

ARLES LES RENCONTRES
DE LA PHOTOGRAPHIE

The Best of 2026

by Valerie Hersleven

OOSHOT

STUDIO SEBERT

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The Best of Arles

During the professional week of Les Rencontres d'Arles, everyone walks. Everyone drinks even more. This year, the temperature climbed above 40°C. Days unfolded between chapels and former factories, shaded courtyards and café terraces, always with a bottle of water within reach.

Schedules filled themselves, conversations flowed into one another, plans shifted as the day went on. Yet the photographs remained the constant. We kept looking, meeting familiar faces and, before long, losing all sense of time.

Then there are those who quietly make the festival possible. The people welcoming visitors, answering the same questions hundreds of times a day, smiling through the heat. Without them, Arles would simply feel different. Thank you.

For one week each summer, Les Rencontres becomes something rare: a city shaped by photography. Photographers, artists, curators, exhibition designers, registrars, mediators, booksellers, publishers, technicians, front-of-house teams, volunteers, collectors, students and local residents all inhabit the same streets, gather around the same café tables and, every now and then, find themselves moved by the very same image.

Walking through this year's exhibitions, another idea slowly came into focus. Behind almost every photograph stands a meeting, a newspaper, a book, an institution, a commission, a community or simply one person who believed the image deserved to exist. Photographs rarely stop where they begin. They travel, acquire new meanings, reach new audiences and often continue telling stories long after the moment they first recorded has passed.

Then everyone heads home. A handful of images stay with us, together with countless conversations and the quiet certainty that we will return the following year.



Valerie Hersleven

Founder, Ooshot Group

Ghana! Dreaming Independence 1957–1976

Winner of the 2020 Curatorial Research Grant



© Carlos Idun-Tawiah, *The Barbershop*, Accra, Ghana, 2023

Kwame Nkrumah understood the power of images. Having worked as a journalist, he knew that political independence also called for independence of narrative, which is why the very name Ghana replaced the colonial Gold Coast, inscribing the new nation within a far older African history, while culture, the press and publishing became essential instruments for shaping this identity and carrying forward its pan-African ambition.

Through the Information Services Department, the state commissioned photographs, published books and organised the circulation of the image of a modern, cultivated and sovereign Ghana. Although these publications did not always travel as widely as expected, the photographs found other paths, through newspapers, posters, postcards, stamps and family albums. Invited by Nkrumah, Paul Strand conceived his portrait of the country as a book from the very beginning, while James Barnor, Felicia Abban and many other photographers were, from within Ghana itself, shaping a new visual culture. Curated by Damarice Amao, the exhibition brings these historical images into dialogue with a contemporary generation, including Denyse Gawu-Mensah and Carlos Idun-Tawiah, showing that while the commission has changed its form over time, its purpose has remained remarkably constant: enabling a society to choose the images through which it wishes to tell its own story.

Venue: **Palais de l'Archevêché**

35 place de la République, 13200 Arles.

Martine Barrat

Soul of the City



© Martine Barrat.
Yohji Yamamoto,
Women's Spring/Summer
Collection, Brazil, 1989.
Courtesy of La Galerie
Rouge.



Martine Barrat,
Woman Is Sweeter, film
couleur, 1973.
Commande des Parfums
Yves Saint Laurent.
Projection exceptionnelle
aux Rencontres d'Arles
2026.

Martine Barrat moves effortlessly between worlds. From the haute couture houses of Paris to the boxing gyms of the South Bronx, from Harlem to La Goutte d'Or, she has always followed people before places. Today, these worlds seem to speak naturally to one another. In the 1970s and 1980s, they barely acknowledged each other's existence.

Her work is, above all, about communities: children and their coaches, families, friends, artists and neighbours. The exhibition even includes the remarkable South Bronx Dictionary, a glossary compiled by Carlos "Mare 139" Suarez that reveals the richness of a language born in the neighbourhood itself. Together, the photographs and the words tell the same story: every community creates its own images, its own vocabulary and, ultimately, its own memory.

It also becomes clear why recognition came so late. Martine Barrat was never documenting the margins; she was already revealing worlds that would go on to reshape our visual culture. Her film with Yves Saint Laurent, unseen for many years, now appears as another bridge between these seemingly distant universes.

