JOHN DIVOLA  AS FAR AS I COULD GET

Santa Barbara Museum of Art
with Los Angeles County Museum of Art
and Pomona College Museum of Art

Foreword by Larry Feinberg
Essays by Brett Salvesen, Karen Sinsheimer, Kathleen Stewart Howe
Interview with John Divola by Simon Baker
Foreword
Larry J. Feinberg, Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director & Chief Executive Officer, Santa Barbara Museum of Art

Being and Photography
Britt Salvesen, Curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department and the Prints and Drawings Department, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

20×24 Polaroids, 1987–89
Seventy Songbirds and a Rabbit, 1995
As Far As I Could Get, 1996–2010
Artificial Nature, 2002

Zuma: The Re-Enchantment of Photography
Kathleen S. Sexton, Executive Director, Pomona College Museum of Art
Zuma, 1977–78

California and John Divola
Karen Jocelyn, Curator of Photography, Santa Barbara Museum of Art
Vandalism, 1973–75
LAX/Noise Abatement Zone, 1973–76
Untitled, 1990
Dark Star, 2008

Interview with John Divola
Simon Baker, Curator of Photography and International Art, Tate, London
The Theodore Street project, 2013

Select Chronology
Exhibition Checklist by Institution
Acknowledgments
Copyright and Credits
In summer 2006, the Centre Pompidou in Paris presented an exhibition that seemed to many as startling as it was enlightening: Los Angeles 1955–1985. As its catalog stated, this exhibition explored “the many sided history of a peculiar scene in Los Angeles, from its emergence at the beginning of the 1960s up until 1987,” and included over sixty talented artists who were exploring California minimalism, conceptual art, performance, video and film, among other art forms. John Divola had three works in that exhibition.

More recently and closer to home, the J. Paul Getty Research Institute and The Getty Foundation jointly launched the Pacific Standard Time (PST) initiative to support and encourage cultural institutions throughout Southern California to explore their histories from 1945 to 1980. In that period innovative directors and curators organized shows of important artists’ work—for instance, former Santa Barbara Museum of Art (SBMA) Director Tom Leavitt offered Marcel Duchamp his first retrospective exhibition when at the Pasadena Art Museum—and many artists found the dynamic environment of Southern California both exhilarating and freeing. Scores of artists brought both innovation and social change to their art practice, though many of these artists remained obscure or narrowly defined as “West Coast.” From October 2011 to March 2012, over sixty institutions and several commercial galleries presented exhibitions as part of PST that explored the vibrant art scene that existed in Southern California from 1945–1980. John Divola’s work was included in Under the Big Black Sun, the PST exhibition presented by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

As part of PST, our Curator of Contemporary Art Julie Joyce organized From Pasadena to Santa Barbara, exploring Leavitt’s tenure at Santa Barbara. Prior to that, in 2009, Karen Sinsheimer, Curator of Photography, became interested in the long career of John Divola, whose work steadfastly remained photographic but who bridged the cultural divide to conceptual art beginning in the 1970s. Realizing that there had not been a museum exhibition that looked at his prolific and varied four-decade career, Ms. Sinsheimer reached out to other Southern California institutions that were interested in Divola’s work in order to thoroughly represent the scope of his impressive career. She found enthusiastic partners in Britt Salvesen, Curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department and the Prints and Drawings Department, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and Kathleen Howe, Director, and Rebecca McGrew, Senior Curator, at the Pomona College Museum of Art.

Several studio visits and meetings were held, and each curator selected works to be shown at her institution, while avoiding duplication of series. Santa Barbara Museum of Art took the lead to produce a publication that serves as exhibition catalog for all three venues. Thus, John Divola: As Far As I Could Get is an exhibition and publication that simultaneously entails three Southern California venues: the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Pomona College Museum of Art. This innovative model, I believe, presages a new way for institutions to work together in order not only to maximize resources but also to expand exhibition possibilities. The end result is much richer because of this mutual presentation.

Collaborations can be challenging and this has proved to be no exception—but the breadth and consistency of Divola’s artistic practice merited the attention of several southern California institutions. The talented and dedicated staffs of each of these museums made the collaboration possible. We are enormously grateful for the generous support, first and foremost, of the Andy Warhol Foundation. Their encouragement for this collaborative effort provided the critical impetus. Jeanne and Dan Fauzi made possible the involvement of Dung Ngo, an innovative art director; the support of Santa Barbara Museum of Art’s collectors’ group, PhotoFutures, and The Charles and Mildred Bloom Fund made this exhibition and publication a reality.

We thank Theresa Luisotti, Luisotti Gallery, who has long championed John Divola’s work, for her support of the entire endeavor, and particularly with regard to the work presented at Los Angeles County Museum of Art. At Pomona College Museum of Art we recognize the Dr. Lucile M. Paris bequest, the Manson Endowment for Museum programming, and the Carlton and Laura Seaver Endowment in support of the Museum.

Additional acknowledgments of individuals and institutions are listed on page 222.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the artist himself. John Divola has continued to produce work in Southern California that challenges, provokes, and engages viewers throughout the world, and we are honored to present him here.

Larry Feinberg is Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director & Chief Executive Officer
Santa Barbara Museum of Art
With the book project *The Green of This Notebook* (Nazraeli, 2008), Divola declared his affinity with Jean-Paul Sartre, the French philosopher credited with formulating existentialism. Tackling the 1943 text *Being and Nothingness* (specifically, an English translation by Hazel E. Barnes, published by the Philosophical Library, New York, in 1956), he marked passages where Sartre describes actual things and experiences in order to make larger points about the nature of reality. Some of these passages are rather ominous and suspenseful (“I am on a narrow path—without a guard rail—which goes along a precipice”), while others strike a more deadpan, descriptive note (“Not far away there is a lawn and along the edge of that lawn there are benches. A man passes by those benches”). All told, Divola extracted twenty pages from Sartre’s 656-page book and then made twenty photographs to accompany them.

In a written statement about the project, Divola characterizes the passages in Sartre that caught his attention as “illustrations.” This is a fitting term, since its Latin root links it to illumination, or light. Its Old French meaning was “apparition, appearance;” to illustrate was to enlighten, to “make clear in the mind.” Only in the nineteenth century did “illustration” come to mean a pictorial accompaniment to text. In *The Green of This Notebook*, Divola reenacted this etymological evolution, first noting the function of Sartre’s verbal illustrations as gateways to more abstract ideas, and then presenting his own visual counterparts, which rely on the material world. It is no accident that he employed the medium whose own etymology means “writing with light.”

Divola’s illustrations in *The Green of This Notebook* are self-consciously literal and empirical. Their contents correspond to the words Sartre published in 1943, but they depict the environment inhabited by Divola some fifty years later, in the late 1990s. Take the passage “This woman whom I see coming toward me.” Were Sartre to have supplied a picture to accompany these words, it might have been shot in Paris by Brassaï or Cartier-Bresson; there would be cobblestones and hand-painted shop signs, and the woman would be shrouded in a wool coat and noir-ish mystery. In Divola’s Nineteenth, California late-afternoon scene, the street is asphalt, the traffic signage is government-issue, and the woman in off-the-rack casual separates looks

---


2. Artist statement for *The Green of This Notebook*, www.johndivola.com


directly and disinterestedly at the camera. The disparity between these two images, and their equal plausibility with reference to Sartre’s words, is part of what interests Divola.

While he admits that a certain “pretense and pomposity” might be expected in an artwork based on Sartre’s Being and Nothingness, Divola avoids this through the ordinariness of his photographs, theearnestness of their correspondence to the text, and the systematic, compare-and-contrast presentation style. Divola’s photographs illustrate Sartre’s illustrations, the validity and conscientiousness of both enhanced through their juxtaposition. We have been led to one of existentialism’s most profound insights—essence is appearance, and vice versa—in a most unpretentious way. The book’s final pages even offer a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down: Sartre’s phrase “If I eat a pink cake, the taste of it is pink” alongside Divola’s mouth-watering color photograph of a frosted homemade cake, a slice of which is about to be savored by the artist (or viewer).

