

“Ruins exert a powerful influence on “men in dark times,” to quote the title of a book by Hannah Arendt. When structures built for purposes of dwelling, storing and preserving begin to disintegrate, or else are actively demolished, something once hidden inside them is revealed. The ruination of what we had filled with ourselves, our things, our past, announces the inevitable approach of total memory-loss. Broken, architecture becomes an emblem of negative history, its historical aura paradoxically concentrated in the course of its eclipse. These are archives that have surrendered their contents to the elements; all that once comprised their interior now devolves into mulch, grist for the mill of romantic speculation on the futility of our most idealistic aspirations. In the long run, no sign of our earthly occupation will remain; every human footprint will eventually be erased – this is what the ruin promises, even as it continues to hold our place, here and there, for the time being.”

Laura Bartlett Gallery is pleased to present *Palms Won't Grow Here and Other Myths*, a two-person exhibition with John Divola and Cyprien Gaillard. Bringing together photographic works from the mid to late seventies by John Divola and new and recent works by Cyprien Gaillard, the exhibition explores the artists' shared interest in the contemporary landscape as a complex site of loss and potential.

In the *Zuma* works from 1977, John Divola was interested in developing a practice in which there could be no distinction between the document and the original, working within the medium of photography in a way that was visual, sculptural and performative. The *Zuma* photographs were taken inside one beachfront property as it went through the processes of ruination.

“On initially arriving I would move through the house looking for areas or situations to photograph. If nothing seemed to interest me I would move things around or do some spray painting. The painting was done in much the same way that one might doodle on a piece of paper. At that point I would return to the camera and explore what ever new potentials existed.” (John Divola), Divola's flash enhanced colour photographs operate together as a sequential narrative of sorts.

These cyclical images juxtapose romantic skies and sunsets with an architectural structure that, frame by frame, deteriorates into ruin as it is vandalized by the artist and others who eventually set it on fire. The activities of local partying teenagers, disgruntled neighbours or homeless drifters amalgamate with those actions of the artist himself.

The mounting hostility of people and place gains an appropriately vexed form in Cyprien Gaillard's collage works and paintings. The paintings are for the most part European landscape studies from the Eighteenth and Nineteenth century executed in an already academic Romantic style, upon which

Gaillard has silk-screened the famously insensitive Cleveland Indians baseball team logo. Gaillard first used this image during the filming of the 16mm film "Cities of Gold and Mirrors" (2009) when he painted it onto a large canvas flag and attached it to a tourist plane that flew over the beaches of Cancun and the 'spring breakers' beneath. Employed again in the Polaroid landscapes of Gaillard's series "Fields of Rest" and here now in this new series of paintings, the image has a macabre, insistent quality. Hovering over the landscape, its heraldic presence stands for themes of displacement and exoticism that run through Gaillard's work. In a new development, the image itself has been left in a state of imperfection - its surface broken allowing the landscape behind to come through. In both the film and in the painting, the Indian reappears as an already corrupted image on a scene that is no less corrupted.

In the collection of Victorian postcards that comprise Gaillard's series *New Picturesque*, Gaillard defaces the archival record with another supremely a-historical logo, the Cambodian Angkor Beer bottle label. Traces of national origin is retained in its design, its colours and fonts, as well as in the schematic rendering of the ancient architecture of Angkor Wat, its crowning ruin.

"The ruinous character of the gradually fading postcard is highlighted by the short, sharp assault of the "ruin in reverse" that defaces it, so that the spatio-temporal distance between them narrows to a faint line. But even, or especially, as we near the point of perfect reflection and symmetry, this remains a line of division, bristling with psychic tensions and prone to erupting between periods of détente.

In John Divola's black and white series *LAX NAZ* psychic tension is played out within formal, forensic considerations. The photographs depict kicked in doors and smashed windows of neighbourhood "The Los Angeles International Airport Noise Abatement Zone" immediately adjacent to LAX that the airport bought out as a noise buffer for new runways in the early and mid 1970's. The houses stood still and vacant for a few years with the windows boarded up, Divola photographed the details of the neighbourhood becoming interested in evidence of forced entries.

Divola (b.1949, Los Angeles) received a B.A. from California State University in 1971 and later received an M.F.A. from University of California in 1974. He has held residencies at many institutions including California Institute of the Arts. Since 1988 he has been a Professor of Art at the University of California. His work has been featured in many solo exhibitions across United States, Europe, Japan and Australia. He participated in 1978, 1989, 2000 the Museum of Modern Art group exhibitions and in 1981 Whitney Biennial. Divola received many awards as Individual Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1973, 1976, 1979, 1990 and a

Guggenheim Memorial Fellowship in 1986. He published four books: "Continuity", "Isolated Houses", "Dogs Chasing My Car In The Desert", and "Three Acts."

Cyprien Gaillard (b.1980, Paris) lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include Hayward Gallery, London, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus Ohio, Tate Modern Turbine Hall, Kunsthalle Basel, Museum Fur Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Hirshhorn, Washington. Selected group exhibitions include The Original Copy: Photography from 1836 to the Present Day, Museum of Modern Art, New York (touring to Kunsthalle Zurich 2011), Gwangju Biennial Aichi Triennial, Cyprien Gaillard is winner of the Marcel Duchamp Prize, 2010 and is nominated for the Junge Kunst Berlin. In 2011, Gaillard will have solo exhibition at Pompidou Centre, Paris.

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