Curators: **Agathe Cancellieri**, in collaboration with **Chuck Kelton**
Venue: **Espace Van Gogh**
Place Félix-Rey, 13200 Arle

L is for Look

The Children's Photobook

We often speak about visual culture without asking where it begins. This exhibition offers a simple answer: in the books we discover as children. Over the decades, photography became a way of learning, of playing, of discovering the world and, sometimes, of encountering poetry. The exhibition, curated by Anne Lacoste, is a gentle reminder that images often accompany us throughout our lives, long before we ever encounter them on the walls of a museum.

Curator: **Anne Lacoste**



Reinhard Matz, Frühstück [Breakfast], 1995–2000.

Venue: **Espace Van Gogh**
Place Félix-Rey, 13200 Arle

Harry Gruyaert

A Sense of Place



Harry Gruyaert, Carnival, Antwerp, Belgium, 1992.

Each of Harry Gruyaert's cities retains its own distinct identity. Tokyo, Mumbai, Cairo, New York and Antwerp never try to resemble one another. And then, almost without noticing, the eye begins to make connections. A flash of red reappears, one yellow car answers another, a shaft of light seems to travel from one photograph to the next. Little by little, the images begin to form a territory of their own, where geography gives way to visual echoes and borders quietly fade into the background. Curated by Géraldine Lay, the exhibition unfolds with remarkable elegance, allowing each photograph to hand the story gently to the next.

Curator: **Géraldine Lay**

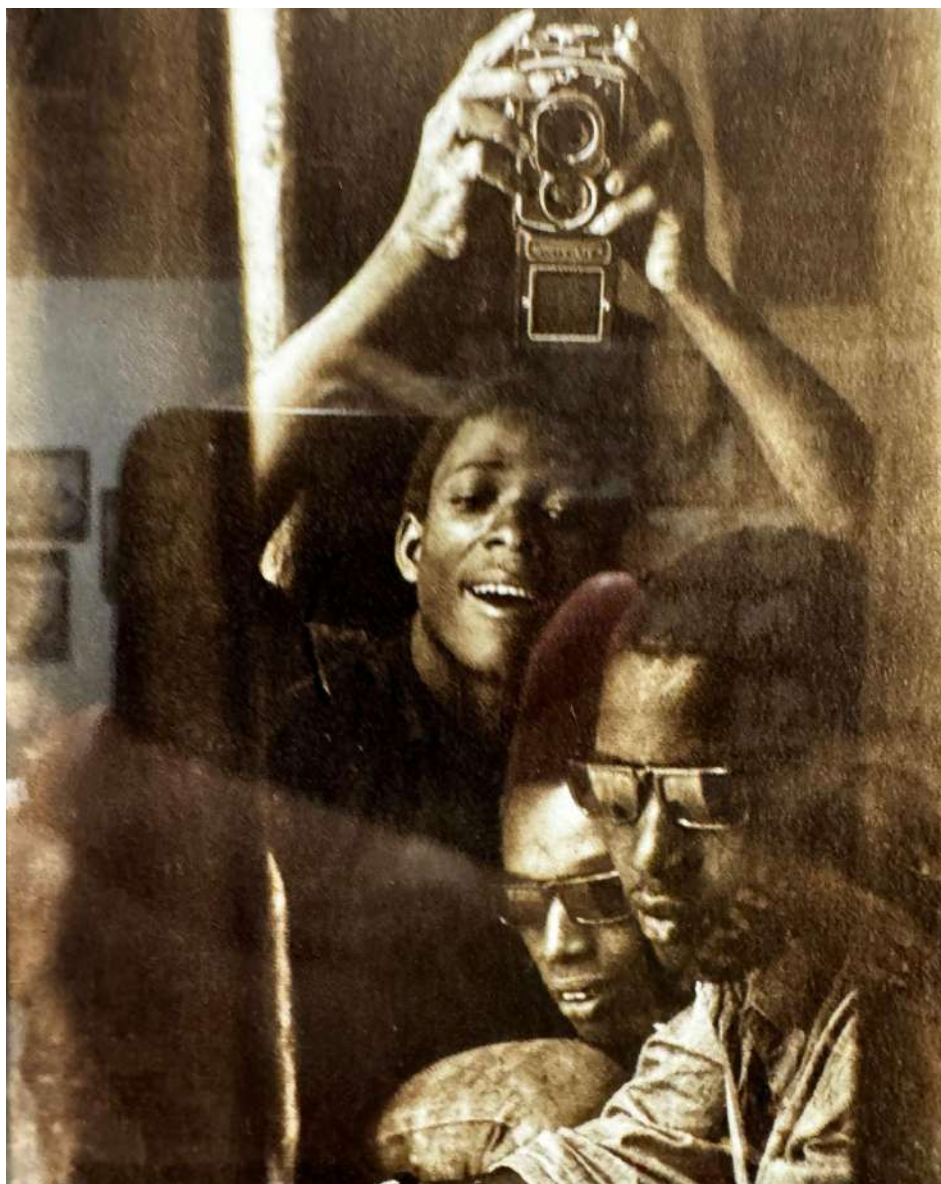
Venue: **Chapelle Saint-Martin du Méjan**
Place Jean-Baptiste-Massillon

