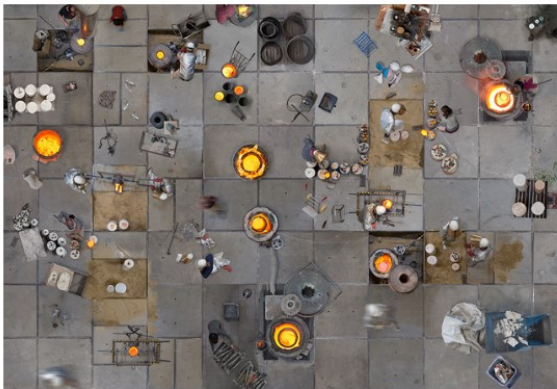


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Photo Basel, a new home for photography in Switzerland?

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Nijhof Beeldenstorm, Brabant (2017) © Katrin Korfmann



Birds 025 (2012) © Yohei Kichiraku



Untitled (25 yrs, fragm. IV) (2014) © Manuel Franquelo

The third Photo Basel was held during Art Basel Week in the Swiss city, joining well established satellites Liste and Volta to try and capture run off from the larger fair. While Volta had little to no photography and Liste had only conceptual photography, Basel had plenty. As one of the largest fairs of its kind in the world with almost 300 Galleries exhibiting, it is somewhat surprising that only a handful of strictly photography galleries are included each year. This year they were Frankel, Edwynn Houk, Howard Greenberg, Kicken, Daniel Blau and Pace/MacGill, with Jenkins Johnson and Hamiltons featuring single artist booths of Gordon Parks and Robert Franks, respectively.

That said, there is a lot of photography sprinkled throughout the fair, although strictly the kind sanctioned by the .01% Art World. So it is filling this "photography gap" where Photo Basel's finds its mission. This is a good year for photography in Basel, with the amazing Foundation Beyeler featuring a photography exhibition for the first time in their history. The exhibition by Wolfgang Tillmans is deserving of a review, preferably by someone who appreciates his work. Needless-to-say, the main fair also included a great deal of Tillman's comically unexceptional work.

European fairs are notoriously long and Photo Basel is no exception. With long hours from the 14th to the 18th and evening previews on both the 12th and 13th, Photo Basel attempted to make it easy for everyone to find time to visit the fair. And with their posters ubiquitous throughout the city it is hard to believe that anyone interested in photography would not be drawn to the fair. In fact, there was a steady stream of visitors, but Basel week is extraordinarily busy with public and private events and the main fair takes at least two days to make one's way through. Add to that the 56th Venice Biennale and Documenta 14 and many people were heading out of town by Wednesday!

Photo Basel is Switzerland's first and only fair dedicated to photography and by all accounts it has improved dramatically from year to year. The biggest improvement so far was last year when the fair moved to its present location at Volkshaus, a wonderful location that's an easy walk from where the main fair is held. There is a very good restaurant and an inviting courtyard, especially given the extraordinary heat that accompanied Art Basel Week. A popular tourist attraction in Basel is to float down the Rhine with its fast-moving current. They sell dry bags everywhere for people to put their belongings into, and it was a common sight to see people coming through the various fairs holding their bags, even as they had changed back into their street cloths.

This year's improvement to Photo Basel was in its production, with better walls and lighting. The staff was led by fair owner Sven Eisenhut Fourth from right) who was always present during the fair and composed, with one exception, of an all-female staff of volunteers (Sven said no men had applied) who were as professional as any paid staff. This year there were 36 Galleries from 15 Countries exhibiting and those who have been there from the beginning agreed that the overall quality of the dealers has improved from year to year. That said, given the opportunity of exhibiting during Art Basel Week it's surprising that the quality of dealers isn't even higher. Everyone seems to agree that after three years what this fair mostly has is potential. To help in that regard a group of exhibitors met over drinks when the fair was over to talk about what worked and what didn't. A couple of dealers who had done Paris Photo from the beginning compared Photo Basel to the early years of France's premier photography fair. Although the art, photography and fair worlds have changed dramatically from that long-ago time. Let's hope Photo Basel has a similar trajectory.

Paul Kopeikin

Paul Kopeikin is the director of the Kopeikin Gallery in Los Angeles USA. This was his first year exhibiting at Photo Basel with works by artist Katrin Korfmann.

Photo Basel

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<http://www.photo-basel.com/>