While Divola knows that existentialism’s conundrums cannot be reduced to bite-sized morals, he doesn’t rule out the possibilities of euphoria and pleasure that adhere within a philosophy commonly thought of as gloomy and bleak. Although Sartre has been derogatorily termed an atheist and a nihilist, in fact he felt the ultimate goal of any philosophy was to consider consciousness in terms of its “true connection with the world.” Existentialism thus has pragmatic and even affirmative aspects, with its bracing references to truth, reason, and freedom, and its useful distinction between things and beings; thus has pragmatic and even affirmative aspects, with its bracing references to truth, reason, and freedom, and its useful distinction between things and beings.

As Sartre outlined in Being and Nothingness, physical objects exist in concrete, fixed states: their condition of being is unconscious, being-in-itself. Humans by contrast have self-awareness, capacity for choice, and a need to actuate our own being: this is consciousness, being-for-itself. Existence comes first, and then a human has to forge his or her own essence. Being-for-itself brings with it the realization—potentially terrifying, potentially liberating—that there is no enduring essence at the core of consciousness, and that imagination and action are the only viable ends of human existence.

Sartre stated it as follows: “If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.” This formulation of essence parallels with artistic endeavors, which Sartre explored in his own fiction and essays on art, and through his site-specific, often temporary installations, excavations, and performances.

Divola’s Vandalism series can be seen in this context, although he managed a bait-and-switch: rather than producing deliberately deskilled snapshots of grandiose fabrications, he made fine prints of tumbledown structures. His articulation of inchoate thinking—that there is no enduring essence at the core of consciousness, and that imagination and action are the only viable ends of human existence.

Divola’s titles for his sculpture-based series—Cones, Genetic Sculptures, Silhouettes, and Natural Reductions—indicate their mute non-specificity. Divola avoided this through the ordinariness of his photographs, the earnestness of their correspondence to the text, and the systematic, compare-and-contrast presentation style. Divola’s photographs illustrate Sartre’s illustrations, the validity and conscientiousness of both enhanced through their juxtaposition. We have been led to one of existentialism’s most profound insights—essence is appearance, and vice versa—in a most unpretentious way. The book’s final pages even offer a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down: Sartre’s phrase “If I eat a pink cake, the taste of it is pink” alongside Divola’s mouth-watering color photograph of a frosted homemade cake, a slice of which is about to be savored by the artist (or viewer).

While Divola knows that existentialism’s conundrums cannot be reduced to bite-sized morals, he doesn’t rule out the possibilities of euphoria and pleasure that adhere within a philosophy commonly thought of as gloomy and bleak. Although Sartre has been derogatorily termed an atheist and a nihilist, in fact he felt the ultimate goal of any philosophy was to consider consciousness in terms of its “true connection with the world.” Existentialism thus has pragmatic and even affirmative aspects, with its bracing references to truth, reason, and freedom, and its useful distinction between things and beings; thus has pragmatic and even affirmative aspects, with its bracing references to truth, reason, and freedom, and its useful distinction between things and beings.

As Sartre outlined in Being and Nothingness, physical objects exist in concrete, fixed states: their condition of being is unconscious, being-in-itself. Humans by contrast have self-awareness, capacity for choice, and a need to actuate our own being: this is consciousness, being-for-itself. Existence comes first, and then a human has to forge his or her own essence. Being-for-itself brings with it the realization—potentially terrifying, potentially liberating—that there is no enduring essence at the core of consciousness, and that imagination and action are the only viable ends of human existence.

Sartre stated it as follows: “If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.” This formulation of essence parallels with artistic endeavors, which Sartre explored in his own fiction and essays on art, and through his site-specific, often temporary installations, excavations, and performances.

Divola’s Vandalism series can be seen in this context, although he managed a bait-and-switch: rather than producing deliberately deskilled snapshots of grandiose fabrications, he made fine prints of tumbledown structures. His articulation of inchoate thinking—that there is no enduring essence at the core of consciousness, and that imagination and action are the only viable ends of human existence.

Divola’s titles for his sculpture-based series—Cones, Genetic Sculptures, Silhouettes, and Natural Reductions—indicate their mute non-specificity. Divola avoided this through the ordinariness of his photographs, the earnestness of their correspondence to the text, and the systematic, compare-and-contrast presentation style. Divola’s photographs illustrate Sartre’s illustrations, the validity and conscientiousness of both enhanced through their juxtaposition. We have been led to one of existentialism’s most profound insights—essence is appearance, and vice versa—in a most unpretentious way. The book’s final pages even offer a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down: Sartre’s phrase “If I eat a pink cake, the taste of it is pink” alongside Divola’s mouth-watering color photograph of a frosted homemade cake, a slice of which is about to be savored by the artist (or viewer).

While Divola knows that existentialism’s conundrums cannot be reduced to bite-sized morals, he doesn’t rule out the possibilities of euphoria and pleasure that adhere within a philosophy commonly thought of as gloomy and bleak. Although Sartre has been derogatorily termed an atheist and a nihilist, in fact he felt the ultimate goal of any philosophy was to consider consciousness in terms of its “true connection with the world.” Existentialism thus has pragmatic and even affirmative aspects, with its bracing references to truth, reason, and freedom, and its useful distinction between things and beings; thus has pragmatic and even affirmative aspects, with its bracing references to truth, reason, and freedom, and its useful distinction between things and beings.

As Sartre outlined in Being and Nothingness, physical objects exist in concrete, fixed states: their condition of being is unconscious, being-in-itself. Humans by contrast have self-awareness, capacity for choice, and a need to actuate our own being: this is consciousness, being-for-itself. Existence comes first, and then a human has to forge his or her own essence. Being-for-itself brings with it the realization—potentially terrifying, potentially liberating—that there is no enduring essence at the core of consciousness, and that imagination and action are the only viable ends of human existence.

Sartre stated it as follows: “If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.” This formulation of essence parallels with artistic endeavors, which Sartre explored in his own fiction and essays on art, and through his site-specific, often temporary installations, excavations, and performances.

Divola’s Vandalism series can be seen in this context, although he managed a bait-and-switch: rather than producing deliberately deskilled snapshots of grandiose fabrications, he made fine prints of tumbledown structures. His articulation of inchoate thinking—that there is no enduring essence at the core of consciousness, and that imagination and action are the only viable ends of human existence.

Divola’s titles for his sculpture-based series—Cones, Genetic Sculptures, Silhouettes, and Natural Reductions—indicate their mute non-specificity. Divola avoided this through the ordinariness of his photographs, the earnestness of their correspondence to the text, and the systematic, compare-and-contrast presentation style. Divola’s photographs illustrate Sartre’s illustrations, the validity and conscientiousness of both enhanced through their juxtaposition. We have been led to one of existentialism’s most profound insights—essence is appearance, and vice versa—in a most unpretentious way. The book’s final pages even offer a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine go down: Sartre’s phrase “If I eat a pink cake, the taste of it is pink” alongside Divola’s mouth-watering color photograph of a frosted homemade cake, a slice of which is about to be savored by the artist (or viewer).

While Divola knows that existentialism’s conundrums cannot be reduced to bite-sized morals, he doesn’t rule out the possibilities of euphoria and pleasure that adhere within a philosophy commonly thought of as gloomy and bleak. Although Sartre has been derogatorily termed an atheist and a nihilist, in fact he felt the ultimate goal of any philosophy was to consider consciousness in terms of its “true connection with the world.” Existentialism thus has pragmatic and even affirmative aspects, with its bracing references to truth, reason, and freedom, and its useful distinction between things and beings; thus has pragmatic and even affirmative aspects, with its bracing references to truth, reason, and freedom, and its useful distinction between things and beings.

