



PHOTO FRENZY

Care to rub elbows with the world's top photographers? Cortona's annual art and photography festival draws a global audience.

by KRISTY ALPERT

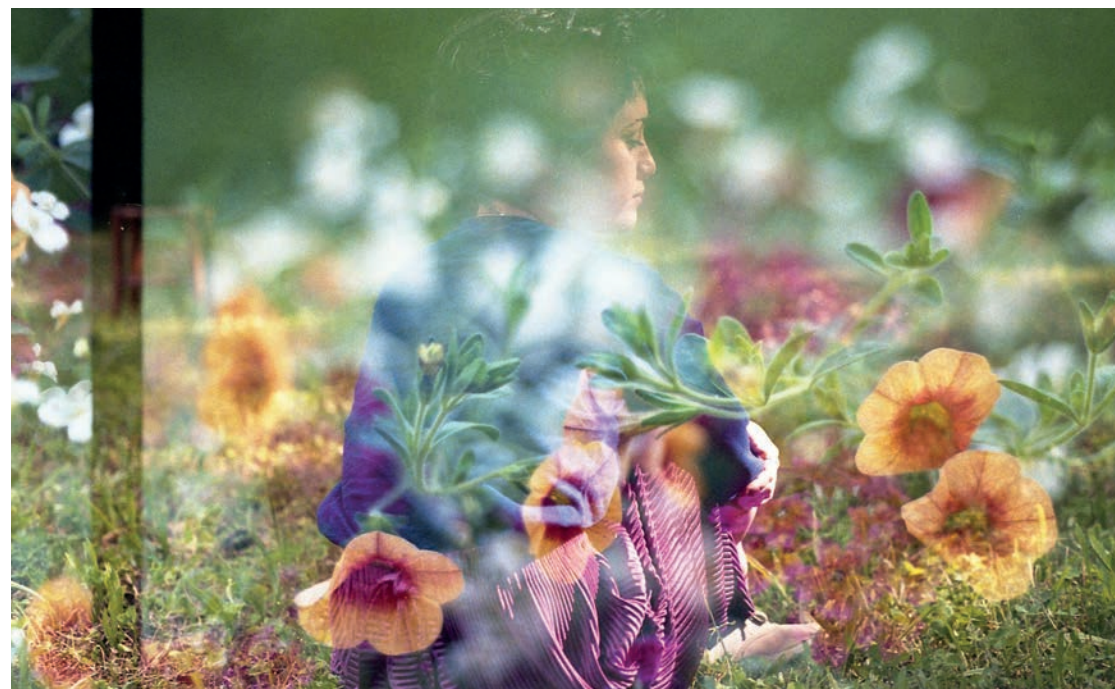
FOR 42 WEEKS OF THE YEAR, THE MEDIEVAL CITY OF CORTONA IN ITALY GLIMMERS WITH A DISTINCTLY TUSCAN LUSTER FROM ITS perch along Val di Chiana; but it's the other 10 weeks on the calendar when this

petite province gets illuminated by brilliant flashes from photographers and appearances from glitterati from foreign lands.

For the past five years, shutterbugs and photography fans from around the world have convened in this picturesque village to take part in what has become one of

the world's greatest gatherings for art and photography. *Cortona On The Move* (cortonaonthemove.com/en), or *Fotografia in Viaggio* (literally, "Photography on the Move"), began in 2011 when Carlo Roberti, founder and director of Toscana Photographic Workshop, met with the minds behind the On The Move cultural association to create an ideal setting to showcase some of the world's best travel pictures and photographs.

In its first year, *Cortona On The Move* featured only 10 principal exhibitions with



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Striking stills of people, places and things reign at the annual gathering (photo by Anastasia Taylor-Lind, courtesy Cortona On The Move); romantic moody shots, such as these, capture an ethereal, dreamy state (photo courtesy Caterina Burlini, caterinaburlini.blogspot.it); street scenes from around the world, on view at Cortona (photo by Braschler & Fischer, courtesy Cortona On The Move).

OPPOSITE PAGE: Journalists, photographers, art amateurs and enthusiasts flock to Italy for global photography that blends culture and nature (photo courtesy Francesco Rossi - Leaf Photography, fr-ph.com).

Stones become graphic; photos come alive; and the sleepy city of Cortona truly gets on the move.



six more exhibitions occurring off circuit. The response was overwhelming as word spread to an increasingly international audience of industry professionals, and the 2014 edition of the festival, featuring 24 world-renowned photographers and welcoming almost 25,000 visitors, more than doubled the tiny town's population during that short, 10-week span. This year's festival is likely to attract even more attendees as it kicks off July 16 with artwork that will hang in place until the close of the festival Sept. 27 going up around town.

