



Press file

NICOLAS BOUVIER

Musée d'art
contemporain
Montélimar

TRAVELS IN
THE FAR EAST

12 May → 31 Oct. 2026

Montélimar
Agglomération
RHÔNE & PROVENCE

BIBLIOTHÈQUE
DE GENÈVE

PRÉSENCE(S)
PHOTOGRAPHIE

FREE ADMISSION

**NICOLAS
BOUVIER**

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THE FAR EAST**

**Musée d'art
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Montélimar**

12 May

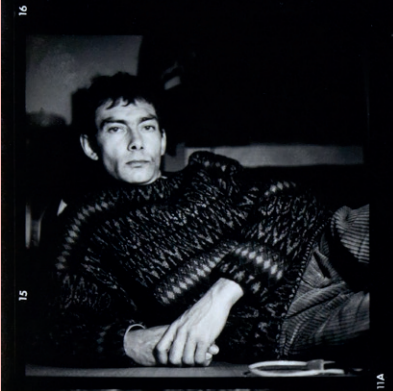
> 31 October 2026



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From 12 May to 31 October 2026, the Montélimar metro area authority is once again hosting a significant photography event, with a first-time exhibition of pictures by the Swiss writer and traveller Nicolas Bouvier.



NICOLAS BOUVIER

TRAVELS IN THE FAR EAST

Two major recent exhibitions of photography held at the Musée d'art contemporain (MAC) have helped to put Montélimar and its metro area on the map of leading French cultural destinations in the field of imagery:

• **June 2024 - January 2025:**

***Play, play, play*, retrospective on William Klein, 21,653 admissions.**

• **May - August 2025:**

***Genesis* by Sebastião Salgado, 28,662 admissions.**

In 2026, following on from these big successes, Montélimar-Agglomération is showing a first-time retrospective at the MAC devoted to the Swiss writer and traveller Nicolas Bouvier (1929-1998). The author of books that have become lodestars for generations of adventurers across the globe, primarily his masterpiece *The Way of the World* (1963) and *The Scorpion-Fish* (1982), Bouvier was curious about images; he worked as a picture editor, and also as a photographer. The upcoming exhibition, running from 12 May to 31 October 2026, will reveal this little-known aspect of his oeuvre, two years before the centenary of his birth and the bicentenary of the invention of photography.



This latest international-class event will seal Montélimar's reputation as a *territoire de l'image* – a land of imagery.

Nicolas Bouvier's photographs, mostly taken during his stays in Japan between 1955 and 1970, are associated in this exhibition with shots by leading photographers. This immersive show features more than 130 pictures – rare gelatin-silver originals and colour prints – on a trail interspersed with Bouvier's writings.

Photography in photojournalism

Nicolas Bouvier (1929–1998), a seminal writer of travel literature, used photography as a visual notebook from his very earliest journeys. But in 1955, he refined his approach upon discovering Japan. In Tokyo, Bouvier struck up a friendship with a barman – a former photographer – who introduced him to the technique of developing his films in the bar’s cocktail shakers. Bouvier’s Japan pictures were noticeably more accomplished, with a greater mastery of light. For the writer, photography became an extra way of making a living in Japan; and it opened the doors of realms that were closed to foreign visitors, such as butoh theatre and sumo wrestling. His attentiveness to others is palpable in a humanist gaze that was specific to that period.

Images through words

For the first time, this exhibition unveils roughly a hundred period prints from a private collection. Texts by Nicolas Bouvier are the thread running through the exhibition, which is divided into eight chapters. The central corridor of the MAC will symbolise visitors’ journey through Bouvier’s literary output. The exhibition design, in which paper and Japanesque materials are prominent, beckons visitors into an experience that plays with revelation and with immersion in Bouvier’s writing.

Visions of Japan

After an introduction to the initiatory journey recounted in *The Way of the World*, the exhibition presents the body of Nicolas Bouvier’s pictures from his three Japanese sojourns (1955–1956, 1964–1966, and 1970).