As Sartre outlined in Being and Nothingness, physical objects exist in concrete, fixed states: their condition of being is unconscious, being-in-itself. Humans by contrast have self-awareness, capacity for choice, and a need to actuate our own being: this is consciousness, being-for-itself. Existence comes first, and then a human has to forge his or her own essence. Being-for-itself brings with it the realization—potentially terrifying, potentially liberating—that there is no enduring essence at the core of consciousness, and that imagination and action are the only viable ends of human existence.

Sartre stated it as follows: “If man as existentialists conceive of him cannot be defined, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.” This formulation of essence parallels with artistic endeavors, which Sartre explored in his own fiction and essays on art, and through his site-specific, often temporary installations, excavations, and performances.

Divola’s Vandalism series can be seen in this context, although he managed a bait-and-switch: rather than producing deliberately deskilled snapshots of grandiose fabrications, he made fine prints of tumbledown structures. His articulation of inchoate thinking—that there is no enduring essence at the core of consciousness, and that imagination and action are the only viable ends of human existence.
melancholy mood, perhaps of fallout, while linen supports contribute to the effect of self-conscious craftsmanship. Yet despite the effort that went into their making, the subjects and studio set-ups seem bereft of meaning—or, to put it another way, the objects cannot change, create, or relate to other beings, yet they exist as “full positiveness” (as externalized memories, surrogates for experience, etc.).13 Through photographic translation, Divola neutralizes the spectacular trappings of the sublime, while retaining some attachment to the term’s deeper historical connotations of purity and completeness. For these elementary shapes do have value, philosophically if not functionally. They can be classified with the objects Sartre uses repeatedly in Being and Nothingness to epitomize unconscious being-in-itself: trees, rocks, cups, tables, branches, benches, and so forth.14 Such things are what they are. They cannot change, create, or relate to other beings, yet they exist as “full positiveness” insofar as they form the basis of and environment for being-for-itself.15 Divola imitated, with some irony, the motivations of a Gaciometti in shaping his “generic objects”—first imagining their essence, then bringing them into existence—but then, rather than preserve the care-fully wrought embodiments of expression, he merely photographed them. In that instant the objects reveal themselves to be props rather than sculptures. By demonstrating the impossibility of enduring consciousness where it cannot exist, Divola undercuts the romantic pretensions of artistic creation, while proposing that the efforts of making are, in themselves, sufficient. Photography, as already established, is the primary or culminating activ-ity in Divola’s process, but in some series photographs themselves serve as “generic objects”—as externalized memories, surrogates for experience, conduits between objects and subjects, or between being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Seven Songbirds and a Rabbit is a series of details from the California Museum of Photography, University of California–Riverside, to which Divola has ready access as a faculty member. Stereoscopy, a three-dimensional imag-ing technology that enjoyed mass popularity during the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, exemplifies photography at its most indexical. An early advocate of the medium, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., described the stereoscope’s ability to plunge him “into the very depths of the imagination”; ibid. a perfect photograph is absolutely inexhaustible. In a picture you can find nothing which the artist has not seen before you; but in a perfect photograph there will be as many beauties lurking, unob-17. See also Michael Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” Artforum 14, no. 9 (1976): 393–400; and 18. Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 231. Sartre also frequently refers to colors, and Divola responds to this in The Green of This Notebook.

19. Stereoscopy, a three-dimensional imaging technology that enjoyed mass popularity during the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, exemplifies photography at its most indexical. An early advocate of the medium, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., described the stereoscope’s ability to plunge him “into the very depths of the imagination”; ibid. a perfect photograph is absolutely inexhaustible. In a picture you can find nothing which the artist has not seen before you; but in a perfect photograph there will be as many beauties lurking, unob-

20. Sartre also frequently refers to colors, and Divola responds to this in The Green of This Notebook.

21. Stereoscopy, a three-dimensional imaging technology that enjoyed mass popularity during the second half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, exemplifies photography at its most indexical. An early advocate of the medium, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., described the stereoscope’s ability to plunge him “into the very depths of the imagination”; ibid. a perfect photograph is absolutely inexhaustible. In a picture you can find nothing which the artist has not seen before you; but in a perfect photograph there will be as many beauties lurking, unob-

22. Derrida, Of Grammatology, p. 231. Sartre also frequently refers to colors, and Divola responds to this in The Green of This Notebook.


24. See the discussion in Hetzler, “Fetischismus,” p. 150.


27. Sartre, “La notion de l’objet.”


Green Notebook/R443, 1995-98. From "Animal Near-Naked Behind the Green of This Notebook Bresson, Paris I see through the viewfinder."

He embraces Sartre’s tenets that reality lies in appearances, meaning can be sought only in action, and action never produces defined conclusions or fills voids. “One of the chief motives of artistic creation,” Sartre wrote in 1949, “is certainly the need of feeling that we are essential in relationship to the world, but the artist’s ultimate relationship is not with objects or the environment, but with viewers of his work.” As Divola realized, existentialism provides a basis for recasting photography’s purported indexicality. The act of photographing, as traditionally understood, attempts to capture the essence of things and people; or to put it in Sartre’s terms, to co-opt physical being-in-itself as compensation for the formless void of conscious being-for-itself. Once this effort is acknowledged to be utterly impossible, photography loses its privileged relationship to the material world, and becomes instead a talisman of the creative freedom shared by artist and viewer.

As Far As I Could Get (1996-2010) was a seemingly simple undertaking in this vein. Divola set up his camera on a tripod, set the timer for ten seconds, and then ran straight into the frame he’d established in the viewfinder. At one level, this was a completely dispassionate endeavor, like Muybridge’s motion studies. On another level, because the recording resonates in a landscape, not in a controlled experimental setting, the viewer cannot suppress a frisson of physical and emotional tension. Inevitably we are back to Sartre’s Being and Nothingness, and to Divola’s extraction of his phrase “I can run away at top speed because of my fear of dying” in The Green of This Notebook. “The quest continues in the artist’s 2009-10 reprise of As Far As I Could Get, now conducted in panoramic high resolution with Gigapan technology (explained in more detail on page 181). However varied in terms of production and presentation, Divola’s art manages to capture something of the desperation (at once fearful and exultant) at the core of human consciousness. There may be no escape from the present, but there is always a future. “That’s the thing about photography,” he says, “it pulls you into the world.”

Divola does not turn to photography as a hedge against existential crisis. He embraces Sartre’s tenets that reality lies in appearances, meaning can be sought only in action, and action never produces defined conclusions or fills voids. “One of the chief motives of artistic creation,” Sartre wrote in 1949, “is certainly the need of feeling that we are essential in relationship to the world, but the artist’s ultimate relationship is not with objects or the environment, but with viewers of his work.” As Divola realized, existentialism provides a basis for recasting photography’s purported indexicality. The act of photographing, as traditionally understood, attempts to capture the essence of things and people; or to put it in Sartre’s terms, to co-opt physical being-in-itself as compensation for the formless void of conscious being-for-itself. Once this effort is acknowledged to be utterly impossible, photography loses its privileged relationship to the material world, and becomes instead a talisman of the creative freedom shared by artist and viewer.
20 × 24 Polaroids, 1987–89
Seven Songbirds and a Rabbit, 1995
As Far As I Could Get, 1996–2010
Artificial Nature, 2002
To stand in a gallery surrounded by prints from John Divola’s Zuma series is to slowly come unmoored from the expectations and reactions that condition our response to photography. Photography, assumed to be the medium of ultimate transparency—one of its principal originators, William Henry Fox Talbot, asserted that photography gave to nature the power to draw herself—enfolds the viewer in the assurance that one sees a framed slice of the real, something that existed in front of the lens at a definable moment. A series of photographs made in the same location over time implies a narrative arc, whether of purposeful activity recorded or entropy observed. Photographic representations of a space in time assert an a priori existence—it was there, it is there. It is easy to forget that before any photograph is an image it first is an event, orchestrated by the photographer.

