

Modern Art

Alvin Baltrop

1 December 2021 – 22 January 2022

Preview: 1 December 2021, 12-6pm

Bury Street, SW1

Modern Art is pleased to announce a solo exhibition of work by Alvin Baltrop (1948-2004) at its Bury Street gallery. This is Baltrop's first exhibition with Modern Art as well as his first solo show in the UK.

Alvin Baltrop was born in the Bronx, New York, in 1948, and he lived and worked in New York City for almost all of his life. He began shooting photographs as a teenager on the city's streets, including scenes from the now famous gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, during the 1960s. In 1969 Baltrop enlisted in the US Navy, spending several years on board an Atlantic patroller as a medic. During his spare time he advanced his photography practice, making his own developing trays out of medic equipment, and capturing his fellow naval officers in leisurely and erotic nuances that carry forward into his later work. Upon returning to the Bronx, he enrolled in the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan and began to work as a taxi driver. It was at this point, in the early 1970s, that he began to photograph activity on the West Side piers, an area of Manhattan in which wrecked industrial warehouses were left abandoned on the docks of the Hudson River, the city unable at the time to afford their demolition. During the 1960s and '70s the piers were adopted for a range of often clandestine activities including gay cruising. Baltrop – then working as a van driver – would spend days there, sleeping in his van. In 1975, Gordon Matta-Clark famously transformed Pier 52 into his "indoor park" *Day's End*, which was immortalised earlier this year by David Hammons in a public artwork of the same title commissioned by the Whitney Museum of American Art with Hudson River Park. The piers form the locus of much of Baltrop's oeuvre, which captures his community there between 1973 and 1986, at which point the piers were eventually torn down. Baltrop was diagnosed with cancer in the 1990s and died in 2004 at age fifty-five. He spent the final period of his life working on a book of his pier photographs. Baltrop's work received little attention during his life; he sometimes received unambiguously classist and racist rejections from the New York art world. It was not until 2008, after Douglas Crimp wrote about it in *Artforum*, that the importance of Baltrop's work began to be recognised. This was not only because of its historical insight into the period of queer New York culture and the city's post-industrial landscape it documents, but also because of Baltrop's unique sensibility born out of the marginalised, difficult and ambitious life he lived.

Modern Art is proud to be able to exhibit a group of Baltrop's photographs taken at the piers. Small in scale, usually between ten and thirty centimetres in length, Baltrop's images are largely black and white, interspersed with a few colour prints. The subjects of these photographs are sometimes the cavernous, dilapidated warehouse structures themselves, seemingly empty of people and life. But more often Baltrop's camera fixes on figures - mostly men - engaged, unselfconsciously, in action of various kinds: sunbathers luxuriating on the wooden docks, couples embracing at a distance. In other images the subjects appear more performative: portraits of his friends or lovers pose in various states of undress, and couples engage in explicit sex acts, seemingly for Baltrop's camera. But pleasure and the sensuality of bodies are countered with scenes of poverty, destitution and even death, pictured for instance, in a group of police officers surrounding a washed up corpse, or a young man in a tent, perhaps homeless. A significant historical document into a period of New York's cultural subcultural and political history, the piers photographs are also glimpses into moments of intimacy and community made visible through Baltrop's artistic conviction, vision and rigor.

Alvin Baltrop's works have been the subject of posthumous solo museum exhibitions at The Bronx Museum, New York (2019) and Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, Texas (2012). His works have been included in group exhibitions at such institutions as Museum of Modern Art, New York (2021); RISD Museum of Art, Providence (2020); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2020); Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2020); Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (2019); MoMA PS1, New York (2015); and White Columns, New York (2012). Baltrop is included in the current exhibition *Black American Portraits* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art until April 2022.

For more information, please contact Alex Glover: alexander@modernart.net

Upstairs (clockwise from entrance)



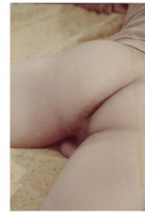
Hand holding cigarette, n.d
silver gelatin print
18.5 x 12.5 cm
7 1/4 x 4 7/8 ins
(BALTA-00021)



The Piers (wreckage), n.d
(1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
11.5 x 16.8 cm
4 1/2 x 6 5/8 ins
(BALTA-00008)



The Piers (elevated west side highway), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
14.5 x 22 cm
5 3/4 x 8 5/8 ins
(BALTA-00012)



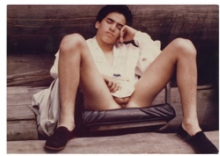
The Piers (man from behind), n.d
(1975-1984)
c-print
15 x 10 cm
5 7/8 x 4 ins
(BALTA-00010)



The Piers (hole in the wall), n.d
(1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
17 x 12 cm
6 3/4 x 4 3/4 ins
(BALTA-00016)



The Piers (two doorways), n.d
(1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
11.6 x 17 cm
4 5/8 x 6 3/4 ins
(BALTA-00014)



The Piers (man sitting), n.d
(1975-1986)
c-print
12.5 x 18 cms
4 7/8 x 7 1/8 ins
(BALTA-00006)



The Piers (two containers on dock), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
11 x 16.8 cm
4 3/8 x 6 5/8 ins
(BALTA-00013)



The Piers (man bending backward), n.d. (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
11.5 x 17.3 cm
4 1/2 x 6 3/4 ins
(BALTA-00024)



The Piers (handjobs), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
17.2 x 11.8 cm
6 3/4 x 4 5/8 ins
(BALTA-00002)



The Piers (man from behind), n.d (1977 - 1978)
silver gelatin print
32.7 x 21 cm
12 7/8 x 8 1/4 ins
(BALTA-00020)



The Piers (man lying on blanket), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
16.7 x 11.6 cm
6 5/8 x 4 5/8 ins
(BALTA-00023)

Downstairs (clockwise from entrance)



The Piers (man lying down with unzipped pants), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
17.7 x 11.5 cm
7 x 4 1/2 ins
(BALTA-00001)



The Piers (woman by motorcycle), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
16.5 x 11.5 cm
6 1/2 x 4 1/2 ins
(BALTA-00017)



The Piers (warehouse exterior), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
11.6 x 17 cm
4 5/8 x 6 3/4 ins
(BALTA-00009)



The Piers (police and corpse), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
10.8 x 17.1 cm
4 1/4 x 6 3/4 ins
(BALTA-00019)



The Piers (man sunbathing), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
16.7 x 11 cm
6 5/8 x 4 3/8 ins
(BALTA-00022)



The Piers (man with leather jacket and sunglasses), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
16.7 x 11.5 cm
6 5/8 x 4 1/2 ins
(BALTA-00004)



The Piers (two figures, one with pants lowered), n.d (1975-1986)
silver gelatin print
18.4 x 12 cm
7 1/4 x 4 3/4 ins
(BALTA-00011)