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## 2020 Photo Fest Smaller, Mostly Virtual but Exhibits Stronger

🕒 September 3, 2020 | 📁 News and Commentary

By JASMINA WELLINGHOFF, Editor —

September has been Fotoseptiembre USA month in San Antonio since 1995, a month devoted to photography-based art, with dozens of exhibits held at multiple San Antonio and Hill Country venues.

But this year things will be different. Like with everything else, the current pandemic has had an impact. The month-long festival will be smaller, mostly presented on virtual platforms, and mostly featuring South Texas artists.

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“Overall, however, the work is a lot stronger than last year,” said co-founder/organizer Michael Mehl, himself a photographic artist and a composer.

Like every year, Mehl has curated the shows presented in **SAFOTO Web Galleries**, which this year feature the work of John Mattson and Karen Zimmerly, two artists who happen to be married to each other. Titled *Street Shots – Walking San Antonio*, both exhibits consist of photos taken during the artists’ walks through various neighborhoods. Though their aesthetics are somewhat different, each captured picturesque oddities, humble but colorful structures, quirky juxtapositions of visual elements, some silly stuff and some sad realities of urban decay as seen through an artist’s lens. “I see photography as an exercise in looking really hard to discover unexpected images just below the surface, in plain sight,” Mattson noted in his artist’s statement.

The two approached Mehl when it became clear that their scheduled exhibit at St. Mary’s University was not going to happen due to COVID-19 safety precautions. So, they asked Mehl if he would feature their work online.

“I’ll do better than that. I would like to curate two monographs, one for each of you for the SAFOTO Web Galleries,” Mehl told them.

“What I like about their work is their consistent, cohesive approach to photography and their disciplined way of working,” explained Mehl. “One of the things you realize after organizing a festival like this for 26 years is that there’s no such thing as “the best work in the world.” So, what I learned to value and appreciate over the years is someone’s consistency and continuity of work.”

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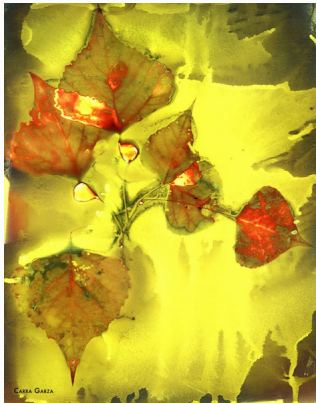
Several other exhibits will also be presented only online, including a group show by the **New Braunfels Photographic Society**, which can be viewed on the society's Facebook page, and another group show at the Witte Museum featuring the winners of the **San Antonio River Authority 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual River Clicks Photo Contest**.



Michael Kruscha: Al Mazraa, Jordan

But a few brave galleries have actually installed 3-D exhibits in real physical spaces. At the **Musical Bridges Around the World Gallery** (23705 IH-10 Frontage Rd, Suite 101, 78257) you can see the work of two Berlin-based artists: Michael Kruscha and Michael Matthews. The show opens Sept. 4 and it will remain on view through Nov.13.

An abstract painter as well as a photographer, Kruscha is also described as a world traveler who takes pictures of bus stops in remote places of the globe "in which the notion of public transportation seems almost ironic," says the press release. The images show a range of structures, from the highly ornate to minimally functional ones. If we understand correctly, these images indirectly speak of the culture and life in these far-away lands. Kruscha's Canadian-born colleague, on the other hand, creates abstract images that in some way echo his musical compositions. In fact, he named his visual images *Partituren*, which means musical scores in German. (The show can be viewed in-person by appointment. For details go to [www.musicalbridges.org](http://www.musicalbridges.org))



Another 3-D show, *Curious Cuttings and Rebellious Rhizomes*, will be opening at the **Studio Comfort Texas** (716 High Street, Comfort, TX 78013) on Sept. 20. Two women artists, Carra Garza and Tracy Lynch, will show their stunning plant-inspired art. (For details visit [www.studiocomforttexas.com](http://www.studiocomforttexas.com))

And **Mockingbird Handprints**, in the Blue Star complex, will present Austin artist Ed Malcik's *The Trouble with Dave – New York Photos*, Sept. 3-30. [www.mockingbirdhandprints.com](http://www.mockingbirdhandprints.com)

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Micheal Mehl: from Butoh Katachi Series 1

But one of the most striking group of images comes from the fest's founder himself. Titled *Butoh Katachi Series 1*, Mehl's images of dancers with multiple arms and legs practically vibrate against the dark background, grabbing you and pulling you into their orbits. The work was inspired by *butoh*, a Japanese theatrical dance originally developed by choreographers Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno in response to the horrors of WWII, explained Mehl.

According to Vincent Truter, who studied the art form, *butoh* often evokes images of decay, fear and desperation, as well as images of ecstasy and stillness." Mehl captured it all in his photos using a single model and creative digital manipulation.

To see the entire 2020 Fotoseptiembre calendar go to [www.fotoseptiembreusa.com](http://www.fotoseptiembreusa.com)

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