

JOHN DIVOLA

The Landscape and Things in the Way.

23 March – 13 May, 2023

Text by Shesna Lyra

The works gathered in *The Landscape and Things in the Way* showcase a historical overview of Divola's earlier works, including his iconic series: *Vandalism*, *Zuma*, *Isolated Houses*, *As Far as I Could Get*, *Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert*, and more.

Spanning over 40 years, John Divola's early works remain extremely contemporary, not only because of their identifiable character but also for being part of a movement, in the 1970's, that laid the groundwork for philosophical critiques of universal truths and objective reality. Moving seamlessly from the origins of postmodernism in the visual arts into contemporary issues, the work's wide-ranging possibilities reflect upon societal structures and their margins, opening the field for pondering the consequences of a globalized modern society.

John Divola's photographs seem familiar. They remind us of other images kept in our memory (movie scenes, home environments, images of space, scientific studies, family albums, etc.). They belong to our own cultural and social knowledge of images embedded in a collective imagination. Thanks to this familiarity, we can relive the experiences they provide, regardless of different backgrounds. When I first came across Divola's photographs, I was immediately drawn to them. Back then, when I was living in Brazil, the breathtaking sunsets reflected over the ocean resonated with me as much as the political act of interacting with abandoned spaces. The same thing happened to other members of the Super Dakota team, even though we all come from different parts of the globe.

Divola has been driven towards abandoned houses since the '70s, interacting with these spaces to create his punk and captivating photographs. Between 1974 and 1975, he made *Vandalism*, a series of black and white photographs showing the artist's interventions on run-down properties in Los Angeles. With a spray can, Divola would make geometric and organic forms on the wall, sets of dots, crescent strokes, and abstract constellations he inserted into the damaged corners of each space.

While he played around with paint, objects, strings, and tissues, the photographic cut produced a new order of meaning. Manipulating the scene's frame, he suspends it from the temporal flow. The result is pure fiction. Between the decisions made by the original architect, the people who lived there, those who came in after and the artist, linear time was compressed into one single frame, bending space and time. In a society united by a connected cultural world, we can all identify with a recurrent scene in science fiction movies and literature when black holes are depicted with properties to bend space and time. No wonder they come to mind when looking at John Divola's *Dark Stars* and his early works.

In Zuma Beach, Malibu, Divola continued the projects he started in the '70s (*Vandalism* and *Forced Entries*). The artist began the series in a beachfront house, allowing him to introduce colour into the practice. Sneaking early or late at night, Divola looked for the ideal lighting to enable the photographic registry and create heterogeneous colour treatments. Unlike the *Vandalism* series, here there's an introduced temporality that can be recognized. Soft lighting spreads out to the sea, and the skies contrast with the bright, artificially illuminated interior, establishing a dialogue described as "a mix of nature and artifice, where interior and exterior, artifice and naturalness, collide." (1)

The double affirmation in all of Divola's work is the balance between the factual nature of photography as a medium and its power of creation. This tension is explored throughout Divola's various series, including his diptychs from the 80s. In these works, elements indicating conceptual opposition are placed side by side, using saturated and cinematic colours to construct meaning and challenge our understanding of colour, composition, and form.

Between the 80s and 90s, Divola continued to explore the tension between archiving and transforming performative acts through photographic representation. In his series *Isolated Houses*, he documented secluded homes bordered by miles of unpopulated desert and uninterrupted skies, highlighting the contrast between nature's enormous scale and small human constructions. Today, these images take on new meaning in light of issues such as self-isolation and Man's environmental impact.

Other series from this period, such as *As Far as I Could Get* and *Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert*, similarly explore performative acts through photography. In *As Far as I Could Get*, Divola tried to get as far away from the camera as possible within 10 seconds, while in *Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert*, he captured dogs chasing his car. The latter series is a metaphor for the illusory nature of the photographic act.

Throughout his work, Divola emphasizes the process of how an image is created as equally important to the image itself. His act of interacting with spaces, such as vandalizing homes in *Vandalism* are acts of affirmation in the shifts of Art History, from which could have facilitated today's discussions and acknowledgements over issues related to identity, gender, feminism, and other important matters that were not dealt with in the past.

Divola's interactions, were acts of re-signifying the space in favor of its structural reuse. His work operates within art's utopic dimension, to fuel creativity and unleash inner impulses. It unveils possibilities, new forms of interaction, which influenced generations such as me, our gallery crew and other artists. Divola's work is without a doubt, constantly defying premises, and predefined notions, pulling in the viewer, suggesting simultaneously, the inevitable forces of predestination and the possibility of an escape.

