

ARTFORUM

John Divola

WALLSPACE

619 West 27th Street

May 2–June 18

John Divola has been well known in photographic circles since the late 1970s, but his work has been largely overlooked in broader art contexts, despite its kinship with the architectural interventions of Gordon Matta-Clark and Robert Smithson, and with the conceptual witticisms of Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, and Douglas Huebler. However, Divola's current solo exhibition, which showcases highlights from the past forty years of his career, seems to indicate that his work is experiencing a moment of newfound relevance, or perhaps critical reappraisal.

From the beginning, Divola's practice has been intertwined with marginal spaces in and around his native Los Angeles—the suburbs and the desert, and the various abandoned and isolated dwellings that can be found therein. While the earliest photographs on view in the show—scenes of suburban life taken from his series "San Fernando Valley," 1971–73—would be at home next to the work of fellow West Coast photographers Bill Owens and Henry Wessel, Divola's oeuvre subsequently underwent a significant methodological shift, with his series "Vandalism," 1973–75, which found him knocking around a series of moldering abandoned houses, wielding spray cans with painterly aplomb and documenting his interventions with his camera. For his next series, "Zuma," 1977–78, Divola further crystallized this interventionist strategy, entering into an extended engagement with a single site—a derelict house on California's Zuma Beach—and beginning to work with color film. The result was a body of work that chronicled Divola's dance with entropy, which ended when the building burned to the ground. Other works on view from the series "As Far as I Can Get," 1996, and "Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert," 1996–2001, show Divola in high Photoconceptualist form, deftly mixing rigor and humor with undercurrents of deep pathos and dread. In all, the show is a beautifully installed and welcome reprise, which, for some, may constitute a new discovery.



John Divola, "Zuma," 1977–78, archival pigment print on rag paper, 21 x 26" each.

— Chris Wiley

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