

The Festival of Light in Paris

©Christine Gates

November 2012

In November Paris celebrates Photography. Even the must-see art show of the season, *Edward Hopper*, highlighted Hopper's appropriation to painting of Cartier-Bresson's 'decisive moment'. Or was it the other way around? Hopper's style has led British author Geoff Dyer to theorize that Hopper 'could claim to be the most influential American photographer of the twentieth century - even though he didn't take any photographs.'

From the world's top commercial galleries, assembled for *Paris Photo* at the Grand Palais, to the latest technology on show at *Salon de la Foto*, to the biennial, *Mois de la Photo à Paris*, the works exhibited catered to every possible taste. Guest-of-honour, David Lynch wandered the galleries of *Paris Photo* selecting his favourites, and photographic icon Duane Michals, was in town to introduce a film about his life and work, *The Man Who Invented Himself*, made by Anne Morien and France Saint Leger of *Terra Luna Films* and screened at Lynch's private club, *Silencio*.

Amidst all the hype, a little known gathering assembled, as they do each year in Paris in November. The Festival of Light is a group of Photography festivals from 6 continents, whose directors meet to share information, exchange ideas, and offer mutual support. *Speos International Photography School* in Paris, has hosted the meeting for the past few years. The venue is large enough to accommodate a table to seat Directors and Representatives from more than 20 countries, who share a love for, and a determination to continue, the promotion of excellence in international Photography.

Since the Europe-based *Mois de la Photo* began in 1980, the goals of Photography Festivals have moved from the need to support Photography as an art form, to promoting internationally recognised, high-quality Photography and Photographic projects. Festival programmes are platforms for ideas and exploration, combining excellence in art with contemporary social and aesthetic issues. Festivals typically encourage education in Photographic Arts with extensive school programmes and Photography Portfolio Reviews. These offer the opportunity for students to interact with industry professionals and to become familiar with the language of aesthetic analysis.

The Festival of Light association allows individual Festivals greater power in addressing issues of sponsorship, with membership providing collective impact in influencing the cultural funding of governments. Many member Festivals operate with minimal financial support surviving on the work of dedicated volunteers. In countries where political changes affect public cultural funding, the support of FOL members can help save a Festival from oblivion. *Aleppo International Photo Festival* in Syria is currently under just such a threat, and member Festivals have been requested to offer letters supporting continued funding to the Syrian government.

Since Festivals can promote each other's events, increased publicity is another benefit, as is increased exposure for exhibitors. The association offers greater visibility to cities little known in Europe and the USA: Ballarat in Australia, host to the *Ballarat International Foto Biennale*, Krasnodar in Russia, with *Photovisa*, or *Kaunas Photo* in Lithuania, for example.

The idea for a collaborative international interaction between Festivals originated at *Fotofest* in Huston, USA in 1994. *FotoFest* was the first international Biennial of Photography and Photo-related Art in the United States. The dialogue continued in following years in Odense in Denmark and then in Mexico, as Festival Directors continued to see each other at Photography Festivals around the world. By 1999 the concept of the Festival of Light organisation had taken a more concrete shape, and member Directors met formally for the first time.

Evolving from a group of friends who supported Photography, to a professional association that has become a cultural force, fostering excellence in that art form, the Festival of Light has become a powerful international alliance, working to promote the Photographic Arts.

The Festival of Light website provides links to member festivals:

<http://www.festivaloflight.net/>

1. [Aleppo – Aleppo International Photo Festival](#)
2. [Atlanta – Atlanta Celebrates Photography](#)
3. [Ballarat – Ballarat International Foto Biennale](#)
4. [Braga – Encontros da Imagem](#)
6. [Bratislava – Mesiac Fotografie](#)
7. [Buenos Aires – Encuentros Abiertos](#)

8. [Derby – FORMAT International Photography Festival](#)
9. [Houston – FotoFest, Inc.](#)
10. [Kaunas – Kaunas Photo](#)
11. [Krasnodar – Photovisa](#)
12. [Lodz – Fotofestiwal](#)
13. [Luxemburg I – Photomeetings Luxembourg](#)
14. [Luxemburg II – European Month of Photography Luxembourg](#)
15. [Mexico – Foto Septiembre](#)
16. [Montreal – Le Mois de la Photo à Montréal](#)
17. [Odense – Fototriennale.dk](#)
18. [Paris – Mois de la Photo](#)
19. [Portland – Photolucida](#)
20. [Porto Alegre – Festival Internacional de Fotografia de Porto Alegre – FestFotoPoA](#)
21. [Rio de Janeiro – FotoRio](#)
22. [Tampere – Backlight Photo Festival](#)
23. [Tenerife – Fotonoviembre](#)
24. [Thessaloniki – PhotoBiennale](#)
25. [Toronto – CONTACT Toronto Photography Festival](#)