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## In San Antonio, When September is Fotoseptiembre

Posted on September 2nd, 2012

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Aptly named, [Fotoseptiembre](http://fotoseptiembreusa.com/gallery/2012-safoto-web-galleries/) is a month-long international celebration of photography. Since its genesis in 1995, the festival has grown to include international sites, and photographers of every kind. From the most experimental and renowned to those using the camera to elicit beauty that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Like most festivals, Fotoseptiembre feels different in different venues. It's possible to hit all the right galleries and feel as though the entire city has been swept up into the photographers' magical frames. It's also possible to visit a different collection and feel a lack of enthusiasm. The quality of the art itself also varies from venue to venue. Sometimes qualifying as "fine art" and other times serving to make a statement connecting community, place, and vision.

In any case, each venue has something unique to offer. Knowing what to expect is key to enjoyment. Here are a few glimpses into the variety of experiences available around town this month.

*(Note: Many exhibits were not yet installed at the time this piece was written. September is 30 days long, and new exhibits open all month long. If people have insights into other openings and galleries not covered in this piece, it would be great if you could mention them in the Comments.)*

**"Mixed Metaphors" at Instituto Cultural de Mexico** (<http://portal.sre.gob.mx/culturamexsa/>) – In the most impressive exhibit and the nexus of this year's Fotoseptiembre, seven photographers from around the world take the viewer on a journey from the haunting to the bizarre to the amusing.

**Shen Chao-Liang** (<http://www.shenchao-liang.com/english/C-INDEX.html>)'s color-reversal film technology in the twelve-photo series "Stages," draws the viewer into the garish, ultrapop world of Taiwanese mobile



<http://www.therivardreport.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Lori-Nix-Church.jpg>

Church, Lori Nix

Most arresting to me was **Lori Nix** (<http://www.lorinix.net>)'s "The City." Her dark, post-apocalyptic scenes are actually miniaturized dioramas photographed to create a devastating and yet satirical portrait of abandoned human civilization with both entropy and industry wreaking havoc within the frame.

When we think of photography, we often think of literalism, or documentation. But fantasy plays a large role in the show, nevermore than in "13 Queens" by **Alex and Felix**, in which thirteen different models are outfitted with themed objects, painted to look alien, and photographed to look imposing. The strangeness of the subject matter would be hard to enjoy if each photo were not so painstakingly balanced and composed. That kind of artistic professionalism does not go unappreciated when being glowered upon by thirteen larger-than-life models wearing only paint and knick-knacks as clothing.

If Alex and Felix dwell in the realm of pure fantasy, then **Christian Lichtenberg** (<http://voltashow.com/Christian-Lichtenberg.6996.0.html>) and **Gabriel Figueroa Flores** (<http://fotoseptiembreusa.com/fotoseptiembre/2012-exhibitions-events-calendar/gabriel-figueroa-flores/>) find a middle ground between what is, what was, and what we wish there would be. Lichtenberg's "Commedia Dell'Arte" is a dramatic interpretation of real places. Flores' "Lugares Prometidos" is the opposite, a documentarian approach to imaginary places. His style is so earnest and direct I found myself feeling as though I had surely seen these imagined places, even though they contained only composite elements of things I'd seen before...maybe.

**Ursula Sprecher** (<http://www.ursulasprecher.ch>) and **Julian Salinas** (<http://www.juliansalinas.ch>)' contribution, "Heimatland," is the only series celebrating the sort of realism I had expected. Their work celebrates simplicity of life in Switzerland, their home. It's a lighthearted look at the constancy of a place that often lives larger in our own fantasies than in the Tati-esque frankness they present.

Exhibit open Tue-Fri, 10am-6pm; Sat 11am-6pm; Sun, 11am-5pm. Thru Oct 24, 2012. Free admission.

"**Intimate Encounters**" at **San Antonio Museum of Art**—True to the name, viewers should plan to squirm a bit in this heady exhibit of **Adad Hannah** (<http://www.adadhannah.com>)'s work. Hannah is overt in the connection of his work to his influences, giving the entire piece an intellectual overtone, in spite of its sexual subject matter.

The elaborately staged opium den scene in Daydreams of a Drunken Scholar was actually constructed in the Contemporary Gallery at SAMA, using pieces and influences from the Walter F. Brown Asian Art Wing. The series, which includes a 7 minute video in which the actors are directed to keep perfectly still, plays on the ideas of communal intimacy while keeping to fairly PG-13 images. He cites the influence of Manet's *Luncheon on the Green*, and Gericault's *The Raft of the Medusa* on two of his more provocative photos.