In the Zuma prints, the framed subject—successive representations of a ruined space open to the sea, sky, and horizon—is overwhelmingly dominant. As a subject it offers the pleasure and comfort of a satisfying trope that we recognize, if only subliminally, from nineteenth-century modes. When Lorenz Eitner addressed the mid-nineteenth-century change in art from an academic classicism to the intense romantic engagement leading to modern art, he focused not on stylistic changes or theories of representation but on a dominant subject with deep ties to a cultural moment—the open window. In Eitner’s description, “the pure window view is a romantic innovation—neither landscape nor interior, but a curious combination of both. It brings the confinement of the interior into the most immediate contrast with an immensity of space outside…”. Unstated in Eitner’s attention to the window is the connection between what he termed the “immensity of space” and ideas of the sublime, the mid-eighteenth-century concept that “reflected a new cultural awareness of the profoundly limited nature of the self, and which led artists, writers, composers and philosophers to draw attention to intense experiences which lay beyond conscious control and threatened…"
individual autonomy." In the Zuma series that immensity is the ocean, which Edmund Burke asserted was “the most sublime (and at the same time the most fearful) spectacle, captivating the mind.” The viewer is held by the tense balance of a constricted view of the ocean and its banal frame, which might, at best, evoke some slight melancholic reflection on the ephemeral nature of modern living spaces but which ultimately has no deep resonance. The experience is both visually compelling and intellectually satisfying as we recognize the balance of oppositions—interior and exterior, sublime beauty and mundane decay, containment and expansion. Yet as we attend to the photographs they become increasingly unsettling.

The tropes of romantic subject that first provided a pictorial comfort and ease of access are subverted by the growing recognition that the photographs refuse to behave as perhaps we think they should. Each moment in the series, which at first seemed to fulfill the photographic promise of transparency, instead becomes a register of contradictions. We become aware of inconsistencies between the cold light revealing the ruined interior, and the luminous seascape beyond. Under the clinical pressure of that unnatural lighting, the interior shell shifts from a framing device for a mutable immensity to a series of exhibits of the detritus of abandonment, the charred evidence of fires, and enigmatic painted marks.

A photographic series, which comprises representations of a string of incidents connected by the place in which they occur and separated by unknown intervals of time, can be read as frames in a film, which one expects to unfold to reveal a narrative. Thus one can construct the successive acts on the Zuma stage—marks appear only to be altered or effaced, fires are set and extinguished, and objects hang suspended in flight—as a narrative incorporating entropy, and random, even criminal, human trespass and intervention. It is a narrative that one’s understanding of how photography operates, or is deployed, conditions. Yet the viewer, now participant, comes to understand that he/she is not passively watching the unspooling of a narrative that juxtaposes the destruction and decay of man’s inconsequential constructions with the constantly changing yet somehow eternal presence of the ocean, an immensity greater than anything mere humanity can achieve. There is a thrill when the patient viewer finally understands that one is actually witnessing a performance. In fact, the viewer isn’t intellectually reading the record of a performance, the way almost all of us will “know” a work of performance art or see most works of land art, through the photographic record. The viewer is both witnessing and taking part in a performance that continuously dismantles assumptions about photography, and painting and sculpture—assumptions about the process of being an artist. One experiences again the same sense of vertiginous adjustment that occurred when the frame flipped to become the subject, when the sublime immensity of the ocean became a foil for the insistent markings of human agency. The simple transparency of framed space opening through gaping window frames to an exterior world shifted to become the space of a performance, and the viewer moved into the space of a painting in process; the space of constantly-recreated sculptural form. It is a shift that seems at first incompatible with photography, and uncanny in the extreme. The uncanny in Freud’s sense of *Das Unheimliche* (1919) is a sort of haunting of the present by the residue of the past, twisted upon itself. Martin Jay describes the real work of the uncanny, what he terms the “Unheimliche manœuvre:” “to undermine the hard and fast distinctions between the metaphoric and the real, the symbolic and the literal, the animate and the inanimate.”

John Divola’s Zuma series undermines the ongoing arguments about photography as a distinct form of social practice, arguments then current in the literature of photographic theory that dominated academic programs and critical discourse. The Zuma series is the result of an art practice that contains and expands the residue of the past, sidesteps assumptions and distinctions, and seduces us to move into the photographs to recognize a way of making and experiencing art that refuses categorization.

Kathleen Stewart Howe, PhD, is Sarah Rempel and Herbert S. Rempel ‘23 Director, Pomona College Museum of Art.

---


Zuma, 1977–78
In its earliest years as an artistic practice, photography in the United States evolved primarily out of two locations—and California was one of them. As Los Angeles Times art critic Christopher Knight noted, “photographers have played leading roles in California’s art. In the nineteenth century, Carleton Watkins was the state’s first great artist; the mantle fits Edward Weston for L.A. in the teens and ’20s. The entrenched perception—until recently—of California as an artistic backwater can be partly attributed to photography’s former second-class status.” It has taken nearly one hundred years for the photographic medium to be received as an equal to painting, drawing and sculpture; as photography takes its rightful place at the ever-abundant table of contemporary art, greater attention is finally being paid to its contemporary masters such as Stephen Shore, Sally Mann, Robert Adams, Cindy Sherman, and a host of others. Likewise, greater attention nationally and internationally has turned to creators who live and work in California, with a particular emphasis on the community of thought and practice in and around Los Angeles. In traversing contemporary interests in photography and in California, one lands immediately at the work and practice of John Divola.

Until fairly recently (given his forty years of practice) neither Divola, nor one of his professors, Robert Heinecken, who both maintained fidelity to the medium of photography, were as well known as fellow contemporary California artists John Baldessari or Ed Ruscha, who used photographic images in their work but did not define themselves as photographers. Divola has frequently used painting in the service of his photographs, much in the way that Baldessari and Ruscha used photography as a vehicle but not a destination for their artistic practice. With no formal training in painting, Divola early on made gestural marks and actions solely for the camera. Rudimentary and often clumsy, these marks were not works of art in and of themselves but a performance that activated the space he was photographing. As writer Jan Tumlir notes, “Divola’s manipulations are never about showing how the camera ‘lies,’ but how things become activated and change ‘for real’ in the camera.” Work from his Vandalism series (pages 102–119) was included in the Museum of Modern Art’s 1978 exhibition Mirrors and...
John Divola was born and raised in California. His family at one point lived in Los Angeles [in the 1970s], I wasn’t seeing much art in its original form. I was looking at art magazines and seeing photographs of performances, photographs of minimalist art, photographs of paintings on walls—all manner of art reduced into photographic reproduction. And by the time I began my Vandalism work I’d concluded that everything is fabricated to be photographed—paintings on the wall are fabricated to be photographed, the sculptures in galleries are fabricated to be photographed and indeed performances are performed to be photographed because ultimately, if they have any cultural efficacy, it is through their representation photographically.9

John Divola was born in California. His family at one point lived near the old Fox movie ranch in Calabasas, which housed film sets of Western and Spanish towns. As a teenager, he and his friends would sneak onto the Fox property, exploring the constructs “behind the screen” while avoid-

He entered college at California State University at Northridge in 1967, in the midst of a social and a cultural revolution. Two years earlier, in August 1965, several areas within the city of Los Angeles were set ablathe during the Watts riot/rebellion. Two years later, in December 1969, young men first began receiving lottery numbers for the military draft that could send them to Vietnam. In the meantime, both the Free Speech Movement and the Haight Ashbury communes in Northern California were in full thrall.

In that volatile atmosphere, Divola morphed from a Valley teen that had intended to study economics into a young man who abandoned conventional career pursuits to explore film history and the British Rationalist philosophers, among others. He spent his junior year of college at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), where he first studied with Robert Heineken; in 1971, he entered the Masters of Art program there, and graduated in 1974.

