„Bienále FIAP jako součást Photokina 1956: revolta proti univerzálnímu jazyku fotografie"

Abstrakt

Fotografie je univerzální jazyk, „kterému rozumí [lidé] na všech pěti kontinentech, bez ohledu na rasu, vyznání, kulturu nebo sociální vrstvu" – toto prohlášení Maurice van Wyera, prezidenta Mezinárodní federace fotografického umění (Fédération internationale de l'art photographique, FIAP), souznělo s mnoha dalšími tezemi, pronesenými při zahájení pátého výročního veletrhu fotografie a souboru výstav *Photokina 1956*, konaného v Kolíně nad Rýnem od 29. září do 7. října 1956. Lídři Spojených států amerických a Německé spolkové republiky, mezinárodních organizací jako OSN a UNESCO, fotografického průmyslu a transnacionální komunity fotografů a fotografek, sdruženými ve FIAP, ti všichni velebili fotografii jako univerzální jazyk. *Photokina 1956* však ukázala dvě radikálně odlišná chápání takového jazyka. První bylo spjaté se západoevropskou a americkou časopiseckou fotografií, která za svůj úspěch vděčila tržním silám vydavatelského a fotografického průmyslu, stejně jako podpoře politiků. Druhé pojetí zahrnovalo početné a svébytné vizuální jazyky, pocházející od fotografů a fotografek ze šestatřiceti zemí Západní i Východní Evropy, Latinské Ameriky, Asie a Afriky, reprezentované na čtvrtém Bienále FIAP, konaném jako součást *Photokina 1956*. Tento článek nahlíží na intervenci FIAP ve výstavní části *Photokina 1956* sociologickým pohledem, který se soustředí na nejistý společenský status fotografů a fotografek a na mocenskou nerovnováhu v poválečné fotografii.

The author is a New York-based art and photography historian. She is the author of Photography as Art in Latvia, 1960-1969 (2011) and the author or editor of several other books about photography.

atifentale@gradcenter.cuny.edu

1 Maurice VAN DE WYER, untitled introduction, in: *Photokina 1956* (catalogue of exhibition) Cologne: Photokina 1956, page 28.
2 Quoted in: Arthur ROTHSTEIN, "Communication." *Image,* volume 6, 1957, issue 3, page 67.
3 Luther H. EVANS, untitled introduction, in: *Photokina 1956*, page 27.

FIAP BIENNIAL IN *PHOTOKINA 1956*: A REVOLT AGAINST THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE OF PHOTOGRAPHY
ALISE TIFENTALE

"Photography is a visual lingua franca understood on all five continents, irrespective of race, creed, culture or social level… [It] contribute[s] to… the understanding between nations," proclaimed Maurice van de Wyer, the president of the International Federation of Photographic Art (Fédération internationale de l'art photographique, FIAP).**1** His announcement echoed numerous other assertions made at the opening of the fifth annual photography trade fair and exhibition complex *Photokina 1956*, which took place in Cologne, West Germany, from September 29 to October 7, 1956. "Pictorial reportage is the most universal of all languages. It is an indispensable tool of freedom in these days when so many people are oppressed and personal freedom is restricted in many parts of the world," said U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower.**2** "Photography… promote[s] international understanding. But photography is not only a medium: it is also an art… many artists, who have mastered to perfection the mechanics of their art, are now using photography to express their personal message and thoughts," argued Luther H. Evans, the director of UNESCO, in a preface to the *Photokina 1956* catalogue.**3**

 Photokina 1956 saw leaders of the U.S. and West Germany, the photography industry, and the transnational community of photographers united in FIAP all sharing a similar idealism and optimism. They all agreed that photography was a universal language that provided peaceful communication between different cultures. International organizations such as the United Nations

4 For a critical history of the ideas behind the postwar humanism, see Mark MAZOWER, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations.* Princeton: Princeton University Press 2009, and Mark MAZOWER, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present.* New York: Penguin Books, 2013. For a discussion on how UNESCO constructed the concept of photography as a universal language of peace during the postwar years, see Tom ALLBESON, "Photographic Diplomacy in the Postwar World: UNESCO and the Conception of Photography as a Universal Language, 1946–1956." *Modern Intellectual History,* volume 12, 2015, issue 2, pages 383–415.

and UNESCO shaped this optimistic, humanistic, and Western-centric idea.**4** Although naïve from today's perspective, such an idea was welcome in a world healing from the destruction and chaos of the Second World War. Photography was thought of as the medium best equipped to help the world heal after the war and spread positive ideas of equality and a basic human understanding.

This praise of photography as a universal language, however, was unanimous only in theory. In practice, *Photokina 1956* revealed two radically different understandings of this universal language. On the one hand, it signified the uniform language of the leading Western European and U.S. magazine photography, distributed by publications such as *Life* or *Stern* and enthusiastically supported by the West German photo industry, the U.S. government, and international organizations such as the UN and UNESCO. This understanding was driven by the market forces of the publishing and photography industries. On the other, it comprised multiple, diverse, and idiosyncratic languages coming from photographers across the world, represented in the fourth FIAP Biennial of photographic art, which was included in the program of *Photokina 1956*. For these photographers, "universal" was their shared understanding of photographic art as an idealistic pursuit of self-expression that existed outside the market.

The FIAP Biennial was conceived as a world survey of contemporary photography, displaying an equal number of works from its constituents—photographers' associations representing thirty-six countries in Western and Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa. This exhibition attempted to showcase the cultural diversity of the world through photographic art. The FIAP Biennial challenged the role of Western Europe and the U.S. as the only centers of creativity, as it was equally open to participants from all regions. In doing so, it claimed its own take on the concept of the universal language of photography. Yet, despite its good

5 *Photokina* continues to take place on a regular basis in Cologne, Germany, to the present day (as of the time of writing this article in 2018). This article, however, is focused only on *Photokina 1956* and the fair's role during the 1950s and does not consider the later developments in the fair's history.
6 *Photokina* presented itself as a photography and cinematography trade fair, but this article is concerned exclusively with the history of photography exhibitions and does not discuss the cinematography section of the fair, which was relatively insignificant in 1956.
7 L. Fritz GRUBER, *Photokina: Its Origin and Achievements*. Köln: Messe- und Ausstellungs-Ges. 1958, unpaginated.
8 *Ibid*

intentions, democratic organization, and transnational inclusivity, the FIAP Biennial went unappreciated and misunderstood in comparison to other *Photokina 1956* exhibitions. This article reviews the intervention of FIAP and the reasons for its failure through a sociological lens that focuses on the contested social status of photographers and the power inequality in postwar photography.

