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A Photographic Feast in the South of France

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Gabriele Basilico

This year's Photomed photography festival is dedicated to Gabriele Basilico, who died in February. He's best known for his photographs of urban landscapes, like this one of Beirut.

Many photography festivals take place in southern France from the spring to fall, and the three-year-old [Photomed](#), one of the newest and fastest rising, just opened in Sanary-sur-Mer, southeast of Marseille. The festival focuses on Mediterranean photographers and images, and is under the artistic direction of Jean-Luc Monterosso, founder and director of the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris. Mr. Monterosso and his team have been successfully striking a balance between exhibiting big-name photographers — the edition this year includes Nino Migliori, Gabriele Basilico, Fouad Elkoury and the filmmaker Costa-Gavras — and showcasing the young and lesser-known, with the spotlight this year on Lebanon.

The town of Sanary, slightly off the beaten track — if it is possible to say that about the French Riviera — has a rich cultural history. Aldous Huxley wrote his "Brave New World" there, and the town provided sanctuary to many German intellectuals fleeing Nazism, including Bertolt Brecht, Erich Maria Remarque, Stefan Zweig and Thomas Mann and his family.

Photomed exhibits extend to nearby Bandol, the island of Bendor and to the Hotel des Arts in Toulon, where Gabriele Basilico's exhibit on Mediterranean cities, "Urban Obsession," is exhibited. This year's Photomed Festival is dedicated to Mr. Basilico, who died in February. His widow, Giovanna Calvenzi, explained how Mr. Basilico, who had an aversion to monuments, loved recording cities "in movement, that were constantly evolving."

It is fitting that the central room in the Hotel des Arts is devoted to Mr. Basilico's riveting photographs of Beirut after the 15-year civil war in 1991. Mr. Basilico was part of an extraordinary group of photographers that included Robert Frank, Raymond Depardon, René Burri, Josef Koudelka and Fouad Elkoury that was commissioned to record the devastation in central Beirut. Mr. Elkoury, like Mr. Basilico, also studied architecture. At Photomed he is exhibiting a selection of solitary and intimate shots from his archives. Mr. Elkoury was visibly moved at the sight of Mr. Basilico's pictures, saying "I think he had the greatest sensitivity of all of us. He was generous, and wanted to understand everything."

Providing a sharp contrast to images of war-torn Beirut is the work of Paris Match's celebrity photographers, Bruno Mouron and Pascal Rostain. An exhibition of their work, called "La Dolce Vita," showcases black-and-white shots of celebrities such as Brigitte Bardot or Sophia Loren enjoying moments of Mediterranean life that have never been exhibited before.

"It was not aggressive in those days," Mr. Rostain said. "These kind of photographs can't be taken today — there are press attachés and so on — we actually spent time with people, we were lucky to be included in their intimacy."

The filmmaker Costa-Gavras, now 80, opened up his personal archive of photographs to Mr. Monterosso for a preview at Photomed of what will be a major exhibition of his images at the end of June at the Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris. Also in his 80s and no less fit is an Italian master of humanist photography, Nino Migliori, whose stunning photograph of a diver in mid-air snapped in 1951 was chosen for the Photomed poster. Work that spans 65 years of Mr. Migliori's career is exhibited here, allowing viewers to see how his work evolved as he experimented with different methods.

Mr. Migliori said he was happy to be sharing the gallery space with the work of some young Lebanese photographers, referring to a show curated by the photojournalist Tony Hage. Some members of this talented group has worked, like Mr. Basilico, on the concept of an evolving city, although in this case it is always Beirut. Caroline Tabet's deliberately blurred images express her feelings about a city that is disappearing before her eyes because of demolition and reconstruction. Joanna Andraos's staged photographs in a ghostly villa examine memory and traces of the civil war, while Tanya Troubousi's images of herself and her alter ego in their daily routine deal with solitude.

The island of Bendor, owned by the Ricard family of the pastis apéritif, lends an exhibition space each year to Photomed. Currently, two contrasting views of Greek photography are exhibited. Katerina Kaloudi's nostalgic black and white images were taken between 1988 and 2005, but they seem to be straight out of the 1950s. Stratis Vogiatzis provides a particularly strong portfolio of photographs of fishermen and the fishing industry in nine Mediterranean countries taken over four years. There is a phantasmagorical element to his color photographs, and Mr. Vogiatzis aptly describes fishermen as "the gatekeepers to a world that is totally unfamiliar to us."

Raised on the island of Chios, Mr. Vogiatzis said, "The sea is everything to me."

Many other exhibitions are included on the Photomed itinerary, including the work of six photographers from Slovenia and a series of portraits of local winemakers in the Bandol region taken by the Moroccan photographer and filmmaker Daoud Aoulad-Syad, who was encouraged at the beginning of his career by Henri-Cartier Bresson. How could he not continue?

[Photomed 2013 runs until June 16.](#)