Divola’s specific location in a geographic space (the Los Angeles region) and time (the early 1970s) absolutely informs his ongoing vision and prac-

tice. It has been said that content is automatic in photography; in his case that content is the vast and complex landscape of Southern California. It was a rich time to be exploring the artistic and conceptual opportunities through photography. Tim Wride, a native Los Angelino and longtime photogra- pher curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and curator of the Norton Museum, wrote of the early 1970s in Los Angeles: “10 [photographers] were present at the beginnings of a burgeoning academic discourse and mentoring process that would transform the photographic landscape in the United States. Implicit in this changing photographic climate was the turn away from a practice that was driven by the primacy of the photograph as image toward one that also acknowledged the photograph’s status as an object—with all of the conceptual implications that this shift carried with it. Basic assumptions regarding photographic truth, the implications and re- sponsibility of authorship, and the artificial nature of the photograph were at stake in this new dialectic.”11

Divola, however, was less connected to the interests developing around him. While many of his cohorts were exploring photography’s “status as an object,” Divola found himself moving back toward a referential nature of the photographs. Of his graduate studies he has commented that “nobody was really using a camera; Robert Rauschenberg and [Andy] Warhol were the two figures people were looking at as a model of a way of working, and there was a lot of emphasis in non-silver photography. And so I was doing that, and I remember making these things with certain iconographic imagery floating about the page, and realizing at some point that I had no reason to be interested in that particular iconography other than the fact that it was vaguely surreal. I consciously decided ‘okay, I’m going to start photographing the neighborhood where I live; at least it will have a relationship to me.’ I was turning away from the model around me but I was probably moving toward something that was fairly conventional, you know, the street photog- raphy that you would see more of in New York.”

While in graduate school Divola produced some social landscape work, as well as formalist photographs redolent of New Topographic photographers such as Lewis Baltz and Robert Adams, but they contained neither the ironic nor critical eye that many of those practitioners cast on American society.

While he was making work contemporaneous to these colleagues, Divola acknowledges that objectivity was not a primary interest to him: “What I was really interested in was process, moving through my environment and making a set of impressions and bringing those back. My complicity or my engagement in that place and time were an aspect of the subject.”12

Having begun the Vandalism series in late 1973, in June of 1974 he moved to Venice, California and over five years produced three seminal bodies of work which would form the basis of his practice: Vandalism (1973–74), LAX / Venice (1976–78), and From the series “San Fernando Valley.”

2. John Divola interviewed by Simon Baker August 24 (California), and November 22 (London), 2012, taped recording, Santa Barbara Museum of Art.
4. John Divola, WINDOWS: American Photography Since 1960 (New York, NY: Norton Museum), written of the early 1970s in Los Angeles: “10 [photographers] were present at the beginnings of a burgeoning academic discourse and mentoring process that would transform the photographic landscape in the United States. Implicit in this changing photographic climate was the turn away from a practice that was driven by the primacy of the photograph as image toward one that also acknowledged the photograph’s status as an object—with all of the conceptual implications that this shift carried with it. Basic assumptions regarding photographic truth, the implications and responsibility of authorship, and the artificial nature of the photograph were at stake in this new dialectic.”
5. John Divola interviewed by Simon Baker August 24 (California), and November 22 (London), 2012, taped recording, Santa Barbara Museum of Art.
Noise Abatement Zone (1975–76), and Zuma (1977–78; see pages 72–95). After teaching positions first at Loyola Marymount University, where he first began exploring color, and ten years at California Institute of the Arts (better known as CalArts), Divola accepted a fulltime position at University of California Riverside in 1978, and moved toward the California desert in 2001. The sprawling, dynamic and ever-changing landscape of Los Angeles, democratically available to anyone with a car, has been Divola’s primary studio throughout his career. He makes documents in a specific place, at a specific point in time, of scenes that exist in that moment. The photographs synthesize intellectual, almost scientific observation with serendipitous random interventions, all rigorously recorded. And yet in no way do they visually resemble what is commonly accepted as “documentary” photography; a closer approximation is described by photographic historian Beaumont Newhall: “most of the work done under the name documentary can best be described less categorically and more accurately as being concerned with the human condition or, in a word, humanitarian.” With Divola’s work, the classical more than the social definition of “humanistic” applies—in his interventions and interactions with the landscape Divola speaks to, if not the triumph of humanity, at least the incontrovertible truth of its presence. This becomes even more definitive when he enters the frame himself, an occasional act that began as early as the Vandalism series (see pages 107, 141) and is overt in As Far As I Could Get (pages 42–55) and the Theodore Street project (pages 184–209).

From his earliest series to his most recent project, Divola has returned to buildings that at some point served as human habitation, and his visual explorations in these spaces offer an evidentiary reading. From the outside looking in and vice versa, he has documented abandoned, forlorn structures whose interiors were bare to the elements and to random vandals, vagrants, and the occasional artist. Images from the Vandalism and LAX/Noise Abatement Zone Forced Entry series present a visual dialogue on the material and social remnants definitive of Southern California. While his work is often based in the place, and, more often than not, the presence of urban and natural environments, it spans the earliest examples of mark-marking in Divola’s work (Vandalism) to his most recent, where physical forms complement or in some cases replace his painting (Theodore Street project). Though they are visually quite different, the kinetic energy of performance unites Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert and the Untitled series with the painterly bodies of work. Consistent throughout is the documentation of his engagement within a space and place, and, more often than not, the presence of urban and natural environments definitive of Southern California. While his work is often based in the conceptual art practices of post-modernism, Divola continues to refuse such categorizations even as he continues to investigate the photographic potential of the dynamic present.


LAX/Noise Abatement Zone, 1975–76
Untitled, 1990
Dark Star, 2008
Simon Baker The 2008 series Dark Star, which precedes and intersects with the Theodore Street project, is interesting in the context of your career as a whole because it appears that you are returning to an earlier way of working, but doing so in a much more determined or focused way—instead of gestural marks, there’s this solid mass invading the space, without the same references towards specific fine-art practices as some of the earlier interventions in Vandalism or Zuma.

John Divola Well, I don’t know if that’s true. There’s certainly a lot of people, from Malevich on, painting black circles. But yes, I intentionally wanted to get away from the calligraphy of the early work, and I wanted to be as reductive as I could in terms of an intervention or gesture.

Given the scale of the work, you’re confronted with these marks, with this black presence in a way that’s slightly different from your earlier series; these prints have a physical human scale and are more theatrical in that sense.

There’s some irony to that—early on I made an explicit disavowal of objectness, you know, I said everything was fabricated to be photographed. I actually remember saying in the seventies, “I’m interested in the image you could someday send over the telephone, where the essential essence of this thing would be intact, separate from its objectness.” And then I’m making the Dark Star series, where it’s totally about the object of the print. I got a drum scanner and an 8×10 inch view camera, and all of a sudden I could make things at a scale and with a presence that the Zuma work (pages 72–95) couldn’t have.

You can go up and see every little crack, and there’s just something about the black paint, being wet black paint, reflecting the windows behind me or picking up the character of the light in the room in a funny way, which is something, were you to intentionally photograph a painting, you would want to avoid. But in my case I’m equally interested in the kind of ephemeral or incidental translation that happens by photographing in that instant—as opposed to some kind of timeless, fixed notion of what the painting is.

The gestures in Zuma as well as the Dark Star series are like the oldest kind of documented mark-making, stating, “I’m here.”

“The gestures in Zuma as well as the Dark Star series are like the oldest kind of documented mark-making, stating, “I’m here.”

Simon Baker was invited by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art to speak with John Divola about the artist’s work and practice. In two conversations in 2012 (August 24 in California, and November 11 in London), they discussed work related to the exhibitions for which this publication serves as a catalog. The following interview, focused on Divola’s most recent work, was drawn from those conversations.
So after each work, it’s harder to make the next one?

Well, it’s just that it’s an echo. So I did the Zuma work something like thirty-five years ago; anything I do with a similar kind of procedure has all of the baggage, the reverberation of intentions from previous projects.

The Dark Star series become quite seductive, the marks that you make, and the way you photographed them as well. The marks relate in a more sympathetic way with the surroundings. You’re just making a mark, so it’s sort of deskilled as painting and not very effective as graffiti. And that I find particularly interesting because the convention of conceptual practice in the late sixties and the early seventies was a dodging of photography. And what you were doing at exactly the same time was going completely in the opposite direction, reinvesting in the technical skills and competencies of the camera, while deskilling, if you like, with the painting.

