

NOAH BECKER'S

# WHITEHOT MAGAZINE

OF CONTEMPORARY ART

(<https://whitehotmagazine.com/>)

*"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"*  
*SEPTEMBER 2023*

**Photofairs 2023 Triumphantly Debuts in New York**

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*A view of Photofairs, New York, NY - September 9, 2023*

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**By J. SCOTT ORR** September 9, 2023

It's not easy to make a splash in New York's vaunted fall art week line-up and it's especially difficult for a rookie debuting at the same time and place as the week's raison d'être, The Armory Show. But here comes Photofairs (<https://www.photofairs.org/>), the brash newcomer offering up traditional photography along with post-contemporary media creations of all kinds. Like The Armory Show, Photofairs opens to the public Friday and runs through Sunday at the Javits Center.

With some 60 domestic and international exhibitors, Photofairs is small in comparison to its art week competition, but it brings welcome new energy, currency, and panache. The show was conceived as a means to engage with the “diverse and rapidly evolving landscape of image-making, from modern examples, to contemporary intersections with digital art and film, to the medium's next frontiers.”

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*A discussion at Photofairs Program Lounge. Photo by Jamie Lubekin*

Photofairs succeeds as a gateway to the next generation of photographic art exhibition and, by extension, art exhibition generally. The work ranges from vintage black and whites to digital compositions that are far afield of traditional camera work. Overall, the show is a sensory delight, alive with color, action and expectation.

During its VIP opening, Photofairs demonstrated its comfort with the digital aspects of photography, embracing augmented and virtual reality, 3D graphics, computer animation, postproduction enhancement and NFTs far more than the spring art season's essential photography event, the Photography Show from the Association of International Photography Art Dealers known as AIPAD (<https://www.aipad.com/#2>). Still, traditional photography is served alongside the latest in whiz-bang digital image creation and manipulation.

Here are some highlights the inaugural Photofairs show:

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Margeaux Walter (<https://www.margeauxwalter.com/>) is a fine-art photographer based in New York and Joshua Tree whose work at Photofairs draws from her Don't be a Square (<https://www.margeauxwalter.com/projects#/dont-be-a-square/>) series of otherworldly landscape photographs, each imbued by a human distraction. These distractions, or interventions, are colored to fit into the larger works, presenting a potentially optimistic message that humanity's failures, like climate change, are mere glitches.

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In 2022's *Nap*, for example, Walter captures a Caribbean blue lake and a matching blue sky, with clouds and reflection off the water forming an arrow pointing to the right, the future. Camouflaged on the lake is a blue woman, napping on a blue couch, unburdened by the environmental decay and climate change suggested by two rotting tree stumps protruding from the water.

“In my performative photographs, this glitch can be seen as a pixel, a cubicle, or a portal, yet there is a glimpse of the humanity that is both camouflaged into the land and completely disconnected from it,” she said. “I see the Anthropocene age as a glitch in time; it is so short in the greater timeline of life, and yet has caused so much havoc,” she added.

Walter studied at the Maine Photographic Workshops, NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and Hunter College and her works have been exhibited in museums and private collections across the country. Her work is presented by Winston Wachter Fine Art (<https://newyork.winstonwachter.com/>) of New York and Seattle.

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Huntrezz Janos (<https://www.instagram.com/huntrezz/>) is a Los Angeles-based new media artist known for alternative world building using 3D graphics, animation, and augmented and virtual realities. Her work often focuses on identity, community, and social justice.

At Photofairs, Janos offers multi-layered face filters that exist in augmented reality so that visitors can try on these fantastical and imagined virtual masks in a digital space. Trying on, for example, a mournful pink and green mammalian/pixie/Martian mask with antenna might offer a playful platform for consideration of diversity, individuality, isolation and dissociation.

“As a Black trans woman, I often feel like I’m not valued, or even not safe in this world. I use my work to showcase diversity and innovation in a way that you can’t deny,” Janos said.

Janos’ work is presented by Miami’s Transfer Gallery (<http://transfergallery.com/>), an experimental enterprise that explores simulation and expanded practice. Janos holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in experimental animation from the California Institute of the Arts, and her works have been exhibited at The Athens Biennale AB7:Eclipse (Athens), Tate Britain (London), Museum of Modern Art (New York), K Museum of Contemporary Art (Seoul) and other sites.





*A piece by Maleonn from his 2021 series Faramite Flowers. Photo by Jamie Lubekin*

Maleonn (<https://www.maleonn.com/>) is a Shanghai-based photographer and artist whose work at Photofairs blends the nostalgia of vintage black-and-white photographs with muted organic backgrounds that frame, but do not obscure, the central subjects.

The exhibition draws from three of Maleonn's recent series *Faramite Flowers*, *Paradise on Earth*, and *Ksana*, all created since 2021. The *Faramite Flowers* pieces are particularly interesting.

