



# Snapshots of American life

FotoFest 2010 Biennial features contemporary U.S. photography

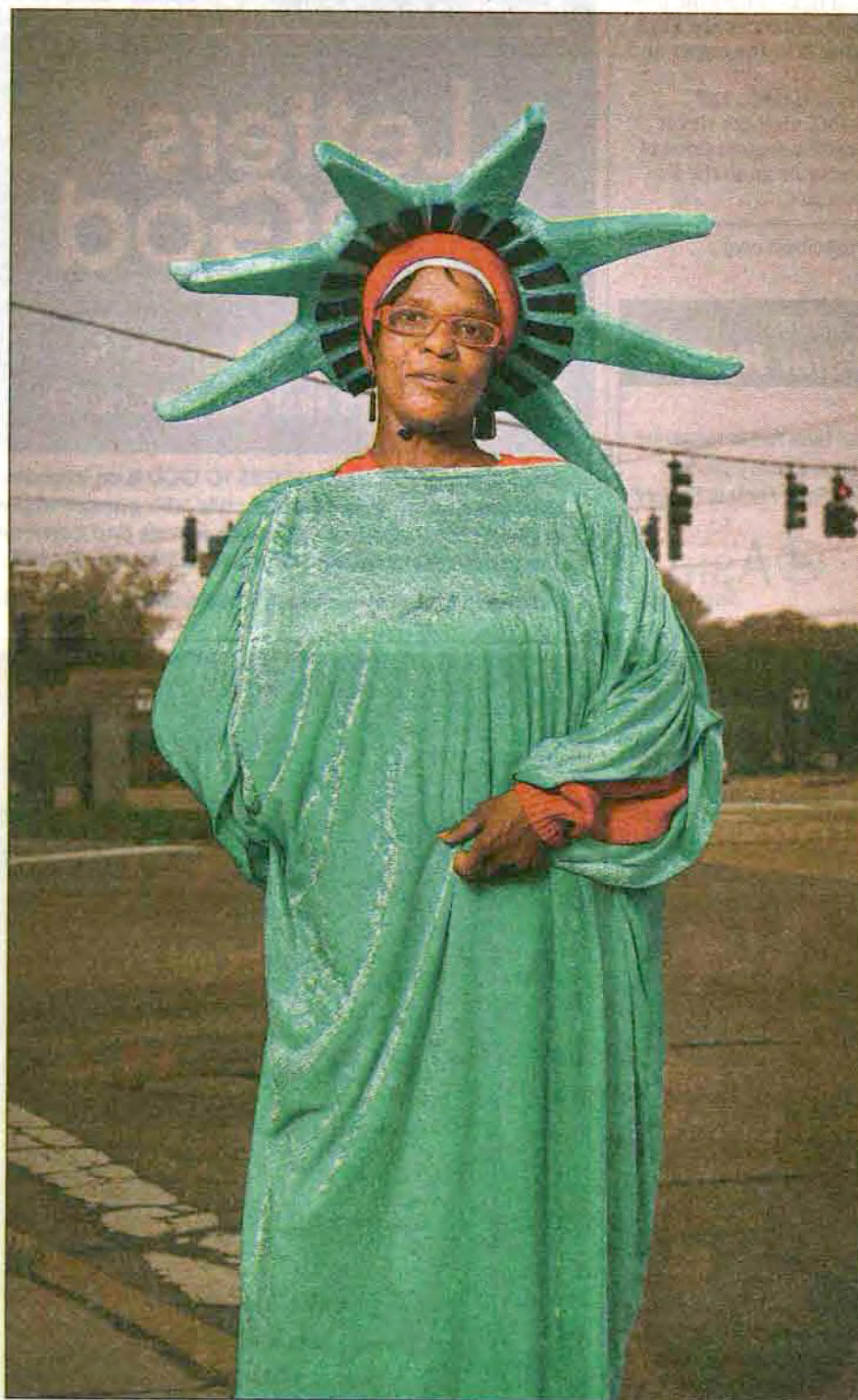
**I**T'S almost March in an even-numbered year, which means Houston art spaces are about to be flooded with thousands of photographs, along with nearly that many chances to discuss them in depth.

