PHOTOGRAPHIC SURVEY OF THE CANTON OF VAUD
SIX PHOTOGRAPHERS' PERSPECTIVES
28.06 – 28.09.2025

1. INTRODUCTION

The second call for applications for the Photographic Survey of the Canton of Vaud was launched in 2023, following a similar exercise held in 2021. Photographers living or working in Vaud were invited to put together a proposal based on a subject selected from the cantonal inventory of intangible heritage – a list of some 75 traditions and customs that are distinctive to the region's culture and history.
Following a competitive selection process, six photographers – Thomas Brasey, Olga Cafiero, Sarah Carp, Matthieu Gafsou, Yves Leresche and Romain Mader – were chosen by a panel of experts to bring their projects to life. Each received a grant and was given one year to conduct research and produce a series documenting a local practice or tradition.
Digital copies of the photographs are held at the Iconopôle at the Cantonal and University Library in Lausanne, while the physical photographs are now part of the Photo Elysée collection.

Modern-day photographers are by no means the first to document an area or region through the lens – the practice is as old as photography itself. From the outset, photographers were indeed considered to be in a unique position to record an environment, capture social and economic changes and preserve these important records for future generations.
It is therefore no surprise that those who have taken on this dual role – as witness and archivist – include some of the biggest names in photography. In 1851, Gustave Le Gray, Édouard Baldus and Hippolyte Bayard were among a group of pioneers who photographed landmarks and monuments around France as part of the *Missions Héliographiques*, a project commissioned by the French Inspector General of Historical Monuments. Some 130 years later, great names including Robert Doisneau, Gabriele Basilico, Josef Koudelka and Sophie Ristelhueber were hired to carry out similar duties by DATAR, France's land management and regional planning agency. In the intervening period, these wide-ranging documentary campaigns took on a more social dimension – a shift in focus driven in part by photographers such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, and Gordon Parks, who worked for the U.S. Farm Security Administration during the Great Depression.

In Switzerland, documentary photography is a more recent but no less thriving practice: the Canton of Vaud was the sixth Swiss region to embark on an exercise of this kind, following in the footsteps of the Cantons of Fribourg, Geneva, Valais, and Neuchâtel, as well as the Bernese Jura region. The campaign involved some of the leading lights of the national contemporary photography scene.
Yet unlike their 19th-century French counterparts, the six photographers who took part in the Photographic Survey of the Canton of Vaud were not tasked with documenting monuments and landmarks. Theirs was an altogether different and more daunting challenge: to capture the Canton's intangible heritage, something that is by nature elusive.

The photographers worked on their subject of choice, selected from a list drawn up by the Canton of Vaud. Afforded total creative freedom, they embraced the complexities that come with documenting the intangible. The result is an exhibition that provides a glimpse into the people and places of Vaud through uniquely personal and subjective lenses. Follow Olga Cafiero as she peruses old copies of the *Messager Boiteux*, and join Matthieu Gafsou as he takes part in the *Jeunesses campagnardes*. Go in search of the *Brigands du Jorat* with Thomas Brasey, and savor the art of mechanics with Sarah Carp. Meet the Helvetia Circus with Yves Leresche, and dig into a *papet vaudois* with Romain Mader. These worlds – each separate yet all connected – reflect the richness and diversity of the Canton of Vaud. Sometimes, we just need to look at things through a different lens.

2. OLGA CAFIERO, *EPHEMERIS*

Le Messager Boiteux is Switzerland's oldest almanac, first published in 1708. Still released annually to this day, it once dispensed crop-growing advice, lunar calendars and horoscopes, traditional remedies, and important information about politics and the local community.
Olga Cafiero took the almanac as the starting point for her exploration of the infinite possibilities of the photographic medium. In a constellation of images, produced by an array of renderings and techniques, she picks up on various topics, sub-topics and related ruminations that inspire this near-biblical work of yesteryear. Cafiero depicts twinkling stars, menacing beasts, and superstitions re-imagined in the age of artificial intelligence. Her work also includes several series of documentary-style photographs, such as a catalogue of the wheat varieties grown in Vaud and aerial shots of the canton taken from a weather balloon equipped with GoPro cameras. This same tension between art and science is evident in Cafiero's examination of the anatomical wax models long used as teaching aids in medical schools, as well as in her reproductions of original engravings from the almanac. Ultimately, *Ephemeris* is a reflection on the limits of our perception and on our relationship with reality, challenging the aphorism, printed in *Le Messager Boiteux*, according to which "there is no sun for the blind, no thunder for the deaf."

