



Press Release

Three awards: The winners of the 2026 Leica Oskar Barnack Award and the inaugural LOBA Women Grant have been announced

Wetzlar, 8 October 2026 – The results are in: Damir Faizulin won the main Leica Oskar Barnack Award (LOBA), Laila AnnMarie Stevens was honoured in the Newcomer category, and Valentina Sinis was delighted to receive the LOBA Women Grant. The awards ceremony was once again a highlight of the Celebration of Photography, held on the evening of 8 October at the World of Leica in Wetzlar.

The two winning series from the 46th LOBA edition impressed the five-person jury, who made their selections from over 400 entries. Nominations for the main category were received from over 130 experts hailing from around 50 countries and spanning the wide spectrum of the international photography scene. The Newcomer Leica Oskar Barnack Award was selected in collaboration with 28 institutions and universities from 18 countries. The LOBA Women Grant was awarded for the first time based on an open-submission application model. Numerous proposals were received describing compelling projects.

The LOBA, which has been awarded since 1980, is now among the most renowned and highly endowed photography prizes worldwide: the Main Prize LOBA winner is awarded €40,000 and Leica camera equipment worth €10,000, while the winner of the Newcomer Award receives €10,000 and a Leica Q3. The LOBA Women Grant is endowed with €10,000, and the selected applicant also receives a Leica Q3 camera, as well as professional support during the implementation and production period.

Damir Faizulin: *Preserving Nature as Preserving Ourselves*

2026 Leica Oskar Barnack Award Winner

In his award-winning series, the Russian photographer draws our attention to the nature and way of life in the mountains of Dagestan in the North Caucasus of southern Russia. Faizulin illustrates the threats to the delicate balance between the inhabitants and nature in his images. He documents current developments and the emerging tourism industry, modern architecture and the neglect of established structures and culture, while at the same time celebrating the region's beauty.

Quote from Damir Faizulin: "I first visited Dagestan as a tourist in 2020 and immediately felt a connection to its cultural fabric, the meaning of the moment and my personal interest in the region. I



had a strong feeling that the region was about to undergo rapid change, and I wanted to document these developments. This is why, in 2021, I moved to Dagestan to explore the region in greater depth. It's important to me that a photograph does not simplify reality, but rather helps us recognise its complexity."

Damir Faizulin was born in Uzbekistan in 1986. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, his family moved to Russia. Until the age of 33, he successfully pursued a career as a martial artist and professional wrestler. He then attended photography workshops with the documentary photographer Dmitry Markov in Kaliningrad. He has been working on independent projects since 2020, and the LOBA is the first international competition in which he has participated.

Laila AnnMarie Stevens: *Clayton Sisterhood Project*

2026 Leica Oskar Barnack Award Newcomer

The American photographer is inspired by her longing for memories of her ancestors, which is reflected in her black-and-white series examining contemporary queer kinship structures and the continuing legacy of strong, self-confident black women. The focal point of her work is the way of life created by the photographer's two sisters and four nieces, who moved from Queens, New York, to a shared house on a plot in Clayton, North Carolina.

Quote from Laila AnnMarie Stevens: "When selecting these images, I wanted the works to reflect the various ways in which connection is expressed across generations. It's incredibly encouraging to have my work recognised in this way. Taking into account the current political climate in the United States, where so many rights relating to autonomy, care and visibility are being actively challenged, this award has given me high hopes."

Born in South Jamaica, Queens, New York, in 2001, Laila AnnMarie Stevens started working with the *New York Times* at the age of 20, having her pictures published in the 'Metropolitan' section. Since then, her work has appeared in various other major publications. She studied at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York and gained a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography and Media.

Valentina Sinis: *The Last Butterflies*

2026/2027 LOBA Women Grant

Winning this award will enable the Italian photographer to continue her long-term project in Iraqi Kurdistan. Her series focuses on Kurdish women who have left their homeland to join the armed resistance. In a new chapter, the photographer will explore how the struggle shapes and transforms ties to land and family, as well as a sense of belonging, through portraits, landscapes and images of abandoned places. The human cost of the female fighters' commitment will also be explored. The



results of this new chapter in her body of work will be presented at LOBA next year.

Photographer Valentina Sinis, originally hailing from Italy, lives and works in China, Iraq and Italy.

Through her extraordinary work, she sheds light on everyday realities and the lives of people who are not usually covered in the media. Her photographs have already been published in many international newspapers and magazines.