It's time to start planning how to tackle the FotoFest 2010 Biennial, the country's largest photography and photo-related extravaganza. With five official exhibitions and 82 affiliated shows in the works, here's a guide to the highlights.

## U.S. photography

For the biennial's 13th installment, organizers of the principal exhibits are doing something new: focusing on contemporary U.S. photography. Although that decision was made before the 2008 elections, it was partially influenced by the global atten-

By Douglas Britt | ARTS WRITER



ALICE CHATMAN: Greta Pratt, 2009, from the FotoFest 2010 Biennial exhibition Road to Nowhere?

COURTESY PHOTO

tion on Barack Obama's candidacy, said Wendy Watriss, FotoFest's cofounder and artistic director.

"I thought the phenomenon of the campaign itself was something that was important internationally," Watriss said. "I thought that whoever won, in the end, it was going to awaken a new interest in: 'Well, what is this country, the United States?'"

The point wasn't so much to show "pictures of the United States" as "to reflect certain kinds of points of view that emanate from being in this country ... over the past 10 years," she said.

To that end, Watriss tapped curators who reflected a mix of interests and geographical perspectives. They came up with four themed exhibitions:

■ **Whatever Was Splendid: New American Photographs** explores the influence of Walker Evans, a towering figure in U.S. photography. The exhibit was curated by Aaron Schuman, founder of SeeSaw online magazine.

■ **Assembly: Eight Emerging Photographers From Southern California** draws on the legacy of conceptual art since the early 1960s as seen through the lens of Southern California art school graduates. It was curated by a team from the Wallis Annenberg Photography Department at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

■ **The Road to Nowhere?** addresses the country's transition from Cold War superpower to an economically vulnerable, militarily strained nation. The show was curated by Natasha Egan, associate director and curator of the Museum of Contemporary Photography at Columbia College in Chicago.

■ **Mediation: Performing for the Screen** examines how social media such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are shaping how artists work today. Unlike the other principal exhibits, *Mediation* is spread over three venues: Art League Houston, Isabella Court and New World Museum. It was organized by Gilbert Vicario, a former Museum of Fine Arts, Houston assistant curator who's now at the Des Moines Art Center in Iowa.

## Other programming

The world's largest portfolio review, the Meeting Place, lasts 16 days and brings together 500 artists from around the world and more than 150 curators, editors, publishers, gallerists, collectors and photo agencies. While most of the review is open only to participants, the



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**THE FORUM, PHILADELPHIA:** Will Steacy, 2008, from the FotoFest 2010 Biennial exhibition *Whatever Was Splendid*

public gets a look during four open-portfolio nights called *Evenings With the Artists*. Four biennial curators will also discuss their roles in deciding what art the public sees in museums and other art spaces as part of those events.

The biennial's fifth FotoFest-sponsored exhibit — and the only nonthematic one — is the eighth edition of *Discoveries of the Meeting Place*. It will highlight some of the best artists who participated in the 2008 portfolio review.

FotoFest is collaborating with Architecture Center Houston to present *U.S. Vernacular and Chinese Modernism*. The exhibit pairs images of modern urban architecture by King Danwen — one of the most intriguing artists from FotoFest 2008, which focused on China — with Jim Vecchi's photos of a small New

Jersey town's mid-20th-century architectural and community spaces.

#### Affiliated exhibits

Among the dozens of photo-related shows mounted in association with the biennial, move *Ruptures and Continuities: Photography Made After 1960* From the MFAH Collection to the top of your list. Already on view and continuing through May 9, it showcases the range and depth of the museum's holdings to dazzling effect. Because the MFAH does not yet have permanent gallery space for its extraordinary photography collection, the show marks both a rare chance to see work that's normally in storage and an incentive for donors to write another check in support of a third building.