Olga Cafiero (IT/CH, b. 1982) holds a bachelor's degree in visual communication and a master's degree in art direction from the University of Art and Design Lausanne (ECAL). She is a nominee for the 2025 Swiss Design Award, a prize she won once before, in 2011. In 2023, Cafiero joined Futures Photography, a Europe-wide photography platform. Her first monograph, *Flora Neocomensis* (Scheidegger & Spiess, 2020), features images taken as part of the Photographic Survey of the Canton of Neuchâtel. Her contribution to the Vaud survey is documented in *Ephemeris* (Noir sur Blanc, 2025).

3. MATTHIEU GAFSOU, *LA LIBERTÉ N'EST PLUS UN RÊVE* [FREEDOM IS NO LONGER A DREAM]

The *jeunesses vaudoises* are the Canton of Vaud's version of country youth groups – a tradition that is still alive in many parts of the world. These groups of young men and women, organized by local societies under the umbrella of the *Fédération Vaudoise des Jeunesses Campagnardes*, meet throughout the year, every summer at the *Girons* regional festivals, and every five years at a large-scale festival known as *La Cantonale*. Featuring competitions such as tug-of-war and wrestling, the festivals are important social occasions and, for many participants, likely serve as rites of passage into adulthood.
Matthieu Gafsou wanted to show what brings people together rather than what separates them. He looked for the universal in this movement to understand what can link the city to the countryside rather than show what sets them apart. The installation documents the unique codes, rules and excesses of the *jeunesses vaudoises* and charts how they are being forced to adapt in a changing society. Wood naturally features heavily in the form of the impressive structures built by the young participants, at times resembling villages sprouting from the fields. The burnt effect conveys a sense of fervor and intensifies these pictorial black-and-white photographs. As the photographer himself puts it, the images depict the sleepy countryside of Vaud in all its "pungent, orderly absurdity." Gafsou has a way with words and a knack for playing with language – as evidenced by the title of his installation, which is repurposed from a line in the official anthem of the Canton of Vaud.

Matthieu Gafsou (CH/FR, b. 1981) holds a master's degree in the humanities from the University of Lausanne and a bachelor's degree from the School of Applied Arts of Vevey (CEPV). Winner of the Prix Maison Ruinart in 2022, the Photographic Survey of the Canton of Fribourg in 2011 and the HSBC Foundation Award for Photography in 2009, he has exhibited in Switzerland and abroad and has published seven books. He has taught at the University of Art and Design Lausanne (ECAL) since 2012 and is a founding member of the photo agency MAPS. Gafsou is represented by Galerie C (Neuchâtel/Paris).

4. THOMAS BRASEY, *NASTY JORAT*

The *Brigands du Jorat* trace their roots back to the 12th and 13th centuries, a time when the lands north of Lausanne were the scene of crimes and misdemeanors against the Savoyard aristocracy. According to historical accounts, which blend truth and legend, these bandits never operated alone, but always as a group. Traditionally depicted as wearing wide-brimmed hats and carrying leather flasks, knives and – most notably – clubs, they were Vaud's very own version of Robin Hood, bound by a pact and at times invoking the devil. The *Nouvelle Compagnie des Brigands du Jorat*, founded in 1971, chose to forgo this criminal past, becoming the self-styled protectors of the Jorat region's culture and traditions.
For his contribution to the Photographic Survey of the Canton of Vaud, Swiss photographer Thomas Brasey produced a series of images that, like their subject, straddle the line between fantasy and reality. The series opens with depictions of peaceful, sun-drenched, and at times innocuous landscapes. But the sense of threat builds as the narrative progresses and the light fades, with small clues pointing to the ominous presence of men in blue shirts and red scarves. Then, when darkness falls, the scene takes on an otherworldly quality – and we come face to face with a truth that only the deepest night can reveal. With *Nasty Jorat*, Brasey revisits an important episode in the history of Vaud, taking us deep into the now-legendary forest in a skillfully executed telling whose narrative arc evokes the silhouette of the treetops themselves.

Thomas Brasey (CH, b. 1980) holds a bachelor's degree in visual communication from the University of Art and Design Lausanne (ECAL) and a Ph.D. in organometallic chemistry from the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL). His work is regularly exhibited in Switzerland and abroad. A winner of several awards, he was selected to take part in the Photographic Survey of the Canton of Fribourg (2015) and the Photographic Survey of the Canton of Valais (2020). His book *Jorat Méchant* will be published soon (Haus am Gern, 2025).

