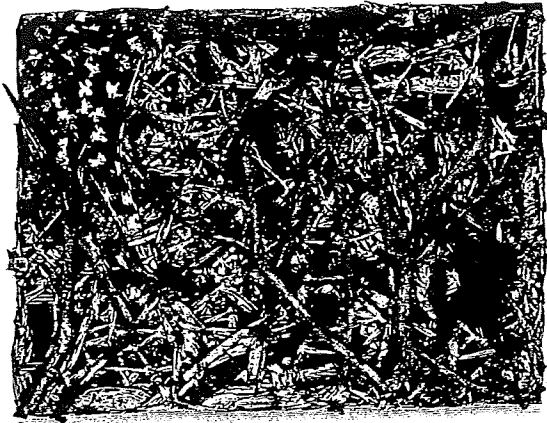


Thornton Dial, *We All Live Under the Same Old Flag*, 2010, cloth, found wood, bones, iron wire, found doll, paint on canvas on wood, 54 1/4 x 74 x 9".



Addressing struggles for equality on the part of women and African Americans, as well as subjects such as bigotry and war, Dial's work can be situated within the tradition of American protest art. Big, brash, and turbulent, his works here first and foremost evince anger. Unlike, for instance, Dial's early memorials to deceased relatives, there is nothing elegiac about them. Moreover, their troubling chaos—the sense of barely controlled order, of wild disarray however formally calculated—seems to convey distress. Oppressed, the self falls apart, even as it struggles to hold its parts together; Dial defends against this entropic collapse by turning disintegration into art.

We All Live Under the Same Old Flag, 2010, is a beaten-up, all but disintegrated flag—a piece of glorified junk. The “stripes” are dead branches painted red and white, and the “stars” are gestural splotches on a blue rag. The assemblage also contains bones—the flag is a graveyard. Indeed, while Dial's work certainly has affinities with high modern art—it seems to condense Cubism, Expressionism, and Surrealism; and like Robert Rauschenberg's early output, Dial's sculptures are marked by clutter and abundance, saturated with materials and images—it resists assimilation by reason of the suffering symbolized by its ruined materials. The cast-off objects, many of them machine-made (coat hangers, for example), weary with wear and tear and finally worked to death, may symbolize the feeling of being an outcast in American society, and perhaps signify an aspect of the African-American experience.

In *Freedom Cloth*, 2005—the title seems ironic—Dial presents a hulking, woven-together mass of multicolored fabric, wire hangers, and artificial plants: a heap of fragments. He may be suggesting, expressionistically, the lush, dense foliage of the Deep South, wrought with the wonderful rich ambiguity particular to his work. Indeed, the whole thing seems overgrown, and birds perch on top of the sculpture. The central, topmost bird appears to have had its wings clipped—they droop downward, suggesting it can't fly. Does this injured bird suggest a wounded eagle—another critique of patriotic iconography? One might suspect. Ultimately however, Dial's charged, complex work brooks no easy interpretation.

—Donald Kuspit

“Drawn from Photography”

THE DRAWING CENTER

In 1927, critic Siegfried Kracauer wrote, “Never before has an age been so informed about itself, if being informed means having an image of

objects that resembles them in a photographic sense.” He didn't mean it as a compliment. To him, the seemingly infinite archive of world events produced by photography conflates surface appearance with psychological depth, iconicity with memory, publicity with history. For the artists assembled in Claire Gilman's kickoff exhibition as curator of the Drawing Center, the superficial mapping Kracauer warned of can be arrested only by a seemingly paradoxical process: keeping photographic resemblances intact, but dismantling their instantaneity and technological reproducibility via the meticulous labor of drawing. Artists such as Andrea Bowers, Sam Durant, Richard Forster, Karl Haendel, and Frank Selby, among thirteen total in the exhibition, hand-copy photographs and photo-based media, thereby lengthening the duration of the image's production and, for the viewer, transforming perception by fastidiously rendering what once presented itself with glossy immediacy.

One of the challenges these artists face is how to sift out empathetic identification from sensationalist rubbernecking or bland iconicity in photojournalistic images portraying the suffering of others. Durant and Selby do so by appropriating images of civil rights and antiwar protests in the 1960s. As familiar as these types of illustrations of police violence are in our historical imagination, they are rarely considered closely; instead, such images tend to emblemize the general trope of protest action. The careful rendering of subtle facial features and gestures by Durant and Selby, however, draws out idiosyncrasies of these singular instants immobilized by the camera, conveying a series of contingent moments that humanize the participants. Other artists, such as Andrea Bowers, call attention to events that are frequently overlooked in the news media's spectacularization of politics. Her drawings of nonviolent protest training sessions, such as those leading to the 1981 detention of 1,900 activists fighting the construction of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Plant in San Luis Obispo, California, depict participants as they practice using physical passivity to resist arrest. However, in contrast to now-familiar images of limp bodies being dragged away by riot police, Bowers's images exhibit activists in a spirit of levity and community, assuming the roles of their antagonists with broad grins.

The artists in this show also seek to remediate news coverage that leaves viewers stranded as distant witnesses to history-making collective action. Karl Haendel's *Untitled (Birthday Drawing)*, 2000, uses the artist's hand to merge the foreign and the intimate. Taking as his source the front page of *Pravda*, the Soviet Union's official newspaper, from an edition published on the date of his birth, July 1, 1976, Haendel painstakingly duplicates columns and headlines of text written in a



Andrea Bowers, *Nonviolent Protest Training, Abalone Alliance Camp, Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, and San Luis Obispo County Telegraph-Tribune, September 14, 1981 (detail)*, 2004, graphite pencil on paper, 38 x 49 3/4". From “Drawn from Photography.”

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

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

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 verine 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