I think artists that were using photography were kind of doing the same thing, which was seeing a language that could be used with no investment. The painted surface is generally thought of as this site for the transaction of a human on a surface with a brush or with materials. So the painting itself is this kind of physical index of a human engagement. But from my point of view, that’s all lost in the primary discourse of looking at paintings, which is in magazines and books, not in interacting with original work. So I very naturally appreciated painting in a completely inappropriate way, which was absent of that really essential dialogue of what’s important in a painting.

The beauty of photography is distance. I can make an incredibly naive and stupid mark, and then make an interesting photograph about a naive and stupid mark. So it takes all of the onus off of me in terms of painting sophistication. I can just subjectively move in there and throw paint about and see what the potential is and if I don’t like it, I’ll do something else with it; or somebody will come and burn it and cover it up, and I can try again. The painting to me is just a subjective kind of engagement; there are certainly some conscious intentions since I have looked at past painting that I’ve done on surfaces and I know certain things work in different kinds of ways. But I’m experimenting, essentially, with different ways of marking the space.

Can you explain how the Dark Star series led into Theodore Street, and the deliberate inclusion of your presence in the photographs?

In all my work, going all the way back, there’s this interest in the specificity of the circumstances. So after each work, it’s harder to make the next one?

Well, in the LAX work there’s one image where I’m in shooting the camera into a broken mirror. And then there’s a number of Vandalism ones (see pages 189, 195, 200) where my arm is, where I’m dropping things or something into a broken mirror. And then there’s a number of Vandalism ones (see pages 189, 195, 200) where my arm is, where I’m dropping things or something like that.

You obviously have always been there, but in the Theodore Street images you’re both intentionally present and hidden, you’re turned away so you’re there but the viewer’s not getting that direct psychological engagement. Do you think it serves in a very basic way to remind the viewer about the question of agency?

Oh, absolutely, that notion of agency is central. You know, sometimes it’s a more physical agency of throwing something onto a surface, or somebody kicks a hole in the wall. But certainly in terms of the marking on the walls, it’s my agency—and in terms of the other marking, it’s the agency of others. That’s exactly what fascinates me about this space, it is so inscribed and it problematizes my own formal distance, my more academicized, abstract desires in relation to these really heated, very emotional, sometimes hate-filled or sometimes just kind of free, expressive, “I’m here” marking.

And then there’s the performative side of painting. Some of the other visitors to Theodore Street have really gone to town with the space, while other people have done strangely competent airbrush or aerosol painting?

Right, very sophisticated graffiti. It’s almost like tattoo iconography in a way. Within this pumped up, emotive content of other people’s painting, they also really threw paint about in a way I hadn’t. So there was a social as well as aesthetic component to what they’d done that was intriguing to me. Somebody does “Kill Whitey” and I do a black circle. It’s either abstract iconography or symbolic iconography. But then there’s always, in my case, this interest in the specificity of the circumstances.
This house is so perfect in terms of these competing iconographies of black races, white races, that I sometimes suspect that maybe somebody shot a film in there. I keep actually going back and if I see somebody there, I stop to see if I can find out what the history of the house is.

sb You never came across any of the other people who were doing this graffiti?

jd No, and I wanted to because I'm a little suspicious of it. It's just too perfect.

sb I think you might be the only person to find this space perfect!

jd I mean, the idea that the black guys would stay in the last back room and the white guys would stay in the front room. It just seemed constructed; even though they eventually kind of crossed out the swastika.

sb The Theodore Street work does have a strange play of layering and depth, just as in some of the work in Vandalism where the sense of perspective is thrown awry by the painting; it's unclear whether a form is receding or coming forward in space. And here too there's a similar kind of cutting of the space. There's something else that strikes me, as well, that it's almost impossible to see the scale of time over which these interventions have happened.

jd Right.

sb So one set of graffiti could predate the other by twenty or thirty years. You can't really get a sense of that, can you? You could imagine a change of local population, or it could be marking of a period of time. But all of that is contained in the interior so you don't see it—it is like stepping into somebody else's argument or domestic dispute, and seeing everything that's happened all at once.

jd Right. And there's also something in abandoned houses about the adolescent or about the Id. You know, it's really a location we're at—the people who are searching for a place where they can play out their impulses are basically adolescents; adults, in a certain sense, have their own homes. So there's something very raw and close to the surface in terms of the gestures.

sb It's also a reverse of a particularly American landscape, where the idea of the road trip and the outside and freedom—from Easy Rider on—freedom is associated with getting out of the house, getting out of the domestic space.

jd They are completely free spaces, as you said—a place where you can do whatever you want in a certain sense. And so there's always a slight sense of danger in that, but there's also this sense of opportunity.

Once I started in those spaces, I became interested in their preexisting content. They had a personality and sense of place and readable history of action, a history of who lived there and the kinds of things they left behind and the architectural vocabulary of it and then this sort of history of distress, how it's fallen apart or where you can see what it was and now what it is. You can almost rewind back and see the sculptural trajectory of those changes. That is one basis of my interest.

sb This might be something of a stretch in terms of reference, but there's a really great essay by Victor Hugo, with dark, moody drawings, about so-called 'dead houses.' In a typically nineteenth-century way, Hugo found these abandoned, ruined houses ideal sites for poetic reflection. And I wondered if in your work, although clearly not in a sentimental way, there is a sense in which the sites you work with take on a little of this poetic haunted character.

So for me, these spaces are a ground for existential reflection, which gets to this idea of me being a presence in relation to them, both by the obvious implication that the photograph exists, that I was there, but I have this desire to be more literally there, in a sense. So there is an imprint and I'm kind of frozen in it and that thing exists in the present, and recedes in terms of its relationship to what I am in some way.

Someone said once, I think relatively pejoratively, that it appears that John Divola's operating principle is that one thing leads to another. And I thought about that and I thought, "well, you know what? That's probably fairly accurate. That's the nature of life, one thing leads to another." And so this project is a case where one thing leads to another in terms of my practice and interest, but I think that I can collate that into some kind of larger construction of meaning.