From *Pressa* to *Photokina*: Phoenix Risen from the Ruins

Established in Cologne in 1950—the same year as FIAP, *Photokina* was an annual, international photography trade fair and photographic art exhibition complex.**5** During the 1950s, *Photokina* became the world's leading photography trade fair.**6** It consisted of two distinct parts: a commercial one, dedicated to all aspects of the industry, and a cultural one, containing exhibitions of applied, creative, and historical photography. On the commercial side of *Photokina*, local and international companies presented the newest cameras, lenses, accessories, film, paper, chemicals, other equipment, supplies, and services for the various needs of professional and hobby photographers. In 1950, the first *Photokina* represented 300 exhibitors (all from West Germany) and attracted 74,000 visitors. The fifth *Photokina* in 1956 featured 355 West German and 139 foreign exhibitors, and accommodated around 200,000 attendees from Europe, Asia, and the Americas.**7** While the majority of the visitors were from West Germany, fourteen percent were from seventy-six other countries from all continents—Europe (twenty-nine countries), the Americas (twenty-three), Asia (twelve), Africa (ten), and Australia and New Zealand.**8** The trade section of

9 *Photokina 1956* also featured a cinematography section with sixty-two exhibitors, but this part of the trade fair is not relevant to this analysis.

10 GRUBER, *Photokina*, unpaginated.

11 *Photokina 1956*, page 614. It has to be noted that Czechoslovakia was not a member of FIAP at the time, and photographers from Czechoslovakia did not participate in the FIAP Biennial in 1956.

12 GRUBER, *Photokina*, unpaginated.

13 *Ibid*

Photokina 1956 featured 432 exhibitors, of which 121 were foreign businesses.**9** At the top of the list of foreign countries participating in the trade fair was France (forty-seven companies) followed by the U.S. (sixteen), Japan (fifteen), the U.K. (thirteen), Austria (eight), and Switzerland (eight). A small number of companies from Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Netherlands, and Sweden also participated.**10** Czechoslovakia was represented by the national holding company Meopta, based in Přerov, which produced cameras, enlargers, projectors, and other optical equipment.**11**

The cultural part of *Photokina*, meanwhile, showcased the work of the most well-known photographers of its time, most of whom were Western European and U.S. photojournalists. "[P]hotography plays a decisive part in shaping the spiritual and social pattern of both the present and future," wrote L. Fritz Gruber (1908–2005), one of the main organizers of *Photokina*.**12** The fair's cultural focus, according to Gruber, "demonstrates and explains photography, and… elucidates this miracle of optics and chemistry."**13** *Photokina 1956* included a retrospective on German photojournalist Erich Solomon (1886–1944); group exhibitions organized by the U.S. photography magazines *Modern Photography* and *Popular Photography*; and a show organized by the photographers' cooperative Magnum featuring work by Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908–2004), Robert Capa (1913–1954), Ernst Haas (1921–1986), Werner Bischof (1916–1954), George Rodger (1908–1995), and W. Eugene Smith (1918–1978). Besides these exhibitions of photojournalists' work, *Photokina 1956* also included a solo show by the U.S. landscape and nature photographer Ansel Adams (1902–1984). In addition, the fair encompassed several shows of applied photography and a variety of thematic group exhibitions such as *Animals in the Wild* (*Tiere in freier Wildbahn*), *Germany Today* (*Deutschland Heute*), *Stronger than Words* (*Stärker als Worte*), and *Photography and School* (*Photo und Schule*).

14 "... die exakt fünf Jahre nach Kriegsende mit einem Werbespektakel eröffnet wurde." Ulrich POHLMANN, "Zwischen Kultur, Technik und Kommerz: die photokina-Bilderschauen 1950-80", in: *Kultur, Technik und Kommerz: die Photokina-Bilderschauen 1950-1980.* Köln: Historisches Archiv der Stadt 1990, page 8. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

15 "Verfolgt man die Berichterstattung zur *Photokina* in der Kölner Lokalpresse, so rücken Jene euphorischen Stellungnahmen ins Blickfeld, die von dem Ende der Entbehrungen der 'trümmerzeit' und von einer verheißungsvollen Zukunft kündeten." POHLMANN, "Zwischen Kultur, Technik und Kommerz," page 8.

16 "Mit dem wirtschaftlichen Aufschwung nach der Währungsreform und dem vollzogenen Übergang zur Konsumgütergesellschaft blieb die Entwicklung der Photokina in den 50er Jahren eng verbunden." *Ibid*

17 West Germany was admitted as a full member only in 1973, together with East Germany (the German Democratic Republic).

Photokina symbolized postwar West Germany's optimism and its focus on economic and technological achievements. As historian Ulrich Pohlmann notes, the trade fair "opened exactly five years after the end of the war with an advertising spectacle."14 It belonged to the determined efforts to rebuild the country's economy after the war. The press welcomed the first *Photokina* fair in Cologne in 1950 with "euphoric opinions," that suggested "the end of the devastation of the 'ruin period' and a promising future."15 *Photokina* echoed a larger shift in West Germany away from politicized public debates and toward "economic recovery... and the transition to the consumer society."16 During the 1950s, *Photokina* was also the site where the economic interests of the increasingly international photography industry—camera, accessory, and chemical manufacturers—aligned themselves with the political agendas of the United Nations and UNESCO. The involvement of UNESCO added political significance to *Photokina 1956* by positioning photography as an instrument of peace building. West Germany–the Federal Republic of Germany–was only an observer, not a full member of the United Nations at the time.17 Nevertheless, *Photokina 1956* prominently featured two photo exhibitions organized by UNESCO: *Knowledge Has No Borders* (*Wissen kennt keine Grenzen)* and *UNESCO's Ten Years of Work in the Service of Peace* (*10 Jahre Friedenswerk der UNESCO*). They were compiled by art historian Jean-Alphonse Keim (1904–1972), head of the information media and technologies department at UNESCO's Paris-based Secretariat General. The UNESCO exhibitions were installed at the entrance to the cultural section of *Photokina 1956,* and their main purpose was to promote

18 POHLMANN, "Zwischen Kultur, Technik und Kommerz," page 38.
19 On *Pressa,* see Jeremy AYNSLEY, "*Pressa* Cologne, 1928: Exhibitions and Publication Design in the Weimar Period." *Design Issues,* volume 10, 1994, issue 3, pages 52–76. On *Film und Foto* see, for example: Bruce ALTSHULER, "Film und Foto" In: *Salon to Biennial— Exhibitions that Made History, 1863–1959*. New York: Phaidon 2008, pages 217–236. On *Film und Foto,* see Olivier LUGON, "Prints from the Thomas Walther Collection and German Exhibitions around 1930." In: Mitra ABBASPOUR – Lee Ann DAFFNER – Maria Morris HAMBOURG (eds.), *Object: Photo. Modern Photographs: The Thomas Walther Collection 1909–1949*. New York: The Museum of Modern Art 2014. On *Die Kamera* and other photography trade fairs and exhibitions in Nazi Germany, see: Ulrich POHLMANN, " 'Not Autonomous Art but a Political Weapon.' Photography Exhibitions as a Means for Aestheticising Politics and Economy in National Socialism." In: Jorge RIBALTA(ed.), *Public Photographic Spaces: Exhibitions of Propaganda, from Pressa to The Family of Man, 1928–1955*. Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona 2008, pages 275–298.
20 AYNSLEY, "*Pressa* Cologne, 1928," page 61.
21 Walter LÄUBLI, "Good Luck!" *Camera*, 1951, issue 11, page 403.

