

WINNING PHOTOS OF THE “PORTRAYING RELIGIONS IN THE PUBLIC SPACE PHOTO AWARD”

Congratulations to the winners of the “Portraying Religions in the Public Space Photo Award.”

The “Portraying Religions in the Public Space Photo Award”, a collaborative project of the IUAES Commission on the Anthropology of Religion and the IUAES Commission on Urban Anthropology, aims to present visual explorations of religions in the public space, across geographical and cultural contexts, through a plurality of methodological, theoretical and aesthetic perspectives. The 13 winning photos will be included in the IUAES “Portraying Religions in the Public Space” Calendar 2027, which will be available as a free printable download.

We are grateful to the authors for their valuable contributions, and the judges Daniela Calvo, Reet Hiimäe, Ullrich Kleinhempel, Vivek Kumar, Helmar Kurz, Tova Makhani Belkin, Natasha Martins, Joana Roque de Pinho, Vincenzo Scamardella, and Marta Wójtowicz-Wcisło for the selection of the photos.

The winning photos are the following:

COVER:

Irina Stahl (Institute of Sociology, Romanian Academy, Bucharest). The Victory of Faith: Re-sacralising the City. The procession honouring Bucharest’s patron saint, Demetrius the New, passes the House of the People, a relic of the communist era. Semantron and incense purify the air, dispelling shadows of the past. Hundreds of clerics, in ceremonial vestments, walk along the boulevard once called The Victory of Socialism. This symbolic cleansing marks religion’s re-emergence in the public urban space and the victory of faith over a fallen dictatorship. Bucharest (Romania), 24/10/2011.

JANUARY:

Hugo Wesley Oliveira Silva (Federal University of Pernambuco, Caruaru, Brazil). An Afro-Brazilian religious procession crosses an urban hillside, where incense, sacred objects, and collective movement transform public space into a site of ritual purification, revealing the cultural persistence and spatial agency of marginalised religious traditions. January marks a period of renewal and spiritual continuity in many Afro-Brazilian religious contexts. Processions and collective rituals held at the beginning of the year often emphasise purification, protection, and the reaffirmation of community bonds. Caruaru (Pernambuco, Brazil), 01/2024.

FEBRUARY:

Lene Faust (University of Siegen, Siegen, Germany). Burning for the Saint. Procession in honour of Saint Agatha in Catania, Sicily. Carrying oversized, unauthorised burning candles during the procession is a sign of deep devotion and a quiet resistance to the authority of state and church, slowing the procession’s pace considerably. Catania (Italy), 05/02/2023.

MARCH:

Jorge David Cuyun (University of San Carlos of Guatemala, Guatemala City, Guatemala). The ritual city: religious syncretism and indigenous resistance in everyday life. On the Friday of Sorrows, faith transforms the urban space of the municipality of Nahualá, Sololá, into a ritual setting where religious practices such as the Holy Way of the Cross reveal memory, identity, and indigenous resistance within everyday life through the symbolic representation of “The Cross of Nicodemus.” Nahualá (Guatemala), 21/03/2025.

APRIL:

Megumi Itaya (Kyoto University, Kyoto, Japan). When rituals emerge. When Kyoto University decided to close a 130-years old dormitory, residents enshrined 9,000 signatures in a *mikoshi*, staging a ritualized protest that transformed a petition into embodied, symbolic legitimacy. Kyoto (Japan), 19/03/2026.

MAY:

Madden Rhys Anil (London School of Economics, London, UK). Blessing of the Boats. Rowing boats are sprinkled with holy water in an English harbour, wishing for good weather and glad company while praying for those in peril on the sea. Langstone Harbour (Hampshire, England), 24/03/2024.

JUNE:

Damilare Adisa (Alaafin Palace in the Culture Department in Oyo town, Oyo, Nigeria). Egungun Festival – The Dead are among the Living. Ancestors (especially male ones, along which the bloodline is transmitted) with covered faces and colourful clothes celebrate the first yam harvest with their families on the roads, and are honoured by their descendants in a festival that lasts seventeen days in May/June. Oyo (Nigeria), 06/2025.

JULY:

Amira Karaoud (Manchester University, Manchester, UK). Followers of Mame Cheikh Ibrahima Fall participate in the Sam Fall chanting circle during the night of the Grand Magal of Touba 2023 pilgrimage. The festival attracts millions of people to the holy city of Touba for prayer, thanksgiving, and cultural celebration. The Grand Magal of Touba in 2027 is expected to fall on Friday, July 23, 2027. Touba (Senegal), 05/09/2023.

AUGUST:

Meg Stalcup (University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada). The Kandy Esala Perahera, the Buddhist Festival of the Tooth in Sri Lanka, transforms urban streets into sacred processional space where rhythmic movement, ritual costume, and public spectatorship reaffirm communal identity, and gives access to the Temple of the Tooth relic, and the city’s living cosmology. Kandy (Sri Lanka), 08/08/2025.

SEPTEMBER:

Tian Chen (World Anthropological Union, Cape Town, South Africa). Pilgrims’ Path at the Museum of World Religions, Taipei. “Keys of the heart — across every faith — unlock doors to goodness, wisdom, and compassion.” Understanding the concept of the pilgrimage may offer nourishment and enlightenment to our personal lives and spiritual growth, especially in the process of confronting all humankind’s increasing mutual interdependence. The source of all growth and development — the pilgrimage — is to be found within each person’s heart. Taipei (Taiwan), 03/2026.

OCTOBER:

Giorgia Mirto (Columbia University, New York, USA). Carrying the Cross: Mourning Border Deaths. During a cemetery Via Crucis held on Italy’s National Day in Memory of Victims of

Migration, local and migrant participants gather before burial niches, where Christ's Passion is reinterpreted through a visit to migrant graves. In contrast to official commemorations, this ritual, organised by Fondazione Migrantes, brings together grief and political mobilisation. At the centre, a cross made from migrant boat wood acts as a relic, binding the ritual together and reconfiguring mourning as a political act of resistance. Messina (Italy), 03/10/2024.

NOVEMBER:

Jacob F. Tischer (Charles University Prague, Prague, Czech Republic). A fluorescent dragon during a nocturnal procession in honour of the god Qingshui zushi, the patron deity of the neighbourhood of Wanhua (Taipei City). In this annual procession, which represents Taiwanese popular religion, the god inspects his territory and offers blessings to its inhabitants. Wanhua (Taipei, Taiwan), 16/11/2019.

DECEMBER:

Abhigyan Singh (TU Delft, Delft, The Netherlands). Varanasi's Sensescape: Fire, Ganges, and the Collective. Each evening at Dashashwamedh Ghat, Hindu priests perform the Ganga Aarti in unison — a centuries-old fire offering honouring the River Ganges as a deity. Thousands of devotees, tourists, and locals fill every surface of the ghat, dissolving distinctions between sacred and civic. The ceremony transforms Varanasi's open riverfront into a sacred theatre, where religion, urban public life and the living river converge into a collective devotion. Varanasi (India), 07/12/2025.

June 12, 2026

On behalf of the organizing committee,
(Daniela Calvo, Coordinator of the Project)

