

The Festival Begins!

The thirty-eighth Visa pour l'Image festival is upon us: twenty-eight exhibitions, spanning life in wartime, career retrospectives, and undersea life. This *édition* is the first for this attendee, but he's reliably informed by festival veterans that there is a particularly large number of French and francophone photographers—but we are *en France*, after all. Much to see!

Losing a Legend

To quote the festival's executive director Delphine Lelu, Jean-François Leroy had the misfortune, or fortune, to 'take the same elevator' as the former French prime minister Édouard Balladur—tributes came in from far and wide, including the President of the Republic, who hailed the late director of the festival as a 'tireless defender of truth.' Delphine Lelu, in her heartfelt tribute to Jean-François Leroy at the evening's ceremony, said that he would have dismissed this praise as mere vanity, and then taken every opportunity to brag about it.

'Photographers are how I see the world.'

- Jean-François Leroy

Spotlight: Hervé Lequeux (1st Meet the Photographer Event)

Hervé Lequeux began his project on Guinean youth in the heart of Paris, where he saw these young men living in makeshift camps on the street. He then traced their journey backwards, across the Alps to Italy, where churches and NGOs provide shelter, then across the treacherous Mediterranean, where Guineans have to bring their own motor for the rickety boats they're smuggled across in, down to Tunisia, where the president scores points off anti-migrant rhetoric, then through the pitiless Sahara, back to their homeland of Guinea, where teenagers work at mines and can't hope to earn more than one Euro a day.

Still, when these men do make it, when they are recognised as genuine minors and gain access to education programs, even in the face of a nation

that recognises neither their historic duty to these former colonial subjects, nor the need for young workers in a rapidly aging society—then they often excel and find a place in French society. A success story looks like a young man who is taken on as an apprentice florist in Versailles.

Discussing the ongoing viability of photojournalism, Lequeux is quick to pay tribute both to Jean-François Leroy and to the festival for their support. But he is not optimistic about the state of contemporary media: the pictures in this exhibition were published piecemeal in a variety of different French publications—it's only here at Visa that audiences can appreciate the full scope of the journey that these youth embark on.

Arte Reportage—Gangs of Haiti

Yesterday also saw the screening of *Gangs of Haiti* by Gaël Turine, a first-person account of the horrors of Haiti today.

'C'est la vie,' says Balthazar. He's been told by the authorities to return home; his home has been completely destroyed; he tries to rebuild. Elsewhere in Haiti, a young man has joined the criminal gangs because they represent a safer future than his previous work as a bus driver. These gangs have more guns than the nation's military. A woman ducks gunfire as she crosses the street. Mothers walk through known 'kill zones,' because they have no other way to get their children to school. A young woman, who will not show her face to the camera, was taken at gunpoint and raped near her children. People walk through so much waste that there's barely an environment left to call polluted. A woman is forced into a police truck on suspicion of association with gangs, then summarily executed at the end of the street. 'C'est la vie.'

Campo Santo

The evening began with applause and emotional tributes to Jean-François Leroy, an image of his irreverent face gracing the Campo Santo screen. Then came the program, beginning, as per tradition, with the retrospective of news from the previous twelve months, including ICE raids, US aggression, and the deaths of beloved international figures. Plus ça change...

The audience was then treated to the usual high standard and wide variety

of presentations: generational revolution in Madagascar, drought in Somalia and Tunisia, eyesight restored in Cambodia, and nightlife in Lagos.

But, in a cruel stroke of fortune, the regular haunt of the festival, the *Café de la Poste*, was closed early on the evening, forcing the festival regulars to scour the streets of Perpignan for an alternative. Here's hoping they reopen their doors tonight.

À demain!

- FSB

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