the organization's work and to set a politically correct tone to the whole trade fair.**18**

Although *Photokina* belonged to the postwar culture, its genealogy can be traced to the German photography exhibitions of the early twentieth century, like the *International Photography Exhibition* in Dresden (1909); as well as photography trade shows of the Weimar Republic, such as *Pressa* (1928, Cologne) and *Film und Foto* (1929, Stuttgart); and Nazi-era exhibitions, such as *Die Kamera* (1933, Berlin).**19** On a symbolic level, *Photokina* was the closest descendant of *Pressa* because it took place in the same building that was constructed to house *Pressa* in 1928–a monumental structure designed in what Jeremy Aynsley calls an "expressive brick idiom."**20** Today, *Pressa* is primarily known for hosting the Soviet pavilion with photomontage murals by Russian avant-garde artist and designer El Lissitzky (1890–1941). *Photokina* had strong connections with the past. These connections, however, in no way pointed to interwar avant-garde art and photography. Walter Läubli (1902–1991), the editor of the international photography magazine *Camera,* dedicated a special issue to *Photokina* in November 1951 and wrote:

> We are… glad that it has been possible for us to dedicate an issue of our magazine to the new German photography and its industry and it is our hope that we can provide in the future many beautiful and valuable examples of this Phoenix that has risen from the ruins.**21**

This Phoenix was the German photographic industry, not the avant-garde art of the 1920s. *Photokina* showcased the latest cutting-edge photographic technology from all over the world. But its cultural focus during the 1950s was not committed to seeking out the most advanced or experimental artistic explorations of its time.

The show was driven by the photography industry whose products at the time had the most visible and prestigious application on the pages of popular illustrated magazines. The displays of cutting-edge technology in *Photokina* were paired with exhibitions of works by famous German, other Western European, and U.S. magazine photographers. The aim of such pairing was to associate the success and fame of internationally acknowledged photojournalists such as Henri Cartier-Bresson and his Magnum colleagues with the cameras, equipment, and supplies that were demonstrated at the trade fair. This pairing promised that any photographer could make images as good as the celebrated photojournalists did if they followed the trends in technological development and purchased the latest inventions.

Shaping the Art World of Photography

Aiming to unite the world's national associations of photographers, FIAP was founded in Switzerland in 1950. By 1956, FIAP united thirty-six members throughout the world: eighteen countries in Western Europe, eight countries in Latin America, five in Eastern Europe, four in Asia, and one each in Africa and Australia. In most cases, a national federation or association of photographers represented a country in FIAP, such as the Argentine Federation of Photography (*Federación Argentina de Fotografía*), the Belgian Federation of Photographic Circles (*Fédération Belge des Cercles photographiques*), the National Federation of Photographic Societies of France (*Fédération Nationale des Sociétés Photographiques de France*), or the All Japan Association of Photographic Societies. In the absence of a nation-wide organization, a single photographic society or club

22 Howard S. BECKER, *Art Worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press 1982, page 16.
23 *Ibid*, page x.

represented the country, for example, the Budapest-based *Soproni Fotoclub* which represented Hungary.

For many photographers in the 1950s, it was crucial to associate themselves with FIAP—an organization that had the words "photographic art" in its name—because artists in most modern societies have an elevated social connotation, something that most photojournalists or professional photographers at the time lacked, except for the few famous exceptions. As sociologist Howard S. Becker has observed:

> [B]ecause artists have special gifts, because they produce work thought to be of great importance to a society, and because they therefore get special privileges, people want to make sure that only those who really have the gift, the talent, and the skill get the position. Special mechanisms sort out artists from nonartists.**22**

One example of such a mechanism that Becker mentions is the academy that controls access to training and practicing an art form. The academy model was not yet established in the field of photography in most FIAP member countries, and the existing art institutions rejected photography. Thus, participating in the work of FIAP for many promised to "sort out artists from nonartists" among photographers.

Furthermore, from a sociological perspective, FIAP exemplified an attempt to organize and structure an art world of photography, where an "art world," according to Becker, means "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that the art world is noted for."**23** Such art worlds form around all kinds of creative practices, and each has its own geographical scope and lifespan–among the numerous examples discussed by Becker are stereography of the late nineteenth--century, American jazz music, English postwar literature, and modern dance in the 1970s. For photographers in the 1950s, it was important to prove that they were making art. They had a strong
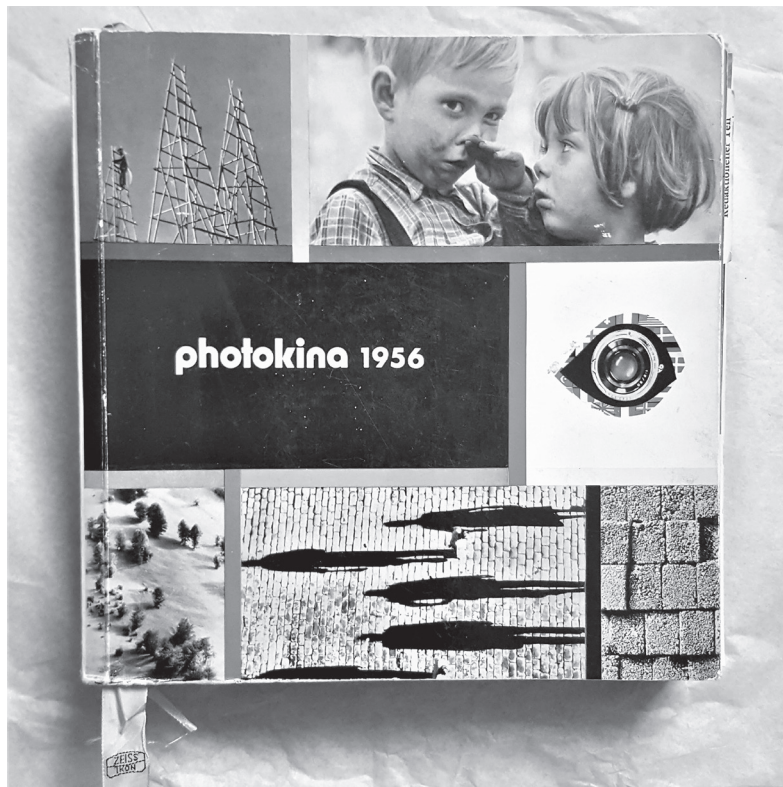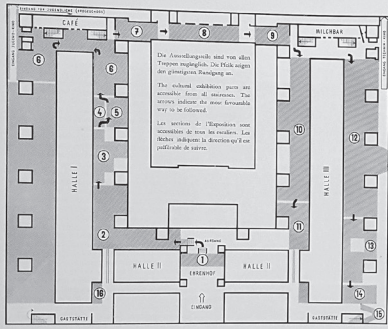
24 *Ibid*, page 339.
25 *Ibid*, page 36.