Paul Kodjo

Photoromance

The photoromance tells far more than a love story. Week after week, readers of Ivoire Dimanche waited for the next chapter in the stories imagined by Paul Kodjo. Through these hugely popular serials, a Côte d'Ivoire in the midst of profound change gradually comes into view, where cinema, photography, fashion and new ways of living all contribute to shaping a shared cultural imagination. The images first circulated in the pages of a newspaper before finding their way, fifty years later, into a museum. Curated by Amandine Nana, this first major exhibition in France is a reminder that photographs can change status over time while never losing the power they held from the very beginning.

Curator: **Amandine Nana**



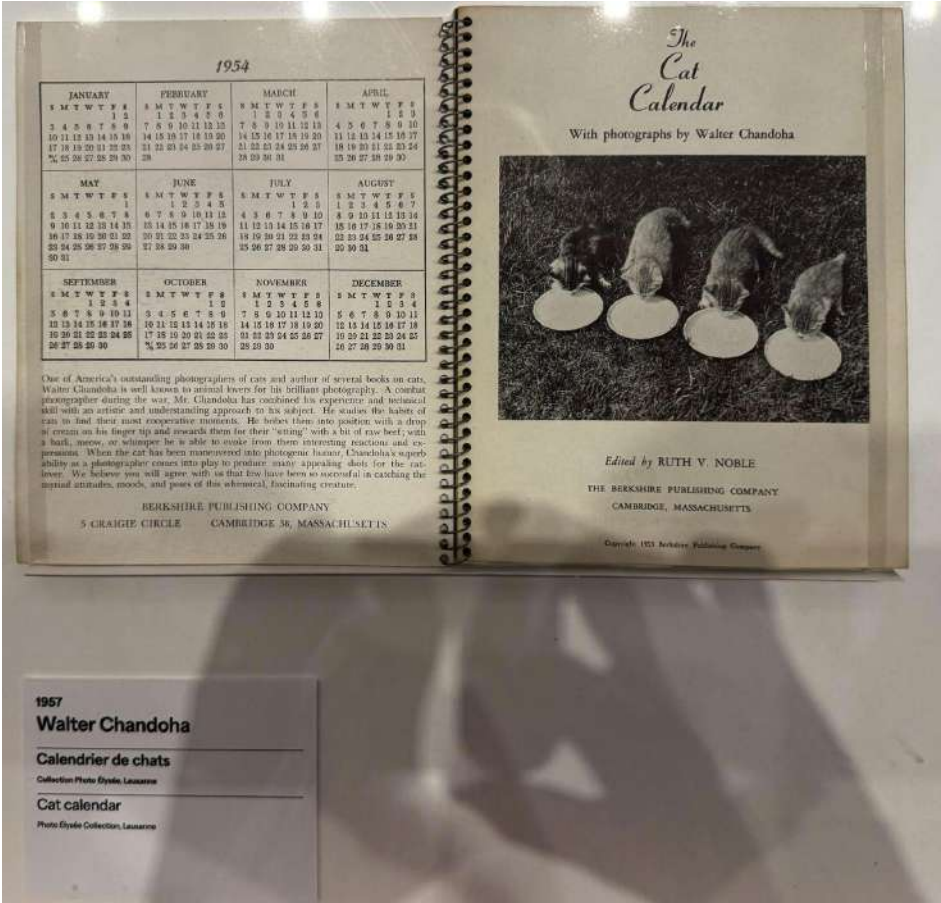
Paul Kodjo, Untitled, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, 1962. Holding a Rolleiflex, the photographer captures in the mirror a shared moment between his brother and a close friend. Vintage print. Kodjo Family Archives.

