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French photo festival frames the Mediterranean in a new light

By [Olivia Snaije](#), for CNN Updated 1219 GMT (1919 HKT) June 2, 2015

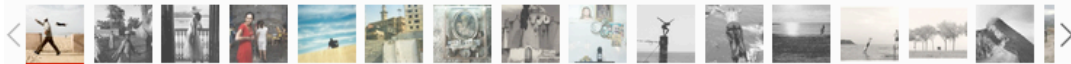


Photomed 2015 19 photos

Photomed is a yearly photography festival that celebrates Mediterranean countries. Browse the gallery to see some of the most interesting shots from this year's exhibition, starting with 'Salta', by Álvaro Sánchez-Montañés.

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(CNN)—At a time when the southern regions of the Mediterranean are often represented by visions of chaos and suffering, a young festival brings images to the public that are mostly filled with light and beauty.

Now in its fifth year, [Photomed](#), the photographic exhibition dedicated to the Mediterranean, has become part of the landscape in the pretty waterfront town of Sanary-sur-Mer, on France's Côte d'Azur.

It also extend to spaces such as the Hôtel des Arts in Toulon and the nearby island of Bendor, reachable by ferry from the neighboring Bandol.

Spanish guests of honor

The 2015 Festival highlights the work of about 20 photographers, ranging from icons like Edouard Boubat to up and coming names such as Italy's Angelo Antolino, or Lebanon's Randa Mirza.

This year's guest of honor is Spain, and visitors will be able to see, among others, works from the Barcelona photographer Jorge Ribalta.

The black and white gelatin images of a sailboat, or mysterious figures in a crowd are printed on a variety of cloths, including silk. Manipulating dimensions, Ribalta's photographs are magnified representations of miniatures, shot before digital photography, prescient of miniature photography.

Photomed collaborated with Valid Foto Gallery in Barcelona for the other Spanish photographers.

The late Mallorca-born Tony Catany's black and white still life and landscapes are gorgeous, technically complicated platinum-printed images in the tradition of Edward Weston or Irving Penn.

Álvaro Sánchez-Montañés, whose droll and colorful photograph of a dog contemplating a concrete structure on a beach south of Barcelona is showing on Sanary's port, and is part of a collection he calls *Unprepared and unsorted*, quirky photographs that don't fit into any planned series that he has been collecting over time.

Another improbable photograph of a dog that appears to be joyfully flying was taken in Essaouira, Morocco, for which he won the Epson photography prize in 2009.

An air traffic controller by profession, Sánchez-Montañés has been carrying a camera with him since he was 17 and is currently working on a project about abandoned objects in nature. Luis Vioque, who works as a train technician spends his free time shooting photographic projects of landscapes taken with a panoramic camera. His Imaginary Voyages series are tender and timeless black and white beachscapes taken in Spain, which he said he hoped transmitted peace and tranquility.

A strange place out of time

French photographer Arno Brignon's eerie pictures of Gibraltar show another side of the Iberian Peninsula, "a strange place that is out of time, where nothing is where one expects it to be," he says. His black and white images show a sort of no-man's land, at once an isolated village and a fiscal paradise.

It is a rare pleasure to be able to view Edouard Boubat's collection of photographs taken in Mediterranean countries between 1952 and 1969; most have never been shown to the public before. The breathtaking shots illustrate women or young men carrying straw baskets of round bread or terracotta water jugs on their heads, of shepherds, farmworkers or a woman sitting and embroidering behind a beaded curtain. Of these photographs, the late Boubat wrote in 1997:

"In 1951 I crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. I saw Africa for the first time. I began my travel-reports for the magazine *Réalités* where I worked for over twenty years. I was discovering the world: Italy, Rome, Sardinia, Sicily, the Gargano; Greece, Lesbos, Paros; Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Lebanon, Alexandria Egypt, Tunisia, North Africa..."

Boubat's son, Bernard, a photographer himself who was present in Sanary and takes care of his father's legacy said: "The most important word to describe my father's work is poetry. In photography you have to be very patient, and when you get the one shot, it's a gift of life...but it doesn't happen all the time. My father's life was photography, a poetic journey."

Italy's Sicilian heart

Italy is represented by a number of artists, two of whom spend much of their time in Sicily: Emma Grosbois is a young French photographer whose study of ex-votos in Palermo workplaces is impeccably displayed in Sanary's tiny 16th century chapel. In a butcher shop, a garage or a carpenter workshop, the owner will paste pictures of loved ones on the wall in a semblance of an altar, often adding photographs of favorite football players, actors or saints.

The Palermo-based American photographer John Pepper is showing images from his last series, *Evaporation*, which are, as he says "out of time and out of context". Isolated figures are on shorelines, alone and fragile, skies are cloudy or dark.

The Neapolitan Angelo Antolino patiently documented women whose husbands, fathers and sons, all members of the Camorra (the mafia-like syndicate from the Campania region), had been arrested in a mass roundup.

Antolino rented an apartment opposite the building where the women lived—none had jobs—and slowly gained their confidence, producing portraits of young women posing in their rooms, an older woman sitting on a chair in her street, a group of women in their courtyard, all left to reorganize their lives following the arrests.



Exporting to Beirut

Since Lebanon was Photomed's 2013 guest of honor, it has played a special role with the organization becoming a festival partner—Photomed will soon be exporting itself to Beirut for the third time in what festival organizers hope will be a trend to come—plans are in the making to have a Photomed Casablanca and further down the line a Photomed Palermo.

Marseille-based Lebanese photographer Randa Mirza's 2003 series *La grotte aux pigeons* ("Pigeon cave") are powerful black and white photographs showing young men diving off Beirut's coastal cliffs.

Mirza, who has recently been focusing on video art, said she was touched to see her decade-old photographs exhibited today to underline the pollution and overdevelopment along Lebanon's coastline. Karim Sakr, winner of this year's Photomed Beirut prize, is a food industry engineer and a self-taught street photographer.

His photographs embody city dwellers in an evolving urban context. Sakr uses texture and contrast, and has moved from shooting in color to black and white; using all the possibilities of subjects his city offers.

Photomed aims to make the public conscious of the Mediterranean in its complexities and beauty—as a free festival that runs a month before the international [Arles photography festival](#), it remains on a human scale, with varied and top quality photography.

Photomed 2015 runs until 21 June 2015.