

# FotoFocus Fills in the Backstory

Its largest Biennial yet includes 86 venues and builds anticipation for a new permanent home. —BILL THOMPSON

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NEW IDEAS  
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BLINK: DON'T  
MISS IT

As FotoFocus prepares for its seventh Biennial event, the “Backstories” theme could apply as easily to the organization itself as well as the 100-plus projects at 86 venues this fall. Opening weekend is September 26–28, with most exhibits running at least through October.



Katherine Ryckman Siegwarth

The nonprofit was founded in 2010 to “present and support photography and lens-based projects that are accessible, enriching, and engaging to a diverse public ... to inspire conversations about the world through the art of photography.” Fourteen years later, FotoFocus has a new leader, Katherine Ryckman Siegwarth, who’s overseeing her first Biennial since replacing founding Executive Director Mary Ellen Goeke at the start of 2023. At the same time, Siegwarth is also focused on the final construction of an almost 15,000-square-foot permanent home at

Liberty and Sycamore streets in Over-the-Rhine, scheduled to open next year.

Meanwhile, Artistic Director and Curator Kevin Moore, who has chosen the Biennial themes since joining FotoFocus in 2013, expands the definition of “the photograph” for “Backstories.” “For years, the reigning idea of what art photography was is that Henri Cartier-Bresson model of the decisive moment, the ‘one’ picture that summarizes everything,” says Moore. “But you don’t see what happened before the picture was taken, what happened after it, or what was outside of it. I think we’ve all become savvy at understanding that there is a backstory about everything we’re presented with. So I think the idea of multiple images is a big part of what ‘backstories’ is about.”

The Biennial’s centerpiece show is the collaboration with the Cincinnati Art Museum on *Discovering Ansel Adams*, which is co-curated by Rebecca Senf, an Adams scholar and chief curator at the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona, and Nathaniel M. Stein, CAM’s curator of

photography. “The art museum exhibit is a wonderful tie-in because it’s not just showing Ansel Adams’s greatest hits,” says Siegwarth. “It looks at his trajectory, his early interests, his style when he was a teenager, and how he morphed into the most beloved American photographer.”

The Adams show might be the atop the marquee, but with more than 100 exhibits, there are treasures throughout the region’s venues from Hamilton, Dayton, and Columbus to Northern Kentucky. The choices can be overwhelming, but luckily those working on it are happy to offer suggestions.

Emily Akil, communications and outreach manager: *Gee Horton: Chapter 2, A Subtle Farewell to the Inner Child* at Kennedy Heights Art Center. Inspired by a soul-stirring pilgrimage to Senegal, the award-winning local artist weaves personal narratives and collective experiences to embark on voyages of healing and self-discovery.

Carissa Barnard, director of curatorial strategy: *Madeleine Hordinski: The Lore of the Pawpaw* at Lloyd Library downtown. The

IMAGES BY (TOP) JACOB DRABIK / (BOTTOM LEFT) MING SMITH / (MIDDLE) BARBARA PROBST / (RIGHT) RACHAEL BANKS / (FILM) SIMON/STOCK.ADOBE.COM



FotoFocus shows are featured at (from left) Wexner Center for the Arts, Contemporary Arts Center, and Weston Art Gallery.

# New Leaders, New Ideas

Get to know fresh faces on Cincinnati's arts scene.

young Cincinnati native shares the history, existence, and fascination behind Ohio's state fruit.

Jacob Drabik, graphic designer: *Devil's Promenade* at Dayton Art Institute. Ozark natives Lara Shipley and Antone Dolezal blend the folklore of their region with photographs of people, land, and images engaging the living mythology of the Spook Light, a scientifically inexplicable floating orb that moves, disappears, reappears, and sometimes splits in two or three.

Lilly Hinckley, participating venue coordinator: *Rollin' in Rhythm* at the Gallery at 1435 Main, Over-the-Rhine. Skate Downtown Cincy presents an exhibit of street photography, portraiture, and sport videography that explores the city's vibrant underground rollerskating culture.

There are more exhibits in more venues this year, but Siegwath is also excited about Call for Entries, a category that welcomes individual artists. "Our level of engagement with independent creatives has been limited," she says. "Regional artists were able to apply, and the FotoFocus team selected six projects. This is a nice way to feature things at the Art Academy of Cincinnati, the Weston Gallery, and the Purple People Bridge in a nuanced way that we haven't had before."

A permanent headquarters is also something they haven't had before. And that creates its own excitement. "We can be very confusing to the world because we don't have a brick-and-mortar place," says Moore, who is based in New York. "It's going to be a big step for us, a really good one."

Details: [FotoFocus.org](http://FotoFocus.org)



## BRIDGET LEAK

Know Theatre of Cincinnati

**TITLE:** Producing Artistic Director

**STARTED:** June 2024

**BACKGROUND:** Directed shows at Cincinnati Playhouse, Ensemble Theatre, and Know and is a 10-time participant in the Cincy Fringe Festival.

**LOOKING FORWARD:** "With two world premieres and two regional premieres, I'm incredibly excited about the variety of shows we're presenting this year."



## CERVILIO MIGUEL AMADOR

Cincinnati Ballet

**TITLE:** Interim Artistic Director

**STARTED:** September 2023

**BACKGROUND:** The Cuban native became one of the youngest Principal Dancers in Cincinnati Ballet history in 2006 and most recently served as Rehearsal Director.

**DISCOVERY:** "What a joy it has been to find new choreographic voices from around the world and to champion new artists."



## SARAH TEMPLETON WILSON

Pyramid Hill Sculpture Park & Museum

**TITLE:** Executive Director

**STARTED:** January 2024

**BACKGROUND:** Twenty years of arts administration experience, including as Pyramid Hill's Development Director since 2021.

**INSPIRATION:** "Art is an essential element to healthy, vibrant communities, and Pyramid Hill contributes to the city of Hamilton's renaissance."



## ANNUAL TBA

May Festival

**TITLE:** Festival Director

**STARTED:** May 2024

**BACKGROUND:** There's a new rotating leadership model after Executive Director Steven Sunderman and Director of Choruses Robert Porco retired. Composer Julia Wolfe served as the 2024 Festival Director.

**WHO'S NEXT:** "The artistic director could be anyone in the arts," says Porco. "A conductor, a composer, a poet, a jazz player."