Venue: **La Croisière**

65 boulevard Émile-Combes, 13200 Arles

Animal Model

200 Years of Photography



We tend to think we know animals because we have been photographing them for almost as long as photography has existed. This exhibition tells a different story. Across two centuries of images, the reasons for photographing animals have continually shifted: scientific observation gradually replaces curiosity, the specimen gives way to the family portrait, advertising meets the growing concern for the living world. The animals themselves remain unchanged; it is the way we look at them, and the uses we make of their images, that keep evolving. That is what makes this exhibition so compelling, revealing as much about our relationship with photography as about our relationship with the living world.

Curator: **Nathalie Herschdorfer**

Venue: **LUMA Arles**
33 avenue Victor-Hugo, 13200 Arles

Camille Henrot

In the Veins

Animals occupy an immense place in childhood. They fill books, toys, songs and the first words we learn. Then, almost without us noticing, they gradually disappear from our daily lives. Camille Henrot begins with this simple observation. Her film speaks as much about children as it does about the stories, images and gestures we choose to pass on to them. A work of great delicacy, reminding us that every generation also inherits an imaginary world.

Curator: **Vassilis Oikonomopoulos**



Camille Henrot, In the Veins, 2026–2027, The Tower, Glassroom, LUMA Arles, France. Courtesy of Victor & Simon / Grégoire d'Ablon.

Venue: **LUMA Arles – La Tour, Glassroom (-2)**
33 avenue Victor-Hugo, 13200 Arles

Katia Kameli

The Algerian Novel



Katia Kameli, Still from The Algerian Novel (A New Chapter), Noweir Sawsan, 2025, video. Courtesy of the artist and ADAGP, Paris.

A nation also tells its story through the images it preserves, the ones it forgets and those it chooses to bring back into view. For almost a decade, Katia Kameli has been patiently composing a narrative in which films, archives, artworks and personal testimonies circulate freely, allowing one another to resonate. Nothing is fixed. Images respond to one another, complement one another and, at times, contradict one another. History gradually moves away from the idea of a single, authoritative narrative and becomes an open conversation, where every voice has a place.

Curator: **Clément Dirié**

Venue: **Église Saint-Blaise**
33 rue Vauban, 13200 Arles

Thato Toeba

Anyone Can Be Lucifer

An archive tells us as much about where it is kept as about what it contains. Thato Toeba begins with photographs from South Africa that have long been preserved far from the histories they belong to, then cuts them apart, reassembles them and places them on discarded iPhone boxes. The gesture is deceptively simple: fragments of colonial memory encounter one of the most ordinary objects of contemporary consumer culture. The support becomes as significant as the image itself. Designed to package, protect and sell a product, these boxes now carry histories that have long been classified, displaced or told by others. In reclaiming both the images and the objects through which they circulate today, Thato Toeba quietly reminds us that the way images travel is also part of what they mean.

Produced by: Les Rencontres d'Arles, with the support of the Mondriaan Fund.



Thato Toeba, Civilians I, 2025, collage, glass and wood. Courtesy of the artist and Stevenson, Cape Town / Amsterdam. Photo: Mario Todeschini.

Venue: **Salle Henri Comte**
28 rue de l'Hôtel-de-Ville, 13200 Arles

Ayana V. Jackson

The Good News Is Not Proclaimed from the Mountaintops but in Clearings



Ayana V. Jackson, To Be Black and Female in the Spanish Southwest, in the Style of Selika Lazevski, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and Mariane Ibrahim.

History tends to remember those who prevailed. Far less often does it remember the women who worked, passed on knowledge, raised children, cultivated the land or simply held communities together. Ayana V. Jackson turns her attention to these quiet presences. By embodying forgotten historical figures herself, she restores visibility to women whom the archives have either overlooked or confined to limiting representations. Her photographs remind us that an image never tells the story of a single individual alone. It also reveals the place an era chooses to grant that person. Perhaps that is what makes this exhibition feel so profoundly contemporary: it invites us to question not only the way we look at the past, but also the images we create today to tell the story of our own societies.

Curator: **Marisol Rodríguez**

Venue: **Abbaye de Montmajour**
Route de Fontvieille, 13200 Arles

Rebekka Deubner

La Terre amoureuse (said of soil that sticks to the boots)

The defining issues of our time often give rise to spectacular images. Rebekka Deubner chooses the opposite approach. For nearly three years, she returned, season after season, to the people who live and work this land, sharing their days, their gestures, their concerns and their harvests. Water runs through the entire body of work, yet it is never its only subject.

What resonates most is the time devoted to building relationships. The photographs seem to arrive only once trust is already there. They remind us that some stories require months, sometimes years, before they can truly be told. At a time when everything seems to move faster and faster, that slowness becomes, in itself, a quiet form of resistance.

