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Art & Design  
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Mars Desert Research Station  
#6 Mars Society, San Rafael  
Swell, Utah, U.S.A., 2008, by  
Vincent Pournier. Courtesy the  
artist and La Galerie  
Paris 1839



# In Focus

**Photo Basel**, the first international art fair dedicated to photography-based art, runs concurrent to the prestigious Swiss summit of Art Basel. But while complementary, this is no mere side show – it’s a satellite fair with its own flair and distinct DNA

**T**he Klein-Basel district beside the river Rhine is an eminent locale in which to absorb art and culture. This Swiss district pulses with vibrant squares, lively streets, and epicurean highlights – add in Pritzker Prize-worthy contemporary architecture plus a diverse swirl of stylish characters, and the inspiring area is an opportunism dream for a photographer.

One of its squares, Volkshaus Basel, was renovated by city-based architects Herzog & de Meuron, sits only 700m away from the location of the main Art Basel fair, and from 14-18 June plays host to an event where photography can truly shine.

Photo Basel first appeared in 2015 and grew, “Out of a deep passion and love for photography. Although Switzerland has the prestigious Art Basel, we wanted to give a platform to solely the photographic medium,” explains Sven Eisenhut, director and one of its founders. “From the very beginning we wanted photography to have its own space,” he elaborates. “A photography-only art fair is a very different experience to a mixed media art fair – particularly for photography

enthusiasts. It’s a much more accessible platform for people who may not necessarily be all-encompassing art lovers, but appreciate the medium.”

Perusing a selection of teaser pictures from the third edition of the fair will undoubtedly evoke such appreciation. Some of the artists have zeroed in on the everyday – Alfred Drago Rens’ *The Grand Bouquet series* and Manuel Franquelo Giner’s *The Artificial Being Is A Reality Of Perfect Simulacrum* being two examples of new perspectives on the everyday.

Others, though, have ventured into alternate realms, and you’d wonder if the artists would find capturing Klein-Basel a slightly blasé experience, despite its charm. You pinch yourself sometimes to remember the art was achieved with a camera – prime examples are the desolate *Mars Desert Research Station* snapped by Vincent Fournier, Ching-Hui Chou’s mesmerically complex *Animal Farm* collection (set in fantastical twilight), and a visually dominant series of stark blue, white and orange fanciful images by Reine Paradis, bestowed with otherworldly titles such as *Moongolf, Crocodile, Starlake, Mars* and such.



Paradis' work can be considered among the most aesthetically arresting of this year's participants, with the LA-based artist's photographs having been described as, "The surreal holiday you never took" by *Plus Paper*, and by *Flaunt Magazine* as, "Uncanny worlds of bright colours, sharp geometries... [with] intricate details lurking beneath the intensity".

Paradis says, "I believe photography is the only way to create this world that exists in between reality and imagination and this is what I think sets it apart from any other medium. I don't use it in a conventional way,

it's more a tool to create a new place." Of this 'new place' for photography, she finds being involved, "An honour. Both being part of such a community of artists, and for the opportunity to share my work with a new audience."

Eisenhut says of this year's line-up overall, "It is more political than in the past. In addition, we once again see a lot of unique pieces, meaning artists not only take shots with polaroid cameras but might paint on the photography like Radenko Milak & Roman Uranjek from Galerija Fotografja, or even stitch over them like Iris Hutegger from Esther Woedehoff."

“ Out of a deep passion and love for photography we wanted the medium to have its own space ”

**Above:** *Flamengus*, 2017, by Reine Paradis. Courtesy Catherine and André Hug Gallery  
**Right:** *Les fantômes de Bassam - ancienne école régionale*, 2016, by Edith Roux. Courtesy Galerie Dix9 Hélène Lacharmoisse; *The Grand Bouquet series*, 2014-2015, by Alfred Drago Rens. courtesy Galleria L'Affiche

Excellence is the name of the game, and to achieve a common shared vision for Photo Basel, a Venn diagram of experts is engaged – with management, advisory and curatorial circles. Galleries are ‘the centrepiece of any art showing, their inputs, suggestions and feedback’, says the Photo Basel literature, while curators will be in charge of ‘reviewing and selecting all the content, with each stakeholder an extended family member that contributes to the sustainable success.’

Details Eisenhut, “We do not strive to make ‘yet another art fair’ – Photo Basel’s sustainable success will only be guaranteed if the quality of the art you see and buy is of very high quality. In order to constantly meet those standards, that is where our ‘experts’ come into play.”

So what’s new for 2017? “Foremost, we are expecting around 34 galleries to attend,” the director discloses. There’s a dedicated showcase for digital, video, time and Net-based art, too: “We’re especially excited for the new Tape/ Basel section. It provides a platform for another lens-based medium, giving an incredible opportunity for these artists to exhibit works that are fresh and dynamic. This year, we will feature several single channel videos on screens in the main hall – on the fairgrounds balcony – again, giving time-based art its own space.”

There’s little doubt that the idea is still emerging – as is photography itself. Eisenhut shares that the medium is, “Absolutely gaining momentum, and I have personally visited dozens of art fairs in the past few months, even the most established galleries have shown a few photography positions.” Thus Photo Basel is gradually establishing a foothold, as a gateway for the exhibiting galleries and artists to build new audiences, as well as the possibility for mutual gallery and museum connections to emerge.

“That’s the role we want our fair to have,” he outlines. “It continues to thrive from the synergies and the encounters of photography enthusiasts, and our vision from the beginning was that each exhibitor, collector, aficionado and visitor can create a unique Photo Basel experience, together.”

*Photo Basel runs from 14-18 June.  
For tickets, visit [photo-basel.com](http://photo-basel.com)*