Simon Baker is Curator of Photography and International Art, Tate, London.
1971  John Divola receives BA from California State University, Northridge
1973  Receives a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) Fellowship for Photography
        Earns MA from University of California, Los Angeles
        Begins work on Vandalism series
1974  Earns MFA at University of California, Los Angeles
1975  Begins work on LAX/NAZ series
1977  Begins Zuma series
1978  A print from Vandalism is included in the exhibition “Mirrors and Windows,” curated by John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York. This is the first of five group exhibitions at MoMA in which Divola’s work is included.
        Divola’s work is featured in a solo exhibition at Gallery Min, Tokyo. An exhibition catalogue, with an essay by Mark Johnstone, is published to mark the occasion.
1978–88  Hired as a photography instructor at the California Institute of Arts (CalArts) in Valencia, California
1979  Gains access to MGM Studios and begins his series MGM Lot
1981  Divola’s work is chosen for the Whitney Museum of American Art Biennial
1983  Produces Who Can You Trust series
1986  Receives a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship
        Begins work on the series Natural Reductions
1987  Begins the 20 x 24 Polaroids series
1988  Hired as Professor of Art at the University of California, Riverside
        Begins the Four Landscapes series
        Divola’s work is included in the group exhibition “The Photography of Invention: American Portraits of the 1980s,” organized by the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The exhibit traveled to The Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago and The Walker Art Center, Minneapolis.
1989  Begins the Untitled series
        The Saxon Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan includes Divola’s work in the exhibition “Individual Realities in the California Art Scene.” The exhibit travels to two other venues in Japan.
1990  Divola’s work is featured in a solo exhibition at Gallery Min, Tokyo. An exhibition catalogue, with an essay by Mark Johnstone, is published to mark the occasion.
1991  Divola’s work is included in the exhibition “Multiple Images: Photographs since 1945 from the Collection,” at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
        Divola’s work is included in the exhibition “Architecture Hot and Cold,” at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
        Divola’s work is included in the exhibition “Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity 1900–2000,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles.
        Divola’s work is included in the exhibition “Architecture Hot and Cold,” at The Museum of Modern Art, New York.
        Divola’s work is included in the exhibition “Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity 1900–2000,” Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles.
1994  Receives the Rome Prize; declines
1995  Begins work on the Collapsed Structures series
1996  Begins work on the following multiple series: Isolated Houses, Community, The Green of This Notebook, and Seven Songbirds and a Rabbit
        Divola’s photographs are included in the exhibition “Crossing the Frontier: Photographs of the Developing West, 1849 to the Present,” at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.
        Divola’s work is included in the survey exhibition “Crossing the Frontier: Photographs of the Developing West, 1849 to the Present,” at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco.
        Divola’s work is included in the exhibition “This Side of Paradise: Body and Landscape in L.A. Photography,” at The Huntington, San Marino.
1997  Receives the Flintridge Foundation Fellowship
1999  Divola’s work is included in the exhibition “William Eggleston and the Color Tradition,” at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.
2001  Divola’s work is included in the exhibition, “Modern Times III/Something Happened,” at the Hasselblad Centre, Gothenburg Sweden.
2002  Receives the Rome Prize; declines
2003  Begins work on the Collapsed Structures series
        First major monograph, Three Acts, published by Aperture Foundation
2005  Begins work on the following multiple series: Interventions, Abandoned Paintings, and March Base
        First major monograph, Three Acts, published by Aperture Foundation
2007  Begins work on the following multiple series: Interventions, Abandoned Paintings, and March Base
2008  Begins the Dark Star series
2011  Develops the Theodore Street project
"John Divola: As Far As I Could Go" opens simultaneously at three museums: The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara; The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; and the Pomona College Art Museum, Pomona.
Exhibition Checklist: Los Angeles County Museum of Art

**Man on Hill**, 1989. Large format internal dye-diffusion print; image 24 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 19

**Cells**, 1989. Made and printed 1989. Unique large format internal dye-diffusion print; image 24 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 64

**Rabbit**, 1989. Large format internal dye-diffusion print; image 24 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 64

**Bunches, 1989**, 1989. Large format internal dye-diffusion print; image 24 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 43

**X14149**, 1995. Gelatin silver on linen with custom walnut frames; image 20 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 41

**V8102**, 1995. Gelatin silver on linen with custom walnut frames; image 20 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 29


**R02F06**, 1996. Pigment print; image 60 × 40, paper 64 × 44; courtesy of the artist p. 47

**X10117**, 1995. Gelatin silver on linen with custom walnut frames; image 20 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 37

**WX6276**, 1995. Gelatin silver on linen with custom walnut frames; image 20 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 35

**R02F09**, 1996. Pigment print; image 60 × 40, paper 64 × 44; courtesy of the artist/Gallery Louis p. 49

**KU100382**, made and printed in 1995. Gelatin silver on linen with custom walnut frames; image 20 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 27

**As Far As I Could Get, 10 Seconds, 12_15_2010, 3:29 PM to 3:42 PM PST, 34.166301,-116.033714, 2010. Pigment print; image and paper 50 × 119; collection of Dan and Jeanne Fauci p. 50–55

**WX6230**, 1995. Gelatin silver on linen with custom walnut frames; image 20 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 33

**V8161**, 1995. Gelatin silver on linen with custom walnut frames; image 20 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 31

**X13194**, 1995. Gelatin silver on linen with custom walnut frames; image 20 × 20; courtesy of the artist p. 39

**R02F33**, 1996. Pigment print; image 60 × 40, paper 64 × 44; courtesy of the artist p. 45

**R02F11**, 1996. Pigment print; image 60 × 40, paper 64 × 44; courtesy of the artist p. 43

**Zuma #21**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper; image 21 × 26, paper 24 × 30; courtesy of the artist p. 78–79

**Zuma #8**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper; image 21 × 26, paper 24 × 30; courtesy of the artist p. 74–75

**Zuma #23**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper; image 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 77

**Zuma #3**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper; image 21 × 26, paper 24 × 30; courtesy of the artist p. 73

**Zuma #7**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper; image 21 × 26, paper 24 × 30; courtesy of the artist p. 75

**Zuma #19**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper; image 21 × 26, paper 24 × 30; courtesy of the artist p. 76

**Zuma #18**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper; image 21 × 26, paper 24 × 30; courtesy of the artist p. 70

**Zuma #17**, 1977. Pigment print on rag paper; image 21 × 26, paper 24 × 30; courtesy of the artist p. 69

All dimensions are given height by width and in inches. Dates listed reference when unique objects were made, or when negative was made for prints produced as multiples.

Dark Star B, 2008. Vintage pigment print on rag paper; image: 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 189

D25 Run Sequence, 1996–1998. Inkjet print; image 40 × 80, paper: 44 × 84; courtesy of the artist p. 168–169

Theodore Street, 33.94522, -117.138789, 9/19/2010, 12:02PM–12:18PM, 2013. Pigment print; image and paper 60 × 114; courtesy of the artist p. 198–199

D03F26, 1996–1998. Inkjet print; image 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of George Eastman House p. 165

Intervention D, 2008. Vintage pigment print on rag paper; image: 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 195

Dark Star E, 2008. Vintage pigment print on rag paper; image: 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 175

Dark Star D, 2008. Vintage pigment print on rag paper; image: 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 209


D10F08, 1996–1998. Inkjet print; image 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of George Eastman House p. 164

Theodore Street, 33.94522, -117.138789, 5/6/2012, 3:00PM–3:13PM, 2013. Pigment print; image and paper 58 × 120; courtesy of the artist p. 190–194

D26F13, 1996–1998. Inkjet print; image 40 × 50, paper: 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist (not illustrated)

Dark Star C, 2008. Vintage pigment print on rag paper; image: 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 200

Dark Star H, 2008. Vintage pigment print on rag paper; image: 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 177

Theodore Street, 33.94522, -117.138789, 2/27/2012, 3:31PM–3:54PM, 2013. Pigment print; image and paper 40 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 186–188

D11F16, 1996–1998. Inkjet print; image 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 171

Dark Star F, 2008. Vintage pigment print on rag paper; image: 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p. 173


D05F06, 1996–1998. Inkjet print; image 40 × 50, paper 44 × 54; courtesy of the artist p.157

Untitled G, 1990. Vintage gelatin silver print; image and paper 60 × 48; courtesy of the artist p. 158

Untitled H, 1990. Vintage gelatin silver print; image and paper 60 × 48; courtesy of the artist p. 159

Dogs chasing my car in the desert

Theodore Street Project

Dark Star
I am deeply grateful to Larry J. Feinberg, Director and CEO of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, who steadfastly believed in and supported this exhibition. Through the extraordinary generosity of funders, both institutional and individual, this project was realized. The Andy Warhol Foundation provided the initial support without which we could not have gone forward, as did the Charles Blum Fund. Other institutional support was provided by the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation, the Furthermore Fund and the City of Santa Barbara County Arts Commission. The generosity and enthusiasm of the members of SBMA PhotoFutures, and the City of Santa Barbara County Arts Commission. The generosity and enthusiasm of the members of SBMA PhotoFutures, without which we could not have gone forward, as did the Charles Blum Fund.

Finally a great debt of gratitude is owed to John Divola who has been an enormous influence on generations of students while steadfastly pursuing photographic practice. This project started in 2009 and though it has not been without its bumps and detours in its four years of evolution, his intense involvement has produced a much richer stew than I could have imagined. Thank you.

—Karen Sinsheimer, Curator of Photography, Santa Barbara Museum of Art

On behalf of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art I would like to acknowledge Bryan Linkel (Ralph M. Parsons Curatorial Fellow), as well as other photography department staff: Deandra Lawson, Rebecca Morse, and Eve Schillito, and the Photographic Arts Council of LACMA.

