

MICHAEL WOLF: Life in the City: Michael Wolf's Major Retrospective at Les Rencontres d'Arles 2017 on
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Photographs by Michael Wolf

The phrase "street photography" comes loaded with meaning, expectations and, in many ways, limitations. Whether it's the decisive moment, the magic of light or the importance placed on happenstance, the genre has a rich and celebrated history—but also find itself a bit foreclosed in its capacity for experimentation.

That is why photographers like Michael Wolf are so important. For well over a decade, Wolf has made work in cities, streets and urban agglomerations all over the world. Whether in Hong Kong, Chicago, Paris, Tokyo or in digital worlds through the use of Google Street view, Wolf's always fresh, widely varied work reminds us why the world's streets continue to capture our attention.

In the words of writer and critic Marc Feustel, "[Wolf] establishes himself not only as a photographer of the urban structure, but of the unexpected ways in which people adapt to and reconfigure this rapidly changing environment. At a time when the urban experience is becoming increasingly homogenized, Wolf has chosen to celebrate the distinctiveness of each city that he photographs, while revealing the universal traits of contemporary city life."

At this year's Rencontres d'Arles, Wolf will showcase a retrospective of his impressive output since 2004. Below, we have made a selection from several of these series. We encourage you to visit the exhibition if you can; otherwise, seek out more information on the particular projects that interest you. We hope you find as much inspiration in Wolf's streets as we have.
—LensCulture

Editors' note: Wolf's retrospective "La Vie dans les Villes" will be shown at l'église des Frères Prêcheurs at this year's Rencontres d'Arles. The show was produced in close collaboration with the Hague Museum of Photography.

More of Marc Feustel's writings on photography (as well as adjacent projects in curation and editing) can be found on his website.



From the series "Architecture of Density," hyper-detailed, large-scale views of high-rise structures that are homes to millions in modern Hong Kong
© Michael Wolf



From the series "Informal Solutions," a visual collection of the endless ingenuity displayed by urban dwellers. Wolf, in using a typological approach, captures workers' gloves, drying mops, maze-like ventilation pipes and much more. © Michael Wolf



From the series "Paris Rooftops," which Wolf made during his years in the City of Light, an iconic location that initially stymied his creative efforts. Eventually, Wolf took to the rooftops, discovering a simple and appealing geometric beauty that contrasted with the heavily loaded architecture found on the street level. © Michael Wolf



From the series "Tokyo Compression," a series of candid portraits of Japanese commuters enduring the inhuman daily crush of bodies in Tokyo's subway cars. © Michael Wolf



From the series "The Transparent City," where architectural abstraction meets high-tech voyeurism in a study of downtown Chicago. © Michael Wolf