

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

All works by Ella Kraimer, 2026, digital print, 60 x 40 inches, courtesy of the artist.

Clockwise from the window:

Appearances 1

Appearances 2

Appearances 3

Appearances 4

Appearances 5

Appearances 6

Appearances 7

Appearances 8

Appearances 9

Appearances 10

SPONSORS:

Support for this 2026 FotoFocus Biennial exhibition was provided in part by FotoFocus.



Education & Public Programs Sponsor:
Dr. Robert L. Brandt, Jr.

Community Partners:
Cross Street Partners
Hilton Garden Inn Dayton Downtown

Gallery & CoSHOP Hours
Wed–Sat 11a–6p
ALWAYS FREE



Scan to sign-up
for eNews



contemporary dayton

25 W 4th Street, Dayton, OH 45402
937/224-3822 | codayton.org



GALLERY GUIDE

Ella Kraimer: Appearances

September 25, 2026–January 23, 2027

The Contemporary Dayton is proud to present *Ella Kraimer: Appearances*, a world-premiere exhibition of ten large-scale photographs from Kraimer’s ongoing series of the same name. The exhibition is presented as part of the 2026 FotoFocus Biennial, *The Long View*.

Kraimer spent her formative years in Berlin, Germany, and is now based in New Bremen, Ohio. An artist and fashion stylist, she works primarily through photographic self-portraiture, transforming herself into a cast of fictional personas through secondhand garments gathered from thrift stores across the country. Through costume, staging, collage, and assemblage, she creates images layered with irony, humor, and cultural critique that explore the blurred boundaries between authenticity and performance, memory and invention, and self and society.

Previously viewed only as a digital project, *Appearances* marks the series’ first presentation as a physical exhibition. The work reflects on life in an age of social media, image culture, and spectacle, where identity is increasingly shaped through images and the ways we present ourselves to others. Kraimer turns the camera on herself, using her own likeness as material to be altered, fragmented, and reconstructed.

The series draws inspiration from Kraimer’s childhood memories of playing with paper dolls. Like a paper doll, her image can be dressed, rearranged, transformed, and assigned a new role. Clothing becomes more than costume; the secondhand garments she collects carry traces of previous lives, histories, associations, and expectations. Through reuse, Kraimer also draws attention to the material and symbolic cycles of fashion and contemporary consumer culture.

Each photograph functions as both tableau and mirror. Kraimer constructs fictional worlds and personas, yet the resulting images reflect recognizable aspects of contemporary life: the desire to belong, the pressure to perform, and the impulse to continually reinvent ourselves. Her figures occupy the space between authenticity and artifice, individuality and conformity, revealing identity as something fluid rather than fixed.

Kraimer’s work is informed by thinkers including Vilém Flusser, Marshall McLuhan, Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and Byung-Chul Han, whose writings examine media, spectacle, simulation, and the changing relationship between people and images. Their ideas provide a framework for Kraimer’s investigation of a culture in which the self increasingly becomes an image to be constructed, before being consumed and shared.

Yet *Appearances* is not simply a critique of contemporary image culture. Kraimer approaches self-portraiture as a process of transformation and discovery. By becoming multiple versions of herself, she questions whether there is ever a single, stable identity beneath the images we create. Her photographs suggest that identity is continually shaped through memory, perception, cultural expectations, and our relationships with the world around us.

In keeping with the theme of *The Long View*, the exhibition also asks us to consider how these forces accumulate over time. Childhood memories intersect with contemporary technologies; old garments acquire new identities; personal experiences become part of larger cultural narratives. Kraimer’s photographs bring these layers together, creating images in which past and present, interiority and exteriority, reality and invention coexist.

At once playful and provocative, *Appearances* invites viewers to reconsider not only the images we create, but the stories they tell about who we are, and how those stories change each time we look again.



Courtesy of the artist.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

From an early age, Ella Kraimer’s transcultural upbringing nurtured a deep curiosity surrounding the mutable relationship between visuality, materiality, identity, and culture. Her subsequent engagements reflect a lifelong fascination with metaphysical and cultural inquiry, communication, and perception. At its core, her practice is rooted in mediating between subjective, objective, and collective worlds of meaning.

Kraimer’s experimentation with self-portrait photography has been both contemplative and pedagogical. She views it as an act of unmasking, a pursuit of freedom, and a space in which to honor subjectivity.

Kraimer earned a BA in Design and Visual Communication from the University of Europe for Applied Sciences, Berlin, and an MA in Visual and Media Anthropology from HMKW University of Applied Sciences for Media, Communication, and Management, Berlin. She is currently based in New Bremen, Ohio.

ABOUT THE FOTOFOCUS BIENNIAL

The FotoFocus Biennial, now in its eighth iteration, activates over 70 exhibitions at museums, galleries, universities, and public spaces throughout Greater Cincinnati, Dayton, Columbus, and Northern Kentucky in October 2026. Each Biennial is structured around a unifying theme; the 2026 theme, *The Long View*, considers aspects of time and perspective in photography and film, and how these mediums shape our understanding of the world. FotoFocus welcomes global artists, curators, critics, educators, and visitors to Cincinnati with exhibitions, talks, performances, screenings, and panel discussions during its Biennial Opening Events, October, 1–3, 2026.



Ella Kraimer, *Appearances, No. 10*, digital print, 60 x 40 inches. Courtesy of the artist.