Watriss said she also looks forward to seeing *Related*, a

group of photos by Cuban-American artist Anthony Goicolea at the Houston Center for Photography; Houston artists Dan Havel and Chuck Ivy's *Dirty Secrets From the Cataract Cinema* at the Lawndale Art Center; *Zoosphere*, an immersive video installation by Houston artist Allison Hunter at DiverseWorks; Luis Mallo's Sicardi Gallery show; and *Labyrinth of Desire*, a mid-career survey of Toronto-based Frank Rodick's work organized by New Mexico Museum of Art photography curator Katherine Ware at Colton & Farb Gallery.

A full list of participating spaces is online at [www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org).

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## FOTOFEST 2010 — MARCH 12-APRIL 25

FotoFest spans many venues throughout the city. Here are the official exhibits and key events. Visit [www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org) for the full lineup.

■ **FotoFest Headquarters:** *Whatever Was Splendid*, biennial opening party 8 p.m.-midnight March 12 at 1113 Vine; 713-223-5522 or [www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org)

■ **Architecture Center Houston:** *U.S. Vernacular and Chinese Modernism*, reception 5:30-7:30 p.m. March 15 at 315 Capitol, Suite 120; 713-520-0155

■ **Williams Tower Gallery:** *Assembly: Eight Emerging Photographers From Southern California*, reception 6-8 p.m. March 17 at 2800 Post Oak; 713-553-5060

■ **Doubletree Hotel Houston Downtown:** FotoFest 2010 Fine Print Auction, preview exhibition 11 a.m.-5 p.m. March 22-23 at 400 Dallas; 713-759-0202

■ **Winter Street Studios:** *The Road to Nowhere?*, reception 6-8 p.m. March 25 at 2101 Winter; 713-223-5522

■ **Allen Center One and Two:** *Discoveries of the Meeting Place*, reception 6-8 p.m. March 27 at 500 Dallas; 713-223-5522

■ **Art League Houston:** *Mediation: Performing for the Screen*, reception 6-8 p.m.

March 29 at 1953 Montrose; 713-523-9350

■ **Isabella Court:** *Mediation: Performing for the Screen*, reception 6:30-8:30 p.m. March 29 at 3917 Main; 713-223-5522

■ **New World Museum:** *Mediation: Performing for the Screen*, reception 8-10 p.m.

March 29 at 230 Center; 713-426-4544

### Curatorial dialogues

Looking at the Contemporary Curatorial Process will be held at 5:30-6:30 p.m. on the following dates:

■ **March 14:** Aaron Schuman with Madeline Yale

■ **March 16:** Edward Robinson with Anne Wilkes Tucker

■ **March 26:** Natasha Egan with Clint Willour

■ **March 31:** Gilbert Vicario with Fernando Castro

■ **Open portfolio review:** *Evening With the Artists* featuring Meeting Place participants follows each curatorial dialogue from 7-9 p.m.

■ **Where:** Doubletree Hotel Houston Downtown, 400 Dallas; 713-759-0202

### Other events

■ **Photo Trek:** March 12-March 30 at various locations. Call 713-223-5522 for details.

■ **Film programs:** Screenings April 9-18 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston include *Visual Acoustics: The Modernism of Jules Schuman*; *An American Journey*; *Fire in the East: A Portrait of Robert Frank*; *FotoFest/Southwest Alternate Media Project — Short Films*; and *The American Dream 2010: Visions of 21st-Century Life in the Americas From North to South*. Call 713-639-7300 or visit [www.mfah.org/film](http://www.mfah.org/film) or for information.

■ **Bike Scramble:** Tours to visit FotoFest and participating galleries, 9 a.m.-8 p.m. April 10 and April 17. Call 713-223-5522 or visit [www.fotofest.org](http://www.fotofest.org) for reservations.

■ **FotoFest at Discovery Green:** 6-9 p.m. April 17, Discovery Green Park, 1500 McKinney or 713-223-5522

