

# HISTORY OF THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHT 1994-2007

August 8, 2007

The idea gradually came about as festival directors informally met around the world. The friendships that developed over the years made the **Festival of Light** (FOL) possible.

**1994:** At a party at the Goethe Institut, during *FotoFest*, festival directors discussed future collaboration between their organizations.

**1996:** The dialogue continued at a meeting organized by Finn Thrane in Odense, Denmark in connection with *Copenhagen 96* (European Cultural Capital).

The next meeting was organized by Patricia Mendoza (Mexico) in the studio of the painter Francesco Toledo in Oaxaca, Mexico after *Fotosepiembre* 1996.

**1997:** Meeting organized by *NAFOTO* and Marcos Santilli at a ranch 100 km from Sao Paulo after *NAFOTO*. The next meeting was held in November at a Scottish castle after *FotoFeis* with additional directors taking part in the meeting.

**1998:** At the Houston meeting during *FotoFest*, festival directors received e-mail training at the Rice University Media Lab. Of the 25 festival directors attending only two knew how to use email. A concrete proposal was made for a collaboration between festivals:

- Patricia Mendoza (Mexico) gave a name to this idea : *Festival of Light* and offered to provide a logo for the group.
- Jean-Luc Monterosso (Paris) agreed to donate 1000 *Festival of Light* guides to each festival.
- *FotoFest* (Houston) agreed to produce a Website for member festivals by the year 2000 to serve as an organizing tool to combine the other festivals Websites under a FOL umbrella.
- The Paris meeting in November added new festivals from the Canary Is., Spain. Directors signed a letter of support for another festival in France at the request of Jean-Luc Monterosso.

**1999:** At a March meeting in Rotterdam hosted by *FotoBiennale Rotterdam*. FOL members approved logo, the maquette for the *Festival of Light* guide, the mockup for the FOL Website, and agreed on paying start up costs and annual dues for the maintaince of the Website.

- June meeting in Spain hosted by *PhotoEspaña*: Paris confirmed that it would deliver the *Festival of Light* guide, suggestions were made for improvements in the FOL Website and Antonio Vela of *FOTONOVEMBRE* (Tenerife, Canary Is., Spain) and Daniel Curtin from *CONTACT* in Torino attended the directors meeting for the first time.

**2003-04:** At more recent FOL meetings attention has focused on simplyfying the *Festival of Light* Website and reducing its maintaince costs. This was accomplished by turning over further Web developmnet to Elda Harrington (Argentina) who passed it to her daughter who is a designer. The cost was absorbed by Leica Camera in 2004.

**2005:** At a September meeting in Montreal several important ideas were put forward. They are excerpted here in a report from *le Mois de la Photo Montrael* (*FotoFest* was unable to attend because of hurricane Rita).

**Arles' Night of the Year 2006:** After discussing different possibilities of exchanges among festival members, Florence Maille proposed dedicating the second Night of the Year to the different members of FOL. Night of the Year is a successful new activity developed by Arles Festival in which the city of Arles becomes the scenario of a multi-projection project. The idea seemed to be very appealing for all members.

- *Noorderlicht Photofestival* : Introduction to *Noorderlicht Photofestival* by Wim Melis. Previous editions of the festival as well as commissioned projects and their Photo gallery work were presented. Catalogues and other samples of their work were showed to FOL members.
- New Festival in Canberra, Australia: A brief overview of the Canberra festival was presented by Martyn Jolly. This festival, which will hold its first presentation in 2008 in Canberra (2 hours from Sydney), is still in the planning stages and will be the result of a partnership between a number of local art and educational institutions.

#### 1. Presentation of each festival

Most of the festivals find that being a part of the collective impact of the *Festival of Light* helps in their search for sponsors, financial support of consulates, embassies and governments (as of August 2007, 32 festivals are listed as members of the Festival of Light). This is especially true with the newer festivals and those in countries where political changes effect public funding for cultural activities.