Quote from Karin Rehn-Kaufmann:

"The Last Butterflies powerfully depicts the new role that women have been playing in war for some time now. The images show how they are joining together to fight for their country without men, in a clear and moving depiction. It's important that Valentina Sinis is able to continue and complete this project."

Quotes from the 2026 LOBA Jury:

Karin Rehn-Kaufmann: "On behalf of the entire 2026 LOBA jury – Jane'a Johnson (Scholar and Curator, Curatorial Assistant, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA), Celina Lunsford (Artistic Director and Curator of the FFF, Fotografie Forum Frankfurt, Germany), Paolo Pellegrin (Photographer, Italy) and Gu Zheng (Professor, Fudan University School of Journalism, Shanghai, China) – I offer my heartfelt congratulations to the winners."

The jury engaged in "intense discussions, and that is precisely where the strength of the process lies", explains Karin Rehn-Kaufmann. "These were fascinating discussions – about the photographers' integrity, their stories and, of course, their visual work", adds Celina Lunsford. "The quality of the work was high, as were our expectations." Jane'a Johnson also shares this view: "The discussions were lively, respectful and in-depth. Each of us brought our own unique perspective to the table. The atmosphere was very friendly, and by the end, we all felt a strong connection." Commenting on this year's cohort, Rehn-Kaufmann emphasises: "As is so often the case, I was impressed by the wide spectrum of themes. The visual styles were also diverse, ranging from classic documentary approaches to poetic, experimental narrative styles. This year's selection struck me as being particularly multi-layered and nuanced. It was less about making quick visual impact and more about encouraging long-term exploration and depth of photographic research."

"The significance of this prize cannot be overstated", emphasises Jane'a Johnson. "It is a real financial boon for photographers, providing access to high-quality equipment and forging a link to the legacy built by some of the most significant photographers ever to pick up a camera." Consequently, the LOBA is now recognised as one of the world's leading awards: "Whenever I'm at a photography festival or conducting research, the leading photographers are always familiar with this prize", notes Celina Lunsford, adding: "Nowadays, the shortlist also acts as an excellent overview for curators, festival directors and editors."



Comments on the Two Winning Series:

Karin Rehn-Kaufmann: "Damir Faizulin's series *Preserving Nature as Preserving Ourselves* impressively illustrates just how closely the well-being of humanity is linked to the state of our natural environment. Using calm, unhurried and occasionally humorous visual language, he sensitively addresses one of the most pressing issues of our time with a nuanced approach. His photographs invite us to reflect on our responsibility towards nature, encouraging us to reconsider our relationship with the environment.

The visual coherence of the series is particularly compelling. Combining documentary precision with poetic visual language, Faizulin's method creates photographs that are both moving and thought-provoking. It's precisely this balance between thematic relevance and emotional depth that makes the work so special."

Karin Rehn-Kaufmann: "With the *Clayton Sisterhood Project*, Laila AnnMarie Stevens has created an intimate and authentic body of work. Its focus is on community, belonging, and female solidarity. Telling a story of resilience and the power of community, she approaches her subject with warmth, respect and sensitivity. The series highlights just how important solidarity and connection can be as sources of strength and hope."

Exhibition and catalogue: The 2026 LOBA Catalogue is being published to accompany the exhibition at the Ernst Leitz Museum. It presents the entire 2026 LOBA Shortlist alongside their complete photo series, interviews and background information. Following the show in Wetzlar, the 2026 LOBA exhibition will be displayed at various Leica Galleries and featured at photography festivals.

Many thanks to Brieke, our partner for the excellent production of the exhibition on display at the Ernst Leitz Museum in Wetzlar.

Further information about this year's winners is available at: www.leica-oskar-barnack-award.com.

About Leica Camera

Leica Camera AG is an international, premium manufacturer of cameras, lenses and sports optics. As part of its growth strategy, the company has expanded its portfolio to include mobile imaging (smartphones) and the manufacture of high-quality spectacle lenses and watches, and is also represented in the home cinema segment with its own projectors.



Leica Camera AG, having its headquarters in Wetzlar, Germany, and a second production site in Vila Nova de Famalicão, Portugal, operates a global network of its own distribution companies with around 120 Leica Stores worldwide.

The Leica brand stands for excellence in quality, German craftsmanship and industrial design, combined with innovative technologies. An integral aspect of the brand culture is the promotion of the culture of photography, with around 30 Leica Galleries worldwide, the Leica Akademie and international awards such as the Leica Hall of Fame Award and the Leica Oskar Barnack Award (LOBA).