Spanning the traditional and modern Japans that Bouvier observed, and including an analysis of his theatrical approach to photography, the exhibition also examines how Japan was perceived and photographed during that period. A dialogue is fostered between Bouvier’s pictures and those of other photographers who depicted the archipelago around the same time, such as Werner Bischof, William Klein and Henri Cartier-Bresson.

The exhibition ends with the discovery of his colour images and his work as a picture editor, and, echoing the French title of *The Way of the World*, asks “How can the world be used today?” and opens onto the work of contemporary artists such as Jeff Wall and Corinne Vionnet.

Sound is played in some exhibition rooms, as Nicolas Bouvier also recorded the music of the countries he visited. Also featured the *L’Oeuf d’Hijikata*, an animated film he co-directed in 1967, based on his Japanese photographs.





BIOGRAPHY

Nicolas Bouvier, a leading figure of 20th-century travel literature, was a Swiss writer, photographer and picture editor. He was born in Geneva on 6 March 1929 and died there on 17 February 1998.

At the age of 19, he was sent on a reporting assignment to Finland; and then, two years later, he crossed the Algerian Sahara, on commissions for two Geneva daily newspapers. In 1951, he went on a first extended journey from Venice to Istanbul. In June 1953, Bouvier and the painter Thierry Vernet set off in a Fiat Topolino from Belgrade for Kabul, travelling through Yugoslavia, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. This first foundational experience of being on the move is recounted in *The Way of the World*, a cult book translated into many languages.

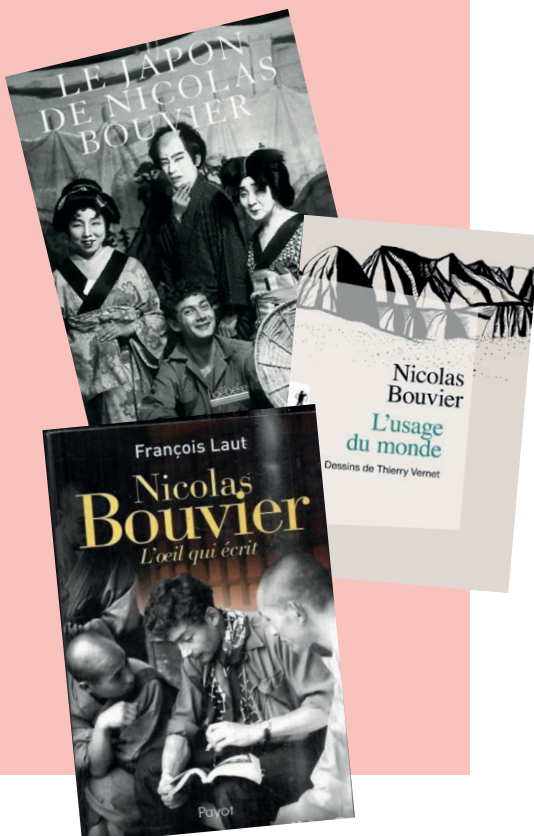
After 18 months of travelling in tandem, Bouvier continued alone through India to reach China. As the route was closed for political reasons, he headed instead for Ceylon to rejoin Vernet. He related this difficult stay in *The Scorpion-Fish*, published 25 years later and winner of the Swiss Prix des Critiques.

In October 1955, he left Ceylon for Japan, where he stayed for a year, writing articles for Japanese and Swiss newspapers and magazines. He returned to Marseille in late 1956. With his wife Éliane, he went back to live in Japan in 1964-1965. This experience yielded three (untranslated) books: *Japan* (1967), *Chronique japonaise* (1975) and a collection of poems and prose, *Le Dehors et le dedans* (1982).

In 1968, Nicolas Bouvier was the recipient of the Prix Rambert, the oldest literary award in French-speaking Switzerland. In 1970, he went to Osaka for the world expo and presented four books he had prepared for the occasion. He received another Swiss literary award, the Grand Prix C.F. Ramuz, for lifetime achievement in 1995. A picture editor with “perfect visual pitch” he was relentlessly interested in other people’s images, whether made by painters, engravers or photographers. The book *Du coin de l’oeil – Écrits sur la photographie* contains most of his writings on black-and-white photography.

