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Beyond the Print : Interview with Calin Kruse by Nadine Dinter

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I met **Calin Kruse** through the kind introduction of Roger Ballen and was immediately struck by the devotion Calin brings to the photobook as a medium. Naturally, I wanted to learn how the idea for a festival devoted entirely to the photobook came about, and what continues to drive him today. So, let's dive in.

Nadine Dinter: You divide your time between magazine-making, publishing photobooks, and organizing a festival devoted to the medium. When did your commitment to printed matter begin, and how has it evolved over time?

Calin Kruse: It started when I was little. In third grade, I did a French homework assignment, bound it like a zine and called it "La Revue." I also made a few issues of a handmade, handwritten school magazine in eighth grade (computers were not really accessible to us back then, and we didn't use typewriters, so everything was handwritten and photocopied). Later on, I started making small handmade artist's books before eventually starting a real magazine.

Your magazine is called dienacht ("the night"). What served as the main inspiration?

CK: The night is a very special part of the day: you see things you don't see during daylight, like wild animals in the city – foxes, wild boars, badgers. Your senses are different, sharper. I also had my best ideas at night, when I couldn't sleep. So the magazine was meant to be something that inspires other people, showing mainly photography across different genres, but also design portfolios, painting, sculpture, and other books or magazines. It also brings forward subjects that already exist, but often remain below the surface. It was meant to be a timeless magazine: I would show both recent and older work, by very well-known photographers as well as photography students. And since it was a one-man magazine, it was also very personal; each issue has a particular mood, shaped by my own state of mind, which I can still recognize today.

You co-founded a festival dedicated to the photobook nearly five years ago. How did it come about? Who were the co-founders?

CK: I was invited by Silvia Gaetti to co-curate a photobook exhibition for the GRASSI Museum of Applied Arts in Leipzig. She is a curator at the museum and a co-initiator of the Leipzig Photobook Festival. Since the exhibition was scheduled to run for almost five months and we were planning a public program alongside it anyway, I thought: why not make it a festival? The exhibition was supposed to open in November 2021, when the second wave of Covid hit and public institutions closed, so it was unclear when everything would reopen. We began working on the festival at the end of January 2022, when institutions reopened, and had six weeks to build it from scratch. It all worked out. When the festival moved to HALLE 14, Jenny Starick joined as artistic co-curator.

In a landscape crowded with photography fairs, photo days, and photo festivals, what gives the Leipzig Photobook Festival its particular identity?

CK: Visitors and publishers often mention the warmth and care they feel during the festival. We want to create an international event of high quality that still feels human. We want to enjoy the ride, not just the result, and to make a festival for the people. We want to entertain, inspire, and change the way people look at photobooks. And we have a rave.

If you could produce or design a photobook without any limitations of size, material, or content, what would it look like, and what would it be about?

CK: I don't think it would be much different from the books we already make at [dienacht Publishing](#). We want to find a language for each project we publish and make the best of what is already there. I don't feel that we limit ourselves in terms of materials, size, or content. But if you ask what we would do with an unlimited budget, that would be a different matter altogether: we would probably start by paying ourselves a wage for our work, and we would involve more people in marketing, design, and distribution.

This summer, you co-curated another exhibition in Arles during Les Rencontres de la photographie. Why does Arles remain such a gravitational center for the photography world, and at the same time, such an enduring site of pleasure for those who care deeply about the medium?

CK: The exhibition was curated by Yana Kruse and me, and it was the second year we were able to have our own exhibition space. Most people who work seriously with photography go there. But I do see a decline in both attendance and quality in Arles; rents keep rising, and the photobook market is less frequented. There were maybe one or two exhibitions in the official program that really struck me; most of them seemed to be made less for the public than for the curators themselves. The best and most surprising exhibitions and events are often the off-program ones, outside the official selection.

What was your favorite photobook published in 2026?

CK: I don't have one yet, but maybe I'll find it in Paris in November.

If you could take the concept of your festival to another city anywhere in the world, where would that be?

CK: I would like to go back to Mexico City and do it there.

Have you settled on a curatorial theme for the 2027 edition of the Leipzig Photobook Festival?

CK: Yes, it's going to be "Other Grounds." It is about looking at photography from different starting points – geographically, culturally, historically, but also materially. We will place a particular focus on photographic and publishing scenes in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, including Georgia, Armenia, Transnistria, Albania, and the Balkans. These regions have very vibrant photographic scenes, but are still relatively underrepresented in the German exhibition context.

At the same time, we do not want to look at these places only through familiar narratives of war, migration, political transformation, or post-socialism. Photography can offer very different perspectives – personal, poetic, absurd, experimental, physical, and sometimes humorous. So the central question is not, "What does Eastern Europe look like?" but rather, "What becomes visible when we leave our familiar point of view?"

What keeps you going?

CK: Making things happen. I enjoy doing rather than talking about doing.

For more information, visit dienacht.eu and dienacht-magazine.com/publishing, and follow @leipzigphotobookfestival and @calin_kruse

Save the Date:

Leipzig Photobook Festival will take place between April 10 – 11th, 2027.