22 FOL directors receive digital cameras donated by EPSON America at FOTOFEST2000

## 2. The accomplishments of the Festival of Light

- email training provided by Houston
- a logo provided by Mexico
- a guide edited and **delivered** by Paris
- **FOL Website** produced by Houston, which began on Saint Lucia Day, December 13, 1999. In Sweden this day is celebrated as the Fair of Light. The *Festival of Light* Website accessed 22 festival Websites from 16 countries. It also provides information about photo groups through 100 Fine Art Links as well as connections to 13 other festivals.
- Argentina provided a Spanish translation for the Website that becomes available at the click of a button.
- *Festival of Light* directors have supported other festivals with petitions to their sponsors (Cahors - France, Odense - Denmark, and Venezuela).
- EPSON Camera donated digital cameras to FOL directors in Houston.
- numerous informal exhibit exchanges between individual festivals
- international publicity for the international network
- LEICA Camera agreed to pay for on-line costs of FOL at the March 2004 meeting at FotoFest



FOL meets in Montreal in January 2002. (left>right) Directors from Xalapa, Mexico; Odense, Denmark; Toronto and Montreal, Canada; Guadalajara, Mexico ; Barcelona, Spain ; Caracas, Venezuela , and staffer from Montreal.

- Several festival directors who were represented at *FotoFest 2004* were invited to join FOL, including *PhotoAmericas* (Portland, Oregon), *Rhubarb Rhubarb* (Birmingham, UK), *Foto Arte* (Brasilia), *FotoFiesta* (Medellin, Colombia), and *Foundation for Visual Arts* (Krakow).
- *Noorderlicht Photofestival* was voted in as a new member of FOL in September 2005.

The *Festival of Light* facilitated three major goals :

- to collaborate between the member festivals in order to promote each other.
- to facilitate sponsorship.
- to become a cultural force to promote quality photography and photo projects worldwide.
- The aim of FOL is to evolve from an association of friends to a professional association.

How the *Festival of Light* responds to the changes that have occurred in photography since the founding of *Le Mois de la Photo* in 1980 will help determine the strategic goals FOL directors set for themselves. For example, digital processes dramatically depart from photographic practices that we have known over the past 20 years and there are other changes.

With respect to the 'culture debates', many of the younger festivals are at earlier stages of development. For some of the older festivals that are no longer compelled to fight to defend 'photography as art', the goals have shifted from fighting for 'photography as art' to working in new ways with institutions that now show photography. Both the younger and older festivals can use the *Festival of Light* Website to collectively draw on the huge new international audience as well as to direct funders attention to the potent collaboration that now includes 32 festivals from 21 countries.

### 3. New festivals

These are the guidelines accepted in February 2000 in Houston.

- Festivals should have at least organized two consecutive events
- The event could be annual, biannual or triannual
- A commitment to present international exhibitions as well as exhibitions dedicated to the regional photographers



(L to R) Vaclav Macek, Bratislava ; Elda Harrington , Buenos Aires ; Karla Osorio, Brasilia ; Wendy Watriss, Houston ; Bernd Fechner (standing), Berlin ; Laura Nolden, Houston; and Juan Gaviria, Medellin at the FOL Meeting on March 19, 2006

- Quality criteria
- Festivals have to pay attention to the public and therefore should not focus only on professionals
- Festivals must pay their share of Website and FOL expenses.
- Seven additional festivals attended the March 19, 2006 FOL meeting in Houston and made presentations about their festivals.
- Lodz, Poland was the site of a FOL meeting May 19 -20, 2007.

4. Website

Proposition to make changes to the the Website was approved, including a common page to improve communication and to reduce each festival page to its own internet address.

5. Next meeting

PhotoArte in Brasilia will host the next FOL meeting between **October 17 – 20, 2007**.



First image downloaded from Epson digital camera on FOL Website during FOTOFEST2000 meeting.