motivation "to convince the rest of the world that what is being done is art, and deserves the rights and privileges associated with that status."**24** But it was not that simple—the ideas about what constituted photographic art were constantly shifting and differed significantly from country to country.

Uncertainty and constant debate are regular modes of operation for all kinds of social systems that Becker refers to as art worlds. All of them, according to Becker, "typically devote considerable attention to trying to decide what is and isn't art, what is and isn't their kind of art, and who is and isn't an artist."**25** With its global scope and ambitious aims, FIAP serves as an outstanding case study of an evolving art world, one that functioned according to many of the same general rules that have shaped, and continue to shape, the multiple art worlds of other visual arts, music, performing arts, and literature. Meanwhile, FIAP differed from most other art worlds because of its conscious rejection of the forces of the market, which, as Becker has shown, are among the main motivators in any art world. This rejection, I argue, was one of the reasons that FIAP failed to significantly improve the working conditions and careers of its members. This imagined, idealistic art world of photography did not succeed partly because it ignored professional photography's dependency on the market.

The emergence of FIAP in 1950 reflects the multifaceted role of photography in the postwar culture. FIAP promised equal opportunity to all members and mobilized photographers in countries emerging from colonial rule, especially in Asia. The organization engaged and brought together hundreds of constituents for whom photography was not just a job or leisure activity, but a serious aesthetic pursuit. Their participation in FIAP—a democratic transnational organization—manifested their desire to belong to an idealized art world that existed outside the commercial market and ignored political borders. One of the organization's major accomplishments was organizing the FIAP Biennial—an international exhibition of creative photography of unprecedented scope at the time. The biennial, established in 1950, was conceived as a world survey of contemporary photographic

Photokina 1956 catalogue. Photo: Alise Tifentale.

Map of *Photokina* 1956 cultural exhibitions. Spread from *Photokina* 1956 catalogue. Photo: Alise Tifentale.

Sample spread of the FIAP section in *Photokina* 1956 catalogue, featuring works from the FIAP Biennial (pages 60–61). From left: Leif Axstål (Sweden) *The Star-Skater*; Mme. de Loz-Briard (Belgium), *Glass and Concrete*; Jacob Nissen (Denmark), untitled; J. Guillermo Reeves (Argentina), *Adventure in the Tower*. Photo: Alise Tifentale.

Installation view of the second FIAP Biennial in the Carabinieri-Saal of the Residenz Palace, Salzburg, Austria, 1952. Photo: O. Stibor. Reproduced in: FIAP, *II Internationale Fotobiennale de la Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique*. Salzburg: Österreichische Lichtbildnerbund, 1952, unnumbered plate insert.

Magnum exhibition in *Photokina* 1956. Photo: Charles E. Fraser.
Reproduced in: Ulrich POHLMANN, *Kultur, Technik und Kommerz: die Photokina-Bilderschauen 1950-1980*. Köln: Historisches Archiv der Stadt 1990, page 82.

