

Laura Bartlett Gallery is delighted to announce the first solo exhibition at the gallery by Los Angeles-based artist John Divola, and his first solo exhibition in the U.K.

“My acts, my painting, my photographing, my considering, are part of, not separate from, this process of evolution and change. These photographs are not so much about this process as they are remnants from it. My participation was not so much one of intellectual consideration as one of visceral involvement.” John Divola, 1980

Divola's practice is intertwined with marginal spaces in and around the suburbs and the desert, and the various abandoned and isolated dwellings of Los Angeles. The relationship between a structured, observational approach to image making and improvisational gesture is at the crux of Divola's practice and can be traced from his earliest work of the 1970's to the more recent bodies of work that are on view in this exhibition: *Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert* (1996-1998) and *Dark Star* (2008). With a career spanning four decades, John Divola is distinctive for his commitment to photography. The notion that a photograph is anchored in a specificity of time, place and circumstance, and the artists' complicity in relation to that is central to an understanding of Divola's practice. In Divola's photographs the instant is openly acknowledged as past, the photograph implicitly a fragment.

With images that bespeak photography's ghostly aspect, frozen in a sort of “anterior present”, Californian artist John Divola portrays the inexorable march of entropy in early works such as the *Vandalism* (1973-75) series. Divola photographed inside abandoned houses, mark making with cans of silver spray paint the discarded objects and desiccated interiors. By using electronic flash he conflates the planes of two-dimensional photographic space and the original three-dimensional structural space. “The visceral quality of Divola's *Vandalism* photographs connects readily to a world of property, transgression and ritual. ” In the landmark *Zuma* works (1977 - 1978), Divola was interested in developing a practice in which 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 its own ruination. With this body of work, Divola invokes a theatrical tension that blurs the lines between authorship and documentation.

This visceral involvement carries through in the series *Dogs Chasing My Car in the Desert*, on view in this exhibition, images of dogs in the desert captured in the midst of running wildly after the car. Emphasising the grain of the image, these black and white photographs capture a haunting moment in which there is a duality between a sense of absence and presence. The behaviour of the dogs

suggests a lack of previous stimuli, a loneliness, at the same time as an all-consuming reaction to the now, a presence.

“It could be viewed as a visceral and kinetic dance. Here we have two vectors and velocities, that of a dog and that of a car and, seeing that a camera will never capture reality and that of a dog will never catch a car, evidence of devotion to a hopeless enterprise.” John Divola, 2004

Downstairs in the gallery, three large photographs titled Dark Star, after a point of light in the universe too faint for direct observation. Dark circles have been painted on the walls of an abandoned house. Creation and destruction are held in a delicate equilibrium, the white rooms of the house, are tattered and derelict. The domestic ruins suggest social collapse, secret renditions of something darkly sinister illuminating our conflicted recent history, updating Zuma and Vandalism for our age of foreclosure.

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