

language and an alphabet he cannot read. For Haendel and indeed for most of us, the day of one's birth is an anonymous occasion, hardly fit for public commemoration (in Russia or anywhere else), but here he connects the personal to world events. In *Rehearsed Inability to Know This (Un)Place*, 2009, Richard Forster takes a more physically proximate but no less fraught object as his muse: the giant Corus steel plant that he used to pass daily on a train ride to his studio in Middlesbrough, UK. At the time, the plant was threatened with closure; Forster shot twelve photographs from the train, rendered them in pencil, and later reproduced the indistinct topography the images suggest in a highly schematic architectural model. Both Haendel and Forster make what cannot be directly, tactilely experienced physical. For the artists of "Drawn from Photography," the attempt to enable confrontations with the normally overlooked detail demands a labor of repeated mark-making, as though to fuse history and memory, the two targets that are always moving in the flux of photography's endless archive.

—Eva Díaz

## Alvin Baltrop

### THIRD STREAMING

Alvin Baltrop is that unsurprising wonder: an unsupported artist fully in touch with the preoccupations of his time. When he died of cancer at age fifty-five, in 2004, he had shown sporadically, at such places as the gay arts nonprofit the Glines, and the Bar, a dive on the Lower East Side. In a brief piece after his death, the *New York Times* profiled him as a neighborhood character, referring to his photographs of sunbathers, cruisers, and homeless kids on the West Side piers—but the paper did not, of course, reproduce riskier images of pulchritudinous booty, sex acts in progress, or corpses fished from the Hudson. At last, in 2008, a feature by Douglas Crimp put one of Baltrop's black-and-white studies of a half-wrecked pier on the cover of this magazine; glimpsed between rivet-studded I beams and sprung planks, a couple in flagrante make carnal the unstable architecture. Last year, Famous Accountants, a gallery in Bushwick, Brooklyn, displayed a selection of Baltrop's color images, enlarged from 35-mm slides as ink-jet prints that were destroyed after the show. The recent outing at Third Streaming, however, was Baltrop's first comprehensive exhibition, presenting seventy-nine prints and eighty slides in black-and-white and color, dating from 1969 through 2003. It will not be his last.

The intimate size and blown-out sunlight in the black-and-white work claim attention first. Baltrop had little money, and though he made gelatin silver prints, he printed small. One of his work's trustees, Randal Wilcox, has realized seventy of Baltrop's thousands of unprinted negatives—these new prints, too, are under thirteen inches square—and a handful of them, both in black-and-white and color, were on view here. Several color images were produced as new digital C-prints, and a carousel projected original color slides. Drawn in by scale, velvety shadows, and saturated primary hues, one finds the bodies in precarious repose. Sleepers huddle against buckling warehouse walls, and figures flare like apparitions backlit by sun. For these clandestine shots, Baltrop hung from pier rafters in a makeshift harness—as did Gordon Matta-Clark, whose 1975 cut *Day's End*, at Pier 52, appears in a number of Baltrop's photographs. A work by the graffiti artist Tava appears in an image here, and another then-neglected pier denizen called David Wojnarowicz turns up in his archive too (though not in this exhibition).

Sometimes Baltrop cruised the cruisers as openly as they surveyed each other. On the piers, the vectors of these looks entwine with the buildings' plunging geometries, as in a piece titled *Friend*, 1977. One guy in tight jeans and a T-shirt walks toward the photographer, yet



Alvin Baltrop, *Untitled*, 1969–72, black-and-white photograph.

glances back at another guy wearing a leather vest, boots, and nothing else, who is walking away. The first man stands parallel to a timbered post sticking up from the floor; what looks like a stripe of paint on the warehouse wall echoes the form of the second. Both their crotches align on the horizon where wall meets floor. In a photograph of fellow sailors taken in 1969, when Baltrop was in the navy, a sweet-faced boy salaciously sticks out his tongue out for the camera. Another cadet watches Baltrop watch this come-on, his lips pursed. (It was just pre-Stonewall, and the sailors, like the photographer, are black. Such public displays, in uniform no less, were hazardous.) A third sailor turns his head toward the lens, but his eyes slew sideways to the laughing nymphet.

Baltrop photographed prostitutes, children, and pedestrians, as well as his own lovers, both male and female. The dangerous tenderness he captured in his subjects, known and unknown, sets him in relation to peers from Mark Morrisroe and Peter Hujar to Nan Goldin and Cindy Sherman who have used photography to conjure gender-radical identities. Elder documentarians such as Helen Levitt and Roy DeCarava come to mind too. And then there is that riverine erotic heave: I imagine Thomas Eakins and Walt Whitman imagining, in their futures, Alvin Baltrop.

—Frances Richard

## Betty Woodman

### SALON 94

Installations of Betty Woodman's works often have an element of theatricality, and in this exhibition, "Front/Back," her ceramic vase sculptures sang together like characters in an opera. Brilliantly united by their chromatic relationships, they evoked a coloratura worthy of Rossini.

Though Woodman's ceramic vases always maintain their function as containers, she positions them on the edge between painting and sculpture, challenging categories of utility, craft, and art. Most sport two planes or fins, which jut out from the vessels' sides; on these surfaces, Woodman paints images inspired by a variety of sources, from Eastern painting to modernist masters. Female nudes—stretched out like Cézannesque bathers—alternate with vividly colored geometric shapes, naturalistic elements, and bright abstract surfaces. The two sides of these sculptures are oftentimes completely different, which is customary for this artist, but in many cases here one side was white, monochrome, or bare ceramic, almost as if to belie the coloristic energy of the opposite face. Though this wide-ranging eclecticism may suggest a lack of formal discipline, Woodman orchestrates the fusion of these disparate