And for those of whose tastes lie less on the art spectrum and more on the culinary, Four Barrel is taking care of the coffee, while Stones Throw will be serving its California-inspired cuisine.

While locals and critics are unsure what the inaugural PHOTOFAIRS | San Francisco will have in store for them, the event promises to be a spectacle and educational opportunity for both seasoned collectors and the photographically curious. According to Shepard, this is the overarching goal: to foster a safe meeting place for the exchange of art and ideas on the stunning San Franciscan waterfront.

“Fort Mason reminds you where you are, makes you consider the history of art in this city,” said Shepard. “It’s also a great place to take photos for yourself.”

PHOTOFAIRS | San Francisco takes place January 27-29 at the Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture. Tickets are \$12-15 and available for purchase [here](#).

*Read Michelle Robertson's latest stories and send her news tips
at mrobertson@sfgate.com.*