5. SARAH CARP, *MECHANICAL DREAM*

The practice of art mechanics features in the Canton of Vaud's inventory of intangible heritage and was added to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2020. This practice is typified by the craftsmanship involved in the creation of objects including timepieces, automata and music boxes. Its history can be traced back to the 17th century and the emerging craft of watchmaking in the Jura region, which spans the French-Swiss border.
Swiss photographer Sarah Carp documents this long-standing tradition in *Mechanical Dream*, taking us on an otherworldly journey that seems to defy the normal constraints of time. Snow-covered landscapes evoke the birth of the profession, harking back to an age when farmers would put away their farm tools for the winter and turn their attention to watchmaking. A perforated disc seen close up, questioning eyeballs and a half-open back offer a glimpse into the ingenious mechanisms that bring these objects to life. Carp spent time in watchmaking studios from Sainte-Croix to L'Auberson, observing the women and men who, to this day, come up with these precision timepieces. Her photographs play with scale to document the incredible craftsmanship behind these creations. The photographer herself is no stranger to precision and technical skill: through her masterful use of deep blacks and subtle lights, she pays homage to the expertise for which the region is famous – not just in Switzerland but around the world.

Sarah Carp (CH, b. 1981) is a graduate of the School of Applied Arts of Vevey (CEPV). Her work has appeared in numerous exhibitions and has been selected for various competitions and festivals in Switzerland and abroad. She is a recipient of several awards, including the 2019 Prix Focale from the City of Nyon and the 2020 Prix CEPY from the Regional Cultural Network of Northern Vaud. Carp was named Swiss Press Photographer of the Year in 2021. Her latest book, *Sans visage* (Actes Sud), was published in June 2025. This body of work is the subject of an exhibition at the Rencontres d'Arles this summer.

6. YVES LERESCHE, *WITH HELVETIA CIRCUS*

For more than 30 years, Swiss photographer Yves Leresche has harbored a fascination for communities: from the alternative music scene formed around the Dolce Vita club in Lausanne to Europe's Roma minorities. It is therefore no surprise that he chose the *Cirque Helvetia* as his object of study. Founded by the Maillard family in Moudon in 1975, it is the only independent circus still operating in French-speaking Switzerland.
Leresche applied his trademark documentary style to *With The Helvetia Circus*. Immersing himself in this circus community, he drew on his experience to know when to interact with his subjects and when to maintain observational distance by stepping back into the shadows. After gaining the troupe's trust and acceptance, he spent several months following them on their summer tour and at their winter quarters in Moudon. The end result is part documentary, part portrait photography: a series of images that capture the experience of being on tour – from public performances in the big tent to more intimate, behind-the-scenes moments in the trailer. Leresche's photographs offer a glimpse into the contrasts that are part and parcel of life as a circus performer, portraying the troupe members both in their colorful costumes and engaged in their secondary duties (such as selling candy floss, working as a ring boy, performing manual labor and staffing the ticket desk). The series also depicts the spectators, bringing back memories of childhood and the inimitable smell of fresh popcorn.

Yves Leresche (CH, b. 1962) trained as a graphic designer before becoming a professional press photographer in 1991. He also works on personal exhibitions and publications, including *Rrom* (Benteli & Infolio, 2003) and *Avec le Cirque Helvetia* (Éditions Favre, 2025), the result of his contribution to the Photographic Survey of the Canton of Vaud. Leresche is the recipient of several honors, including a World Press Photo award and two Swiss Press Photo awards. He was named Swiss Press Photographer of the Year in 2020.

7. ROMAIN MADER, *THE PAPET*

When it comes to traditional cuisine in the Canton of Vaud, nothing stands out more than the *papet vaudois*. This dish, a staple of Vaud cuisine that is commonly enjoyed between mid-September and April, consists of cabbage sausages accompanied by leeks and potatoes cooked in white wine.
For his contribution to the survey, Swiss artist Romain Mader took a road trip from his current home in Zurich to the Aigle region (Chablais), his birthplace, to document the making of this culinary delicacy. He spent time working as a trainee under market gardeners, a butcher, and a winemaker, capturing the entire process in intricate detail – from picking the vegetables to rearing and slaughtering the pigs. The end result is a ten-minute film in which Mader, known for his performance art, features personally. At times tinged with humor, the film is an ode to craftsmanship, local produce, traditions and the social aspect of this hearty dish.

Romain Mader (CH, b. 1988) holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Art and Design Lausanne (ECAL) and a master's degree from Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). He has participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions (Tate Modern, London; Paris Photo; UNTITLED, Miami; Pully Art Museum; Images Vevey) and is the author of *Ekaterina* (Mörel Books, 2017) and *Get the Look!* (Mörel Books, 2024). Mader received the 2017 Foam Paul Huf Award and is represented by Galerie Dix9 (Paris).

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Translated by Christopher Scala