Now under the artistic direction of Arianna Rinaldo, a famed independent photographer and curator, and executive director Antonio Carloni, the festival is celebrating its fifth season this year in a seductive soirée that begins and ends with the concept of a journey. Everything, from the photography on display to

the deliberate way the artwork is arranged throughout the town, conforms to this theme of artistic exploration.

"This year, the festival offers around 15 photography exhibitions, including OFF Circuit (five works selected from a free open call for entries) and an award exhibit," explains Arianna Rinaldo, freelance photography consultant and artistic director of *Cortona On The Move*. "During the opening days, there are portfolio reviews with professionals and experts from all over the world, as well as conferences and roundtables, plus evening projections and events."

For festivalgoers, the journey begins the second they arrive for the opening days of the festival with a stroll through stone-laden corridors that lead to a series of tastefully decorated plazas playing host to numerous open-air events and dinner parties. The opening days are certainly the most

interesting, as the excitement in the air gets electrified by numerous pop-up events occurring throughout the city, and by wandering photographers, artists and specialists making their way around town to see how their works are being received by the masses.

"The town's cozy atmosphere allows us to welcome the invited guests and all the participants in a very informal setting, where the high quality of photography is accompanied by the human touch, accessibility and fun as well," Rinaldo adds. "The communal dinners are the highlight of the opening evenings, where masters of photography and emerging talents come together with the general public."

Nights at the festival are simple, when the open-air dinners and cocktail receptions make it just as easy to get entranced in the sea of languages all simultaneously striving to communicate the art of immersive travel, as it is to let the rising bubbles from a glass of Prosecco carry your dreamy gaze up into the crystal-clear summer skies above. The streets are lit by the glow of dimly burning candles and the faded haze from streetlights well beyond their youth, as guests take their seats at the communal dinner tables. Tickets are available in advance or at

Snapshots of lively receptions, workshops and exhibits, captured during the opening days of *Cortona On The Move*, 2014. The international photography gathering is now celebrating its fifth year (photos courtesy Cortona On The Move).

the door for a seat at the tables, where the artists themselves sit shoulder-to-shoulder with festival attendees to discuss travel and art, while indulging in local Tuscan delicacies and equally delicate wines.

Interaction with artists and photographers is rare and often nonexistent at other photography festivals, and it's the interaction and unrestricted access to the creators behind the photos that makes Cortona such a unique breed in the photography circuit.

"The friendly atmosphere, the informal gatherings, the beauty of the town, the interconnection between photography and the ancient beauties of Cortona set this festival apart," Rinaldo says, "and, of course, the variety of contemporary photographic work with the high quality of exhibition that is offered, with the possibility to meet the authors. We invite all the photographers and the experts;

it is important for us to create the connection and have the protagonists with us."

At the end of the evening, more often than not, it's the sound of *la musica toscana* playing in the open air that ultimately directs guests toward their nightly quarters, of which the Falconiere & Spa (*falconiere.it*) and Badia Di Campoleone (*badiacampoleone.it*) are undoubtedly the top-end retreats in the village.

Although nights in the plaza are magical, festival veterans know the trick to the perfect Tuscan morning in Cortona rests in rising early to grab a dark-roasted espresso at Caffè Tuscher before claiming a seat among the ancient steps of the Palazzo Comunale for the opening act of the day: when the morning sun rises to waken the sleepy city to a day of visual pleasure.

Throughout the course of opening week,

For the past five years, shutterbugs and photography fans from around the world have convened in this picturesque village ...



FROM TOP: Teatro Signorelli, Cortona's historic theatre (photo courtesy Luca Tiezzi, cortonaweb.net); opening shot from Cortona On The Move, 2014 (photo courtesy Cortona On The Move).



workshops take place throughout the city on topics such as unlocking inspiration day, or travel writing and photography. The main event, viewing the photography, occurs daily throughout the next several weeks, where artwork from more than 15 photographers will hang in venues around the city. Visitors can stroll lazily along the cobblestoned streets and meander through Etruscan chamber tombs to view the work in venues including Vecchio Ospedale, the

Fortezza di Girifalco, Ex-Magazzino delle Carni, Chiesa di Sant'Antonio, Ruga Piana 60, Via Santucci and Via Cesare Battisti. *Cortona On The Move* festival is truly unlike anything else of its kind. There is ease to its splendor and simplicity in its structure that makes the familiar seem exotic and ordinary objects appear as objects d'art. Stones become graphic, photos come alive and the sleepy city of Cortona truly gets on the move. ■

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