FIAP Biennial in *Photokina* 1956. Photo: unattributed. Reproduced in: Ulrich POHLMANN, *Kultur, Technik und Kommerz: die Photokina-Bilderschauen 1950-1980*. Köln: Historisches Archiv der Stadt 1990, page 63.
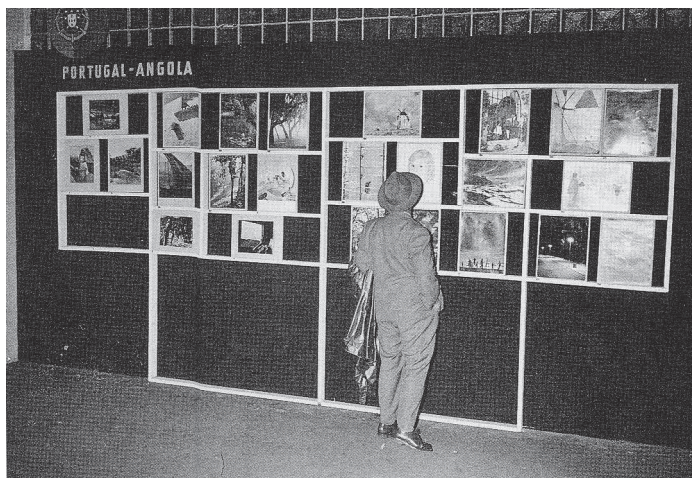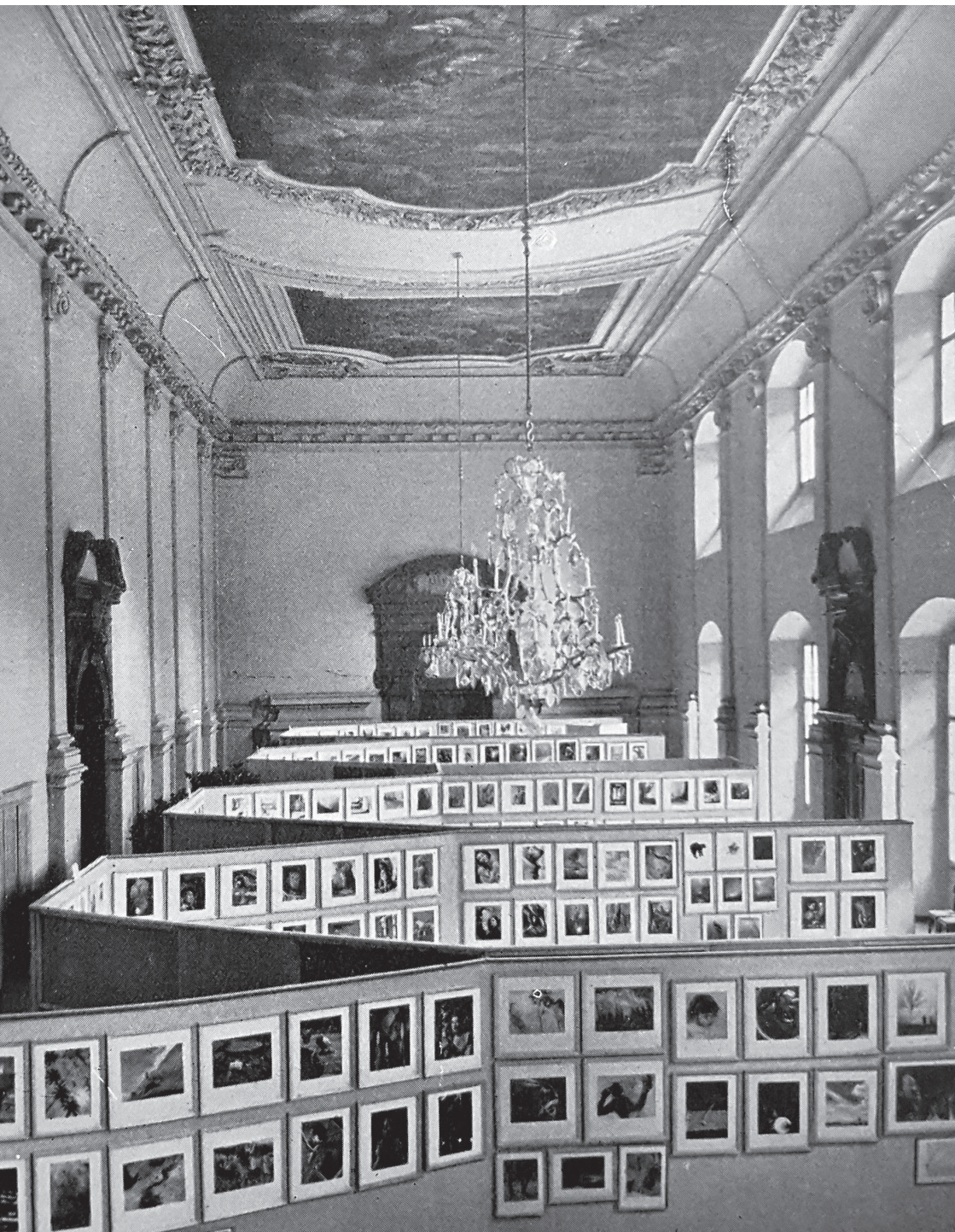
26 The first seven FIAP Biennials took place in the following cities: Bern (Switzerland, 1950), Salzburg (Austria, 1952), Barcelona (Spain, 1954), Cologne (West Germany, 1956), Antwerp (Belgium, 1958), Opatija (Yugoslavia, 1960), Athens (Greece, 1962), and Basel (Switzerland, 1964).
27 Between 1950 and 1965, FIAP organized an exhibition within the framework of *Photokina* in 1951, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1958, and 1963.
28 FIAP, "Offizieller Bericht über den 4. Kongreß in Köln," *Camera,* 1958, issue 3, page 143.
29 Of the catalogue's 616 pages, 232 pages (or 38% of its total volume) were dedicated to the sixteen photographic art exhibitions. The other sixty-two percent were related to the trade fair section of *Photokina 1956*. See: *Photokina 1956*.

art, displaying an equal number of works from each participating country. The first seven biennials each took place in different European cities, and the fourth biennial was staged as one of the central events of *Photokina 1956* in Cologne, West Germany.**26**

The fourth FIAP Biennial was granted the central, and largest, exhibition hall at *Photokina 1956*.**27** This was an unprecedent opportunity for FIAP to reach a large international audience of professionals involved in the photography trade, whether it was industry, publishing, or creative work. The FIAP board reported that more than 100,000 visitors from around the world saw the biennial.**28** FIAP was also granted a significant presence in the catalogue for *Photokina 1956*. Included at the beginning of the catalogue was an introduction by the president of FIAP along with prefaces by Theodor Heuss, the president of West Germany; Dwight D. Eisenhower; and Luther H. Evans. This was the most prestigious recognition that FIAP received in the 1950s, and it marks the highest point of the organization's achievements. The section of the catalogue dedicated to the FIAP Biennial is outstanding–forty--five richly illustrated pages. It is almost twice as many pages as any other exhibition, which received an average range of two to twenty pages.**29** The FIAP section appears at the very beginning of the catalogue after a short description of the two UNESCO exhibitions. This central placement suggests that the organizers of *Photokina 1956* believed that the work of FIAP was important and fitting in the discourse of photography as a universal language. Yet, it turned out that the FIAP Biennial represented values that were different, and often even contrary, to the rest of the fair's participants.

Works on display in the FIAP Biennial were selected by each member country's federation or association of photographers. Thirty out of the thirty-six FIAP member countries took part in the 1956 biennial: seventeen countries from Western Europe, five from Latin

30 Western Europe was represented by these seventeen countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Saarland, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Latin America: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay. Eastern Europe: Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Yugoslavia. Asia: India, Japan, and Pakistan. Africa: Angola.

31 Only five countries submitted a smaller number of works. The FIAP Biennial had sixteen works from Luxembourg and Ireland, fifteen from Denmark, nine from Iceland, and eight from Angola.

32 The practice of arranging an exhibition by the participant's country of residence was partly modeled after the international salons of photography—a type of exhibition that had emerged in the pictorialist milieu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For a sociological analysis of this milieu, see Ulrich F. KELLER, "The Myth of Art Photography: A Sociological Analysis." *History of Photography,* volume 8, 1984, issue 4, pages 249–275. For the most recent contribution to the Pictorialism studies, see Anne McCAULEY (ed)., *Clarence H. White and His World: The Art & Craft of Photography, 1895–1925.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2017.

America, four from Eastern Europe, three from Asia, and one from Africa.**30** Each participating country was invited to contribute an equal number of works—eighteen prints.**31** The works then were grouped by the photographer's country of residence, and the countries arranged alphabetically.**32** The FIAP Biennial exemplified ultimate democratization of the exhibition organizing process—the role of a curator or any other supervisor was eliminated, and all the power was in the hands of participating artists. But the side effects of such democratization proved to be problematic. One of the outcomes of this democratization was the visual incoherence of works appearing at the FIAP Biennial. The aesthetic and thematic diversity of the biennial adequately reflected the variety of local photographic cultures across the world that coexisted in the 1950s. But this diversity, I argue, lacked sufficient verbal commentary that would have helped viewers navigate the parade of unconnected, unrelated works coming from all corners of the world. As a result, the leading photography critics of the time overlooked the FIAP Biennial and instead focused their attention on photography projects like the Magnum exhibitions, characterized by prominent authorship, a clear message, and visual coherence.

