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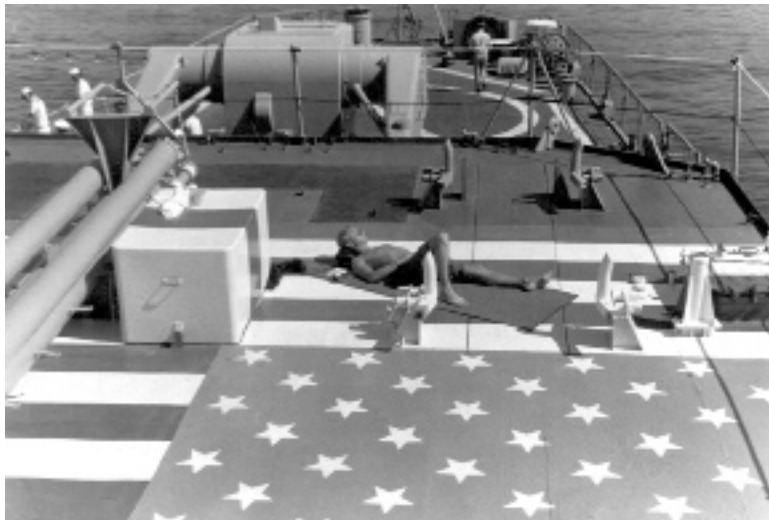


## ALVIN BALTROP: PHOTOGRAPHS 1965 – 2003

MARCH 16 – MAY 28, 2011

OPENING RECEPTION: SATURDAY, MARCH 19, 2011 6 PM – 8 PM

CURATED BY YONA BACKER AND RANDAL WILCOX



Alvin Baltrop  
*American Beauty (FTG 3 Louis Shurina)*  
1970

In the 1970s, the abandoned piers along the Hudson River in Manhattan became a conduit and locus for artistic experimentation. While Gordon Matta-Clark, Vito Acconci, Richard Serra, Dan Graham and many others produced collaborative and multidisciplinary works that radically challenged artistic traditions, Alvin Baltrop (1948 – 2004) turned his camera to a phenomenon that has been rarely documented and written about—the precarious lives of the individuals who gathered and lived at the piers up until their demolition in the late 80s. Baltrop captured intimate portraits of friends, lovers, and strangers; homeless people, runaways and murder victims, sexual encounters; as well as the decaying architecture and the landscape of a Manhattan that no longer exists.

The Pier Photographs are not simply visual documents about an untapped part of the history of New York; they also show how Baltrop's practice unfolded during this turbulent period. "Alvin Baltrop: Photographs 1965 – 2003" features the silver-gelatin prints of the Pier series that initiated the artist's posthumous fame, images made in the Navy during the Vietnam War, dozens of other previously un-exhibited vintage prints, rare archival materials, and late works shot at various Manhattan hospitals up until his death in 2004. The subjects range from military conflicts, lounging soldiers, children, prostitutes, public and private sex, crime scenes, and dilapidated buildings in the deindustrialized neighborhoods of New York. The exhibition is the first extensive overview of the African-American photographer's work, and aims to show the formation, development, and refinement of a major yet under-recognized artist's vision.

Viewed individually and as a body of work, Baltrop's photographs convey an idiosyncratic hybrid of Classicism and *Film Noir*. Baltrop's ability to record spontaneous action as images with an aesthetic refinement transforms 'street photography' into a probing form of social introspection. With the use of blinding highlights and dark shadows, his photographs depict the familiar as curious, luring abstractions.

Baltrop's work was rarely exhibited during his lifetime. It was however the cover story of the February 2008 issue of *ARTFORUM*, and is included in the collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art. Selected exhibitions include *Looking Back/The Fifth White Columns Annual*, White Columns, New York, NY (2010); *Alvin Baltrop: Color Photographs 1971-1991*, Brooklyn, NY (2010); *Mixed Use, Manhattan: Photography and Related Practices 1970s to the Present*, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, Spain (2010); and *Darkside II – Photographic Power and Violence, Disease, and Death Photographed*, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Switzerland (2009).