<http://www.therivardreport.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Two-Body-Equilibrium-Video.jpg>

Two Body Equilibrium, Adad Hannah (still from video)

The other series, which also include videos of actors being asked to keep impossibly still, are more literal in their homage. "Blocking Adam and Eve" depicts a curatorial crank censoring the genitalia of Durer's *Adam and Eve*. "Eros and Aphrodite" turns a statue of the two Greek deities into an object of temptation, and in the four-photo series "Unwrapping Rodin" we watch a member of the *Burgers of Calais* disrobed before our eyes.

The exhibit is in the Focus Gallery (enter through the gift shop) until December 30. (Free with \$8 admission to SAMA during opening [hours](#))

"**Connecting Moments**" at **Southwest School of Art** (<http://www.swschool.org/>)—if Hannah's work was highly intellectual, **Peter French** (<http://www.flickr.com/people/pfrench99/>)'s exhibit at SSA's Ursuline Hall Gallery was even more emotive. A deep connection to place and people reaches out from the technically experimental photos to draw the viewer into the moments. "I take pictures every day, and I hate to edit, so I have this huge collection of moments, and places, and people," says French. His subject matter is rural and rooted in places like Quihi, Texas, which endear themselves to those who love them through moments like those captured by French.





(<http://www.therivardreport.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/childs-portrait-II.jpg>)

*child's portrait II*, Peter French

The exhibit is largely uncelebrated, lining the Ursuline Hall Gallery between the gift shop and the Copper Kitchen. But this suits the low-key photos which are nothing if not understated. (Free during opening **hours** (<http://www.swschool.org/visit/galleries/ursuline-hall-gallery/>)). French is one of at least two San Antonio photographers whose work has been showcased in slide show format on The Rivard Report.

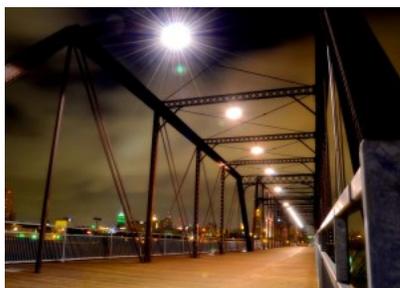
Another is **Scott Martin** (<http://www.on-sight.com/>), a digital photographer and teacher who specializes in painting the dark with light, and who was the subject a **profile** (<http://www.therivardreport.com/artist-scott-martin-when-others-are-sleeping-painting-the-darkness-with-light/>) published here in June. For Fotoseptiembre Martin partners with friend and fellow night photographer **Lance Keimig** (<http://www.lancekeimig.com/>), who lives and teaches in Boston. Martin and Keimig exhibition is titled, "It Might Have Been Midnight Since Last We Talked," which opens Sept. 7 at **Rendon Photography and Fine Art** (<http://www.alrendon.com/artgallery/fotoseptiembre2012.php>) in Southtown.

**"Somos San Antonio" at Villa Finale Visitor's Center** (<http://www.villafinale.org/Exhibits.html>)—this collection was amassed through a call for submissions wherein San Antonians were asked to submit photos of iconic West Side locales. My personal favorite were the artfully Photoshopped submissions of Ray Perez.

This exhibit is tucked into the back room of the Villa Finale Visitors Center, at the corner of Madison and Turner. It's unlikely that it will serve as the focal point of anyone's Fotoseptiembre tour, but for those who know of the event, if you happen to be in the area, it's worth popping in. (Exhibit runs through October 13, admission is free during opening **hours** (<http://www.villafinale.org/Home.html>)).

**"En La Luz" at King William Association Office** (<http://kingwilliamculturalartsdistrict.com/photographer-selected-for-fotoseptiembre-show/>)—the collection of **Albert Pedroza** (<http://www.stage32.com/profile/5865/albert-pedroza>) photos are representative of the efforts of KWA to promote the artistic community of Southtown. While the exhibit is not technically open to the public until Thursday, Sherry Hess and Susan Athené were kind enough to give us a sneak peek. The photos play with light and long exposures to display San Antonio in the magic of city nighttime.

The King William Association's dedication to the artistic community of Southtown does not end with Fotoseptiembre. They continuously display works by Southtown artists, and encourage interested persons to submit works to be part of the two-month rotations.



(<http://www.therivardreport.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Albert-Pedroza.jpg>)

from "En La Luz", Albert Pedroza

En La Luz will open on Thursday, September 6 and run through the end of October. It is free to the public and open during KWA business hours.

I for one, definitely plan to visit more galleries as they open throughout the month. More exhibits at Southwest School of Art and Blue Star promise a challenging look at realities of border life in San Antonio and beyond. The goals of participating venues are varied and exciting. Everything an art festival should be.

*Bekah McNeel is a native San Antonian. She went away to Los Angeles for undergrad before earning her MSc in Media and Communication from the London School of Economics. She made it back home and now works for **Ker and Downey** (<http://www.kerdowney.com/>), as an International Travel Consultant. She is one of the founding members of **Read the Change** (<http://www.readthechange.org/>), a web-based philanthropy.*

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