Reputation and Social Status of Photographers

The professional background of photographers in the FIAP Biennial ranged from the country's leading photojournalists to small-town

newspaper reporters, from well-known artists to dedicated amateurs who had successful professional careers in other fields. FIAP embraced all photographers equally. But the level of each photographer's professional involvement was never mentioned. Information about participating photographers was strictly limited to their name and country of residence, thus further emphasizing the notion of equality among the organization's members.

Photography was the primary source of income for quite a few participants in the FIAP Biennial. But the biennial itself was positioned strictly outside the market. FIAP insisted that photographic art existed only outside the market relationships, and thus set up a dichotomy between all professional—commissioned and/or paid—work and photographic art as an unpaid, idealistic form of self-expression. Art and professional work could overlap in a person's career, but the leaders of FIAP proudly emphasized the nonprofit nature of all its projects. FIAP did not have a dedicated office or paid staff, and all its activities relied exclusively on its members—unpaid volunteers. The organization's board members and the people involved in organizing the biennial were not supposed to benefit financially from their efforts, and neither were the participating photographers. The organization never promoted or endorsed any activity that might have resulted in the sale of prints. All prints submitted to the FIAP Biennial were returned to the photographers after the closure of the exhibition. The work of FIAP was based on an idealistic concept of financially uninterested devotion to artistic self-expression, free communication, and cultural exchange.

Such an understanding of photographic art was attractive to many photographers in the 1950s, including professional photojournalists. They were eager to showcase their work in a context and format that differed from the disposable magazine or newspaper page. FIAP succeeded in attracting photojournalists among its members because journalism during the 1950s was largely a collective effort where the photographer was not the most important participant. The ultimate authority was in the hands of magazine editors. The magazine and newspaper workflow limited photographers' creative autonomy and control over their

34 WORLD PRESS PHOTO, "Sports, Second Prize Singles," undated, https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/1956/28669/1/1956-Tibor-Komlos-SP2 (cit. 6. 6. 2019).

work.**33** The FIAP Biennial, meanwhile, provided photographers with an opportunity to exhibit self-commissioned, self-produced work–images that were made entirely under the control of the artist, from the moment of exposing the negative until the making of the final print.

Thus, for example, among FIAP members in the 1950s were also high-level photojournalists working on assignments for the most popular illustrated magazines like *Life*, such as Dimitris Harissiadis (1911–1993) from Greece, Gianni Berengo Gardin (b. 1930) from Italy, and Jean Dieuzaide (1921–2003) from France. Hungarian photographer Tibor Komlós (1923–1976) was an established sports photojournalist who received the prestigious World Press Photo prize in 1956.**34** His work *Ice Hockey* was included in the FIAP Biennial in *Photokina 1956* and reproduced in the October 1956 issue of *Camera*. Likely stemming from a regular work assignment, *Ice Hockey* captures an important moment during a hockey game where four players struggle for the puck at the net. The triangular composition and the players' bodies conveys movement, while their facial expressions reveal the intensity of athletic competition. The image is a good photographic representation of the game and an excellent example of sports reportage. It was appreciated by the magazine industry and awarded the highest press photography award of the time. Yet, despite this recognition, Komlós desired to present his work also in the context of photographic art. This example demonstrates how the fields of photojournalism and photographic art often overlapped within an individual's career in the 1950s.

But even the photographers who were well-known locally remained virtually unknown to audiences abroad. The majority of the *Photokina 1956* visitors had little or no knowledge about leading photographers in other European countries and more distant regions of the world whose work was featured in the FIAP Biennial. Among them was, for example, Lang Jingshan (1892–1995) who represented the Chinese nationalist refugee community in Taiwan. His style, reminiscent of a Chinese ink painting on silk or paper, epitomized the mix of traditional and modern culture that his

35 Mia Yinxing LIU, "The Allegorical Landscape: Lang Jingshan's Photography in Context." *Archives of Asian Art,* volume 65, 2015, issue 1–2, pages 1–24.
36 See, for example, Andreas VALENTIN, "Light and Form: Brazilian and German Photography in the 1950s." *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History,* volume 85, 2016, issue 2, pages 159–80; Andreas VALENTIN, "Nas asas da mariposa: a ciência e a fotografia de José Oiticica Filho." *ARS,* volume 13, 2015, issue 25, pages 31–49; Beatriz Scigliano CARNEIRO, "Uma inconsutil invenção: a arteciência em José Oiticica Filho." *Ponto-e-Vírgula,* volume 6, 2009, pages 107–146.
37 K. L. KOTHARY, "Federation of Indian Photography." *Camera¸* 1954, issue 2, page 96.
38 BECKER, *Art Worlds*, page 23.

community strived to identify with after the communist takeover of mainland China in 1949.**35** José Oiticica Filho (1906–1964), one of the pioneers of abstraction in postwar photographic art, was committed to the development of modernist aesthetics within São Paulo's leading photo club Foto Cine Clube Bandeirante.**36** K. L. Kothary, (Kantilal Kothari, 1921–2008), a photographer and medical doctor from India, was a leading figure in Indian photography who saw his participation in FIAP as a means of establishing a modern cultural identity for his nation as it emerged from British colonial rule.**37** Their images alone were not able to convey their local cultural and political significance. Because the FIAP Biennial provided only the photographer's name and country of origin, viewers did not have a chance to learn about the different careers and roles these photographers held within their local contexts.

Meanwhile, *Photokina 1956* visitors were much more open to appreciate the work by a small elite group of Western—mostly French, Italian, and U.S.—photographers. They were professional photojournalists like Henri Cartier-Bresson and his peers at the Magnum cooperative. Their work was promoted by the popular illustrated magazines such as *Life* in the U.S. or *Stern* in West Germany, specialized photography magazines such as *Camera*, and other involved parties in *Photokina,* including the UN and UNESCO. The audience of *Photokina 1956* was culturally conditioned and prepared to perceive such work—they were already familiar with the photographers' names, key images, and biographies. The fame of the leading photographers predisposed the spectators to receive their work with respect and admiration. As Becker has observed in his study of art worlds, "The reputation of the artist and the work reinforce one another: we value more a work done by an artist we respect, just as we respect more an artist whose work we have admired."**38** The reputation of a few Western photojournalists

39 Nadya BAIR, "The Decisive Network: Producing Henri Cartier-Bresson at Mid-Century." *History of Photography,* volume 40, 2016, issue 2, pages 146–166.

40 David SEYMOUR, *Children of Europe*. Paris: UNESCO 1949.

41 FIAP, "Einladung zur Teilnahme am V. Kongreß und an der V. Photo-Biennale der FIAP 1958 in Antwerpen." *Camera*, 1958, issue 7, page 342.