Curator: Julie Héraut



Rebekka Deubner, Market Gardener's and Protester's Hands at Sainte-Soline 2 During Sowing, 2023, from the series The Loving Earth (said of earth that clings to boots), 2023–2026.

Venue: **Croisière**
65 boulevard Émile-Combes, 13200 Arles

We are not alone.

Alien Images.

2025 Curatorial Research Grant Winner



Eduard Albert "Billy" Meier, Third Photograph from a Series of Eight Images Depicting a "Pleiadian Craft," Ober-Sädelegg, Switzerland, March 8, 1975. Courtesy of the artist and FIGU.

This exhibition begins with extraterrestrials and gradually becomes a history of photography itself. Long before artificial intelligence, a speck of dust on a negative, a chemical flaw or a simple reflection could already give rise to belief. Photography played a central role in shaping the global imagination surrounding flying saucers, lending the appearance of evidence to what was often little more than interpretation.

Above all, the exhibition reminds us that photographs have never simply recorded the world. They create narratives, sustain beliefs and shape the way we perceive reality. The technology behind images continues to evolve. Their power, however, remains remarkably unchanged.

Curator : **Philippe Baudouin**

Venue: **Croisière**
65 boulevard Émile-Combes, 13200 Arles

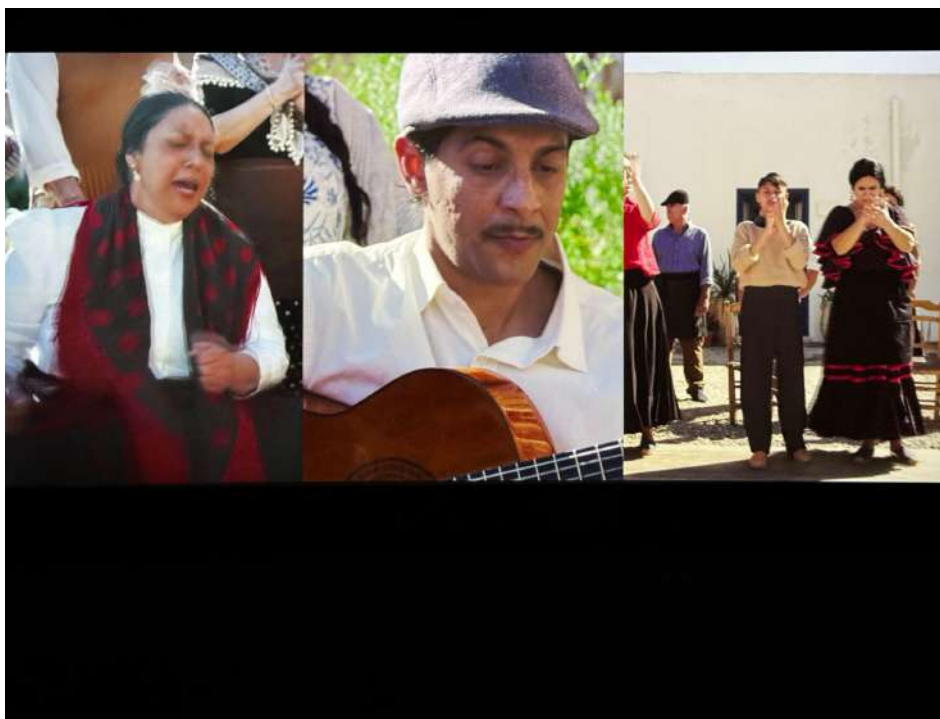
Stan Douglas

Bodies Never Lie

For *Bodies Never Lie*, LUMA Arles commissioned Stan Douglas to create a new work, *Exquisite Corpse*. Inspired by the Surrealist game of the same name, the installation brings together, across three screens, flamenco performances filmed in different locations throughout Andalusia. Bodies, voices and rhythms appear to answer one another, although they have never shared the same place or the same moment. Editing becomes the space where they meet.

Flamenco plays a central role here. Under Franco's regime, this popular tradition was appropriated and transformed into a symbol of national identity. Stan Douglas restores its plurality. Each singer, musician and dancer brings a story of their own, without any one voice taking precedence over another. The work reminds us that culture is always a collective construction, shaped through transmission, encounters and countless interpretations.

Production: **LUMA Foundation**



Venue: **LUMA Arles**

33 avenue Victor-Hugo, 13200 Arles

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