One piece features an old photograph of a group of Chinese little girls dressed in fine, pale-colored dresses posing as though on a family field trip. This photograph floats in a field of green, purple, maroon and yellow flowers that is interrupted, jarringly, by the suggestion of mortality and the unknown through the inclusion of the skeleton of an animal, perhaps a dog. This suggestion of death and time gives the piece a level of certainty that would otherwise be missing since neither the vintage, nor the provenance, of the central image is known.

“A friend of mine showed me 50 old photos of Shanghai he had found (in an antique) market, developed from several old rolls of film....I want to use this work to talk about the existence and extinction of life, the memory and forgetting in time,” Maleonn said.

Maleonn’s work is presented by Shun Art Gallery (<https://shunartdesign.com/>) of Shanghai, which focuses on Asian contemporary art, including work by Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Indian and other artists.

Educated at Shanghai Huashan Art School and the Fine Art College of Shanghai University, Maleonn’s work has been recognized with the Australian International Digital Art Award; the 4th Spider International Black and White Photography Award; the Golden Panda Photography Award and many other honors.

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Amanda MARCHAND & Leah SOBSEY  
*This Earthen Door*



*This Earthen Door* is a unique presentation from artists Amanda Marchand (<https://www.amandamarchand.com/>) and Leah Sobsey (<https://www.leahsobsey.com/>) that honors the green thumb of American poetry doyenne Emily Dickinson. While her poetry was little known during her lifetime, Dickinson's facility with plants was hardly a secret.

The project uses plants and flowers grown by the two artists to rework Dickinson's nearly 200-year-old plant scrapbook using a 19th century photographic process known as anthotype. The anthotype process involves the use of an emulsion made from crushed flower petals or any other light-sensitive plant, fruit or vegetable.

*Herbarium Plate 9 - Petunia*, for example, is a 40 x 31-inch archival pigment print that features delicate leaves, pedals, stems and seed heads rendered stencil-like on a soft purple field.

"*This Earthen Door* gives a glimpse into the nature-inspired world of the enigmatic, beloved poet nearly two centuries later – and asks, with today's 'plant blindness' and climate chaos, where she may point us," the artists said.

*This Earthen Door* is presented by New York's Rick Wester Fine Art (<https://www.rickwesterfineart.com/>). Marchand is an award-winning, Canadian-New York-based photographer whose experimental approach to her work seeks to explore the natural world. Sobsey, a professor of photography, curator, and director of the Gatewood Gallery at the University of North Carolina, maintains a multidisciplinary photographic practice that reaches into science, design, installation, and textile.



*Caleb Kwarteng Prah, Ali x Sule, 2023. Photo by Jamie Lubekin*

Caleb Kwarteng Prah (<https://www.instagram.com/calebprah1/>), is a Ghanaian photographer and artist whose work celebrates contemporary Ghana through digitally enhanced photographs of its people, culture, and everyday life.

In his projects *Dukes of Trotro* and *Portraits of a City. 1 Minute Instant*, Prah captures images of the Ghanaian working class, often framed by the doors of the ubiquitous "trotro," the shared, minibus taxis many Ghanaian people rely on as their principal

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means of transport. The series speaks of resilience and optimism amid struggle and want.

In one piece, *Ali x Sule*, two men face each other, their images imposed on the actual door from a trotro. They stare straight ahead strong, calm, expressionless, resolute. The red, gold and green of the Ghana flag pop up in a bracelet on a black hand in the lower left corner and in a knife gash that exposes the trotro's insides.

"I'm inspired by the social economic conditions of everyday Ghanaians, so I borrow from the texture, the color and the patterns from everyday objects like trotros, the most common means of local transportation in Kumasi. Trotro culture is a very vibrant and colorful scene," Prah said.

Prah's work is presented by the Paris-based NIL Gallery (<https://www.nilgallery.com/>), which focuses on discovering and promoting emerging contemporary artists.

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*Shots of Patti Smith by Bob Gruen. Photo by Jamie Lubekin*

The Music Photo Gallery (<https://www.musicphoto.net/>) brings works by renowned rock 'n' roll photographers Bob Gruen (<https://www.bobgruen.com/>), Marcia Resnick (<http://www.marciaresnick.com/>) and Roberta Bayley

(<https://www.robertabayley.com/>) to Photofairs, focusing on the 1970s New York City underground scene and the big bang that shaped rock music's enduring future.

The work includes some of Gruen's iconic photographs of the era, including portraits and on-stage renderings of superstars like John Lennon, Patti Smith, and David Bowie along with action shots and intimate moments caught by Resnick and Bayley.



Based in New York City and Buenos Aires, The Music Photo Gallery

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(<https://www.musicphoto.net/>) seeks to validate music photography as fine art. **WM**



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