42 During a FIAP congress meeting in Cologne, September 26, 1956, Ernest Boesiger reported on the status of the organization's bank account in the Kantonalbank of Bern during the previous two years. According to Boesiger's report, 1954 saw revenue of 1,262.56 Swiss francs and expenses of 1,704.51, with net loss of 439. 95. The following year, 1955, ended with revenue of 2,483.88 Swiss francs and expenses of 2,192.38, resulting in a net income of 291. 50. Ernest BOESIGER, "Offizieller Bericht über den 4. Kongreß in Köln." *Camera*, 1958, issue 3, page 144. Information about the price of a Leica camera: *Camera*, 1953, issue 6, page 276.

such as Cartier-Bresson had become paramount in the 1950s partly because they constantly produced high-quality, visually captivating work, and partly because magazine publishing was a blooming industry that had enough resources to constantly commission and popularize this work.**39** No less important promoters of these photographers and their work were international organizations such as the UN and UNESCO. For example, UNESCO commissioned Poland-born American photojournalist David "Chim" Seymour (1911–1956) to produce a series of photographs of children in postwar Europe. This commission resulted in a widely circulated photo book, *Children of Europe*, published in 1949.**40** The book created a powerful image of a child as a survivor and victim of the war. At the same time, this book also contributed to the creation of the heroic image of an American photojournalist who travels across borders with a humanistic mission.

Meanwhile FIAP, a volunteer organization, did not have the same resources as commercial magazines of the time or international organizations such as UNESCO. Its operations depended exclusively on unpaid volunteer work done by the photographers themselves in their free time. The primary, and often only, source of the organization's income was the fifteen-dollar (U.S.) membership fee, per country per year, that barely covered the expenses of running the organization. The application fees for participation in the FIAP Biennial (usually four U.S. dollars per country)**41** and small fees for other services (such as ordering FIAP membership cards and badges) were intended to cover expenses related to organizing the biennial or providing services. The annual budget of FIAP in 1955 did not exceed the price of two new Leica cameras, which at that time cost 1,300 Swiss francs.**42** This monetary element is significant

43 BECKER, *Art Worlds*, pages 356–357.
44 In the 1950s, large-size prints for many photographers and artists still signified disposable propaganda posters of the 1930s and 1940s, while a small artist's print suggested belonging to the world of fine art. The issues of the scale in photography and especially the inherent tension between miniaturization and enlargement are discussed in great detail by Olivier Lugon. See: Olivier LUGON, "Photography and Scale: Projection, Exhibition, Collection." *Art History,* volume 38, 2015, issue 2, pages 386–403.

when comparing the efforts of FIAP to the well-designed and well-
-promoted exhibitions organized by popular illustrated magazines,
Magnum, UNESCO and other participants of the photographic
industry that had access to more substantial budgets and resources.

Western photojournalists did not miraculously produce work
that was so much better than anybody else's. First, they had more
opportunities and better conditions to continuously produce new
work. Second, their work had more exposure. The audiences had seen
their key images so many times that they could not think about them
as average or ordinary. Articles in photography magazines praised
these photographers as extraordinarily talented. Their photo-books
were produced and distributed by organizations such as UNESCO. All
these elements predisposed the viewers to perceive all of their work
positively. As Becker puts it, "If we know that a person of superior
ability made a work, we pay more careful attention to it, and thus
can see what might escape the more casual inspection we give a work
from which we expect nothing special."**43** Unfortunately, FIAP
did not have the means to prepare the visitors to *Photokina 1956*
to adequately appreciate works by Chinese, Brazilian, and Indian
photographers and their peers from all other FIAP member countries.
Although the FIAP Biennial exhibited their work, it unfortunately did
nothing to fill this knowledge gap about their careers and ideas about
photography.

The Print Size as
a Message

The FIAP Biennial differed from most other *Photokina 1956*
exhibitions with its distinct look. All prints came directly from their
makers, not an agency or editorial office. These prints were sent
in by the photographers, mounted at the location of the biennial,
and returned after the show. The handmade prints were believed
to express their authors' creative intent.**44** The maximum size of

45 BECKER, *Art Worlds*, pages 94–95.
46 Furthermore, "The standard features of the works so produced may become a kind of aesthetic criterion people use in assessing works, so that a work which does not exhibit them seems crude or amateurish." *Ibid*, page 128.

the prints was limited to eleven-by-fifteen inches (thirty-by-forty centimeters). The detailed regulations regarding the size of prints can seem irrelevant or restrictive from today's viewpoint. In the 1950s, however, they clearly outlined the art world of photography as imagined by FIAP and its constituents. As Becker has noted:

> Art works... come to be what the art
> world's distribution system can handle because,
> for the most part, work that doesn't fit doesn't
> get distributed, when it is made at all, and most
> artists, wanting their work distributed, do not
> make what the system will not handle.**45**

The organizers of FIAP biennials constructed their own distribution system whose practical limitations were based on the capacity of the international mail services.

Thus, for example, the print size was limited so participants could ship them as "registered printed matter" without commercial value, complying to international mail regulations. Such practical considerations, according to Becker, arise "from what the system finds convenient to handle rather than from any independent choice made by the maker of an art work."**46** As a result, the prints in the FIAP Biennial tended to be of uniform size which, furthermore, was quite small in comparison with other *Photokina 1956* exhibitions. This size, however, was also a message: The print size was influenced by commercially manufactured paper, which only came in standard sizes. Eleven-by-fifteen inches was close to the largest size for printing in a conventional home darkroom, thus signaling the importance of the author's hand, as opposed to enlargements produced in professional darkrooms for commercial purposes. Thus, the convention to keep the exhibition prints on average within elven-by-fifteen inches was, among others, a sign that the prints were made by the photographers themselves.

FIAP provided a space where photographers had control over the entire process of creating the picture, including but not limited to developing the film, printing the contacts, selecting the right image,

See, for example, Peter Galassi's discussion of Henri Cartier-Bresson's typical workflow. GALASSI, *Henri Cartier-Bresson*, pages 27–30.

making and post-processing the final print. This understanding of photographic art differed from the magazine industry's workflow. During the 1950s, the responsibility of a photojournalist was to press the shutter, following the guidelines developed by the editors. The rest was done by others, including developing the film, making contact prints, selecting shots for enlargement, composing the narrative of a photo-essay, and organizing page layouts.**47**

Photokina 1956 translated this approach to photography into an exhibition format. Most exhibitions in *Photokina 1956* consisted of impressive enlargements of various sizes, made to the order of the organizers to fit their envisioned design. These enlargements were made by anonymous darkroom technicians. The photographers supplied the negatives, but the image selection was in the hands of the curator, and printing in the hands of technicians who followed the curator's instructions. The large-format prints represented the authority of the curatorial vision that superseded the author's intentions. The preferences of individual photographers in such shows were not accommodated or even considered. The photographs in these displays did not appear as autonomous, self-sufficient works of art—they were part of a larger narrative constructed by the curator or organizer, not the photographer.

