

# Q&A: Sven Eisenhut, Founding Director, Photo Basel

BY ARCHANA KHARE-GHOSE | JUNE 16, 2017



"Listen 2," by Newsha Tavakolian at AB43 Contemporary  
(Newsha Tavakolian/ AB43 Contemporary)

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Photo Basel that will be held from June 14-18 at Volkshaus Basel, is Switzerland's first international art fair dedicated to photography based art. Held parallel to Art Basel, its focus on artistic photography underscores the importance this medium has come to acquire in our lives, and is also a nod to the art finding its place in the market. Though only a few years old, it has already become the go-to destination for all those who have a stake in making photography the higher form of art that it veritably is.



Ahead of the next edition of Photo Basel, the fair's founding director Sven Eisenhut speaks to Blouin Artinfo about the fair, its economic viability and the art of photography.

**In an age when everybody is a photographer, what is the significance of a picture? How does one sift the artwork from the massive haystack of photography being created digitally every second?**

Since the invention of photography in the 19th century to the selfie culture of today, photography has always been used to expose, dramatise or perform something. What makes a photograph interesting is the dynamics in the confrontation between the photographer and object or subject. Digital photography and smartphones are brilliant these days, and Annie Leibowitz has called smartphones “the snapshot camera of today.” As with all mediums of art, it invariably centres around the question of the relativity of taste and everything being subjective.

**You intend to make Photo Basel the hub of artistic photography in Switzerland while a Sotheby's expert has already hailed it as one of the top five photography events of the year. What do you think gives Photo Basel a cutting edge over others?**

Its small size with up to 40 exhibitors means the visitors, collectors and aficionados get to spend some time with the galleries and artists more closely. Photo Basel is also very international, exhibiting 16 different nations from five continents. The Photo Basel team is constantly travelling to other art fairs and aims to scout artists first, and then approach the galleries that represent them. We prefer this curated approach. We are also very lucky to receive great applications because they believe in the fair and know how hard we work. In addition, Basel becomes somewhat of the cultural super hub during June.

**Even earlier, artistic photography didn't sell in the same figures as conventional works of art did, and they don't do so now. How, then, does a fair such as this achieve its most important goal – of getting good sales in each edition?**

I read a report recently on [arttactic.com](http://arttactic.com) by Anders Petterson who explained that overall, photography at auction has remained steady since the second half of 2015, with contemporary sales becoming more popular amongst buyers. Naturally, this will spill over into the sales at art fairs also. Photography is a very accessible medium that non-art world people can understand more easily than most artistic mediums. I have a strong and encouraging belief that things will only get better!

**Could you share some highlights of what Photo Basel is going to offer in the upcoming edition?**

At Photo Basel 2017, you will discover emerging talents such as Sebastian Riemer (exhibited by Gallery Dix 9, Paris). He just had a show at the Museum Folkwang together with Thomas Ruff. Los Angeles-based Reine Paradis (Galerie Catherine and André Hug) creates surreal stages of color and prefab accessories – all her work is blue with orange, very captivating and fresh.

Furthermore, we will see a lot of “unique” work (which is quite special in terms of photography). Here, I would like to highlight the works of Switzerland-based artist Iris Hutegger (represented by Galerie Esther Woerdehoff, Paris). Iris stitches over her photography in a month long process – it is an absolutely fantastic work.

In addition, every fair should also show some masters. This year, we are blessed to see works by Werner Bischof, René Burri, Simone Kappeler, Arnold Odermatt, Edward Burtynsky, Joel-Peter Witkin, Herb Ritts, Erwin Olaf, Andreas Fux, Nan Goldin, Imogen Cunningham, Luigi Ghirri, Gilles Caron, Michael Kenna, Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, Paolo Ventura, Newsha Tavakolian, Robert Mapplethorpe, Roger Ballen, Georges Rousse, Saul Leiter, Sascha Goldberg and Vincent Fournier.

## What are the current trends in artistic photography that you think will be reflected in the upcoming edition of Photo Basel?

This year's content is defined by many works strongly identifying with the current world issues, and their aim is to bring new reflections and new points of view on current events. Furthermore, we are proud to showcase young, upcoming artists who are brought in dialogue with more established artists. In addition, we're excited to launch the new Tape/Basel section which is devoted entirely to the moving image. It offers a platform for another lens-based medium, giving an opportunity for the exhibiting artists to show their works.

— *Photo Basel runs through June 18 at Volkshaus Basel, Rebgasse 12-14, CH-4058, Basel*



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