—Brit Salvesen, Curator, Wallis Annenberg Department of Photography and Prints and Drawings Department, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, as well as to Simon Baker, Curator of Photography and International Art, Tate, London, who took the time out of his very busy schedule to tape two conversations with John Divola. Their professionalism and enthusiasm made this unique collaboration possible.

Profound thanks are due Theresa Lusso, of Lusso Gallery in Santa Monica, for providing invaluable assistance and information from the beginning. She has tirelessly championed Divola’s work and career Dany Ngy Studio designed the publication and managed the arrangements with publisher Prestel/Delmonico; editor Michelle Diane Mardi brilliantly shepherded this complex catalog to completion with expert skill and finesse.

Thanks are owed to the many Santa Barbara Museum of Art staff who contributed their expertise and energy to this project, particularly Liz Volpe, Curatorial Assistant, who compiled the chronology and kept track of the many moving parts of this project. Patty Hucks, Director of Education; Barbara Ren-Horst, Director of Development; Katrina Carl, Public Relations Manager; Cherie Summers, Chief Registrar; John Coplin, Director of Facilities and Nancy Rogers, Preparator; Alex Grabner and Mike Woxell, Retail and Visitor Services Manager; Joseph Price, Information Systems Manager; and my curatorial colleagues Eik Kahng, Chief Curator; Susan Tai, Elizabeth Adams Curator of Asian Art, and John Jette, Curator of Contemporary Art—each and every one committed their skills and those of their departments to this project. Finally a great debt of gratitude is owed to John Divola who has been an enormous influence on generations of students while steadfastly pursuing photographic practice. This project started in 2009 and though it has not been without its bumps and detours in its four years of evolution, his intense involvement has produced a much richer stew than I could have imagined. Thank you.

On behalf of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art I would like to acknowledge Bryan Linkel (Ralph M. Parsons Curatorial Fellow), as well as other photography department staff: Deandra Lawson, Rebecca Morse, and Eve Schillito, and the Photographic Arts Council of LACMA.

As always at the Pomona College Museum of Art, the level of exhibition excellence is due in great part to a committed and dedicated staff. We owe many thanks to Justin Bar, Steve Combs, Terri Geis, Gary Murphy, and Debbie Wilson. We thank them for their support throughout all stages of this project, and especially for their good cheer and high standards of professionalism.

—Karen Sinsheimer, Curator of Photography, Pomona College Museum of Art

Work exhibited at Los Angeles County Museum of Art is also included in the following collection:


Works exhibited at Pomona College Museum of Art are also included in the following collections:

Zuma #9 (page 73), collection of the Capital Group Companies, Los Angeles

Zuma #8 (pages 74–75), collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee

Zuma #81 (pages 76–78), collection of Donna Kolb

Zuma #82 (pages 82–83), collection of Andrea and John Nyland

Zuma #82 (page 88), collection of Dr. Philip Greider

Zuma #83 (pages 90–91), collection of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Weeks exhibited at Santa Barbara Museum of Art are also included in the following collections:

VANDALISM SERIES

#2 VR 1 (page 105) collection of Mr. & Mrs. Gregory Gooding

#2 VR 2 (page 104) Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck

#2 VR 3 (page 103) The Black Dog Collection

#2 VR 4 (not illustrated); #2 VR 5 (page 113) private collection, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

#2 VR 6 (page 116) collection of Frank and Donna Kolb

#2 VR 7 (page 159) collection of David Kraus

#2 VR 8 (not illustrated): The Andy Simpkin Collection

#2 VR 9 (not illustrated): collection of Jack Kirkland

DARK STAR SERIES

Dark Star II (page 189) collection of Vida Vida

Work exhibited at Los Angeles County Museum of Art is also included in the following collections:


Works exhibited at Pomona College Museum of Art are also included in the following collections:

Zuma #9 (page 73), collection of the Capital Group Companies, Los Angeles

Zuma #8 (pages 74–75), collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee

Zuma #81 (pages 76–78), collection of Donna Kolb

Zuma #82 (pages 82–83), collection of Andrea and John Nyland

Zuma #82 (page 88), collection of Dr. Philip Greider

Zuma #83 (pages 90–91), collection of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Weeks exhibited at Santa Barbara Museum of Art are also included in the following collections:

VANDALISM SERIES

#2 VR 1 (page 105) collection of Mr. & Mrs. Gregory Gooding

#2 VR 2 (page 104) Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck

#2 VR 3 (page 103) The Black Dog Collection

#2 VR 4 (not illustrated); #2 VR 5 (page 113) private collection, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

#2 VR 6 (page 116) collection of Frank and Donna Kolb

#2 VR 7 (page 159) collection of David Kraus

#2 VR 8 (not illustrated): The Andy Simpkin Collection

#2 VR 9 (not illustrated): collection of Jack Kirkland

DARK STAR SERIES

Dark Star II (page 189) collection of Vida Vida


Works exhibited at Pomona College Museum of Art are also included in the following collections:

Zuma #9 (page 73), collection of the Capital Group Companies, Los Angeles

Zuma #8 (pages 74–75), collection of the Haggerty Museum of Art, Marquette University, Milwaukee

Zuma #81 (pages 76–78), collection of Donna Kolb

Zuma #82 (pages 82–83), collection of Andrea and John Nyland

Zuma #82 (page 88), collection of Dr. Philip Greider

Zuma #83 (pages 90–91), collection of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

Weeks exhibited at Santa Barbara Museum of Art are also included in the following collections:

VANDALISM SERIES

#2 VR 1 (page 105) collection of Mr. & Mrs. Gregory Gooding

#2 VR 2 (page 104) Gloria Katz and Willard Huyck

#2 VR 3 (page 103) The Black Dog Collection

#2 VR 4 (not illustrated); #2 VR 5 (page 113) private collection, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

#2 VR 6 (page 116) collection of Frank and Donna Kolb

#2 VR 7 (page 159) collection of David Kraus

#2 VR 8 (not illustrated): The Andy Simpkin Collection

#2 VR 9 (not illustrated): collection of Jack Kirkland

DARK STAR SERIES

Dark Star II (page 189) collection of Vida Vida


Published in 2013 by the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and DelMonico Books, an imprint of Prestel, a member of Verlagsgruppe Random House GmbH.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art
1130 State Street Santa Barbara, CA 93101 USA

Prestel Verlag
Neumarkter Strasse 28
81673 Munich, Germany
Tel: 49 89 41 36 0
Fax: 49 89 41 36 23 35
www.prestel.de

Prestel Publishing Ltd.
4 Bloomsbury Place
London WC1A 2QA
United Kingdom
Tel: 44 20 7323 5004
Fax: 44 20 7636 8004

Prestel Publishing
900 Broadway, Suite 603
New York, New York 10003
Tel: 212 995 2720
Fax: 212 995 2733
E-mail: sales@prestel-usa.com
www.prestel.com

© 2013 Santa Barbara Museum of Art
ISBN 978-3-7913-6468-1
All rights reserved.

Curator of Photography: Karen Sinsheimer
Production Assistant: Lisa Volpe

Editor: Michelle Dunn Marsh
Art Direction: Dung Ngo
Design: Franklin Vandiver
Duotone Separations: Robert Henessey

No part of this publication may be transmitted in any form by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from the publisher.

The exhibition checklist on pages 212–221 constitutes a continuation of the copyright page.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

John Divola : As Far as I Could Get / Santa Barbara Museum of Art with Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Pomona College Museum of Art ; foreword by Larry Feinberg, Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Director & Chief Executive Officer, Santa Barbara Museum of Art ; essays by Karen Sinsheimer, Britt Salvesen, Kathleen Howe ; interview with John Divola by Simon Baker.

224 pages cm
Catalog of an exhibition.
ISBN 978-3-7913-6468-1
TR647.D545 2013
770.74'79493--dc23
2013008362


16 15 14 13 / 4 3 2 1 First edition
Printed and bound in China