An example of such an approach was the Magnum exhibition at *Photokina 1956*. Enlargements of different sizes were arranged as if on a magazine page, contrasting large images with smaller ones. The various sizes of the prints provided a dynamic rhythm of distinct emphases and background. The unframed prints were mounted directly on panels, some of which were free-standing and removed from the wall. The free-standing panels extended into the viewers' space and created a visually interesting landscape that visitors were invited to explore. This type of display belongs to magazine-style exhibition design, which was aimed at constructing a space for an integrated visual experience. Some of the standard elements of magazine-style exhibition design were large, unframed prints; narrative or thematic sequences of works; and displays combining different sizes of prints in a dynamic and visually captivating manner, which together resembled the way images were arranged on a magazine page. The combination of different sized prints on

48 Ulrich POHLMANN, "Zwischen Kultur, Technik und Kommerz," page 13. See also Olivier LUGON, "Dynamic Paths of Thought. Exhibition Design, Photography and Circulation in the Work of Herbert Bayer." In: Annie VAN DEN OEVER (ed.), *Cinema beyond Film: Media Epistemology in the Modern Era.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2010, pages 117–144.
49 FIAP, "Offizieller Bericht über den 4. Kongreß in Köln." *Camera*, 1958, issue 3, page 143.

free-standing panels added visual interest to the Magnum show because it suggested a labyrinth of endless visual experiences. The precursors of this kind of exhibition design had emerged in the Weimar Republic of the 1920s, in avant-garde exhibitions such as *Pressa* (1928) and *Film und Foto* (1929).**48** In the 1950s, the magazine-style exhibition design had lost its politically radical – socialist – connotation and become a mainstream format for displaying large photography exhibitions in commercial trade fair contexts such as *Photokina.*

In most of its shows, like the Magnum exhibition, *Photokina 1956* promoted the magazine-style design. The organizers attempted to apply a similar style to its representation of the FIAP Biennial. Its display, like most other *Photokina 1956* exhibitions, was designed by Hellmut Remmelmann, the chief architect and designer of *Photokina.* Unlike the previous FIAP Biennials, where the works were framed and displayed in singular or multiple rows on the wall, here the prints were displayed in a more dynamic fashion. Unframed photographs were directly attached to free-standing display panels. Instead of monotonous rows, Remmelmann arranged three rows of prints in a grid-like structure, outlined with thick, light-colored lines that stood out on the dark background color of the panels. The available photo documentation is black and white, but a report suggests that these stands were designed using the organization's official colors—blue and gold.**49** Remmelmann clearly designed the FIAP Biennial in this way so it would better align with the other *Photokina 1956* exhibitions.

But his efforts did a disservice to FIAP by undermining the importance of the individual print—the very essence of the FIAP Biennial. By implication, the biennial's primary mission was to further the understanding of photographic art as manifested in the qualities of the unique fine art print because it consisted of such prints, provided directly by each artist. Unframed and grouped

together in tight layouts, however, these prints arguably lost their individual appeal. The panels were lacking visual anchors and created an overcrowded, uninviting impression. The uniform size of the prints in the FIAP Biennial was the only element that balanced out the wildly varied visual qualities and content of the exhibited work. The overall effect of this uniformity, however, did not benefit the FIAP Biennial in *Photokina 1956*. In Remmelmann's design, it could not compete with the dynamism of the magazine-style exhibitions with their poster-size enlargements. The magazine-style approach did not work well for the FIAP Biennial.

The Revolt That Went Unnoticed

The case study of the FIAP Biennial that took place within the framework of *Photokina 1956* reveals the limitations and contradictions of the postwar paradigm of photography as a universal language. Although all participants in *Photokina 1956* spoke about photography as a universal language, in practice this term signified the magazine-style photography exhibitions backed by the publishing industry as well as generous funding and publicity from U.S. and West German sources. FIAP—a transnational, voluntary, and self-financed organization of photographers—also attempted to make its mark in *Photokina 1956*. This resulted in a clash between different versions of what types of photography translated into a universal language. It was a clash between photographic art that exists outside the market and commissioned photography that exists exclusively within, and because of, the market.

For FIAP members, the universal language of photography was the set of technical skills and mastery of the medium shared by photographers the world over. This aspect of photographic production was, and still is, often overlooked. As Becker has observed:

> Equipment, in particular, produces… universal
> knowledge. When the equipment embodies
> the conventions, the way a conventional
> thirty-five millimeter camera embodies the

50 BECKER, *Art Worlds*, page 57.
51 Maurice VAN DE WYER, untitled introduction. In *Photokina 1956*, page 28.

> conventions of contemporary photography, you
> learn the conventions as you learn to work the
> machinery.**50**

Based on this universal knowledge, this "visual lingua franca
understood on all five continents, irrespective of race, creed,
culture or social level" in the words of the president of FIAP,
the organization set out to build a transnational art world of
photography that would exist outside the market and would cross
all political, social, and economic borders.**51**

FIAP advocated photographic art as an aesthetically and
economically autonomous practice at a time when the daily
work of most photographers depended on decisions made by
others—magazine and newspaper editors, exhibition curators,
and commercial customers. The FIAP Biennial provided a unique
platform for photographers' creative, self-commissioned work. It
was a groundbreaking attempt to reject Western Europe and the
U.S. as the only centers of creativity in favor of a model of global
participation. The biennial succeeded to showcase a vast range of
interpretations of what photographic art meant in different cultural
contexts. But this presentation lacked explanation and "packaging."
The leaders of FIAP never provided a unifying definition of
photographic art, and never theorized their ideals apart from their
vaguely humanistic claims. The images in the biennial were not
accompanied by any comments from the organization's leaders or
arguments from photographers themselves. The prints were small,
and their overwhelming incoherence left a chaotic impression. Their
makers' local significance remained unknown to the spectators.
FIAP failed to clearly articulate its values, and this failure sabotaged
the powerful statement of diversity and inclusiveness it attempted
to convey.

In *Photokina 1956*, this idealized art world as FIAP had imagined
it, met its much more powerful adversary—the publishing
and photo industries, supported by the U.S. and West German
governments as well as by international organizations such as UN
and UNESCO. Although FIAP had its own claim to photography
as a universal language, its presence in *Photokina 1956* proved

that some types of photography were more universal than others. More precisely, only one type of photography entered history as a universal language, and it was the language of the Western mainstream illustrated magazine. Because it had the most powerful advocates in the U.S. magazine publishing and Western European photo industry, it became the dominant force in photography of the 1950s. It overshadowed FIAP's attempt to survey the cultural diversity of the world through creative photography and its thematic and aesthetic variety.