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**PREVIEW // ART + EXHIBITS**

# CPW's inaugural photography biennial spotlights upstate's creative surge

The first Upstate Photography Biennial brings together 39 artists exploring displacement, memory, queer life and the changing identity of the region

By **Emma Fiona Jones**, *For the Times Union*

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Morgan Gwenwald, from the series "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" (1974). Courtesy of the

“The Biennial reflects the organization’s belief that some of the most compelling contemporary photography today is being made outside traditional cultural centers,” CPW Executive Director Brian Wallis said.

Rather than provide a definitive survey of upstate photography, the Biennial offers an entry point: a thoughtfully curated snapshot of the aesthetic and intellectual quality and depth of the work being produced throughout the region.

While there was no predetermined theme, certain threads emerged as Chao and Ryan sifted through the images. Chao noted that “many of the projects on view variously interrogate, brush up against, and carry echoes of displacement, through explorations of diaspora, migration, material trace, counter histories, broken time and psychological projections.”

The artists themselves are based upstate, and this environment, natural and built, features prominently. Yet the implications of the work stretch far beyond.

Selections from the series “Trap Rock” by An-My Lê, who was born in Vietnam in 1960 and has been a professor of photography at Bard since 1998, are a highlight. Her images — often documentary in nature but sometimes staged, and always with a cinematic affect — articulate the mise-en-scène of warfare and the choreography (both military and civilian) that unfolds therein. Navigating military structures and processes are often as much a part of the work as the final image.



Experiences of diaspora, labor and Indigenous displacement ripple across the work featured at CPW. “For me, the idea of displacement became especially resonant while organizing the exhibition,” Chao said. “Many of the works in the exhibition grapple with broken time, migration, memory and uncertain futures — concerns that feel deeply tied to the social and political atmosphere of 2026.”

Ecstasy and desire persist amid endless uncertainty and unspeakable violence. Meryl Meisler has been photographing queer nightlife since the 1970s, when she moved to New York to study with Lisette Model, but her series “Queer Friendly Nightlife Now” marks a turning point in her thinking, if not her methods. While exhibiting in Berlin in 2021, Meisler received VIP invitations to clubs where cameras were forbidden. With awareness of the trust she had nurtured among drag artists, burlesque dancers, showgirls, DJs, MCs and regulars back home, Meisler returned to photographing queer New York nightlife with the same analog camera she used in the 1970s

Among the images from the series featured in the Biennial is “Six Legs on Bar Le Bain New York NY.” Shot with flash in black and white, the image is dominated by three pairs of toned, glitter-streaked limbs strapped to Lucite stiletto platforms, assumedly standing on the bar of the penthouse Meatpacking District club known for its dancefloor-adjacent plunge pool.