Range of work

Nicolas Bouvier’s books are now considered to be masterpieces of travel writing. *The Way of the World*, self-published in 1963, helped redefine the genre in the 20th century, and is a source of inspiration for countless travellers and writers. Bouvier also experimented with other literary genres: the poetic narrative or the illustrated narrative, where text combines with images – the ink drawings of Thierry Vernet in *The Way of the World*, or his own photographs. For Bouvier the “writing eye”, text and images stemmed from travel and from the many sensations and observations served up by the wandering life.





PARTNERS, LENDERS AND CURATOR

Partners and lenders

Most of the period prints in this exhibition come from private collections, while the Photo Elysée museum in Lausanne, which holds the majority of Nicolas Bouvier's photo collection, has lent roughly 30 photographs for the show.

The exhibition has also been made possible by a partnership with the Bibliothèque de Genève: Geneva's public library holds most of Nicolas Bouvier's manuscripts as well as Thierry Vernet's ink drawings, and has granted access to its collection especially.

Lastly, thanks to Radio-Télévision Suisse Romande (RTS) visitors will be able to discover Nicolas Bouvier's worlds of sound and film.

Nicolas Crispini, curator of the exhibition

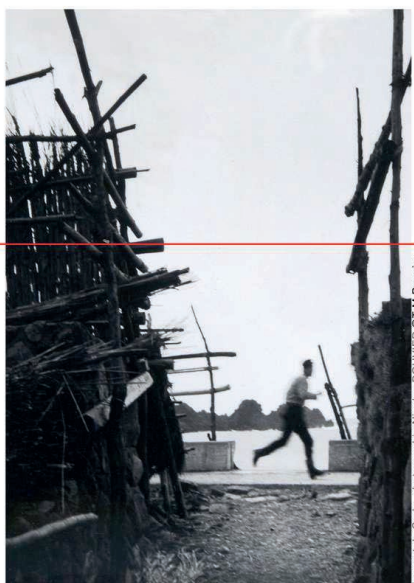
Nicolas Crispini is an exhibition curator, a photography historian and an exhibition designer who has worked for a range of public institutions in Suisse Romande for over 20 years. His publications include: *Glaciers. Passé et présent du Rhône au Mont-Blanc* (the recipient of four awards), *Les couleurs du paradis perdu* (about autochrome in the Alps) and *La Suisse Magazine*.

An editor, picture editor and graphic designer, he has produced roughly 50 publications for French and Swiss publishing houses. Also a photographer, he recently showed his work in *Apocalypse, Qu'avez-vous vu à Hiroshima ?* at the Musée International de la Réforme in Geneva; this exhibition, on the trail of the atomic bomb, met with great success.

His studio was adjacent to that of Nicolas Bouvier, with whom he bonded; they had plans to make a book together about *Les bouts du monde* ('the edges of the world') which was unfinished when Bouvier died.



PRÉSENCE(S) PHOTOGRAPHIE



Le port de Sado, photographie Nicolas BOUVIER © T.H. Bouvier

The MAC, partner of the PRÉSENCE(S) PHOTOGRAPHIE festival

This exhibition is being held in conjunction with the Montélimar metro area festival *Présence(s) Photographie*, and resonates particularly strongly with the festival's 13th edition this year.

Subtitled **"PRÉSENCE(S) SUISSE AUTOUR DE NICOLAS BOUVIER"**, the theme running through the 2026 festival is **the question that rounds off the Nicolas Bouvier exhibition – "How can the world be used today?"** – which the festival put to 14 contemporary Swiss photographers.

Their replies, in the form of photos, will be on view from 23 May to 21 June 2026 in the streets of Montélimar, Le Teil and Viviers as well as in many villages along the River Rhône.

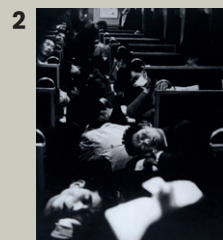
A different journey, but one that explores the same question.