1. 'You speak of things that haven't happened yet in the past-tense': John Divola's Los Angeles, Andrew Witt, Oxford Art Journal, 2018

1. JOHN DIVOLA

Isolated Houses N34°12.325' W116°01.374',
1995-98
HP Viverra Pigment on Epson Exhibition Fiber
26.3" x 27.1" / 67 × 69 cm
Edition 5 of 8

2. JOHN DIVOLA

Isolated Houses N34°09.948' W115°47.952',
1995-98
HP Viverra Pigment on Epson Exhibition Fiber
26.3" x 27.1" / 67 × 69 cm
Edition 8 of 8

3. JOHN DIVOLA

Isolated Houses N34°07.319' W115°50.987',
1995-98
HP Viverra Pigment on Epson Exhibition Fiber
26.3" x 27.1" / 67 × 69 cm
Edition 7 of 8

4. JOHN DIVOLA

Dark Star (DSE), 2006-2008
Archival Digital Pigment Print on Rag Paper
44" x 54" / 111.8 × 137.2 cm
Edition 2 of 3 with 2 APs

5. JOHN DIVOLA

Dogs Chasing My Car In The Desert, D10F15,
1996/2001
Gelatin Silver Print
28.7" x 22" / 73 × 56 cm
Edition 2 of 5

6. JOHN DIVOLA

Dogs Chasing My Car In The Desert, D07F30,
1996/2001
Gelatin Silver Print
28.7" x 22" / 73 × 56 cm
Edition 1 of 5

7. JOHN DIVOLA

Dogs Chasing My Car In The Desert, D23F29,
1996/2001
Gelatin Silver Print
28.7" x 22" / 73 × 56 cm
Edition 1 of 5

8. JOHN DIVOLA

Vandalism Portfolio 2 74V125, 1974/2016
Archivaly Processed B&W Photograph
24.2" x 25.1" / 61.5 × 64 cm

9. JOHN DIVOLA

Vandalism Portfolio 2 74V27, 1974/2016
Archivaly Processed B&W Photograph
24.2" x 25.1" / 61.5 × 64 cm
Edition 2 of 5

10. JOHN DIVOLA

Vandalism Portfolio 1 74V05, 1974/2016
Archivaly Processed B&W Photograph
24.2" x 25.1" / 61.5 × 64 cm
Edition 7 of 12

11. JOHN DIVOLA

Vandalism Portfolio 2 74V111, 1974/2016
Archivaly Processed B&W Photograph
24.2" x 25.1" / 61.5 × 64 cm
Edition 2 of 5

12. JOHN DIVOLA

Vandalism Portfolio 2 74V52, 1974/2016
Archivaly Processed B&W Photograph
24.2" x 25.1" / 61.5 × 64 cm
Edition 2 of 5

13. JOHN DIVOLA

As Far As I Could Get, Running 6A, Ro2F11,
1996
HP Viverra Pigment on Museo Silver Rag Paper
34.2" x 24.4" / 87 × 62 cm
Edition 2 of 8

14. JOHN DIVOLA

Zuma #73, 1977/2006
Pigment on Museo Silver Rag paper
30.7" x 24.8" / 78 × 63 cm
Edition 2 of 10

15. JOHN DIVOLA

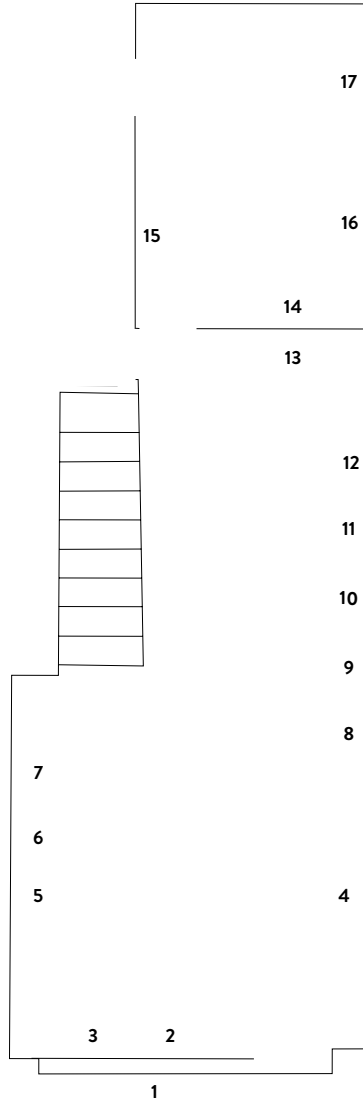
Zuma #68, 1978/2007
Pigment on Museo Silver Rag paper
30.7" x 24.8" / 78 × 63 cm
Edition 6 of 10

16. JOHN DIVOLA

Zuma #26, 1978
Archival Pigment on Rag paper
30.7" x 24.8" / 78 × 63 cm
Edition 1 of 10

17. JOHN DIVOLA

Zuma #71, 1978/2006
Pigment on Museo Silver Rag paper
30.7" x 24.8" / 78 × 63 cm
Edition 2 of 10



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