ROYALTY-FREE, HIGH-RES IMAGES

Available by request (see contact details on p6 of this PDF). The captions provided below must appear with any publication of the associated photo(s). The photos must not be reframed or altered. They may be published royalty free in any publication relating to the exhibition.

Media captions, NICOLAS BOUVIER exhibition at the Musée d'art contemporain in Montélimar, France.

1. Nicolas Bouvier, Japan, Self-portrait and statues of Bodhisattva Jizo, Mount Koya, c.1956, detail of contact sheet – Private collection, Switzerland © Estate of Nicolas Bouvier
2. Nicolas Bouvier, Japan – Private collection
3. Nicolas Bouvier, Japan, The port of Sado island, 1964 – Private collection, Switzerland © Estate of Nicolas Bouvier
4. Nicolas Bouvier, Japan, 1964, Photo Elysée collection © Estate of Nicolas Bouvier
5. Nicolas Bouvier, Japan, Mirror, c.1964, colour photograph – Private collection, Switzerland © Estate of Nicolas Bouvier
6. Nicolas Bouvier, Japan, Festival in Kyoto, 1964 – Private collection, Switzerland © Estate of Nicolas Bouvier
7. Nicolas Bouvier, Japan, Kazuo Ono, one of the founders of butoh theatre, c.1964 – Private collection, Switzerland © Estate of Nicolas Bouvier



OTHER CULTURAL HIGHLIGHTS



Montélimar Agglomération Territoire de l'image



FESTIVAL PRÉSENCE(S) PHOTOGRAPHIE

MONTÉLIMAR-AGGLOMÉRATION
ARDÈCHE RHÔNE COIRON-VIVIERS
23 May - 21 June 2026

FESTIVAL DE L'ÉCRIT À L'ÉCRAN

CINÉMA FESTIVAL - MONTÉLIMAR
18- 24 September 2026

LES CAFÉS LITTÉRAIRES

31^E ÉDITION - LITTÉRATURE CONTEMPORAINE
MONTÉLIMAR - LE TEIL
PIERRELATTE - VIVIERS
8 - 11 October 2026

FESTIVAL DU CINÉMA ITALIEN

November 2026

Le Musée d'art contemporain de Montélimar



Museum photos: Jean Delmarty

Located at the northern gateway to Montélimar, on the road between Valence and Avignon, the Musée d'art contemporain opened in 2008. Owned by the Montélimar-Agglomération metro authority, it offers 750 sqm of exhibition space in the former Saint-Martin barracks, which were converted in 2003 as part of a new district hosting public services, restaurants, businesses, and more.

The MAC stages temporary exhibitions of artists who enjoy national and international renown. Since 2024, these have focused chiefly on photography, with exhibitions by two world-famous exponents: William Klein (2024) and Sebastião Salgado (2025).

Its permanent collections consist mainly of works gifted to the museum by a local artist and collector, Pierre Boncompain. This gift comprises paintings, pastel drawings and tapestries by the artist himself, as well as graphic works by Picasso, Chagall, Renoir, Bonnard and others.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Musée d'art contemporain de Montélimar

1 avenue Saint-Martin, 26200 Montélimar

FREE ADMISSION

Opening times

Outside of school holidays: Wednesday to Sunday, 1.30pm to 6pm
Saturday, 10am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 6pm
School holidays (zone A): Tuesday to Sunday,
10am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 6pm
July-August: every day, 10am to 6pm

For the general public: Guided tours, speed tours, sensory tours, family tour kits

For schools: guided tours, packages (guided tour + creative workshop) tailored to each level.

Coming to Montélimar

By car: ● A7 motorway, exit 17 (Montélimar Nord) or 18 (Montélimar Sud) • RN7 main road to the town centre ● Parking available in the Saint-Martin car park (under the MAC)

By train: the MAC is a 7 minute walk from Montélimar railway station): • TGV direct from Paris, gare de Lyon to Montélimar (3h) • TER direct from Lyon Part-Dieu to Montélimar (1h30) • TER direct from Marseille, Arles and Avignon (1h - 1h30 depending where you start)

By bicycle: the MAC is accessible from the ViaRhôna bike path

Staying in Montélimar

montelimar-tourisme.com

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